Nietzsche, Sin and Redemption

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Index

Abstract

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In this thesis, I use the work of Friedrich Nietzsche to offer a detailed account of existential sin. I show that existential sin as a form of self-understanding is deeply embedded in the Christian theological tradition, and that Nietzsche's account of existential sin should be understood as part of this same tradition. In my reading of *On the Genealogy of Morality* I show that we need to place sin in close relation to bad conscience, guilt and the genealogical method itself. However, despite being grounded in Christian thought and dependent upon the figure of the Christian God in its origin and emergence, I follow Nietzsche in positing that existentia*l* sin continues to exist after the death of God. It is by considering sin as not only a form of self-understanding, but also as a cultural memory, that we can make sense of this claim.

For Nietzsche existential sin is at its root a mistaken understanding of human nature that has taken hold of us through Christianity. However, I argue that we need to consider existential sin as a socio-historical answer to the ontological problem of meaningless suffering. Existential sin responds to a fundamental experience of the human condition. With this in mind, in the final chapter of the thesis I examine possible avenues of redemption from post-Christian sin. What options are open to the person suffering from post-Christian sin-consciousness if she cannot turn to religious narratives? I argue that Nietzsche's redemptive method of genealogy is not sufficient, and that life-affirmation is too demanding. However, a weaker version of life-affirmation in which meaningless suffering is affirmed as necessary, but not desired, does provide a promising alternative answer to the problem of meaningless suffering.

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Abbreviations

Works by Nietzsche

AC   *The Anti-Christ*, trans. Norman, J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

BGE   *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Norman, J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

BT   *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Fadiman, C.P. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1995)

D   *Daybreak*, trans. Hollingdale, R.J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

EH   *Ecce Homo*, trans. Large, D. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

GM   *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Smith, D. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

GS   *The Gay Science*, trans. Nauckhoff, J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

HH   *Human, All-Too-Human*, trans. Hollingdale, R. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

TI   *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Large, D. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

TZ   *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Del Caro, A. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

UM   *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, R.J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

WP   *The Will to Power*, trans. Kaufmann, W. and Hollingdale, R.J. (New York: Vintage Books, 1968)

WS   'The Wanderer and His Shadow' in *Human, All-Too-Human*, trans. Hollingdale, R. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Bible verses (all from New Revised Standard Edition).

Gen	Genesis
Lev	Leviticus
Josh	Joshua
1 Kings	1 Kings
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lk	Luke
1 Jn	John, Book 1
Rom	Romans
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Col	Colossians
Tit	Titus

Introduction

> After Buddha was dead, they still showed his shadow in a cave for centuries – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow. – And we –we must still defeat his shadow as well! (GS: 108)

We live in a world that is inundated with messages about the importance of self-improvement. When we walk into a bookstore or open a magazine, we read reviews of the latest popular self-help book, interviews with so-called 'self-made' individuals, we read about the importance of self-improvement, how mindfulness and meditation can make us more efficient human beings, and many similar stories. Books with techniques for living better and more efficient lives such as *The Secret*, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck, 12 Rules for Life* and *The Power of Habit* frequently top best-seller lists. In these books we learn that we are responsible for our own success and failures. After all, the message is that if we work hard enough on every aspect of our lives, we will succeed. In many ways, this is the message that we are happy to hear; "[t]he figure of the self-made man—and more recently that of the self-made woman—comforts and consoles us, suggesting that vast material, social, and personal success are available to anyone who is willing to work long and hard enough." (McGee 2005: 13).

However, when we take a closer look, it becomes clear why there is a downside to this culture of self-help. Take, for example, language we often hear used in relation to cancer diagnoses and treatment. Cancer can be "beaten", by a "positive attitude", patients are considered to be

"fighters", who can win the "battle" (see for example Jardin 2017). Cancer is thought of as an opponent that can be defeated, as long as the patient is dedicated enough. By using this kind of language, we suggest that it is an individual's spirit and fight that decides, or at the very least influences, the outcome of the illness. This, of course, is at the very least simplistic, and at worst offensive. There are many aspects of physical and mental illnesses that we cannot influence, and to attribute this to the failing of the patient is highly problematic.

So why is this still a common way to talk about illnesses such as cancer? The answer to this question can be found in the comfort that McGee described above. We do not wish to think of ourselves as helpless to the world, the victims of (bad) luck and fate. The fact that *any* of us can become terminally ill at any point, without any regard for who we are and how hard we work – this is, for many, unbearable. The world is unpredictable and in many ways "morally inhospitable" (Dews 2008: 118) but in order to make it easier for us to exist in this world we choose to ignore this. We need to understand why one person suffers more than another, and we need to be able to feel like we can control our own happiness and suffering. In a response to a critic, Russian author Lydia Chukovskaya identifies this desire: "[t]he human mind, unwilling to reconcile itself to the senseless, looks for *reasons* to explain every case" and claims that this desire can lead to uninformed attempts to explain suffering (1990: 5th paragraph).[1]

All of the above examples are nothing more than contemporary expressions of an experience as old as humanity, and indeed an essential part of what it means to be human. This experience can best be described as an inability to accept *meaningless* suffering. One of its most profound expressions can be found in the Book of Job. Job is described as the most

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[1] It could be argued that Chukovskaya falls prey to this same desire that she attributes to John Russell. In her letter, she clearly gives an explanation for the death of her husband by the Russian authorities: quotas. However, I would argue that her point is that the explanation of 'quotas' is often considered to be an insufficient explanation: we want to think that there must be a reason why particular individuals were targeted during the Great Purge, and that it cannot all have been a case of bad luck.

upstanding person on earth; "a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1:8). However, in response to a challenge from Satan[2], God takes away everything from Job: his children, livestock and property, and his health. When they see Job suffer so terribly, his friends argue that he must have sinned; he must have done something to upset God as otherwise the suffering simply makes no sense. Eliphaz tells us that "as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same." (Job 4:8). Bildad argues that Job must repent as "If you will seek God, and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place", explicitly saying that "God will not reject a blameless person" (Job 8:5-6, 20). Zophar even argues that "God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves" (Job 11:6), stating that Job deserves his punishment. Despite Job's insistence that he is innocent, his friends cannot accept this as true, because there must be a good reason for Job's suffering. It cannot be the case that he is suffering unjustly, as this goes against their understanding of God, against their entire world-view.

Job points out that their account of the world is rather simplistic, as plenty of 'wicked' people live until old age, and there is much suffering of innocent people in the world that God does not in fact respond to; "from the city the dying groan, and the throat of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer." (Job 24:12). The fact that the world is like this is ground for despair and anger in Job ("when I think of it I am dismayed, and shuddering seizes my flesh" (Job 21:6). Job wishes that there was something he could do to appease his suffering, he wishes there were sins he could atone for, and above all he wishes he could speak to God. Why is God making him suffer so much? The fact that Job's wife tells him he should "curse God and die" (Job 2:9) seems quite reasonable: how can one make sense of God allowing for this suffering to continue?

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[2] 'Satan' meaning 'Accuser', from the Hebrew *ha-satan* (הַשָּׂטָן.)

God's response to Job does very little to explain why he is suffering. His response from out of the whirlwind emphasizes the lack of knowledge and understanding in Job, and much of the passage is God reminding Job of all the things that he, as God, can do, but Job, as human, cannot. No part of the response explains why Job was suffering. God does not explain nor apologise, but he does say to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar "you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7).

We must therefore read the Book of Job as a meditation on meaningless and undeserved suffering. The explicitly religious message that we are given is that it is not on us to question God (see also Ecclesiastes 8), and that God's actions cannot be explained by a narrow framework such as that proposed by Job's friends. Although this religious message may not resonate as much with us now, when we remove the concept of 'God' and replace it with something such as 'the world', it becomes clear how little our concerns have changed. Indeed, we are still attracted to views such as those of Job's friends, where illnesses can be fought by the person suffering from them (whether it be through repentance or positive thinking). Most importantly, the question of 'why?' is one I am sure we have all asked in relation to our own, or someone else's, suffering. 'Why do good people suffer?' is a question that we demand an answer for, despite the reality that it often cannot be answered by anything other than because of 'sheer dumb luck'.

It is important not to confuse these questions with an inability to accept suffering *as such*, it is rather suffering that we cannot explain that bothers us. We know, as do Job and his friends, that suffering exists. For Job and his friends, the problem appears because they understand suffering as divine punishment. If suffering is divine punishment, then there must be a reason *why* Job is being punished. In other words, we feel the need to explain and understand the suffering we see in the world.

In addition to the above, another example is the increased interest in the pathology of criminal offenders, in particular violent offenders and psychopaths. An impressive amount of books written, TV shows and documentaries on this topic are continuously made. What drives this interest is the need to *understand* why these crimes were committed. The *why* requires an answer – we will not be satisfied by any claim that someone simply happened to become a criminal. Instead, what we want to hear are underlying psychological, physiological, social, or environmental reasons for why a violent act was committed. Similarly, when natural disasters strike, we can find a wide array of explanations in the media. Conservative and evangelical preachers claim that natural disasters are a sign of divine retribution, in particular that these disasters are God's response to the acceptance of homosexuality.[3] Though controversial and morally objectionable, there is a reason why these preachers are given a much larger platform after such events. We seek answers to the question of why tragedies occur – *even when the answer itself is problematic*.

It is the consequences of this need to explain meaningless suffering that I am primarily interested in. One of the historically prevalent ways in which the problem of meaningless suffering has been responded to, is the concept of sin. In this thesis I will argue that sin, although also offering us relief, has brought with it additional suffering. This suffering relates to the self-understanding that sin presupposes – namely that human beings are innately deserving of suffering.

Sin can explain suffering in two ways; firstly it designates some acts as sinful and therefore deserving of punishment, and secondly it depicts human nature as essentially guilty before God and therefore deserving of suffering. These two different sides of sin roughly correspond with the theological concepts of 'acts of sin' and 'original sin' respectively. The Book of Job

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[3] We can think here of figures such as Rabbi Yehuda Levin, Pastor John McTernan, Rt Rev Graham Dow, and preacher Cindy Jacobs.

illustrates both types of sin very well; firstly, Job's friends are convinced that Job must have committed a specific act for which he is being punished. They endeavour to convince him of this – that there must be something he has done that has angered God. However, Bildad also asks: "How then can a mortal be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his sight, how much less a mortal, who is a maggot, and a human being, who is a worm!" (Job 25: 4-6). Here, he is not speaking of particular acts, but rather human nature as a whole.

In order to offer a philosophically robust account of sin as responding to the ontological problem of meaningless suffering, I will turn to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, he explicitly frames sin as following:

> 'Sin' – for that is the name for the priestly reinterpretation of the animal 'bad conscience' (cruelty turned back on itself) – has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul up till now: with sin, we have the most dangerous and disastrous trick of religious interpretation. Man, suffering from himself in some way, at all events physiologically, rather like an animal imprisoned in a cage, unclear as to why? what for? And yearning for reasons – reasons bring relief –, yearning for cures and narcotics as well, finally consults someone who knows hidden things too – and lo and behold! from this magician, the ascetic priest, he receives the first tip as to the 'cause' of his suffering: he should look for it within himself, in guilt, in a piece of the past, he should understand his suffering itself as a condition of punishment . ." (GM III:20)

Nietzsche here describes precisely the issue we are concerned with: people need to understand why they are suffering. The figure of the 'ascetic priest' responds to this need by positing the concept of sin as providing an answer, namely that people themselves are to blame for their suffering. This answer, Nietzsche tells us, is problematic in its own ways. Indeed, we will see later in this introduction and throughout the thesis that although sin may explain meaningless suffering, it itself also *causes* suffering.

The claims that we are concerned with should be placed in two different spheres; the ontological and the socio-historical. The problem of meaningless suffering is an ontological problem that is a part of what it means to be human. However, when we talk about sin as

responding to meaningless suffering, we have to look at sin as a socio-historical, contingent, response to the ontological problem. And this is indeed precisely what Nietzsche does. This thesis is primarily concerned with the concept and experience of sin, and therefore with the particular socio-historical response to the ontological problem of meaningless suffering. The suffering that is caused by sin should be interpreted similarly. When I talk about meaningless suffering in this thesis, I am referring to the *ontological* problem of meaningless suffering, yet when I speak about the suffering caused by sin, it is a contingent *socio-historical* suffering.

In attempting to understand the concept of sin, it is important to understand its history. Sin has historically been understood in a number of different ways. When a specific act is considered to be sinful, this means that it is a transgression against God and religious laws. In some sense, designating an act as sinful appears to be synonymous with judging it to be morally wrong. This form of sin is localized and act-specific, thereby it need not affect any understanding of the person who commits an act. There is a further way of understanding sin that focuses primarily on the person, however. This is sin as a burden or a weight, as a blemish or punishment. Often spoken of in relation to original sin, we are speaking here of a concept with an existential dimension. To be sinful means not merely to have committed a transgressive act, but rather that one's nature is somehow corrupted.

What we therefore might call "sin-consciousness" is different from locally-reactive guilt. We are not talking about feeling guilty in response to certain actions or events. Instead, sin-consciousness refers to an overarching, existential sense of wrongness. This can take several different shapes. We might say that this sin-consciousness is a reflection of our fragility, that what it means is that we are aware of just how weak we are in the face of the world. We could also interpret it as being a reflection of human nature as a plague upon this earth, that human beings as such are abominable. Or perhaps we can think of a more individualistic interpretation, where individual agents will feel themselves as bad and corrupted to the core,

as a 'mistake'. For now, I would like to allow these different interpretations to remain possibilities, and focus on what they have in common: a sense of global wrongness.

There has been a decline in belief in the Christian God, or in Nietzschean terms, God has died. We might be tempted to assume that, given this decline, 'sin' as an existential experience has also declined. If we accept that there are now more people who would identify as non-religious than as Christian, and there are thereby more people who do not accept the theological story of sin, then there is no reason to think that they would still experience themselves as sinful. When Nietzsche talks about shadows that remain after the death of God in *The Gay Science* 108, he perhaps refers to Christmas songs, to Christian holidays, to Christian schools. They do not refer to anything quite as internal as forms of self-understanding – on this line of thought we have moved beyond sin as a way of relating to ourselves. The Christian concept of sin is now only meaningful for those who still believe in God, and their number has been dwindling steadily since the early twentieth century. If we think about the world from a secular perspective, this concept of sin no longer has value to us.

It is precisely this attitude, but with regards to evil, that Peter Dews describes in *The Idea of Evil*:

> From the secular, naturalistic perspective prevalent amongst citizens in many Western societies it is tempting to regard the question of theodicy – and more generally, the philosophical problems of evil – as the product of an antiquated conception of the world. It is only if we assume the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent creator, it seems, that we encounter acute difficulties in explaining the existence of suffering and moral evil. (2008: 118)

The problem of evil, and the concept of sin, belong to "antiquated conception[s] of the world", and depend upon belief in God. If we reject God, however, the problem of evil will not appear as an acute problem, and similarly, the concept of sin will not appear as a form of self-understanding that acutely calls upon us. If we accept this viewpoint, we must focus our

inquiries on sin or evil within the field of theology, or redirect our philosophical efforts altogether. It might be interesting for the history of philosophy to discuss sin, but it certainly will not help us understand our contemporary lives. I believe that the perspective just outlined is misguided: the perspective, that is, in which the concept of sin and experiences of sinfulness are no longer relevant to us.

Secularization

Our starting point is contemporary Western European culture, which is a culture that is often thought of as secularized. Certainly when we think about the importance of Christianity in Western Europe, the overarching view is that it is much less important to us than it was, say, 200 years ago. This is the process of secularization. In sociological and historical literature, many other changes are linked to secularization, such as modernity, the advent of modern science, new religious movements, and moral nihilism.[4] The overall picture is one wherein we now understand the world and ourselves better, through scientific endeavours such as physics, neuroscience and the biomedical fields. We no longer rely on the concept of a God in order to explain the world or to make sense of ourselves: we are able to more rationally reflect upon the reality of existence.[5]

Some of these claims regarding secularization are no doubt contentious. We find debates, for example, about whether or not secularization is necessarily related to the onset of modernity and science, and whether it is thereby a necessary consequence of our time: they also consider whether Western Europe is actually an exception, or if this process will also occur in other parts of the world. For now these discussions are not relevant. I shall not rely in this thesis on any particular sociological account of the process of secularization, nor is there any need to

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[4] For more detailed explorations of this thought, see Eagleton, T., 2014, *Culture and the Death of God* (Yale University Press) and Taylor, C., 2007, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press)

[5] Nietzsche, and he is not alone in this, argues that this development of modernity is the product of Christianity itself.

make global claims about the importance of religion. Within sociological literature on secularization, however, one claim appears uncontested: that there are less people who identify as Christian in Western European societies now than there were 100 years ago.

In Steve Bruce's *God is Dead* we can find, for example, that in the UK between 1851 and 1998 church attendance was reduced from 40-60% to 7.5% (2002: 63-64). Bruce himself points out the limitation of this kind of data; there are more people who do profess to believe in God than people who attend church. Therefore, if we want to be able to say anything salient about the importance of Christianity, we must somehow also track belief. To this end, Bruce turns to data on people who believe in a personal creator God. Here there is a decline noticeable from the 1950s to 2000, namely from 43% to 26% (ibid. 71). Furthermore, we can find evidence that in the UK that there is a significant downward trend in people identifying themselves as religious. Clive Field shows three important findings for this current project: in 2011, only 35% of individuals in the UK identified as religious (2015: 311). A 2014 MORI poll showed that only 10% of those questioned considered religion an important part of their identity (ibid. 319). Finally, between the 1970s and 2015 the self-assessed importance of religion to adults in the UK went from 51% to 30% (ibid. 320). Again we see here a downward trend, as well as the sense that the number of people who identify themselves as religious in the UK are, generally speaking, a significant minority.[6]

The data compiled and analysed by Bruce and Field are not exceptional: these trends have by now been described in a large body of empirical research. In fact, when we look at sociological literature on religion or secularization in Western Europe, it becomes clear that even though the particular definition of secularization or the analysis of it might differ, there

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[6] Field further states that "the range of objective quantitative evidence for overall religious decline is relatively narrow and often discontinuous. It therefore requires supplementation by more subjective sources, reflecting claimed patterns of religious belonging, behaving, and believing." (2015: 309). The methodological concerns Field raises here are important to consider, as they reflect the difficulty in really measuring the importance of religion for individuals.

is no doubt about the decline of the importance of Christianity in Western Europe. In *On Secularization*, David Martin employs a hermeneutics of suspicion towards different versions of the secularization thesis, but does not question the secularization of Western Europe. Peter Berger's seminal *The Social Reality of Religion* similarly concerns itself with the interpretation of the processes of secularization, but states that they are "empirically available processes of great importance in modern Western history (1973: 112) and that "the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations." (ibid. 113). Grace Davie even states in her *The Sociology of Religion* that "the notion of secularization as an identifiable social process is inextricably bound up with the discipline of sociology as such" (2007: 47). My philosophical project is grounded upon this broad sociological consensus.

Sin as socio-historical

The focus of this thesis is primarily on sin as a socio-historical concept. In this thesis I will argue that the concept of sin as developed by Christianity has become a part of how people in Western European societies are given to understand themselves. This is not the same as supporting a theological account of sin, in which its reality is underpinned by our relationship to the real, existing God. This belief in God is not necessary for the experience of sinfulness. Not only is it not necessary, but someone can actually understand themselves as a sinner whilst openly rejecting the existence of God. We can therefore have a person who consciously rejects any theological underpinnings to her sense of self but who nonetheless continues to experience herself in ways that seem to force the concept of sin on her.

This claim seems paradoxical: how could it make sense for a person to reject the theological underpinnings of the concept of sin and yet, on the other hand, continue to experience herself as sinful or a sinner? At the heart of this antinomy is a question about the ontological status of

a concept such as sin. What is it dependent on in order for it to be of meaning to us? Can we still use the concept of sin without referring to a god, or will this render it too opaque? Is belief in existence of God only required for the origin and perhaps emergence of sin, and can this concept then take on a life of its own as a form of self-understanding?

In order to answer these questions, I suggest that we need to look at a second way in which 'secularized' Western European culture relates to religion. This is a tendency to conceive of Western European cultures as Judeo-Christian (often used in contrast to Islamic cultures). Indeed, many people express the idea that this heritage ought to be cherished and in some way held onto. There is a tendency to believe that we should still be looking at the historical presence of Christianity for moral and behavioural guidance. After all, the line goes, if we want to be well-integrated participants in this culture we need to be sensitive towards its cultural history. This argument is often used with regards to immigrants and asylum seekers, for example, who are asked to adapt to Western European culture by respecting historical customs and beliefs.[7]

These two different movements – the move away from religion together with a continuing emphasis upon its historical importance - are clearly not necessarily contradictory. On one approach, we need to enforce a sharp distinction between them, and say that in the case of morality, referring to our Christian heritage is necessary in order to retain order and an ethically robust society - but that, in the case of knowledge and critical thinking, we want to trust in science instead. We cannot rely on the foundations of Christianity anymore, but we can rely on sciences to help us explain the world around us. In this picture, science has simply

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[7] For example, in The Netherlands there exists a custom in which people dress up as in black face in order to represent Black Pete, the 'helper' of Sinterklaas (loosely based on St. Nicholas of Myra). Although contemporary political theory and race theory are clear in the negative effects of customs such as black face, the public debate will often see people defend the custom based on its historical significance in the culture (Sinterklaas being the most important holiday of the year for many). This is often fleshed out in terms of 'outsiders' coming in to criticize Dutch culture, and in particular we can find a rhetoric that blames people of other religions wanting to change 'Judeo-Christian' culture.

usurped some of Christianity's functions. Christian heritage lives alongside science: they simply belong to different spheres of society.

However, some problems arise here. Besides the fact that morality and scientific knowledge cannot be entirely separated from one another, there are also problems with the particular roles that science and religion actually do play in our society. Morality influences the scientific endeavours that are undertaken and the value we attach to them, and scientific findings can influence our moral judgements (we can think here of neuroscientific research into psychopathy). Furthermore, we cannot simply posit that the overarching cultural narrative concerning morality is that Christianity ought to play a role. Not only are there those who would deny Christianity any reason to play a role, but we also often hear about people being concerned about the status of moral judgments now that Christianity is no longer important. This latter concern would not have appeared if there was a consensus that morality is still the sphere of religion now. We see this concern expressed in, for example, Larry Siedentop's *Inventing the Individual*, where he writes on the very first page: "[p]eople who live in nations once described as part of Christendom – what many would now call the post-Christian world – seem to have lost their moral bearings. We no longer have a persuasive story to tell ourselves about our origins and development." (2015: 1)

Here Siedentop suggests that it is actually a significant aspect of life in a 'post-Christian' world that we no longer have a foundation for our morality, by contrast with the era in which Christianity was a prominent part of life and culture in Western Europe. The Christian narratives and doctrines offered us a way of understanding the world and human beings as well as how we ought to act in this world. But the power of these narratives has faded away. Siedentop here demonstrates that we cannot simply assign Christianity to one sphere of our lives. With the process of secularization, Christianity's influence in Western European society

lessened as a whole, and this impacted upon the field of morality as well as other areas of people's lives.

'Post-Christian'

There is one phrase Siedentop uses that requires some elucidation, as I will also be employing it in my thesis. This is the concept of 'post-Christian'. In some sense it simply means that we live somewhere that has historically been Christian, but is not anymore. Or at the very least, it is no longer as Christian as it once was, but the historical impact of Christianity should be acknowledged. Rowan Williams uses the concept to explain precisely that view: "[i]f I say that this is a post-Christian nation, that doesn't mean necessarily non-Christian. It means the cultural memory is still quite strongly Christian. And in some ways, the cultural presence is still quite strongly Christian." (Moreton 2014). Note that Williams says that our cultural memory is still Christian, and that this has its effect upon our culture *now*. This makes it clear why we would want to talk about post-Christian, rather than 'secular' or 'atheist' – the reference to Christianity is essential. 'Secular' and 'atheist' can be understood in reference to any religion (and perhaps any culture), whereas post-Christian declares itself more precisely. We can think here that 'post-Christian' is a helpful term for differentiating Western European culture from cultures that might also be somewhat secularized but do not have the background of Christianity.

Similarly, Daphne Hampson writes:

> I am post-Christian. Post-*Christian* because Christianity (and not Islam) is the historical context within which my religious sensibilities were formed. But definitely *post*-Christian because I do not believe […] that God could be related in a particular way to a particular age or to one particular person Jesus Christ. (1990: 42).

Hampson here tells us that she does not identify as Christian, but she does acknowledge that the ways in which she understands the world, in this case her 'religious sensibilities', are

inextricably linked to Christianity. She is explicit about rejecting Christian doctrines, however, and particularly the doctrine of the incarnation. Now if we generalize Hampson's view, we might phrase it as something like the following: I am post-*Christian* because I live in (and was brought up in) a historically Christian culture that still carries this heritage with it. This means that I learned how to understand the world and religion in the context of this history. But, I am *post*-Christian, because I reject the Christian theological doctrines themselves.

When I write about the post-Christian in this thesis, this is in accordance with both Williams' and Hampson's use of the phrase. However, there is an added element to the experience of the post-Christian that is signalled by neither of these thinkers, but is essential to my use of the term. Living in a post-Christian culture means not only living in a culture with a Christian heritage, but also living in a culture that has the heritage of modernity: a culture that has a move away from Christianity embedded within it. Our culture offers us two different messages. Firstly, we are to respect and acknowledge the importance of Christianity for our culture historically; secondly we are to accept that with the advent of science and modernity we no longer need God or Christian doctrines in order to explain and understand that world. *Both* of these messages make up the 'post-Christian'. In other words, living in a post-Christian culture means living not only in a culture with Christian heritage, but also in a culture that has the heritage of modernity and a move away from Christianity embedded in it. Our culture offers us two different messages. Unsurprisingly, these two messages are often conflicting.

Sin as pre-reflective

We have observed that our post-Christian culture inscribes two different messages: on the one hand, the on-going importance and value of our Christian heritage and, on the other hand, our

having moved decisively away from Christianity and calls for ever more thoroughgoing secularisation. I posit that these two messages are often-times conflicting. Although there are undoubtedly many different ways in which this conflict will show up, I will be focusing on one. This is the way in which this double heritage affects us in our *self-understanding*. Post-Christians understand themselves as no longer requiring religion, and some are explicitly atheist. At the same time however, the culture in which they find themselves still carries within it elements of Christianity. And this impacts upon post-Christians, even on those who would consider themselves atheists and consciously deny the existence of God and the validity of Christian doctrines.

In this thesis I will argue that we can think of sin-consciousness as one of these Christian remnants. Sin-consciousness is a mode of self-relation that tends to go underneath the radar of explicit beliefs and judgments.[8] I will argue that post-Christians can continue pre-reflectively to relate to themselves as sinners even while they reflectively disavow belief in God. This claim is fraught with difficulties however, and so the goal for this introduction is to render the hypothesis intelligible, and to argue that post-Christian sin-consciousness is a genuine possibility.

We have to ask if this sin-consciousness can, paradoxically, be pre-reflective. Can we have a form of self-understanding that flies under the radar of reflective judgment? Reflective beliefs are what allow the post-Christian to identify herself as an atheist. Here a reflective disavowal of God can, and often is, part of the way in which the post-Christian consciously understands herself.[9] Now, if we take sin-consciousness to be a pre-reflective self-relation, this means that

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[8] With self-relation I am referring to, simply put, the way in which we relate to ourselves. Kierkegaard famously uses the term in *The Sickness Unto Death* when he writes that "the self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relating to itself" (2004: 43). I am not committed to this interpretation of self-relation, my use of it is closer to "self-understanding", but does not have the same allusion to conscious reflection that 'understanding' has.

