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# Health and Sickness: An Examination of the Question of the Affirmation or Negation of Life in the Face of Suffering

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# Health and Sickness: An Examination of the Question of the Affirmation or Negation of Life in the Face of Suffering

## Abstract

In this thesis, I examine a line of thought that stretches from Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who regarded his own work merely as an interpretation and continuation Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) philosophy, through Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who reacted to Schopenhauer's negation of life with an affirmative philosophy, to Thomas Mann (1875-1955), who, operating from within this tradition, attempted a synthesis of it as well as a critical analysis of some of its aspects and their relation to seemingly-pathological fascistic sentiment he witnessed in the Germany of the 1920s and 30s. This line of thought deals with the essential question of Life. It addresses: questions of the relation of the body to the physical world; interpretations of bodily suffering, Death, and a sympathy with Death, called "Romanticism." Through this examination, I discuss, in order: Schopenhauer's system at length, as presented in *The World as Will and Representation*, and the bodily emphasis found therein; Nietzsche's philosophy, its essential character as being both a reaction to and inverse of Schopenhauerianism, exhibited in Nietzsche's identification of Schopenhauer's latent Romanticism as a "sickness" in *The Gay Science*, and his increasing focus on this idea of physiological-philosophical sickness in his later works -- which as a totalizing idea can be seen to encompass all his major notions, including the Will to Power and Amor Fati, for example; and finally Mann's work within this tradition, regarding a philosophical synthesis of it in *The Magic Mountain* and in his address "An Appeal to Reason," given at the Beethovensaal the night following the 1930 German elections. Ultimately, and most importantly, this thesis asks: what is the meaning of physiological-philosophical health, in the exceptional sense of the term, and what is the consequence of its opposite, a sickness in respect to life itself?

## Keywords

Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Thomas Mann, health, suffering, Goethe, *The Magic Mountain*, *The World as Will and Representation*, Will to Power, sickness, Romanticism, Kant, Kantianism, Schopenhauerianism

## Disciplines

Comparative Philosophy | Continental Philosophy | History of Philosophy

## Comments

Written as a Senior Thesis in Philosophy.

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***Health and Sickness:***

**An Examination of the Question of the Affirmation or Negation of Life in the Face of  
Suffering**

**A Thesis in Philosophy**

**By**

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**Prologue: *Faust***

“FAUST:...

*(He opens the book and sees the symbol of the macrocosm.)*

What jubilation bursts out of this sight  
 Into my senses – now I feel it flowing,  
 Youthful, a sacred fountain of delight,  
 Through every nerve, my veins are glowing.  
 Was it a god that made these symbols be  
 That soothe my feverish unrest,  
 Filling with joy my anxious breast,  
 And with mysterious potency  
 Make nature’s hidden powers around me, manifest?

Am I a god? Light grows this page –  
 In these our lines my eyes can see  
 Creative nature spread in front of me.  
 But now I grasp the meaning of the sage:  
 ‘The realm of spirits is not far away;  
 Your mind is closed, your heart is dead.  
 Rise, student, bathe without dismay  
 In heaven’s dawn your mortal head.’

*(He contemplates the symbol.)*

All weaves itself into the whole,  
 Each living in the other’s soul.  
 How heaven’s powers climb up and descend.  
 Passing the golden pails from hand to hand!  
 Bliss-scented, they are winging  
 Through sky and earth – their singing  
 Is ringing through the world.

What play! Yet but a play, however vast!  
 Where, boundless nature, can I hold you fast?  
 And where you breasts? Wells that sustain  
 All life – the heaven and earth are nursed.  
 The wilted breast craves you in thirst –  
 You well, you still – and I languish in vain?

*(In disgust, he turns some pages and behold the symbol of the earth’s spirit.)*

How different is the power of this sign!  
 You, spirit of the earth, seem close to mine:  
 I look and feel my powers growing,  
 As if I’d drunk new wine I’m glowing,  
 I feel a sudden courage, and should dare

To plunge into the world, to bear  
 All earthly grief, all earthly joy – compare  
 With gales my strength, face shipwreck without care.  
 Now there are clouds above –  
 The moon conceals her light –  
 The lamp dies down.  
 It steams. Red light rays dash  
 About my head – a chill  
 Blows from the vaulting dome  
 And seizes me.  
 I feel you near me, spirit I implored.  
 Reveal yourself!  
 Oh, how my heart is gored  
 By never felt urges,  
 And my whole body surges –  
 My heart is yours; yours, too, am I.  
 You must. You must. Though I should have to die.

*(He seizes the book and mysteriously pronounces the symbol of the spirit. A reddish flame flashes, and the SPIRIT appears in the flame.)*

SPIRIT:

Who calls me?

FAUST (*turning away*):

Vision of fright!

SPIRIT:

With all your might you drew me near  
 You have been sucking at my sphere,  
 And now–

FAUST:

I cannot bear your sight!

SPIRIT:

You have implored me to appear,  
 Make known my voice, reveal my face;  
 Your soul's entreaty won my grace:  
 Here I am! What abject fear  
 Grasps you, oh superman! Where is the soul's impassioned  
 Call? And where the breast that even now had fashioned  
 A world to bear and nurse within – that trembled thus,  
 Swollen with joy that it resembled us?  
 Where are you, Faust, whose voice pierces my domain,  
 Who surged against me with his might and main?  
 Could it be you who at my breath's slight shiver

Are to the depths of life aquiver,  
A miserably writhing worm?

FAUST:

Should I, phantom of fire, fly?  
It's I, it's Faust; your peer am I!

SPIRIT:

In floods of life and creative storm  
To and fro I wave.  
Weave eternally.  
And birth and grave,  
An eternal sea,  
A changeful life:  
At the roaring loom of the ages I plod  
And fashion the life giving garment of God.

FAUST:

You that traverse worlds without end,  
Sedulous spirit, I feel close to you.

SPIRIT:

Peer of the spirit that you comprehend  
Not mine! (*Vanishes.*)<sup>1</sup>

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, From *Faust: Part One* 1790

This scene, early in Goethe's *Faust*, takes place in the main character's study. Faust is contemplating the different ideas of life and gazing at their symbols in his alchemical summoning book. Faust reacts in contempt to the first symbol, the *macrocosm*. The macrocosm signifies a vaguely metaphysical, pseudo-theological idea of the nature and meaning of life in which life has purpose: in which all is complete and balanced, as it is part of the *whole*. The macrocosm signifies that everything is composed of the same Oneness and has meaning thereby: one could say the macrocosm is, in essence, a picture of Spinozian pantheism. "All weaves itself into the whole, / Each living in the other's soul. / How heaven's powers climb up and descend. / Passing the golden pails from hand to hand! / Bliss-scented, they are winging / Through sky and

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Faust*. Ed. and Trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961. Print. Page 103.

earth – their singing / Is ringing through the world.” Taken as it is in the whole, the macrocosm is in essence an omnipresent, changeless, timeless idea of benevolent unity. Oppositely, the Earth Spirit is a figure of striving activity and ceaseless change: “...floods of life and creative storm / To and fro I wave. / Weave eternally. / And birth and grave, / An eternal sea...” In contrast to the macrocosm, which is explicitly a symbol of redemptive, affirmative meaning, the Earth Spirit has no inherent quality other than that which it simply is: ceaseless change and striving, the constant “fashion[ing of] the living garment of God” and its simultaneous, inexorable rending asunder. It is not coincidence that it appears to Faust as a terrible, consuming flame. Faust reacts in “abject horror,” and, quite literally, cannot bear the sight of this manifestation of the true essence of life.

This thesis is an exploration of that fear, and of its overcoming.

## **Introduction:**

In this thesis, we will examine a line of thought that stretches from Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who regarded his own work merely as an interpretation and continuation Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) philosophy, through Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who reacted to Schopenhauer's negation of life with an affirmative philosophy, to Thomas Mann (1875-1955), who, operating from within this tradition, attempted a synthesis of it as well as a critical analysis of some of its aspects and their relation to seemingly-pathological fascistic sentiment he witnessed in the Germany of the 1920s and 30s. This line of thought deals with the essential question of *Life*. It addresses: questions of the relation of the body to the physical world; interpretations of suffering, Death, and *Romanticism*. It asks what the meaning of physiological-philosophical *health* is, in the exceptional sense, and what is the consequence of its opposite, a *sickness* in respect to life itself.



## Chapter One: Schopenhauer, Will, Representation, and the Body

“Subject to the limitation of human knowledge, my philosophy is the real solution of the enigma of the world. In this sense it may be called a revelation. It is inspired by the spirit of truth: in the fourth book there are even some paragraphs which may be considered to be dictated by the Holy Ghost.” – Schopenhauer on his “single thought,” *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, from *Parerga and Paralipomena*, 1851.<sup>2</sup>

“This can be expressed in different ways, and we can say: my body and my will are one; -- or: what (as intuitive representation) I call my body, I call my will to the extent that I am aware of it in an entirely different and utterly incomparable manner; -- or: my body is the *objecthood* of my will; – or: besides being my representation, my body is also my will; etc.” – Schopenhauer, from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 1818.<sup>3</sup>

“...life swings back and forth like a pendulum between pain and boredom; in fact, these are the ingredients out of which it is ultimately composed.” – Schopenhauer, from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 1818.<sup>4</sup>

“...for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours, which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing.” – Schopenhauer, from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 1818.<sup>5</sup>

### Section One: Introduction; Schopenhauer and European Pessimism

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Schopenhauer’s philosophy, formed out of his interpretation of Kant’s and others’, is centrally and almost exclusively focused on *the body*, both in its metaphysics and ethics (in fact the two are linked on this very account): this has a profound effect on the pessimism endemic in Schopenhauer’s system, which borders on nihilism and encourages a want of personal dissolution and a sympathy with death.

The writings of Arthur Schopenhauer marked an entirely new way of thinking in European culture. While most German philosophers were the son of clergymen, Schopenhauer’s

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. *Essays and Aphorisms*. Trans. and Ed. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985. Print. Page 31.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*. Ed. and Trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print. § 18. Page 127.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* § 57. Page 338.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* § 71. Page 439.

father was a cosmopolitan Dutch merchant, who ran one of Danzig's most prosperous mercantile houses: Schopenhauer's attitude, in a strange, removed and mutated way, demonstrates the bourgeoisies' cold, cynical interpretation of life in way that, even Nietzsche's, for example, with all its talk of exploitation, does not.<sup>6</sup> Schopenhauer: the great pessimist, born out of a life of, at least material, ease and luxury.<sup>7</sup> And yet, if there was not some truly profound insight contained therein, it is unlikely Schopenhauer's philosophy would have come to predominate German culture, and especially the artistic subculture, by the second half of his century: significantly, first popularly, and then academically.<sup>8</sup>

I will begin from my contention that Schopenhauer's philosophy, in both the metaphysical and ethical aspects, is centrally rooted on an interpretation of the body, and makes the body and the world "analogous," to almost directly quote Schopenhauer.<sup>9</sup> I will first show how this arises primarily out of Schopenhauer's use and interpretation of Kant's system, but also combined with that of Plato and the ancient Hindus, all of which, Schopenhauer contended, described the same phenomena; a phenomenon which he had now discovered the key to, with his insight into the nature of: the body and the world; *will* and *representation*. I will show that this

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<sup>6</sup> "Here we must beware of superficiality and get to the bottom of the matter, resisting all sentimental weakness: life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation – but why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages?" Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. "Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future." *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. § 259. Page 393. While Nietzsche claims that life "is exploitation," he also affirms its value unequivocally (or, as in *Twilight*, claims we are not in a position to assess it, *pro* or *contra*, and therefore, in order to be *healthy*, must affirm, not deny). Schopenhauer by contrast doubts its value, contends it is in fact worthless, and considers the suffering inherent in it to be totally pointless, which Nietzsche, as we shall see, will call a physiological defect and a *sickness*.

<sup>7</sup> Schopenhauer's father, with whom he was close, committed suicide in 1805, when Schopenhauer was seventeen.

<sup>8</sup> See R. J. Hollingdale. "Introduction." *Essays and Aphorisms* by Arthur Schopenhauer. Ed. and Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985. Print. A good overview of the popularity of Schopenhauriansm in the late nineteenth century is provided, along with details of Schopenhauer's life and its interrelation to his philosophy: for example, his strict adherence to routine.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*. Ed. and Trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print. § 19. Page 129. Quoted more fully below.

emphasis on the body appears at the very start (indeed, the first sentence) of Schopenhauer's discussion of metaphysics in his *magnum opus*, and never ceases to be the essential, defining point. Following this, I will discuss the impact of this emphasis on Schopenhauer's ethics: ethics as derived from a conception of the body-as-world-*in-essence*, and vis-à-vis. I will then discuss Schopenhauer's pessimism, the negative quality of his ethics, having emerged out of this bodily focus, and essentially concerned with the dissolution of the body as its ultimate goal, *in toto*. Working up to a thorough understanding, I will end by discussing the implications of what will increasingly become clear is the nihilism inherent in Schopenhauer's system.

### **Section Two: Schopenhauer's "Single Thought"**

What I propose to do here is to specify that this book is to be read so as to be understood. – It aims to convey a single thought... I believe it is the idea that people have sought for such a long time under the heading of philosophy, which is why scholars of history have thought it to be as impossible to discover as the philosopher's stone, although Pliny had already told them: 'how much has been considered impossible before it has been done?'<sup>10</sup>

Schopenhauer always claimed that his magnum opus, *The World as Will and Representation*, was merely the thorough explication of a single thought (and that, "in spite of all efforts", no "shorter way of conveying the thought" could be found than the near-600 page work).<sup>11</sup> This thought, simply: "my body and my will are one."<sup>12</sup> Or, put more expansively, and with Kantian-metaphysical implications: "my body is the phenomenal form of my will, my will is the noumenal form of my body; my body is appearance [*representation*, for Schopenhauer], my will is thing-in-itself."<sup>13</sup> Schopenhauer, in fact, saw his work and his "single thought" as having discovered the true meaning of Kant's thing-in-itself: Schopenhauer, in his own view, surpasses

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Preface to the First Edition. Page 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Preface to the First Edition. Page 5.

<sup>12</sup> R. J. Hollingdale. "Introduction." *Essays and Aphorisms* by Arthur Schopenhauer. Ed. and Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985. Print. Page 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Page 21.

Kant's system and achieves total systematized unity and clarity with the profound insight that the *thing-in-itself* is the *will*.<sup>14</sup> Schopenhauer makes the case that he, and we, have access to this insight, the insight of *will* as *thing-in-itself*, via our particular relationship to our bodies. Kantian language throughout Schopenhauer's work is key: one must understand Schopenhauer's basis in Kant foremost, as well as in the philosophies of Plato and the Hindus, to understand how he derived his essential conflation of the body and world.

### **Section Three: Schopenhauer as Kant's 'One True Successor'**

For my part, I cannot see that anything has happened in philosophy between Kant's time and my own, so I will take up directly from him.<sup>15</sup>

Schopenhauer saw himself as the only true inheritor to Kant, in contrast to Hegel and his acolytes, whom he regarded as practicing purposeful obfuscation, dogmatism, and not real, analytic philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Schopenhauer, in his view, directly continued Kant's project, and built on and continued the profoundly new line of thought which Kant had initiated. In his continuance, or rather interpretation, of Kantianism, Schopenhauer in no way shies away from asserting his reliance and indebtedness to Kant, referring to him frequently as the greatest philosopher of all

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<sup>14</sup> While outside the scope of my work here, it has been pointed out to me by Professor Dan DeNicola of Gettysburg College that Schopenhauer generally refers to the *thing-in-itself* in the singular, while Kant more often does so in the plural: *id est*, in Kant, objects have a *thing-in-itself* ascribed to them in particular, whereas Schopenhauer makes the, arguably, logical jump that, without the *principium individuationis*, which exists in appearance, there must only be one. It is possible this betrays more Spinozian substance-monism influence on Schopenhauer's interpretation of Kant than Schopenhauer himself would admit.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. "Appendix: Critique of the Kantian Philosophy." *The World as Will and Representation*. Trans. and Ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. Print. Page 443.

<sup>16</sup> "[Kant's philosophy] became the worthy point of departure for the even cruder nonsense of the clumsy and mindless Hegel." Ibid. Page 445. Schopenhauer's animosity toward Hegel is legendary. Another choice quote: "From a reasonable point of view, one has no business to concern oneself at all with what these persons [Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling], in order to seem something, brought to market, unless it were that it should be deemed desirable for the scribblings of Hegel to be kept in the chemists shops as a physically active vomitive, the disgust they excite being really quite peculiar." Arthur Schopenhauer. *Selected Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*. Ed. Ernest Belfort Bax. London: G. Bell, 1926. Print

time, and perhaps the greatest genius in all world history.<sup>17</sup> Schopenhauer explains in his *Critique of the Kantian Philosophy* that Kant was responsible for two immeasurably important steps forward in philosophy: first, following Locke, who pointed out our reliance on the senses, Kant showed that “primary qualities, i.e. qualities of things in themselves, belong only to the way in which things appear in our faculty of apprehension.”<sup>18</sup> Secondly, and in the process of articulating the former, Kant clearly delineated the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* cognition.<sup>19</sup> Once this step was achieved, something previously unattainable in philosophy was attained: the knowledge that we have *a priori* cognition of space, time, and causality: that they exist relative to the subject’s cognition as opposed to existing definitely as a quality of the object.<sup>20</sup> Thusly subtracting the role of brain functions (cognition), as Locke has subtracted the senses, Kant “gave infinitely greater meaning and a much more profound significance to the distinction between appearances and things in themselves,” something that had not “yet been done with proper rigour and thoroughness, or with a clear consciousness.”<sup>21</sup> This, accordingly, “became the chief import of [Kant’s] profound investigations.”<sup>22</sup>

The great Kant taught us that time, space, and causality are present in consciousness with respect to their lawlikeness and the possibility of all their forms; and that their presence in consciousness is entirely independent of the objects that appear in them and constitute their content. In other words: time, space, and causality can be found just as easily by proceeding from the subject as from the object, which is why it is just as correct to call them the subject’s mode

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<sup>17</sup> “However much I take the achievements of the great Kant as my point of departure...” Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*. Ed. and Trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print. Preface to the First Edition. Page 8. “I have already explained in the preface to the first edition that my philosophy takes Kant as its point of departure... Kant’s teaching so fundamentally alters every mind that has grasped it, that it can be considered an intellectual rebirth...” Ibid. Preface to the Second Edition. Page 17.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. "Appendix: Critique of the Kantian Philosophy." *The World as Will and Representation*. Trans. and Ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. Print. Page 444.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Page 444.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Page 444.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Page 444.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Page 444.

of intuition as it is to call them characteristics of the object, *in so far as it is an object* (or as Kant would say: appearance), i.e. *representation*. These forms can even be seen as the indivisible boundary between object and subject: this certainly explains why all objects must appear in them, but also why the subject possesses and examines them thoroughly without reference to the appearing object. – Now if the objects that appear in these forms are just empty phantoms, that is, if they are to be significant, then they need to signify or express something that is not just another object or representation (as they are), something whose existence is not just relative to a subject, something that can exist without an external support as its essential condition, i.e. something that is not a *representation* but rather *thing in itself*.<sup>23</sup>

This is what Schopenhauer describes as Kant’s initiation of “critical philosophy,” which goes “*above and beyond* the eternal truths on which all dogmatism has so far been grounded, in order to make these into objects of investigation.”<sup>24</sup> In doing so, Kant undertook a fully “transcendental philosophy” which *transcends* space and time, i.e. the very appearance of the world: spatiality and temporality become significant only in consideration of the phenomenal realm, being, as said, *a priori* cognition – existing within the subject’s intellect.<sup>25</sup> If time, space, and causality – the apparent character itself of the world – are merely a result of forms of cognition, “conditioned by the subject,” then they cannot be applied to the noumenal realm; they do not affect objects *in-themselves*, and the inner-essence of all things must be one and indivisible; if individuation occurs only in the phenomenal world due to the *principium individuationis*, then the noumenal world must be absent of multiplicity.<sup>26</sup> Subtracting time,

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<sup>23</sup> Look up.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Page 448.

<sup>25</sup> “From this it follows that we recognize as the objective world does not belong to the essence of things in themselves, but rather only to its *appearance*, and is conditioned by those very forms that lie *a priori* in the intellect (i.e. the brain) and thus that the world can contain nothing but appearances.” Ibid. Page 448.

<sup>26</sup> “As thing in itself, the *will* is completely different from its appearance, and entirely free of all forms of appearance. The will only takes on these forms when it appears, which is why these forms concern only its *objecthood* and are foreign to the will itself. The will has nothing to do with even the most general form of representation, that of being an object for a subject, and it has even less to do with the subordinate forms that are collectively expressed in the principle of sufficient reason, and so, in consequence, does multiplicity, which exists and is made possible only through these. With respect to this last point, I would borrow an old scholastic expression and call time and space the *principium individuationis*... It is only by virtue of time and space that

space, and causality from the world, one must be left with *something*, and that something, which is not only *some-thing* but *all things*, all objects *in-themselves*, must be one force, event, and substance; if one had access to an object both phenomenally and noumenally, this would give one access to the *thing-in-itself* absent of multiplicity: or, the essential, ubiquitous character of the world. Accessing an object simultaneously both phenomenally and noumenally, as the subject and as the object, would allow one to understand the thing-in-itself, to understand the *world-in-itself*. “Of course, Kant did not realize that appearance is the world as *representation*, and the thing in itself is the *will*.”<sup>27</sup>

I have alluded to the means by which Schopenhauer contends he solves the “enigma of the world.” Before we complete this near-finished puzzle with Schopenhauer’s “single thought,” let us first consider the other philosophies which Schopenhauer claimed exhibited the same basic truth as Kantianism, significant as they are to Schopenhauer’s overall project, giving character to his “profound insight.”

#### **Section Four: The Essence behind the Hindus’ *Veil of Maya*, Plato’s *Realm of Ideas*, Kant’s *Thing-in-Itself*, Schopenhauer’s *Will***

Schopenhauer’s claim that Plato and the ancient Hindus expressed the same basic thought in their philosophy as does Kant is significant. With the addition of Plato and the Brahmic tradition to the philosophy of Kant, the founder of modern critical/analytic philosophy, Schopenhauer can present his philosophy as the final step in a continuing line of thought that spans cultures and epochs: in other words, an essential human truth.<sup>28</sup> If one is willing to go along with

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something that is one and the same in essence and concept can nonetheless appear as different, as a multiplicity of coexistent and successive things...” Ibid. § 23. Page 137.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Page 448.

<sup>28</sup> Schopenhauer also includes Buddhism, though not mentioned as frequently as the Hindu *Vedas*. “We must not evade it [the nothingness following the negation of the will] through myths and meaningless words as the Indians

Schopenhauer and accept his philosophy as it is offered, then his speaking of solving the oldest puzzle of the human race, of his work being the metaphorical “philosopher’s stone,” so long sought after, becomes no exaggeration. Speaking as the immediate successor to Kant, Schopenhauer discusses the interrelatedness of Kantianism, Platonism, and Eastern thought. He takes care to point out that all three lines of thought arrived *separately at the same conclusion*:

With complete originality and in an entirely novel way, Kant discovered, from a new angle and along a new path, the same truth that Plato tirelessly repeats, usually expressing himself, in his own language, as follows: this world that appears to the senses does not have true being, but instead is instead only an incessant becoming, it is and it is not, and apprehending it does not involve cognition so much as delusion. Plato expresses this mythologically at the beginning of the seventh book of the Republic... there he says that the people who are chained firmly in a dark cave would not see either the true, original light or the real things, but rather only the dim light of the fire in the cave and the shadows of real things that pass by the fire behind their backs: they would think that shadows were reality and true wisdom consisted of determining the succession of the shadows. – The same truth, presented in yet another, completely different way, is also a principal doctrine of the *Vedas* and *Puranas*; this is the doctrine of *maya*, which simply means what Kant called appearance in contrast to the thing in itself: because the work of *maya* is declared to be precisely the visible world in which we exist, a magic trick, an insubstantial, intrinsically inessential semblance comparable to an optical illusion or dream, a veil wrapped around human consciousness, something that can be said both to be and not to be with equal truth and falsity. Kant not only expressed this same doctrine in a completely new and original manner, but also made it into an established and incontrovertible truth through the calmest and most sober presentation...<sup>29</sup>

Schopenhauer thusly contends that Kant, Plato, and the ancient Hindus all agree on the unreality of the apparent world.<sup>30</sup> His explication of his “single thought” in such terms takes the form of

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do, words such as ‘reabsorption into the *Brahman*’, or the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists.” Cf. *Ibid.* § 71. Page 439. Quoted more fully below.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. "Appendix: Critique of the Kantian Philosophy." *The World as Will and Representation*. Trans. and Ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. Print. Page 446.

<sup>30</sup> Schopenhauer parses this concept further in the third book of *The World as Will and Representation*, describing Plato’s Ideas as specific gradations of the apparent manifestation of the *Will* in representation. “If we are to acquire deeper insight into the essence of the world, it is absolutely necessary to learn to distinguish the will as thing in itself from its adequate objecthood, and the different levels on which this objecthood emerges with increasing clarity and perfection, i.e. the Ideas themselves, from the mere appearance of the Ideas in the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, the individuals constricted mode of cognition. Then we will agree with Plato



both synthesizing and solving the questions of world-philosophy: significantly, for those well-steeped in Schopenhauer, it also gives these previous philosophies an air of the pessimism which permeates Schopenhauer's thought. Schopenhauer's interpretation of these disparate philosophies as essentially agreeing with his own, and by extension essentially confirming his pessimism, has far reaching impacts on the future of German philosophy. Schopenhauer's essential focus on the body, and its pessimistic inclinations stemming from the analogy of the body, but reflecting back onto the body, also finds itself reflected back, in a similar way, on these previous philosophies.<sup>31</sup>

### **Section Five: Body as Will, Will as World**

Schopenhauer's insight and launching-point was to have seen that Kant, Plato, and Eastern thought all describe the same essential thought. Proceeding from this standpoint, with the weight of "philosophy hitherto" marshalled at his back, Schopenhauer adds, with immense implication, his far-reaching "single thought." With this addition, Schopenhauer creates a metaphysically systematized, centrally ethical philosophy of which Kant (and quite possibly Plato and the Brahmins!) would never have conceived.<sup>32</sup> Schopenhauer's profoundly new philosophic

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when he accords genuine being to the Ideas alone, while granting only apparent, dream-like existence to things in space and time, to this world that is real for the individual. Then we will realize how the same Idea manifests itself in so many different appearances and presents its essence to cognizing individuals only bit by bit, one aspect after the other. We will then also differentiate the Idea itself from the manner in which its appearance comes to be observed by the individual, knowing that the former is essential and the latter inessential..." Ibid. § 35. Page 204.

<sup>31</sup> Cf., discussed below, Nietzsche's claim that "taking a large view, philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*." Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974. Print. Preface to the Second Edition. § 2. Page 35.

<sup>32</sup> "As this one thought is considered from different sides, it reveals itself respectively as what has been called metaphysics, what has been called ethics, and what has been called aesthetics; and it is only natural that it be all of these, if it really is what I claim it to be." Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*. Ed. and Trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print. Preface to the First Edition. Page 5. This should importantly be regarded as Schopenhauer's fundamental inclination. When he was just twenty-five, a year before he claims to have come up with the "single thought" that is so lengthily enumerated in all his works, Schopenhauer stated that his goal in life would be to, unlike previous philosophers, create a system that is both *fundamentally metaphysical* and *fundamentally ethical*. Not just an

system, cobbled together out of so much that had preceded him, marked the emergence of a thoroughly pessimistic strain in contemporary German and European thinking.<sup>33</sup>

Employing the above described Kantian model, Schopenhauer conceives of a world delineated by *Will* and *Representation*. As stated above, the body is key: it is the deciding factor in Schopenhauer's conception of both sides of the world. The very first lines of his magnum opus, describing *representation*, are as follows:

“‘The world is my representation’: this holds true for every living, cognitive being, although only a human being can bring it to abstract, reflective consciousness: and if he actually does so he has become philosophically sound. It immediately becomes clear and certain to him that he is not acquainted with either the sun or the earth, but rather only with an eye that sees a sun, with a hand that feels an earth, and that the surrounding world exists only as representation, that is, exclusively in relation to something else, the representing being that he himself is. – If any *a priori* truth can be asserted, then this is it; for this truth expresses the form of all possible and conceivable experience. This form is more universal than any other form, more universal than time, space, and causality, which presuppose it...”<sup>34</sup>

Representation is Schopenhauer's term for the world in which we inhabit and perceive as the subject, under the natural laws.<sup>35</sup> Immediately, Schopenhauer relates his conception of the world back to the body, stating that we are not in actuality in contact with the world, but that it is merely represented to us via our bodily perceptions. In this way, Schopenhauer makes the body, exclusively, the central aspect of our being in the world, and demarcates the concept such that we

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Ethics or a Metaphysics, but both, and inseparably so. This is precisely what Schopenhauer did, to tremendous effect, and as he says above, he could not claim to have 'solved the eternal riddle of world philosophy' without simultaneously informing both via his "single thought." Arthur Schopenhauer. *Essays and Aphorisms*. Trans. and Ed. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985. Print. Page 23.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche would later describe this phenomenon as *Romantic Pessimism*. This and the related issue of Nietzsche's central focus on the body, inherited from Schopenhauer, will largely be the subject of Chapter Two.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*. Ed. and Trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print. § 1. Page 23

<sup>35</sup> "Thus, no truth is more certain, no truth is more independent of all others and no truth is less in need of proof than this one: that everything there is for cognition (i.e. the whole world) is only an object in relation to a subject, an intuition of a beholder, is, in a word, representation. Of course this truth applies just as much to the past and future as to the present, and to the furthest as much as to what is close by: for it applies to time and space themselves, and it is only in time and space that such distinctions can be made." Ibid. § 1. Page 24

are in reality restricted *only to our body*; the world, being as it is a *representation*, consequently and in actuality being completely foreign to us. The body is the only immediate object: everything else, the world of objects, is, inescapably and irrefutably, mediated, foreign, and unreachable. But just as the body defines our experience in representation, it also enables us to understand the inner essence of our experience, ourselves, and our world, the *thing-in-itself*.

