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January 13, 2017: "The way it is nowadays, unless I see positive proof, it's all a lie"

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Title: "The way it is nowadays, unless I see positive proof, it's all a lie."

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1/13/2017—As I mentioned earlier that my teacher challenged me to specify how nihilism manifests in America. Roughly speaking, nihilism is the belief that all values – – normative judgments – – are matters of opinion rather than of truth. But Americans do not think about matters that way. So nihilism may be the condition, but the symptoms will look like something else. My first effort along the line of specification was that nihilism manifests in a lack of hope. And this does seem to be the case. Certainly, under the rule of nihilism, there can be no grand hope of a genuinely better world and life. But today's New York Times brings a much more potent illustration of the effect of nihilism. The quote above is by Al Amaling, a member of the Table of Knowledge, which refers to a group of older white men who meet in a diner to discuss things in Monticello Iowa. President Obama won this district decisively in 2012 and Donald Trump did the same this year. In a world of nihilism, nothing is trustworthy. That means we must always insist on proof. That sounds like a helpful formulation, but it is not. Because, in a world in which nothing is trustworthy, no proof is trustworthy either. Mr. Amaling's comment from the right—although he was an Obama voter in 2008-- just echoes the distrust on the left of vaccines and genetically altered food. In a world of nihilism, everyone is lying to us. And since our inconsistencies on proof will always prove inadequate, we are left with our own prejudices, biases and ideology. Unfortunately for Mr. Amaling, in a world of nihilism there is no proof either.