[9] I am deliberately avoiding a discussion on identity here. Whether or not reflective judgments and pre-reflective modes of self-relation are constitutive of a person's identity is an interesting question, but not relevant to this

sin-consciousness will be a part of the way in which the post-Christian understands herself, but not consciously so, and this complicates matters. The relevant reflective judgment of an atheist can be phrased as "I reject God, and I know that I reject God". It is transparent to her that she holds the belief 'I reject God', so she is able to also affirm the second-order belief that she knows she rejects God. Sin-consciousness as a pre-reflective self-relation would involve relating to oneself as a sinner, at some primitive level, but not doing so reflectively and thematically. It would be as if one were looking at the world through a pair of coloured lenses, without knowing that this is the case. The lenses impact how she perceives the world, but unless she knew they were there, she would have no reason to believe that there is any such thing in place that would colour the world differently. Of course the implication of this analogy that there is an innocent, 'natural' way to look at the world may well be unhelpful. After all, the post-Christian's atheism is also like a lens through which she experiences the world. The difference, however, relates to transparency; the post-Christian is aware the she sees the world as an atheist, but she is not conscious of experiencing the world and herself through sin-consciousness.

This preliminary account of post-Christian sin leaves unanswered a number of questions. How is possible for sin-consciousness to fly under the radar of reflective thought? How is this post-Christian sin-consciousness related to the concept of sin that we find throughout that Christian tradition? And how can the post-Christian 'sinner' become aware of the presence of her sin-consciousness? In order to answer these questions I will turn to Nietzsche's philosophy. My aim in the body of this thesis is to illuminate Nietzsche's thought about these matters and thereby provide convincing answers to all these questions.

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current project. Works that do discuss this topic are, among others, Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Dan Zahavi's *Subjectivity and Selfhood* and Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*.

This thesis contains four chapters. In the first chapter, I will offer a historical overview of sin in Christian thought. I will argue that in order to understand the category of existential sin, we have to become familiar with other concepts such as transgressive sin, sin as guilt, acts of sin and original sin. By focusing on Biblical writings, as well as thinkers such as Paul, Augustine, Aquinas and Tillich, I establish existential sin as a socio-historical form of self-understanding that is an essential part of the Christian belief system. The first chapter will provide a structured way of thinking about sin that will be mirrored in the second chapter. The second chapter will be dedicated to three different, but related, ways in which Nietzsche understands sin: sin as transgression, sin as debt, and sin as an existential sense of self. The latter of these will contain an in-depth analysis of the passage quoted above that contains Nietzsche's most powerful description of the experience of sin, which he argues is made possible by the Christian church. Before turning to this, however, I first explore earlier works in which Nietzsche understands sin primarily as a transgression against God and religious law. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Daybreak*, *Human, All-Too-Human*, and *The Gay Science* we find such accounts, and I will argue that already there we find a distinction Nietzsche makes between Jewish and Christian forms of sin. For Nietzsche, there is a specifically Christian way to relate to the Law, which he traces back to St. Paul. The law here functions as a tool not to enable people to act as ethically as they can, but rather to feel as sinful as possible. Here, therefore, is some kind of existential dimension to the experience of sin: a transgression of the law is not taken as an isolated incident. The second half of the chapter is dedicated to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, and the specific accounts of sin as debt and existential sin that it offers. I argue that, for Nietzsche, indebtedness towards the Christian God becomes transformed into existential sin.

Furthermore, the second chapter serves to argue against certain interpretations of Nietzsche that hold his moral psychology to be entirely secular. I argue that the notion of moralized

guilt, in the form of existential sin, is a religious concept for Nietzsche. I will show that Nietzsche's understanding of sin is rooted in the Christian tradition. The way in which Nietzsche understands sin, in any of the shapes he discusses, is congruent with much of Christian thought. The experience of existential sin that he describes in the *Genealogy* belongs in a long-established tradition that began with Paul, and continued with thinkers such as Calvin and Kierkegaard.

The second chapter raises a question about the nature of Nietzsche's account of sin. I show that his understanding of sin is very similar to important accounts in the history of Christian thought, but Nietzsche himself was, famously, not a Christian thinker. This may lead us to ask why sin is such an important problem for Nietzsche. After all, did he not declare that God is dead? In the third chapter I will argue that, for Nietzsche, existential sin has continued to exist after the 'death of God'. In order to show this, I first offer a detailed analysis of the death of God, focusing in particular on the status of the 'shadows' that Nietzsche tells us remain after God's demise. Although Nietzsche's work clearly contains the hypothesis of sin after the death of God, it remains unclear throughout his work exactly how we can conceptualize this possibility. I will therefore turn to Paul Ricoeur and Hans Blumenberg in an attempt to answer the question of how post-Christian sin is possible. I argue that we can think of existential sin as a cultural memory that is deeply embedded in Western European culture.

One question that remains unanswered is why existential sin has remained as a cultural memory. Why does existential sin endure, when other aspects of Christianity no longer play an important role for post-Christians? I suggest that the answer to these questions lies in the correspondence between existential sin and the human condition. Here, I will explicitly move away from Nietzsche, as for him, the concept of sin tells us nothing true about human nature. His account of sin relies on a particular judgment of its truth-value: Nietzsche considers the concept of sin to misrepresent human nature. However, I will offer a phenomenological

account of existential sin that allows us to understand the self-understanding of the sinner as an accurate understanding of human nature.

The fourth and final chapter seeks to answer the question of what is next for the post-Christian sinner. Assuming that the account I established in the first three chapters is plausible, we have to turn to the question of redemption. In the tradition of theology, we always find accounts of redemption that correspond to accounts of sin. However, Nietzsche convincingly argues why these Christian avenues of redemption are no longer accessible for the post-Christian. I consider two Nietzschean redemptive concepts instead: the genealogical method and life-affirmation. I will argue that the affirmation of suffering can be considered an alternative to existential sin: it responds to the problem of meaningless suffering by offering us a framework with which to understand it.

Chapter 1   The Concept of Sin in Christian

Thought

> They called God what contradicted and hurt them, and truly, there was much heroics in their adoration! And they knew no other way to love their God than to nail the human being to a cross! (TZ, 'On Priests')

The concept of sin has provided an answer to the problem of meaningless suffering that, given its prominence in the Christian tradition, has been very persuasive. Before we can begin to understand the nature of its appeal, we have to understand exactly what sin is. The first thing to point out is that 'sin' is a multifaceted concept. There are the conceptual categories of 'actual sin', 'original sin' and 'existential sin', and furthermore each of these forms of sin can be conceived of in various different ways. In this chapter I will focus on sin as transgression, sin as debt, and sin as a feeling of guilt. This chapter offers a historical approach to the concept of sin in order to explain these different shapes that it can take. However, it is impossible to offer a single, definitive account of sin in the Christian tradition. There are countless books that offer comprehensive overviews of sin in, for example, the biblical period and early Christianity, later Christian thought or more recent theology.[10] If we want to understand in what way sin, and in particular existential sin, responds to the need for

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[10] See: Anderson, G. A., 2009. *Sin: A History*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), Lyonnet, S., 1970, *Sin, Redemption and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study*, trans. Sabourin, L. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press), Frederikson, P., 2014, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), Newhauser R.G. & Ridyard, S.J. (eds.), 2012, *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, (York: York Medieval Press), Delumeau, J., 1990, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of the Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries*, trans. Nicholson, E. (New York: St. Martin's Press), Sievernich, M., 1983, *Schuld und Sünde in der Theologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt: Verlag Josef Knegt), Häring, B., 1974, *Sin in a Secular Age* (New York: Doubleday).

meaningless suffering, it has to be clear to us exactly what we mean by ' sin'. This chapter therefore aims to use historical accounts to elucidate the concept of sin, and in particular existential sin.

1.1 Sin in Christian thought

A few general remarks about sin will give us a helpful starting point. Firstly, the concept of sin has generally been understood in relation to both morality and human nature. This is to say that to talk about a sin or a sinner is mainly done with relation to the condemnation of certain acts,[11] or with a certain analysis of what it means to be human. In the realm of morality, we can say the following: when an act is considered sinful, it is simultaneously judged as morally wrong. Furthermore, the sinner who commits this act has not only *done* something wrong, but *is* in fact in some way wrong. The category is existential, not merely deontological. It is this notion of existential sin that I, following Nietzsche, argue has been taken up as an answer to meaningless suffering. It can be fleshed out in several different ways, which I will show throughout this chapter.

It is important to understand that when we talk about a sinner or a sin, the judgment that it implies is severe. A bad act can be considered a thoughtless mistake, or perhaps an oversight. When a sinful act is committed out of oversight, Augustine, for example, takes this to mean that the person who committed the act is inherently ignorant of what the good is. To designate an act as sinful is therefore a reflection upon the moral standing of the act, but to designate a person as sinful is not merely to state that she has committed one act of transgression, but rather that there is something wrong with her nature.

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[11] Following Augustine, Luther and Aquinas, we can understand 'acts' to include thoughts. Luther, for example, tells us: "[s]in, in the Scripture, means not only the outward works of the body but also all the activities that move men to do these works, namely, the inmost heart, with all its powers." (2012: 278-279).

1.1.1 Actual, original and hereditary sin

In the Christian tradition a distinction has often been made between original and actual sin. Actual sin refers to specifics acts of sin that a person does, specific acts that go against God's will. Original sin can be understood in two different ways. Firstly, it can refer to the first sin of Adam and Eve, their eating of the fruit in the garden of Eden. Secondly, original sin can refer to the concept of hereditary, inherited, sin.

The first interpretation is based upon Genesis 3. This passage reads:

> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. (Gen. 3: 2-6)

Against God's command, Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of good and evil. And this is *the* original sin, a singular event that was the first transgression of God. There are many different interpretations of this particular section of Genesis. For example, Lyonnet argues that the sin in Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit is not the fact of their transgression, but rather the internal sin of pride lead to a desire to become more like God and therefore preceded the eating of the fruit. However, in Kierkegaard we read that Adam and Eve could not have known what God's prohibition meant without already being aware of what good and what evil was: "how could [Adam] understand the difference between good and evil when this distinction would follow as a consequence of the enjoyment of the fruit?" (1980a: 44). Tillich similarly focuses on the nature of the prohibition. He argues that in order to make sense of Genesis, there must have already been present in Adam and Eve a "sin that is not yet sin", which he understands as "the desire to sin" (Tillich 1957: 35). For

Nietzsche, the fall is a passive story of transgression, where temptation is the primary motivation for the act. He frames the fall narrative as entirely passive, as Eve merely succumbs to temptation of the snake, but does not act in a desire to do good. In all of these accounts, however, we find that the act of eating the fruit is a transgression against God, whether deliberate or not.

Although Adam's eating of the fruit can be understood as the first sin and is in that sense original, the more common understanding of original sin holds it to be inherited sin. This understanding of original sin is seen as a consequence of the Fall.[12] It is therefore still related to the first sin, as it is because of the eating of the fruit from the tree of good and evil that human nature suffers from hereditary sin. This account we find for example in Augustine: "God […] justly decreed that from the first pair we should inherit ignorance, difficulty, and death, because they, as a result of their sin, fell into error, tribulation and death" (1955: 3.20.56). Similarly, in Bonaventure original sin is considered a debt to God that we incurred due to the Fall, and in Aquinas original sin is "an inordinate disposition of nature" that has been transmitted to all from Adam (2016: II.I 82.1). In the article on 'Original Sin' in the Augsburg Confession we can read that "since the fall of Adam, all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin" (1921: Article II), which again emphasizes the hereditary nature of this kind of sin. Calvin further emphasizes the impact of Adam's sin on human nature when he writes "[f]or when it is said, that the sin of Adam has made us obnoxious to the justice of God, the meaning is not, that we, who are in ourselves innocent and blameless, are bearing his guilt, but that since by his transgression, we are all placed under the curse [*maledictione*]," (2006: II.1.8). These theologians all posit that although Adam indeed committed the first sin, original sin refers instead to the state of human nature after the fall: since Adam all humans have inherited a corrupt nature.

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[12] The German and Dutch words for original sin, *Erbsünde* and *erfzonde* are translated literally as 'inherited sin'.

There are important exceptions to the above understanding of original sin as hereditary sin, which can for example be found in Kant and Tillich. Both of these thinkers reinterpret the meaning of the Fall, and suggest that we should understand the story as symbolic for each individual's experience. Kant interprets the Fall in terms of an "innate propensity to transgression", which can be traced back to a beginning in time in our life "when the use of reason had not yet developed" (1998: 6:42). We all have this propensity to transgression, but not through any inheritance; "[w]hatever the nature […] of the origin of moral evil in the human being, of all the ways of representing its spread and propagation through the members of our species and in all generations, the most inappropriate is surely to imagine it as having come to us by way of *inheritance* from our first parents." (ibid. 6:40). Tillich's account of original sin seeks to emphasize the reality of our existential condition. As such, he considers the story of the Fall and notion of original sin to be crucial; "[t]he story of Genesis, chapters 1-3, if taken as a myth, can guide our description of the transition from essential to existential being. It is the profoundest and richest expression of man's awareness of his existential estrangement […]" (Tillich 1957: 31). Tillich differs from Kant in arguing that the Fall does not concern a particular point in time, but rather that it designates "the universal destiny of estrangement which concerns every man" (ibid. 56). In other words, to exist as a human being means to be fallen.

In all of these accounts, however, hereditary sin is concerned not with particular acts that a person commits, but rather their existence or being as a whole. If we were only looking at acts of sin we could say that a person commits a sin, but that might not mean she is herself sinful – at least, the definition of actual sin does not necessitate it. In the case of original sin, we cannot point to an act that has been committed by the person in question that enables the diagnosis of sinfulness, but only to her nature as such. It is of course possible within Christian thought for a sinful person to commit an act of sin, and I will show later in this chapter that

committing acts of sin does reflect upon one's nature: committing a sinful act leaves a stain on oneself. But this stain is not inherently a part of acts of sin, and similarly we can conceive of a person with a sinful nature due to hereditary sin who does not commit acts of sin.[13] As Aquinas puts it; "original sin is passed down from the sin of the first parent to his posterity [and] actual sin is passed down from the soul's will, by way of its moving the members" (2016: II.I.81.3). What we therefore see is that hereditary sin is a way of understanding human nature, whereas actual sin is a way of understanding actions.

The distinction between actual and hereditary sin will be important throughout this thesis. In the next chapter I will show that Nietzsche's understanding of sin as transgression focuses on acts of sin, whereas his more existential descriptions of sin relate to notions of hereditary sin. Therefore, the type of sin that serves as an explanation for meaningless suffering, namely existential sin, appears more closely related to notions of hereditary and original sin than acts of sin. In section 1.3 I will show that the relation between acts of sin and existential sin can be understood by looking at sin as debt and the notion of the body. First, however, I will turn to sin as a form of transgression.

1.2 Sin as transgression

When we speak of acts of sin as being transgressive, generally what is meant is that they transgress *divine* laws. We can here think of, for example, the commandments given to Moses by God in *Exodus* 19 as divinely given and representing God's will. These laws have a different status from immanent laws, as the person transgressing does this not only against a law, but also against God.

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[13] We are here dependent upon certain interpretations of original sin. In contrast, Calvin's notion of double predestination tells us that although a person is born either good or evil, their actions reflect this nature – if you are acting evilly, committing acts of sin, then this means that you are a sinful person *an sich*.

In scripture, we see that Adam disobeys God's commands (Gen. 3), which in Isaiah 43 is explicitly called a sin ("your first ancestor sinned" (Is. 43:27)). In John we can read "[e]veryone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4) and in Romans 2 and 8 we can clearly see that it is sinful to go against the Law, precisely because it reflects God's will. Furthermore, in *Contra Faustum* Augustine defines sin as "any transgression in deed, or word, or desire, of the eternal law" (1887b: 22.27); similarly Aquinas argues that sin is acting against the eternal laws (2016: II:I.71.6). In his *Homily on Romans* John Chrysostom understands sin purely in terms of the Law (1887: 12,13). Barth follows Paul in understanding righteous people in terms of "doers of the law", and sin as transgression of and rebellion against the law (1968: 63), and in Kierkegaard we find an account of sin as "disobedience that defies [God's] commandments" (1985: 81). We can therefore, at the very least, state that there are many authoritative authors within Christian thought who have discussed and proposed an account of transgressive sin. In all of these accounts, furthermore, transgression is understood in the narrow sense of transgressing against God or God's laws.

Is sin here simply synonymous with law-breaking? Perhaps this particular type of transgression can be called sin because the law that is broken is a divine law, and so the transgression is law-breaking of a more extreme type. It is structurally the same; a person breaks a law, but because of the nature of the law, the transgression is simply more severe. This way of understanding sin as transgression is oversimplified, however. A comparison with secular law is useful to some extent, but it does not adequately capture the nature of a divine transgression precisely because it does not account for the relation to the divine. In other words, in secular law we transgress an immanent law that has been posited by other human beings. A transgression of God's law is not sinful because it transgresses a law, but because it goes *against* God. The consequence of having this type of God in the picture is that

the transgression itself is never *merely* a transgression of a law. It is always a transgression against God, "by sinning a man offends God" (Aquinas 2006: II:I, 113.2), "sin is an offense against God" (Catholic Catechism: 8.2). A transgression is considered to be sinful only in case it is an offence to God, the immanent aspect of this act, i.e. the breaking of a given law, is not the most important aspect. We therefore need to shift our focus from understanding the role of the law to understanding the role of God.

1.2.1 Transgression against God?

It is important to establish what kind of God is required for this account of transgression to be intelligible. Presupposed is a God, not as one who merely posited Laws and then disappeared; He is, rather, an active God. Furthermore, it appears that God is not understood as a more powerful, more perfect version of human beings, but instead as wholly other.

There are many different ways of understanding God. For example, we can think of God as (simply) creator or 'clock maker', a God who is present in natural processes, God as King, before whom we must live our lives in humility, a judging God who observes, keeps score and deals out punishment, a God who intervenes occasionally, a personal God who acts in the world and responds to individuals, or the still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12), where God can be found in the quiet conscience.[14] This list, though not exhaustive, illustrates why it is worthwhile trying to understand precisely what kind of God transgressive sin requires. After all, sin as transgression of God's law does not need to involve a relation between the sinner and God, as we could consider the laws as having been posited by God, but no longer involving Him in any active way. Lev Shestov suggests precisely this:

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[14] One of the most prominent accounts of God as simply Creator, also called deism, is Paley's description of the Divine Watchmaker in his *Natural Theology*. A God that is present in natural processes can be found in pantheistic accounts, including Spinoza's *Ethics*. God as Judge can be found for example in Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, chapter two. Maimonides suggests an occasionally intervening God, who only looks after species and not individuals in *Guide for the Perplexed*. Note that these different understandings of God can co-exist in one account. Tillich, in 'The Witness of the Spirit to the Spirit' argues for God as judge *and* a fatherly, loving God.

> God commanded only once and, thereafter, He and all men after Him no longer command but obey. He commanded a long time ago, an infinitely long time ago, so that He Himself has forgotten when and under what circumstances there occurred this absurd, unique of its kind, and consequently unnatural, event. Perhaps, having taken on this habit of passive and submissive existence, God has even forgotten how to command; perhaps, like us ordinary mortals, He can only obey. (Shestov 1968: 85)

Theoretically this possibility is entirely compatible with transgressive sin. We could perhaps even explain the offence against God as being an offence grounded in the fact that God laid down these laws, and so going against them would be act of disrespect towards (the memory of) Him. Similarly, we often think about what someone we lost may have thought about a particular action of ours – and if we commit an act we know they would have disapproved of it can feel immensely disrespectful. However, this feeling coincides with some sense of distance, as it is the historical significance of a person's memory that makes the disrespect possible for us. If we were to take this analogy seriously we would have to state that a transgression of God's laws is sinful in the light of what God once posited, but not in the light of our active relationship with God *now* – this relationship is seen to be inaccessible, as it would be with a person who has passed.

This picture of God is not sufficient for understanding the severity of transgressive sin, however. I suggest that we need to posit a living God in order to understand the Christian accounts of transgressive sin. In fact, all of the accounts of sin discussed in his chapter presuppose a living God. As Kierkegaard tells us, "[W]hat really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God" (1980b: XI 192).

So what does this *before God* mean? It designates the added dimension of transgressive sin: because we are positioned before God a transgression of His laws is never merely a transgression. For the 'before God' to be meaningful, God must be living, and for the 'before God' to be significant it requires the God before whom we stand to have a particular nature. This, we will see, is particularly important to Nietzsche. Nietzsche posits a perfect God who

we can never live up to as God is conceived of in terms that are impossible for human beings to achieve. Nietzsche fleshes this out in terms of egoism, but we can find other accounts in which the radical difference between God and human beings is understood in different terms.

Kierkegaard focuses on God as infinite and eternal, and human beings as particular existences, finite and mutable. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* we read: "[T]he absolute difference between God and the human being consists precisely in this, that the human is a particular existing being (which holds as much for the cleverest as for the most stupid), [...] while God is the infinite, who is eternal" (Kierkegaard 2009: 182-3). Furthermore, for Kierkegaard this absolute difference must be acknowledged, as we can only take up an adequate attitude towards ourselves and God if we acknowledge it. In other words, to feel oneself as sinful, or to acknowledge one's own sinfulness means to be aware of the lowliness of human nature and the magnitude of God's. And so, it seems that even though in cases of transgressive sin we may be able to point at a particular act and designate it as wrong, we cannot designate it as sinful without the added dimension of the 'before God'. Such acts are sinful because they go against laws that were not only posited by God, but are representative of God now.

In addition, it is the relation with God that actually makes the experience of sin possible. Paul Ricoeur writes "it is […] the personal relation to a god that determines the spiritual space where sin is distinguished from defilement" (1969: 48). Sin is therefore made possible only when a certain kind of God-relation comes into play. This relation involves the possibility of transgression, as well as allowing the 'sinner' to think of herself in relation to God. For Ricoeur, this means that the sinner must see herself as opposed to the good God, such that the reality of sinfulness becomes an essential part of her self-understanding; "the penitent becomes conscious of his sin as a dimension of his existence, and no longer only as a reality that haunts him" (ibid.). In other words, sinfulness becomes internalised through the

relationship with God. Ricoeur thereby acknowledges the importance of the 'before God', and furthermore situates it in the context of the Decalogue. He rejects the notion of what he calls the Hegelian wholly Other image of God, as he argues that the Covenant could only have arisen with a God who is "essentially turned toward man" (ibid. 51).

However, in trying understand sin as a transgression of the covenant between God and humans, Ricoeur argues that we have to acknowledge two different aspects; firstly an understanding of human nature that places evil and sin in their "hearts", we are "unclean in lips and hearts"; and secondly, there is an immanent imperative in place in the form of the Decalogue; "on one side [there is] an unconditional but formless command that finds the root of evil in the "heart"; on the other, a finite law that determines, makes explicit, and breaks up sinfulness into enumerable 'transgressions' […]" (ibid. 62).

Ricoeur thereby explicitly speaks about the two dimensions that are a part of transgressive sin. We have to look at the immanent covenant, these laws that have been set up between God and the people of Israel in dialogue. However, in addition to these laws that offer a "limited imperative", there is the dimension of the "unlimited demand" that God as the holy God, the "God of sovereignty and majesty" places on people (ibid. 57-58). It is in fact the height of God that allows us to truly understand the depth of sin; "it is the holiness of God that reveals the abyss of sin in man" (ibid. 242), or in Kierkegaard's words "because sin is against God it is infinitely magnified." (1980b: 80).

Contra Kierkegaard, I argue that it is not necessary to accept a notion of God as wholly other in order to understand sin as transgression. Instead, what it requires is a living or active God who is also considered holy. Sin as transgression requires the 'before God' in order to be understood as more than merely law-breaking. In order for the 'before God' to be significant, we have to take seriously the notion that in committing an act of transgression against the

Law, a person is really transgressing against the holy, magnified, God. In as much as we understand transgressive sin as concerning not merely a breaking of the law, but as doing so *before God*, the Christian position as expounded in this section understands sin as being against God.

1.3 Sin as a debt to God

Now that we have a firm grasp on what it means for sin to be understood as a transgression, we can turn to the second understanding of sin: sin as a form of debt. This can be understood in two different ways. Firstly, sin can in this context refer to a debt that humankind incurred through the sin of the first man. Secondly, sin can represent a debt we owe God because we personally have sinned. Hereditary or original sin can therefore itself be thought of as a debt, whereas acts of sin are acts that incur debts. The type of debt here is very different, hence the solutions to these debts are very different. In the case of original sin, theologians such as Augustine, Bonaventure, Luther, and Aquinas have all spoken about the rite of baptism as redeeming the debt of sin.

As with transgressive sin, we can find the basis for sin as debt in scripture.[15] In Colossians 2 we read: "And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross." (Col. 2:13,14). In Matthew 6 Jesus mentions sins as debts to God, similar to debts to our neighbour that we ought to forgive. The notion of original sin as a debt we find particularly in theological discussions on baptism, as for example Aquinas describes " the stain and debt of sin" (1920: III 68.4). However, it is significant that Aquinas speaks of "the debt *of* sin", and similarly Augustine writes about the "debt of sins" (1887c: III.17). In contrast, accounts of

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[15] Lyonnet considers the conception of sin as debt to be particularly important for Judaism, and not so much for Christian thought (Lyonnet 1970: 26). In contrast, Anderson argues that sin as debt is the primary conception of sin in both Judaism and Christianity after the Old Testament (Anderson 2009: 27).

transgressive sin suggest that to sin is to transgress, but in the case of debt, to sin is not to become indebted. Instead, the indebtedness is a consequence of the sin.

Accordingly, in Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* we read that by conceiving of sin as debt, sin is placed within a particular human's own responsibility. At the same time, Kristeva speaks of this debt requiring "infinite fulfilment", and being "constitutive of man" (1982: 121). What we see here is precisely the two different forms that sin as debt can take: particular debts and an inherited debt. In both of these accounts we can see that sin is not synonymous with debt, but instead a debt follows from sin – if you have sinned, you incur a debt with God as a consequence of your sin. And in the case of hereditary sin, the sin of Adam has as its consequence a hereditary debt that needs to be redeemed. It appears therefore that sin leaves something behind: it leaves a mark in the form of a debt.

The mark left by sin has been referred to throughout the literature as a stain, the stain of sin, and is not exclusively thought of as relation to debt. In the *Summa* Aquinas discusses the debt of sin alongside the stain. In the works of Kristeva and Ricoeur we find detailed analyses of how stain as defilement is related to the concept of sin. But what exactly does this stain refer to? Gary Anderson explains it in terms of a 'thing-ness': "sin is not just a guilty conscience; it presumes, rather, that some-"thing" is manufactured on the spot and imposed on the sinner" (Anderson 2009: x). This lays bare the most important element of the stain of sin: that there is a physical reality to the consequence of sin.

1.3.1. Sin as a stain

The notion of sin as a stain or impurity has received particular attention from scholars of the Hebrew Bible. Their interest comes from a number of key passages in the text, which establish a relation between purity and sin:

Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness. (Isa. 59: 2-3)

Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, says the Lord God. (Jer. 2:22)

I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. (Jer. 33:8)

Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which a plague came upon the congregation of the Lord. (Josh. 22:17)

What we find here is the idea that sin is a stain or impurity that can be washed clean. It is a blemish upon us but in some sense not fundamental to our nature, as there are cleaning rituals we may undertake in order to cleanse ourselves. This means that in some sense we can consider the stain of sin to be external to us, as Joseph Lam states: "[t]he idea of a stain presumes a thing that is outside of us, an intrusion that doesn't belong." (2016: 180). For example, say I lean against a wall that has a sign saying "do not touch" on it. As a consequence of my action, I now have a large stain on my back. This stain is there due to my action, and in some sense, I certainly deserve to have it. However, this stain on my back will not become a part of me, not even if it is there for a couple of days or longer. It will continue to be felt, by myself, as external, as a part of the outside world that encroached upon me (through my own fault). My intention is not to suggest that the blemish of sin is like a blemish of paint, but nonetheless there are parallels here. If sin is considered a blemish upon oneself, it need not necessarily be thought of as a part of oneself.[16]

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[16] Jonathan Klawans argues that we need to make a sharp distinction between moral and ritual impurities in order to deal with precisely this problem. He argues that ritual impurities are contagious impurities that are temporary but will forbid a person from participating in public life or ritual life for this period of time. Women with periods are paradigmatic examples of ritual impurities; they cannot enter the temple for seven days and anyone and anything they touch during this period is impure (Lev. 15). It is essential to this kind of impurity that it is of a temporary nature. Moral impurities are neither temporary nor contagious, and they are the result of acts that are considered to be immoral. The result of these immoral acts is a permanent "degradation of status" (Klawans 2000: 34).