From the standpoint of the perceived world as *representation*, Schopenhauer describes the true nature of the world as that of *Will*. Just as the nature of representation is built around the idea of ourselves being a subject within an object, our body, in a world of inaccessible, mediated, foreign objects, Schopenhauer frames the concept of the *Will* around our body, the idea being that *Will* is something we can perceive subjectively as our own *will*, which we intuit *a priori* by our own intimate, subjective knowledge, as an object, *of our own body*:

What I am searching for, the meaning of the world that confronts me as mere representation, and the transition from this world as mere representation of the cognizing subject to whatever it may be besides, could indeed never be discovered if the enquirer were himself nothing more than a pure subject of cognition (a winged cherub's head without a body). But he is rooted in this world and finds himself in it as an *individual*, i.e. his cognition, which upholds and conditions the entire world as representation, is nonetheless completely mediated through a body whose affectations, as we have shown, are the starting point for the understanding as it intuits this world. To the pure subject of cognition as such, this body is a representation like any other, an object among objects: to this extent, the subject is familiar with its movements and its actions in the same way he is familiar with the alterations that take place in other objects of intuition; and these movements would be foreign and incomprehensible as these other objects if their meaning were not unriddled in an entirely different way... He would have no understanding of the inner essence of his body's actions and expressions; he would refer to this essence variously as a force, a quality, or a character, but he would have no more insight than this. But none of this is the case: rather the subject of cognition, appearing as an individual, is given the solution to the riddle: and this solution is *will*. This and this alone gives him the key to his own appearance, reveals to him the meaning and shows him the inner workings of his essence, his deeds, his movements. The body is given in two entirely different ways to the subject of cognition, who emerges as an individual only through his identity with it: in the first place it is given as a representation in intuition by the

understanding, as an object among objects and liable to the same laws; but at the same time the body is also given in an entirely different way, namely as something immediately familiar to everyone, something designated by the word *will*. Every true act of his will is immediately and inevitably a movement of his body as well: he cannot truly will an act without simultaneously perceiving it as a motion of the body. An act of the will and an act of the body are not two different states cognized objectively, linked together in a causal chain, they do not stand in a relation of cause and effect; they are one and the same thing, only give in two entirely different ways: in one case immediately and in the other case to the understanding in intuition. An action of the body is nothing but an objectified act of the will, i.e. an act of the will that has entered intuition. Furthermore, we will see that this is true of all bodily motion, not just motivated by action, but even involuntary acts in response to simple stimuli; indeed, that the entire body is nothing but objectified will, i.e. will that has become representation; all of which will be clarified in the discussion to come. That is why I will now call the body the *objecthood of the will*... And thus we can also say, in a sense: the will is *a priori* cognition of the body, and the body is *a posteriori* cognition of the will.<sup>36</sup>

We intuit the body as an object in a world of objects, girded by natural laws. But we also have access to the body in a particular way, given that it is the only object in this world of representation which we have unmediated access to. With our particular relationship to our body as both subject and object, we perceive our own *will* as our essence, and our body as the objectification of our *will*. At the same time, we are given to understand the nature of other objects by our distinct relationship to the one object which we also *are* as subject. Under Kant's metaphysics, we see how our understanding of our own will, the essence of our bodies, can be viewed analogously as the essence of the world; via our special understanding of our bodies as our objectified *will*, we can perceive the true nature of the world as that of *Will*. What separates the *Will* into the multiplicity of objects which we intuit as representation, as we noted above, is the *principium individuationis*: time, space, and causality, which exist only as the subject's mode of cognition, *id est* appearance or representation, and therefore do not precede *Will* as the essential thing. Our *will* is the essence of ourselves, and what gives us volition; the *Will* is similarly the true essence of all representation. The will within us, which we seem to grasp and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. § 18. Page 124.

control, or perhaps which grasps and controls us, is only the immediate manifestation of the *Will* (as world), which Schopenhauer understands to be the driving force behind all things, from the weather to the growth of plants to my own want, or *will*, to procreate and eat: it is all the *Will*, manifesting itself.<sup>37</sup> By understanding the *Will*'s character as witnessed by my own will, and also by our observation of the world of representation around us, we may apprehend the *Will* as a blind, endlessly striving force, and its nature as such leads it into conflict with and consume itself.<sup>38</sup> Schopenhauer routinely undergirds discussion of the general nature of the *Will* as striving force, omnipresent in our world, with reference to the body:

Thus what appears in representation as plant, as mere vegetation and blindly striving force, we will treat, as regards its essence in itself, as will, and recognize it as what constitutes the basis of our own appearance as it expresses itself in our deeds as well as in the entire existence of our body itself.<sup>39</sup>

In such a way, Schopenhauer posits the body as the central aspect of life, in that it is both the means by which we perceive, and exist, in the world of representation, but also the means by which we have access to, intuit, and understand the real essence of the world, as *Will*.

Schopenhauer is unequivocal on this point: the body and the will are inseparable concepts.

Finally, the cognition I have of my will, although it is immediate, cannot be separated from that of my body. I do not have cognition of my will as a whole, in its unity, in perfect accord with its essence; rather I cognize it only in its individual acts, which is to say in time, time being the form in which my body (like every other object) appears: this is why the body is the condition of

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<sup>37</sup> "We will recognize that the same Will as the inner essence, but not only of people and animals, which are appearances very similar to our own; rather, the continuation of this reflection will lead us to recognize this will as the driving and vegetating force in plants, the force growing in crystals, turning magnets north, delivering a shock when heterogeneous metals strike each other; it appears as repulsion and attraction, separation and unification in the elective affinities of matter, and finally, even as gravity, struggling so forcefully in all of matter, pulling stones to the earth and the earth to the sun, -- all these are different only in the way they appear; in their innermost essence, they are the same thing we know so intimately and so much better than anything else, the thing that, when it occurs most clearly, we call *will*." Ibid. § 21. Page 135.

<sup>38</sup> "...but it is a blind activity..." Ibid. § 23. Page 139.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. § 23. Page 142.

cognition of my will. Consequently, I cannot truly imagine my will without my body.<sup>40</sup>

If that is fully understood, then the meaning of the phrase “*the body is the objectified Will,*” gains even greater significance: it is the essence of the world. To put this in another way: *the nature of the body is the nature of the world* by way of the fact that *the essence of the body is the essence of the world:*

We now clearly understand our double cognition of the essence and operation of our own body, a cognition that we are given in two completely different ways; and we will go on to use this cognition as a key to the essence of every appearance in nature; and when it comes to objects other than our own body, objects that have not been given to us in this double manner but only as representations in our consciousness, we will judge them on the analogy with our body, assuming that, since they are on the one hand representations just like our body and are in this respect homogenous with it, then on the other hand, what remains after disregarding their existence as representation of a subject must have the same inner essence as what we call will. After all, what other sort of existence or reality could we attribute to the rest of the corporeal world? Where could we get the elements to construct such a world? We do not know anything – we cannot even think anything – besides will and representation.<sup>41</sup>

Or; we cannot conceive of the world in a way that does not make analogous our fundamental experience with our body with the state, nature, character and essence of the world, of reality itself.

### **Section Six: Between Metaphysics and Ethics**

We have come to understand Schopenhauer’s system as, *au fond*, one in which: the body is the only object which we have unmediated access to; through our particular relationship to our body (as object), we can understand (as subject) the nature of the *thing-in-itself*, which we recognize as our *will*; the body is the objectification of the *will*, or, the *will* and the body are the same thing, noumenally and phenomenally, respectively. Furthermore: our *will* (*id est* our body) is the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. § 18. Page 126.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. § 19. Page 129.

perceivable manifestation of the “larger” *Will*; *Will*, as the indivisible *thing-in-itself*, operating outside of the *principium individuationis*, is the “innermost essence of this life;” we may understand the nature of *Will*, or, the nature of the essence of life, by and through understanding of the our *will*, *id est*, our own bodies. With Schopenhauer’s metaphysics fully understood, we have now arrived at a juncture where we may examine the implications, ethically, of this system, in which our body, and our relationship to it, is equated with the nature, essence, *et al.* of the world and reality itself.<sup>42</sup>

The conflation of the body and the world has tremendous implications, not just for Schopenhauer’s philosophy, but for those he influenced as well; implications which have not been borne out in any scholarly material which I have been able to locate. While Schopenhauer does not explicitly make the case that his philosophy is, in a significant sense, an interpretation of the body (preferring to mention the body, though amazingly frequently, as merely a tool to understand his larger concepts), Schopenhauer goes to lengths explicating his idea that we have access to the *Will*, the essence of the world, via our body, and he is just as clear that the nature of *Will*, as a blind, striving force, can be witnessed as manifested in and as our body by the sexual drive, hunger, and other urges: *id est*, that the *Will* is synonymous with physiological functions. Proceeding from here, Schopenhauer’s ethics, that the *Will* is the cause of all suffering, can be witnessed as morally assessing these physiological drives, being, as they are in his system, the cause of all individual suffering: suffering which he then projects outward, onto all things: hence, *The World as Will* being, as we shall see, a world of suffering. On a more subconscious level, the central conception that very nature and inner-essence of the world is synonymous with

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<sup>42</sup> I will contend in the next chapter that Nietzsche maintains this notion, of the relationship we have with our bodies as being equivalent to the relationship we have with the world, as the central element of his philosophy as well, but interprets its significance differently: one could say oppositely.

the body brings with it all manner of inferences and silent associations that, even if not spelled out *in abstracto*, as the explicit notion of the instincts and drives equating to suffering is, may take hold in the mind of Schopenhauer's reader. For, the body can be: strong; lithe; attractive; expansive; powerful; even noble; a figure of a beautiful, proud Greek sculpture. At the same time, the body is also a place of: disease; frighteningly complex, labyrinthine anatomical structures; pain, often arising from unknown causes; ungovernable urges; unstoppable and irreversible decay; and, unimpeachable death and a final dissolution. The body – viewed in a certain light, a fertile breeding ground for not only a profound optimism, but also the most gruesome... pessimism?

### **Section Six: A Suffering World**

In discussing Schopenhauer's ethical worldview, let us begin by understanding his judgement concerning the *value of life*. We will then go on to address how exactly Schopenhauer relates this assessment to his overall system, and the roll the body has, ethically, therein. Rather than proceeding outward, from the body, as we did metaphysically, we will now *reverse perspectives*, and asses Schopenhauer's view of the world, then endeavoring to understand how the body gives rise to it.

As we have said, the essence of the *Will* is a blind, relentless striving. "It is always striving, because striving is its only essence, and it is not brought to an end by reaching any goal."<sup>43</sup> With striving being its one and only aspect, the Will is "not capable of any ultimate satisfaction... on into infinity."<sup>44</sup> "There is never a goal, never a satisfaction, never a resting

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. § 56. Page 335.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. § 56. Page 335.



place.”<sup>45</sup> Teeming, striving, grasping, struggle: this is the essence of life and all the world knows.<sup>46</sup> While, in an ethical sense, this is of no cause for concern in relation to gravity and galvanism, it presents a horrifying spectacle for sentient beings to both perceive and endure.<sup>47</sup> Since the *Will* and its manifestations, all organic and inorganic beings and forces, are constantly striving, the *Will* is at odds with itself as it exists in representation.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority of desires of the *Will*, as manifested in each cognizing being, cannot be obtained: “when an obstacle is placed between it and its temporary goal, we call this inhibition suffering.”<sup>49</sup> “On the other hand, the achievement of its goal is satisfaction, contentment, happiness.”<sup>50</sup> Suffering, however, is ubiquitous; satisfaction, waning, and inevitably short-lived:

All striving comes from lack, from dissatisfaction with one’s condition, and is thus suffering as long as it is not satisfied; but no satisfaction is lasting; instead, it is only the beginning of a new striving. We see striving everywhere inhibited in many ways, struggling everywhere; and thus always as suffering; there is no final goal of striving and therefore no bounds or end to suffering.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. § 56. Page 336.

<sup>46</sup> “We saw this in the simplest of all the appearances of nature, in gravity, which does not stop striving and urging its way to an unextended central point (although it would negate itself and matter if it were to reach this point); gravity would not stop even if the whole universe gathered up into a ball. We see this in other simple natural phenomena: solidity strives to be fluid, whether by melting or dissolving, since its chemical forces can be free only in a fluid state: rigidity is the prison where they are held by the cold. Fluidity strives to vaporize, and it passes into a vapour state as soon as it is freed from all pressure. No body is without affinity, i.e. without striving or without desire and appetite... Electricity transmits its inner self-dichotomy to infinity, even if the earth’s mass absorbs the effect. As long as the pile keeps going, galvanism too is an aimless, endlessly repeated self-dichotomy and reconciliation. The existence of the plant presents another example of restless and insatiable striving, an incessant drive through higher and higher forms until the end point, the seed corn, becomes the beginning again...” Ibid. § 56. Page 335.

<sup>47</sup> “Although it takes close attention and effort to discover all this in the part of nature that is devoid of cognition, it stares us straight in the face in the part of nature that does have cognition, in animal life, whose constant suffering is easy to prove... An increase in pain is directly correlated with an increase in clarity of cognition and an increase in consciousness; consequently, pain reaches its highest pitch in human beings, and even there continues to grow in proportion to cognition and intelligence...” Ibid. § 56. Page 336.

<sup>48</sup> “...the many different forces of nature and organic forms struggle with each other for the matter in which they want to appear, since each only has what it has torn away from another; thus, there is a constant mortal struggle, and what emerges first and foremost is a resistance inhibiting the striving which is the innermost essence of all things.” Ibid. § 56. Page 335.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. § 56. Page 336.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. § 56. Page 336.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. § 56. Page 336.

With relatively-lasting satisfaction being, essentially, the opposite of the will's *modus operandi*, a new striving inevitably commences, even when it appears, briefly, that the satiety of a desire is finally at hand.<sup>52</sup> “It is no more possible for some satisfaction to stop the will from willing new things than it is for time to begin or end.”<sup>53</sup> In this way, the will is compared by Schopenhauer “to an to an unquenchable thirst.”<sup>54</sup> Continuing this metaphor, one could say that, if one does manage to drink as much as one wants, when one wants, all the time, the only thing that proceeds from this is an equally oppressive feeling of slackness – uncomfortable, unsatisfying satiety: a torturous *ennui*, languor, and lassitude: in other words, the most hideous, sickening boredom:

But the basis of all willing is need, lack, and thus pain, which is its primordial destiny by virtue of its essence. If on the other hand it lacks objects to will, its former objects having been quickly dispelled as too easily achieved, it is seized with a terrible emptiness and boredom: i.e. its essence and its being itself become an intolerable burden to it.<sup>55</sup>

Summed up, a vacillation between pain, and a lack of pain in which one's very being becomes a “burden” to oneself. Thus, in assessing life, Schopenhauer concludes that:

...life swings back and forth like a pendulum between pain and boredom; in fact, *these are the ingredients out of which it is ultimately composed*. This has also been fancifully expressed by saying that after people had placed all the pain and suffering in hell, nothing was left in heaven except boredom.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “Finally, the same thing can also be seen in human endeavors and desires, which always delude us into believing that their fulfilment is the final goal of willing; but as soon as they are attained they no longer look the same and thus are soon forgotten, grow antiquated and are really, if not admittedly, always laid to the side as vanished delusions; we are lucky enough when there is still something left to desire and strive after, to carry on the game of constantly passing from desire to satisfaction and from this to a new desire, a game whose rapid course is called happiness and slow course is called suffering, so that the game might not come to an end, showing itself to be a fearful, life-destroying boredom, a wearied longing without definite object, a deadening languor.” Ibid. § 29. Page 189.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. § 65. Page 389.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. § 57. Page 338.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. § 57. Page 338.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. § 57. Page 338. Emphasis mine.

The curtain is drawn back for us on a clear picture: life, as essentially composed of boredom and pain. One either strives and suffers, or suffers, perhaps even worse, from a lack of striving.<sup>57</sup> To say Schopenhauer paints a bleak picture would be to do him a disservice to him. One could say the crux of Schopenhauer's ethical argument, inasmuch as the world *in toto* is concerned, is that life *really is that bad*. While in the above, Schopenhauer sketches a clear picture of the emotive life as experienced by cognizing individuals, he draws an even more pessimistic view of life and its value as an idea. Below, in an especially illustrative and gloomy passage, Schopenhauer's pessimism culminates in one of the most movingly depressing, eloquent presentments of a worldview ever made: a meaningless vacillation between suffering and boredom, whisking through time, culminating in a bitter death. Schopenhauer's pessimism in actuality assumes a shade closer to utter nihilism:

“The life of the individual, far from remaining fixed in one of these extremes, only rarely touches on them, and is mostly just a stronger or weaker approximation of one or the other of these aspects, a needy willing of petty objects that always returns and thus escapes from boredom. – It is truly unbelievable how vacuously and meaninglessly (viewed from the outside) and how dismally and insensibly (viewed from the inside) life flows away from the vast majority of human beings. It is a feeble yearning and a torment, a dream-like whirl through the four ages of life through to death, accompanied by a series of trivial thoughts. They are like mechanical clocks that are wound up and go without knowing why; whenever someone is begotten and born, the clock of human life is wound again so it can play the same hurdy-gurdy that has already been played countless times, movement by movement, beat by beat, with insignificant variations. – Every individual, every human face and its life history is just one more short dream of the infinite spirit of nature, and the persistent will to life; it is just one more fleeting image jotted playfully on its infinite page, space and time, and is allowed an infinitesimal existence (compared with these), before it is erased to free up room. Nonetheless, and here is the troubling side of life, each of these fleeting images, these stale conceptions, must be paid for by the whole will to life in all its vehemence, with many profound sufferings and

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<sup>57</sup> “Instead, the fulfilment of a wish only alters its shape, so now it spread its misery in a new form; and in fact, when all wishes are finally exhausted, the will retains its impulses even in the absence of any known motives, and these impulses announce themselves with incurable misery through a feeling of the most horrible desolation and emptiness.” Ibid. § 65. Page 391.

ultimately with the long-feared arrival of a bitter death. That is why the sight of corpses makes us suddenly so serious.

Viewed overall and in a general manner, and extracting only the most significant features, the life of every individual is in fact a tragedy; but worked through in detail, it has the character of a comedy. The urges and nuisances of the day, the restless taunts of the minute, the hopes and fears of the week, the accidents of every hours, all of which are brought about by chance playing practical jokes – these are true comic scenes. But the unfulfilled desires, the thwarted striving, the hopes that have been mercilessly crushed by fate, the fatal errors of the whole life, with increased suffering and then death at the end, this always makes for tragedy. So as if fate wanted to add mockery to the misery of our existence, our lives have to contain all the grief and tragedy, but we cannot even assert our dignity as tragic players; instead, in the expanse of life's details we cannot escape the roles of foolish, comic actors.<sup>58</sup>

Schopenhauer's philosophic worldview, his pessimism, is essentially nihilistic. He regards life as a comic – not even tragic, tragedy being dignified – farce, which one is doomed to suffer through, pointlessly, to a bitter death.<sup>59</sup> Life has no value for Schopenhauer, no inherent meaning, and exists only as a long torture endured by the individual, not to mention senseless striving by the animals and plants, *et al.* The individual and the events have no meaning what so ever: the individual is merely a manifestation of the will, which is non-spatial and timeless, existing in representation due to the *principium individuationis*.<sup>60</sup> A life: a meaningless manifestation in time and space (themselves being meaningless) of *Will*, composed of pointless suffering and aching boredom, with its only significance lying in the sheer amount of senseless suffering the individual must endure before being finally silenced by a long-feared death. It is under this gloomy architecture that Schopenhauer advocates the *negation and denial of the will*; but we must first understand how the body epitomizes the suffering and striving *Will*, ethically,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. § 58. Page 348.

<sup>59</sup> "Life itself is a sea full of reefs and maelstroms that a human being takes the greatest care to avoid; he uses all his efforts and ingenuity to wend his way through, while knowing that even if he is successful, every step brings him closer to the greatest, the total, the inescapable and irreparable shipwreck, and in fact steers him right up to it, – to death: this is the final goal of the miserable journey and worse for him than all the reefs he managed to avoid." Ibid. § 57. Page 339.

<sup>60</sup> "It is true we see the individual come into being and pass away: but the individual is only appearance, it exists only for cognition that is caught up in the *principium individuationis*... the individuals... emerges out of nothing, and... return[s] back into nothing." Ibid. § 54. Page 301.

before we can understand the nihilistic *fait accompli* of Schopenhauer's philosophy. As we shall see, Schopenhauer couches the ethics of the will, understood individually, as well as its denial, in bodily terms.

### **Section Seven: A Suffering Body**

In describing his ethics, and ethical concerns relating to the individual, Schopenhauer often denotes the *will* as the *will to life*, calling the two terms a “neoplasm.”<sup>61</sup> The *will* is the *will to life*: they are the same; but the term *will to life* carries with it additional implications; namely, it casts life itself as a derivative of the will in character. It is clear with the use of this term that the essence of life itself is striving, just as with the will: after all, the will *is* life, the inner-essence of life, and, so to speak, *wills life* – and life is the will.<sup>62</sup> This is something that, while borne out through Schopenhauer's entire philosophy, is not borne out in such a readily concise way until this term is introduced. The purpose of the term *will to life*, as opposed to simply *will*, is to tie the concept of the will, and the character of life itself, directly to bodily urges: for what are bodily urges, *exempli gratia*, sex drive and hunger, but the most readily apparent manifestations of life? Of a *will to life*?

What we have seen metaphysically with the conflation of the body, the will, and the world, we now witness ethically. Accordingly, as it is characterized clearly as the will “*to life*,” when Schopenhauer speaks of negating the will (and as we shall see, the body), there can be no

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<sup>61</sup> “Regarded simply in itself, the will is just a blind and inexorable impulse, devoid of cognition... With the emergence of the world as representation (which has developed to serve the will) the will obtains cognition of its willing and what it wills: namely, nothing other than this world, life, precisely as it exists. This is why we called the appearing world the mirror of the will, its objecthood: since what the will wills is always life, precisely because life is nothing but the presentation of that willing for representation, it is a mere pleonasm and amounts to the same thing, if, instead of simply saying ‘the will’, we say ‘the will to life.’ § 54. Page 301.

<sup>62</sup> “For the will to life, life is a certainty: the form of life is the endless present...” Ibid. § 54. Page 307.

question he speaks of negating life itself.<sup>63</sup> Schopenhauer is clear that the character of life itself, an assessment of its value, *pro* or *contra*, ought to be undergone simultaneously with an analytical examination of the function of the *will to life*.<sup>64</sup> After all, under Schopenhauer's system, how could one assess and rule on one, without the other? It is just so with the body. As Schopenhauer concludes that life is striving, thwarted striving, and subsequent suffering, so he concludes that our striving, both conscious and unconscious, and our suffering, is most clearly manifested in our body. Schopenhauer's negative assessment of life and of its essential value is simultaneously a negative, even hateful, understanding of the body: in effect, as with the metaphysics, it cuts three ways. Will, life, the body: they are all, at root conception, one and the same.

Schopenhauer delineates his ethics per the individual by assessing the two options available when considering the *will to life*, affirmation or negation:

...we can [now] clarify the nature of the affirmation or negation [of the will] themselves... we will do this by looking at the ways of acting (since this is the only way in which affirmation and negation are expressed) and by regarding this action with respect to its inner meaning.<sup>65</sup>

Affirmation, affirmation of the will – of the nature of the will, affirmation of life – its striving and its suffering, is couched explicitly in bodily terms:

*The affirmation of the will* is the constant willing itself, undisturbed by any cognition, as it fills the lives of human beings in general. The human body is already the objecthood of the will as it appears at this level and in this individual; similarly, his willing as it develops in time, is the paraphrase of the body, so to speak, the explanation of the meaning of the whole and its parts, and another way

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<sup>63</sup> This is Nietzsche's central thesis on Schopenhauer, and one finds it hard to argue against. *Negate the will to life...* how else would one characterize this, but as a negation of life? How could one negate one, without the other?

<sup>64</sup> "Since the will is the thing in itself, the inner content, the essential aspect of the world, while life, the visible world, appearance, is only the mirror of the will; life will be as inseparable from the will as a shadow from a body. And where there is will, there will be life as well as world." Ibid. § 54. Page 301.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. § 60. Page 353.

of presenting the same thing in itself that already appears in the body. Thus, instead of ‘affirmation of the will,’ we could also say ‘affirmation of the body’. The basic theme of all various acts of will is the satisfaction of needs that are inseparable from the healthy experience of the body, are already expressed in it, and can be reduced to the preservation of the individual and the propagation of the species.<sup>66</sup>

Schopenhauer could not be more clear: instead of “affirmation of the will,” one could just as easily say “affirmation of the body.” A healthy body, one which experiences satisfaction from, shall we say, sex, nourishment, exercise, is one which is affirming the *will to life*.

Schopenhauer’s contention is that the striving which these drives, acts and desires represent, as with all the world-striving in general, brings with it no real rest, no lasting satisfaction: constantly, rather, we are thwarted in our desires and strivings. Even if one manages to be relatively successful in any given field or area, our desires always outstrip our accomplishments, and we always feel unfilled: striving is incessant, and the same striving we see and Schopenhauer describes in the world is witnessed most clearly by us in the form of our own bodies. As we have said, the body and the will are analogous; the body is the will’s objecthood.<sup>67</sup> All the urges we feel, “varying, according to age and circumstance, as sex drive, passionate love, envy, jealousy, hatred, anxiety, ambition, greed, illness,” in one way or another, stem from our body, and they lead to our immense individual suffering.<sup>68</sup>

Sexual appetite and the sexual organs, however, are targeted specifically by Schopenhauer as the most readily perceived “subjects” of the will in respect to the body.

The genitals are much more exclusively subject to the will and less subject to cognition than any other external organ of the body: indeed, the will shows

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. § 60. Page 353.

<sup>67</sup> “...violent and profuse willing entails violent and profuse suffering... even the pain that results when the body is injured or destroyed is only possible because the body is nothing but the will itself become object.” Ibid. § 65. Page 390.

<sup>68</sup> “...for the most part we close our eyes to the recognition – which is like a bitter medicine – that suffering is essential to life, and thus does not flow upon us from the outside, but that all people carry within themselves an unconquerable source of suffering.” Ibid. § 57. Page 344.

itself almost as independent of cognition here as it does in parts of the body that work by mere stimuli and serve vegetative life or reproduction...<sup>69</sup>

One can understand the particularly “blind” aspect of sexual desire as being especially synonymous with the conception of *will*. Reproduction is perhaps the most primal urge, and few drives ensnare us and cloud our judgement so thoroughly when in their full thrall. “Independent of cognition,” indeed! Schopenhauer certainly deserves no lack of credit for introspective honesty, nor does one who can understand him at his word.<sup>70</sup> However, Schopenhauer is clear that this association has deeper meaning than merely the outward striving character of human sexuality. In describing the sexual drive, more so than other bodily urges, Schopenhauer draws the idea of the *will to life* closely into his ethical framework, placing our sexual actions in all-encompassing ethical terms relating to life’s essential value:

In expending its own energy to preserve itself, the body demonstrates so minimal an affirmation that if it voluntarily stopped this, we could assume that the death of the body would entail the extinction of the will that appears in it as well. But even the satisfaction of the sex drive goes beyond the affirmation of one’s own existence (which occupies such a small space and time) and affirms life for an indefinite time beyond the death of the individual. Nature, which is always true and consistent, and is here even naïve, shows us quite plainly the inner meaning of the act of procreation. Our own consciousness, the intensity of the drive, teaches us that this act expresses the most decisive *affirmation of the will to life*... This is the act through which the generations of living things bind themselves into a whole... With that affirmation, which goes above and beyond the individual

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. § 60. Page 356. There is no doubt some truth to Schopenhauer’s assertion regarding sexual appetite, along with many of our other bodily drives. When is the sexual appetite ever truly sated? When, in drinking from that cool draught, has the thirst been slaked? In the vast majority of cases, where other emotions are not in play, how soon does one, to use colloquial language, attain one such sought-after “conquest,” before its value is almost completely diminished, and another prize looms, just out of reach, painfully desirous on the horizon?

<sup>70</sup> Certain preceding philosophers have questioned whether Schopenhauer’s entire philosophy does not owe its origin to Schopenhauer’s sexual appetite and its effects, good and bad, on his psychology: “Indeed, one might be tempted to ask whether his basic conception of ‘will and representation,’ the thought that redemption from the ‘will’ could only be attained through ‘representation,’ did not originate as a generalization from his sexual experiences. (In all areas of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, by the way, one should never forget that it was the conception of a young man of twenty-six; so that it partakes not only of the specific qualities of Schopenhauer, but also of the specific qualities of that period of life.)” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “On the Genealogy of Morals.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. Section III. § 6. Page 541.



body to the production of a new one, suffering and death are affirmed again as well (since they belong to the appearance of life), and the possibility of redemption... is declared fruitless now. This is the deep reason for the shame associated with copulation.

One ought to leave it in the hands of the psychoanalysts to conjecture as to the darkly limbed phantoms, the indescribable revulsion and horror, that must have lurked in the mind of Schopenhauer when he considered his own bodily apparatus, his own drives and urges; truly, it gives one pause when considered in light of the actually nihilistic system that develops out of Schopenhauer's metaphysical and ethical ruminations on the body. Schopenhauer's relationship with his own body seems to have been a particularly painful one: not unlike many men of profound genius, he undoubtedly embodied the strongest sensuality in his very nature, and what's more, a sensuality coupled in his case with an emotional sensitivity which keenly felt the various betrayals and deprivations life serves up to virtually all reflective, sentient beings. Schopenhauer's thoughts on what truly lies inside each cognizing being, as we attempt to look inward and understand the deepest seat of ourselves, are even more disturbing than his outward-bodily ruminations on our physical being and drives:

Rather, as soon as we try for once to understand ourselves, and to do so by turning in on ourselves and directing our cognition inwardly, we lose ourselves in a bottomless void and find ourselves like hollow, transparent spheres from whose void a voice is speaking, while the cause of it is not to be found within, and in wanting to grasp ourselves we shudder as we catch nothing but insubstantial phantoms.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The entire quote, with more metaphysical description proceeding: "For those who do not find it too subtle, the following consideration can also help clarify the fact that the individual is only appearance, not the thing in itself. Every individual is on one hand the cognitive subject, i.e. the complementary condition for the possibility of the whole objective world, and on the other hand a single appearance of the will, which is precisely what objectifies itself in everything. But this duality of our essence does not remain in a self-subsisting unity: otherwise we would be able to be aware of ourselves *in ourselves and independent of the objects of cognition and willing*: but this is absolutely impossible. Rather, as soon as we try for once to understand ourselves, and to do so by turning in on ourselves and directing our cognition inwardly, we lose ourselves in a bottomless void and find ourselves like hollow, transparent spheres from whose void a voice is speaking, while the cause of it is not to be found within,

Like the old joke about the haunted house, few would want to “spend a night” inside the mind of Arthur Schopenhauer! The world has known few such *dark* people, whose mind seems only to have thought its thoughts in the most oppressive of nights: even fewer who, at the same time, possess such eloquence, such an ability, with total clarity and completeness of vision, to express their rain-sodden disposition.<sup>72</sup> But now that we have fully understood the nihilistic darkness that is Schopenhauer’s understanding of the world and the body, let us finish our discussion of the man and his philosophy by relating what he proposes to do with all this worldly horror and bodily squalor: *the negation of the will to life*.

