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9-29-2016

September 29, 2016: A Nihilistic Election

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Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2016). September 29, 2016: A Nihilistic Election. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1039>

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Title: A Nihilistic Election

Date: 2016-09-29T05:59:00.002-04:00

9/29/2016—"I feel like the election is just playing the American people." So said a young voter—26—in the New York Times today. This is an expression of powerlessness—it is a feeling that nothing will change. On the other hand, a lot of young people were enthusiastically for Bernie Sanders, so how can I say that the election is nihilistic? Isn't it just that there are two bad nominees by the major Parties? I am actually not sure. It may be that Bernie was attractive because he was not going to actually win. Look at how a fair proportion of his support seems to be going to Gary Johnson, who in one recent poll has 29% of the under 35 vote—a really remarkable figure. But Johnson is very far away from Sanders in terms of substantive political positions. Johnson is the only free trade candidate running. You would think that support would be going to Jill Stein and the Green Party, but it is not, or not nearly as much. So, this makes me feel that a lot of young voting is really protesting. The other thing I don't get is the antipathy toward Clinton. On domestic policy, I don't know of many differences between Sanders and her. For example, is Clinton against single-payer health insurance? Against a \$15 minimum wage? Then again, Johnson is plainly against both. The point of this entry is not criticizing younger voters. (Although I am much afraid of Donald Trump than some of them are). My point here is just thinking about what is going on. In a culture of nihilism, nothing seems to matter. That frees people, even encourages people, to act in unexpected ways. By a culture of nihilism, I don't mean that people are indifferent. I mean that all standards are destroyed. In our terms, the establishment is discredited and may not exist at all. It's what Nietzsche predicted with the death of God. To improve our politics, you have to think at this level.