The imagery of stain or defilement is a powerful one. It incites a reaction in the reader that "transgression" does not. Whether this reaction is one of disgust, as Kristeva argues, one of dread, as Ricoeur tells us, or a general "instinctual, visceral reaction" (Lam 2016: 180), these all fit in the same category. There is a strong physical response to impurity and defilement, which is to turn away and to designate the defiled as somehow untouchable. Unsurprisingly, it is essential to think about the specific role of the body if we want to understand the notion of sin as stain.

1.3.2 The body

The body, the flesh, is in many accounts considered as the place in which sin resides. In the story of the Fall, one of the consequences that Adam and Eve face is feeling shameful of their bodies. They want to hide parts of their bodies when faced with God, because they feel that these parts are somehow inappropriate to be shown in public. Furthermore, in many traditional accounts of sin the concept of *concupiscence* has played a role. For example, Bonaventure, and with this issue he should be considered representative of the Catholic tradition, defines original sin not only as a privation of justice, but also as excessive concupiscence. Here, concupiscence is an overwhelming physical desiring of things are contrary to reason; "the carnal desire takes precedence over the spirit" (Bonaventure 2006: 2.32.7-8). In Reformation thought there is similarly a link between concupiscence and original sin; for Luther concupiscence is the human disposition since the Fall, and the Augsburg Confession reads that after the fall, all humans are born "with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence" (1921: II).[17] Concupiscence is excessive desire, yet it is also typically understood in terms of sexual desire. In Christian

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[17] Tillich defines concupiscence as the "unlimited desire to draw the whole of reality into one's self" (Tillich 1957: 52), which he argues concerns every single aspect of a human being's relation to the world. The insistence of traditional accounts of concupiscence (he singles out Augustine and Luther) to focus on sexual desire is for Tillich representative of the church's general difficulty in dealing with the "central ethical and religious problem" of sex (ibid.).

thought, both excessive and sexual desires are associated with the body. It is in and through the body that concupiscence takes its form. The body is thereby, in some sense, seen as a place of sin, and further as a place of defilement.

Consider the following passage from Romans 7:

> For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

We find here a battle between one's body and mind. Paul acknowledges that he *knows* what is right, yet because he is "of the flesh" he does not continuously act in accordance with what the good is. Additionally he writes, "nothing good dwells within […] my flesh", even though he delights in God's laws in his mind. We therefore find a very clear distinction between the body and mind, and moreover a very clear sense of the body as the place in which sin resides. We can interpret this claim in different ways. Most simply, we might consider Romans 7 to be condemning the body and its drives; after all, Paul states that the body is where sin dwells, and the body battles with the mind that knows the right thing do. However, as Hans Hübner tells us, we can also interpret the flesh, the body, theologically. This means that when talking of the flesh or the body, we are not speaking of the physical site of humans, but rather the "individual place of the universal power of sin" (2000: 81, my translation). If we take this interpretation, we can avoid a condemnation of the body by suggesting that, even though the flesh is designated by Paul as the place of sin, the significance lies entirely within *sin* and not within the *flesh*. In other words, instead of arguing that Paul condemns the body, and that by suggesting that the body is the place in which sin resides we condemn the body, there is no

condemnation of the body, but only of sin, which merely happens to reside in the body. A third interpretation is found in Tillich, who argues that we need to distinguish between the human body and the concept of 'the flesh'. The human body is not condemned, but the 'flesh' is "hostile to God" (Tillich 1953: 133). In Tillich's account the body as such cannot be condemned because it is able to "become a temple of the spirit", but the 'flesh', as a "distortion of human nature", with its "unlimited desire" is separated from God (ibid.). Therefore, not all natural drives are rejected as sinful, and neither is the body as a whole.

Despite writing "if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me", Paul does not relinquish responsibility for his sinful acts. Indeed, it is clear throughout the Christian literature that we are held fully accountable for any sinful acts. However, Paul's statement does tell us something very important. His lament is powerful precisely because he thereby tells us that sin alienates us from ourselves. As Ricoeur puts it, "the flesh is myself alienated from itself, opposed to itself and projected outward" (1967: 142). It is through sinfulness that we become more alienated from our bodily selves, as we become alienated from God. And so, it is not a matter of our spiritual selves being 'true', and our bodily selves as being somehow external to our true nature. The relation Paul takes up to his body, one of despair and alienation, is a symbol and consequence of sin. To borrow Tillich's words, the body itself is not condemned as sinful, but it is rather a specific incarnation of bodily existence that is called the 'flesh' that distorts and houses sin.

However, at this stage it is still unclear exactly how the notion of sin as a stain is related to a Paulinian account of a sinful body or sinful flesh, nor how these forms of sin relate to the explanation of meaningless suffering. In response to the first problem, I suggest that there are two different avenues of interpretation open for us. The first is fairly straight-forward, as it is to understand the stain that original sin has left as synonymous with the sinful body of *Romans* 7. There is some plausibility to this claim. The stain is a consequence of actual and

hereditary sin that makes the sinner less able to act rightly in the future. Similarly, Paul describes the sinful body as impacting his ability to act in accordance with the law; it is because of the drives of his body that he finds himself sinning. However, there is an important difficulty with this account, which is brought out in the *Defence of the Augsburg Confession*. There, sin is described as a disease in order to make it clear that sin refers not merely to "a part of man, but the entire person with its entire nature is born in sin as with a hereditary disease" (Melanchton: II.5). Here, Melanchton reacts to certain conceptions of original sin that hold it to be a burden or a blemish instead of a corruption of the *entire* nature of humankind. He seems to want to guard against the risk of diminishing the impact and presence of sin by describing the consequence of sin as a stain or blemish. A reading of Romans 7 with this in mind could focus on the fact that Paul's suffering and sinfulness is not depicted as a small part of himself, but rather concerns his body as a whole.

Ricoeur and Kristeva can offer us a second robust understanding of the stain of sin. In their accounts of sin, they pay considerable attention to the notion of defilement. The stain that sin leaves is considered a blemish, an imperfection: whatever it marks is now impure. In order words, the stain of sin is a form of defilement. Ricoeur argues that defilement is the understanding of one's body as a source of impurity, and that this understanding lingers in religious traditions, and specifically the concept of sin (1967: 15,48). The significance of the impurity lies in its transgressive nature; by being impure or defiled, the body is already transgressing. This understanding of the defiled body need not mean that it is sinful, and Ricoeur argues that we find it in the Greek tradition as well. However, it shows how closely linked the notions of defilement and the stain are, and precisely what kind of role the body can play here. The body is the place of the stain and defilement, and it is also the place in which transgression can continue to take place.

Kristeva fleshes this out further. She argues that there are certain bodily functions that we find repulsive, mainly those related to our various bodily fluids. For Kristeva, this repulsion comes from the threat that these moments pose to the symbolic order. We see this clearly in sin; "those various descriptions of sin converge on the *flesh* or rather on what might be called, by anticipation, an overwhelming release of drives, unrestrained by the symbolic." (Kristeva 1982: 124). Kristeva helps us understand that the body and its drives are considered to be transgressive (hence "unrestrained by the symbolic"), and possibly even threatening. By designating the flesh as a place of threat to the symbolic order, we are taught to become suspicious of our body and to consider it as disobedient and transgressive.

This does not mean, however, that the body is only relevant to accounts of transgressive sin. Paul is again crucial here. He designates the body as the place where sin *as such* resides, yet also understands the body as that part of us which acts upon these sinful desires. This means that the sinful body *is* sinful and *acts* sinfully. As Ricoeur puts it, the sinful being is both "act and state" (1967: 154). She not merely acts sinfully but is sinful. We have therefore here returned to the notion of an existential type of sin. I will turn to this concept in detail in the next section, but there is a further dimension of the role the body plays with regards to understandings of sin that requires a closer look.

Further insight into the relation between sin and the body can be gained by looking at descriptions of sin that describe it as a disease. If we think about sin as disease, then we might have to think of it as in some sense outside of people's control. With a number of diseases we can make the utmost effort not to contract them, but generally speaking we become ill through no fault of our own. Ricoeur argues that the sinful body is a contagious source of impurity. It is difficult to know how to make sense of this aspect of sickness. We can, of course, point to hereditary sin as a kind of contagious sickness; it is passed down from one generation to the next. It is in fact in discussions of hereditary sin that we most often find a comparison with

sickness. Aquinas talks about original sin in terms of an infection: *"[o]riginal sin infects the different parts of the soul, in so far as they are the parts of one whole; even as original justice held all the soul's parts together in one. Consequently there is but one original sin: just as there is but one fever in one man, although the various parts of the body are affected."* (2016: I.II 82.2*)*. In the *Augsburg Confession,* sin is referred to as a disease, and furthermore that "this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost" (1921: II).

In these accounts it is unclear whether we ought to understand the disease of sin as contagious, but what is clear is that it represents the ill-health of a person suffering from sin. As with Paul's descriptions of the body in Romans 7, something is *wrong* with the sinner. It is this element of sin that is most essential to the current project, and that again brings us to the notion of existential sin.

1.4 Existential sin: Nietzsche, Paul, and Calvin

A fruitful way of understanding existential sin is by looking at the difference between a particular act of transgression and a general feeling of indebtedness. In *Human, All-Too-Human* I:141, Nietzsche describes that the saints experience an increased feeling of sinfulness because through the outlawing of sexual acts their desires increased, yet these desires and thoughts are considered transgressions. This increased sinfulness is related to a particular act of sin. There is a clear prohibition or commandment against a specific act, and doing, thinking or desiring it leads to a feeling of indebtedness. But when Nietzsche writes further in the same section that "Christianity had indeed said: every man is conceived and born in sin; and in the insupportable superlative Christianity of Calderón this idea was again knotted and wound together, so that he ventured on the most perverse paradox there is in the well-known lines: the greatest guilt of man is that he was born" (HH I:141) an entirely different form of

indebtedness is implied. This does not concern a particular act that is prohibited: it is being alive in the first place that is seen as the cause of a feeling of indebtedness.

Existential sin is the notion that there is something wrong with me, as an individual, by virtue of being alive, being human. This does not concern one specific part of me, nor is it in relation to one particular action on my part; the sinfulness is felt to be all-encompassing. Romans contains myriad descriptions of existential sin, both experientially and conceptually. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Romans 7 displays a man struggling with himself to the core of his being. The cry, "[o]h wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24), that is echoed throughout Paul's writings evidently expresses an intense suffering on the author's part. However, Paul does not think his suffering is unjustified – he is not struggling with meaninglessness of suffering. He knows why he suffers, and believes it to be just. Here we can therefore see why the notion of existential sin can provide us with an answer for meaningless suffering: Paul knows that he deserves to suffer because he is sinful.

Furthermore, this suffering is not without relief – Paul clearly believes in God's grace as redemptive. This possibility of redemption nonetheless does not diminish the kinds of claims Paul makes about human beings; in Romans 3 he writes that "[t]here is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10), and that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). Jacob Taubes analyses the salient parts of Paul's account as follows;

> Paul really does believe that humanity and the cosmos are guilty [Rom. 7:7-25]. A guilt that can be redeemed by means of sacrifice and atonement. Justified. But what a terrible price is paid in this entanglement! What terrible cruelty, from which there is no escape! Everything else in the critique of Christianity is not worth talking about, is so to speak negotiable, as we say about contracts, but not *that*. This is a fundamental experience. (Taubes 2004: 87-88)

Taubes here understands sin to be related to a guilt that has been handed down since Adam, or in other words hereditary sin. What defines human nature (as well as nature as a whole) is this

guilt, a price that has been paid for the transgression of the first man. Taubes furthermore argues that the experience of sinfulness, the experience of this guilt, is a fundamental experience in Christianity. For Paul, the fundamental human experience is one in which a person feels themselves to be a sinner; and in this experience they feel "sick, miserable, filled with ill-will towards [them]sel[ves]" (TI VI:2). In other words, existential sin is an ineluctable part of the Christian experience.

A reading of Calvin further supports this analysis. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin offers an account of sin that similarly can be described as *existential*. He argues that sin is a "hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature extending to all the parts of the soul." (II.1.8). He describes, furthermore, the way to redemption as a difficult one: "[we] shall not prove that we have thoroughly shaken off our stupor [*soporem*] until, groaning under the burden, and lamenting our sad condition, we seek relief from God." (III.3.18).[18] Note the formulations that echo the intensity of sin described by Paul; "depravity of our nature", "groaning under the burden", "our sad condition". For Calvin human nature was changed radically after the Fall, to the point where post-lapserian humanity is wicked: we cannot do good without help from God. Furthermore, there is an awareness of this state, and humans feel themselves carrying the weight of their condition and their sinfulness.

We can therefore begin to understand how sin can offer an answer to the problem of meaningless suffering. There are intricate narratives surrounding different ideas of sin that help us understand why we are sinful and why we deserve to suffer. With actual transgressive sin, the explanation for suffering is quite straight-forward: a person has committed an act that is designated as sinful, and therefore deserves to be punished in some way. This parallels how we think about transgressions of the law in secular society, where to break the law is usually

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[18] *Malaque nostra*, here translated as "our sad condition" could also be interpreted as a "bad condition". In the context of sin, this is potentially significant.

followed by a punishment that we consider to be justified. We can think of this in terms of debt as well; by committing an act of sin, we are incurring a debt towards God.

However, these explanations are not what I am interested in here. As I explained in the introduction's discussion of the Book of Job, there are certain explanatory narratives that are more easily available to us than others. Job's friends are quick to point to his actions as deserving punishment, as this is an explanatory framework that human beings often turn to. However, the crux of Job's story is that his actions are in fact not deserving of punishment, and that we cannot point to a particular aspect of his life as having caused his suffering. When we are unable to point to one particular act or part of a person in order to explain suffering, that we begin to struggle with explanatory narratives. And this is precisely why the notion of existential sin is compelling.

By positing hereditary sin and grounding this concept in a narrative telling us of a prior state (the Garden of Eden), we are offered an explanation for the meaningless suffering of those who seem not to deserve it. After all, even if they have not acted sinfully, they still have a sinful nature, which can be traced backed to wrongdoing by someone else. Here, we are therefore still able to understand suffering as punishment for an act, but it is no longer our own act that causes the sin. Rather, our very nature must be understood as deserving of punishment because of the first, original, act of sin. We have seen that this sinful nature can be conceptualized in many different ways: as a stain left behind by the original act of sin, as a debt towards God, or as the fact of our bodily nature. Importantly, existential sin designates a person as sinful *as a whole*, rather than pointing to certain acts as sinful.

There are consequences to this conception of human nature. Indeed, when we read in this chapter the descriptions by Paul, Calvin, Kierkegaard and others, the image we get is not a

joyful one. Sin may explain why there is meaningless suffering, but it itself causes suffering of a different kind. It is here that a turn to Nietzsche is extremely fruitful.

In Third Essay of *On Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche offers one of the most powerful descriptions of the *experience* of sin we can find:

> The unhappy man has heard, has understood; he is like a hen around which a line has been drawn. He cannot get out of this drawn circle: the sick man has been made into 'the sinner' . . . And now we shall not be rid of the sight of this new sick person, 'the sinner', for a few thousand years, – shall we ever be rid of him? – wherever we look, everywhere the hypnotic glance of the sinner always moving in the one direction (in the direction of 'guilt' as the sole cause of suffering); everywhere, bad conscience, that 'abominable beast', as Luther called it; everywhere, the past regurgitated, the deed distorted, the green eye on every action; everywhere, the will to misunderstand suffering made into the content of life, suffering reinterpreted as feelings of guilt, fear, punishment; everywhere, the scourge, the hair shirt, the starving body, contrition; everywhere, the sinner breaking himself on the cruel wheel of a restless and morbidly lustful conscience; everywhere, dumb torment, the most extreme fear, the agony of the tortured heart, the paroxysms of unknown happiness, the cry for 'redemption'. In fact, the old depression, heaviness and fatigue were thoroughly overcome by this system of procedures, life became very interesting again: awake, eternally awake, sleepless, glowing, burned out, exhausted and yet not tired, – this is how man, the 'sinner', looked when initiated into these mysteries. (GM III:20)

We see here that Nietzsche uses metaphors of illness, torture, self-mutilation, and insomnia, and emotive descriptions referring to fear, agony, and depression. The sinner cries, cannot sleep, tortures herself, and interprets everything through the lens of sinfulness. Here, therefore, we are not given a detailed definition of sin, but rather a depiction of the experience that speaks to us emotionally as well as logically. Nietzsche tells us that the sight of the sinner is not rare, the sinner is everywhere, and Nietzsche even wonders if we will ever be rid of the concept of the sinner.

Furthermore, we see towards the end of the paragraph that Nietzsche talks about how the "old depression, heaviness and fatigue" were beaten by the notion of sinfulness. Positing sin as an answer to meaningless suffering does to away with some form of suffering, here called the "old depression" by Nietzsche. It serves its purpose very well, and Nietzsche even argues that

it made life interesting again. The concept of sin therefore has a complicated relation to suffering: it lessens the suffering caused by an inability to understand meaningless suffering, yet it brings with it another type of suffering, a suffering *from oneself*. This is key. The ontological category of meaningless suffering is related to our existence in the world. By virtue of finding ourselves as human beings in this world we see and experience meaningless suffering. The desire to have it explained is similarly ontological; it is essential to the human experience.

The suffering that is caused by sin is socio-historical in nature, and not ontological. In other words, it is contingent upon the specific explanation of meaningless suffering that was offered by Christianity. The particular shape that this suffering takes, namely to suffer from oneself as sinful, is not an essential part of the human experience. In order to further elucidate the relation between sin and suffering, I will in the next chapter turn to Nietzsche's account of sin. By offering a detailed account of his thought on the concept and experience of sin, I will show that the price paid by accepting sin as an explanation for meaningless suffering may indeed be too high.

Chapter 2   Nietzsche on Sin: Transgression,

Indebtedness, Guilt, and God

> Churches they call their sweet smelling caves. Oh how repulsive is this falsified light, this stale air! Here, where the soul to its height – is denied flight! Instead their faith commands: 'Up the stairs on your knees, you sinners!' (TZ, 'On Priests')

In the previous chapter I presented the first part of an account of existential sin by focusing on its history within Christian thought. I argued that existential sin concerns a person's nature as a whole, rather than a specific act that they may have done. By contrasting actual sin with hereditary sin, we can understand this difference in more detail. Acts of sin are specific violations of God, usually conceived of as transgressions of God's Law. Hereditary sin, however, is the concept that sinfulness is inherent to human nature since the Fall, and that it is therefore not primarily related to specific acts a person may do. It is, rather, an ontological state: to be human means to be sinful. As such, hereditary sin has functioned as an effective explanation for meaningless suffering: this suffering that we perceive as meaningless exists because we are all, at heart, sinful beings who deserve to suffer. This account of hereditary sin is the basis for our understanding of existential sin. However, existential sin is not synonymous with hereditary sin, which I will show in this chapter.

This chapter furthermore argues for a specific method of reading Nietzsche. I will show that we cannot merely explain Nietzsche's account of sin in terms of *moral* wrong-doing; it is,

rather, a religious concept. If we want to understand Nietzsche's project in the *Genealogy*, we need to frame the central concept of sin in religious terms. If we were to instead focus on moral psychology, as a significant number of secondary texts do, we will misunderstand the phenomenon that Nietzsche is discussing in the Second and Third Essay that I defined as existential sin in the previous chapter. It is in fact the Christian background that makes this phenomenon of moralized guilt what it is: existential sin.

I will thereby be arguing against Nietzsche commentators such as Christopher Janaway and Aaron Ridley. I will show that Ridley and Janaway suggest that even though Nietzsche introduces the Christian God in the Second Essay as the reason why we feel reprehensible or that we deserve punishment, we can take the Christian God out of the picture and still make sense of the phenomenon of moralized guilt. This is a mistake. We can only understand why moralized guilt becomes existential sin if we look at the role of the Christian God in particular.

Furthermore, in order to understand Nietzsche's accounts of sin, and in particular his account of sin as a sickness, it is essential to understand the religious literature that grounds his account and that I presented in the previous chapter. The cultural phenomenon of sin that Nietzsche diagnoses in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* is one that can be found in Luther, in Calvin, in Paul. It is therefore not new, but what makes Nietzsche's account distinctive is the value he attaches to this phenomenon; he describes it as a sickness that is grounded in a false narrative Christianity has taught us. For Nietzsche, sin is not ontological, but it is a historical fact, and a crucial part of the constitution of the European soul. As Valadier tells us, "we cannot underestimate the importance of Christianity in the shaping of the European man" (1974: 293, my translation).

In order to bring out the salient points of Nietzsche's account of sin, I will offer a thorough discussion of this account. The structure of this chapter mirrors chapter one and contains discussions of four different models of sin that Nietzsche offers us; sin as transgression, sin as debt, sin as a feeling of guilt, and existential sin. I will show that Nietzsche's account of sin is very much rooted in the Christian framework that I presented in the previous chapter. For example, Nietzsche's understanding of sin as transgression focuses on acts of sin, whereas his more existential descriptions of sin clearly relate more to notions of hereditary sin. However, although echoing the sentiments described by Paul and Calvin on the experience of sin, Nietzsche moves away from them in presented existential sin as a *cultural problem*. The explanation for meaningless suffering that existential sin consists of can be understood outside of the Christian paradigm: it has, in a way, taken on a life of its own. For Nietzsche, existential sin is a problem that has led to much suffering.

2.1 Sin as transgression

Section 9 in *The Birth of Tragedy* is the first mention of transgressive sin in Nietzsche's works. He offers a comparative analysis of Oedipus, Prometheus and Eve that focuses on their particular kinds of transgressions as well as their relation to nature. He describes Oedipus and Prometheus as radically different from Eve: their transgressions are self-aware, whereas Eve transgresses out of passivity. The different orientations towards the world of these three figures are also very important. Both Oedipus and Prometheus find themselves in a world that is already bad, and their transgressions can only be explained if we acknowledge that aspect of life. In Oedipus we see the badness of the world reflected, and Prometheus finds himself in a world that he wants to improve by his particular act of transgression. In the myth of the Fall, Adam and Eve find themselves in a good world but through the act of sinning badness is brought into the world.

Nietzsche writes that the myth of the Fall is a myth in which "curiosity, deception, weakness in the face of temptation, wantonness, - in short, a whole series of pre-eminently feminine passions, - were regarded as the origin of evil" (BT: 9). The story of Christian sin is not one of a person actively going against a rule because "the best and highest" that someone can attain is through breaking this rule. It is a passive story of transgression, where seduction and temptation are the primary motivations for the act. Nietzsche hereby suggests that sin is weak and does not aim towards any good, nor does it reflect the world the transgression takes place in.

Eve's transgression is passive due to the way in which she transgresses, rather than the nature of her transgression. In contrast to Prometheus, Eve does not transgress because she feels that it is necessary or even important. Nor is there in place a prophecy that will dictate her action, unlike Oedipus. Eve acts not because her transgressive action would lead to something worthwhile, she decides on the action out of curiosity and temptation. And indeed, the contrast between Oedipus saying "no one but I brought down these piling curses on myself!" (Sophocles 1984: 206) and Prometheus's powerful "all that I did wrong I did on purpose; I shall not deny it" on the one hand, and Eve's "[t]he serpent tricked me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:14) is significant.

It might seem that in the Fall narrative, Eve is actually actively transgressing. After all, she decided to take the fruit from the tree, and for Nietzsche acts in awareness of it being a transgression.[19] However, the salient aspect of the story of the Fall for Nietzsche lies in the fact that Eve does not desire the consequences of her action. She does not act in a desire to do good, instead she merely succumbs to temptation. Furthermore, Eve's act only becomes meaningful in light of its dire consequences, but not in the *act* that Eve was taking up.

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[19]As I showed in the previous chapter, section 1.1.1, there are thinkers who would argue that Eve could not have been aware that her action was a transgression, as the concept of 'transgression' would not have been available to her.

We can explain this argument by looking at Oedipus, who Nietzsche also considers to be passive. He is the victim of his fate: he is "fated [*bestimmt*] to error and misery", and he has no choice but to live his life in accordance with it. Before he became aware of the truth of his patricide and incest, Oedipus thought that he knew himself, but this supposed self-knowledge and self-awareness unravels when he gains the knowledge of his transgressions. It is this, and his knowledge of his own fate as foretold by the oracle of Delphi that make him aware of the remedial effect that his suffering and death will have, both in a literal and metaphorical sense.[20]

When Oedipus finds out the truth about his life, when he sees the reality of things, he does not shy away from this knowledge, but embraces it and the suffering that will follow. There is no active refusal to believe his fate, but a passive acceptance. Instead of striving to establish himself through his actions, Oedipus accepts himself as fate, his self-knowledge has become knowledge of fate. And it is "in this purely passive attitude the hero achieves his highest activity, whose influence extends far beyond his life, while his earlier conscious thought and striving led him only to passivity" (BT: 9). The early Oedipus in *Oedipus the King* constantly tried to resist the fate accorded to him, and this only lead to temporary power and strength. It is in the passivity of accepting his fate and the suffering that comes with it, that Oedipus becomes a more powerful figure. This is what Nietzsche refers to as Oedipus's "glory of passivity", which is contrasted with Prometheus's "glory of activity". For Nietzsche, Oedipus's passivity is therefore very different from Eve's: Eve's transgression was passive because of its motives, and furthermore her response to this aggression is passive, all she admits to is succumbing to temptation. Oedipus's transgressions are similarly passive because

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[20] Burnham and Jesinghausen write that "clearly, Nietzsche sees Sophocles' Oedipus in some relation to Christ, or at least to the idea of 'sainthood' […]" (Burnham & Jesinghausen: 83). The link to Christ is not as obvious as Burnham and Jesinghausen imply, although it could certainly be argued for, but the idea of Oedipus as a saint-like figure is interesting. For Nietzsche saints are figures of self-denial and suffering, and perhaps by pointing towards Oedipus as a saint-like figure he wanted to emphasize the importance of suffering for Oedipus even more.

he was the victim of fate. However, for Nietzsche, Oedipus gains self-knowledge through accepting his fate, and as such, becomes more powerful.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Prometheus is similarly powerful. Nietzsche argues that Prometheus is well aware of his action and its consequences. Prometheus acts not out of necessity, as Oedipus does, nor out of deception, as Eve does, but out of justice, the chief Promethean value. Prometheus changes the future of humankind and turns us into reflective beings. His transgression is not merely going against Zeus, as it furthermore allowed humans to take the place of Gods. This transgression thereby led to a change in the position of the Olympian gods: the gods are forced to ally themselves with humans, to become *our* gods. What Prometheus did was to create the possibility for new values, a new normative model, by turning humans into reflective beings, and thereby the importance of the Olympian gods changes. Prometheus acted out of *hubris* by facilitating humans to become gods and to take the place of the Olympians. The importance of Prometheus's awareness of both the fact that he has transgressed and the fact that he will be punished for it is seen more clearly when contrasted with Oedipus and Eve. For Oedipus the suffering comes unexpectedly and Eve does not embrace the idea of suffering when she commits the first act of sin. Prometheus stands tall whereas Eve literally hides after her sin.

However, there is an interesting parallel between Prometheus and Eve that Nietzsche leaves unexplored. Prometheus gives humankind what we need to be reflective beings, but Eve does a very similar thing. By eating from the Tree of Knowledge, she gives humankind knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, in both myths the transgressors offer something to humans that will adds to their experience in the world, and allow a certain kind of progress. Both the myth of Prometheus and Genesis seem to suggest the same thing: that through bringing some kind of knowledge to humankind, they become more like gods. The snake said to Eve that by eating the fruit "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). By giving

humans fire Prometheus also elevated their status to one closer to gods, and as Nietzsche writes in *Human, All-Too-Human*, "in the *Greek* grade of religion […], there may even be imagined a common life between two castes […], in their origin both belong to each other somehow, and are of one kind; they need not be ashamed of each other." (HH I:111). Similarly, in the Bible we read "the man has become like one of us" (Gen. 3:22).