### **Section Eight: Negating the Will, the Self, Body, and Life**

The culminating aspect of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is fairly simple; it comes crashing down on one, so serious a matter as it is, and expressed in so few pages, after hundreds in thorough, systematized build-up, preparation, and explanation. Schopenhauer contends that, if it is understood in a true and deep way that the world is will, and that the will is the cause of all suffering: that the world is suffering *in essence*; one will deny the *will* in themselves.

Once an individual sees through the veil of *maya*, the *principium individuationis*, he will “no longer make a distinction between his person and that of others,” but instead “takes as much interest in the suffering of other individuals as is his own.”<sup>73</sup> That is to say, he will come to perceive, in a total and profound way, all world-suffering as *his suffering*. He will have complete compassion, “tak[ing] upon himself the pain of the whole world.”<sup>74</sup> “He recognizes

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and in wanting to grasp ourselves we shudder as we catch nothing but insubstantial phantoms.” Ibid. § 54. Page 304.

<sup>72</sup> Had Schopenhauer been seized on a different course in this life, he may have written one of the great dark novels of Western literature. Instead, he expressed himself and his darkness in what is, when all is considered, notwithstanding the romantic pessimism, the nihilism, a beautifully systematized philosophical system.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 405.

<sup>74</sup> “[If he] is not only exceedingly charitable but is actually prepared to sacrifice his own individual as soon as several others can be saved by doing so, then it clearly follows that such a human being, who recognizes himself,

the whole, comprehends its essence, and finds that it is constantly passing away, caught up in vain striving, inner-conflict, and perpetual suffering,” and he recognizes that he too is this whole, this vain striving, this suffering.<sup>75</sup> With all this in mind, with the weight of a true, felt, and sincere understanding of all this, “how could he affirm this very life by constant acts of will, binding himself ever closer to it, embracing it ever more tightly?”<sup>76</sup>

...a recognition of the whole, of the essence of things in themselves such as we have described, becomes the *tranquilizer* of all and every willing. The will begins turning away from life: it shrinks from each of the pleasures in which it sees life being affirmed. A human being achieves the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composer, and complete will-lessness... His will reverses course, and no longer affirms his own being, mirrored in appearance, but negates it instead.<sup>77</sup>

One can begin to understand later philosophers’ claim that compassion leads to a negation of life: that is, in the most literal sense, the case Schopenhauer is making here. The end-point of Schopenhauer’s system is the overwhelming of the individual with compassion: such an overwhelming, that their *will to live*, their *will to life*, turns inward, against itself, and negates itself – negates *life itself*. In practical terms, the phenomenon of the negation of the will “is revealed as the transition from virtue to asceticism.”<sup>78</sup> *Id est*, rather than act “virtuously,” as other philosophers, *exempli gratia* Aristotle, suggest, one denies oneself and life altogether: one cannot hold acting “virtuously” as a standard, upholding themselves in a noble fashion, if one takes to heart exactly what is expressed above, with nearly every self or bodily-affirming act being, as it is, an *act of will*.

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his innermost and true self in all beings, must also regard the endless suffering of all living things as his own, and take upon himself the pain of the whole world.” Ibid. § 68. Page 405.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 406.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 406.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 406.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 407.

Anyone who has reached this point will continue to sense a tendency for all sorts of willing, since he is still an animated body and concrete appearance of the will: but he intentionally suppresses this by compelling himself not to do anything he really wants to do, and instead does everything he does not want to, even when this serves no further purpose than to mortify the will. Since he himself negates the will that appears in his own person, he will not resist it when someone else does the same to him, i.e. does him wrong; that is why he welcomes every bit of suffering that comes to him from the outside, through chance or by someone's malicious actions, every harm, every injury, every disgrace, every insult: he receives them cheerfully, as an opportunity for assuring himself that he no longer affirms the will; rather, he cheerfully sides with everyone hostile to the expression of the will that is his own person...<sup>79</sup>

Thus, compassion becomes an embrace and even craving for suffering in all forms, as if, to use theological terminology, one “takes on the sins of the world,” and deserves to be crucified, tortured, and punished; but that is exactly Schopenhauer's contention: the will – and, as it is, the body and life itself – must be racked, beaten down, desiccated and destroyed. Not so different, indeed from the God of the Old Testament, who, speaking largely in terms of crime, guilt, and punishment, and with his eyes failing to “spare or pity,” flays, stabs, bludgeons, and mutilates all through the books of the Israelites, “recompensing them according to their ways and their abominations that are in the midst of them.”<sup>80</sup> One would not be amiss to say a devotee of any monotonous-theistic sect should accordingly find something of a fellow-traveler in Schopenhauer, and a feeling of sympathy for he who speaks of life itself as crime that one is, so to speak, guilty of, and must be punished for. Even more than this, perhaps the ultimate irony here is that, unlike the Old Testament God, who directs his ruthless, un pitying gaze outward, and not inward onto the Creator that he himself is, Schopenhauer finds a way to direct all the previously-outward ire of the vengeful God at the “abominations” he sees in the world inward, onto the self, in a *hatred* of the self *for* what he sees in the world, and even find a means to do so in the very *name* of the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 407.

<sup>80</sup> Ezekiel 7:4.

pity which the vengeful God categorically and self-pronouncedly lacks. In Schopenhaurianism, one becomes simultaneously the vengeful God, smiting his hapless, fallen creations, and the irredeemable sinner who cannot appease his divine creator given his unchangeable, thoroughly wicked nature.

And how does Schopenhauer describe the spectacle of life but as just such an “abomination?” A sort of ‘affront to decent feelings?’ Schopenhauer assumes an increasingly ghoulish tinge in describing the end-all of his philosophic system: he even begins, in certain passages, to sound a bit like the Cryptkeeper— and one must admit, in all fairness, significantly more than we would like, even for levity’s sake. The essential asceticism of the negation of the will comes with, not only a voluntary wish for pain and misfortune to assail, cripple, and lacerate oneself from the outside, but also with a genuine, almost Christian self-mortification of the flesh. One could even say, reflecting back to our jumping off point thirty-pages or so ago, we are no more than ever surprised that Schopenhauer, unlike most German philosophers, is *not* the son of clergymen, given the truly sadomasochistic joy he seems to take in describing, like some horrifically-sensual and depraved monk, the tortures he prescribes as remedy for the *evil* will and body:

“As he mortifies the will itself, he also mortifies its manifestation, its objecthood, the body: he feeds it meagerly, so that its exuberant thriving and prospering will not revive or stir up the will, of which he is merely the expression and mirror. So he takes to fasting, he takes to castigation and self-torture in order to keep breaking and deadening the will through constant deprivation and suffering, since he recognizes and abhors the will as the source of his own suffering and existence and that of the world.<sup>81</sup>

If Schopenhauer’s philosophy has caught on in a more practical way, surely, we would have seen a run on hair shirts! The most ghastly words of all, however, are for the dissolution of the body:

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 407.

and it must be understood that this dissolution, given the centrality of the body we have now evinced, is and cannot be anything but ultimate goal of Schopenhauer's entire philosophy. *Death* is the final "redemption" of Schopenhauerianism.

When death finally arrives to dissolve the appearance of that will whose essence had already died here long ago through voluntary self-negation, with the exception of the feeble remnant that appeared as the vitality of this body, this death is highly welcome and will be received cheerfully as a longed-for redemption. Death, in this case, does not bring an end to appearance, as in other cases; rather, the essence itself is abolished, that essence that led only a feeble existence in and through appearance; this last brittle bond has now been broken too. When someone comes to an end in this manner, the world comes to an end at the same time.

An understanding of the nature of the world as pure suffering; an overwhelming feeling of compassion for this suffering, generating a negation of the *will*; a turn away from life; a voluntary calling forth of pain and misfortune; abusement and mortification of the body; a wish for death. This is, nearly, the end of Schopenhauer's systematized philosophy. But ultimately, death is not the real wish of Schopenhauer. What he craves is *nothingness*, which supersedes even death in its nihilistic implications; death, at least, being the result *of life*. Schopenhauer reveals a *will to nothingness* in what is probably the most disturbing of his nihilistic pronouncements:

His body, healthy and strong, expresses the sex drive through its genitalia; but he negates the will and belies the body; he does not will sexual satisfaction under any conditions... By means of chastity, asceticism negates an affirmation of the will that goes beyond individual life, and proclaims that the will appearing in the body abolishes itself along with the life of the body. Nature, always true and naïve, states that the human race would die if this maxim were universal: and given what was said in the Second Book about the inter-connectedness of all the appearances of the will, I think I can assume that when the highest appearance of the will has fallen away, then animal existence, its weaker reflection, will fall away as well, just as the half-shadows disappear along with the full light. If cognition is entirely abolished, the rest of the world would fade into nothing too, because there is no object without a subject.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. § 68. Page 407.

And later, continuing and finishing the notion in the final chapter, ending the work:

Only nothing remains before us. But our nature, which resists this melting away into nothing, is really only the will to life which we ourselves are, as it is our world. The fact that we hate nothing so much is nothing more than another expression of the fact that we will life so much, and we are nothing other than this will and know nothing other than it... But then we look with deep and painful longing at this state, which puts the miserable and incurable nature of our own condition into sharp relief. Nevertheless, this consideration is the only one that can give us any lasting comfort when we have truly recognized, on the one hand, that incurable suffering and endless misery are the appearance of the will, of the world, and have seen, on the other hand, the world melting away with the abolition of the will, leaving only empty nothing before us... We must not evade it through myths and meaningless words as the Indians do, words such as 're-absorption into the Brahman, or the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists. Instead we confess quite freely: for everyone who is still filled with the will, what remains after it is completely abolished is certainly nothing. But conversely, for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing.<sup>83</sup>

Asceticism, denial of life, nothingness. These are the nihilistic results of Schopenhauer's grand, systematized philosophy. It cannot be stated otherwise that Schopenhauer argues for the gravest asceticism and self-torture, the ruination of the body: that he craves the dissolution of the body, death: that most of all, he quite literally wants the entire world to cease being – for all to become pure *nothingness*.

### **Section Nine: Concluding Thoughts; or, Going Forward with Schopenhauer**

There is no doubt that there is indeed something deeply satisfying about many of Schopenhauer's pronouncements.<sup>84</sup> One can feel his genius and understand the truth in a great many of his

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. § 71. Page 439.

<sup>84</sup> An especially good example of a truly soul-satisfying passage is as follows: "Everyone who has woken from the first dreams of youth, has paid any attention to his own experience or that of other people, has looked into life, into the history of the past as well as the present age, and finally into the works of the great writers – such a person (unless the indelible imprint of some prejudice has crippled his judgement) will certainly recognize the result, that the human world is the realm of accident and error which have a mercilessly free hand in matters both great and small, and are joined by stupidity and evil in brandishing the whip: thus it is that everything better makes its way with difficulty, that nobility and wisdom rarely appear, have an effect, or receive an audience, and that the absurd and perverse assert their mastery in the realm of thought, the trite and tasteless in the realm of art, and the evil and underhanded in the realm of deeds, with only brief interruptions." Ibid. § 59. Page 350. One

observations, his descriptions of the world – a world in which the sensitive soul finds so much to be senseless and horrifying – if not the conclusions born out of these observations. There is *much* to be found that is gratifying, even soothing in Schopenhauer’s work, especially when compared to other well-known philosophies and philosophers. Like Nietzsche, one truly gets the sense in reading Schopenhauer that he is speaking directly to you, not in the name of some academic-philosophic-pedantic exercise, but in an earnest attempt at the benevolent revealing of a universal truth which he has discovered and wholeheartedly believes. Yet, avowed as this gratifying truthfulness is, there is much that one finds exceptionally troubling, even deeply disturbing, in Schopenhauer’s work.

To begin with, Schopenhauer’s philosophy is, at base, decidedly nihilistic. The *most charitable* interpretation of Schopenhaurianism is one which acknowledges that Schopenhauer: sees the world as a truly horrible place; tells one the only appropriate response to that fatalistic cry of “The horror! The horror!” is to negate their own will, the self, destroy their body and avoid procreation;<sup>85</sup> suggests one await death eagerly as a release from this negated will and life. Indeed, Schopenhauer encourages a feeling of sympathy with death (the end of life – in his thought, the *opposite* of life, only separate from the nothingness he craves by its connection to

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cannot help but feel that, to *some extent*, Schopenhauer is indeed describing eternal human truths we have all felt in our own time, and in a particularly unapologetic, assured, and satisfying way.

<sup>85</sup> “His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines... One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, ‘I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.’ The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, ‘Oh, nonsense!’ and stood over him as if transfixed.

Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn’t touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath:

‘The horror! The horror!’

I blew the candle out and left the cabin....” Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin. 2007. Print. Page 77.



life – for opposites still have connections).<sup>86</sup> Even aside from the longing for death expressed once one has negated the will, a sympathy with death, characterized as the opposite of life, is deeply disturbing to anyone who wishes to ascribe to life any inherent value. A worldview which proffers that life is simply suffering, punctuated by some boredom, doesn't leave any room for hope of betterment or change, and in a world such as this, one cannot help but feel that death becomes an increasingly attractive notion, a worthy force *against life*; and indeed, positive action of any kind, affirmation of any kind, of the self, of life, being as it is inevitably an *affirmation of the will*, whether it be social, personal, et cetera, is antithetical to Schopenhauer's entire philosophy. But, and perhaps more disturbingly still, even if one does not accept the argument for the negation of the will, a picture still emerges in the mind of the reader of a world in which nothing is in the hands of the individual: in which everything, and especially all human suffering, regardless of any attempt to locate a "cause" or a party which is inflicting harm, is a result, *in the essence of reality*, of an all-encompassing, pulsating *Will* that knows no bounds or control, and runs through all things, causes all things. In reading Schopenhauer, a creeping feeling that there may be something to all this talk of *will*, a striving that cannot be contained and is the essence of all things, penetrates the mind even of those readers who claim to reject his philosophy, and the consequences of this conception of the world are far reaching and hard to recast precisely, given their enormity... Indeed, even in myself, I have found it hard to totally cast this notion, in a complete way, from my mind, given what I see around me (and that is the lure and magic of Schopenhauer, in general terms)! For the world *is* full of suffering – so much suffering, as has been said, that it almost makes up the essential component – and what does one see, when looking with open eyes as we shall behold in the next section, but life *devouring* life?!

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<sup>86</sup> "That is why fearing death as an annihilation is like thinking that the evening sun could complain: 'Woe is me! I am sinking into eternal night.' Ibid. § 54. Page 307.

To be clear on the subject of personal accountability for causing harm, Schopenhauer, as with several other philosophers, rejects the Free Will Thesis entirely -- and at this time I do not feel comfortable ruling for or against his professed grounds in doing so.<sup>87</sup>

Schopenhauer's pseudo-mysticism, his assertion that life itself and all the evil (life's true essence) contained therein lie in an amorphous, non-spatial and timeless force leaves room for the use of elements of his philosophy by the very worst, the moral scum and dregs of society. If one accepts the main tenets of Schopenhauerianism, if one accepts the nihilism engendered by the essential and inescapable suffering that characterizes the world, *without* the overwhelming compassion and need for self-negation of the will and body which Schopenhauer also describes, the door is easily left open to merely double down on the suffering one already sees, to accept its inevitability, to *revel in it*. In short, accepting, even passively, the omnipresent quality of the *Will* and its characteristic of pure striving and suffering, one could, and arguably much more easily and naturally than the negating route which Schopenhauer prefers, *embrace* the will; and since the will is viewed in Schopenhauerianism as an evil and the cause of all evil, embrace it in the worst, most utterly nihilistic way possible, enfolding oneself in a web of darkness and pain, making oneself the harbinger thereof. A being who rapturously agrees with Schopenhauer's worldview and metaphysics – without his ethical nuances – would stalk the land as an angel of suffering and death, knowing that in his own end death merely presents the total re-absorption back into the *Will* which is already his essence, and the essence of which (and not even of his own choice or responsibility, *id est* no “free will”) he, seemingly naturally, lives and carries out to the fullest, being, as he would understand it essentially what he *is*. Moreover, one could,

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<sup>87</sup> See Arthur Schopenhauer. “Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will.” *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. Ed. Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. Print. In this essay, the subject of the freedom of the will is given a lengthy treatment by Schopenhauer.

confronted by a profound disgust and deep seated, almost unconscious revulsion at the apparent inescapability of this quality of striving and characteristic of suffering, experiencing and understanding it as his own essence in truly self-loathsome way, take a sadomasochistic pleasure in inflicting pain *on others* so as to inflict pain *on himself*, understanding their essence and being as, essentially, one and the same. It ought to be plainly said that Schopenhauerianism leaves the door open for all sorts of strange, gruesome, and horrifying configurations of meaning, conceptions of life – some of which it would frankly be hard to speak, or even imagine, given their alien character and indeterminate, shapeless form. There is no real end point once one sets down this rocky pass, as if caught in some *unheimlich* Roerich painting of Asian hillsides, through the shadowy foothills and non-Euclidian landscape of the unfettered and unmasked darkness within the human soul. For closing here, let us say that, from wellspring of such a profoundly, ingeniously dark man as Schopenhauer, a truly *dark philosophy* takes shape in the pages of *The World as Will and Representation*.

### **Interlude: Werther's Suffering; or, A Pause at *Romanticism***

Does it have to be this way, that whatever it is that makes a man blissfully happy in turn becomes the source of his misery?

The full, warm feeling of my heart for living nature, which flooded me with such joy, which turned the world around me into a paradise, has now become an unbearable torturer, a tormenting spirit that pursues me wherever I turn. When, looking out from these rocks across the river to those hills, I used to survey the fruitful valley and was aware of the sprouting and swelling of all that surrounded me; when I saw those hills clothed from foot to peak with tall, closely ranked trees, saw those valleys with their many turnings shaded by the loveliest woods and the gentle stream gliding between the lispings reeds and mirroring the lovely clouds that the gentle evening winds rocked, as in a cradle, across the sky; when I heard the birds around me lend life to the forest while a million swarms of gnats boldly danced in the last red rays of the sun, whose final quivering glance roused the humming beetle from the grass, and the whirring and weaving around me made me look to the ground and to the moss that wrests its nourishment from these hard rocks, and the shrubbery that grows along the barren sand dunes revealed to me the innermost glowing sacred life of nature: how my warm heart enfolded all that, how I felt like a god among the overflowing abundance, and the glorious shapes of the infinite world entered and quickened my soul. Enormous mountains surrounded me, chasms lay before me, and swollen brooks plunged downward, streams rushed beneath me, and woods and mountains resounded; and I saw them, all the unfathomable forces, entwined in their hustle and bustle in the depths of the earth; and now, above the earth and under the skies swarm all the species of the manifold creatures, and everything, everything is populated with a thousand shapes; and then men shelter together in their little houses and build their nests and think they govern the whole wide world! Poor fool, who thinks so little of everything because you are so little. – From the inaccessible mountains across the deserts where no one has set foot, to the ends of the unexplored oceans wafts the spirit of the eternally creative One, delighting in every speck of dust that senses it and lives. – Oh, then, how often did I long to have the wings of the crane soaring above me to fly to the shores of the uncharted oceans, to drink that surging joy of life from the foaming breaker of infinity, and to feel for even a moment in the confined power of my breast a drop of the bliss of that Being that brings forth everything in and through itself.

My brother, the very memory of those hours makes me glad. Even the effort of summoning up and expressing once again those ineffable feelings lifts my soul and makes me feel twice over the fear of the condition that now enfolds me.

It is as if a curtain had been drawn back from my soul, and the spectacle of infinite life is transformed before my eyes into the abyss of an ever-open grave. Can you say: This is what is! since everything passes, since everything rolls on with the swiftness of a passing storm, so rarely down the entire force of its existence last, oh! torn along into the river and submerged and shattered on the rocks? There is no moment that does not consume you and those near and dear to you, no moment when you are not a destroyer, must be one; the most innocent stroll costs the lives of thousands and thousands of tiny creatures; one footstep shatters the labouriously erected structures of the ant and pounds a tiny world into a miserable grave. Ha! I am not moved by the great, rare disasters of this world,

those floods that wash away your villages, those earthquakes that swallow your cities; my heart is undermined by the destructive force that is concealed in the totality of nature; which has never created a thing that has not destroyed its neighbor or itself. And so I stagger about in fear! heaven and earth and their interweaving forces around me: *I see nothing but an eternally devouring, eternally regurgitating monster.*<sup>88</sup> – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, from *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, 1776.

This passage, from Goethe's most famous work, *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, which itself essentially began the literary genre of *Sturm und Drang* and German Romanticism, expresses a sentiment that in the truest sense can be described as Romanticism *par excellence*. Conceptually, its link with Schopenhauer is clear. In the next section, we will observe how Nietzsche places Schopenhauer, accordingly, under the broad umbrella of a negating view of life which he refers to as *Romantic Pessimism*. The above passage could not be a more fitting exposition of why: life, as a sentiment almost indistinguishable from that described by Schopenhauer, as an “*eternally devouring, regurgitating monster.*”

## Chapter Two: Nietzsche, Health, Sickness, and *Romantic Pessimism*

“*The Joyful Wisdom*, written in 1882, just before *Zarathustra*, is rightly judged to be one of Nietzsche's best books. Here the essentially grave and masculine face of the poet-philosopher is seen to light up and suddenly break into a delightful

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<sup>88</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *The Sufferings of Young Werther*. Ed. Stanley Corngold. New York: W.W. Norton, 2013. Print. Page 40. The perfect exposition of what one could call the romantic disposition and worldview. Emphasis on the last sentence mine.

smile. The warmth and kindness that beam from his features will astonish those hasty psychologists who have never divined that behind the destroyer is the creator, and behind the blasphemer the lover of life.”<sup>89</sup> – Dr. Oscar Levy, from the editorial note to the first English edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1909.

“...what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all “truth” but something else – let us say health, future, growth, power, life.”<sup>90</sup> – Nietzsche, from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1887.

“The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, ideals, purely spiritual goes to frightening lengths – and often I have asked myself whether, taking a large view, philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*... All those bold insanities of metaphysics, especially answers to the question of the value of existence, may always be considered first of all as symptoms of certain bodies... such world affirmations or world negations *tout court* lack any grain of significance...”<sup>91</sup> Nietzsche, from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1887.

“I turned my will to health, my will to *life*, into a philosophy.”<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche, from *Ecce Homo*, 1888.

### Section One: Introduction

Having peered into the darkness that is Schopenhauer’s philosophy, we will now examine the philosophy of his successor; one whose entire philosophy can in fact be seen as a prolonged grappling with and attempt to overcome the implications of Schopenhauer’s thought.

Nietzsche’s discovery of Schopenhauer was of indescribable importance in his personal and philosophical development, but he eventually recoiled in horror from the nihilistic implications of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Ultimately, Nietzsche proposed an affirmative philosophy: one which betrays Nietzsche’s profound indebtedness to Schopenhauer by being so purely the inverse of his predecessor’s. The ultimate irony of Nietzsche’s philosophical relationship to Schopenhauer is that he not only maintains Schopenhauer’s bodily emphasis, which saw the

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<sup>89</sup> These words of preface by Dr. Oscar Levy are some of the most beautiful, truthful (and my favorite) on both Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* and what I regard to be his oft-misunderstood true nature as man and as philosopher.

<sup>90</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 35.

<sup>91</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 35.

<sup>92</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. “Why I Am So Wise,” § 2. Page 680.

body as the essence of and analogous to world, but brings it back around on its originator with his conclusion that

All those bold insanities of metaphysics, especially answers to the question of the value of existence, may always be considered first of all as symptoms of certain bodies.<sup>93</sup>

In other words, a *sick* body, in the exceptional sense, inevitably promulgates a *sick* or negating worldview and philosophy. We will discuss Nietzsche's view that, categorically "the value of life cannot be estimated" below, but for now consider Nietzsche's essential idea that, just as Schopenhauer views the body and the world as analogous, Nietzsche understands this valuation in-itself as a *symptom of Schopenhauer's body*. In other words, Schopenhauer contends that the body and the world are analogous; Nietzsche takes this a step further, and says that one's particular body dictates their *experience* of the world, and therefore their judgement of it. One of the ultimate conclusions of Nietzsche's philosophy is that, not only do "world affirmations or world negations *tout court* lack any grain of significance," but that they do in fact possess great value

for the historian and psychologist as hints or symptoms of the body, of its success or failure, its plenitude, power, and autocracy in history, or of its frustrations, weariness, impoverishment, its premonitions of the end, its *will to the end*.<sup>94</sup>

Nietzsche would ultimately describe Schopenhauer's philosophy of negation – and Romantic Pessimism in general, of which he considered it a part – as a *sickness*. Nietzsche is emphatic that his having gone through this sickness of Romantic Pessimism allowed him to achieve true *health*: to understand life in an affirmative way. In an interesting extension of this thought, Nietzsche characterizes his own physiological sickness as having allowed him to understand the condition of "certain bodies" which exhibit qualities of *décadence*, degeneration, and decline; *id*

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 35

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 35. Emphasis mine.

*est*, judge *against life*. In other words, Nietzsche claims his own experience with physical suffering allowed him to understand Romantic Pessimism *as a sickness*.

In this chapter, I will discuss the simultaneously philosophical and physiological nature of Nietzsche's conceptions of *health* and *sickness*, which he developed into a critique not just of people, but of whole societies, cultures, and philosophies. I will then consider the philosophical concepts which Nietzsche generated and viewed as *healthy* in line with a general *revaluation of values*, including the *will to power*, *amor fati*, and the *Dionysian*, along the way considering their Schopenhauerian character and influence.

Nietzsche's philosophy presents itself to us as the quest for *health* from a man who was, at one point, both physiologically and philosophically, gravely ill: "I turned my will to health, my will to *life*, into a philosophy."

## **Section Two: Philosophical Sickness; or, *Romanticism***

Nietzsche tells us that "For a psychologist there are few questions that are as attractive as that concerning the relation of health and philosophy, and if he should become ill, he will bring all his scientific curiosity into his illness."<sup>95</sup> Throughout his later works, most notably, *Ecce Homo* and 1887 edition of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche makes it clear that he was indeed sick, that is he a *convalescent*, and that he marks his sickness and his subsequent return to *health* as *the* defining point of his life.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 33.

<sup>96</sup> The original English translation of Nietzsche's *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* translated the title as *The Joyful Wisdom*. Walter Kaufmann retranslated the title as *The Gay Science*. The subtitle of the original German work was the Italian "la gaya scienza," and the word "gay" implies a sense of carnivalesque frivolity and excitement Nietzsche meant to convey, which "joy," while coming close, simply does not. "...it is no accident that the homosexuals as well as Nietzsche opted for 'gay' rather than 'cheerful.' 'Gay science,' unlike 'cheerful science,' has overtones of light-hearted defiance of convention; it suggests Nietzsche's 'immoralism' and his 'revaluation of



This book may need more than one preface, and in the end there would still remain room for doubt whether anyone who had never lived through similar experiences could be brought closer to the *experience* of this book by means of prefaces. It seems to be written in the language of the wind that thaws ice and snow: high spirits, unrest, contradiction, and April weather are present in it, and one is instantly reminded no less of the proximity of winter than of the triumph over the winter that is coming, must come, and perhaps has already come.

Gratitude pours forth continually, as if the unexpected had just happened – the gratitude of a convalescent – for *convalescence* was unexpected. “Gay Science:” that signifies the saturnalia of a spirit who has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure – patiently, severely, coldly, without submitting, but also without hope – and who is now all at once attacked by hope, the hope for health, and the *intoxication* of convalescence.<sup>97</sup>

It would not be inaccurate to state that Nietzsche’s mature philosophy is defined by his status as a convalescent, as someone who has “become well again;” we are given to understand his entire conception of gay science, Nietzsche’s own term for his method of philosophy, as a method developed out of convalescence.<sup>98</sup> Gay science is the ‘saturnalia of the spirit,’ and Nietzsche frequently characterizes his philosophy as having “light feet,” of a pursuit of knowledge closest in relation to laughter and dancing.<sup>99</sup> Nietzsche stands, philosophically, in opposition to all

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values.” Walter Kaufmann. “Preface to *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs.*” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. Page 5. “Science” is used here not as we colloquially use the term today to mean strictly the natural sciences, but “science” as in “the pursuit of knowledge.” *Wissenschaft*, the German word, can mean “knowledge,” “science,” or “wisdom.” Typically it implies “the pursuit of knowledge in a systematic way.” “Gay Wisdom” or “Gay Knowledge” doesn’t quite hint upon the fact that this is a *method*: science is something you may continually *undertake*. *Gay Science* is the pursuit of knowledge in a light-hearted, frivolous, *gay* manner.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. § 1. Page 32.

<sup>98</sup> A further explanation of “Gay Science:” “The opposition to gravity remains central in Nietzsche’s mature thought but was missed entirely by his early interpreters and translators, partly owing to the influence of his sister. In *The Gay Science* this theme is equally pronounced in Nietzsche’s verse and in his prose. In *Zarathustra I* we found the words: Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity!”... as well as Zarathustra’s celebration of “light feet” and the dance... The point is of considerable philosophical importance. It concerns Nietzsche’s view of science. With science he dealt again and again from his first book to his last, and he is widely held to have been “against” it. In fact, he did not repudiate science even in his discussion of “ascetic ideals” in his *Genealogy of Morals*, where science is seen to involve ascetic ideals but Nietzsche, unlike many of his readers, never loses sight of the fact that he himself was an ascetic. Still, the ideal is – gay science. And once this is understood one can even find it announced in Nietzsche’s first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche envisions ‘an artistic Socrates’ (§ 14).” Walter Kaufmann. Ibid. Note to § 327. Page 257.