There are substantial differences between Prometheus and Eve, however. One of the most important differences between the transgressions of *Frevel* and *Sünde* as described in BT 9 lies in the nature of the world wherein the transgressors find themselves. Prometheus and Oedipus exist in a world that contains evil, and they are bound by this world. Both Prometheus's and Oedipus's transgressions go against their worlds, Prometheus transgresses knowingly and willingly, and Oedipus unknowingly. Prometheus moves against this world by trying to reject the gods and offer a new system of values, and Oedipus' transgressions show us what nature is by breaking their laws. The world of Eve, the Garden of Eden, seems radically different from the world of Prometheus and Oedipus. A new world is created after the act of sin, but it is not the intentional effect of the action.

Oedipus is undeniably part of the world he finds himself in. The transgressions he commits are against nature, yet at the same time they tell us something essential about this same nature. In the figure of Oedipus we see reflected some of what is wrong in the world. Prometheus tells a story of a figure who also finds himself in a world that contains badness, and his transgression can be explained as an attempt to make the world better. By contrast, Adam and Eve find themselves in a world that is wholly good, and it is only through the act of sinning that evil is brought into the world. It is essential to the story of the Fall that as a result of their transgression the world is transformed into one that contains suffering. With the act of sin, sinfulness and evil have come into the world, which creates a narrative of the world being bad because *people* are bad. In other words, it is because of human action, because of *us* that the

world contains evil and suffering. Here, we can already see why original sin, even when considered to be an act of sin, helps us to understand and accept meaningless suffering: there is meaningless suffering because people have acted in such a way that brought it into existence. Already in Nietzsche's early work of *The Birth of Tragedy* we can therefore find a radical distinction between Greek and Judeo-Christian ways of understanding transgression. This distinction will continue to be illuminating in Nietzsche's later passages on sin, as we will see in the next section on *The Gay Science*.

2.1.1 The origin of sin

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche turned to one of the paradigmatic examples of sin by focusing on *Genesis*. However, in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche's concerns about the origin of sin turns into a historical approach. He argues that sin has its origin in monotheism, and in particular in Judaism. It is in Jewish thought that we first see the concept of sin, and Nietzsche tells us that it is a "Jewish invention":

> Sin, as it is now experienced wherever Christianity reigns or once reigned: sin is a Jewish feeling and a Jewish invention; and given that this is the background of all Christian morality, Christianity can be said to have aimed at 'Judaizing' the whole world. The extent to which this has succeeded in Europe is best brought out by how alien Greek antiquity – a world without feelings of sin – strikes our sensibility of being, despite all the good will expended by entire generations and many excellent individuals to approach and incorporate this world. 'Only when you *repent* does God have mercy on you' – to a Greek, that is an object of ridicule and an annoyance; he would say, 'Maybe slaves feel that way.' (GS: 135)

We seem to read here that, with regards to sin, Christianity is merely an extension of Judaism. Sin has its origins in Judaism, but has been propagated by Christianity, which aimed to "Judaize" the world. Furthermore, we read that sin is closely related to repentance; the feelings of sin Nietzsche talks about are captured by the sentiment that one must repent in order to be forgiven. But what is this feeling of sin? When we continue reading the aphorism,

we see that Nietzsche defines sin as a trespass against God, a transgression of God's laws: "every sin is an injury of respect, a *crimen laesae majestatis divinae*" (GS: 135).

This particular understanding of sin echoes the Hebrew concept of *aveira*, as well as 1 John 3:4, "[e]veryone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." The Hebrew Bible is the first place where the concept of sin as a transgression of God's law (*aveira*) appears. The key passage is Deuteronomy 17:2, where we see a condemnation of transgressions of God's covenant. This idea of understanding transgression as being against a god's wishes is not new to Judaism. In Greek religion there are numerous examples of people being punished for going against what the gods desired, for example Prometheus going against Zeus's commands, Orpheus and Eurydice going against Hades and Persephone, but also less explicit transgressions such as Cassandra rejecting Apollo and Tantalus attempting to feed his child to the gods. There are two reasons why the Greek understanding of transgression against gods is so radically different from the notion of sin: firstly the nature of the deities; and secondly the consequences of the transgression.

The Greek gods are described as selfish, vengeful, loving, hateful, cruel; in other words, in terms of human characteristics. The Greek gods are therefore not thought of as completely alien to us, but instead as a greater or more powerful version of human beings. No conceptual problems occur when they act callously, as this is simply a human trait. Furthermore, there are many Greek gods, and their interests often collide: think, for example, of Athena and Apollo during the Trojan War. The transgression of their laws is like the transgression of human laws, but the punishment is potentially much greater (the eternal suffering of Sisyphus as a result of his transgression of *xenia* can only occur because his punisher has divine power). As Nietzsche writes, "The Greeks did not see the Homeric gods as set above them as masters, or themselves set beneath the gods as servants, as the Jews did. They saw as it were only the reflection of the most successful exemplars of their own caste, that is to say an ideal, not an

antithesis of their own nature" (HH I:114).

The God of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament is very different from the Greek gods. Nietzsche tells us that the Jews set themselves "beneath the gods as servants": their God is exalted to a much greater extent. There is possible an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible's God as having human characteristics, such as vengefulness, pride and anger, but even so the nature of God is no longer *just like* human nature. A radical difference between humans and God is introduced. Whereas in ancient Greek religion, for example, humans and gods were conceived to be on the same continuum, Nietzsche argues that the Judeo-Christian God exists on a different continuum than human beings, and as we saw in section 1.2 this is indeed what the Christian account of transgressive sin presupposes. In *Human, All-Too-Human* Nietzsche interprets the radical difference between God and humans in terms of egoism. He argues that human beings are inherently incapable of un-egoistic acts, yet God is said to be "capable only of those actions which are called un-egoistic and to live in the perpetual consciousness of an unselfish mode of thought" (HH I:132). Here God has an attribute that is the opposite of that of which humans are capable.[21] This is essential: God's nature is not like human nature, He is far beyond anything human beings can ever be.

The difference between the natures of the Greek and Judeo-Christian gods plays a significant role in how we conceive of a transgression against this deity. It is the difference between transgressing against a very powerful human-like being, and transgressing against the most powerful, perfect being that exists. Intuitively, these feel like very different cases. By considering the respective consequences of such transgressions, we will be able to understand the difference between the Greek and Judeo-Christian accounts in more detail.

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[21] Paul Valadier offers a different picture and argues in a Feuerbachian vein that with Paul Christianity became anthropocentric, and God is thought of only in relation to humans; "Dieu est conçu en fonction de l'homme et par rapport à lui" (2001: 51). This can be compatible with the above account, however, as even if we accept that Christianity is anthropocentric, that does not mean that the God to which humans relate is not posited as infinitely greater than us.

Although the Greek gods punished transgressors, these consequences were fairly straight-forward. You committed an act against the gods, and the gods punished you in a, usually, visceral manner. Whether eternally pushing a rock up a hill, being turned into a stag or spider, being blinded or simply being killed, the gods were quick to punish humans for their transgressions. Furthermore, the people that were being punished after transgressing could still be held up as heroic, which we see above all in the example of Prometheus.

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition we can also find punishment enacted for transgressions, but there is an added element that I discussed in the previous chapter: the blemish or stain that transgressions leave. In the *Zohar* we can read that "a sin leaves a mark; repeated, it deepens the mark; when committed a third time, the mark becomes a stain" (Zohar, Gen. 73b), and Nietzsche echoes this when he writes about sin "as a stain in a creature vowed to God" (HH I:133).[22] It is important here not to understand this stain only in terms of original or hereditary sin, as for example Aquinas does.[23] Instead, once someone has transgressed against God she has blemished herself, and punishment is not enough in order to remove this blemish. Only through an act of God can this blemish be removed. Thus, what is required is an act of repentance and an acknowledgement of guilt in order to receive forgiveness from the deity. In Greek culture, repentance was neither required nor expected. For example, if we return to Prometheus, he recounts the actions that lead to his punishment, but he does not apologise or see them as wrong. He emphasizes the "goodwill" of his gifts to humankind, and tells Hermes "be sure of this: when I measure my misfortune against your slavery, I would not change" (Aeschylus 2013: 965), and that he hates "all of the gods that unjustly returned me ill for good" (ibid. 975). Prometheus therefore does not feel guilty for his action, despite the

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[22] Although the *Zohar* is very clear about the existence of such a stain, the exact way to understand it is, and was, less straight-forward; "[w]hile many Jews believed that sin was in some way defiling, ancient Jews did not all agree on how the relationship between ritual and moral impurity was to be understood." (Klawans 2000:159)

[23] He writes, "For this reason children are taken to be baptized soon after their birth, to show that they have to be washed from some uncleanness." (Aquinas 2016: I-II 81.1)

exclamation "all that I did wrong I did on purpose; I shall not deny it" (ibid. 265).

The repentance that Nietzsche emphasizes in *The Gay Science* 135 can be understood in terms of this difference between Greek and Judeo-Christian religion; 'Only when you *repent* does God have mercy on you' – to a Greek, that is an object of ridicule and an annoyance; he would say, 'Maybe slaves feel that way.'"[24] This conception of repentance and mercy, Nietzsche tells us, while thoroughly alien to Greek religious consciousness is absolutely crucial for the Judeo-Christian tradition. Certainly, it would be difficult to deny the centrality of repentance in Judaism and Christianity. Consider, for instance, the Jewish custom of *cheshbon nefesh*. Held in the month of *Elul*, before Yom Kippur, this custom is an occasion for Jewish people to examine their past actions and seek forgiveness from whoever has been wronged through those actions. It is only once this act of contrition has been fulfilled that forgiveness from God could be sought. Likewise, within Christianity one of the seven Catholic sacraments is that of penance and reconciliation, and Luther could scarcely have emphasized repentance more than he did. The first of his 95 Theses reads; "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent'', He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence"[25] (Dillenberger 1962: 490).

2.1.2 Judaism and Christianity

If we follow Nietzsche's account, we can therefore say the following. The concept of transgressive sin is particular to Judaism and Christianity because of the specific nature of the deity they uphold, in contrast to, for example, Greek deities. It is furthermore precisely because of the nature of the Judeo-Christian God that sin can be conceived of as a transgression. In a sort of caricature of the Judaic God, Nietzsche writes specifically that God, an "honour-craving Oriental", does not care whether or not sins have been done against

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[24] Nietzsche here echoes St. Paul: 'but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23).
[25] A more detailed account of repentance in Luther can be found in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.

humanity or the immanent world. All that He cares about is whether He, God, feels assaulted. In fact, he asserts that "there can basically be no sin against humanity": Nietzsche tells us that this is what the "Jewish feeling" demands. Repentance is purely about sins that have been done *towards* God, transgressions made against God.

Here a puzzle arises, however. Nietzsche's claim in this regard appears to run counter to some key elements of Judaism. In Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* we can read that there are not only sins between God and humans, but between humans themselves. He writes of "sins between man and man", and "sins between man and God" (1998: 'Teshuvah' 2:5), and shows that both should be taken seriously and require repentance. We can find the idea that sins are committed against humans as well as God in many other Jewish thinkers, including Yitzchak Meir Alter, Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi, Abraham Danzig, Max Arzt, and texts such as the *Orchot Tzaddikim,* the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* and the *Midrash Psalms*. Another interesting example is Franz Rosenzweig, who writes in *The Star of Redemption* "For the Day of Atonement, all sins, even those committed against and pardoned by man, are sins before God, sins of the solitary individual, sins of the soul – for it is the soul that sins." (1971: 327). He argues that on Yom Kippur "the individual in all his naked individuality stands immediately before God" (ibid. 325), but this exception precisely confirms that sins against humans are possible.

What are we to make of this problem?[26] One approach is to concede the point that Nietzsche's reading of the Jewish concept of sin as only against God is quite simply inaccurate or one-sided, but claim that this does not much matter for Nietzsche's purposes. It might therefore be argued that these purposes do not ultimately rely on the historical accuracy of Nietzsche's descriptions of Judaism and Christianity (or Greek religion), but rather on their ability to

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[26] Paul Valadier does not acknowledge this problem in his reading of the section, and instead proposes that what we see here is the paradigmatic Jewish attitude, in which the natural is rejected for the supernatural. (1974: 305-306)

bring out salient features of religious consciousness within these traditions.[27] However, there is a passage in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* that allows us to contemplate a more generous reading of the claims in *The Gay Science* 135: "[i]t was the founder of Christianity who wanted to abolish secular justice and remove judging and punishing from the world. For he understood all guilt as 'sin', that is to say as an offence against God and not as an offence against the world" (WS: 81). Note that here Nietzsche speaks of Christianity instead of Judaism. And this is where a solution to the above problem may lie.

The opening lines of *The Gay Science* 135 state that "Sin, as it is now experienced wherever Christianity reigns or once reigned: sin is a Jewish feeling and a Jewish invention; and given that this is the background of all Christian morality, Christianity can be said to have aimed at 'Judaizing' the whole world". In this account, Christianity and Judaism are clearly playing significantly different roles. The origin of sin is in Judaism, it is a "Jewish invention". However, it is not through Judaism that sin became of central importance. In fact, in aphorism 138 Nietzsche writes that sin was "rarely a very great torment" among Jews, despite being responsible for the invention of sin (GS: 138). Only with Christianity does it become true that there is "nothing from which men suffered more than their sins" (ibid.). Thus, what we find in this section of *The Gay Science* is a schism between Judaism and Christianity. Sin was invented by Judaism, but it lacked two elements of sin that originated in Christianity: its central importance in moral psychology and its universality.[28]

When Nietzsche writes that "Christianity first brought sin into the world" (WS: 78) we can

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[27] This kind of approach to Nietzsche is often taken by theologians who reject many of Nietzsche's views but nonetheless find some of his insights valuable, for example see Deane, D., 2006, *Nietzsche and Theology: Nietzschean Thought in Christological Anthropology* (Aldershot: Ashgate), and Hovey, G., 2008, *Nietzsche and Theology* (London: T&T Clark). For further insight see Ledure, Y., 1981, 'The Christian Response to Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity' in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, eds. Geffré, C. and Jossua, J-P. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).

[28] Stephen Williams supports this interpretation when he argues that the main difference between the Old and New Testaments, according to Nietzsche, lies in the fact that the priests re-interpret sin to become "the cause of misfortune" (Williams 2006: 129).

therefore interpret him as making a claim about the historical development of the concept of sin as a fundamental and universal category, a way of understanding the human condition as such. Sin was in the world before Christianity, but it was not yet promoted as a universal truth. This is the key claim Nietzsche makes in GS 135: it was through Christianity that sin became a universal concept that took particular hold in Europe. Sin was universalized, because Christianity, through Paul, became a universalizing religion, through assertions like this: "[t]here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Scripture no longer talks about the saving of a people, but the saving of *all* people.[29] In other words, sin, as we understand it can be traced back to the Hebrew Bible. Christianity did not invent the concept but took it up and spread awareness of it. When Nietzsche talks about Christianity "'Judaizing' the whole world", this concerns the *propagation* of sin. A distinction between the origin and the continuation or propagation should therefore be made quite strongly, in order to present a coherent and plausible picture of Nietzsche's account of sin.

Nietzsche explores the distinction between the origin of a concept and its propagation or continued existence in the *Genealogy*. He writes that:

> [t]he origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* separate; […] The 'development' of a thing, a tradition, an organ is therefore certainly not its *progressus* towards a goal, still less is it a logical *progressus* […] instead it is a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subjugation exacted on the thing, added to this the resistances encountered every time, the attempted transformations for the purpose of defence and reaction, and the results, too, of successful countermeasures. (GM II:12)

When we trace the history of a concept, the tendency is to create a complete and systematic narrative, where the contemporary use of the concept can already be seen in its origin. These kinds of narratives are used in order to justify the use of certain words or concepts, but this is

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[29] Jacob Taubes explores this in *Occidental Eschatology* and *The Political Theology of Paul*. In the latter he discusses Nietzsche and Freud as respectively responding to and inheritor of Paul's universalization of sin.

not a project that Nietzsche is interested in. The genealogical method that he offers is meant to elucidate the history of a concept in order to show its contingency and complexity, and not so that we can provide a succinct definition of it. In other words, if we want to understand sin, the origin of the concept need not tell us anything about its development or its current use. And so, despite designating sin as a Jewish feeling, the way in which sin is fleshed out in *The Gay Science* 135 represents the way in which has been taken up by Christianity – and thereby the fact that it is clearly unrepresentative of Jewish thought on sin ceases to be a problem.

Indeed, Julian Young argues that even though Nietzsche appears to at times focus on the origin, for example by naming an aphorism "The Origin of Sin", his true concern lies in the consequences of Christian belief. Young writes: "[t]hough Nietzsche places a great deal of methodological emphasis on the origins – historical and psychological – of Christian belief, his main effort, it seems to me, concerns not origins but rather the (unhealthy) consequences of such belief." (2006: 65). The two are of course not unrelated, as Young continues to acknowledge, because Nietzsche's project as a whole included the attempt to show that some aspects of Christian belief are epistemologically unsound. In order to do so, it can be helpful to look at the origins of this belief. However, the true focus of Nietzsche's account of sin indeed lies in what sin looked like *after* Christianity took it up.

Holding onto this distinction between the origin and continuation of sin, we can understand *The Gay Science* 135 as telling us *two* stories about sin. Firstly, Nietzsche tells us that Judaism invented sin, and secondly that Christianity took up the concept of sin increased its impact by making it a universal concept. The first claim has been explored above, and I think can now be granted. It is to the second story that we must now turn: what does it mean for sin to have been *taken up* by Christianity? It appears that for Nietzsche the very concept of sin

was transformed in Christianity. No longer can we understand sin merely as a transgression against God, instead, Nietzsche tells us, we should understand it as a kind of *sickness*. Here we will get the first glimpse of why Nietzsche considers sin to be a cultural problem.

2.2 The demands of the law

Nietzsche argues that the Christian laws were put in place to encourage people to feel *more sinful*; "Go through the moral demands exhibited in the documents of Christianity one by one and you will find that in every case they are exaggerated, so that he *could* not live up to them; the intention is not that he should *become* more moral, but that he should feel *as sinful as possible*." (HH I:141). In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes "[t]he law itself *must* continually prove itself unfulfillable" (D: 68).[30] In other words, the laws were put in place in order to foster feelings of sinfulness. These laws were not simply meant to offer moral guidance or to control people's desires, as the demands that they place are purposefully impossible to meet.

Importantly, although Nietzsche treats the unfulfillability of the Christian laws as a problem, this need not be the case. Nietzsche's critique here relies on a rejection of the Christian story; but if our sense of sinfulness corresponds to our true state of being, then becoming aware of this sinfulness is not a problem, even if it involves an acknowledgement that the laws are impossible to fulfil. Instead, the awareness of our sinful state can enable us to take up the proper relation to God, and become receptive to grace. We can find this kind of account in thinkers such as Paul Tillich, Søren Kierkegaard, and Martin Luther: "[a]lthough the law is the best of all things in the world, it still cannot bring peace to a terrified conscience but makes it even sadder and drives it to despair. For by the law sin becomes exceedingly sinful"

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[30] Nietzsche continues; "[…] the law existed so that sins might be committed, it continually brought sin forth as a sharp juice brings forth a disease; God could never have resolved on the death of Christ if a fulfilment of the law had been in any way possible without his death..." (D: 68)

(Luther 2012: 308). Furthermore, in Romans Paul already talks about the law's function as awakening sin in us; "for through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

It is important to acknowledge that Christianity differs here from Judaism. The paradigmatic Rabbinic principle that there should be no laws created that will make more people into sinners is reflected throughout the Jewish tradition. For example, Maimonides argues in *Guide for the Perplexed* that in issuing laws and commandments God always kept in mind what humans are capable of: "God refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying, and gave the above-mentioned commandments as a means of securing His chief object, viz., to spread a knowledge of Him [among the people], and to cause them to reject idolatry" (1903: 3.32). We can therefore again designate sin as the place where Judaism and Christianity grow apart in Nietzsche's account.

For Nietzsche, we can make sense of Christianity's 'exaggerated' demands by looking at the role of God. As previously shown, in *Human, All-Too-Human* Nietzsche fleshes out the nature of God in terms of egoism. He tells us that God is conceived of as non-egoistic, and that human beings are incapable of any non-egoistic act. Nietzsche follows La Rochefoucauld and Lichtenberg in arguing that we do not love or value other people because of who they are, but rather for what kind of (pleasant) emotions they invoke in us. He writes that we value actions because of their usefulness, and not for any other reason: "The praise of the selfless, the self-sacrificing, the virtuous – […] this praise is certainly not born out of the spirit of selflessness! The 'neighbour' praises selflessness because *it brings him advantages*!" (GS: 21).

Nietzsche's claim goes beyond the idea that we often do things out of egoism, or even that we do everything out of egoism. His claim is that we have no option but to do so. This does not designate a logical impossibility, rather the claim is that our human nature is such that we

cannot ever act out of non-egoistic motives. In other words, for Nietzsche it is not the case people usually act egoistically, nor even that no one has been able to act non-egoistically. Acting non-egoistically as such is *impossible*; it cannot be done. Any actions that we do consider to be non-egoistic, such as expressions of pity (*Mitleid*, to-suffer-with) are in actual fact self-gratifying.

For example, one could think of a friend who buys many presents, offers to get drinks all the time, and thereby seems exceedingly generous. Instead of looking at this as a gesture of kindness or generosity, Nietzsche would interpret these acts as a way to gain power over other people, a way of perhaps manipulating them into spending time with you; "when I buy this person a present, they will surely feel like they have to tolerate my presence, they will owe me". La Rochefoucauld makes this exact point: "[i]t may seem that self-love is deceived by kindness, and that it forgets its own interests when we are working for the sake of other people. Yet this is the surest way for it to reach its goals: it is lending at interest, under the pretext of giving; in fact, it is a subtle, refined method of winning over everyone else" (2007: V.236). So even when we are being kind, when we are "working for the sake of other people", what we really want from this act is appreciation. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche argues that Christian morality is based upon this kind of self-deception, and is in fact driven by egoistic motives. As Stephen Mulhall tells us, "Christian altruism is not just a moral code that comes naturally to the naturally weak and feeble, its function is to serve their own interests against those of others, as a weapon in the war between nobles and slaves." (2007: 35).

At the same time, by positing God as an ideal to live up to, the impossibility of acting non-egoistically starts to become a cause of feelings of guilt. Without the figure of God, understood in a specific sense as a being that is *only* capable of non-egoistic actions, our inability to act non-egoistically would not be particularly harmful or frustrating, it would just add a moderate amount of dissatisfaction to our lives. With the establishment of the Christian

God, Nietzsche argues, the inability for non-egoism becomes almost unbearable. (HH I:37, 101, 132).

In order to understand the role of the Christian God for Nietzsche, we need not accept that He really is non-egoistic, nor that humans are intrinsically and necessarily egoistic. What we instead have to focus on is the mechanism described by Nietzsche. God has attribute *x*, humans are either inherently or practically unable to obtain attribute *x*, yet they still ought to strive to obtain *x*. In other words, God is posited as an ideal, something that we ought to live up to, but His nature is in some sense beyond what humans are capable of. God is perfect, and we cannot achieve this perfection, yet, at the same time, we ought to strive for this perfection. Pascal voices this feeling in *Pensées*; "Christianity is strange. It requires man to recognize that he is vile, and even abominable, and requires him to want to be like God" (2004: 103). This is indeed precisely the argument presented by Ricoeur and Kierkegaard in 1.2.1, "it is the holiness of God that reveals the abyss of sin in man" (Ricoeur 1969: 242).

For Nietzsche, no concept of the divine has evolved as much in the direction of the radical alterity of God as in Christianity. The Christian God has a nature that goes beyond any other deity; He is non-egoistic, He is perfect, He is the "uttermost example of godliness". If a person compares herself to Him, she will always fall short. We are fallible beings, and are constantly aware of this fact. Even if we behaved as perfectly as we could, it would be impossible to be 'like God'. The kind of demands that are placed on us are not there in order to ensure that we live the best life possible *as humans*, but to ensure that we live the *best life*. According to Nietzsche, this poses a problem. If God is not only held up as a God-head, but also as an exemplar, and the particular quality of God is not one we can ever attain, then we will be striving for something that is impossible to achieve. The fact that it is still asked of us leads to feelings of uselessness and despair, and the sense that as humans we are essentially corrupt, even loathsome: that there is something wrong with us.

What we find here is sin that can be described as existential. Although particular events may trigger the feeling of sinfulness, the feeling is not locally reactive, it is an *overarching* feeling. In the previous chapter, we saw this feeling depicted powerfully in Romans 7 (see sections 1.3.2 and 1.4). There is still something opaque about the phrase "feeling of sinfulness" however. Is it a feeling of debt or guilt? Is it an uneasiness, or perhaps feeling lost? I propose that the best way to capture it is to emphasize existential sin as signalling to us that something is not right *about us*. Not about the world or our surroundings, but about *ourselves*. In other words, to experience existential sin means to feel that there is something wrong with us by virtue of being human. Nietzsche further establishes this account of existential sin in *On the Genealogy of Morality.*

2.3 Sin in the Genealogy

In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche offers several different accounts of sin. First, he discusses sin as a debt towards God, which is somehow transformed into a sense of guilt. I will explore this account of sin as debt as grounded in Nietzsche's account of the historical development of societies. I will then turn to the notion of 'moralized guilt', which I argue is how Nietzsche understands sin in the Second Essay of the *Genealogy*. Moralized guilt already brings us closer to an understanding of existential sin, as it explores sin as a sense of guilt. Thirdly, after a thorough analysis of the specific role of God in the origin and perpetuation of sin, I will offer a detailed reading of existential sin. Nietzsche argues that through positing sin as an explanation for meaningless suffering, the ascetic priests were able to make this type of suffering more bearable. I will show that the ascetic priest's answer to meaningless suffering brings with it another form of suffering; suffering from existential sin.

In the Second Essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche tells us of a pre-societal human being who was free to act upon her instincts, free to act upon her urges and fulfil her needs. In his

account, this human being did not need to have a conscience, as promises and interpersonal punishment only come into play once people begin living together. With the emergence of communal living, people have to be able to be responsible for themselves. A person becomes calculable and "able to vouch for himself as future" (GM II:1). According to Nietzsche, two things need to be in place before a person is capable of making and keeping promises: she has to be able to predict her future behaviour and she has to remember her promises. This knowledge of one's sense of responsibility is a "dominant instinct" that can also be called *conscience*; Nietzsche goes on to say that conscience "is the product of a long history and series of transformations" (GM II:3).

The development of conscience meant that a person becomes able to feel *indebted*. She is thereby able to make promises, because if she would not (or could not) fulfil her promise, she would be accountable to the person with whom she made the promise. For Nietzsche, this potential for indebtedness is essential to societal life. Furthermore, when a person becomes bound by society and its rules, she has to change in other ways. This means that once inhabiting the same space people have to channel some of their instincts that previously they were able to act upon freely. These instincts include "hostility, cruelty, pleasure in persecution, in assault, in change, in destruction" (GM II:16): all powerful, and violent, instincts. The instincts that used to be aimed outwards now become internalized: they turn inwards. Nietzsche argues that the internalization happens to "every instinct which does not vent itself externally" (ibid.), and by the turning inwards of instincts, the inner world of a person is vastly expanded. Nietzsche writes, "I take bad conscience to be the deep sickness to which man was obliged to succumb under the pressure of that most fundamental [*gründlichsten*] of all changes – when he found himself definitively locked in the spell of society and peace." (ibid.). Bad conscience is a turning against oneself, a self-destructive mechanism which belongs in the field of *cruelty*.

We can now see the general structure of Nietzsche's narrative. Prior to living in societies, people were free, "happily adapted to a life of wilderness", with instincts appropriate to that sort of life. But then they found themselves living in a society where these instincts were no longer appropriate. And in order to live with others, people had to be able to feel guilty, feel indebted and they had to condemn their own natural instincts. In other words, humans were once content with themselves, in a pre-societal life, but then were forced to change in a way that seemed to necessitate self-condemnation.[31]

2.3.1 Indebtedness and moralized guilt

The indebtedness that is first made possible by conscience plays a further role in the development of guilt. A creditor-debtor relationship appears, which takes the shape of a debt to one's forefathers: "here the conviction prevails that the race only *exists* by virtue of the sacrifice and achievements of the forefathers – and that one is obliged to *repay* them through sacrifice and achievements: a *debt* is recognized" (GM II:19). The more a culture advances, the more indebted it will feel towards its forefathers and the more it will sacrifice to repay its debt in another way. Then "the forefather is necessarily transfigured into a *god*" (GM II:19). Therefore, for gods to have come into existence, a certain kind of community needed to have been in place, and this is a community where indebtedness is an important part of life.

In Nietzsche's account in the *Genealogy*, sin appears when the particular god to whom we feel indebted is the *Christian* God. As opposed to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche here places the origin of sin within Christianity rather than Judaism. Nietzsche explains the indebtedness towards God in terms of 'moralized guilt'. Roughly, if we consider bad conscience to be the internalization of our instincts, and guilt to be bad conscience plus indebtedness towards

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[31] The structure of this narrative is similar to the Fall narrative in Genesis, and, as Mulhall has convincingly shown in *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, this similarity is not accidental.

ancestors or gods, then the moralization of guilt is guilt with the added feeling that we *deserve* to feel guilty; we deserve to suffer because of our guilt.[32]

The notion of 'moralized guilt' is a difficult one. Most accounts of moralized guilt within the secondary literature acknowledge that with moralized guilt we are no longer speaking just about feeling guilty for a specific action, but rather that this guilt permeates the way in which we understand ourselves. There are two different ways in which this is fleshed out, however. On the one hand, we find accounts where moralized guilt impact upon one's self-understanding as a whole being. In other words, moralized guilt impacts how I understand myself as a person, rather than only effecting how I understand myself in relation to one specific action that caused me to feel guilt. Brian Leiter and Aaron Ridley are two of the commentators who propose accounts of this nature. Leiter writes; "to feel guilty is to feel that one could have done otherwise (one could have not transgressed the norms) and to feel that the transgression reflects a fundamental defect of character or personhood." (2015: 189). Ridley argues that moralized guilt "involves not merely "inward pain" and the thought "I ought not to have done that," but also the thought that one's deed, the type of one's action as such, is reprehensible" (2005: 37). In these accounts therefore, moralized guilt requires a notion of what a good person is and does, as well as perceiving oneself as not fitting those criteria. Instead of simply feeling guilty because of a broken promise, with moralized guilt we would furthermore experience an extra dimension of feeling in which we did not merely break a promise but are also now the kind of person who breaks promises, i.e. a bad person.

However, Simon May, David Owen, Christopher Janaway and Matthias Risse offer different accounts. For them, the moralization of guilt indeed impacts the way we understand

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[32] This echoes Lutheran views. Merold Westphal's poignantly describes the feeling; "What drove Luther, however, first to despair and then to grace was not a fear of suffering in hell, but the overwhelming sense that this is what he *deserved*. Not the mere fact of God's wrath, but its incontestable rightness brought his existence to its crisis. For man can face enormous suffering with nobility and courage if with Job he is sure of his innocence or with Prometheus he is sure of God's guilt. What defines Luther's experience as that of guilt is precisely the absence of these comforts." (1987: 76).

ourselves, but it concerns the way we understand ourselves *qua* human beings. May understands moralized guilt as designating a "putatively innate corruption of human nature" 1999: 70), and Risse speaks about the "very fact of one's being human" (2001: 65) determining the kinds of debts we have towards God. Here, moralized guilt does not involve an understanding of what a good person does, but purports to tell us about human nature *an sich*. Similarly, Owen tells us that moralized guilt contains both the idea of having been able to act otherwise, and the thought that "human existence is itself characterized by the feeling of guilt" (2007: 109). Janaway emphasizes that a further part of the process of moralization entails the notion that to feel guilty is itself a requirement for the good person:

> Moralization is the elevation of feeling guilty into a virtue, its incorporation into what the morally good individual is or does, into a conception of the kind of person one should want to be, be, by means of the rationalizing metaphysical picture in which the individual's essential instinctual nature deserves maltreatment, because it stands in antithesis to an infinite creditor. (2007: 142).

Here we see that moralized guilt is no longer primarily related to specific acts, but rather that it posits an understanding of human nature as deserving to be punished. These accounts, therefore, closely mirror the Christian accounts of both hereditary and existential sin we saw in the previous chapter, they understand human nature itself to be sinful.

The distinction between these two different ways of understanding moralized guilt is especially important when we consider the fact that, for Nietzsche, moralized guilt should be understood to be the same as the feeling of sinfulness the ascetic priest promotes. In the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche turns to the ascetic priest's use of guilt. He there argues that guilt took on the shape of sin in the hands of the ascetic priest, and I will show later in this chapter that this shape should be understood as existential sin. This "dangerous and fateful trick of religious interpretation" (GM III:20) meant that this incarnation of guilt

became disconnected from specific actions, and focused entirely upon one's human nature.[33] In other words, the feeling of sinfulness is no longer related to specific acts that one does, but rather to the fact of one's human nature. I submit that these considerations tell decisively in favour of the second line of interpretation outlined above. By understanding moralized guilt as continuing to concern specific actions and not our conception of human nature, Leiter and Ridley have no way of accounting for the transformation of moralized guilt into sin.

2.3.2 Indebtedness to God

For Nietzsche, guilt becomes problematic once the Christian God is in the picture. Feelings of guilt and indebtedness are simply part of living in communities, and a feeling of indebtedness towards ancestors is an extension of this. Even the transformation of these ancestors into deities is not necessarily a negative development, but it is the introduction of the Christian God that makes feelings of indebtedness more intense and problematic. This argument relies on Nietzsche's account of the radical alterity of the Christian God, as discussed in the first part of this chapter. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche offers the following narrative: "the sense of guilt towards the divinity has continued to grow for several thousands of years, and always in the same proportion as the concept and sense of god has grown and risen into the heights" (GM II:20).[34] It is this conception of God's nature that allows guilt (and sin) to grow so tremendously.

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[33] As seen in chapter one, understanding sin as being a deserved punishment, or understanding our sinful state as being deserving of punishment can both be found in many works within the Christian tradition (e.g. Augustine, Aquinas, Barth, Luther, Bonaventure). They also designate a distinction between two different types of sin; hereditary sin and actual sin. The second, which generally concerns specific acts that transgress God('s laws), leads to punishment unless one repents (see for example Genesis 4:7). The first, which understands sin itself as a state of punishment, tends to be thought of in relation to Adam, where all of humankind is punished as a result of Adam's transgression. Human nature becomes depraved and corrupt; the consequence of the punishment is a "hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature" (Calvin 2006: II.1.8), or "ignorance, difficulty, and death" (Augustine 2010: 3.20.26).

[34] Douglas Smith translates "*Gottesbegriff und das Gottesgefühl*" as "the concept and sense of god", whereas Carol Diethe's translation is "concept of and feeling for God". Within the context of the passage, we can make sense of either translation, but I suggest that Smith's is more accurate. Nietzsche's argument concerns the

As Risse writes, "if we bring the Christian God into the story, we can easily explain why there is now an experience of reprehensible failure (existentially conceived): for we now have introduced the figure *vis-à-vis whom* this failure is experienced" (2005: 50). Feeling guilty or indebted for a particular occurrence in our life, or even feeling indebted towards our ancestors for allowing us to come into existence does not necessarily involve an experience of failure. This is because we often feel that we can make up for the wrong we have done, or we can live up to the expectations of our parents, live up to the image of our ancestors. When God is in the picture, however, we know we cannot redeem ourselves nor live up to the ideal. After all, God's nature is radically different from ours, and we know we will never be able to live up to His image. Nietzsche tells us that some of the narratives and imagery of Christianity, as well as the work of the ascetic priests, increase our feelings of indebtedness, our feelings of sin.[35] Bernard Reginster argues that "[e]mphasizing indebtedness toward God, as some commentators propose to do, will not help" in understanding the moralization of guilt. His view is that "[i]f the feeling of indebtedness itself by no means decreases my worth as a person, it is hard to see how making it indebtedness toward God could have this effect." (2011: 67), but this reasoning appears to misunderstand the particular position of God. It is entirely conceivable that indebtedness *towards* God decreases a person's self-worth, even if indebtedness in any other context does not do so. To be aware of our nature, in this picture, means to be aware of our shortcomings and to judge ourselves negatively, because we are so unlike the exemplar God. This is indeed what many Christian thinkers argue, as shown in section 1.2.1. We can, for example, find a convincing account of this thought in Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the *before God* serves to

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conception of any deity, and by writing God with a capital 'G', we would be implying that this sentence concerns the Abrahamic God exclusively.

[35] See more in section 1.2.1. In addition, outside of Nietzsche we can find a convincing account of this thought in Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the *before God* serves to show precisely that standing in a relation to God changes everything about indebtedness; "[W]hat really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God" (1980b: XI 192).

show precisely that standing in a relation to God changes everything about indebtedness; "[W]hat really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God" (1980b: XI 192).

The importance of the figure of the Christian God requires a closer examination of the *emergence* of God. In section 22 of the Second Essay, Nietzsche tells us about the origin of "the holy God". He writes that "[the] man of bad conscience has assumed control of the religious presupposition in order to carry his self-punishment to the most horrific pitch of harsh intensity." (GM II:22). Humans have a will to self-cruelty and a will to find oneself guilty, which can be seen most powerfully in the relation that is posited between the holy God and humans with their "absolute unworthiness" (ibid.).

I suggest that there are three different ways we can read section 22. We can, on the one hand, interpret this section to be telling us about the contingent historical event of the emergence of the Christian God. What is found is that this is an event caused by humanity's need to find itself guilty, and the positing of this Christian God in turn causes humans to feel increasingly guilty, and to find themselves even more wretched. This kind of reading is offered by Janaway (2007) and Ridley (2005).[36] The second interpretation of section 22 suggests that God came *before* guilt, as proposed by Risse (2001, 2005). I will defend a third interpretation, which holds that God and the will to self-cruelty emerged together.

Firstly, Ridley writes that section 22 is about "the invention of the Christian concept of God" (2005: 40). This invention is, for Ridley, not a condition for the "moralized concept of guilt", as guilt existed before God came into the picture. Ridley paints a picture in which guilt is

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[36] A similar account is offered by Reginster, who says that "[moralized guilt] is rather a different process whereby the concepts of guilt and obligation, already understood in a generic moral sense, are enrolled in the service of the aims of morality understood in a specific sense, namely, as "slave morality" or "Christian" morality." (2011: 69). He argues that Christianity perverts guilt by putting guilt in the category of the 'before God'.

"logically prior to the concept of God" (ibid. 41). In other words, the concept of the Christian God is dependent for its emergence on guilt, but guilt is not dependent upon God. For Ridley, this temporal causal narrative is therefore one where God comes after guilt, and the emergence of this idea of God is caused by the kind of guilt humans already felt, concluding that "only the guilty need God" (ibid.). Janaway has a similar reading and describes Nietzsche's account as follows;

> [W]e need to be cruel to ourselves, so we invent the notion of ourselves as wrongdoers in order to legitimize the self-cruelty; then in order to sustain the notion of ourselves as wrongdoers we resort to a metaphysical picture in which we are bound to transgress against something absolute that is placed there for that very purpose. (2007: 137)

This "metaphysical picture" is one in which the Christian God takes centre stage. Janaway argues that God is a consequence of our desire to "legitimize our self-cruelty", we create and use the idea of God in order to live with ourselves as self-cruel beings. The reason why we need to be cruel to ourselves, according to Janaway, is because in our society we are not able to act on our instincts. And indeed, this is what Nietzsche writes towards the beginning of the Second Essay; once people started to live together in communities many of their instincts had to be channelled or denied. This leads to people taking their violent drives out on *themselves*, rather than on others. Janaway argues that we legitimize this cruelty aimed at ourselves through the story told to us by Christianity.

But Janaway's and Ridley's interpretations are unsatisfactory in a number of ways. First of all, they appear to conflate Nietzsche's use of a historical narrative with teleological claims. Janaway's suggestion that the metaphysical picture Christianity offers us was *placed* for the *purpose* of considering ourselves as sinful misses the point. Nietzsche importantly tells us that "there is a world of difference between the reason for something coming into existence in the first place and the ultimate use to which it is put" (GM II:13). Moreover, he claims that this is

the most important principle for "all types of history". So when Janaway and Ridley posit structured teleological accounts of guilt we must seriously question them.

However, even if we were to accept Janaway's and Ridley's approach to the *Genealogy* problems remain. If we need to legitimize our cruelty to such an extent, then why did it, historically, take so long before Christianity emerged? And, if the response to that question is that there are other ways in which we can cope with our self-cruelty, why did Christianity emerge in the first place? One could of course locate the emergence of Christianity elsewhere, but Ridley and Janaway locate it precisely as a consequence of self-cruelty.

The second interpretation of section 22 comes from Risse. He argues that "[…] guilt of the sort that Nietzsche wants to explain arises only because there is a Christian notion of God already operative" (Risse 2005: 48). The kind of criticism that Ridley levels at Risse, namely that this means guilt is inconceivable after the death of God, is misguided as "it can both be true that guilt is 'separable' from the notion of God […] *and* that guilt could not have arisen without the notion of God being operative." (ibid. 49). In other words, the fact that moralized guilt as sin only emerged when Christianity was around is simply contingent; it appeared at that point in history, but it could have also appeared at another point.

After all, showing that the will to self-cruelty arose in a Christian framework does not tell us anything about the *necessity* of that framework – this is precisely the point of a genealogical method. Furthermore, the origin of a concept, and in this case the origin of God, does not necessarily tell us anything about it *now*. The factors that were in play that made it possible for God and sin to come into being do not have to be in play anymore. These concepts can take on a life of their own, which can mean that they are no longer dependent upon the conditions of their origin. Therefore, if we want to understand the relation between sin and

God in the *Genealogy*, we should not be focusing merely on the emergence of the Christian God.

2.3.3 Sin and suffering

In the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche offers a further account of the relation between sin and God that focuses on the growth of Christianity rather than its origins, and this is where we begin to see more clearly why Nietzsche's account is so important to understand existential sin. In order to explain the growing influence of Christianity, Nietzsche turns to the problem of suffering. He writes that people do not struggle with suffering as such, but they struggle with *meaningless* suffering. Suffering, for Nietzsche, is a necessary part of life. As Leiter writes, Nietzsche believes that "[s]uffering is a central fact of the human condition." (2015: 205). We do, however, desire to *understand* suffering, and struggle to accept any suffering that we perceive as meaningless.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*'s section 9, Nietzsche's interpretations of Oedipus and Prometheus serve to emphasize this point. Oedipus shows the necessity of suffering in human life, and furthermore Prometheus shows us that suffering is not all bad: if we want to achieve progress, suffering is necessary. In the case of Oedipus, Sophocles describes Oedipus as being "born for pain" (1984: 232), a slave "to the worst relentless pains that ever plagued a man", and that his acts "were acts of suffering more than actions outright" (ibid. 290, 299). Oedipus's story teaches us about the necessity of suffering as well as the link between suffering and wisdom. He needed to find truth, searches for it obsessively in *Oedipus the King*. Yet knowledge brings him suffering and misery. As Tyler T. Roberts writes; "suffering, as an effect of wisdom, leads to blessedness […]. This blessedness is not so much a 'hope' for restored oneness as a recognition of the fact of oneness, of the fact of the close link between suffering

and joy, pain and wisdom" (1998: 109). Oedipus has seen into the heart of things, and he knows that suffering belongs to it.

Similarly, the task of Prometheus is really not comprehensible *without* suffering. Prometheus considers suffering a necessity; "I must bear the fate allotted to me as best I may, because I know one cannot fight with the power of necessity" (Aeschylus 2013: 16). As opposed to Oedipus, who strives for self-knowledge but ultimately fails in this quest, Prometheus does have this self-knowledge, which also means that his attitude to suffering is different from Oedipus'. Whereas Oedipus does not feel entirely responsible for his actions, and therefore his sufferings do not seem to him to be entirely deserved, Prometheus does accept and even embraces the suffering accorded to him.

Prometheus' task cannot be imagined without the consequences of suffering, because the Promethean myth tells us something essential about the relation between suffering and progress. Nietzsche writes that in the Promethean myth it becomes clear that in order for humans to achieve "the best and highest", they must suffer. Suffering is not something to be done away with, but it is an essential part of life and indeed an essential part of progress. This means that the Promethean myth offers a "justification of human evil – of human guilt as well as of the suffering incurred thereby" (BT: 9). For progress, suffering is necessary.

Nietzsche holds onto these positions throughout his work. For him, suffering in itself does not constitute a problem that he believes requires redemption. However, a problem appears when the suffering is understood to be meaningless. There is a drive in all humans to explain suffering, to try and make sense of it. We desire to find a reason for our suffering. We are not able to suffer quietly; instead we feel the need to understand why it is happening. Our understanding of the reason for our suffering is essential in making the suffering bearable. This desire for an explanation plays into the power that sin can have over us. Imagine that you

have a chronic condition that has not yet been fully understood by medial science, such as fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome. Every day you experience a suffering that often interferes with your functioning in society. No explanation for your suffering is really given, nor do you know exactly what you can do in order to decrease your suffering. This situation that you find yourself in has no satisfying reason, no justification, no meaning. This lack of understanding, Nietzsche tells us, is unbearable. And our solution as human beings is to find an answer, in whatever way we can. This is, as I posited in the introduction to this thesis, an ontological claim. To be human means to desire an explanation for suffering. An answer to the question of suffering that posits that *we* are the reason for our own suffering therefore is in some ways actually satisfying to us, because it allows us to understand suffering and thereby to live with it. We are content to misunderstand suffering as long as this misunderstanding provides us with some peace of mind, that it has other suffering as its consequence is not a problem; this is the suffering that we desire, in Nietzsche's terms it is a suffering that we *will*.

Nietzsche tells us that the ascetic priests managed to increase the prevalence of sin tremendously. They did so by tapping into people's need for an explanation of suffering. The need for an explanation of suffering is ontological, but the particular answer that the ascetic priest gave is not; the ascetic priest offered a new meaning for suffering that is historically contingent. The meaning offered by the priests is one of guilt; it is one in which human beings are sinful and irredeemable, the only relief available existing in another world. There is suffering because *we* are to blame, because *we* are *sinful*. What characterizes the sinner in this picture is that *all* suffering is felt as caused by herself.

Leiter fleshes out the ascetic priest's explanation for suffering by arguing that we must understand it in relation to the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal, in which self-denial is celebrated as a virtue, is impossible for humans to live up to. Leiter argues that "[t]he ascetic priest seizes upon this fact in order to provide a meaning for human suffering: in a nutshell,

one suffers, according to the priest, as punishment for failure to live up to the ascetic ideal." (2015: 209). The guilt that the ascetic priest transforms into sin is related to being unable to live up to the specific commandments of God that are connected to the ascetic ideal. Leiter therefore understands the explanation of the priest in a very specific way: we deserve to suffer because we cannot live up to the ascetic ideal. And indeed, the fact that the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* is centred on the ascetic ideal and its influence upon the psychology of Western Europe lends plausibility to Leiter's interpretation. However, this is too narrow an interpretation of the specific shape of guilt that Nietzsche argues is transformed into sin. The experience of sin that Nietzsche describes in section 20 of the Third Essay tells us that the guilt the sinner feels is "everywhere", it is all-encompassing: it does therefore not concern only an inability to live up to one standard.

Indeed, the concept of sin provides an overarching narrative that gives a certain meaning to *everything* in the life of the 'sinner', and this narrative is closely related to *suffering*. We understand our own suffering now as deserved, as punishment for our guilt. Here we posit a relation between suffering, punishment and guilt. The description Nietzsche offers us does not refer to the sinner punishing herself because she is guilty. Instead, what we have is the sinner interpreting suffering that she is experiencing in a way that corresponds to her self-understanding. This does not mean that when she stubs her toe she blames her sinful nature: in such a case the causal chain of events that causes the pain in her toe can remain clear, and trivial. But we have to remember that it is the overarching narrative of sin that we are concerned with. The suffering that Nietzsche talks about is not merely the suffering of a stubbed toe or a temporary headache, but rather the existence of suffering as such.

In the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche gives us the following description; "Man, suffering from himself in some way […], uncertain as to why and wherefore, desiring reason – reasons are a relief – […] and behold! he receives a hint […] from the ascetic priest, the first

hint as to the 'cause' of his suffering: he is to seek it in *himself*, in some *guilt* […]" (GM III:20). What characterizes this sinner is that suffering is felt as caused by herself. The explanation of suffering that is offered by the priests is one of sin and guilt: there is suffering because *we* are to blame, because *we* are *sinful*. As Risse writes, "it is only when the ascetic priests introduce the Christian 'maximal God' that the moral psychology of guilt arises" (2005: 51).

A problem appears here, however. The claim concerning suffering does not seem to accurately capture Christian doctrines of suffering. There are important examples in both the Old and New Testament that seem to hold the opposite. The Book of Job is perhaps the most explicit example of this. Here, we find that God scolds Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar precisely because they tried to explain Job's suffering. Job's suffering had no other reason than that God allowed him to suffer (after being challenged by Satan), it was not because Job had sinned. Important to this story is that the personal guilt of Job is not at all relevant to his suffering.[37] In fact, God declares him to be his most faithful. Similarly in John 9 we find Jesus saying that the blind man was not suffering because of his sin; "his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (1 Jn: 9).

These examples make clear that the relation posited between sin and suffering in Christianity is not accurately captured by an account that states that a person suffers *because* she is sinful. Of course this does not contradict that the idea of a causal relation between suffering and particular sins may find its place in the discourse of the aesthetic priest (as in the case of Job's

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[37] For more detailed philosophical interpretations of Job, see Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* pp. 314-322, Girard, *I see Satan Fall Like Lightning*, pp.117-118., Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 8.265- 8.267, and Stump's *Wandering in Darkness*, pp. 177-226. Although varied in interpretation, all of these accounts affirm the importance of the idea that Job is not suffering because of his personal guilt.

putatively pious friends). However, there is a way to make sense of Nietzsche's account nonetheless, without attributing to him a caricature of Christian thought. This is to think about suffering and sin on a global scale, and not a personal one. The difference here is between the statements "I am suffering because I am a sinner" and "there is suffering because we, as human beings, are sinful". The second would allow the idea that suffering *as such* exists because of the sinful nature of humans, rather than individual cases of suffering being directly linked to a sinful action. Despite this universalized sense of sinfulness and suffering, the individual person will still *feel* sinful because *she* is human. Again, the emphasis is on an overarching feeling of sinfulness rather than locally-reactive guilt – and indeed, an overarching feeling about what it means to be human rather than a feeling about what it means to be a specific individual. If we accept this reading of sin, and I suggest that we must, we are able to remove the contradiction between Nietzsche's above account of sin and the Christian picture as portrayed in Job and John. The explanation that the ascetic priest offers concerns the notion that human nature as such is sinful, which leaves room for a person such as Job to not deserve the suffering he, as an individual, endures.

This account, that explains suffering on a global scale, is entirely compatible with the accounts of sin that I discussed in the previous chapter. Although Paul struggles with himself as an individual, the basis for his struggle is in the fact of his human nature. It is useful here to think of the notion of hereditary sin: although we each of us are sinful, this is not because of any particularities of our existence, but rather because we are human.

So, in the story Nietzsche wants to tell, the positing of God and sin has enabled us to find an answer for suffering. But this answer, he thinks, causes a different kind of suffering. Nietzsche writes: "[w]e have here a sort of madness of the will showing itself in mental cruelty which is absolutely unparalleled: man's *will* to find himself guilty and condemned without hope of reprieve […]" (GM II:22). The will to find oneself guilty, an extension of the

will to self-cruelty, is expressed in the idea of God and the idea of moral perfection. There is a "madness of the will"; the answer to the meaninglessness of suffering is cruelty towards ourselves. But is this not contradictory to what we previously established, namely that the offering of an explanation for suffering helps the sinner live? In some sense, yes. The explanation of 'sin' does not help, in fact, the sinner experiences pain, fear, agony, cramps and cries out for a release from this suffering. And this, I think, is precisely Nietzsche's point. He tells us in the final section of the *Genealogy* that the introduction of the perspective of guilt brought with it "new suffering", which is a "deeper, more internal, more poisonous, gnawing suffering" (GM III:28). Because of this new and different kind of suffering, the sinner is still seeking redemption. The understanding of guilt has explained some suffering for her, but her suffering has not diminished, it has merely transformed. Nietzsche therefore posits two different types of suffering here. Firstly, there is the suffering without an explanation, and secondly there is the suffering that is caused by the specific explanation for suffering sin gives.

The ascetic priests posit guilt as the explanation for suffering in that human beings are sinful and irredeemable, and furthermore they tell us that the only relief we may ever find will be in another world. These two sides of the ascetic priest's explanation are important to examine. According to this explanation there is suffering in this world because of our human nature, and we must orient ourselves away from this world in order to find some kind of redemption.

Thus, the purpose and meaning that follow from the ascetic priest's answer are not aimed at our world. For Nietzsche they involve a "hatred of the human" and result in "an aversion to life" (GM III:28). After all, the place where we can be without suffering is beyond our domain. We live in a world where there is suffering, but we should orient ourselves towards an afterlife – the afterlife itself gives meaning to our suffering. This "aversion to life" is what the *will to nothingness* entails. The explanation the ascetic priest provides for suffering, and

consequently the way people then are able to give meaning to their lives, represent this same will to nothingness.

The will to self-cruelty, to find yourself guilty, should be interpreted as an expression of this will to nothingness. To say, as Janaway does, that the will to self-cruelty is prior to the will to nothingness, that "cruelty is the base", is mistaken (2007: 137). Janaway clearly acknowledges that for Nietzsche the Christian God plays a unique role, and in Christianity "[i]t belongs to the human essence to be transgressive against absolute values, and so the consciousness of guilt is inbuilt, perpetual, and profound" (ibid. 139), but he takes the Second Essay of the *Genealogy* as telling us about self-cruelty as a general fact or problem of human life, not just of life in the Christian world. What Janaway misses is that there is something about the particular importance of self-cruelty to the individual in the Christian framework that we do not find in Nietzsche's description of Greek society. If we look at Janaway's reading of the *Genealogy*, this self-directed cruelty should be there for any society with laws and regulations that force us to control some of our violent instincts, if they are not able to be discharged in any other way.

In section 23 of the *Genealogy*, however, Nietzsche tells us something different. The Greek gods enabled people to live proudly and with "freedom of soul", the gods were used to "keep 'bad conscience' at bay" (GM II:23). If the Christian God is simply a logical consequence of the need for self-cruelty and this self-cruelty is a part of life in any society, then why did the Greeks have gods that were experienced so differently from the Christian God? Perhaps one might argue that the Greek society was not as restrictive as the Christian one – but this would again point to there being something specific about Christianity that enabled self-cruelty to become so important. Nietzsche writes, for example, that the Greeks explained "what is bad and disastrous" by referring to "foolishness, *not* sin!" (GM II:23). They therefore resorted to an entirely different framework of understanding the world and of explaining the world.

It appears that the Greeks did not need to resort to self-cruelty in order to explain suffering in the world. Their explanation blamed someone else, namely the gods. The gods in the Greek society had a different role to the Christian God: "at that time they did not take upon themselves the execution of punishment, but rather, as is *nobler*, the guilt" (GM II:23). This shows that the drive to self-cruelty that Nietzsche writes about comes *after* the need to explain suffering. Nietzsche's description of Greek society shows us that self-cruelty is but one possible answer to this need.