<sup>99</sup> “*In media vita* [In mid-life] – No, life has not disappointed me. On the contrary, I find it truer, more desirable and mysterious every year – ever since the day when the great liberator came to me: the idea that life could be an experiment of the seeker for knowledge – and not a duty, not a calamity, not trickery. – And knowledge itself: let

dogmatic “seriousness.”<sup>100</sup> One could almost say what Nietzsche critiques, in his newfound *health*, is the *sick* seriousness of previous philosophy: he has found in convalescence the ability to take himself lightly and therefore healthfully, to “laugh at [himself] as one would have to laugh in order to laugh *out of the whole truth*” of existence; and taking a brief look backward, one can certainly say that Schopenhauer was *not* laughing, least of all at himself.<sup>101</sup> So, when Nietzsche asks us, perhaps ironically, “what is it to us that Herr Nietzsche has become well again?” the answer is, philosophically speaking, “everything.”<sup>102</sup> The nature of Nietzsche’s *sickness* and of his newfound *health* is very nearly the key to the esoteric riddle which presents itself as his philosophy; its nature provides not only a background and lens by which to understand and view his philosophy, but it enables us to precisely define his relationship with the tradition in which he operates: and around which he, metaphorically, laughs and dances in the pursuit of higher a higher, healthier, *gayer* understanding of life.

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it be something else for others; for example, a bed to rest on, or a way to such a bed, or a diversion, or a form of leisure – for me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. “Life as a means to knowledge” – with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too. And who knows how to laugh anyway and love well if he does not first know a good deal about war and victory?” Ibid. § 324. Page 225.

<sup>100</sup> “*Taking seriously*. – In the great majority, the intellect is a clumsy, gloomy, creaking machine that is difficult to start. They call it “taking the matter *seriously*” when they want to work with this machine and think well. How burdensome they must find good thinking! The lovely human beast always seems to lose its good spirits when it thinks well; it becomes “serious.” And “where laughter and gaiety are found, thinking does not amount to anything:” that is the prejudice of this serious beast against all “gay science.” – Well then, let us prove that this is a prejudice.” Ibid. § 327. Page 257.

<sup>101</sup> “...Pursue your best and worst desires, and above all perish! In both cases you are probably still in some way a promoter and a benefactor of humanity and therefore entitles to your eulogists – but also to your detractors. But you will never find anyone who could wholly mock you as an individual, also in your best qualities, bringing home to you the limits of your boundless, flylike, froglike wretchedness! To laugh at oneself as one would have to laugh in order to laugh *out of the whole truth* – to do that even the best so far lacked sufficient sense for truth, and the most gifted had too little genius for that. Even laughter may yet have a future. I mean, when the proposition “the species is everything, *one* is always none” has become part of humanity, and the ultimate liberation and irresponsibility has become accessible to all at all times. Perhaps laughter will then have formed an alliance with wisdom, perhaps only “gay science” will then be left.

For the present, things are still quite different. For the present, the comedy of existence has not yet “become conscious” of itself. For the present, we still live in the age of tragedy, the age of moralities and religions...” Ibid. § 1. Page 74.

<sup>102</sup> “But let us leave Herr Nietzsche: what is it to us that Herr Nietzsche has become well again?” Ibid. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 33.

Let us consider first of all that Nietzsche refers to himself, almost exclusively in his later works, as a psychologist.<sup>103</sup> What is the implication, then, of his statement about the psychologist and his own ‘illness?’ In the general sense, assuming one is introspective enough, on a personal-moral-intellectual level to consider themselves, in a true sense, a *psychologist*, one becomes one’s own ‘experiment’ if one is to become *sick*; one may bring “all [their] scientific curiosity” to bear on “[their] illness,” and make real inroads into perhaps the most fruitful question in regards to philosophy and the human condition, “the relation of health and philosophy.”<sup>104</sup> This is, on the whole, exactly what Nietzsche attempted to do.

Nietzsche contends that, when one has become ill, one may “as a traveler” resolve “before calmly abandon[ing] himself to sleep, to wake up at a certain time,” surrender totally “to sickness, body and soul.”<sup>105</sup> But just as “the traveler knows that something is *not* asleep, that something counts the hours and will wake him up,” the psychologist understands that something within him will “leap up” at the right time and, being as he is his own test-subject, “catch the spirit in the act,” in its “weakness or repentance or resignation or hardening or gloom, and whatever other names there are for the pathological states of the spirit that on healthy days are opposed by the *pride* of the spirit” and provide oneself with the answer to “the question that

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<sup>103</sup> The subtitle of his last work, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, is *Out of the Files of a Psychologist*. Cf. “Idleness is the beginning of all psychology. What? Should psychology be a vice?” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. “Maxims and Arrows,” § 1. Page 466. *Twilight of the Idols* was originally to be titled *A Psychologist’s Idleness* but Nietzsche was inspired to change the name by Peter Gast, who described the book as having an “artillery”-like quality. Thus, something more “terrifying” was chosen – indeed, almost apocalyptic!

<sup>104</sup> A worthy piece of information for those who partake in what one may – and without hesitation – call in our modern age of almost ubiquitous pharmacological-societal-dowsing the psycho-pharmaceutical-industrial complex!

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* “Preface to the Second Edition,” § 2. Page 34.

concerns the psychologist,” “what will become of the thought when it is subjected to the *pressure of sickness?*”<sup>106</sup>

After such self-questioning, self-temptation, one acquires a subtler eye for all philosophizing to date; one can infer better than before the involuntary detours, side lanes, resting places, and sunny places of thought to which suffering thinkers are led and misled on account of their suffering; for now one knows whether the sick *body* and its needs unconsciously urge, push, and lure the spirit – toward the sun, stillness, mildness, patience, medicine, balm in some sense. Every philosopher that ranks peace above war, every ethic with a negative definition of happiness, every metaphysics and physics that knows some *finale*, some final state of some sort, every predominantly aesthetic or religious craving for some Apart, Beyond, Outside, Above, permits the question whether it was not sickness that inspired the philosopher. The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, ideals, purely spiritual goes to frightening lengths – and often I have asked myself whether, taking a large view, philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*.

Behind the highest value judgements that have hitherto guided the history of thought, there are concealed misunderstandings of the physical constitution – of individuals or classes or even whole races...<sup>107</sup>

Nietzsche’s sickness has allowed him to assess what occurs when one becomes *ill*, in the exceptional sense of the term. Having been profoundly *sick*, Nietzsche is in a position to assess the “involuntary detours, side lanes, resting places and sunny places” which sick thinkers are drawn to, are to led to, on account of their suffering, which Nietzsche has come to understand in the strongest sense: “for now one knows whether the sick body and its needs unconsciously urge, push, and lure the spirit,” with the answer quite apparently being yes. Nietzsche even brings into question a large section of modern psychology, for the idea of happiness as the absence of some variety of negative feeling is relatively pervasive in our culture today, and one beings to wonder in serious terms how much of even modern psychology, with all its scientific objectiveness, is yet still a *misunderstanding of the body*. “For assuming that one is a person,

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<sup>106</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. “Preface to the Second Edition,” § 2. Page 34.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 34.

one necessarily also has the philosophy that belongs to that person; but there is a big difference.

In some it is their deprivations that philosophize, in others, their riches and strengths.”<sup>108</sup>

Nietzsche makes the case as we have seen above that “world affirmations or world negations *tout court* lack any significance when measured scientifically.” Profoundly displaying his

Schopenhauerian influence, Nietzsche makes the case that the body is the deciding factor, its physiological disposition betrayed in its conceptualization of happiness as a merely “negative”

phenomenon, *id est a lack* of something else; the “craving for some Apart, Beyond, Outside,

Above:” all these notions, this pathological way of configuring values, which one necessarily

pronounces in opposition to life itself, cause the psychologist to “question whether it was not

sickness that inspired the philosopher,” or individual.<sup>109</sup> “Judgements, judgements of value,

concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true: they have value only as

symptoms, they are worthy of consideration only as symptoms.”<sup>110</sup> And when Nietzsche

concludes this from his own sickness, simultaneously concluding that “taking a large view,

philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the*

*body*,” it is worth considering Schopenhauer, of his subsuming of the Greeks, Hindus, and even

Kant, the majority of preceding philosophy, into what is so clearly his “unconscious disguise of

physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, ideal, [and] purely spiritual;” into what is

so clearly one of, if not *the* “bold insanities of metaphysics.” Reading Schopenhauer as the

subtext for these passages, as I contend one can do for a surprisingly and significantly large

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 33.

<sup>109</sup> For if happiness is necessarily conceived negatively, *id est* as the absence of pain, is life itself not the mere absence of... nothingness? Rather than positively-attributable thing, life itself becomes a *lack*. When one lacks something, one seeks it. Hence, we arrive quite neatly at all the formulations for the deadening longing of some lost or otherworldly peace, Above, Beyond, “Heaven,” in a word “nothingness.” What a formula for sickness!

<sup>110</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976. Print. “The Problem of Socrates,” § 2. Page 474.

amount of Nietzsche's philosophy, Schopenhauerianism displays itself as not only a philosophy-as-bodily-interpretation, but, to a "frightening length," a philosophy-as-bodily-misunderstanding. Schopenhauer: whose very concept of the *will to life* is quite plainly a vilification, a *sick interpretation*, of the most basic physiological processes. Indeed, how truly *sick*, in the most exceptional sense, does one have to be to become the spidery web-spinner of the metaphysical monstrosity we so carefully examined above – and to reach such conclusions?<sup>111</sup> What may have initially appeared as a hyperbolic usage of medical phraseology becomes increasingly *apropos* as one considers the question more deeply.

And what was, in Nietzsche's own words, this *sickness*, this

stretch of desert, exhaustion, disbelief, icing up in the midst of youth, this interlude of old age at the wrong time, this tyranny of pain even excelled by the tyranny of pride that refused the conclusions of pain – and conclusions are consolations – this radical retreat into solitude as a self-defense against a contempt for men that had become pathologically clairvoyant – this determined self-limitation to what was bitter, harsh, and hurtful to know, prescribed by the nausea that had gradually developed out of an incautious and pampering spiritual diet...<sup>112</sup>

That gave him such profound insight? Nietzsche has one answer: "*romanticism*."<sup>113</sup>

### **Section Three: "What is *Romanticism*?"**

It is clear that one can read Schopenhauer's philosophy as, to a very large extent, the essential subtext for Nietzsche whole idea of *sickness*. What is important to consider now is how and why Nietzsche characterizes Schopenhauer's philosophy under the broader category of *romanticism*, and what this means for his philosophy. It is significant that Nietzsche does not point to

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<sup>111</sup> "Why did mankind have to take seriously the brain afflictions of sick web-spinners? They have paid dearly for it!" Ibid. "Reason in Philosophy," § 4. Page 482.

<sup>112</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. § 1. Page 32.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. § 1. Page 33. Emphasis mine.

Schopenhauer or Schopenhauerianism *in particular* as a the problem, but that he indicates, as we shall see below, that Schopenhauer's philosophy is merely a part of the larger problem, this problem being the *romantic* worldview, which we saw at work above in Werther's moving, and admittedly frightening, description of the world and life.

Nietzsche provides a detailed discussion of how he understands *romanticism* and the *romantic* disposition as a sickness. In thoroughly understanding *romanticism*, we come to understand the essential commonality which all *sick* philosophies, artists, individuals, and cultures share: in discerning this crucial relationship, we begin to understand Nietzsche's mature philosophical conception of Schopenhauer, and how he may regard philosophical pessimism, more broadly *romantic pessimism*, as a *sickness*.

*What is romanticism?* – It may perhaps be recalled, at least among my friends, that initially I approached the modern world with a few crude errors and overestimations and, in any case, hopefully. Who knows on the basis of what personal experiences, I understood the philosophical pessimism of the nineteenth century as if it were a symptom of a superior force of thought, of more audacious courage, and of more triumphant fullness of life than had characterized the eighteenth century, the age of Hume, Kant, Condillac, and the sensualists. Thus tragic insight appeared to me as a distinctive *luxury* of our culture, as its most precious, noblest, and most dangerous squandering, but, in view of its overrichness, as a *permissible* luxury. In the same way, I reinterpreted German music for myself as if it signified a Dionysian power over the German soul: I believed that I heard in it the earthquake through which some primeval force that had been dammed up for ages finally liberated itself – indifferent whether everything else that one calls culture might begin to tremble. You see, what I failed to recognize at the time both in philosophical pessimism and in German music was what is really their distinctive character – their *romanticism*.<sup>114</sup>

What initially appeared to Nietzsche, in what he grimly describes as the “crude” error and overestimation of the “hopefulness” of youth, in his appraisal of the modern world: as a superior force of thought; as an audacious courage; as a triumphant fullness of life; something categorically not experienced as the eighteenth century's focus on reason and “Enlightenment,”

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. § 370. Page 327.

and exemplified by the overrichness of feeling, of sentiment (which we see in all *romantic* works and figures), Nietzsche has now reinterpreted, following his own experience with the *sickness* that is the romantic worldview, as its complete opposite. Nietzsche originally equated philosophical pessimism with a Dionysian-pessimistic understanding of life, but owing to his convalescence, his journey *through* sickness of romanticism, he is now able to appreciate romanticism for what it really is. Concerning life itself, Nietzsche now understands *romanticism* as true spiritual impoverishment, and the opposite of the overflowing vitality exhibited in the latter. Romanticism: overflowing in sentiment, but not necessarily in *vitality*.

*What is romanticism?* – Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *over-fullness of life* – they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight – and then those who suffer from an *impoverishment of life*, and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsion, anesthesia, and madness. All romanticism in art and insight corresponds to the dual needs of the latter type, and that included (and includes) Schopenhauer as well as Richard Wagner, to name two most famous and pronounced romantics whom I *misunderstood* at the time – *not*, incidentally, to their disadvantage, as one need not hesitate in all fairness to admit. He that is richest in the fullness of life, the Dionysian god and man, cannot only afford the sight of the terrible and questionable but even the terrible deed and any luxury of destruction, decomposition, and negation. In his case, what is evil, absurd, and ugly seems, as it were, permissible, owing to an excess of procreating, fertilizing energies that can still turn any desert into lush farmland. Conversely, those who suffer most and are poorest in life would need above all mildness, peacefulness, and goodness in thought as well as deed – if possible, also a god who would be truly a god for the sick, a healer and savior; also a logic, the conceptual understandability of existence – for logic calms and gives confidence – in short, a certain warm narrowness that keeps away fear and encloses one in optimistic horizons.”<sup>115</sup>

Nietzsche understands *romanticism*, exemplified by two of the most famous and pronounced romantics, Wagner and Schopenhauer, as an *impoverishment of life*. In Schopenhauer we see one “seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge,”

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. § 370. Page 328.



and in Wagner we see a similar redemption from the self, but in the form of “intoxication, convulsion, anesthesia, and madness.”<sup>116</sup> Thus Nietzsche has come to fully understand those who he misunderstood in his youth, recasting them as he now understands them in light of his true experience with the worldview which they espouse: a worldview which he, as a psychologist, has diagnosed as a *sickness* and now understands. In contrast to the impoverishment we see in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, which turns everything one may derive joy and satisfaction from into a subject worthy of *negation*, those who enjoy a healthy fullness of life require “Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight:” one can understand tragic in this sense to mean the dignity regarding life itself affirmed in the suffering of the tragic hero: the tragic hero does not negate. As opposed to one sickened by, and under the influence of, *romanticism*, a healthy individual, one with a Dionysian disposition, can “not only afford the sight of the terrible and questionable but even the terrible deed and any luxury of destruction, decomposition, and negation. In his case, what is evil, absurd, and ugly seems, as it were, permissible, owing to an excess of procreating, fertilizing energies that can still turn any desert into lush farmland.” The *Dionysian* man, holding the tragic *yet affirmative* view of life and especially of suffering, rejoices at the sight of life even in its worst moments, knowing they may be turned into “lush farmland” in the absolute end through the overflowing “procreating, fertilizing energies” of an affirmative nature. Conversely, *the romantic cannot stand the sight of life*, and most especially life as exhibited in its closest subjective form, the self and the body. They suffer terribly out of an impoverishment of life: physiologically, life cannot be borne by their constitution in a mode that affords the aforementioned tragic insight, the *Dionysian* perspective, and thus they seek escape, either through the denial of all in the deadening effect of

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<sup>116</sup> *Liebestod*, the ecstatic romantic-pessimistic conflation of love and death (both involving the dissolution of the self), is only one of the myriad stranger configurations of meaning to come out of romanticism, will be the discussed in the third chapter.

overabundant and perpetual calm seas, perhaps brought on and *forced* on the self by the most vicious asceticism, or the deadening effect of the senses through total overstimulation, itself its own escape.<sup>117</sup> *Romanticism* is, most essentially, the flight away from life through a flight away from the self, in the form of the crude asceticism of Schopenhauer (and your religious fanatic – under this framework, one could well call them a romantic as well – and indeed, your fanatic always walks off into a “desert,” internally or externally, somewhere, somehow, sometime...) who wished to mortify the self into oblivion; or the flight away from the self in the form of its overstimulation, through the intoxication of love or addiction to any kind of numbing substance. Both the art of Wagner and the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and indeed, *romantic* art, writing, and thought as a whole, exhibits the telltale obsession with dissolution in the form of a pathologically compulsive depiction of nature, love, and death, all forces which assume an interrelated character in romantic writing and share the common property of being a force which is both greater than human beings and able to subsume the individual. An expression of this morbid pursuit of dissolution is the calling card of the *romantic*, a calling card that is physiologically conditioned by an inability to, in simple terms, *cope with life*. It is thus very well that Nietzsche not only saw to question philosophic pessimism in regards to *health*, but more accurately, and expansively, romanticism *as a whole*. And thus, Nietzsche

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<sup>117</sup> This would do well to be studied as those who abuse any physiologically altering or numbing substance in our present age, be it alcohol, marijuana, prescription pain killers, antidepressants or muscle relaxers. “How much disgruntled heaviness, lameness, dampness, dressing gown— how much *beer* there is in German intelligence! How is it at all possible that young men who dedicate their lives to the most spiritual goals do not feel the first instinct of spirituality, *the spirit’s instinct for self-preservation* – and drink beer? The alcoholism of the young scholars is perhaps no question mark concerning their scholarliness – without spirit one can still be a great scholar – but in every other respect it remains a problem. Where would one not find the gentle degeneration which beer produces in the spirit? Once, in a case that has almost become famous, I put my finger on such a degeneration 00 the degeneration of our number-one German free spirit, the *clever* David Strauss, into the author of a beer-bench gospel and “new faith.” It was not for nothing that he made his vow to the “fair brunette” in verse – loyalty unto death.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976. Print. “What the Germans Lack,” § 2. Page 506.

...gradually learned to understand Epicurus, the opposite of a Dionysian pessimist; also the “Christian” who is actually only a kind of Epicurean – both are essentially romantics – and my eye grew ever sharper for the most difficult and captious form of *back inference* in which the most mistakes are made: the backward inference from the work to the maker, from the deed to the doer, from the ideal to those who *need it*, from every way of thinking and valuing to the commanding need behind it.

Overtime, Nietzsche begins applying this conceptual framework to thinkers and artists throughout time and regardless of place. What Nietzsche therefore illuminates is a mode of critique which, as I said in the introduction to this chapter, can function as a means of evaluation for almost any individual, society, culture, or philosophy: Nietzsche’s entire critique of morality emerges from this aptly named “backward inference,” and it can be witnessed in everything from his aesthetic theory, to his critique of Christianity, to his writings on the ascetic ideal; it is even something one can make use of in day to day interactions. Nietzsche refers to this method – the essential method of his entire mode of philosophic critique – as the “most captious” inference one can make for a reason.

Regarding all aesthetic values I now avail myself to this main distinction: I ask in every instance, ‘is it hunger or superabundance that has here become creative?’ At first glance, another distinction may seem preferable – it is far more obvious – namely the question whether the desire to fix, immortalize, the desire for *being* prompted creation, or the desire for destruction, for change, for future, for *becoming*. But both of these kinds of desire are seen to be ambiguous when one considers them more closely; they can be interpreted in accordance with the first scheme that is, as it seems to me, preferable. The desire for *destruction*, change, and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, ‘Dionysian’); but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged, who destroy, *must* destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them. To understand this feeling, consider our anarchists closely.

It is key to understand and avoid what Nietzsche acknowledges is the easy mistaken conflation of *Dionysian Pessimism* and *Romantic Pessimism* through their seemingly-similar actualizations: *exempli gratia*, the desire for “destruction, change, and becoming” can not necessarily be relied

on to distinguish those possessed with *ressentiment*, “the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged,” who want to slander life itself because life itself is poisonous to them, from those who are possessed of “overflowing energy,” who are “pregnant with future.” In other words, the desire for destruction or change can just as easily be born from a position of overflowing affirmation as from a position of total negation. The backward inference is, in fact, much more difficult to make than it initially appears: one has to examine the circumstances of the individual “deeds” quite closely indeed to accurately assess the “doer.” Ultimately, the difference between someone like Julius Caesar and St. Paul, however, should be obvious. Both wanted to, to some extent, destroy or change: for vastly different reasons, out of vastly different understandings of themselves and life – out of vastly different *valuations* of life.<sup>118</sup>

The will to *immortalize* also requires a dual interpretation. It can be prompted, first, by gratitude and love ; art with this origin will always be an art of apotheoses, perhaps dithyrambic like Rubens, or blissfully mocking like Hafiz, or bright and gracious like Goethe, spreading a Homeric light and glory over all things. But it can also be the tyrannic will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, is tormented, and would like to turn what is more personal, singular, and narrow, the real idiosyncrasy of his suffering, into a binding law and compulsion – one who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of his torture, on them, branding them with it. This last version is *romantic pessimism* in its most expressive form, whether it be Schopenhauer’s philosophy of Will or Wagner’s music – romantic pessimism, the last great even in the fate of our culture.

The difficulty of the backward inference is just as difficult in the opposite sense. The will to *immortalize*, to stamp one’s very image on the world, can be brought on by an overflowing “gratitude and love,” in which one may appear quite luminously, as a *shining example*, “bright and gracious like Goethe, spreading a Homeric light and glory over all things,” but may also, be, as we have seen all too clearly, the effect of a “tyrannic will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, is tormented, and would like to turn what is more personal, singular, and narrow, the

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<sup>118</sup> Could one ever imagine Julius Caesar, even at the moment of the 50<sup>th</sup> stab wound, assigning life, as a whole, a *negative* value?

real idiosyncrasy of his suffering, into a binding law and compulsion – one who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of his torture, on them, branding them with it.” Schopenhauer: the image of his *torture*, indeed.

(That there still could be an altogether different kind of pessimism, a classical type – this premonition and vision belongs to me an inseparable from me, as my *proprium* and *ipissimum*; only the word classical offends my ears, it is far too trite and has become round and indistinct. I call this pessimism of the future – for it comes! I see it coming! – *Dionysian* pessimism.)”<sup>119</sup>

*Romanticism* is, most essentially the flight away from life through: a flight away from the self in the form of the crude asceticism of Schopenhauer (and your religious fanatic – one always walks into a “desert,” internally or externally, somehow, sometime...) who wished to mortify the self into oblivion; or, the flight away from the self in the form of its overstimulation, through the intoxication of love or addiction to any kind of numbing substance. In *romanticism*, the self is the problem because life is essentially one grand misfortune, which one experiences in, as, and through the self. Both the art of Wagner and the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and indeed, *romantic* art, writing, and thought as a whole, exhibits the telltale obsession with dissolution in the form of a pathological depiction of nature, love, and death, all forces which assume an interrelated character in romantic writing and share the common property of being a force which is able to subsume the individual. Nietzsche’s description of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and Wagner’s music as being akin in the specific aspect of their *romanticism* is key to understand their shared character, which otherwise may not be so easily illuminated, and we can see even more clearly from the brief interlude we took with *Werther* above what is meant by this: *romanticism* is, in essence, a prolonged, transcendental, all-encompassing *recoiling in horror* when one is faced with the spectacle of the true essence life. Regardless of the subsequent

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<sup>119</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. § 370. Page 329.

reaction, whether it be, as we examined above, destruction or immortalization, this recoiling assumes a dispositional quality, and this disposition is most accurately called *romantic pessimism*. One cannot, quite literally, as Goethe eloquently presented in Werther's moving description of life, or as we see in Schopenhauer's profound, systemized reaction, stand the pain, comprehend the suffering, see things for what they really are, and maintain a *healthy* view of things. It will be profitable now to remember that Schopenhauer formulated his philosophy in his early twenties, and changed it in no detail whatever until his death, fifty years later. His philosophy of profound *romantic pessimism* withstood thirty years of total ignorance by the general public and philosophical community without a single change. Schopenhauer *needed* his *romantic pessimism*, he did not change it because he could not change himself: it was not a choice.

What is perhaps even more significant is that Nietzsche is very clear in his contention that *romantic pessimism* is the "last great event in the fate of our culture." Nietzsche's understanding of romantic pessimism as engendering, or already being some form of, nihilism, is central to his conception of the *revaluation of all values*, discussed below.

What was the shock of pain, the ineffaceable, perhaps even unspeakable moment of suffering which initiated Schopenhauer's lifelong "dark period?"<sup>120</sup> His father's suicide, perhaps? On some level, it feels indecent to speculate about a man's most private moment in such a way. What can be sure is that Schopenhauer underwent a great pain, and continued feeling it in all the littlest ways all his life: and he had willpower. He needed a strong *will* to will negation and nothingness that effectively for that long.

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<sup>120</sup> "Did you ever wake up to find  
A day that broke up your mind,  
Destroyed your notion of circular time?  
It's just that demon life has got you in its sway."  
The Rolling Stones, Jagger/Richards. "Sway." *Sticky Fingers*. 1971.

On the subject of individual health and sickness, Nietzsche's ultimate conclusion, which applies to Schopenhauer just as much as ever, is that it is ultimately up to the physiological-philosophical composition of the individual whether or not we affirm by pitting "our pride, our scorn, our will power against" the pain, suffering and disillusion we find in this life, "equaling the American Indian who, however tortured, repays his torturer with the malice of his tongue;" or whether we, like Schopenhauer, attempt to "withdraw from pain into the Oriental Nothing – called Nirvana – into mute, rigid, deaf resignation, self-forgetting, self-extinction."<sup>121</sup> In any case, one does not remain unchanged. When one is confronted with the realization with which Werther is above: that is, when one is confronted with "great pain, the long slow pain that takes its time – on which we are burned, as it were, with green wood" (Werther's is just such a case of great pain – his moving description of his newfound, *romantic* understanding of life comes after profound heartbreak, which ends in suicide) one is, at the very least, fundamentally altered in some way. One cannot go back, and whether one becomes the American Indian, revenging himself, as it were, on his torturer or the self-negating Buddhist who retreats from the world,

out of such long and dangerous exercise of self-mastery one emerges as a different person, with a few more question marks – above all with the will henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly and quietly than one had questioned heretofore. The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a problem. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy. Even love of life is still possible, only one loves differently. It is the love for a woman that causes doubts in us.<sup>122</sup>

When one undergoes a great pain and undergoes that revelation – and a truly great pain is always accompanied by a revelation – life does indeed become the *problem*. Whether one is able to react with an affirmative, *Dionysian* view of things or sinks into the depths of a pathological

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<sup>121</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 34.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* Preface to the Second Edition, § 2. Page 34.

*romantic pessimism*, it is hard to argue that it is not, on some level, ultimately up to the constitution of the individual. One cannot deny, though, that a romantic-pessimistic interpretation of life in the terms of a Schopenhauer is a *sickness*, indeed.

#### **Section Four: Nietzsche's Understanding of Physiology in Relation to Philosophy**

While we now understand in some detail Nietzsche's view of *sickness* and *health*, and the overall relation of this view to the question of life itself, a question mark may yet hover over what exactly Nietzsche means by all this talk of "physiology." To be sure, the Schopenhauerian character of Nietzsche's philosophy which, on the most basic level, remained present regardless of his status as Schopenhauer's "antipode", expresses itself fully here.<sup>123</sup> Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, bases his philosophy on the body, on interpretations *of* the body. One point of clarification is that Nietzsche at times uses the term "physiological" to address what we may consider today to be "psychological" problems: as a philologist by education, there is no doubt Nietzsche was acutely aware of the Greek root of the word psychology. The Greek "psyche" is "soul."<sup>124</sup> Nietzsche frames himself as a psychologist throughout his later work, but he views one's "thought patterns" and overall disposition as directly tied to their physiology, and categorically *not* to some metaphysical essence; *id est*, your thoughts come from, are conditioned by, are nothing but, an effect of your body. After all, what else could one say about it, when put that way? What first comes across as an almost crude and superficial idea gathers weight as one considers it more thoroughly.<sup>125</sup> In what amounts to an extension of the Schopenhaurian

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<sup>123</sup> "Wagner responds to this dual need of the latter no less than Schopenhauer: they negate life, they slander it, hence they are my antipodes." Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. "Nietzsche Contra Wagner." *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. "We Antipodes." Page 670. More thoroughly addressed below.

<sup>124</sup> Why Nietzsche would opt for words without the metaphysical baggage of "soul," if not yet obvious, should be soon enough.

<sup>125</sup> Not to mentioned modern findings on epigenetics. The idea that your actions in life, and such things as your educational level and work ethic, can be genetically impacted by your forebears, and can impact the genetics of



position, in which the *will* is considered to be analogous to the body in-itself and *vice-versa*, for Nietzsche physiological indications point to the essential idea that

We have no right to *isolated* acts of any kind: we may not make isolated errors or hit upon isolated truths. Rather do our ideas, our values, our Yeas and Nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit – related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of *one will, one health, one soil, one sun*.<sup>126</sup>

The body and questions of physiology are essential to Nietzsche's mature philosophy, and form an integral part of his concepts of *health* and *sickness*, though we have more or less danced around this issue until now by focusing on the implications of physiology in regards to the affirmation or negation of life in the face of pain and suffering: we have seen clearly that Nietzsche firmly believes one 'can tell the tree by the fruits.' "*One will, one health, one soil, one sun;*" the art of the fore-examined backward inferences *par excellence*, indeed. Now let us address the topic more fully and directly.