So: is the will to self-cruelty the consequence of the specific response to the will to nothingness given by the ascetic priests and Christianity? Both the will to nothingness and the will to self-cruelty are representative of a general drive towards self-cruelty that define humans in the Christian world. In order to explain this, I want to return to the question of the relation between God and sin. What I propose is that (moralized) guilt or sin are not logically or ontologically prior to God, but neither is God logically or ontologically prior to them.

2.3.4 Sin and God

Janaway and Ridley rely on a framework in which answers only come into existence once the question is accurately stated. Nietzsche's account is more complex, however. The question is 'why is there meaningless suffering?' and the answer that the ascetic priest offers is 'because you are to blame'. This seems fairly straight-forward. However, when we bring the will to self-cruelty into play, things become more complicated. The will to self-cruelty is *expressed* in sin; sin provides a way in which this will to self-cruelty is channelled. But, the will to self-cruelty as channelled into sin only provided an answer to the question of meaningless suffering *once sin was already in place.*

Simon May writes that "one of the central truths to which the whole Genealogy has been leading – that man tolerates and even wills suffering providing he is shown a meaning for it –

is just another expression of moral thinking and its religious roots" (2011: 80). This train of thought gets us closer to a convincing interpretation of Nietzsche. For May, as opposed to Janaway and Ridley, "moral thinking and its religious roots" is prior to the need to explain suffering. This reflects the difference between the Christian and Greek cultures in Nietzsche, and gives us insight into the relation to suffering that seems to essential to Nietzsche's understanding of Christianity.

If we return to section 23 of the Second Essay, Nietzsche describes the Greek gods as follows: "those reflections of noble and self-controlled [*selbstherrlicher*] men in whom the *animal* in man felt himself deified, and did *not* tear himself apart, did *not* rage against himself!" According to Nietzsche, this raging against itself, this self-cruelty, was therefore not present for the ancient Greeks. However, Nietzsche is not saying that it could not have been present; in fact he claims that 'bad conscience' was kept at bay by the Gods, not that it was non-existent in this world. It might be possible to conceive of a person in Greek society who struggles with their 'bad conscience'. Her relationship to the gods may not have allowed them to place guilt with them, rather than with herself – and despite not having a concept of sin in place, this appears at the very least a possible scenario. This appears to support May's suggestion that the *particular shape* the will to nothingness and the will for an explanation of suffering take is dependent upon the Christian framework.

Risse's reading is similar to May's, although he goes one step further and argues that the will to self-cruelty and the need to explain suffering, and the Christian God, can be dependent upon each other. Risse agrees with May insofar as for both of them guilt or sin could not have arisen without a notion of the Christian God. Risse goes further, however, and also states that we can still conceive of moralized guilt *without* God, even though God was necessary for the emergence of guilt. As we saw him say earlier in this chapter; "it can both be true that guilt is 'separable' from the notion of God [...] *and* that guilt could not have arisen without the

notion of God being operative" (Risse 2005: 49). However, I want to go one step further still. On the account I propose, Nietzsche's claims are best interpreted as advancing a 'no-priority' thesis about the relationship between the ideas of God and sin: these are mutually dependent and take shape together.

On this account, the emergence of the will to nothingness as the main driving force of humans, through sin, could not have occurred without an idea of the Christian God – but the Christian God would have been entirely unbelievable and unconvincing as a God without the will to nothingness. This we see in Nietzsche when he writes; "'Only when you *repent* does God have mercy on you' – to a Greek, that is an object of ridicule and an annoyance; he would say, 'Maybe slaves feel that way'" (GS: 135). In other words, the Christian God and how people relate to Him would have been an object of *ridicule* for the Greeks. This is because generally the Greeks did not *suffer* from the will to nothingness, they did not suffer from the kind of drive to self-cruelty that so defines the person living in relation to the Christian God.

The suggestion Janaway, Ridley, Reginster and others make is that the will to self-cruelty can be conceptualised without God. The problem here is that if we consider the will to self-cruelty to provide us with an answer to the problem of meaningless suffering, it cannot actually be an answer unless the Christian God is in the picture. The idea that we, by virtue of being human beings, are ourselves to blame for suffering is one that Nietzsche considers to be exclusively Christian. The will to self-cruelty, that for Nietzsche leads to sin, requires a conception of God in order to be an effective way to explain suffering.

If this interpretation is right, both the idea that sin is prior to God, and that God is prior to sin oversimplify Nietzsche's account of this relationship. The will to nothingness as channelled into sin and the Christian God are dependent upon each other for their emergence and

propagation. Sin took hold of people and spread like a sickness, which could only happen because there was a need for an explanation for suffering. This explanation for suffering is universal, and not particular to any Christian or Greek context. But the shape that the explanation took, sin and the accompanying will to self-cruelty, was possible only in relation to the Christian conception of God. However, as we can see from Nietzsche's writings on Greek culture, the Christian God would not have been successfully implanted or resonated without the concept of sin and the will to self-cruelty.

So where does this leave us? One of the main objections Risse tries to fight off is that if we posit such a strong relation between sin and God, we cannot think of moralized guilt as existing without God. Ridley writes that if God is required for guilt, then "the notion of guilt should eventually […] wither away once the consequences of the death of God are fully acknowledged" (2005: 43). Furthermore, there is a problem in that "it is implausible to insist that guilt occurs only in cultures that have developed a Christian notion of God" (Risse 2005: 52). These objections, as Risse rightly points out, do not hold up. Firstly they do not take into account the difference between guilt and *moralized* guilt or sin. This distinction, that allows us to understand moralized guilt in the specific form of sinfulness, is the accurate way to read Nietzsche's Second and Third Essays. Secondly, contra Ridley, is in my view not at all implausible to suggest that Christianity has been influential to such an extent that it influenced and dictated particular forms of self-understanding, particular ways of viewing ourselves and the world.[38] In fact, this is an important part of Nietzsche's philosophical project, to understand and expose the psychology of existence in the Western European paradigm. Thirdly, the suggestion appears to be that the mutual dependence of moralized guilt and God in their emergence necessarily means there is a continual dependence. This latter point is rejected by Nietzsche throughout his work, which I will demonstrate in the third chapter of

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[38] Nietzsche's account is compatible with the thought that other religions could have done the same, though admittedly in different places or times.

this thesis. In this chapter I will suggest that sin can coherently and plausibly be thought of as continuing to exist after the death of God.

In summary, Nietzsche's account of sin in the *Genealogy* focuses on guilt and the idea of God. Sin originates when an indebtedness towards ancestors becomes transformed into an indebtedness towards gods. With the emergence of the Christian God, this indebtedness becomes a 'moralized guilt', where our guilt no longer reflects specific locally-reactive actions, but our human nature. It may seem that transgressive sin offers a very different account, as we saw that Nietzsche focuses on specific transgressions of God's law. There, to understand sin means to understand a specific act as being a transgression against God. However, even in his account of transgressive sin we can find an existential dimension; by positing the law as unfulfillable, Nietzsche argues, Christianity aimed to make people feel as sinful, as guilty, as possible. The guilt that was encouraged as a response to a transgression went beyond feeling bad for one action, instead this one action is to be thought of as emblematic for one's entire nature: as human beings we will always transgress God's laws, because our nature cannot allow us to fulfil its requirements.

In the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* we see in more detail how for Nietzsche Christianity promoted a sense of guilt and sin in humans. Through the work of the ascetic priests, people's self-cruelty turned inwards and transformed into a sense that there was something fundamentally wrong with them as human beings. And if we want to understand this feeling of existential sin, there is no better place to turn to than the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*.

2.4 Existential sin: the "hypnotic gaze of the sinner"

In the Third Essay, Nietzsche offers us a description of the experience of existential sin that is one of the most vivid in the literature since Paul:

> No matter where one looks, one meets the hypnotic gaze of the sinner, always moving in the same direction (in the direction of 'guilt', as the *sole* cause of suffering); everywhere the evil conscience, this '*abominable beast*' to use Luther's phrase; everywhere the regurgitation of the past, the distortion of the deed, the 'jaundiced eye' for all activity; everywhere the *will* to misunderstand suffering, its reinterpretation into feelings of guilt, the content of life reduced to fear and punishment, everywhere the whip, the hair-shirt, the starving body, remorse; everywhere the sinner stretching himself on the cruel rack of a restless, sickly, lascivious conscience; everywhere the dumb pain, the most extreme fear, the agony of the tortured heart, the cramps of an unknown happiness, the cry for 'redemption' (GM III:20).

This quote will be the basis of our understanding of existential sin, and I will show that two aspects are particularly important: (i) sin colours our understanding of (past) experience, and, (ii) those who experiences themselves as 'sinners' are those who desire punishment and pain.

Firstly, when we talk about sin colouring experiences, and especially past experiences, what we mean is that sin provides an overarching narrative that offers a new perspective upon a person's life and her world as a whole. In this way it goes beyond merely feeling guilty for a certain act, or even a period in one's life. Nietzsche talks about "regurgitation of the past", "distortion of the deed", "the 'jaundiced eye' for all activity". This latter metaphor is particularly helpful. We can think of sin-consciousness as a change in vision, as putting on new, different, and according to Nietzsche distorted, glasses. This means that when we look at past events and experiences, we see them anew. We now see everything in light of our own sinfulness, our unworthiness.

Let us sketch this out in some more detail. The act of looking back upon our past actions and experiences is a common experience for most, if not all, of us. Our present situation, state of mind, emotional well-being, and other factors will always play a role in how we interpret our past and perhaps distort this past somewhat. Furthermore, it tends to be at times in which we do not feel well that we tend to *regurgitate our past* the most. When we are already anxious about a certain situation, or full of regrets over messing up a presentation a couple of hours ago, we can easily get trapped in an avalanche of regrets, suddenly-remembered embarrassing

moments and overwhelming shame. Nietzsche's description of the sinner seems to refer to a similar experience. We relive our past, we distort our actions, we view the world with new eyes. We do not merely view the world in a new way, we view it through *sick* eyes, jaundiced eyes. Nietzsche tells us that these sick eyes are not a localized illness, the sickness of sin pervades us.

A useful way to understand what this means is by simply imagining our anxiety-laden moment of shame about our past actions as being constant, being *everywhere*. It is not a temporary emotional slump that altered our view, it is an all-encompassing existential stance that informs the way we look at the world. This is why Nietzsche places such emphasis on the *everywhere*, and the eye for *all activity*.

When Nietzsche talks about "everywhere the whip, the hair-shirt, the starving body, remorse; everywhere the sinner stretching himself on the cruel rack of a restless, sickly, lascivious conscience", the focus shifts from external suffering to suffering that the sinner inflicts upon herself. Nietzsche's allusions to Christian penitents and ascetics ("the whip, the hair-shirt, the starving body") are not accidental here. There is a long history of practices of penitence and asceticism in which practitioners aim to acknowledge their own sinfulness. Penitents would have committed particular sins for which they had to atone – and part of the atonement was through acts of self-flagellation, for a set period of time. This temporal limitation does not seem to apply in Nietzsche's description of the sinner, and we must recognize the importance of Nietzsche's repetition of the word 'everywhere'. His point, therefore, is not simply that such practices exist within Christian traditions, but that they give expression to the fundamental form of self-understanding associated with the existential category of sin.

The kind of sin-consciousness that Nietzsche is describing does not relate merely to specific acts, then, but to a person's existence as such. The world-view of the sinner is not that she is

wrong because of one thing she may have done, but rather because of her nature. The transgression that requires punishment is therefore not related to specific acts, but to an existential state of being. And despite the relief of being offered an explanation for suffering, of being given an overarching picture that makes sense to us, it is difficult to find peace in it.

When Nietzsche describes the sinner as living with a "deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life" (GM III:28), or with "dumb torment, the most extreme fear, the agony of the tortured heart" (ibid. 20), he is writing with a sentiment that can be traced back to accounts such as those of Calvin and Paul.[3] Nietzsche appears to consider these descriptions themselves to contain a criticism of Christianity. For him, Christianity has made humans feel sick and feel sinful, and this has hampered their flourishing. I would suggest that both Paul and Calvin would agree with the above statement. However, for them there is a truth revealed through the feeling of sinfulness: the suffering *from* sinfulness that people experience is merely a way of living with awareness of one's existential state. We must acknowledge that Nietzsche's account serves as a critique of Christianity only if the experience of sinfulness is considered to be grounded on false propositions regarding human nature.

However, Nietzsche's understanding of sin and sinfulness is still not incompatible with much – even most – Christian thought. Nietzsche's accounts of transgressive and existential sin in particular clearly have their roots in that tradition. Sin, as Nietzsche understands it, is a robustly religious, and indeed distinctively Christian, concept, and the experience of existential sin is closely tied to the specific understanding of human nature that 'priests' offer. As Karl Jaspers writes, "[Nietzsche's] thinking has grown out of Christianity and through the Christian impulses themselves" (1952: 10, my translation).

We have arrived at a puzzle here. It is clear that Nietzsche's account of sin is rooted in the Christian tradition, and that the figure of the Christian God plays an essential role in this account. However, Nietzsche was not a Christian thinker: after all, fact he famously announced the death of God. Why, then, is his account of sin so similar to Christian accounts? Is his account of sin, in fact, purely Christian?

I have previously established that there is in fact a significant difference between Nietzsche's account of sin and the accounts of sin offered by Christian theologians; and this difference lies in the evaluation of sin. For Nietzsche, sin is a false: it is a lie that has been used by the Church in order to promote feelings of self-cruelty and self-judgment in people. For Christian thinkers, however, sin is an ontological state: to be sinful is to be human. Given that Nietzsche believes sin is based on a falsehood, we would be justified to ask why exactly he spends so much time discussing it. Even if we keep in mind Nietzsche's claim that the death of God will not simply mean an abolishment of Christian morality, and that remnants of Christianity will continue to be around for centuries to come, 'sin' as a concept will surely not survive, because it relies so heavily on the idea of the human condition as being manifest before God.

There are two parts to my answer to this. Firstly, it is by no means obvious that the 'death of God' will necessarily do away with existential sin, *even* if sin seems to require a being 'before God'. We can say that a relation to God was necessary for sin to develop, and indeed that it was necessary for anyone wanting to offer a thorough account of sin. However, it is possible for concepts to become removed from their originating conditions yet to continue existing. These 'floating' concepts can remain a part of our realm of understanding and indeed a part of people's self-understanding, even if they cannot be grounded. This can be explained by looking at the cultural dimension of sin. Sin is here understood no longer narrowly as a personal feeling of guilt towards the Christian God, but it has taken on an existence in the

cultural realm. In the next chapter I will establish in more detail what it means for sin to continue existing even for those people for whom God does not exist. In addition to Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, I will turn to Ricoeur and Hans Blumenberg in offering an account of the cultural presence of sin that allows us to make sense of the concept of post-Christian sin.

Chapter 3   Post-Christian Sin: A Nietzschean

Hypothesis

> Perhaps the day will come when the concepts of 'God' and 'sin,' which are the most solemn concepts of all and have caused the most fighting and suffering, will seem no more important to us than a child's toy and a child's pain seem to an old man… (BGE: 57)

Sin as explored so far in this thesis appears to be a thoroughly religious and Christian concept. It may therefore be puzzling that in one of the earliest parts of this thesis I discussed post-Christianity and secularization. However, the ways in which we can understand ourselves are historically situated and do not take place within a present-day vacuum. Although one of the aims of this thesis is to understand how sin can exist within a secular(ised) framework, this does not mean that it can be discussed entirely secularly. In order to understand what sin may look like in a post-Christian account, we have to understand what sin means within Christian accounts. This we saw reflected in Nietzsche's work: although he does not offer the same interpretation of the value of sin as Christian thinkers, his descriptions and understanding of what sin means and how it is experienced closely echo Christian accounts.

However, the question that we need to raise is, given that Christianity no longer holds sway in our culture, why should we be interested in looking at sin as anything other than a historical phenomenon? What is its relevance to us, now? This line of questioning suggests that we have, in a way, *moved on* from Christianity. Its idea(l)s no longer matter to us. It is this idea of *moving on* that Nietzsche questions throughout his work, and that I will attempt to bring

out in this chapter. In the introduction I defined 'post-Christian' as describing a person who lives in a culture that is historically Christian, yet also contains the message that we no longer need religion with the advent of modernity. In order to understand the experience of existential sin, we need to understand its shape in both of these aspects of Western European culture.

Jacob Taubes points out that "[w]e still wear Christian eyeglasses, although they no longer fit the eyes. Our eyes see differently, and the Christian eyeglasses are artificial." (2004: 82). In other words, our historically conditioned self-understanding, this *inherited* form of self-understanding, no longer fits us well. In this chapter I will focus on both of these claims, namely that our self-understanding is inherited, and that this particular self-understanding – that is, the form of self-understanding in which we regard ourselves as sinful has now become artificial. In considering this second claim I will discuss how existential sin might be responsive to an ontological aspect of our existence, and thereby potentially offers us insight into the human condition.

3.1 The 'death of God'

In the previous chapters, I explored the distinction between acts of sin and existential sin, and argued that existential sin describes the experience of feeling that something is wrong with oneself just by virtue of being human. Both of these concepts of sin are grounded within Christian thought and the Christian tradition, and I further argued that Nietzsche's understanding of sin is, in a fine-grained way, responsive to that tradition. However, there are two aspects of his account of sin in which we can see clearly how he moves away from Christian accounts. Firstly, he considers sin to be a false category of experience, in the sense that the concept of sin tells us nothing true about human nature. Secondly, Nietzsche explores the notion of sin as continuing to exist after the 'death of God'. For him, even after

Christianity's prevalence waned, existential sin continued to exist as a way of understanding oneself. The first of these aspects, namely that Nietzsche considers sin as not reflective of human nature, will be further discussed in section 3.4. The second requires a thorough understanding not only of sin, but also of the 'death of God'. This is what I will turn to now.

Nietzsche's famous passage reads:

> Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, 'I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!' Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. […] The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God?' he cried; 'I'll tell you! We have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers [*Wir Alle sind seine Mörder!*]. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? […] God is dead! God remains dead! [*Gott ist todt! Gott bleibt todt!*] And we have killed him! [*Und wir haben ihn getödtet!*] How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? There was never a greater deed – and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now![…] Finally he threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. 'I come too early', he then said; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. […] This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars – and yet they have done it themselves!' (GS: 125)

Most straight-forward accounts on the death of God hold that in this passage Nietzsche is announcing a diminishing of belief in the Christian God, and along with it, a rejection of Christian doctrines. For example, Richard Schacht tells us that the death of God is simply about "the abandonment of belief in God" (2003: 119, a similar but more nuanced account can be found in Reginster 2006). However, this interpretation is inadequate. Nietzsche clearly states in the passage that the madman is announcing the death of God to *atheists*, and that it is in fact these atheists who do not understand the enormity of the event: when Nietzsche writes "[t]his tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men", he is not speaking about Christians being blind to the death of God, but rather about the

atheists who do not realise the true nature of the event. Therefore, Nietzsche's point is that the consequences of the death of God go further than we naturally expect. We cannot simply reject Christianity and go on with our lives as we always have done.

And indeed, much secondary literature supports this reading. The death of God not only signals a diminishing of belief in the Christian God, but an entire way of understanding the world is undermined. Along with God, there is a rejection of metaphysics (prioritized by Hatab 2005, Pippin 2010, May 1999), morality (Löwith 1997) or a rejection of an entire sphere of meaning (May 1999, Fraser 2002). These accounts explain why Nietzsche describes the death of God as a devastating event. Not only was God killed, but along with God the ground for our understanding of the world, our explanatory narratives disappeared. As Terry Eagleton tells us, "Our conceptions of truth, virtue, identity and autonomy, our sense of history as shapely and coherent, all have deep-seated theological roots. It is idle to imagine that they could be torn from these origins and remain intact." (2014: 156). We thereby see that the 'death of God' offers another way of understanding the concept of 'post-Christian'.

In contrast to the above accounts, however, Tillich and René Girard argue that Nietzsche does not actually show the death of God at all. For Tillich the figure of Zarathustra represents the idea that the person who has killed God still needs *a* god: "Nietzsche offers a solution which shows the utter impossibility of atheism. The Ugliest Man, the murderer of God, subjects himself to Zarathustra, because Zarathustra has recognized him, and looked into his depth with divine understanding. The murderer of God finds God in man." (Tillich 1953: 47). Girard argues that the consequences of God's murder have to be religious, and that this will in fact only make God more important: "the death of God is also his birth" (Girard 1984: 831). New sacrificial rites will have to be invented, and the process of religion will thereby only continue, which explains why the madman asks "[w]hat festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves?" (GS: 125). Tillich and Girard hereby emphasize

that even if the traditional concept of the Christian God may have been rejected by the madman and the atheists, the desire and need for God still exist. The consequence of the death of God is therefore not as tremendous, though still significant, as Nietzsche thought, because what we find is a return to religion, albeit in a different shape.

The question Tillich raises, how we can synthesize Nietzsche's figure of Zarathustra with his rejection of religion, is worth asking. And indeed, Nietzsche's insistence upon one great figure, one great redeemer, who will release people from the consequences of the death of God gives pause. In the *Genealogy* he talks of "the *redeemer* of great love and contempt" (GM II:24) who will rescue us from the curse of sin and the ascetic ideal: a single individual who is able to transcend the seeming reality of this life, and instead redeems this reality. Zarathustra is portrayed as precisely this kind of individual.[39] Christopher Hamilton similarly draws our attention to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* when discussing the death of God. He argues that the murder of God is Nietzsche's individual act, and that Nietzsche murders God because "God pities men and Nietzsche pities God" (Hamilton 2007: 174).

The word *murder* is significant. Many of the secondary accounts on *The Gay Science* 125 miss the fact that Nietzsche describes the death of God as a murder.[40] Instead, they talk about the death of God as an event that simply occurred or was the result of an organic process. Nietzsche's description of the murder as having left us covered in God's blood appears to be irrelevant to them. For example, Robert Pippin describes the passage as telling us that "a kind of death has occurred" (2010: 50), and Young describes the death of God as follows: "[w]hen Nietzsche reported, in 1882, that 'God is dead', he articulated no more than the truth: the sociological fact […] that Western culture has ceased to be a religious culture" (2006: 3). All

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[39] See more on this in section 4.2.
[40] A key contrary account can be found in Girard, who emphasizes the collective aspect of the murder of God, and argues that "Nietzsche sees the disappearance of God as a horrible murder in which every man is involved" (Girard 1984: 830).

Nietzsche did, according to this interpretation, was point out a fact of life in Western Europe at the time. However, this seems rather incongruent with the actual text. Why, if all that this passage is supposed to do is describe a sociological fact, is the madman described as distraught, why does he exclaim, "…we have killed him! How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us?"? Nietzsche places the responsibility for God's murder in the hands of human beings. This is not something that happened to us, but rather something that we made happen.

And indeed, one of the messages of the madman to the atheists is the message of responsibility. When he asks, "who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it?", the message is clear: God is dead and we bear responsibility for this. If we consider the death of God to be an organic process, it is difficult to see where our responsibility lies. Similarly, if the death of God in *The Gay Science* reflects an act of Nietzsche alone, we must ask why the madman directs himself to the atheists. I suggest that in the madman's appeal to responsibility we can see reflected Nietzsche's admiration for figures such as Prometheus and Oedipus. Remember that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche argues that Prometheus knows that what he did was against the will of Zeus, and was fully aware of the consequences of his actions, but he affirms them nonetheless, and accepts any consequences (including eternal suffering). Oedipus was not as aware of the consequences of his actions, but once he realised what he had done, he accepted his responsibility. Both of these figures therefore display an acceptance of suffering and despair. This is now what is asked of the atheists in the marketplace.

The death of God parable tells us of the murder of God. God has been killed by humans, and this is an event that will be difficult to move on from. However, despite this, the atheists who hear the madman's speech are unmoved. They are responsible for God's death, but they do not seem aware of this fact. Furthermore, they do not realise the extent to which the death of God impacts the world. Instead, they think that they have already accepted the consequences of the death of God, as after all they are atheists. This portrays a misunderstanding of the impact of religion. And that is in fact one of the foundations on which this thesis stands. As opposed to thinking about religion and secularization in terms of reflectively-endorsed beliefs, Nietzsche tells us that there is more going on: despite reflectively endorsing atheism, the atheists in the marketplace still do not understand what it means for God to be dead.

In order to understand exactly what the atheists are missing, we must turn to an earlier passage in *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche there declares not only the death of God, but furthermore tells us that there are shadows of God that remain. Nietzsche describes these shadows "God is dead: but given the way people are [*so wie die Art der Menschen ist*], there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow. – And we – we must still defeat [*besiegen*] his shadow as well!" (GS: 108). If this sentence is straightforwardly interpreted, it appears that the only remnant of God is one shadow, which does not appear particularly overwhelming. However, for Nietzsche the shadow of Buddha, with which he opens the above passage, is considered to be "tremendous [and] gruesome [*ungeheuren schauerlichen*]", and we must similarly interpret God's shadow. Certainly, shadows are more one-dimensional than what they reflect, but as Nietzsche rightly points out, they can also grow larger and more terrifying in their darkness.

The fact that Nietzsche talks about a shadow, in the singular, of God, might lead one to think that the remnants of Christianity will take the specific *shape* of God. So, depending on the analysis, the shadow might refer simply to Christian religion as a whole, to metaphysical

placeholders, to any kind of world-view that requires the giving of a God-like status to any aspect of the world. This analysis is certainly compatible with what Nietzsche tells us in *The Gay Science*, but a broader interpretation is also possible. By using the metaphor of shadow, Nietzsche is telling us that there is a presence of Christianity that remains, even if we can no longer locate God. Throughout his works, Nietzsche is concerned with the consequences of the predominance of Christianity in Western Europe. The 'death of God' does not lessen his interest or worry. If the shadow of God would be interpreted strictly as a shadow taking the shape of God, we can only make sense of Nietzsche's focus if we also posit that this shadow of God *brings with it* other shadows. Otherwise, Nietzsche's project after *The Gay Science* would have been primarily dealing with aspects of life that took over the function of God. This is not the case, as *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *The Anti-Christ* and *Twilight of the Idols* very evidently show.

Furthermore, Nietzsche tells us that the shadow(s) of God, regardless of its shape, cannot simply be ignored, because even if our backs are turned it lingers. This is why Nietzsche talks about the need to *defeat* the shadow. The German *besiegen* that Nietzsche uses, implies not only defeating, but *conquering*. We must therefore be active in a pursuit of this shadow, it will not disappear on its own. Yves Ledure argues that in some sense nothing actually changes after the death of God, precisely because these shadows remain; "[c]ertainly, there is no more shepherd, there is no more God, but his shadow continues still. […] Fundamentally nothing has changed after the death of God" (1973: 126, my translation). It is therefore not simply the case that with God's death these shadows will disappear on their own, nor that they are no longer important.

3.2 Nietzsche on sin without God

Can we think about sin as one of God's shadows? The answer to this question depends on the specific concept of sin we are looking at. If we conceive of sin as a transgression against God, then sin after the death of God is difficult to conceptualize. In the previous chapters I argued that for transgressive sin the position of the *before God* is essential – we cannot properly account for transgressive sin without it. With the death of God, the notion of an active God before whom one stands in sin is no longer possible, all we can stand before is His shadow. Similarly, if we conceive of sin as a debt to God, a relation to God seems necessary. Existential sin appears to be somewhat different, however. Whereas transgressive sin and sin as a debt require an active relation to God, this is much less obviously the case for existential sin. In this chapter I will argue that we can offer a plausible account of existential sin in a post-Christian context.

I posit that we can intelligibly think of existential sin as one of God's shadows. It has gone surprisingly undetected, but its dark and vast imprint upon society's walls is there nonetheless. It impacts the ways in which we see ourselves, the way in which we are able to imagine ourselves. The eyeglasses that Taubes speaks of at the start of this chapter are coloured by the notion of sin. In the previous chapters I have begun to explain what this sin looks like, but how does it relate to a post-Christian culture? How can we make sense of 'sin' as a shadow, as a factor that still impacts contemporary life even if it is not explicitly present? What we must do now is explore how existential sin has continued to exist as a form of self-understanding even after Christianity's influence has lessened. The claim will have to be that some of the shadows that remained after God had died, are more than simply explicitly-endorsed beliefs. This means that the influence of Christianity and Christian doctrines went beyond such beliefs, it impacted upon the experience of ourselves and the world in much less explicit ways. Christianity has influenced ways in which we can understand ourselves, and

these forms of self-understanding are still present, even when the religious beliefs on which they were based are no longer here. Furthermore, these forms of self-understanding have not immediately appeared to us as misplaced or relying on an antiquated idea of the world. Nietzsche's account tells us that sin as a form of self-understanding that flies under the radar of explicit judgments can be conceived of as still being in place now.

However, some of Nietzsche's own work could be interpreted to argue the opposite. Most importantly, in section 133 of *Human, All-Too-Human* Nietzsche argues that "if the idea of God is removed, so is also the feeling of 'sin' as a trespass against divine laws, as a stain in a creature vowed to God". This passage suggests that with the disappearance of God sin will also go away. However, this passage in fact points to an important distinction within sin that we must keep in mind: transgressive sin and other forms of sin. The above passage makes specific reference to sin as transgression, "'sin' as a trespass against divine laws". And indeed, as argued above, if we understand sin to be synonymous with transgressive sin, it is difficult to see how it would survive being taken out of the Christian context. We can see very clearly that for Nietzsche, this *type* of sin is done away with when God is removed from the picture. And so, what is left now is existential sin.

3.2.1 Existential sin without God: the Genealogy

In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche writes that there is already a "decline in the human sense of guilt [*menschlichen Schuldbewusstseins*]" (GM II:20).[41] Furthermore, he says, "the prospect that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might redeem mankind entirely from this

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[41] The German word '*Schuld*' can be translated as both 'debt' and 'guilt'. Kaufmann and Hollingdale, who translate it as 'mankind's feeling of guilt', support Smith's choice of 'guilt' in this passage. However, Carol Diethe translates '*menslichen Schuldbewusstseins*' as "consciousness of human debt". This can have significant consequences for the interpretation of the passage. Brian Leiter, for example, relies on Diethe's translation in arguing that passage II:20 concerns debt, but passage II:21 concerns guilt (Leiter 2015: 189-190). I follow Smith's translation, which I believe to be clearer and more consistent. For example, Diethe appears to get into trouble in section II:21, where she translates every instance of *Schuld* as 'debt/guilt', which raises many questions on how to read the text. However, my interpretation in this chapter is in fact also compatible with Diethe's translation of II:20.

feeling of indebtedness towards its origins, its *causa prima*, cannot be dismissed [*ist nicht abzuweisen*]" (GM II:20). Nietzsche therefore signals a decline that is already taking place: as the Christian God becomes less important, people's sense of guilt towards God has also lessened. However, we can also see a hesitation on Nietzsche's part concerning the outright removal of this sense of guilt. He writes that it *might* be possible, which shows Nietzsche does not want to discount the possibility. But he certainly does not straightforwardly affirm it. We need to explore the significance of Nietzsche's hesitation.

In a similar way to *Human, All-Too-Human* 133, Nietzsche talks about a specific kind of sin, namely sin as a feeling of indebtedness towards one's (first) origins. How are we to understand this? This relates back to the historical narrative Nietzsche gives us in the *Genealogy*. The move from bad conscience to guilt involves an indebtedness towards ancestors, towards forefathers. This indebtedness is related to one's origins: it is a being indebted because you exist, because you have been able to come into existence. Now when we put this in the context of sin, the idea is that there is an indebtedness towards God because he is our *causa prima*. And so, with the death of God, we can no longer hold onto this idea. Or at least, this is an option that Nietzsche considers: an option, he says, that *cannot be dismissed*. I suggest that this means that Nietzsche himself realized that the existence of sin after the death of God is not straightforwardly obvious. Although he acknowledges the possibility of at least a certain kind of sin not existing anymore, he is clearly not convinced.

Indeed, in the next section, 21, of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche tells us the following;

> […] at the end of the previous paragraph [I] even talked as if this moralization had not taken place, and consequently, as if these concepts were from now on necessarily approaching their end, now that their pre-condition, the belief in our 'creditor', in God, has collapsed. The real situation is fearfully different. The moralization of the concepts guilt and duty, their being pushed back into *bad* conscience, actually represents an attempt to *reverse* the direction of the development just described, or at least to halt its movement. The *goal* now is the pessimistic one of closing off once and for all the prospect of a definitive repayment […], the *goal* now is to turn those

concepts 'guilt' and 'duty' back – against *whom* then? There can be no doubt: first against the 'debtor' […] (GM II:21).

We see here that Nietzsche's hesitation has turned into an outright rejection of the thesis that sin might not continue to exist after the death of God. Nietzsche suggests in this passage that the moralization of guilt has resulted not in its demise, but in fact guilt is turned back against the debtor – now that the creditor, God, is out of the picture. In other words, guilt becomes internalized because it cannot be projected onto any external source, anyone to whom we are indebted. Furthermore, as a consequence of this internalization, redemption is cut off, because there is no longer a creditor who can release our debt.

We must understand this passage not as describing the process that every single individual undergoes, but rather as an explanation of the existence of moralized guilt, of existential sin, now. One could read the above passage as symbolic for the human condition – that we all incur a debt that eventually becomes internalized. However, Nietzsche is telling us that moralized guilt may have once been primarily related to the *before God*, to a debt incurred to the figure of God, but that it has since transformed into a different kind of experience. This does not mean that every experience of existential sin takes places after the 'death of God'. In fact, we saw in the first chapter of this thesis that Nietzsche posits existential sin as first depending upon the presence of God, as the ascetic priest relies on the Christian narrative in order to posit existential sin as an answer to suffering.

But what we can see is how sin can continue to exist after the 'death of God'. Once God is out of the picture – and this need not be an explicit acknowledgment of the death of God, the transformation of guilt towards God into existential sin could occur in Christians: existential sin becomes a way of understanding oneself in the world, without having any recourse to its religious origins. As Daniel Conway writes:

> "[t]he rise of the Christian God […] completes the transformation of the concept of *debt* into the concept of *guilt*. To experience oneself as guilty is to experience oneself as permanently and irremediably indebted, independent of what God has and has not provided in recent memory. One stands *guilty* before the God of Christianity, that is, inasmuch as one's indebtedness to him is indelibly imprinted on one's very being." (Conway 2008: 91-92).

It is this imprint that remains after the death of God. There are multiple interpretations in the secondary literature describing what this imprint might look like. For example, Tracy Strong argues that "[f]or those who live without God, yet continue to act in the forms of Judeo-Christian morality, the forces of guilt that may drive them on now lack all goals, even the imagined ones" (1988: 101). Strong thereby seems to tell us that even in a post-Christian culture, the forces of guilt can still drive people, even when these forces are now without goals. For Nietzsche, the goals that were envisioned by the ascetic priest and attached to existential sin were imagined; there was no redemption, no afterlife, no God to save us, and after the death of God this seems to have come to light.

Simon May offers a further analysis of the consequences of the death of God that focuses on the will to nothingness. Recall that in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche argues that sin is posited by the ascetic priests as an explanation for meaningless suffering, and as such, it offers a way for the will to nothingness to be channelled. If we want to uphold the above account of how sin can continue to exist after the death of God, then the next step is to ask what role the will to nothingness will play here. The origin of sin, for Nietzsche, lies in indebtedness to God, but it became a truly important part of Western European people's self-understanding by positing sin as an answer to meaningless suffering. Does post-Christian sin still appear to us as an explanation for this kind of suffering?

May tells us that:

> Before the death of God, the goods posited by the will to nothingness explicitly involved a transcendent deity: suffering is a path to God, in whose realm death, loss and transience are abolished; it is redeemed by the sacrifice of his son; it is punishment for disobeying him. […] After the death of God, the underlying will

remains perfectly intact. All that changes is that the goods posited by this will are no longer structured by overtly supernatural or otherwise dualistic categories. (May 2011: 83).

We read here that the underlying mechanism of the will to nothingness continues to exist after the death of God, but that the particular form it takes changes. In other words, the Christian framework has for many lost credibility, and therefore for such post-Christians, there is no longer any recourse to supernatural narratives. This means that even though the will to nothingness, and the accompanied desire to understand meaningless suffering, remains the same – the particular narratives that it resorted to, change. If, as May argues, the will to nothingness remains the same, then for sin to continue to play a role, it would still have to offer a satisfying answer to meaningless suffering, otherwise the will to nothingness would presumably simply be channelled into something else. For example, if we can explain meaningless suffering by pointing to scientific research outcomes, then the explanation sin offers might be usurped. For May, then, the existence of sin after the death of God does not appear as a problem: we will find new narratives and new ways to explain suffering.

This certainly seems to be a plausible interpretation. Let us think about a person who fits the description of a post-Christian, and who struggles with expansive and apparent meaninglessness of suffering in the world. A priest offers her the concept of sin as a possible answer; there is suffering in the world because humans are sinful. This explanation presumably would not be received positively, as there is no metaphysical foundation which the post-Christian would be willing to accept. The explanation that sin offers would seem to her archaic, a left-over from a previous era. The problem of meaningless suffering would remain for her, and presumably she would seek a different answer to this problem. We can therefore see that existential sin here functions as a socio-historically contingent explanation for the ontological problem of meaningless suffering, and it is an explanation that has lost its appeal.

We need to therefore suggest that existential sin will only be sustained after the death of God if it is already internalized. For Nietzsche's conceptions of transgressive sin and sin as debt, this is most clearly the case: reflectively, the post-Christian will likely deny that she has committed any transgressive sin or has incurred a debt to God, because for her there is no God to refer to. Similarly, in the case of existential sin that offers an explanation for suffering, the post-Christian would struggle to explicitly and reflectively envision this as a part of her world-view. We here therefore return to the understanding of sin I proposed in the introduction: post-Christian sin is a *pre*-reflective form of self-understanding.

So how does sin become a part of people's pre-reflective self-understanding, if they have not themselves undergone a transition from debt to sin or sought an explanation for suffering? To answer this question, Strong writes that "[…] important sustaining mechanisms, such as guilt, will continue to operate even among those who consider themselves somehow free of religion." (1988: 101). Strong suggests that these mechanisms in fact can still function as sustaining mechanisms when the Christian framework is removed. If we think of guilt as a sustaining mechanism, the picture appears to look something like this: sustaining mechanisms are ways of understanding ourselves and the world that underlie our communal culture or individual convictions. They are mechanisms insofar as they may not be conscious decisions and they are sustaining insofar as there are other aspects of our understanding that rely on these mechanisms. In the case of existential sin, it functions as a sustaining mechanism that allows us to exist in the world without being overwhelmed by the problem of meaningless suffering. The fact that this mechanism may not be conscious would make it harder for them to be removed, and the fact that other important aspects of our lives might rely on it, raises the question as to whether we would want these sustaining mechanisms removed at all. Before we turn to the question of change, however, we need to understand in more detail what existential sin would look like after the death of God. Although Strong's suggestion of "mechanisms",

and May's references to the will to nothingness offer convincing interpretations of how Nietzsche can conceptualize 'shadows' after the death of God, it remains opaque exactly how existential sin might be one of these shadows. In order to understand this, we have to look at the relation between sin and Western European culture.

3.3 Sin as a cultural memory

The reason why the madman's message in the marketplace falls on the atheists' deaf ears is because they do not understand the extent to which Christianity and its concept of God have influenced their lives. This goes beyond explanatory narratives or a desire for metaphysics, as it even concerns what kind of worldview or self-understanding is possible at all. In other words, Christianity shaped the horizon of possibilities, which explains the madman's seemingly extreme claims about the earth being unchained from the sun, the sea being drunk up, a continuous falling, a straying through infinite nothing, empty space breathing at us, and a perpetual night. The death of God affects *everything*, seems to be the madman's claim.

The claim that Christianity has impacted upon Western-European culture to such an extent that even when its metaphysical basis ground is denied, much of the influence still remains, is of course difficult to definitively prove. However, we can make it both a sensible and plausible claim, if we put this thought in terms of cultural memory. The concept of cultural memory is grounded explicitly in a culture's history. Furthermore, essential to the notion of a cultural memory is the idea that there is a reciprocal relationship: we influence the cultural memory, but we are also influenced by it. This means that the concept of cultural memory allows us to not only understand how pre-reflective sin-consciousness might still exist in contemporary culture, but it also opens up a potential to *change* it. If we are still wearing the wrong eyeglasses, as Taubes claims, then a change certainly seems desirable.

If we want to first understand how a Christian concept such as sin can still have a hold over the post-Christian, it is helpful to consider what Ricoeur calls a 'retroactive cultural relation' (1969: 21). This is one of three relations that orient our culture, the others being relations in depth and lateral relations. All three dictate how we view our culture, while simultaneously being influenced by this culture. The relations in depth relate to our immersion in our own culture: when we find similarities with other cultures, these merely serve to allow us to understand and affirm our own culture rather than to endeavour to understand another's. However, in lateral relations we have to acknowledge that our culture is in fact influenced in important ways by other cultures, both historically and in the present. Any explanation of our own culture and its history will need to relate it to others. As an example Ricoeur argues that Middle Eastern culture has significantly impacted the "Hebrew source of our memory", and that if we want to understand this source adequately, we must also look at the Middle East. What we see here is that even though we are very deeply grounded within our own culture, we must still acknowledge that it does not exist in a vacuum and that a sufficient understanding of our own culture and its past necessitates an understanding of other sources as well.

It is the third, retroactive, relation that concerns cultural memory. In addition to an immersive relation with our own culture, and a relation with other cultures, we also relate to the past of our culture. Our cultural memory will always colour the world that is around us, but at the same time, this memory is itself contingent as we find ourselves in the world *now* and continue to understand and discover things about the world, which can change our memory. And so, this retroactive relationship to the past is constantly in flux which means that our *memory* itself is also retroactively undergoing changes. As Ricoeur tells us, "[o]ur cultural memory is unceasingly renewed retroactively by new discoveries, returns to the sources, reform and renaissances that are much more than revivals of the past and constitute behind us

what one might call a 'neo-past'" (1969: 21). Ricoeur thereby points out the contingency of our "cultural memory". Our understanding of ourselves and our culture undergoes changes and thereby its meaning changes as well. The current situation in which we find ourselves, the types of questioning and research that we undertake, influence the past. Therefore, concepts that we used in the past never truly belong to the past; they will always be interpreted with our current lenses. We look back at our cultural past with our current selves, and we cannot simply ignore the influence of our current selves and our present motivations.

One straight-forward way in which we can understand this mechanism is when we think about how morality impacts on our assessment of history. In The Netherlands, for example, the Seventeenth Century is known as the Golden Century, as it was a time when the country flourished in the fields of knowledge, art, politics, power and economics. A large part of the successes were due to colonial endeavours undertaken by the Dutch VOC-company. Depictions of this century were idealised as the greatest for Dutch culture, and indeed a time to celebrate. And so, when prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende referred in 2006 to wanting to foster a "*VOC-mentaliteit*" [VOC-attitude], he presumably did not think of it as a controversial statement. Thirty years ago it indeed would not have been, but with increasing work done by post-colonial theorists and historians, and increased cultural awareness, the utterance was received with outrage by a large number of people. And so, our relation to and interpretations of past events and epochs change as our knowledge, attitude and priorities change.

Ricoeur proposes that there are elements of our cultural memory that are not transparent to us. These aspects of our memory do show up in some way, in particular in myths and symbols that continue to resonate with us. I submit this is a helpful way to think about existential sin within the framework of post-Christianity. After all, we might ask ourselves why, despite the conscious rejection of sin as an ontological fact, we can still see elements of sin in literature,

art, and the kind of symbols and myths we use in order to explain our experience in the world. We may think of, for example, the works of literature by Camus and Dostoevsky, paintings by Arnulf Rainer and Jenny Saville, the often-invoked image by environmentalists of humanity as corrupt, and accounts of people suffering from depression as experiencing what seems to be existential guilt. These narratives and symbols impact upon our understanding of the world, even if this does not involve a conscious affirmation of the applicability of the category of sin.

Aspects of cultural memory refer to objects of thought that are culturally and historically contingent, and thereby they take on an existence both in the world and in minds. What this means is that there is a reality to these collective concepts outside of an individual's understanding of it. This is important, because what we want to emphasize is the cultural and historical dimension of the objects of our thought. Aspects of cultural memory are communal concepts, and they serve as restrictions to our thought. These restrictions dictate what shows up to us as possible.

So how do these aspects of cultural memory show up for individuals? In other words, how do individuals in a culture experience aspects of cultural memory? In order to answer these questions, it is useful to turn to a concept adjacent to cultural memory: social imagination. This concept, borrowed from Miranda Fricker, posits a sphere that can help us make sense of why cultural norms, habits, and history can play a big role in individuals' lives. It is what Fricker calls the collective, and not individual, social imagination that is particularly useful to us.[42]

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[42] Fricker further distinguishes between what she calls the *diachronic* and *synchronic*, which are two ways in which the social imagination interferes with progress. Diachronic means that an individual still has content in her social imagination that has not progressed along with her consciously-endorsed beliefs. In the synchronic case, the *collective* social imagination still holds residues that simply do not allow an individual to filter out prejudice (Fricker 2007: 39).

The collective social imagination still carries in it remnants of Christianity that influence the ways in which people can understand themselves. We can see the difference between individual and collective social imagination when we consider the following example. *A.* is a post-Christian who was brought up in a Catholic household, but grows up to reject Christianity. She continues, now and then, to feel what she considers to be pangs of sin-consciousness, as well as a desire to say prayers. In other words, she continues to have affective states that indicate Catholic beliefs, despite reflectively having moved away from them. Her own, personal, background in this religion still has somewhat of a hold on her even after having consciously moved away from its beliefs. This kind of phenomenon can be explained by looking at a single individual's psychology and history. However, think now of a person who was not brought up religious, nor ever affirmed any religious doctrines knowingly. She was educated in a secular school and never showed any particular interest in religion. However, she was actually raised in a country that was historically Calvinist and culturally still carries much of that heritage within it. Much to her surprise, she finds out that most of the moral norms she has internalized are in fact entirely based upon Calvinist thought. This is the kind of phenomenon that I am trying to capture: it is culturally dependent, and the possibilities of understanding oneself and the world are limited by the content of the collective social imagination.

Importantly, the sphere of the social imagination often does not contain reflectively-endorsed judgments, but rather, in Fricker's words, things that exist "not unconsciously in any strict, psychoanalytical sense, but without any focused awareness and without […] permission, as we might put it." (2007: 39). The content of the social imagination can influence our thought directly, without having to pass through beliefs that we endorse. This is how religious content can "bypass" reflective rejections of religion. As such, it still influences the way in which we see ourselves, even if we are not consciously aware that this is what is going on. We can

therefore have the reflectively-endorsed belief that God does not exist, whilst still relating to ourselves as sinful.

Even though our present motivations may colour how we look at certain events and ideas of the past, the framework in which we are able to think in the first place has been determined by this same cultural history. The options that are open to us may slowly shift and widen, but are still largely dictated by our cultural history. In this light, we can understand why Nietzsche talks about God's shadows as lingering for centuries. The process is one of a lessening of the grip on our culture, and this is slow and painstaking and not at all inevitable. When thinking about sin, we should consider the presence of sin *within* our cultural memory as having an impact larger than our current-day lenses can make apparent to us. In other words, even though our cultural memory is contingent, it is not easily changed, and the change that we may perceive superficially does not tell us everything.

But why has sin remained as an aspect of our cultural memory, while other historically significant concepts have not? We know of concepts that lose cultural significance through cultural processes such as struggle, increased knowledge, and changing power relations. We can here think of, for example, eugenics and the supposed intellectual inferiority of women. However, there are also concepts that have stuck around in cultures for centuries. The difficulty here is that we often cannot refer to a debate or a process analogous to efforts to eradicate certain concepts from our cultural vocabularies and frameworks. I suggest that the concepts, rituals, and stories that are able to linger for centuries, do so because they, in some important sense, speak to us. This is not to suggest that there are no other factors in play: Nietzsche importantly points out that the ascetic priests, who were responsible for the promotion of sin, were figures of power. Undoubtedly the predominant role Christianity has played in the development of Western European society will have played a part in the prevalence of existential sin. However, as I began to explain in the introduction to this thesis;

existential sin has remained a part of our cultural memory because it resonates with the human experience.

3.4 Existential sin and human nature

So far in this thesis, there has been a division in the assessment of existential sin between Nietzsche and post-Christianity on the one hand, and Christian thinkers on the other. I have shown that for Nietzsche, sin is a mistaken sense of self: it is a feeling that through the encouragement of the church people have taken up, but it does not represent an accurate picture of human nature. In contrast, for most Christian thinkers, sin designates the state of human nature as being fallen, and estranged from God in some way. The post-Christian, I have argued in this chapter, cannot simply fall back on the Christian narratives, and so the second option is not immediately available to her. Indeed, we might want to take a Nietzschean line here and say that existential sin is the creation of Christianity, and Christianity has lost its authority for the post-Christian. This does not mean that existential sin has disappeared, but it is simply a remnant of Christianity, that the post-Christian should aim to do away with accordingly.

There is a third option available to us here, which is to suggest that existential sin responds to an ontological need, and as such gives expression to a fundamental aspect of human life. On this line of thought, Christianity managed to give us the tools to think about and accept an aspect of human nature and our existence in the world. The category of existential sin allows us to live with meaningless suffering by offering an explanation for it, and this responds to the ontological need to understand suffering. Relinquishing the concept of sin would therefore mean that we lose some of our grasp upon the world and ourselves, which is something we might want to avoid.

This option appears to go against much of what Nietzsche writes. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche describes the person who turns to sin as an "insane, sad beast", who is preoccupied with "unnatural things" and "absurd paroxysms". (GM II:22). Indeed, he tells us that humans are suffering from a sickness, and the world has turned into a madhouse. Nietzsche further describes sin as "the most dangerous and fateful trick [*Kunststück*] of religious interpretation." (GM III:20). Nietzsche's evaluation of sin is clear: it is a religious trick that has made humans (more) sick, and it does not correspond to our actual human nature. As Mulhall describes: "For Nietzsche, th[e] identification of humanity and sinfulness—the burden of the Christian conception of the Fall—is not only a contingent, but also a reactive and secondary episode in our development; it is not just that it could in principle be otherwise, but that in fact it was otherwise." (2007: 38).[43]

It is possible to reject the notion that sinfulness is a true state of human nature without considering it to be a problem. We could, for example, argue that sin provides an orientation towards the world that is desirable, perhaps we could argue that it encourages people to focus on humility and that this is a good orientation to have. It is therefore not the case that for Nietzsche sin is bad *because* it does not correspond to truth. In other words, there are two aspects of his criticism; firstly that sin is untrue, and secondly that sin is bad for human beings. However, despite sin depicting an inaccurate state of human nature, Nietzsche does

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[43] Christopher Hamilton gives us a very different account: "Nietzsche has 'dirty corners'. Someone who thinks he has dirty corners is judging himself in the light of a certain conception of goodness and purity, in which light everything in the inner life seems compromised and tainted, as if one were nothing but a naked, lonely, shivering self, remorselessly driven by greed, envy, fear, and various other forms of self-assertion and self-concern. Who could bear to be seen in this way? Not Nietzsche. Nietzsche's longing to be clean is, at least in part, a longing to be free of all that. But his bloody hands after the murder of God show him that in the very act of killing God he is not clean: his bid to free himself is at the same time a confirmation of his dirtiness. Nietzsche's whole philosophy is, seen from one perspective, an attempt to wash the blood from his hands" (Hamilton 2007: 169). I am very sympathetic to this reading of Nietzsche's oeuvre. It relies on an interpretation of what is going on between the lines, rather than the words of the text. In this light, we can for example interpret Nietzsche's repeated reference to sin as a sickness and his powerful description of existential sin, as reflecting Nietzsche's own experience. This does not mean that he considered existential sin to be a true fact of human nature, but it would certainly add another dimension to the way in which we can understand the experience of sin.

acknowledge that sin is responsive to an ontological problem: the problem of meaningless suffering. He tells us:

> The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind, – and the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning. Up to now it was the only meaning, but any meaning at all is better than no meaning at all; the ascetic ideal was, in every respect, the ultimate 'faute de mieux' par excellence. Within it, suffering was interpreted; the enormous emptiness seemed filled; the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism. The interpretation – without a doubt – brought new suffering with it, deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life: it brought all suffering within the perspective of guilt... (GM III: 28).

We see here that, for Nietzsche, Christianity offered the first meaning for suffering that was offered, and that it was accepted simply because "any meaning at all is better than no meaning at all". This, however, is an unconvincing claim. If, as I and Nietzsche both claim, the problem of meaningless suffering is an ontological one, and people have always struggled with it, it is difficult to imagine that the answer sin offered really was the very first. We can interpret the passage differently, however. When Nietzsche writes about the "only meaning" for meaningless suffering, what he might mean is "the only meaning that took hold of us". In other words, no explanation for meaningless suffering has become as predominant as that of guilt and sin. This more plausible claim offers more support for the argument that I propose in this thesis, namely that existential sin is a substantial aspect of the Western European culture.

For some, to exist as a human being in Western European culture means to feel oneself as sinful, and I argue that we must take this experience seriously. We can take God or Christianity out of the picture, but that will not meaningfully impact this fundamental experience. Furthermore, the concept of existential sin tells the post-Christian something fundamental about her human experience. I will argue, following Nietzsche, that the category of existential sin responds to an ontological fact of human nature, namely the need to explain suffering. Before doing so, however, I will discuss the other part of Nietzsche's criticism of

sin, namely that it is damaging and destructive for human beings. In particular, I will turn to the question of whether post-Christian sin should be considered harmful.

3.4.1 A phenomenology of post-Christian existential sin

In order to look at this claim in more detail, we have to understand what post-Christian existential sin looks like. So far I have been defending the claim that post-Christian existential sin is intelligible. However, I have not yet explored how this form of sin may actually manifest itself. The definition of existential sin offered in this thesis has deliberately remained somewhat vague: a sense of global wrongness by virtue of being human. I wish now to flesh out this description.

First, existential sin is experienced as an individual problem, despite being related to one's being human. If I suffer from existential sin, the feeling will be one that I only relate to myself – there is something wrong with me specifically. However, this feeling is not because of specific actions, thoughts or desires of mine. I could feel that there is something wrong with me because I have acted callously towards a friend, and somehow cannot convince myself to make it up to her. I may be aware that what I did was wrong, but I do not feel the motivation to change anything about this. My lack of motivation can be felt as a problem if my moral compass is pointed in the opposite direction and urges me to fix the situation. As a result I feel guilty and bad, and am perhaps angry at myself. "Why can't I fix this situation?" I might ask, "if I was a *good* person I would do something about this!". Although perhaps pulling from the same emotional reservoir, this experience is not existential sin. It is localized, related to certain actions that we can point to. Importantly, this is not the case for existential sin, where no matter how many occurrences in one's life we point to, this will never be able to explain the depth of feeling.

This does not mean that actions or thoughts are entirely separated from existential sin. They will affect one another, and indeed there can be actions that are determined entirely by existential sin. The entire way in which one acts in the world, in which one relates to the world, can be dictated by the underlying understanding of oneself. In other words, there are ways in which existential sin shows up to us in people's behaviours or dispositions. For example, someone who suffers from existential sin and thereby has an underlying understanding of herself as somehow wrong, may be more reluctant to engage in social engagements. We can also imagine that she may, for example, struggle with hearing compliments, as her behaviour being applauded will for her feel incongruent with who she is.