A testament to the import of physiology in Nietzsche's mature thought can be found in its use as the main point of reference in the very first section of Nietzsche's autobiography, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*. Just as the body is brought to focus in the very first sentences of *The World as Will and Representation*, *Ecce Homo* begins

The good fortune of my existence, its uniqueness perhaps, lies in its fatality: I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother I am still living and becoming old. This dual descent, as it were, both from the highest and lowest rung of the ladder of life, at the same time a *decadent* and a *beginning* – this, if anything, explains that neutrality, that freedom from partiality in relation to the total problem of life, that perhaps distinguishes me. I have a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and

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your descendants, has quite recently become a very real scientific possibility. It has not escaped my attention that this lends credence to a notion of "good breeding."

<sup>126</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. "On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic." *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. Preface, § 2. Page 452.

decline than any other human being before me; I am the teacher *par excellence* for this – I know both, I am both.<sup>127</sup>

In a moving metaphor in which he assumes the implicitly-bodily vitality of both his mother and father, Nietzsche begins to address the central Schopenhauerian issue of death: of the sympathy with death which we witnessed as one of the nihilistic end-points of Schopenhauer's system; death as the longed for dissolution of the negated *will* in the mortified body. Nietzsche, in assessing the 'fatality of his existence,' characterizes himself as, in some way, both the decaying body and essence of his father and the living, breathing anatomy of his mother; he has "come to grips" with both death and life, and as a result understands *decadence* and its opposite, rising life, *id est* a "beginning." In this way, we can understand his association of the term *decadence* with not only a social decline, but with negation and a predilection to death in the form of a nihilistic assessment of value; he stresses his impartiality in philosophical matters, yet also in bodily matters, by his "dual descent both from the highest and lowest rungs of the ladder of life." Regarding *decadence* and rising, vital life, decline and ascent, Nietzsche knows both, he *is both*.

Initiating his autobiography with clear testament to his understanding of *both death and life*, Nietzsche recenters his autobiographical discussion of his philosophy around his relationship and understanding of his body. Nietzsche portrays his own bodily illness as granting him the ability to understand *sickness* in the exceptional sense, the *sickness* of the individual philosophers, their *decadence*, and their modes of thought which he critiques throughout his later works. In this way, Nietzsche's discussion of his physiological illness closely parallels, even becomes indistinguishable from, his discussion of his experience with *romantic pessimism*, the reality of which as a *philosophical* sickness we are now acutely aware. One must fully

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<sup>127</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. "Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is." *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. "Why I Am So Wise," § 1. Page 678.

appreciate Nietzsche's understanding of the overlap, simultaneity, even inseparability, of the two forms of sickness – physiological and philosophical – to understand the synonymous nature of terms like *decadence*, decline, degeneration, corruption and *sickness*, terms which would appear to have very different meanings, but which for Nietzsche act as synonyms and provide the same critique of nihilistic persons, philosophies, and cultures.

The following winter, my first one in Genoa, that sweetening and spiritualization which is almost inseparably connected with an extreme poverty of blood and muscle, produced *The Dawn*. The perfect brightness and cheerfulness, even exuberance of the spirit, reflected in this work, is compatible in my case not only with the most profound physiological weakness, but even with an excess of pain. In the midst of the torments that go with an uninterrupted three-day migraine, accompanied by laborious vomiting of phlegm, I possessed a dialectician's clarity *par excellence* and thought through with very cold blood matters for which under healthier circumstances I am not mountain climber, not subtle, not cold enough. My readers know perhaps in what way I consider dialectic as a symptom of decadence; for example in the most famous case, the case of Socrates.<sup>128</sup>

Nietzsche very clearly asserts that the profound "spiritualization" he achieved during his first winter in Genoa is directly attributable to the "extreme poverty of blood and muscle" he was coping with at the time; a profound physiological weakness, an excessive pain, leading him to both an understanding of certain matters and a subsequent 'bright cheerfulness' at his awareness. *The Dawn* marked the first book of his convalescence, and the title is a metaphor in this respect. Most strikingly, Nietzsche considers his possession of the "dialectician's clarity *par excellence*," his ability to think through matters with "very cold blood," a symptom of his physiological condition, one which allowed him to understand *decadence*; *id est*, the state of *declining life*, because he was *sick*.<sup>129</sup> Nietzsche even seems to indicate that had he been completely

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid. § 1. Page 678.

<sup>129</sup> "One chooses dialectic only when one has no other means. One knows that one arouses mistrust with it, that it is not very persuasive. Nothing is easier to erase than a dialectical effect: the experience of every meeting at which there are speeches proves this. It can only be self-defense for those who no longer have other weapons.

physiologically healthy, he would not have been able to establish the overall philosophical understanding of *sickness* and decline which he enjoys upon writing *Ecce Homo*: as he says above, he knows both and *is both*.

All pathological disturbances of the intellect, even that half-numb state that follows fever, have remained entirely foreign to me to this day; and I had to do research to find out about their nature and frequency. My blood moves slowly. Nobody has ever discovered any fever in me... There is altogether no sign of any local degeneration; no organically conditioned stomach complaint, however profound the weakness of my gastric system may be as a consequence of over-all exhaustion. My eye trouble, too, though at times dangerously close to blindness, is only a consequence and not a cause: with every increase in vitality my ability to see has also increased again.<sup>130</sup>

Nietzsche claims that any mind-numbing effects that routinely accompany physiological sickness among people are absent in his case: in other words, he was able to consider “with cold blood” problems of life and death in his sickest moments that under healthier ones he would not have been able to approach with near the subtlety or clarity, and also which most people are not able to contemplate in those moments because of the half-numb state which fever and illness typically induce. Just as importantly, he claims his physiological trouble is a condition of his overall vitality: that is, the overall condition of his being in life; his physiological sickness is not “organically conditioned;” his eyesight improves along with his overall vitality, *id est*, his overall strength, arguably both in the physiological and philosophical sense.

A long, all too long series of years signifies recovery for me; unfortunately it also signifies relapse, decay, the periodicity of a kind of decadence. Need I say after all this that in questions of decadence I am *experienced*? I have spelled them forward and backward. Even the filigree art of grasping and comprehending in general, those fingers for *nuances*, that

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One must have to enforce one's right: until one reaches that point, one makes no use of it. The Jews were dialecticians for that reason; Reynard the Fox was one – and Socrates, too?” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. “The Problem of Socrates,” § 6. Page 476.

<sup>130</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. “Why I Am So Wise,” § 1. Page 679.

psychology of looking around the corner, and whatever else is characteristic of me, was learned only then, is the true present of those days in which everything in me became subtler – observation itself as well as all organs of observation. Looking from the perspective of the sick toward *healthier* concepts and values, and, conversely, looking again from the fullness and self-assurance of a *rich* life down into the secret work of the instinct of decadence – in this I have had the longest training, my truest experience; if in anything, I became master in *this*. Now I know how, have the know-how, to *reverse perspectives*: the first reason why a ‘revaluation of values’ is perhaps possible for me alone.<sup>131</sup>

In essence, Nietzsche’s abilities as a psychologist and philosopher are directly applicable to his physiological sickness and suffering, and as we said above, his description of these events and their impact on his understanding of the human condition mirror each other to an amazing extent. In general terms, Nietzsche does not distinguish between physiological and philosophical health: they inform each other to such a degree that he does not see fit to handle them separately. This is evinced by his description of his own physiological condition, not to mention his experience of the death of his father, as enabling him to understand *decadence*: in fact, he refers to himself *as* a decadent. His time of physical sickness enabled him to comprehend the morbid, degenerative nature of the decadence that is exhibited in all forms of life-denying philosophy, and most especially to conceptualize the “backward inference” with which he is able to diagnose, to understand the “symptoms” of sick thinks. Nietzsche’s physiological torture, his immense physical anguish, in essence led him out of his *philosophical sickness*, his understanding of the world via a *romantic pessimism*, and he even contends that his particular physical ailments may improve along *with* his overall vitality, corresponding to his *health* in the exceptional sense. Nietzsche’s “fingers for nuances” and that “psychology of looking around the corner” and whatever else is characteristic of his philosophy owes itself, as with his overall *convalescence*, to what was “*learned only then*,” in his times of the deepest sickness, torment, and pain. Unlike

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* § 1. Page 679.

a true decadent, who typically chooses what is bad for himself, in his times of sickness, Nietzsche was able to bring himself back to health, a sign that he is a *healthy* person, in the exceptional sense, at bottom, and he is subsequently able to enjoy the insights that both *health* and *sickness* provide.<sup>132</sup> In this vein, Nietzsche concludes:

I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again: the condition for this – everything physiologist would admit that – *is that one be healthy at bottom*. A typically morbid being cannot become healthy, much less make itself healthy. For a typically healthy person, conversely, being sick can become an energetic *stimulus* for life, for living *more*. This, in fact, is how that long period of sickness appears to me now: as it were, I discovered life anew, including myself; I tasted all good and even little things, as other cannot easily taste them...

And in one of the most telling moments of his entire corpus of writing, Nietzsche claims “I turned my will to health, to *life*, into a philosophy.”<sup>133</sup>

And what, then, is the description of a healthy person for Nietzsche? Does this man strictly deal in talk of opposites? Before we move on, it is worth it at this juncture to see just what Nietzsche claims a healthy person looks like.

What is it, fundamentally, that allows us to recognize who has turned out well? That a well-turned-out person pleases our senses, that he is carved from wood that is hard, delicate, and at the same time smells good. He has a taste only for what is good for him; his pleasure, his delight cease where the measure of what is good for him is transgressed. He guesses what remedies avail against what is harmful; he exploits bad accidents to his advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger. Instinctively, he collects from everything he sees, hears, lives through, his sum: he is a principle of selection, he discards much. He is always in his own company, whether he associates with books, human beings, or landscapes: he honors by choosing, by admitting, by trusting. He reacts slowly to all kinds of stimuli, with that slowness which long caution and deliberate pride has bred in him: he examined the stimulus that approaches him, he is far from meeting it halfway. He believes neither in “misfortune” nor in “guilt:” he comes to terms

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<sup>132</sup> “Apart from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the opposite. My proof for this is, among other things, I have always instinctively chosen the right means against my wretched states; while the decadent typically chooses means that are disadvantageous for him. As *summa summarum* [over-all], I was healthy; as an angle, as a specialty, I was a decadent.” Ibid. “Why I Am So Wise,” § 2. Page 680.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. “Why I Am So Wise,” § 2. Page 680.

with himself, with others; he knows how to forget – his is strong enough; hence everything must turn out for the best.<sup>134</sup>

It is up to the individual to decide how taken they are by the picture that is above painted. For my part, I find it hard to argue with: I wish, I consciously try, to be more like that person. Nor could I more effectively conjure up a picture of a *heathy* individual, possessed of himself and his world. Perhaps it is so much about the value of this individual above, for his good qualities, his eminent *health*, are indeed hard to argue with, but more about Nietzsche's next line. "Well then, I am the *opposite* of a decadent, for I have just described *myself*."<sup>135</sup> Whether Nietzsche, given what we know about him, was much like this, is open for debate. I, however, largely agree with him in his self-assessment, from what I have seen. And how I wish the world was more filled with *such people*. By and large, a far cry, indeed, from those I found surrounding *me*.

We now fully understand the interaction of physiology and philosophy in Nietzsche's conceptions of *health* and *sickness*. Broadening our scope now to Nietzsche philosophy as a whole, we can see how Nietzsche is able to undertake his most expressly central task, the *revaluation of all values*, because of his ability to assume the position of *health* and *sickness*, decadence and its opposite, with equal subtlety and precision: unlike someone like Schopenhauer, who was physiologically healthy his entire life, Nietzsche is able to "reverse perspectives" without bias, and revalue the values of modern morality from a relatively nuanced position of understanding of the human condition, of life itself and its *experience, in toto*. Let us now examine this revaluation.

### **Section Five: *Décadence* and the Revaluation of All Values**

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. "Why I Am So Wise," § 2. Page 680.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. "Why I Am So Wise," § 2. Page 680.

Of what is great one must either be silent or speak with greatness. With greatness – that means cynically and with innocence.<sup>136</sup>

We have given to understand how Nietzsche conceptualizes *health* and *sickness* in the exceptional sense, how he considers himself in a unique position to understand both; in essence, how he came to formulate his philosophy of *health*, how he, in his own words, turned his will to health, his will to life, *into a philosophy*. Armed with these conceptualizations, equipped with this this critique, this method of the backward inference, and this appreciation for true *health* and an affirmative view of life in the totalizing sense found in his convalescence, Nietzsche proposes something truly remarkable, *a revaluation of all values*.<sup>137</sup>

Maintaining cheerfulness in the midst of a gloomy affair, fraught with immeasurable responsibility, is no small feat: and yet, what is needed more than cheerfulness? Nothing succeeds if prankishness has no part in it. Excess of strength alone is the proof of strength.

*A revaluation of all values*, this question mark, so black, so tremendous that it casts shadows upon the man who puts it down – such a destiny of a task compels one to run into the sun every moment to shake off a heavy, all-too-heavy seriousness. Every means is proper for this; every case a case of luck. Especially, *war*. War has always been the great wisdom of all spirits who have become too inward, too profound; even in a wound there is the power to heal. A maxim, the origin of which I withhold from scholarly curiosity, has long been my motto: *Increscunt animi, virescit volnere virtus* [The spirit increases, vigor grows through a wound].<sup>138</sup>

Ending with a reference to his sickness and the subsequent vigor of his convalescence, strength having grown *through a wound*, Nietzsche describes the revaluation as a truly awe-inspiring

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<sup>136</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1968. Print. Preface, § 1. Page 3.

<sup>137</sup> “For one should make no mistake about the meaning of the title that this gospel of the future wants to bear. *‘The Will to Power: An Attempt at the Revaluation of All Values’* -- in this formulation a countermovement finds expression, regarding both principle and task; a movement that in some future will take the place of this perfect nihilism – but presupposes it, logically and psychologically, and certainly can come only after and out of it. For why has the advent of nihilism become *necessary*? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals – because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these “values” really had. – We require, sometime, *new values*.” Ibid. Preface, § 4. Page 3.

<sup>138</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976. Print. Preface. Page 527.



task. Indeed, this is a massive, possibly soul-crushing undertaking, for in a true revaluation of *all values*, everything that one has been taught to hold, to understand, to honor – almost as one’s very humanity – melts into air.<sup>139</sup> Thus we have Nietzsche running out “into the sun” to shake off the serious we saw him so emphatically condemn in our discussion of gay science – even here, Nietzsche speaks, enthusiastically, of cheerfulness.<sup>140</sup>

This revaluation takes on a generally simple form: morality, in general terms, is a life-denying idea. Nietzsche contends that modern *decadence*, the exhibition by an individual or culture of *sickness* and degenerative slide toward nihilism, is a direct result of our current values, is *the end result* of our current values.

It is a painful, horrible spectacle that has dawned on me: I have drawn back the curtain from the *corruption* of man. In my mouth, this word is at least free from one suspicion: that it might involve a moral accusation of man. It is meant – let me emphasize this once more – *moraline free*. So much so that I experience corruption most strongly where men have so far aspired most deliberately to “virtue” and “godliness.” I understand corruption, as you will guess, in the sense of decadence. It is my contention that all the values which mankind now sums up its supreme desiderata are *decadence-values*.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> “This problem of the *value* of pity and of morality of pity (—I am opposed to the modern effeminacy of feeling—) seems at first to be merely something detached, an isolated question mark; but whoever sticks with it and learns how to ask questions here will experience what I experienced – a tremendous new prospect opens up for him, a new possibility comes over him like vertigo, every kind of mistrust, suspicion, fear leaps up, his belief in morality, in all morality, falters...” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. Preface. § 6. Page 456.

<sup>140</sup> “...but he had read Darwin – so his hypotheses, and after a fashion that is at least entertaining, the Darwinian beast and the ultramodern unassuming moral milksop who “no longer bites” politely link hands, the latter wearing an expression of a certain good-natured and refined indolence, with which is mingled even a grain of pessimism and weariness, as if all these things – the problems of morality – were not really worth taking quite so seriously. But to me, on the contrary, there seems to be nothing *more* worth taking seriously, among the rewards for it being some day one will perhaps be allowed to take them *cheerfully*. For cheerfulness – or in my own language *gay science* – is a reward: the reward of a long, brave, industrious, and subterranean seriousness, of which, to be sure, not everyone is capable. But one day we can say with all our hearts, “Onwards! our old morality too is part of *the comedy!*” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. Preface. § 8. Page 453.

<sup>141</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Portable Nietzsche*. “The Antichrist.” Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. § 6. Page 572.

And what exactly is meant by this concept of *decadence*? We have already seen its relation in Nietzsche philosophical worldview to *sickness*, in the most exceptional sense. We have seen that Nietzsche has come to understand decadence in a personal way through the death of his father, and through his own physiological frailty: Nietzsche knows degeneration and the declining mode of life, but he also knows true *health*, stemming from a worldview that affirms even his immense own, perhaps most *especially* his own immense, suffering. As Nietzsche understands *sickness*, in the exceptional sense, to be a turn away from life, so he “call[s] an animal, a species, or an individual corrupt when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it prefers, what is disadvantageous for it.”<sup>142</sup> *Id est*, when an ‘animal, species, or individual’ sides against life, the life that is itself, and instinctively chooses what is bad for it, what is antithetical to life itself:

Life itself is to my mind the instinct for growth, for durability, for an accumulation of forces, for *power*: where the will to power is lacking there is decline. It is my contention that all the supreme values of mankind *lack* this will – that the values which are symptomatic of decline, *nihilistic* values, are lording it under the holiest names.<sup>143</sup>

*Decadence* is essentially the outward symptoms, the exhibition of a *sickness* which posits nihilistic values in a response to the pain, hardship, and suffering that one encounters in life.<sup>144</sup>

Physiologically, decadence is often exhibited by, as we saw in the previous section, an instinctive choosing of what is bad for oneself, an inability, given its instinctual nature, *not* to choose what is bad for oneself, or, in other cases, an inability not to respond to stimulus, an over-

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. § 6. Page 572.

<sup>143</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. § 6. Page 572.

<sup>144</sup> “To be comprehended: That every kind of decay and sickness has continually helped to form overall value judgements; that decadence has actually gained predominance in the value judgements that have become accepted; that we not only have to fight against the consequences of all present misery of degeneration, but that all *previous* decadence is still residual, i.e., survives. Such a total aberration of mankind from its basic instincts, such a total decadence of value judgements – that is the question mark par excellence, the real riddle that the animal ‘man’ poses for the philosopher.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Random House. 1968. Print. “European Nihilism,” § 39. Page 25.

sensitivity to stimulus of all kinds, but especially, as in the *romantic*, in reaction to perceived suffering and pain.<sup>145</sup>

While we will discuss Nietzsche life-affirming principles below, what is key to understand now is that Nietzsche understands modern morality to be decadent by characteristic, nihilistic even, largely owing to its basis in pity (also translated as compassion), which is the characteristic of a revulsion at life itself: the No to life, in general terms, instead of the Yes.<sup>146</sup>

We witnessed this overwhelming of the individual by compassion – and the subsequent obsession with negation, of the self and of life, all too clearly with Schopenhauer above. “Moral value judgements are ways of passing sentence, negations; morality is a way of turning one’s back on the will to existence.”<sup>147</sup> Indeed, what did Werther exhibit above more than an excess of pity and compassion – pity and compassion at the sight of *all things*, at the very sight of life, and

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<sup>145</sup> In describing “late” cultures which become so riddled with decadence they lurch toward nihilism, Nietzsche writes: “The two kinds of physiological facts on which it is based and which it keeps in mind are: first, an excessive sensitivity, which manifests itself in a refined susceptibility to pain; and second, an overspiritualization, an all-too-long preoccupation with concepts and logical procedures, which has damaged the instinct of personality by subordinating it to the “impersonal.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. § 20. Page 587.

<sup>146</sup> “It is good fortune that after whole millennia of error and confusion I have rediscovered the way that leads to a Yes and a No.

I teach the No to all that makes weak – that exhausts. I teach the Yes to all that strengthens, that stores up strength, that justifies the feeling of strength.

So far one has taught neither the one nor the other: virtue has been taught, mortification of the self, pity, even the negation of life. All these are the values of the exhausted.

Prolonged reflection on the physiology of exhaustion forces me to ask to what extent the judgements of the exhausted had penetrated the world of values.

My result was as surprising as possible, even for me who was at home in many a strange world: I found that all the supreme value judgments – all that have come to dominate mankind, at least that part that has become tame – can be derived from the judgments of the exhausted.

Under the holiest names I pulled up destructive tendencies; one has called God what weakens, teaches weakness, infects with weakness. – I found that the “good man” is one of the forms in which decadence affirms itself.

That virtue of which Schopenhauer still taught that it is the supreme, the only virtue, and the basis of all virtue – precisely pity I recognized as more dangerous than any vice. To cross as a matter of principle selection in the species and its purification of refuse – that has so far been called virtue *par excellence*.

One should respect fatality – that fatality that says to the weak: Perish!— ” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Random House. 1968. Print. “European Nihilism,” § 54. Page 34.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* “European Nihilism,” § 11. Page 11.

its true essence: what did Werther exhibit more than a totally overwhelming, crippling sense of compassion, even for the ‘ants below his feet?’ Simultaneous compassion and, in the case of Schopenhauer, hatred, for the ‘eternally devouring, eternally regurgitating monster’ which we, as a part of life, not only exist *in*, but also *as*.

As part of the revaluation, Nietzsche contends that a culture of *decadence* is the natural end point of a moralistic system that for millennia had posited value outside of life, and now cannot even believe its own valuations because it no longer truly believes in an Above, Beyond, *et al.*

1. Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests? Point of departure: it is an error to consider “social distress” or “physiological degeneration” or, worse, corruption, as the *cause* of nihilism. Ours is the most decent and compassionate age. Distress, whether of the soul, body, or intellect, cannot of itself give birth to nihilism (i.e., the radical repudiation of values, meaning, and desirability). Such distress always permits a variety of interpretations. Rather: it is in the one particular interpretation, the Christian-moral one, that nihilism is rooted.<sup>148</sup>

Nietzsche is stating that he essentially understands modern morality as a result of the Christian-moral interpretation of the world, and as we will discuss further below, this extends especially to philosophies like Schopenhauer which maintain Christian morals without even the “salvation” promised by heaven.” What is most important here is to posit that “physiological degeneration” or “social distress” are not the cause for Nietzsche, they are the effect: the effect of the Christian-moral worldview on our entire culture, down through millennia; the effect of a vilification of the world through “sin” and the positing of value outside of it; the effect of the most natural and incontrovertible of our instincts being made into these very “sins,” the very evil

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<sup>148</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Random House. 1968. Print. “European Nihilism,” § 1. Page 7.

in the world. Again, Schopenhauerianism witnessed as Christian morality without even the salvation of a God and heaven.

2. The end of Christianity – at the hands of its own morality (which cannot be replaced), which turns against the Christian God (the sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and of history; rebound from “God is truth” to the fanatical “All is false;” Buddhism of *action*—).<sup>149</sup>

Nietzsche contends that, unlike previous people’s, Christianity has made people particularly obsessed with the idea of “truth.” As such, eventually, Christian morality turned on and killed its own God: our culture could no longer believe the “mendaciousness” of such an obviously false idea. Yet, most disconcertingly, Christian morality and the comfort it originally provided “cannot be replaced.” One bounds from one extreme to the other. Truth is first located in one very specific thing, and when it is seen to be false, “truth” cannot be located at all. Thus we arrive at:

3. Skepticism regarding morality is what is decisive. The end of moral interpretation of the world, which no longer has any sanction after it has tried to escape into some beyond, leads to nihilism. “Everything lacks meaning” (the untenability of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awaked the suspicion that all interpretations of the world are false.) Buddhistic tendency, yearning for Nothing. (Indian Buddhism is not the culmination of a thoroughly moralistic development; its nihilism is therefore full of morality that is not overcome: existence as punishment, existence construed as error, error as a punishment – a moral valuation.) Philosophical attempts to overcome the “moral God” (Hegel, pantheism). Overcoming popular ideals: the sage; the saint; the poet. The antagonism of “true” and “beautiful” and “good”—<sup>150</sup>

In the modern world, we see various attempts to maintain the façade of the Christian world interpretation through the likes of Hegel’s philosophy, and still concepts which see existence as

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid. “European Nihilism,” § 1. Page 7.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. “European Nihilism,” § 1. Page 7.

punishment, as error, pervade. As a society, we cannot seem to recognize what were nearly analogous concepts to the Ancient Greeks: the true, the beautiful, and the good.

4. Against “meaninglessness” on the one hand, against moral value judgements on the other: to what extent has all science and philosophy so far been influenced by moral judgements? and won’t this net us the hostility of science? Or an antiscientific mentality? Critique of Spinozism. Residues of Christian value judgements are found everywhere in socialistic and positivistic systems. A *critique of Christian morality* is still lacking.<sup>151</sup>

Nietzsche concludes that ultimately, meaningless (nihilism), and moral judgements and valuations, are to be fought against. Nihilism is not an option, and yet, most valuations of the world in the form of contemporary morality are still besmeared by “residues of Christian value judgements,” id est Schopenhaueriansm. Therefore, in essence, the *revaluation of values* takes the form of a revaluation of Christian morality, since Christian morality is still, nearly exclusively, what characterizes our moralistic system and, as a culture, the way we view the world.<sup>152</sup> Indeed: we have lost the Christian God, but cling tenaciously to the moral ideas created by monotheistic religions.

When one gives up Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one’s feet. This morality is by no means self-evident: this point has to be exhibited again and again... Christianity is a system, a *whole* view of things thought out together. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one’s hands. Christianity presupposes that man does not know, cannot know, what is good for him, what is evil: he believes in God, who alone knows it. Christian morality is a command;

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. “European Nihilism,” § 1. Page 7.

<sup>152</sup> “The state of corruption.— To understand how all forms of corruption belong together, without forgetting the Christian corruption... Here no terms are permissible: here one has to eradicate, annihilate, wage war; everywhere the Christian-nihilistic value standard has to be pulled up and fought under every mask; e.g., in present-day sociology, in present-day music, in present-day pessimism (all of them forms of the Christian value ideal)... The priest, the shepherd of souls, as objectionable forms of existence. All education to date, helpless, untenable, without center of gravity, stained by the contradiction of values...” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Random House. 1968. Print. “European Nihilism,” § 51. Page 32.

its origin is transcendent; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticism; it has truth only if God is the truth – it stands and falls with faith in God.<sup>153</sup>

The modern problem is then: not only do we believe in a morality generated by a life-denying conception of the world, which posits meaning outside of it, but even more so, that we no longer even believe in that other world; hence, nihilism. “What does nihilism mean: That the highest value judgements devalue themselves. The aim is lack, ‘why?’ finds no answer.”<sup>154</sup> We have maintained Christianity’s emphasis on the world as a place full of sin and suffering, and we are still repulsed by suffering, overwhelmed by compassion, and seek something to “justify” the world which goes against the valuations we have so assiduously posited *against* the world, against *life*, but now without the Christian palliative, “the Lord works in mysterious ways,” the belief that all will be “made right” by our admittance, after a life we have viewed, consciously or unconsciously, as evil, to Heaven. Accordingly, as we saw above, Nietzsche contends that Schopenhauer, Kant, and very nearly all German metaphysicians, and along with them most preceding philosophy *en masse*, have one way or another sought to justify a moralistic interpretation of the world through metaphysics.<sup>155</sup> We are left with the want to still classify

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<sup>153</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” § 5. Page 515.

<sup>154</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Random House. 1968. Print. “European Nihilism,” § 2. Page 9.

<sup>155</sup> “Among Germans I am immediately understood when I say that philosophy has been corrupted by theologians’ blood. The Protestant parson is the grandfather of German philosophy; Protestantism itself, its *peccatum originale*. Definition of Protestantism: the partial paralysis of Christianity – *and* reason. One need merely say “Tübingen Seminary” to understand what German philosophy is at bottom: an *insidious* theology. The Swabians are the best liars in Germany: they lie innocently.

Why was Kant’s appearance greeted with jubilation among German scholars – of whom three-fourths are the sons of parsons and teachers – and whence came the German conviction, echoed even today, that a change for the *better* began with Kant? The theologian’s instinct in the German scholars divined *what* had once more been made possible. A path had been found on which one could sneak back to the old ideal. The conception of a “*true world*,” the conception of morality as the essence of the world (these two most malignant errors of all time!), were once again, thanks to the wily and shrew skepticism, if not provable, at least no longer *refutable*. Reason, the *right* of reason, does not extend that far. Reality had been reduced to mere “appearance,” and the mendaciously fabricated world, the world of being, was honored as reality. Kant’s success is merely a theologians’ success: like

things as good or evil without the ability to assert the world will ever actually bend to these notions. End result: ‘God does not dole out punishment for sin, the world is simply evil, justice is never obtained, and life itself must be negated.’

Nietzsche contends that Schopenhauer’s philosophy acquires its nihilistic air, its “cadaverous perfume,” from its status as an attempt to ground Christian morality, the morality of a devaluation of the world in the face of suffering, in a metaphysical system.<sup>156</sup>

Schopenhauerianism follows from the same line of thought that created Christianity’s valuations of good and evil: that is, an emphasis on pity.<sup>157</sup>

Once one has comprehended the outrage of such a revolt against life as has become almost sacrosanct in Christian morality, one has, fortunately, also comprehend something else: the futility, apparentness, absurdity, and *mendaciousness* of such a revolt. A condemnation of life by the living remains in the end a mere symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether it is justified or unjustified is not even raised thereby. One would require a position *outside* of life, and yet have to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be permitted even to touch the problem of the *value* of life: reasons enough to comprehend that this problem is for us an unapproachable problem. When we speak of values, we speak with inspiration, with the way of looking at things which is part of life: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values. From this it follows that even that anti-natural morality which conceives of God as the counter-concept and commendation of life is only a valuable judgement of life – but of what life? Of what kind of life? I have already given the answer: of declining, weakened, weary, condemned life. Morality, as it has so far been understood – as it has in the end been formulated once more by Schopenhauer, as “negation of the will to

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Luther, like Leibniz, Kant was one more clog for German honest, which was none too steady in the first place.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. § 6. Page 572.

<sup>156</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. “The Birth of Tragedy,” § 1. Page 726.

<sup>157</sup> “Christianity is called the religion of *pity*. Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. That loss of strength which suffering as such inflicts on life is still further increased and multiplied by pity. Pity makes suffering contagious. Under certain circumstances, it may engender a total loss of life and vitality out of all proportion to the magnitude of the cause (as in the case of the death of the Nazarene).” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. § 7. Page 572.



life” – is the very *instinct of decadence*, which makes an imperative of itself. It says: “Perish!” It is a condemnation pronounced by the condemned.<sup>158</sup>

Once again, we have arrived back on familiar ground: “the value of life cannot be estimated.” It is an argument that cannot be argued with. For truly, how could one, in a truthful way, posit valuations from a *single* perspective? It is absolutely correct that, to *even touch the problem* of the value of life, one would have to live not just as oneself, but as every single person who has ever lived, and at the same time, view life “objectively,” from the outside. The notion – and a notion, at that, that our whole cultural-morality has been pathologically obsessed with for thousands of years – itself becomes so ridiculous when properly considered, it begins to make one’s head spin! To think of the wasted time, energy, and lives on this ridiculous task of assessing and living by a valuation regarding *life itself*, of wanting life to conform to *our standards*! To be more than ironic, “my God!” It all truly makes me sick – and in 2017, I am no more convinced we are rid of this plague than we were one-hundred and fifty – or five-hundred – years ago.

At the same time, Nietzsche’s second claim cannot be argued with, either: that “life itself values through us when we posit values.” The result of this conception is profound, and dovetails immediately with our whole discussion of health and sickness: for Nietzsche’s answer is, obviously, a *sick*, “declining, weakened, weary, condemned life.” Thus we see Nietzsche’s backward inference operating on an ever-larger scope, as we are now observing, taking in the whole of modern morality – our modern anti-natural morality – and in fact, the very essence of our culture and our present day moral valuations. What comes out most prominently, however, is Nietzsche’s essential concern that Schopenhauerianism, or all forms of Christian morality

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<sup>158</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. “Morality as Anti-Nature,” § 5. Page 490.

which vilify the world through an emphasis on the “meaninglessness” of life, the unanswerable question “why is there suffering,” *id est*, what amounts to a the pitying revulsion at the sight of life itself, goes unchallenged in today’s world and is in fact, as a way of evaluating life, actually spreading. Nietzsche worries that the spread of this sickness which denies life in the face of suffering will lead us to a “Buddhism for Europeans:” an all-encompassing nihilism which holds that this life, with its suffering, is rendered evil and is actually and practically valueless thereby.<sup>159</sup> Nietzsche therefore maintains his criticism of compassion, even in the most general terms, emphatically. Though it should be noted Nietzsche speaks specifically of the pity that comes out of the romantic view of life, the pity that sees suffering as the evil of life, life as evil because of it. Nietzsche does believe there can be *Dionysian*, and Nietzsche is not against compassion in totality: only that which comes from a position of hostility to life. All compassion that says “this suffering is necessarily bad,” and refuses to acknowledge the necessity of suffering to *healthy* life, is “practical nihilism.”

Suppose we measure pity by the value of the reactions it usually produces; then its perilous nature appears in an even brighter light. Quite in general, pity crosses the law of development, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends those who have been disinherited and condemned

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<sup>159</sup> “Even then my real concern was something much more important than hypothesis-mongering, whether my own or other people’s, on the origin of morality (or more precisely: the latter concerned me solely for the sake of a goal to which it was only one means among many). What was at stake was the *value* of morality – and over this I had come to terms almost exclusively with my great teacher Schopenhauer, to whom that book of mine, the passion and concealed contradiction of that book, addressed itself as it to a contemporary ( -- for that book, too, was a “polemic”). What was especially at stake was the value of the “unegoistic,” the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, which Schopenhauer had gilded, defied, and projected into a beyond for so long that at last they became for him “value-in-itself,” on the basis of which he *said No* to life and to himself. But it was against precisely *these* instincts that there spoke from me an ever more fundamental mistrust, an ever more corrosive skepticism! It was precisely here that I saw the *great* danger to mankind, its sublimest enticement and seduction – but to what? to nothingness? -- It was precisely here that I saw the beginning of the end, the dead stop, a retrospective weariness, the will turning *against* life, the tender and sorrowful signs of the ultimate illness: I understood the ever spreading morality of pity that had seized even on philosophers and made them ill, as the most sinister symptom of a European culture that had itself become sinister, perhaps as its by-pass to a new Buddhism? To a Buddhism for Europeans? to – *nihilism*?” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. Preface. § 5. Page 453.

by life; and by abundance of the failures of all kinds which it keeps alive, it gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect.

Having done away with morality, Nietzsche questions the value of maintaining, through pity, those that life has condemned. Surely, there are exceptions to this idea: but at the same time, there are those who are not cut out for life, and should *not* be pitied for their weakness, their misshapen nature, their status as a failure in regards to the total view of a *healthy* or a *sick* existence; nor is this a moral accusation, for it is not their *fault*, and they are not to *blame*: but it certainly, as the saying goes, *is the way it is*. And one cannot doubt that so many people, of whom there is no doubt the reader knows more than he should, give life a truly *gloomy aspect* through their sick disposition, their negating quality, their status as the very opposite of the health we have spoken of above.

Some have dared to call pity a virtue (in every *noble* ethic it is considered a weakness); and as if this were not enough, it has been made *the* virtue, the basis and source of all virtues. To be sure – and one should always keep this in mind – this was done by a philosophy that was nihilistic and inscribed the *negation of life* upon its shield. Schopenhauer was consistent enough: pity negates life and renders it *more deserving of negation*.

The effect of pity in a philosophical system we acutely examined above, and Nietzsche contention regarding Schopenhauerianism is as accurate as it can be: Schopenhauer was very clear that the nature of the world as a place of suffering, and the compassion one should very much feel for it as such, ought to be translated as a negation of life itself and a yearning for the dissolution of the self into nothingness.

Pity is the *practice* of nihilism. To repeat: this depressive and contagious instinct crosses those instincts which aim at the preservation of life and at the enhancement of its value. It multiplies misery and conserves all that is miserable, and thus a prime instrument of the advancement of decadence: pity persuades men to *nothingness*! Of course, one does not say “nothingness” but “beyond” or “God,” or “*true* life,” or Nirvana, salvation, blessedness.

Since Nietzsche views suffering as essential to growth, and as we saw in his own case, to actually acquiring a healthy view of things, a healthy view of life, Nietzsche contends that its opposite, pity and revulsion in the face of suffering, is indeed practical nihilism. Pity engenders a sick view of life, it “multiplies misery,” and proceeds to individual, and eventually societal *decadence*. It is an example of men choosing “what is bad for themselves,” out of a seemingly physiological need to do so.

This innocent rhetoric from the realm of the religious-moral idiosyncrasy appears much less innocent as soon as we realize which tendency it is that here shrouds itself in sublime words: *hostility against life*. Schopenhauer was hostile to life; therefore pity became a virtue to him...

Aristotle, as is well known, considered pity a pathological and dangerous condition, which one would be well advised to attack now and then with a purge: he understood tragedy as a purge. From the standpoint of the instinct of life, a remedy certainly seems necessary for such a pathological and dangerous accumulation of pity as is represented by the case of Schopenhauer (and unfortunately by our entire literary and artistic decadence from St. Petersburg to Paris, from Tolstoy to Wagner)—to puncture it and make it *burst*.

Now that we understand pity as being, while veiled in benevolent robes, an essential and inescapable hostility to life, we can also begin to understand the connection of Nietzsche’s general critique of morality with his conception of *Dionysian Pessimism* and a tragic view of life which we touched on above. In the tragic view of life, one does not hold that the misfortune of the tragic hero is necessarily *evil*: rather, the sight of a great tragedy acts as a cathartic means, and seems, oppositely of *romantic-pessimistic* pity, to affirm the value of life as a whole, even as one feels what could be called an affirmative compassion for the suffering of the tragic hero, who one both identifies with and also understands the necessity, in view of the sequence of events, of their fate. The experience of a tragedy is an affirmation of life: a tragedy, unlike, for example, the events at Calvary (or what the event was made into, theologically), does not present itself as a negative moral valuation regarding life as a whole, but just the opposite.

In our whole unhealthy modernity there is nothing more unhealthy than Christian pity. To be physicians *here*, to be inexorable *here*, to wield the scalpel *here* – that is *our* part, that is *our* love of man, that is how *we* are philosophers, we *Hyperboreans*.<sup>160</sup>

We now understand what Nietzsche means by his own definition of “love of man,” by his “part,” which is that of the *revaluer of values*, aimed at illuminating a *healthier* view of life. We have now seen this revaluation, the calling into question our central emphasis on suffering as an evil, on compassion or pity for suffering and sufferers. Nietzsche is unequivocal: this is an “anti-natural morality” that negates life, is fundamentally composed of nihilistic ideas, and leads to cultural nihilism. Pity is the *practice of nihilism*. We can now comprehend even more clearly the way in which Nietzsche understands moralities which revolt at the sight of life as symptoms of *sick* individuals, and Nietzsche has come to understand Schopenhauer’s philosophy of life-negation as engendered by central emphasis on pity, which Nietzsche characterizes stemming from a worldview, *romantic pessimism*, inherent to such *sick* individuals; but as he was very clear to point out, itself owing to a Christian-moral world interpretation. In the revaluation, Nietzsche attempts to confront the consequences of the cultural success and predomination of moral valuations created by fundamentally unwell people, physio-philosophically *sick* people, people who say *No to life*.

Before we discuss Nietzsche’s affirmative values, values that he posits as alternative to the ones we have so far reviewed and discussed in such detail, let us take a closer look at Nietzsche himself, his relationship with Schopenhauer, and in doing so address how he may have formed them.

### **Section Six: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche’s Educator**

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<sup>160</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976. Print. § 7. Page 573.

As I said in the introduction to this chapter, Nietzsche's indebtedness to Schopenhauer is betrayed by his almost single-minded opposition to him, by his categorical inversion of, as far as outcomes go, everything that Schopenhauer proffered. At times even Nietzsche's critique of Christianity seems to take on the aspect of merely a search for an understanding of what led to Schopenhauer's own moral valuations – though his success in locating them in the Christian-moral world interpretation is hard to argue with. In truth, Nietzsche's philosophy can be seen as a long and continuous attempt by someone so profoundly influenced by Schopenhauer to come to terms with the implications of his philosophy.

By his own words, Nietzsche had only one "teacher," Arthur Schopenhauer.<sup>161</sup> There are other figures for whom Nietzsche, rare as it is, reserves praise: most eminently and unequivocally, Goethe, but also the French moralists like La Rochefoucauld, as well as Spinoza, and certain pre-Socratic Greek philosophers. Even after his famous "turn" away from Schopenhauer, amidst the profound confusion and disgust at what he encountered at Bayreuth – which, according to Nietzsche, made him *physically ill* – Nietzsche spoke of his erstwhile mentor in a reverential, if philosophically-critical, manner.<sup>162</sup> "Schopenhauer, the last German worthy of consideration (who represents a European event like Goethe... like Heinrich Heine, and not

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<sup>161</sup> See *Schopenhauer as Educator*, cited below.

<sup>162</sup> Bayreuth being the site of Wagner's specially built opera-house, where grandiose annual performances of his operas were held. "It cannot be helped – I must bring distress to all my friends by declaring at last how I myself have got *over* distress. That metaphysical befogging of all that is true and simple, the pitting of reason against reason, which sees every particular as a marvel and an absurdity; this matched by a baroque art of overexcitement and glorified extravagance – I mean the art of Wagner; both these things finally made me more and more ill, and practically alienated me from my good temperament and my own aptitude. I wish that you could now feel as I do, how it is to live as I do now, in such pure mountain air, in such a gentle mood vis-à-vis people still inhabiting the haze of the valleys, more than ever dedicated, as I am, to all that is good and robust, so much closer to the Greeks than ever before; how I now live my aspiration to wisdom, down to the smallest detail, whereas earlier I only revered and idolizes the wise – briefly, if you could only know how it feels to have known this change and this crisis, then you could not avoid wishing to have such an experience yourself." Nietzsche alludes first to Schopenhauer here, then to Wagner. He alludes at the end to his "experience" of Wagner and Schopenhauer shaping him and leading him to appreciate all that is good and robust. This, articulated differently, becomes key to Nietzsche's philosophy: discussed below. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. and Trans. Christopher Middleton. Massachusetts: Hackett Co. 1997. Print. Page 168.

merely a local event, a “national one)...”<sup>163</sup> Fourteen years earlier, a much younger, more naïve, more enthusiastic Nietzsche wrote, in one of his first published essays, *Schopenhauer as Educator*: “I belong to those readers of Schopenhauer who know perfectly well, after they have turned the first page, that they will read all the others, and listen to every word that he has spoken... I understood him as though he had written for me...”<sup>164</sup> In a philosophical-scholarly atmosphere awash with Hegel, dry, antiquarian historicism, and increasing State-oriented militaristic-nationalism, Schopenhauer’s appeal to the young Nietzsche ought to be obvious.<sup>165</sup> With acutely clear-sighted and unsparingly truthful appraisals of life, human action, and an apparently pervasive suffering contained within a systematized theory explaining why things are the way they are *in toto*, we can see how Schopenhauer would have been, and apparently was, a ‘breathe of fresh air’ (if a rather chilly and macabre one) for the young Nietzsche, as well as so many others.

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<sup>163</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” § 21. Page 527.

<sup>164</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Schopenhauer as Educator.” *Thoughts Out of Season, Part Two*. Trans. Anthony M. Ludovici. Ed. Oscar Levy. New York: Russel and Russel, 1964. Print. § 2. Page 114.

<sup>165</sup> See “David Strauss: The Confessor and the Writer,” and “On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life”, both also from the *Thoughts Out of Season*, now most often published as *Untimely Meditations*, for Nietzsche’s views on contemporary German culture and scholarship. In short, Nietzsche held that German State-worship and militarism were sapping Germany of its cultural vitality, creating a philistine atmosphere of conformity and uniformed thought, backed by more-or-less nominal religious reverence, as epitomized by David Strauss’s “beer-bench gospel and new faith.” See also “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. “What the Germans Lack,” § 2. Page 507. In the glory days of Weimar Classicism, there was no Reich to speak of, merely a collection of German principalities: Nietzsche’s general thesis is that with the growth of State power – temporarily in the form of growing Prussian domination culminating in the formation of the German Empire – usually exhibited by nationalism and militancy, actual (*id est*, artistic) culture wanes. Additionally, the contemporary scholarly obsession with quantitative-based “historicist” history “mummified” life and relegated its most ‘splendid, humane, and true’ form to the past, not the present or the future, as well as glorifying German imperialism, the military victory of 1871, *et cetera*, as a legitimate “cultural” triumph. These two separate critiques can be seen as combining somewhat under Hegel’s theory of *Geist*, which holds (and my hands begin to shake as I write this) the State as the ultimate ‘goal’ of human historical development.

Nietzsche first picked up Schopenhauer in 1865, reading *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* when he was twenty-one; a letter from that year reads “three things are my recreations, but rare recreations: my Schopenhauer, Schumann’s music, finally long walks.”<sup>166</sup> Nietzsche grew up in a house of devoutly Protestant, pious German woman: his father, a clergyman, died as Schopenhauer’s did when he was quite young man, though not by suicide as was the case in the former. One of Nietzsche’s most frequent praises of Schopenhauer is his “honest atheism.”<sup>167</sup> It doesn’t take a wild imagination to see the attraction such a work as *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* would hold for the young Nietzsche of twenty-one years old, a time of life when he was, in accordance with his age and that particular time in one’s life, formulating his definitive worldview, and even more so after what was an oppressive, perhaps miserable childhood. This is not to mention the present circumstances in Germany: and indeed, this was the time when Schopenhauer’s philosophy began to hold more and more sway in German, and especially artistic, culture. In Schopenhauer, one did not find the deadening theological explanations, “faith,” the State-worship, the lack of practical, understandable and *relatable* answers. Nietzsche felt the unencumbering effect of someone speaking plainly and telling the truth, or at least the truth inasmuch as their honest view of it holds; and moreover, in a way that, apparently, confirmed much of what the young Nietzsche and others saw in the

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<sup>166</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. Quoted in a note by Kaufmann. Page 705. Also, in *Ecce Homo*: “Indeed, till I reached a very mature age I always ate badly: morally speaking, “impersonally, selflessly, “altruistically” – for the benefit of cooks and other fellow Christians. By means of Leipzig cuisine, for example, I very earnestly denied my “will to life” at the time when I first read Schopenhauer (1865).” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. “What I Am So Clever,” § 1. Page 693.

<sup>167</sup> Nietzsche’s household: his sister, mother, paternal grandmother, and two maiden aunts. Not a particularly charming set up for any young man, and especially of an intellectual bent. If we want to play psychoanalyst, perhaps we can understand a little better why Nietzsche felt so strongly about religion – and women!



world.<sup>168</sup> But for all his need of answers as a young man, Nietzsche's disposition, one could say his *constitution*, was not like Schopenhauer's: it was inevitable in his maturation he would strive for his own formulations regarding the gnawing questions he initially sought in Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche required affirmation, not negation. Whereas Schopenhauer's negative attitude gave him strength – allowed him a strong, albeit embittered, way to understand and cope *with life* – Nietzsche needed to truly *believe* in life: he needed to believe in living; and to believe, he needed an affirmative understanding of all the pain suffering which, oppositely, engendered Schopenhauer's pessimism. Nietzsche was, quite literally, not *constituted* like Schopenhauer; belying the physiological-philosophical connection regarding values we have examined above, Nietzsche was, as we have said, physically speaking, the opposite his “teacher:” a very sick man. Unlike what we examined above in Nietzsche's own health, in Nietzsche's own experience with profound physical suffering, Schopenhauer was decidedly *not* routinely incapacitated for days by horrifying migraines, blindness, and nausea; nor was Nietzsche financially as well off as Schopenhauer, scraping by on a small professor's pension while Schopenhauer existed all his life quite comfortably on the interest from the liquidation of his father's trading house.<sup>169</sup> Nietzsche succumbed to disease and went mad at forty-four. Schopenhauer lived in good health all his life, had, for example, live-in “help” and other such comforts, all until a sudden, mercifully unexpected heart attack brought the robust man down – according to his servants, swiftly and

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<sup>168</sup> Which, as we said earlier, is the primary lure of Schopenhauer's writing to this day versus other philosophy. Especially, in the period, when compared to Hegel *et al.*

<sup>169</sup> Schopenhauer was keen on investing and managing his money, some would say in a miserly: anyone who wishes to get a closer look at his personality should research the incident with the seamstress, who he threw down the stairs when she was, according to him, making too much noise in the hall of their apartment building. He had, he claimed, issued her a stern warning which she ignored. Schopenhauer was sued, tenaciously litigated the case for several years, and after being forced finally by the court to pay the women yearly damages – for she could no longer sew with a broken hand, or so she said – upon her death merely commented, in his accounts ledger book no less, “the old woman dies, the burden is lifted.” R. J. Hollingdale. “Introduction.” *Essays and Aphorisms* by Arthur Schopenhauer. Ed. and Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985. Print. Page 8.

quietly – at the old age (especially for the 1850s) of seventy-two. Nietzsche and Schopenhauer: as we said earlier, opposite lives, opposite valuations; another clue for the psychoanalysts, and a clear lesson to be drawn by people of various means regarding their *own* valuations in the face of life itself.

### **Section Seven: An Opposition of Values; or, *Renaissance* and Modernity**

Nietzsche ultimately had to resign his professorship at Basel, which he had been awarded at the incredibly young age of twenty-four, after only a decade or so of teaching, due to ill-health; his subsequent travel around Europe was characterized by a search for a *healthy* climate. He never returned to Germany – a decision he would characterize, as with his search for a healthy climate, as having been undertaken for both physiological *and* philosophical concerns.<sup>170</sup> Eventually, he would settle on the Swiss-Italian Alps and Northern Italy: summers in Sils Maria, winters in

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<sup>170</sup> The following quote reveals how seriously Nietzsche took the body in relation to life itself: obviously, a Schopenhauerian influence, as we will soon discuss. Physiological: “The question of *place* and *climate* is most closely related to the question of nutrition. Nobody is free to live everywhere; and whoever has to solve great problems that challenge all his strength has a very restricted choice in the matter. The influence of climate on our *metabolism*, its retardation, its acceleration, goes so far that a mistaken choice of place and climate can not only estrange a man from his task but actually keep it from him. His animal *vigor* has never become great enough for him to attain that freedom which overflows into the most spiritual regions... The slightest sluggishness of the intestines is entirely sufficient, once it has become a bad habit, to turn a genius into something mediocre, something “German.” The German climate alone is enough to discourage strong, even inherently heroic, intestines. The *tempo* of the metabolism is strictly proportionate to the mobility or lameness of the spirit’s *feet*; the “spirit” itself is after all merely an aspect of the metabolism. List the places where men of *esprit* are living or have lived, where wit, subtlety, and malice belong to happiness, where genius found its home almost of necessity: all of them have excellent dry air. Paris, Provence, Florence, Jerusalem, Athens – these names prove something: genius *depends* on dry air, on clear skies...” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. “What I Am So Clever,” § 2. Page 697. Philosophical: “The Germans are by far the worst experience of my life; for sixteen years now one has left me in the lurch, not only concerning my philosophy but also in regard to my honor. What respect can I have for the Germans when even my friends cannot discriminate between me and a liar like Richard Wagner? In one extreme case, one even straddles the fence between me and an anti-Semitic canaille. – And this at a moment when an indescribable responsibility ways on me—... It seems to be that association with Germans even corrupts one’s character. I lose all mistrust; I feel how the fungus of neighbor-love spreads in me – it has even happened, to my profound humiliation, that I have become *good-natured*. Is it possible to sink any lower? – For with me, malice belongs to happiness – I am no good when I am not malicious – I find no small justification of existence in provoking tremendous stupidities against me.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Appendix.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. From discarded drafts of *The Case of Wagner*. § 4. Page 705.

Genoa, Rapallo, and, in the end, Turin. Breathing in the crisp, light, *rarefied* mountain air, he wrote frequently of his having achieved a “height” with his philosophy.<sup>171</sup> Especially in Turin, Nietzsche loved the quietness, the “aristocratic” atmosphere – he considered these things as necessary for his physiological as well as philosophical health.

In all these matters – in the choice of nutrition, of place and climate, of recreation – an instinct of self-preservation issues its commandments, and it gains its most unambiguous expression as an instinct of *self-defense*. Not to see many things, to hear many things, not to permit many things to come close – first imperative of prudence, first proof that one is no mere accident but a necessity. The usual word for this instinct of self-defense is *taste*. It commands us not only to say No when Yes would be “selfless” but to be able to say *No as rarely as possible*. To detach ones, to separate oneself from anything that would make it necessary to keep saying No. The reason in this is that when defensive expenditures, be they ever so small, become the rule and a habit, they entail an extraordinary and entirely superfluous impoverishment. Our *great* expenses are composed of the most frequent small ones. Warding off, not letting things come close, involved expenditure – let nobody deceive himself about this – energy *wasted* on negative ends. Merely through the constant need to ward off, one can become weak enough to be unable to defend oneself any longer.

Suppose I stepped out of my house and found, instead of quiet, aristocratic Turin, a small German town: my instinct would have to cast up a barrier to push back everything that would assail it from this pinched and flattened, cowardly world. Or I found a German big city – this built-up vice where nothing grows, where everything, good or bad, is imported. Wouldn't this compel me to become a *hedgehog*.

But having quills is a waste, even a double luxury when one can choose not to have quills but *open hands*.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> A note on the rarefied air of the Alps, and on the opposite of the rare, the common: “To live with tremendous and proud composure; always beyond –. To have and not to have one's affects, one's pro and con, at will; to condescend to them, for a few hours; to *seat* oneself on them as on a horse, often as on an ass – for one must know how to make use of their stupidity as of their fire. To reserve three hundred foregrounds; also the dark glasses; for there are cases when nobody may look into our eyes, still less into our “grounds.” And to choose for company that impish and cheerful vice, courtesy. And to remain master of one's four virtues: of courage, insight, sympathy, and solitude. For solitude is a virtue for us, as a sublime bent and urge for cleanliness which guesses how all contact between man and man – “in society” – involves inevitable uncleanliness. All community makes men – somehow, somewhere, sometime “common.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. § 284. Page 416.

<sup>172</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968. Print. “What I Am So Clever,” § 8. Page 708.

Nietzsche's abilities as a psychologist are compelling: in the end, he needed only such a penetrating insight into his own mind to make such eminently applicable observations.<sup>173</sup> Here, more than anything else, Nietzsche urges introspection: to know what enables one to say Yes as often as possible: the obvious extension, in the end being a Yes to life, as life is, ultimately, made of so many little things.<sup>174</sup> Here, Nietzsche essentially continues his discussion of what constitutes a *healthy* individual, for as we saw above, what fundamentally makes one healthy is an instinctive ability to discern – and even more so, to then actively *choose* – what is good, what is *healthy*, for oneself. As we have said, Nietzsche sought an ability to affirm things at the root: more than anything, Nietzsche wanted to be a Yes-sayer in the most totalizing sense.<sup>175</sup> Warding off, negating, as Schopenhauer deified and applied to almost all things, was the opposite expression of that which was his soul; on considering it, one may say Schopenhauer probably would have, and perhaps did, dispositionally choose to live somewhere where he was compelled to say No all the time – and perhaps then having a cause to right such a philosophy!

Nietzsche – to say Yes, but not to just any thing: Nietzsche also expresses profound ideas of reverence to oneself, of *taste*. Nietzsche needed to live somewhere where he could, as he so beautifully puts it, walk about with *open hands*. To be able to receive things openly, without hesitation, without the draining, deadening effect of the constant battle to 'ward off'

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<sup>173</sup> Or perhaps one other's – Richard Wagner's.

<sup>174</sup> Even here again, we have a thought to give one pause. What is life made of but so many Yesses and Nos? How profound is Nietzsche's thought here: of truly seeking and structuring one's life, in a profound way, to say Yes as often as possible.

<sup>175</sup> "For the new year. – I still live, I still think: I still have to live, for I still have to think. *Sum, ergo cogito: cogito, ergo sum*. Today everybody permits himself the expression of his wish and his dearest thought; hence I, too, shall say what it is that I wish from myself today, and what was the first thought to run across my heart this year -- what thought shall be for me the reason, warranty, and sweetness of my life henceforth. I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse: I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be a Yes-sayer." Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974. Print. § 276. Page 223.

what one knows is bad for oneself, what one knows has the possibility to make one *sick*. But most importantly here, one must consider what exactly about old Turin, besides the dry air, allowed Nietzsche to say Yes; and in contrast at that to, let's say, a burgeoning, modern German city: what *taste* are we dealing with, fundamentally, that dictates pro-Turin, a Yes to and in Turin? What was it about Turin, in contrast to modern Germany, that Nietzsche thought was *good* for himself, *healthy*? That allowed the beautiful, unreserved *open hands* as opposed to clenched fists?

This question raised by *taste* brings us fully and directly around to the essential ethical concern of Nietzsche's we have been examining all along: the question of Yes or No, of affirmation or negation, *health* and *sickness*, is above all an ethical one. What engenders the Yes and the No, and what does it mean? We know that it is a decision based on the idea of *health*, but what about Turin makes it healthy?

We have examined the issue of health both philosophically, with *romantic pessimism*, and physiologically, with Nietzsche's own understanding of his body, and we have even seen the interesting and profound interrelation of the two, not to mention their relation with other terms such as *decadence*. Now, it is profitable to examine this issue in relation to Turin more closely: what does Turin have that the increasingly urbanized, industrialized, capitalized Germany does not for Nietzsche? Or rather, the question becomes: what does old Turin *represent* in view of *health*?<sup>176</sup>

As we have seen, Nietzsche is a deeply conceptual thinker; he was constantly making categories, organizing along themes, forming connections, asking intersecting questions and proposing intersecting answers; in a word, Nietzsche always "cuts both ways." To him, Turin

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<sup>176</sup> I hope this question does not seem redundant – I mean, besides, of course, the fact that it is an Italian city and therefore, even before other considerations, necessarily *healthier* and better than anywhere else in the world...

was just as much an *idea* and a *symbol* as it was a place in which he lived in a “small student room... situated opposite the Palazzo Cariagnano... and which moreover allow[ed him] to hear from its desk the splendid music below [him] in the Galleria Subalpina.”<sup>177</sup> “I pay twenty-five francs, with service, make my own tea, and do my own shopping, suffer from torn boots, and thank heaven every moment for the *old* world, for which human beings have not been simple and quiet enough.”<sup>178</sup> What is the idea of Turin? *Old* Turin? What is Nietzsche thanking God for?

Turin: a venerable, storied Italian city; one as it had been for hundreds of years, and even longer. Turin, an almost timeless place, which one may say achieved its cultural height during the Italian Renaissance. Nietzsche saw in Turin an older Europe: as he says, quieter and simpler, but also, subtler, more spiritualized, *healthier*, and much, much more human.<sup>179</sup> Old Turin: from time when people were *allowed* to be human.

In other words, the question of Turin, its relation to the Yes and the No, is: what is the significance of the Renaissance in opposition to modernity? Now, ladies and gentlemen, we

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<sup>177</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. Christopher Middleton. Massachusetts: Hackett Co. 1997. Print. Page 347.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. Page 347.

<sup>179</sup> Spiritual in the sense Nietzsche uses it when he refers to the “spiritualization of the passion.” *Id est*, the drives; or, the *will's* striving. “All passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity – and a later, very much later phase when they wed the spirit, when they ‘spiritualize’ themselves. Formerly, in view of the element of stupidity in passion, war was declared on passion itself, its destruction was plotted; all the old moral monsters are agreed on this: *il faut tuer les passions*. The most famous formula for this is to be found in the New Testament, in that Sermon on the Mount, where, incidentally, things are by no means looked at from a height. There it is said, for example, with particular reference to sexuality: ‘If thy eye offend thee, pluck it out.’ Fortunately, no Christian acts in accordance in this respect. *Destroying* the passions and cravings, merely as a preventative measure against their stupidity and the unpleasant consequences of stupidity – today this itself strikes us as merely another acute form of stupidity... To be fair, it should be admitted, however, that on the ground out of which Christianity grew, the concept of the ‘spiritualization of the passion’ could never have been formed. After all the first church, as is well known, fought *against* the ‘intelligent’ in favor of the ‘poor in spirit.’ How could one expect from it an intelligent war against passion? The church fights passion with excision in every sense: its practice, its “cure,” is *castratism*. It never asks: ‘How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a craving?’ It has at all times laid the stress of discipline on extirpation (of sensuality, of pride, of lust to rule, of avarice, of vengefulness). But an attack on the roots of passion means an attack on the roots of life: the practice of the church is *hostile to life*.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols; Or, How to Philosophize With a Hammer.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. “Morality as Anti-Nature,” § 1. Page 487.

have an *ethical* consideration, and one which will allow us to attack the issue of Nietzsche affirmative values on their own terms, using an example of an opposition of values Nietzsche was himself not only fond of, but saw as so important that consciously sought to *live* it, as much, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as he possibly could. What was the Renaissance to Nietzsche? a time where *virtù*, as opposed to “virtue,” reigned in a *healthier* Europe.<sup>180</sup>

*Whether we have become more moral.* Against my conception of “beyond good and evil” – as was to be expected – the whole ferocity of moral hebetation, mistaken for morality itself in Germany, as is well known, has gone into action: I could tell fine stories about that. Above all I was asked to consider the “undeniable superiority” of our age in moral judgement, the real *progress* we have made here: compared with us, a Cesare Borgia is by no means to be represented after my manner as a “higher man,” a kind of overman. A Swiss editor of the *Bund* went so far that he “understood” the meaning of my work – not without expressing his respect for my courage and daring – to be a demand for the abolition of all decent feelings. Thank you! In reply, I take the liberty of raising the question whether we have really become more moral. That all the world believes this to be the case merely constitutes an objection.

Understanding the revaluation of values as we know do, we can now meet Nietzsche on his own terms when he speaks of the moral hebetation which counts itself as morality in Germany, as well as share in his calling to question the superiority of what one would call our modern morality, especially regarding a man who we should think is very, very bad, such as a Cesare Borgia. Nietzsche goes on to examine this example in detail. The “undeniable superiority” which we today lord over the past with our notion of “progress” is most of all called into question, and it is asked, what kind of “progress” are we, here, really referring to, and is it

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<sup>180</sup> As part of his description of the *will to power*, Nietzsche writes “...Not contentedness but more power; not peace but war; not virtue but fitness (Renaissance virtue, *virtù*, virtue that is moraline-free).” *Virtù* is one of Macchiavelli’s essential concepts: it essentially entails possessing the virtue to turn a situation to ones advantage. In contrast to Christian “virtue,” *virtù* may include pride, bravery, strength cunning, civic humanism, the possession of a classically “noble” bearing *exempli gratia* Julius Caesar, and *ruthlessness*. To flesh out this connection further: Nietzsche’s contention that “the weak and the misshapen shall perish: first principle of *our* love of man. And we shall help them to it” could most definitely be made by something possessing *virtù*. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. § 2. Page 570.

something to at all be pleased with? Even more so, what would a man of the Renaissance think of we moderns, with our ‘tender sentiments?’

We modern men, very tender, very easily hurt, and offering as well as receiving consideration a hundredfold, really have the conceit that this tender humanity which we represent, this attained unanimity in sympathetic regard, in readiness to help, in mutual trust, represents positive progress and that in this respect we are far above men of the Renaissance. But that is how every age thinks, how it *must* think. What is certain is that we may not place ourselves in Renaissance conditions, not even by an act of thought: our nerves would not endure that reality, not to speak our muscles. But such capacity does not prove progress, only another, later constitution, one which is weaker, frailer, more easily hurt, and which necessarily generates a morality rich in consideration. Were we to think away our frailty and lateness, our physiological senescence, then our morality of ‘humanization’ would immediately lose its value too (in itself, no morality has any value) – it would even arouse disdain. On the other hand, let us not doubt that we moderns, with our thickly padded humanity, which at all costs wants to avoid bumping into a stone, would have provided Cesare Borgia’s contemporaries with a comedy at which they could have laughed themselves to death...

Once again, we witness Nietzsche making excellent use of the backward inference, that “most captious” of all inferences, indeed. Nietzsche is essentially setting his notion of *decadence* up against what he sees as the overflowing vitality of the Renaissance. The overlapping of this critique with what we witnessed earlier in the critique of the *romantic* disposition versus that of the *Dionysian* is both obvious and important, and in such a way, we can understand how this opposition of Modernity and Renaissance, too, fits neatly into the broader notion of health and sickness. Nietzsche holds the “physiological senescence” of modern man to be much the same as he does the physiological shortcomings of *romantic-pessimistic* philosophers and artists who articulate their work from the point of view of an impoverishment of life. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to say that, in the simplest terms, Nietzsche feels that modernity suffers from a great “impoverishment of life” *vis-à-vis* the Renaissance; conversely, our morality of increasing “consideration” and pity stems from an increasing societal weakness. In terms of the backward inference, Nietzsche is clear in his notion that once again, modern valuations and the notion of



“progress” we attach to them are a mistaking of cause and effect: our modern morality, with its ‘tender feelings’ is a result of a general, societal and individual, weakening of the constitution in regards to life, a loss of vitality, and the values which we now posit as superior we have to hold as superior, since we lack another way, societally, of positing them. In such a way, Nietzsche questions the entire notion of “progress.”<sup>181</sup> “But such capacity does not prove progress, only another, later constitution, one which is weaker, frailer, more easily hurt, and which necessarily generates a morality rich in consideration.” If we were physiologically different, stronger, more like the people who inhabited the age of the Renaissance, there is no reason our morality would not be, accordingly, stronger, harder, more *vital*. Nietzsche contends that A Cesare Borgia would not only laugh at our notion of progress, but the very sight of the effete nature of modern culture, and people, would provide good comedy for what Nietzsche calls the people of the “last great age.”

The decrease in instincts which are hostile and arouse mistrust – and that is all our “progress” amounts to – represents but one of the consequences attending the general decrease in *vitality*: it requires a hundred times more trouble and caution to make so conditional and late an existence prevail. Hence each helps the other; hence everyone is to a certain extent sick, and everyone is a nurse for the sick. And that is called ‘virtue.’ Among men who still knew life differently – fuller, more squandering, more overflowing – it would have been called by another name: ‘cowardice’ perhaps, ‘wretchedness,’ ‘old ladies’ morality.’

As Nietzsche continues to unfold his understanding of the difference between our time and the Renaissance, his critique appears more and more germane to those that we witnessed earlier. As

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<sup>181</sup> “Mankind does not represent a development toward anything better or stronger or higher in the sense accepted today. “Progress” is merely a modern idea, that is, a false idea. The European of today is vastly inferior in value to the European of the Renaissance: further development is altogether not according to any necessity in the direction of elevation, enhancement, or strength.

In another sense, success in individual cases is constantly encountered in the most widely different places and cultures: here we really do find a higher type, which is, in relation to mankind as a whole, a kind of overman. Such fortunate accidents of great success have always been possible and will perhaps always be possible. And even whole families, tribes, or peoples may occasionally represent such a bull’s-eye.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976. Print. § 4. Page 571.

I said, the notion of health and sickness, and its accompanying method of the backward inference, is application to individuals, societies, philosophers and philosophers across both time and space. Nietzsche could, in fact, come out and call the modern disposition romantic, as I have, instead of using the term *sick*, which we witness as fully synonymous given the talk of fullness, “squandering,” and “overflowing,” the exact words Nietzsche used to describe the opposite of the *Romantic* disposition. This passage similarly exemplifies the *revaluation of values* with its talk of “virtue,” and we shall see Nietzsche compare its opposite, *virtù*, to his own affirmative valuations below.

Our softening of manners – that is my proposition; that is, if you will, my innovation – is a consequence of decline; the hardness and terribleness of morals, conversely, can be a consequence of an excess of life. For in that case much may also be dared, much challenged, and much squandered. What was once the spice of life would be poison for us.

To be indifferent – that too is a form of strength – for that we are likewise too old, too late. Our morality of sympathy, against which I was the first to issue a warning – that which one might call *l'impressionisme morale* – is just another expression of that physiological overexcitability which is so characteristic of everything decadent. The movement which tried to introduce itself scientifically with Schopenhauer's morality of pity – a very unfortunate attempt! – is the real movement of decadence in morality; as such, it is profoundly related to Christian morality. Strong ages, noble cultures, consider pity, “neighbor-love,” and the lack of self and self-assurance something contemptible. Ages must be measured by their positive strength – and then that lavishly squandering and fatal age of the Renaissance appears as the last *great* age; and we moderns, with our anxious self-solicitude and neighbor-love, with our virtues of work, modesty, legality, and scientism – accumulating, economic, machinelike – appear as a *weak* age...”<sup>182</sup>

We can now clearly see Nietzsche's critique of modernity in contrast to what he sees as the greatness of Renaissance Europe. Strength, harshness, fullness, contrasted with modern manners, a certain ‘effeminacy of feeling.’<sup>183</sup> The Renaissance was, according to Nietzsche, a

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<sup>182</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976. Print. “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” § 37. Page 538-40.

<sup>183</sup> “This problem of the value of pity and of morality of pity ( – I am opposed to the pernicious modern effeminacy of feeling – ) seems at first to be merely something detached, an isolated question mark; but whoever sticks with it and learns how to ask questions here will experience what I experienced – a tremendous new prospect opens up

time of true vitality, of an “overflowing life,” exhibited by such a man as Cesare Borgia, and the modern comes up the poorer in the contrast: what we see instead is a time before us of, as we said above, *decadence*: physiological “overexcitability,” oversensitivity; in a word, decay as opposed to “progress.”<sup>184</sup> It is noteworthy that Nietzsche does not use the term *decadence* in the section above, but instead describes the same phenomenon along similar lines, exemplifying the unified nature of his critique. Instead of *virtù*, today we pride “neighbor-love,” softness, suppression and repression, and a truly machine-like quality in which all being are expected to bond together in a mutual denial of true life as expressed by our instincts. All this in Nietzsche’s eyes comes back to the central emphasis in today’s society on pity: everyone exhibits “that *largueur* of the heart, which ‘forgives’ all because it understands’ all.”<sup>185</sup> “This modernity was our sickness: lazy peace, cowardly compromise, the whole virtuous uncleanliness of the modern Yes and No.”<sup>186</sup> “Hence each helps the other; hence everyone is to a certain extent sick, and everyone is a nurse for the sick. And that is called ‘virtue.’” Sickness, which above all would be *sirocco* to what Nietzsche considers the *healthier* men of the Renaissance, who, as Nietzsche says, would merely laugh at our modern “virtues.” Prizing his compassion and his willingness to “help” and “understand” in an utterly self-effacing manner, regardless of any critical eye, regardless of any real *value*, the Modern Man cuts a considerably less impressive figure than the man of the Renaissance, and can only sigh “I have got lost; I am everything that has got lost.”

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for him, a new possibility comes over him like vertigo, every kind of mistrust, suspicion, fear leaps up, his belief in morality, in all morality, falters...” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. Preface. § 8. Page 453.

<sup>184</sup> One need only mention the recent statistic that one in three US adults are on anti-depressants or anti-anxiety medication to give some credence to this mode of thought.

<sup>185</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “The Antichrist.” *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976. Print. § 1. Page 569.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* § 1. Page 569.

Without any answers to a fundamental questions other than a vague mistrust at the world, a vague hostility to life itself in its truly apprehended form.<sup>187</sup>

Again, one cannot help but think that Schopenhauer looms large in this picture. As a final note in our discussion of the Renaissance, let us consider that, perhaps, Nietzsche had a very much Cesare Borgia-like figure in mind for the “master” of this particular section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, and by now it is hoped that my reader can guess who the latter figure of the section may very well be:

A man who says, ‘I like this, I take this for my own and want to protect it and defend it against anybody’; a man who is able to manage something, to carry out a resolution, to remain faithful to a thought, to hold a woman, to punish and prostrate one who presumed too much; a man who has his wrath and his sword and to whom the weak, the suffering, the hard pressed, and the animals, too, like to come and belong by nature, in short a man who is by nature a *master* – when such a man has pity, well, *this* pity has value. But what good is the pity of those who suffer. Or those who, worse, *preach* pity.<sup>188</sup>

Clearly, to say that Nietzsche disavows compassion entirely is a falsity, and given a Dionysian understanding of life, he, here, even affirms it: on the whole, one cannot help but feel there is some truth to what he is saying. What value is pity if it is a result of a societal indoctrination as opposed to the genuine good-will of someone who has said the most exultant Yes? Who truly believes in and has *mastered* life? Can compassion, as envisioned by Schopenhauer, ever be said to have positive value?

On a lighter note, we can at the very least say that Nietzsche would warmly agree with the amazingly *apropos* quote by Orson Welles’s character, Harry Lime, says to Joseph Cotten’s in the 1949 classic, *The Third Man*:

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid. § 1. Page 569.

<sup>188</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. “Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. § 293. Page 420.

Don't be so gloomy! After all it's not that awful. Like the fella says, in Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the *Renaissance*. In Switzerland they had brotherly love - they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock. So long, Holly!

Perhaps Graham Greene had recently dusted off his copy of *Twilight of the Idols*...

Let us now examine what Nietzsche may mean by an idea of a master, of one who masters life: in a brief and concise way, what Nietzsche posits as affirmative values. After this exercise, Nietzsche's fondness for the Renaissance, his notion of the time of *virtù* as constituting a truly *great age*, will become even more clear, and we will have a thorough understanding of Nietzsche's general philosophic system.

### **Section 8: *Will to Power, Amor Fati, and Dionysus; or, Nietzsche's Affirmative Values***

We have at length examined Nietzsche's critique of health and sickness. To complete this picture, let us see what Nietzsche considers his own, healthy philosophic concepts. We have already discussed the *Dionysian* at length. We will now look at the *will to power* and *amor fati*, before finishing our discussion of Nietzsche with a final look at the *Dionysian* and an example he sets at as his own, in direct contrast to Schopenhauer, moral exemplar.

The *will to power*, more than anything else in Nietzsche's system, reveals Nietzsche profound Schopenhauerian influence, and it is probably the most misunderstood aspect of his entire philosophy. While Nietzsche does believe that "Life is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation," the *will to power* is not a *carte blanche* for one to go about, doing those whatever they like, willy-nilly, in the most obscene way possible.<sup>189</sup> Rather, the *will to power*, like the statement above, merely aims to describe life *as it*

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid. § 259. Page 393.

*truly is*, regardless of all moralistic, sentimental interpretation. “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the *will to power*, which is after all the will to life.”<sup>190</sup> With this in mind, when Nietzsche talks of the will to power in relation to the individual, he is merely stating the necessity of not rebelling against the basic instinct of life, which is what we have seen in Schopenhauer. The will to power is, in effect, the exact opposite of Schopenhauer’s will to life, in so much as its conclusions are concerned. Schopenhauer saw the suffering as inherent in all striving, in all willing, as the evil of the world, and advocated the negation of life itself on account of it. Nietzsche has taken Schopenhauer’s concept and inverted, making it into an affirmative conception of life: instead of negation, we have Yes-saying, the *healthy* manifestation of the *will to power*, the will to growth, expansion, *life*. Nietzsche understands suffering as necessary for the accumulation of power, which is the most basic principle of all thriving life, and is synonymous with a need or want to grow, expand, exceed boundaries and overcome yourself in the constant upward movement of the very *conception* of the self: the accumulation of power, self-overcoming, self-expansion and self-growth as the very *essence* of life. Without constant growth, without the necessity of change, with striving for expansion, one only has stagnation, decline, and sickness. This, more than anything else in Nietzsche’s philosophy, cannot be argued with. Thus, Nietzsche’s core philosophic doctrine, devoid of what he calls “moral hebetation,” considers

What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself.

What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness.

What is happiness? The feeling that power is *growing*, that resistance is overcome.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid. § 259. Page 393.

Not contentedness but more power; not peace but war; not virtue but fitness, (Renaissance virtue, *virtù*, virtue that is moraline-free).  
 The weak and the failures shall perish: first principle of our love of man. And they shall be given every possible assistance.  
 What is more harmful than any vice? Active pity for all the weak and misshapen: Christianity.<sup>191</sup>

While Nietzsche's position may sound extreme, particularly the talk of the "weak and the failures" perishing, one has to consider "what the opposite of this ideal?" Ultimately, if one disagrees with Nietzsche here, if one chooses the opposite, the "weak and misshapen" (and there will always be the *weak*, the *misshapen*, the out-and-out *failures*) must be *saved*, one is left with the same kind of morality, which sees suffering, and even perishing, as an evil and the evil of the world, that we have so carefully traced the nihilistic character of above. This Nietzsche concludes that, in fact, helping the weak and the failures to perish is the first principle of his philosophy's "love of man."

In a personal sense, the *will to power* is the affirmative self-doctrine *par excellence*. One must constantly grow, change, adapt, and expand in this life to be *healthy*. There can be no second guessing here. And when Nietzsche speaks of the failures perishing, perhaps he is not all that far off there, either. Some people, truly, are *not made for life*. In this life, nothing will make one more unhappy, more depressed, more thoroughly worthless, than stagnation, decline, lack of drive, et cetera; and yet, these are the very characteristic that so many exhibit, and the very same people who bemoan life itself, who continually give it its "gloomy aspect," to their own shame and to my own profound disgust. Oppositely, in real terms, the *will to power* is a doctrine for personal *health*. On a societal level, one cannot argue that a society which exhibits its opposite, embodied in what we have so thoroughly observed above, is indeed a fundamentally *sick* society.

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<sup>191</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Portable Nietzsche*. "The Antichrist." Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Penguin. 1976. Print. § 2. Page 570.

Along with the *will to power*, which is an active principle, Nietzsche proposes the concept of *amor fati* to maintain a healthy view of things: one must crave life so deeply that they act as though they will relive it again and again, for all eternity. This is not meant to be a metaphysical conception of time, as some have misunderstood it, but merely a way of thinking about one's life which imparts tremendous value upon one's actions. If one considers the concept of *amor fati* to be their guiding principle, life is anything but the "dreamlike whirl" described by Schopenhauer above: one is going to relive it over and over, and as opposed to the utter valuelessness of one's actions described by Schopenhauer, here one sees everything, every moment, as infinitely valuable, and attempts to make all actions, every day, as meaningful as possible.<sup>192</sup> This can be thought of in conjunction with the *will to power* to promote a general idea of self-reverence, care, and growth in the face of a life which, does indeed, contain much suffering; but even the worst of this suffering *must be affirmed*. This affirmation is what Nietzsche refers to as the *Dionysian*.

With the Dionysian, with his talk above of "overflowing life," of "vitality," Nietzsche's essential contention that only someone who has strong roots in life – indeed, someone who is able to understand the *will to power*, overflow past their limits and constantly grow, will be able to stomach this fundamentally *healthy* concept and view of life, of *amor fati* and the

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<sup>192</sup> *"The greatest weight.* – What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to love once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sight and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!'

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every things, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself *and to life to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate confirmation and seal? Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage. 1974. Print. § 341. Page 273.



simultaneous infinite meaning of life, will hold he calls a Dionysian view of life. This amounts to his own explication of what the “overflowing with life” as we discussed in the concept of *Dionysian Pessimism* looks like to the individual person, the self-conception and world conception they invariably must hold to understand these ideals and to *live these ideals*.. Nietzsche hold Goethe as the shining example of the *Dionysian* perspective, of essentially, the moral exemplar of his whole philosophy.

*Goethe* — not a German event, but a European one: a magnificent attempt to overcome the eighteenth century by a return to nature, by an *ascent* to the naturalness of the Renaissance — a kind of self-overcoming on the part of that century. He bore its strongest instincts within himself: the sensibility, the idolatry of nature, the anti-historic, the idealistic, the unreal and revolutionary (the latter being merely a form of the unreal). He sought help from history, natural science, antiquity, and also Spinoza, but, above all, from practical activity; he surrounded himself with limited horizons; he did not retire from life but put himself into the midst of it; he if was not fainthearted but took as much as possible upon himself, over himself, into himself. What he wanted was *totality*; he fought the mutual extraneousness of reason, senses, feeling, and will (preached with the most abhorrent scholasticism by *Kant*, the antipode of Goethe); he disciplined himself to wholeness, he created himself.

In the middle of an age with an unreal outlook, Goethe was a convinced realist: he said Yes to everything that was related to him in this respect — and he had no greater experience than that *ens realissimum* [most real being] called Napoleon. Goethe conceived a human being who would be strong, highly educated, skillful in all bodily matters, self-controlled, reverent toward himself, and who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of being natural, being strong enough for such freedom; the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength, because he knows how to use to his advantage even that from which the average nature would perish; the man for whom there is no longer anything that is forbidden — unless it be *weakness*, whether called vice or virtue.

Such a spirit who has *become free* stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the *faith* that only the particular is loathesome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole — *he does not negate anymore*. Such a faith, however, is the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name of *Dionysus*.

Now we have come full circle from our Interlude, and even our Prologue above. While Goethe wrote of characters who expressed profound revulsion and fright at the essence of life, Nietzsche contends that Goethe himself is his ideal model for its greatest Yes. Speaking of the

fundamental healthiness of the experience of the *will to power* in craft the individual through a constant self-overcoming, the overcoming of the self and *recreation of the self*, a mode of constant growth in the very *face* of life and its suffering, Nietzsche contends that what Goethe “wanted was *totality*; he fought the mutual extraneousness of reason, senses, feeling, and will... he disciplined himself to wholeness, he created himself.” He “conceived a human being who would be strong, highly educated, skillful in all bodily matters, self-controlled, reverent toward himself, and who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of being natural, being strong enough for such freedom; the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength...”

Nietzsche’s conception of Goethe does not sound so dissimilar from the self-portrait we saw above. And like Nietzsche, who we are told was, personally, a being of tenderness and kindness, Nietzsche speaks of Goethe in reference to a mode of “tolerance:” a tolerance out of a Yes to life: tolerance for both the good and the bad, for the natural, and of the kind we saw displayed in the compassion of the master above, in contrast to the preacher of pity. In effect, a tolerance and compassion of total understanding: not out of negation, but affirmation. Not out of weakness, but from the most transcendental kind of strength. Goethe said Yes to everything that was related to him, in terms of a realism regarding life itself: that is so say, he said Yes to all the real, lived and felt events in his life, and especially that of his own suffering, and others. Goethe did not say No, and to Nietzsche, Goethe is in this sense the very opposite of a Schopenhauer, a *romantic pessimist*. Not a horrified running away in *romantic pessimism* and despair, but instead a refocus on self-mastery, self-control, and most importantly, being “strong enough for such freedom” that only this attitude can provide. This is Nietzsche’s ideal of the *Dionysian* view of life, and indeed, of the “*Dionysian* god and man”: a view which understands what life really is, but which seeks to affirm life, in the most ecstatic of terms, none the less, and to especially

affirm the suffering of life as not evil but necessary, the sign of growth, the true essence of life, and ultimately and incontrovertibly “redeemed in the whole:” indeed, to affirm because of this suffering, and not even necessarily in spite of it, affirming both the self and the whole life in the face of it, that is truly Dionysian. ‘Only the particular is loathsome,’ and at the same time, the value of life itself, as a whole, simply ‘cannot be estimated.’ One *must* affirm and be healthy – and ultimately, this is the secret to happiness which so many people today crave and yet find hopelessly out of reach. As Nietzsche says, in reference to the original, Dionysian Greeks, they were “superficial, out of profundity.” Perhaps that is the ultimate expression of Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy.

### **Section Nine: Concluding with Nietzsche’s Affirmation**

I ultimately find it hard to argue with Nietzsche’s views of *health* and *sickness*. When one begins considering the implications of this critique, and one begins applying it to the world, and especially the backward inference regarding people, one realizes, as Nietzsche argued, how much sickness we really do live with. As an affirmative philosophy, Nietzsche’s concepts are true formula’s for personal growth, nor do I find myself in a position of wanting to defend traditional morality, traditional ideas of what constitute moral valuations. Ultimately, Nietzsche presents himself, to me, as the most important philosopher of modern times, with a truly personal aspect to his philosophy but it would benefit anyone to truly understand. More than this, the negative aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy become less apparent as one reads his works and understands him in full. For instance, as we have seen, Nietzsche does not disavow compassion *in toto*, but only compassion that comes forth out of a moral valuation regarding suffering as an evil in the world. Nietzsche, there is no doubt, expresses compassion in much of his writing, and especially his letters: affirmative compassion. In the end, Nietzsche’s philosophemes, are, in my

view, and as he himself argued, true ways of achieving health, in the exceptional sense: and I will not hesitate that I myself have benefited from them. There is nothing more important than an earnest and real effort to turn one's personal suffering into growth, positive change, and to strive for a constant overcoming of the self in view of something better: in some ways, these few ideas represent all that I do enjoy in the way of a personal philosophy. Moreover, I will not hesitate that, when it comes down to people being weak, not possessing self-respect, not having the ability, the want, to grow, to overcome themselves and strive, constantly, for something better (and what first comes to mind here is the physically ill out of wanton self-neglect, the morbidly obese, the dedicated smokers – this wanton weakness and neglect which so much of our present day “medical community,” the same medical community which has seen fit to drug one-third of adults in an attempt at administered happiness, has sought to “justify,” in a mode of *pity*), one can have nothing but contempt. And yet, even here, one affirms. One holds contempt for these ways and means of living because one wants to affirm something better, and here, one affirms them and themselves. Overall, the idea of health, as Nietzsche formulated it, is, in my view, more proper, and fulfilling, than the question for our effete, disingenuous, disgusting modern “happiness.” In many ways, our whole modern idea of happiness is represented in the notion of shielding oneself from the woes of life – for example, numbing oneself out with varieties of medications, or forms of what we can call “self-medication” – and almost represents the romantic disposition, on the cultural level, that Nietzsche diagnosed as a *sickness*, and which he showed was indeed contributing to a growing nihilism in our valuations. When did life become, instead a search for self-actualization, meaning, and identity in the face of hardships, a shallow search for numb, stupefied, and above all, *mediocre* contentment? When did a life of placid, but “content” mediocrity make itself societally preferable to the divine madness and

sadness of a Beethoven or a Van Gogh? How does a valuation of life, an ideal of supposed “happiness,” an understanding of the human condition which leads one-third of adults to be placed on prescription anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication still assert itself as *the valuation?*

**Interlude Two: *Tristan und Isolde; or, the Liebestod***

*(Isolde, aware of nothing round about her, fixes her gaze with mounting ecstasy upon Tristan's [dead] body)*

ISOLDE:

How softly and gently  
he smiles,  
how sweetly  
his eyes open -  
can you see, my friends,  
do you not see it?  
How he glows  
ever brighter,  
raising himself high  
amidst the stars?  
Do you not see it?  
How his heart  
swells with courage,  
gushing full and majestic  
in his breast?

How in tender bliss  
 sweet breath  
 gently wafts  
 from his lips -  
 Friends! Look!  
 Do you not feel and see it?  
 Do I alone hear  
 this melody  
 so wondrously  
 and gently  
 sounding from within him,  
 in bliss lamenting,  
 all-expressing,  
 gently reconciling,  
 piercing me,  
 soaring aloft,  
 its sweet echoes  
 resounding about me?  
 Are they gentle  
 aerial waves  
 ringing out clearly,  
 surging around me?  
 Are they billows  
 of blissful fragrance?  
 As they seethe  
 and roar about me,  
 shall I breathe,  
 shall I give ear?  
 Shall I drink of them,  
 plunge beneath them?  
 Breathe my life away  
 in sweet scents?  
 In the heaving swell,  
 in the resounding echoes,  
 in the universal stream  
 of the world-breath -  
 to drown,  
 to founder -  
 unconscious -  
 utmost rapture!<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Richard Wagner. *Tristan und Isolde*. 1865. This is the quintessential *Liebestod* moment and a essential expression of *romantic pessimism*. Isolde seeks the dissolution of the self through the unity of love and the and death, which here become indiscernible from one another. <http://www.rwagner.net/libretti/tristan/e-tristan-a3s3.html>

### Chapter Three: Thomas Mann, *An Appeal to Reason*, and *The Magic Mountain*

“Nietzsche, whose mission it was to bring art and knowledge, science and passions, even nearer to each other, to make truth and beauty mingle together, even more tragically and thrillingly than Schopenhauer before him; Nietzsche saw in this man his great teacher and master... Even after this great self-conqueror had renounced both Wagner and Schopenhauer, in itself a decisive event in the history of human intellect, he never ceased to love where he had ceased to believe, and in the late work *Ecce Homo*, that almost frighteningly *spirituelle* last phosphorescence of his over-stimulated and solitary career, there is a page on *Tristan* that reveals no estrangement but, on the contrary, passion... One may say that his thinking and teaching after he had “got over” Schopenhauer were a continuation and interpretation of his teacher’s world-picture instead of an actual departure from it.” – Thomas Mann, from *Schopenhauer*, 1938.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Thomas Mann. “Schopenhauer.” *Essays of Three Decades*. Trans and Ed. H. T. Lowe-Porter. New York: Knopf. 1947. Print. Page 374. The section Mann mentions, in which Nietzsche makes reference to Wagner’s sickness: “But to this day I am still looking for a work that equals the dangerous fascination and the gruesome and sweet infinity of *Tristan* – and look in all the arts in vain. All the strangeness of Leonardo da Vinci emerge from their spell at the first note of *Tristan*. This work is emphatically Wagner’s non plus ultra; with the *Meistersinger* and the *Ring* he recuperated from it. Becoming healthier – is a retrogression, given a nature like Wagner’s...” Friedrich Wilhelm

“And now we are swept into a new economic crisis that stirs political passions afresh – for one need not be a materialistic socialist to understand that the masses thinking and feeling are dictated by their economic condition and get translated into political opinion, much as though a sick philosopher were to erect his physiological draw-backs into a system without the corrective ideal.”<sup>195</sup> Mann, from “Appell An Die Vernunft,” 1930.

“I dreamed about the nature of man, about a courteous, reasonable, and respectable community of men – while the ghastly, bloody feast went on the temple behind them. Were they courteous and charming to one another, those sunny folk, out of silent regard for that horror? What a fine and gallant conclusion to draw!... I will keep faith with death in my heart, but I will clearly remember that if faithfulness to death and what is past rules our thoughts and deeds, that leads only to wickedness, dark lust, and hatred for humankind. *For the sake of goodness and love, man shall grant death no dominion over his thoughts.*”<sup>196</sup> – Mann, from *Der Zauberberg*, 1924.

### **Section One: Introduction**

Thomas Mann not incorrectly saw himself as the heir and torch-carrier of the German literary-philosophic tradition stretching back, link by link, from his present age of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to Goethe in the late 18th. Mann not only consciously worked within this tradition, addressing and continuing the examination of themes and topics very much in conversation with his predecessors, some of which we ourselves have considered in this thesis, but attempted a critique of the tradition given what he was witnessing in Germany in the aftermath of the Great War through the 1930s. Along with this critique, which we will first discuss, Mann also worked at a synthesis of Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean understanding of life, which takes shape in his magnum opus, *The Magic Mountain*.

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Nietzsche. “Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.” *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and Ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library. 1968. Print. “What I Am So Clever,” § 6. Page 706.

<sup>195</sup> Thomas Mann. “An Appeal to Reason.” *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Ed. Edward Dimendberg, Martin Jay, and Anton Kaes. Berkeley, California: U of California. 1995. Print. Page 150.

<sup>196</sup> Thomas Mann. *The Magic Mountain*. Trans. John E. Woods. London: Everyman's Library, 2005. Print. Page 587.



## **Section Two: *An Appeal to Reason*, the German Tradition, and Fascism**

Mann employed all his literary and philosophic skill in his analysis – and fight against – of the rising fascistic tide he was forced to contend with in Germany following the devastation of the First World War. Given his position within, and appreciation of, what could be called the German canon, Mann displays some profound Nietzschean influence in his important essay, *An Appeal to Reason*, originally delivered as a speech. As a profound expression of the serious role he felt philosophy had played in the shaping of German culture, Mann uses even the platform of an expressly political speech and essay to critique not only fascism, but what he viewed as elements of the German tradition which aided and abetted the rise of the fascistic mode of thinking. “An Appeal to Reason” was delivered within days of the 1930 German election

In the German election of September, 1930, the National Socialists vaulted to 18% at the polls, becoming the second largest part in Germany, and increasing its seats in the Reichstag from 12 to 108, with the Social Democrats having 143 seats, and the Communists having 77. Mann was alarmed by the growing support for Hitler and Nazis and accepted an invitation to address a gathering of prominent persons and intellectuals at the Beethovensaal, a concert hall and cultural center, in Berlin. The Nazi's caught wind of the event, and Goebbels sent twenty SA thugs, also known as “Brown Shirts,” dressed in suits to disrupt the gathering. Thomas Mann was repeatedly interrupted by catcalls. The novelist Ernst Jünger was also present, and my guess is, unsympathetic to Mann’s “appeal.”

In “An Appeal to Reason,” Mann essentially takes stock of the position he Germany in. The trauma felt by the Germans in the aftermath of the Great War is probably unimaginable to any modern Americans, and man compares to wounded nation to a “sick philosopher,” in a cultural assessment that could not be more Nietzschean. Mann more or less uses the “backward

inference,” discussed above, to understand the political choices being taken by Germans at the time.

“So it was sixteen years ago when the war broke out that was to be for every conscious human being so much more than a war... And so it is again today, after years in which the well-intentioned have tried to believe in recovery and a slow return to comfort and security – though all the while the world economic system, struck down and trodden upon by the war, was in no way healed nor could look forward to healing, but remained in a state of confusion rendered more acute by the blind and archaic policy of tribute adopted by the governments that dictated the peace. And now we are swept into a new economic crisis that stirs political passions afresh – for one need not be a materialistic socialist to understand that the masses thinking and feeling are dictated by their economic condition and get translated into political opinion, much as though a sick philosopher were to erect his physiological draw-backs into a system without the corrective ideal.”<sup>197</sup>

It is a true testament to the interconnectedness of the German literary-philosophic tradition that Mann so adroitly uses this Nietzschean method to analyze a culture that was indeed becoming profoundly *ill*. One can almost imagine Mann himself thinking of Nietzsche’s critique of Schopenhauer in this statement, the “physiological drawbacks” of Schopenhauer’s understanding of his own body seamlessly compared to the misunderstanding of the German people of the body politic. And just as Schopenhauer erected this drawback, the drawback of his profound “misunderstanding of the body” into his philosophic system without the “corrective ideal,” so the German people, according to Mann, are erecting their own profound misunderstanding of the conditions of their society into the very socio-economic and political framework. As ghastly as Schopenhauer’s philosophy is, one can say with some certainty that Mann no doubt foresaw the misunderstanding occurring in Germany at the time as of horrifying worse implications and consequences.

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<sup>197</sup> Thomas Mann. "An Appeal to Reason." *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Ed. Edward Dimendberg, Martin Jay, and Anton Kaes. Berkeley, California: U of California. 1995. Print. Page 150.

In perhaps another nod to Nietzsche, Mann continues that “one need not be a great psychologist to recognize these trials, both foreign and domestic, the causes which, together with the bad economic situation, conditioned the sensational elections results.”<sup>198</sup>

The German people took advantage of a garnish election poster, the so-called National Socialist, to give vent to its feelings. But National Socialism could never have attained the strength or scope it has shown as a manifestation of popular feeling had it not, unknown to the mass of its supporters, drawn from spiritual sources an element that, like everything born of the spirit of its times, possesses a pragmatic truth, legitimacy, and logical necessity, and by virtue of them lends reality to the popular movement. The economic decline of the middle classes was accompanied – or even preceded – by a feeling that amounted to an intellectual prophecy and a critique of the age: the sense that here was a crisis that heralded the end of the bourgeois epoch that entered with the French Revolution and the notions associated with it. A new mental attitude was proclaimed for all mankind, which should have nothing to do with bourgeois principles such as freedom, justice, culture, optimism, faith in progress. As art, it gave vent to expressionistic shrieks of the soul; as philosophy, it repudiated the reason and the mechanistic and ideological conceptions of bygone decades; it expressed itself as an irrational throwback, placing the conception *life* at the center of thought, and raised on its standard the powers of the unconscious, the dynamic, the darkly creative, which alone were life-giving. Mind, quite simply the intellectual, it put under a taboo as destructive of life, while it set up for homage as the true inwardness of life the Mother-Cthonic, the darkness of the soul, the holy procreative underworld. Much of this religion of nature, by its very essence inciting to the orgiastic and to Bacchic excess, has gone into the nationalism of our day, differentiating it sharply from the nationalism of the nineteenth century with its bourgeois, strongly cosmopolitan, and humanitarian cast. It is distinguished in its character as a nature cult precisely by its absolute unrestraint, its orgiastic, radically antihuman, frenzied character. But when one thinks what it has cost humanity through the ages to rise from orgiastic nature cults, from the service of Moloch, Baal, and Astarte, with the barbaric refinements of its Gnosticism and the sexual excess of the divinities, to the plane of a more spiritual worship, one stands amazed at the lighthearted way in which today we repudiate our gains and our liberations – while at the same time realizing how fluctuating and ephemeral, in a general sense how really meaningless, such a philosophical reaction must be.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid. Page 151.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. Page 152.

From a standpoint of assessing the *misunderstanding* of the German people regarding their societal *health* which has culminated in the 1930 election, Mann begins to analyze the specific ideas which contributed to this misunderstanding. While Mann uses a directly Nietzschean method in his critique, he brings here to critique, at least to some extent, Nietzsche, the ideas he formulated, or at the very least the way his promulgation of these ideas have been misunderstood, and led to a broader misunderstanding.

The concept of the “end of the bourgeoisie epoch” was popular in the *fin de siècle*, and seemed, as Mann says, to gain an especially immediacy given the events of the Great War and the proceeding economic downturn of the middle classes: and the implications of this concept, if it is felt to be true, are essentially nihilistic. Nietzsche, with his conception of *decadence* and talk of degeneration was, at the very least, in no way unattached to this mindset: though I believe Nietzsche himself would have said the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the continuation of a society that had, as he has given it to be understood, lost its instincts for life. More specifically to Nietzsche, Mann’s discussion of the “Mother-Cthonic, the darkness of the soul, the holy procreative underworld,” and of “Bacchic excess,” call very explicitly to mind many passages of Nietzsche, in his effusive insistence – again admittedly, along with many Europeans – of the spiritual, instinctual, and societal superiority of the Ancient Greeks, and more specifically, his whole conception of the *Dionysian*. Dionysus is, after all, the same god as Bacchus, and the followers of this sect would indeed give themselves over to “absolute unrestraint... orgiastic, radically antihumane, frenzied” activities which, to a large extent, one can see mirrored in the entire ethos of the fascistic movement where, as Mann says, one begins to sense, compared to other more purely political parties, the character of a “nature cult” in that very vein. One cannot help but feel that, when Mann speaks, especially, of philosophers placing “the conception *life* at

the center of thought,” and also of their raising as their “standard the powers of the unconscious, the dynamic, the darkly creative,” which they held “alone [as] life-giving,” he is to some extent criticizing Nietzsche. Though if one reads, for example, the above quoted passage on Goethe in relation to the *Dionysian*, one feels that the orgiastic nature cult and anything like a fascistic movement is not very much what Nietzsche, in his heart of hearts, had in mind: and Goethe, given more effusive praise than anyone in Nietzsche’s philosophy, and indeed, held as the model individual, was anything but orgiastic or darkly creative.<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, as Mann seems to point out (and being in a cultural and temporal position, far more than anyone alive today, do so), Nietzsche, at least to some extent, left the door open to these kind of botched, and debauched, interpretations of his philosophy by the very way he wrote and communicated his, as he should have foreseen, easily misunderstood ideas. Even Nietzsche’s conception, as he explained it, of *Dionysian Pessimism*, leaves itself starkly open to misuse: who is to say that Hitler and the Nazi’s were not “pregnant with future?” One could of course, more accurately argue that they were as possessed of *ressentiment* as any group in history, but nonetheless, the vulnerability of Nietzsche’s ideas to misuse is clear.

Mann seems to indicate that *ressentiment*, *romantic pessimism*, is playing a role in the present climate in Germany as well. The Nazi’s were, after all, explicitly setting out to ameliorate German suffering that was occurring in the inter-war period. Could one say that the National Socialists were, in some sense, one long recoiling in the face of life, as we have characterizes romanticism above? Mann seems to indicate it, too, was playing a role, and even casts doubt on whether or not Nietzsche himself truly escapes from *romanticism*.

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<sup>200</sup> Though he, Goethe, did try to marry a teenager when he was in his seventies. But as they say, who’s counting?

It may seem daring to associate radical nationalism of our day with these conceptions from a romanticizing philosophy. Yet the association is there, and it must be recognized by those concerned about gaining insight into the relation of things. And there is even more: there are other intellectual elements to strengthen this National Social political movement – a certain ideology, a Nordic creed, a Germanistic romanticism, from the philological, academic, professional spheres...”<sup>201</sup> Page 153.

Mann is clear that the two major intellectual undercurrents which are driving National Socialism are: the belief that the bourgeoisie epoch is degenerating or ending, and the return to some kind of pre-modern, anti-rational, orgiastic and “natural” society driven by the unconscious and “darkly creative” powers of true *life*, shed of its modern illusions, is the solution; a “Germanistic romanticism” which assumes elements of a “Nordic creed,” and which emanates from the “philological, academic, and professional spheres.” One cannot help but think that, for Mann, to some large extent, Nietzsche, in the foreground, and Schopenhauer, in the background, or charitably, a misunderstanding of their philosophies, contribute largely to both of these ideas. Mann contends that these two lines of thought are working to erase the Germany that has come to prominence, even with the horrifying shock of the Great War, in the past several centuries.<sup>202</sup>

And yet Mann asks the question

Can a people old and ripe and highly cultured, with many demands on life, with a long emotional and intellectual experience behind it; a people who possess a classical literature that is lofty and cosmopolitan, a romantic literature of the profoundest and most subtle; who have Goethe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and in their blood the noble malady of the *Tristan* music – can such a people conform, even after ten thousand banishings and purificatory executions, to the wish image

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid. Page 153.

<sup>202</sup> “Indeed, the moment has already come when militant nationalism displays itself less militantly for the foreign than for domestic consumption... Its hatred is leveled not so much without as within; yes, actually is fanatical love of the fatherland appears chiefly as hatred not of the foreigner but of all Germans who do not believe in its methods, and whom it promises to destroy root and branch (even today that would be rather a large order); as hatred, in short, of everything that makes for the good name and intellectual renown of Germany in the world today. More and more it looks as though the chief goal were the inner purification of the country, the return of the German to the conception that radical nationalism has of him.” Ibid. Page 155.

of a primitive, pure-blooded, blue-eyed simplicity, artless in mind and heart, which smiles and submits and clicks its heels?"<sup>203</sup>

From our present day vantage point, we know that the ultimate, unspeakably disconcerting, disquieting and disturbing answer is, categorically, "yes."

Compare the cultural memory of contemporary American society, and the level of education, the historic, cultural literacy of the average American today, to Germany and the average German of the 1920s. Shudder at the implications.<sup>204</sup>

### **Section Two: The Magic Mountain**

While Mann attempted to understand what he witnessed in Germany in view of the tradition he knew had so thoroughly shaped his culture, he also made excellent use of this the profound subtleties regarding life and considerations regarding people that this very same tradition made available to him: a tradition that he, though as we say with criticism, thoroughly embraced.

Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* his perhaps the greatest philosophical novel ever written.

While one could write a one hundred – no, one thousand – page book on the novel (which itself stands at some nine-hundred pages), here we will very strictly examine two episodes which most especially underscore what he have been discussing, and ultimately we will end with Mann's own conception of the life and suffering in the face of suffering, in what essentially amounts to his synthesis of the Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean positions on the subject.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid. Page 155.

<sup>204</sup> I had myself in splinters all over the floor, laughing, in a darkly creative way, what this speech would look like regarding Modern America. "Can a people fat and wheezing and stupid, with many so few demands on life provided they can buy frozen food and a six pack of Budweiser; with so short a cognized and remembered emotional and intellectual experience behind it; a people who possess a reality television that is vapid, disingenuous, and valueless; a plethora of "professional sports" of the profoundest and most mind-bogglingly stupefying, worthless and commercialized quality; who have Kanye West, Terry Bradshaw, Rachel Ray, and in their blood the commercialized malady of the *Modern Country* music – can such a people conform, even after one or two uses of terms like "we're going to be winning so much" and "we're going to make this country great again," to the wish image of a primitive, loud-mouthed, bloated, blue-eyed and fake-haired simplicity, artless in mind and heart, which grins and boasts and gives us a thumbs up?"

*The Magic Mountain* takes place at a tuberculosis sanatorium in the Swiss Alps. As one can imagine, death and suffering are pervasive. No doubt intentionally, this setting proves to be ideal for Mann in examining and discussing many of the themes we have looked at in this very thesis. Ultimately, in this setting, the protagonist, Hans Castorp, comes to understand life and death with an almost unimaginable level of intimacy: in such a way, Mann provides us with a character who, in a way similar to Nietzsche's description of his own intellectual development, is in a unique position to assess life and death, and accordingly, in a unique position to synthesize the strains of thought we have seen from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in this thesis.

Castorp is initially falls into a mode of thinking which could be called *romantic pessimistic*, and begins to view death as a worthy, noble against the corruption that is life. He begins visiting the patients of the sanatorium who are approaching death, and has premonitions of his now deceased grandfather, dressed in his ceremonial black robes and Spanish ruff, as a personification not so much of death itself, but of the *nobility* of death and things past.<sup>205</sup> This reaches its nadir in a scene from the Walpurgis Nacht chapter, in which man, among other things, lampoons the notion of Liebestod which we saw above in the second interlude: the romantic conflating of love and death as rapturous forces of dissolution. Hans falls into this very same line of thinking to an almost comic degree.

In "Walpurgis Nacht," Hans, quite drunk, stumbles over to talk to his love interest, Clavdia, who he has watched for months but never spoken to. They discuss the possibility that

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<sup>205</sup> "Death is a great power. You take off your hat and tiptoe past his presence, rocking your way forward. He wears the ceremonial ruff of what has been, and you put on austere black in his honor. Reason stands foolish before him, for reason is only virtue, but death is freedom and kicking over the traces, chaos and lust." Thomas Mann. *The Magic Mountain*. Trans. John E. Woods. London: Everyman's Library, 2005. Print. Page 588.



Hans' cousin, Joachim, will die.<sup>206</sup> They move on to a discussion of the body, to their sickness, and Hans claims that he has come to *know* the body through his sickness. Hans asks for Clavdia's X-Ray of her tuberculosis-ridden chest. He views this as more valuable than any photograph of her – it is, to him, a more intimate photo.<sup>207</sup> Hans has no regard for typical morality.<sup>208</sup> He does, however, have regard for love: and he refuses to address Clavdia formally, because he is deeply in love with her – to an extent, a sign of “social decay.”<sup>209</sup> And, in an utterly romantic fashion, compares love to a sickness which he has had for a long time: he understands love and sickness and equally degenerations, dissolutive forces which foreshadow and hold a certain intimacy with death.<sup>210</sup> Hans becomes overcome with his declarations of love, and, despite claiming to not know much French, speaks to her in a language that can only be described as darkly eloquent.

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<sup>206</sup> Hans, speaking of Joachim “That he will die. Death. A terrible word, isn't it? But it's strange, the word doesn't impress me so much today. It was more just a conventional phrase when I said, ‘you frighten me.’ The idea of death doesn't frighten me. It leaves me calm. It arouses no pity – either for dear old Joachim or for myself – to hear that he may die. If that's true, then his condition is very much like my own, and I don't find mine particularly grand. He is dying, and me, I'm in love – fine!” Ibid. Page 404.

<sup>207</sup> “You spoke with my cousin once, in the waiting room outside where they take intimate photographs, if you recall.” Ibid. Page 404.

<sup>208</sup> “Morality? It interests you, does it? All right – it seems to us that one ought not to search for morality in virtue, which is to say in reason, in discipline, in good behavior, in respectability – but in just the opposite, I would say: in sin, in abandoning oneself to danger, to whatever can harm us, destroy us. It seems to us that it is more moral to lose oneself and let oneself be ruined than to save oneself. The great moralists have never been especially virtuous, but rather adventurers in evil, in vice, great sinners who teach us as Christians how to stoop to misery. You must find that all very repugnant.” Ibid. Page 404.

<sup>209</sup> “Never, Clavdia. Never will I address you formally, never in life or in death, if I may put it that way, and surely I may.” Ibid. Page 405.

<sup>210</sup> “No, Clavdia, you know perfectly well that way you say is not true and is spoken without conviction, of that I am certain. The fever in my body and the pounding of my exhausted heart and the trembling in my hands, it is anything but an episode, for it is nothing but” -- and he bent his pale face deeper towards hers, his lips twitching – “nothing but my love for you, yes, the love that overwhelmed me the instant I laid eyes on you, or better, the love that I acknowledged once I recognized you, and it is that love obviously that has led me to this place....” “Oh, love is nothing if not foolish, something mad and forbidden, an adventure in evil. Otherwise it is merely a pleasant banality, good for singing calm little songs down on the plains. But when I recognized you, recognized my love for you – it's true, I knew you before, from days long past, you and your marvelous slanting eyes and your mouth and the voice which which you speak – there was a time long ago, when I was still just a schoolboy, that I asked you for a pencil, just so I could meet you at last, because I loved you with an irrational love, and no doubt what Behrens found in my body are the lingering traces of my age-old love for you, proof that I was sick even back then.”

His teeth banged together. While he fantasized, he had pulled one foot out from under the creaking chair, and shoving it out in front of him and letting his other knee touch the floor, he was now kneeling beside her, his head bent low, his whole body quivering. “I love you,” he babbled, “I have always loved you, for you are the ‘intimate you’ of my life, my dream, my destiny, my need, my eternal desire.”

“Come, come! If your teachers could see you –”

But in his despair he merely shook his head, his face still directed toward the carpet, and replied, “I don’t care, I don’t care about Carducci and the republic of eloquence and human progress over time, because I love you!”

She softly stroked the short-cropped hair at the back of his head with one hand. “My little bourgeoisie!” she said. “My handsome bourgeoisie with the little moist spot. [Tuberculosis spots in the lungs.] Is it true that you love me so much?”

Thrilled by her touch – on both knees now, head thrown back, eyes closed – he went on, “Ah love, you know. The body, love, death, are simply one and the same. Because the body is sickness and depravity, it is what produces death, yes, both of them, love and death, are carnal, and that is the source of their terror and great magic! But death, you see, is on the one hand something so disreputable, so impudent that it makes us blush with shame; and on the other it is a most solemn and majestic force – something much more lofty than a life spent laughing, earning money, and stuffing one’s belly – much more venerable than progress chattering away the ages – because it is history and nobility and piety, the eternal and the sacred something that makes you remove your hate and walk on tiptoe. In the same way, the body, and love of the body, too, are indecent and disagreeable; the body’s surface blushes and turns pale because it is afraid and ashamed of itself. But at the same time it is a great and divine glory, a miraculous image of organic life, a holy miracle of form and beauty, and love of it, of the human body, is likewise an extremely humanistic affair, and an educating force greater than all pedagogy in the world! Ah, ravishing organic beauty, not done in oils or stone, but made of living and corruptible matter, full of the feverish secret of life and decay! Consider the marvelous symmetry of the human frame, the shoulders and the hips and the breasts as they blossom at each side of the chest, and the ribs arranged in pairs, and the navel set amid the supple belly, and the dark sexual organs between the thighs! Consider the shoulder blades shifting beneath the silky skin of the back, and the spine descending into the fresh doubled luxuriance of the buttocks, and the great network of veins and nerves that branch out from the trunk through the armpits, and the way the structure of the arms corresponds to that of the legs. Oh, the sweet inner surfaces of the elbow and the hollow of the knee, with their abundance of organic delicacies beneath the padding of flesh! What an immense festival of caresses lies in those delicious zones of the human body! A festival of death with no weeping afterward! Yes, good God, let me smell the odor of the skin on your knee, beneath which the ingeniously segmented capsule secretes its slippery oil! Let me touch in devotion your pulsing femoral artery where it emerges at the top of your thigh and divides farther down into the two arteries of the tibia. Let me take in the exhalation of your pores and brush the

down – oh, my human image made of water and protein, destined for the contours of the grave, let me perish, my lips against yours!”<sup>211</sup>

Mann presents here a sort of grotesque, ultimate example of the strange configurations of which can come out of a romantic pessimistic worldview. Hans quite literally wants to consummate his love for Clavida in the grave, and die while doing it. Even more disturbing is Mann’s use of the German word for “contours,” which is the same in German as “anatomy.” Hans’ intimate knowledge of the human body through his study while at the sanatorium only leads him to revel in its complexities, the complexities of what he calls “corruptible organic matter.” Hans is completely overcome in ecstasy at the thought of the almost grossly anatomical descriptions of Clavida’s body, and even more so in the idea that as “corruptible organic matter,” it will some day decay, along with his: dissolve into nothingness, in true Schopenhauerian fashion.

And at the same time, he sees love as part of this admixture: love and sickness, both dissolving he and his lover into a mutual embrace of nothingness. It is not without acknowledgment of Mann’s humour that I note Clavida’s preceding words, “You are indeed a gallant suitor, one who knows how to woo in a very profound, German fashion.”<sup>212</sup>

Hans eventually overcomes this conception of life and meaning in the “Snow” chapter, in which he has a frightening vision of an idyllic Mediterranean setting. Deliberately getting himself lost in a snowstorm, Hans unconsciously seeks to confront death itself in its home in the absolute, inhuman power of the natural world. Freezing, and deciding to drink a bottle of port to get warm – though he admits he is aware this is exactly what one who is freezing is not supposed to do – Hans finds himself in a seaside scene in some bygone, Antique Mediterranean

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid. Page 408.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. Page 408.

location.<sup>213</sup> Hans essentially sees an idealized picture of humanity, unsullied by modernity and everything that one finds loathsome in today's world.<sup>214</sup>

Hans is greatly disturbed, while at first witnessing this idealized scene, to eventually find himself wandering into a temple, where he witnesses two pagan witches tearing apart and devouring an infant child with their bare hands and teeth.<sup>215</sup> When Hans awakens from this dream, he realizes the synthesis of life and death which his vision has led him to.

I dreamed about the nature of man, about a courteous, reasonable, and respectable community of men – while the ghastly, bloody feast went on the temple behind them. Were they courteous and charming to one another, those sunny folk, out of silent regard for what horror? What a fine and gallant conclusion to draw!... I will keep faith with death in my heart, but I will clearly remember that if faithfulness to death and what is past rules our thoughts and deeds, that leads only to wickedness, dark lust, and hatred for humankind. *For the sake of goodness and love, man shall grant death no dominion over his thoughts.*<sup>216</sup>

This is Mann's moving synthesis of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: in understanding this, the individual becomes Hans, and life itself becomes, in away, the idyllic (or, perhaps, unidyllic)

<sup>213</sup> "The line of the horizon lay high, its vastness seemed to climb – this was because Hans was gazing down on the bay from a considerable height. The mountains reached out on all sides, beginning with wooded foothills that ran down into the sea, then rising in a semicircle from a midnight in the distance to where he was, and extending behind him. It was a mountainous coast, and here he sat, crouching on sun-warmed stony steps; the ground fell away from him in tiers of moss-covered boulders and undergrowth, down to the level shoreline, where little harbors and ponds could be seen among the reeds and shingled blue bays. And this whole sunny region – these easily scaled coastal heights, these laughing rock-bound pools, and the sea itself, as far as the islands where boats sailed past now and then – was populated in all directions: people, children of the sea and sun, were stirring and resting everywhere, intelligent, cheerful, beautiful, young humanity, so fair to gaze upon. And at the sight, Hans Castorp's whole heart opened wide – painfully, lovingly wide." Ibid. Page 582.

<sup>214</sup> "'It's all so very charming,' Hans Castorp thought, touched to the quick. 'They're all so pleasant, so winning. How pretty, healthy, clever, and happy they are. It's not just their well-formed bodies – a cleverness and warmth comes from within them, too. That is what moves me, makes me love them so – the spirit and purpose, if I can put it that way, that lies at the basis of their being and allows them to live like this.'" Ibid. Page 583.

<sup>215</sup> "Hans Castorp stood gazing at the statues, and for some dark reason his heart grew even heavier with fear and foreboding. Hardly daring to risk it, he felt himself compelled to circle behind the figures and move on through the next double row of columns. The metal doors to the sanctuary stood open, and the poor man's knees almost buckled under him at what he now saw. Two half-naked old women were busy at a ghastly chore among the flickering braziers – their hair was gray and matted, their drooping watches' breasts had tits long as fingers. They were dismembering a child held above a basin, tearing it apart with their bare hands in savage silence – Hans could see pale blond hair smeared with blood. They devoured it piece by piece, the brittle little bones cracking in their mouths, blood dripping from vile lips. Hans Castorp was caught frozen in the gruesome, icy spell..." Ibid. Page 585.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. Page 588.

Mediterranean dream he so fortuitously had. For Mann, one may hold the suffering and death we see in the world in horror, in revulsion, as Schopenhauer does. One may recognize its gruesome quality, one may even be tempted to flee from it. But unlike Schopenhauer, Mann contends, in a pseudo-Nietzschean fashion, that life is made more valuable by this very suffering, by the thought of death, by having to live a life where one knows one is going to die. Like anything that comes with a hefty price, the very value of life is increased, not decreased, by the suffering we find in it, by the very presence of death. One can hold death in reverence, but grant it “no dominion over their thoughts:” accordingly, life, too, is held in even greater reverence, since death, in its nobility, is only the end of a life – a life that in every way should and must be fully affirmed. And we can well apply to Schopenhauer the “wickedness, dark lust, and hatred for humankind” that Mann speaks of when one allows thoughts of death and suffering to hold sway within them. Perhaps the secret to every *healthy* person and their zest for life is, at least a little, silent regard for the horror they see around them. But, a silent, respectful, and affirming regard is far greater, far *healthier*, far, far more *human*, than a reaction of pity, despair, and negation.

**Conclusion and Epilogue:**

We have examined a line of thought of immense importance, that deals with essential questions of valuation and meaning, which every thoughtful human being must, on their own terms, come to grapple with; and at this point, there really isn't much to say that *hasn't* been said. The body, the world, life, *health*, *sickness*, death – and even the relation of it all to fascism! I hope that, at this point, my reader has a clearer picture of the whole thing, as I certainly do, having written it.

In my view, it is, in the most real sense, worthless not to affirm life. It is worthless not to strive for overcoming. It is worthless to have pity in the romantic sense, and most especially, self-pity. It is worthless not to hold death in reverence and hold life in even *greater* reverence. To grow, to strive, and finally to affirm, *in the whole*. The alternatives are, indeed, *sickness*: it escapes me how it can be anything but. I believe the individual can look inside themselves, and judge for themselves just how healthy or sick they really are: and it is contemptible to strive for anything less than *health* in the most exceptional sense. To hold life in contempt because of moral valuations which seek to make life into something it is not is – that is certainly a *sickness*,

and even in the secular, amoral society we pride ourselves on living in today, it seems to me this mode of valuation is perhaps more prevalent than ever. *A sickness regarding life is more prevalent than ever.* Life is, and always has been, *life*: it does not operate by human valuations. It is up to the individual, or perhaps their constitution, whether they have the strength to be *healthy* or not, to maintain a *healthy* view. Unlike Nietzsche, I am more of the mind that, with the proper understanding, many people who may have a sick view of things may find their way to health. But perhaps they were already *healthy* at bottom...

In any case, one must maintain the cheerfulness Nietzsche spoke of in all seriousness. If anything, one should strive to be like the mad Nietzsche, who said

“I go everywhere in my student overcoat; slap someone or other on the shoulder, and say: ‘*Siamo contenti? Son dio, ha fatto questa caricatura...*’”

[Are we content? I am God, I made this *caricature...*]<sup>217</sup>

Life, a caricature? But how does one affirm a caricature? With easygoing light feet, and a *good, warm-hearted laugh*, in spite of, or maybe *because of it all*.

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<sup>217</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. and Trans. Christopher Middleton. Massachusetts: Hackett Co, 1997. Print. Page 348.

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