When it comes to feelings that seem closely related to sin, such as guilt and shame, in response to events, there are ways in which we can ascertain whether we are responding accurately. Bernard Williams tells us;

> What arouses guilt in an agent is an act or omission of a sort that typically elicits from other people anger, resentment, or indignation. What the agent may offer in order to turn this away is reparation; he may also fear punishment or may inflict it on himself. What arouses shame, on the other hand, is something that typically elicits from others contempt or derision or avoidance. This may equally be an act or omission, but it need not be: it may be some failing or defect. It will lower the agent's self-respect and diminish him in his own eyes. (Williams 1993: 90)

We see here that our response of guilt and shame does not occur in a vacuum: other people respond to our actions in accordance with these feelings. There are social consequences as well as personal ones; when we have acted in a way that elicits guilt in us, they may be angry at us; and when we act in a way that makes us feel ashamed, they may avoid us. Other people's reactions then serve as a confirmation of the accuracy of our feelings and can indeed deepen them. What is being presupposed here, therefore, is that other people attribute responsibility to the person who committed the action: I will feel guilty and they will feel anger if both of us recognize that this act was indeed committed by me, and that I was

responsible for it. This is much less clearly the case for existential sin. The fact of the wrongness of one's existence is not something that the individual is responsible for, yet this responsibility may still be felt. As Ricoeur tells us, "[the sinner] need not be the author of the evil to feel himself burdened by its weight" (1969: 101).

Furthermore, a person may not be aware of the presence of existential sin. In the introduction to this thesis I described it as pre-reflective sin-consciousness: an underlying sense of self that flies underneath the radar of reflective judgments. If we here return to the above example of a person who receives compliments: she might not understand why the compliments do not feel justified. This again seems to separate existential sin from feelings such as guilt or shame, whose presence is usually not only felt acutely, but also understood consciously.

However, even if we now understand more clearly how sin may be differentiated from guilt or shame, the *content* of the experience is still vague. Perhaps the experience of existential sin cannot be narrowly defined. This is why every single one of the descriptions of this feeling of sin has been filled with metaphors: Kierkegaard's image of sin dragging "the individual along like a woman whom the executioner drags by the hair while she screams in despair" (1980a: IV 384), Nietzsche repeatedly referring to sin as some kind of torture, Paul's war with himself, Calvin's reference to sin as a sad condition whose burden we groan under, the Underground Man's sense that he is lower than an insect. Or, consider Simone Weil: "[w]e are all conscious of evil within ourselves; we all have a horror of it and want to get rid of it. […] This is the presence of evil in us. It is the ugliness in us. The more we feel it, the more it fills us with horror." (1973: 189-190). It is significant that none of these descriptions posit certain conceptual requirements: there is no structured argument that something is existential sin *iff* it meets criteria *x*, *y* and *z*. The nature of the phenomenon does not allow such a precise capturing.

However, we can flesh existential sin out further by looking at works of Camus and Dostoevsky. Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground* and Albert Camus's *The Fall* offer useful frameworks through which to explain the phenomenology of sinfulness. Dostoevsky's Underground Man might in fact be considered somewhat of a paradigm of the sinner. Camus's judge-penitent Jean-Baptiste Clamence in *The Fall* does not suffer as clearly from existential sin, but his stories tell us something about his view of human nature and his experience of himself that should be interpreted as such.

Dostoevsky's Underground Man struggles with himself, and some of his depictions are similar to the sentiment expressed in Romans 7, and by Nietzsche and Calvin, that to be a sinner means to be depraved, to be broken, to be corrupt: "[...] I couldn't even manage to make myself into an insect. I tell you solemnly that I often wanted to become an insect, but didn't manage even that." (Dostoevsky 2010: 9). The protagonist feels himself to be abject, to be worthless. It is especially in his interactions with Liza that we can see how troubled the Underground Man is because of his sense of worthlessness.[44]

Merold Westphal provides an account of the *Notes From Underground* that gives further credence to the theory that it depicts a man suffering from existential sin. Westphal writes that "the one all pervasive fact is his inability even to look anyone in the face. He not only feels their disdain; he feels it is justified." (1987: 84). This is a key thought: not only does the Underground Man feel himself to be worthless, he also believes that any disdain or judgement he receives from others is deserved. In other words, the confirmation of one's own sinfulness through the judgement of others is experienced as something that is justified. The condemnation of human nature that is essential to understanding the concept of sin is not felt

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[44] Dostoevsky's depiction of the Underground Man is of course ironic. One might therefore think that using *Notes From Underground* as a serious example is a flawed approach. However, I think the ironic nature of the Underground Man further strengthens Nietzsche's claim that existential sin is a problem for the European soul. Dostoevsky states at the beginning of the book that it is a fictional account of a certain *type* of person and as in most cases of effective irony, Dostoevsky's portrayal is immediately recognisable by the reader.

to be unjust. Instead, the way in which we should understand it is that this condemnation is our own responsibility: it is justified, even though we cannot fix it ourselves.[45]

In Albert Camus's novel *The Fall* we are confronted by the idiosyncratic Jean-Baptiste Clamence, a self-pronounced judge-penitent. Throughout the work Clamence appears unapologetic. He tells us that he used to think of himself as a good person, as someone who saved other people, but there were a number of occurrences in his life that made him realise that all of that was just fake. A key moment comes when Clamence walks by a woman standing on the side of a bridge looking over the Seine, and hears her jump moments later. This event leads Clamence to re-evaluate himself and his life, and he describes that he only ever did good things for selfish reasons: "modesty helped me shine, humility to conquer, and virtue to oppress" (Camus 1963: 62). This re-evaluation is portrayed not as a kind of traumatized, biased way of looking at his life, but instead as more enlightened. In other words, the event on the bridge allowed Clamence to become enlightened as to his true nature. He now understands precisely how, to borrow Calvin's phrase, depraved he is. We might therefore say that what became clear to Clamence is his sinful state.

Furthermore, by calling himself a judge-penitent, Clamence emphasizes two different sides of himself: he is continuously judging not only other people, but also himself and his own imperfections. The two are linked, however, which we see when Clamence says, "The more I

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[45] I think there can potentially be a useful parallel with some cases of depression, where the concept of sin might not be appealed to, but I think is a useful tool in understanding the experience. Roughly speaking, depression can manifest itself in a sense of overwhelming existential guilt. With existential guilt I mean to separate this experience from experience of particular guilt, i.e. guilt about particular situations or actions. Existential guilt is an experience importantly similar to how I defined sin, as it refers to a feeling guilty for being alive in the first place. This is often combined with a sense of oneself as corrupt or bad, and therefore also undeserving. Even though one's 'badness' is often felt as our own fault or responsibility, at the same time there is a kind of awareness that this is not something that we ourselves can fix. Practically speaking this is also true, as most forms of depression need outside help in order to move beyond the feeling of oneself as inherently bad and undeserving. This help is not God's grace, but therapy or medication, but it seems that some experience of depression have a very similar structure to the experience of sinfulness. This account is also found in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, as well as contemporary research such as 'Guilt-Selective Functional Disconnection of Anterior Temporal and Subgenual Cortices in Major Depressive Disorder' by Green, S. et al, 2012, *Arch Gen Psychiatry.* 69(10): 1014-1021.

accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you. Even better, I provoke you into judging yourself and this relieves me of that much of the burden" (ibid. 103). The capacity to judge others is important for Clamence, but the capacity to judge himself and to enable other people to judge themselves is even more so. This is because whilst everyone does deserve to be judged, everyone should already have judged themselves. He thereby echoes the Pauline and Lutheran accounts of sin that emphasize the sinful state as *deserved*. Clamence is an example of someone for whom the righteous judgement of the inner state of sinfulness is made explicit.

One puzzling aspect of existential sin appears to be that it is often experienced in isolation: one struggles with existential sin by oneself. Although rooted in a certain understanding of human nature, existential sin is not posited onto others. This is portrayed powerfully in Véronique Olmi's *Beside the Sea*, which shows that although the feeling of not being at home in the world may be a common experience, we begin to consider it as wrong and cruel once it is projected onto others. Olmi's protagonist acknowledges that she does not belong and that there is something wrong with her, but furthermore posits that the same is true of her sons. Her subsequent murder of her children might be motivated by a feeling of existential sin, but does not appear to us as an understandable act. And indeed, why would it, if our fundamental experience is one in which only we ourselves are wrong? It appears that our own sense of sinfulness does not necessarily extend to other people.[46]

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[46] Another example is the character Dean Winchester in the TV series *Supernatural*. In season 4, Dean is saved from hell by the angel Castiel. Throughout the season Dean struggles with the question of why he was saved, and Castiel's answer that God told him to do so, proves unsatisfactory. It would have been easy for the writers to explain Dean's struggle by pointing out that he had committed certain acts that ought to be morally condemned (such as causing the apocalypse). Dean could have pointed out certain events and actions in his life that render him undeserving of redemption. However, Dean's struggle is portrayed differently. The character believes that he did not deserve to be saved by virtue of his nature. Furthermore, despite his younger brother Sam being remarkably like him in behavior and temperament, Dean continuously emphasizes that Sam did deserve to be saved. Again, we see that the condemnation of one's nature cannot easily be transposed onto another.

Furthermore, we can say that existential sin relies on a distinction between innocence and guilt, a state before and after the fall. The corruptness of human nature is understood in contrast to the goodness of God, or in contrast to the goodness of humans *before* their fall. This distinction can indeed be found in Nietzsche's work as well, as Stephen Mulhall demonstrates that the *Genealogy of Morality* itself has the exact structure of a fall narrative (Mulhall 2007). We might therefore be led to think that if a notion of existential sin is preserved, there must be a simultaneous concept of innocent human nature. Tillich argues this same point when he posits that: "logically, it is not correct to speak of innocence when there is no possibility of becoming guilty" (1953: 43).

In Genesis we do indeed see a powerful contrast between the state of human nature in innocence and after the fall. In the Garden of Eden, the Bible says, Adam and Eve were "both naked, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). Their first acts after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, however, are dictated by shame. Suddenly their nakedness takes on a different meaning and becomes something they ought to conceal. They furthermore feel shame in the presence of God: as he walks into the garden they hide from him because they are naked. Ricoeur explains the passage as follows;

> The nakedness of the innocent pair and the shame that follows fault express the human mutation of all communication, marked henceforth by dissimulation. Work ceases to be joyous and becomes toilsome, placing man in an attitude of hostility toward nature. The pain of child-bearing darkens the joy of procreation. The conflict between the woman's seed and the serpent's symbolizes the militant and suffering condition of freedom, henceforth a prey to the guile of desires (compare with Genesis 4:7). Even death is altered: the curse is not that man shall die ("for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"), but that he shall face death with the anguished awareness of its imminence; the curse is the human modality of dying. (Ricoeur 1969: 247)

Precisely by being contrasted with a pre-lapserian state are these consequences of the fall considered to be punishment, rather than offering a depiction of how life simply is. The insistence upon an innocent state displays what seems like a hopeless optimism, however. There is no plausible reason why the mythical state of innocence should be considered a

possibility. Nietzsche himself falls into this trap, when he writes in *Twilight of the Idols* about restoring the innocence of becoming and redeeming the world (TI VI: 8). Significantly, we are not offered an account of what the world may be like after the innocence of becoming and world-redemption is achieved. And indeed, what if there is no innocent state to which we can return? What would this change about the way in which we relate to the world?

Importantly, if we conceive of existential sin as some kind of post-lapserian state, it might seem that we have to accept that there is something *true* about sinfulness. It implies that human nature is now corrupted, that humans have fallen from a better state of being. There might therefore be limits to its usefulness if we want to question the validity of the category of sin. We can interpret the contrast between pre- and post-lapserian humanity as metaphorical, however: we are aware of the substantial limits and flaws of human nature, and one way in which we can bring these into sharp relief is by contrasting them with a, albeit hypothetical, more perfect state.

Nietzsche allows us to understand existential sin as a significant aspect of Western European culture, and make explicit its role in explaining meaningless suffering. As a socio-historical explanation offered to the problem of meaningless suffering, it has been profoundly effective. Even in Nietzsche's account existential sin is reflective of some kind of truth: it reveals to us the problem of meaningless suffering. I have argued in this chapter that one of the reasons why existential sin has taken hold of us is because it speaks to our human experience. Although sin may have been posited by Christianity, and as such is a socio-historical and contingent element of human nature, it in fact responds to an ontological problem.

Of course, there are people who would argue against the above position. It might be entirely incongruent with their experience of the world. There are philosophical accounts that support such an interpretation, and suggest that we are still so deeply embedded in a Christian culture

that we may interpret existential sin to reveal a true state of human nature, but this is in fact nothing more than a left-over from Christianity. They argue that the problem of meaningless suffering is not ontological, but rather something that shows up to us because of our Christian eyeglasses.

Hans Blumenberg, for example, can be used to argue against the above position. He writes about aspects of our cultural memory in terms of 'question' and 'answer' positions. For him, we must be aware of the contingency of the questions that are being asked, and acknowledge their historicity. It is in this context that he writes the following:

> It is in fact possible for totally heterogeneous contents to take on identical functions in specific positions in the system of man's interpretation of the world and of himself. In our history this system has been decisively determined by Christian theology, and specifically, above all, in the direction of its expansion. Theology created new 'positions' in the framework of the statements about the world and man that are possible and are expected, 'positions' that cannot simply be 'set aside' again or left unoccupied in the interest of theoretical economy. (Blumenberg 1983: 64)

Note here the use of *heterogeneous* contents, *identical* functions and *specific* positions. The individual's system of interpretation, in which we find instances of cultural memory, is not pre-given. In fact, it is dependent upon the specific cultural surroundings that she finds herself in. And most importantly, it is the positions themselves, the specific questions that are being asked, that are culturally contingent. So the needs that we feel and the questions that we ask are themselves already a part of a pre-supposed framework. At the same time these needs will be felt intensely, and those answers that can satisfy these needs have the chance of being successful within the aforementioned framework. We can therefore say that the fact that existential sin maps onto one's experience of the world so well is precisely because expectations, problems, questions and needs were formed within the context of existential sin. It maps on so neatly, precisely because it helped to create the framework within which we attempt to understand the world.

It might therefore be the case that there is no *ontological* problem of meaningless suffering, but rather that the context of existential sin, i.e. Christianity, created a narrative and world-view in which such a problem appeared. I argued in section 2.3.3 of the previous chapter that the problem of meaningless suffering also shows up in the ancient Greeks. However, we could argue that this interpretation of these Greek texts is itself entirely dictated by the Western European Christian paradigm in which my culture and thought was formed. If we accept this argument as valid, then perhaps we need to make any claims about meaningless suffering less strong: the problem of meaningless suffering is not an ontological one, but rather socio-historical. It appears to us as ontological because our thought on such issues is dictated by the realm of Christianity.

Even if we were to accept this claim, not much would change about our account of existential sin. After all, even if what we *perceive* as ontological problems are only socio-historical, this perception is essential to our experience. My goal in this thesis is not to offer a response to meaningless suffering, but rather to argue that existential sin has served, and continues to serve, as one such answer. This is the case even if the problem of meaningless suffering is a historically contingent problem.

3.5 The (im)possibility of redemption

Indeed, all we definitively know is that existential sin is historically Christian, and can plausibly be thought of as a part of our cultural memory. In Christian thought sin is very closely tied to redemption. Generally, we can be redeemed despite our sinfulness, and thereby released from its burden. This does not seem an avenue immediately available for the post-Christian. For Nietzsche, in fact, we are even facing an "impossibility of redemption" of sin after the death of God. This impossibility of redemption appears because we are no longer able to rely on the redemptive or explanatory narratives that Christianity offered us. We are

stuck with a feeling of existential sin (a remnant of the Christian narrative), and as a consequence of our murdering God we can no longer have any hope of redemption.

However, Giles Fraser offers a different interpretation. He writes that "the death of God is, for Nietzsche, precisely that from which salvation is made possible." (Fraser 2002: 30). And indeed, in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes that "[t]he concept 'God' has hitherto been the greatest objection to existence.… We deny God; in denying God, we deny accountability: only by doing that do we redeem the world." (TI VI:8). In response, we have to emphasize that there are two different ways in which redemption shows up here: redemption from sin, and redemption from suffering. This project is concerned with the first of these forms of redemption. We saw in the first chapter that there is a complicated relation between sin and suffering in Nietzsche, as he argues that redemption from suffering has in fact taken the form of sin, which brings with it its own kind of suffering. If we therefore look at the above quotation again, we can say that the kind of suffering that has been caused by sin now requires the world to be redeemed. In this Fraser is right, by removing God from the picture, Nietzsche believes that we can redeem the suffering caused by sin. By no longer holding people accountable for existence and suffering, we can achieve some kind of redemption. This, however, is not the whole story.

I posited that Nietzsche's descriptions of the origin and emergence of sin can help us understand how sin came into the world and took on the important role it did. However, it cannot help us understand the situation of the post-Christian who struggles with sin-consciousness. After all, the way in which she acquired her sin-consciousness was not through her search for a meaning of suffering: the story of the ascetic priest would not be convincing to her, as a *post*-Christian. The way in which existential sin exist, and the fact that the post-Christian is able to take it up as a pre-reflective self-relation means that the concept of sin has transformed from an explanation into a cemented part of our cultural understanding.

This also means that even though the absence of God may imply that there will be less "new" sinners, the above passage from *Twilight of the Idols* is misleading. Indeed, this whole chapter has aimed to show that by denying God, we do not automatically redeem the world.

This does not mean that redemption is impossible, however. In the next chapter I will look at different possible forms of redemption for existential sin. For now, we can orient ourselves towards possible avenues of redemption by returning to Blumenberg. In the first part of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* Blumenberg gives a detailed elaboration of the very idea of the secularization itself and argues that "there is no need for a continuum of verifiable instances of the metaphorical content of 'secularization' (1983: 19). In order to show this, he writes the following;

> The alienation of a historical substance from its origin, which it carries with it only as a hidden dimension of meaning, unavoidably raises the question whether this is a process of self-alienation or externally induced deformation. The difference here is the difference between the proposition that the attribute of infinity crossed over from God to the world because in its highest intensification the idea of creation simply cannot avoid this consequence and the alternative proposition that infinity was usurped for the world in order by this means to let the world take over God's position and function. (ibid. 18)

Blumenberg rejects the notion of one universal historical substance, but does talk about particular examples of historical substance, and the notion of infinity is one of these. We must here understand historical substance to refer to a substance that has existed in history, and not a substance that is a *necessary* part of history as such.

The starting point for Blumenberg is that historical substances, or as I have named them so far, instances of cultural memory, can be alienated from their origin. The question Blumenberg raises is whether this alienation is caused by an internal shift in this cultural memory, or whether it is forced to change through external influence. The internal shift appears to look something like a necessary transposition – if there is to be any idea of creation, there must be an idea of infinity. Therefore, if the consensus about the creation of

the world has shifted from God to the world, the idea of infinity will shift accordingly. And so, we have the same kind of ideas in Christianity as in secular thought, they are simply transposed.

So what does it mean for external forces to change the use of an attribute such as infinity? The example Blumenberg gives is strikingly similar to the role Nietzsche ascribes to the ascetic priest, albeit more abstractly, as Blumenberg talks about the world usurping infinity, but of course "the world" is not an entity that can act in such a way. The goal is for the world to "take over God's position and function" – but this is a goal that we cannot attribute to the world itself, only to agents in the world. Blumenberg offers another glimpse of what kind of change he is talking about in this discussion on the status of original sin:

> The *generatio aequivoca* consists simply in the fact that the combination of the concept of freedom and the doctrine of original sin could be codified at this specific location into the 'answer' to a 'great question' that was yet to be accurately stated. When the credibility and general acceptance of such answers dwindle away, perhaps because inconsistencies appear in the system, they leave behind them the corresponding questions, to which then new answers become due. Unless, perhaps, it turns out to be possible to destroy the question itself critically and to undertake amputations on the system of world explanation. (ibid. 66)

The reference to 'amputation' is especially interesting here. This implies that we can remove certain questions and answers from our arsenal of explanations, but that this will not be without any pain. An amputation is the removal of a limb, often in order to save a person's life (although in the past also often the cause of people's deaths, especially on battle fields). These limbs are often diseased, or malfunctioning in some other way, and the body to which it belongs can be considered healthy outside of this limb. And so, although amputation can restore health to the entire individual, this will be at the cost of a loss, a lack, that will forever appear as something missing. When limbs are amputated, they do not grow back.

Blumenberg suggests that an organic process takes places with the questions and answers; as answers become unbelievable, they will fade away, leaving behind questions. The question

concerning the meaning of suffering, to which Nietzsche argues sin gave an answer, should therefore remain after the death of God. Its answer of existential sin, however, should be fading away. This does not appear to be the case. So how can we respond to this problem?

Although existential sin may have first become important as an answer to a question, it now no longer functions as an answer. As I have argued in this chapter, sin's presence in our cultural memory means that it has become cemented in such a way that it functions differently. I suggest that the process that Blumenberg describes, radically undervalues how cemented instances of cultural memory can become. Reflectively these changes may indeed be taking place the way Blumenberg describes, but this does not mean that all our realms of experience are similarly affected. Indeed, this is precisely what the concepts of cultural memory and social imagination show: any explicit changes in our culture are not necessarily accompanied by changes in our entire consciousness. We must therefore turn to different ways of understanding the change within our cultural memory to be able to think about what kind of redemption is possible for the post-Christian sinner.

Chapter 4   The Possibility of Redemption after the 'Death of God'

> I, however, rejoice in great sin as my great consolation.
> (TZ, 'Of Higher Men')

In the previous three chapters I have established an account of post-Christian sin by tracing the history of the concept of sin, and arguing that it has become a part of the cultural memory of Western Europe. I have furthermore argued that we need to understand sin as a socio-historical response to the ontological question of meaningless suffering, and as such responsive to an aspect of human nature. We have also seen, however, that even though existential sin may provide a response to meaningless suffering, it comes with its own kind of socio-historical suffering. This we find not only in Nietzsche, who offers a critique of sin, but also in Christian texts such as those by Simone Weil, Calvin and Paul (see chapter 3).

There are two ways in which we can consider existential sin to be a problem for the post-Christian. Firstly, existential sin as a pre-reflective form of self-understanding might be incongruent with the conscious beliefs of the post-Christian. She may consciously reject the Christian God and its concept of sin, but still relate to herself as sinful. It is important to enable the post-Christian to become aware of her sin-consciousness, as self-awareness is generally beneficial. Secondly, existential sin is itself the cause of suffering that we may wish to avoid. When the post-Christian feels herself to be a sinner, she suffers. It is, after all, not a pleasant thought: that there is something wrong with herself, as an individual, simply because

she is human. The self-understanding it fosters can manifest itself in anything from intense self-hatred to self-alienation, as we have seen in descriptions of existential sin throughout this thesis. Indeed, for Nietzsche, one of the main problems with existential sin is that it prevents human flourishing. By internalizing drives, moralizing guilt, and standing before God, the human soul is alienated and corrupted (AC: 58). We can safely assume that it is desirable for human beings to not hate themselves, and as such to encourage forms of self-understanding that allow for this. In the Christian tradition, the possibility of redemption helps to alleviate the distress of sin-consciousness. Can we similarly conceive of redemption for the post-Christian?

In the first part of this chapter I will turn to Christian forms of redemption from sin. Considering the fact that post-Christian sin is so closely related to Christian forms of sin, the question arises whether we can use Christian redemptive narratives in order to attain redemption. By looking at Nietzsche's critique of Christian forms of redemption from sin, and in particular the event of the crucifixion, I will argue that this is not the case for two reasons. Firstly, it is unclear how Christian redemptive accounts could survive the 'death of God', as they rely on the figure of God too heavily. Secondly, following Nietzsche, I will argue that Christian redemptive accounts may redeem us from suffering but not from sin, and this distinction should be taken seriously.

In the second and third sections of this chapter I will turn to Nietzsche's accounts of redemption, in particular genealogy and life-affirmation. Therefore, we must turn to the genealogical method. Nietzsche proposes genealogy as a method through which we can increase our understanding and knowledge of ourselves and the world. As such, it responds well to the problem of *pre*-reflective sin-consciousness. However, the genealogical method itself does not constitute or motivate change, and is therefore not sufficient in itself. This is where life-affirmation provides a further avenue to explore. Life-affirmation, I will suggest,

appears to map onto post-Christian sin well. In Chapter 2 we saw that one of Nietzsche's objections to the ascetic priest is that this figure denies this life, this world, and instead posits meaning in another world. The 'other world' plays a large role in the emergence of sin, and therefore re-orienting herself towards *this* world might be helpful for the post-Christian. I argue that instead of redemption, pursuing the avenue of life affirmation allows us to answer the problem of meaningless suffering, whilst enabling a reduction of the suffering caused by sin.

4.1 Nietzsche's critique of Christian redemption

In the Christian tradition, redemption can take several different shapes. There are, for example, the concepts of grace and sacrifice, and the rites of baptism and confession. One important aspect of grace is the notion that our redemption from sin cannot be achieved by our own actions alone, God must be willing to help us, and bestow His grace upon us (Eph. 2:8-9).[47] The Lutheran tradition emphasizes the redemptive powers of baptism, which we can see in *Augsburg Confession* Article IX, Augustine emphasizes that we have to search for and accept God in order to receive grace in *On Free Choice of the Will*, and Bonaventure similarly argues in *The Journey of the Mind into God* that we must commit to acting a certain way order to receive grace; we must pray, live in accordance with the Laws, and cultivate our understanding of the world and God. In the New Testament we find a significant shift, as with Paul grace became *redemptive*. Although there are mentions of grace in the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament, these refer to God's favour, often to a specific person being favoured by God; Noah in Genesis 6, Moses in Exodus 33, the king in Psalm 45. In the New Testament grace becomes a gift from God that redeems us (Romans 5, Ephesians 2-3). This gift is closely

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[47] "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

linked to the event of the crucifixion: God sent down his only son Christ in order to be sacrificed for the salvation of humankind.

4.1.1 The crucifixion

Nietzsche's critique of Christian redemption is focused on the notion of the crucifixion as redemptive. Nietzsche emphasizes the cruelty of the crucifixion, and although this itself does not go against most Christian interpretations, there is something about the cruelty itself that Nietzsche finds objectionable. For example, Nietzsche refers to the crucifixion as the "horrific and paradoxical expedient" (GM II:21), an "unexpected ignominious death" (AC: 40) and as the "mystery of an inconceivably ultimate, most extreme cruelty" (GM I:8). The argument seems to be that i) the crucifixion was a cruel act of torture, ii) Christianity emphasizes the cruelty by taking up the crucifix as its symbol, iii) seeing the crucifix reminds us of the torture of Christ, and iv) being reminded of this torture is objectionable. Many Christian thinkers could conceivably agree with points 1-3, it is point 4 that separates Nietzsche here. The statement does not mean that what the crucifix inspires us to think about, namely Christ's sacrifice, is a bad thing *an sich*. But it is the thinking-about, the being-reminded-of, that Nietzsche criticizes. He argues that the sacrifice of Christ, although couched in terms of love, grace, and mercy, has been interpreted by the Church (following Paul) as actually being an event that increases people's debt to God. This, Nietzsche tells us, goes against Christ's own message (AC: 40,41).

For Nietzsche the crucifixion narrative and symbolism encourage people to feel even more indebted to God. Although we are told that God has sacrificed himself on the cross for us, at the same time the emphasis lies on the suffering of the innocent Christ. He is suffering because of us, and we are constantly reminded of his suffering because the symbol of His church is Christ's torture device. As we can see his Fraser's analysis; "Nietzsche's attack

upon Christianity is based upon the observation that Christian salvation, far from being a legitimate means of saving human beings, actually constitutes much of – and certainly reinforces – their bondage. Christian soteriology is salvation which damns." (2002: 82-83).

This thought can also be found in earlier Nietzsche works. In *Daybreak*, for example, he writes: "[…] what a dreadful place Christianity had already made of the earth when it everywhere erected the crucifix and thereby designated the earth as the place 'where the just man is tortured to death'!" (D I:77). Christ is designated as a "just man" (this thought is reaffirmed by Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*), and the church is spoken of in relation to its use of the symbol of the crucifix. This second point is especially important. Nietzsche's criticism of Christian redemption is not a purely theoretical argument. He not only rejects the specific theological account of redemption, but he also points at the practices of the Church. The Church, through the workings of the ascetic priests, has been able to affect human's sense of self-understanding by constantly focusing on the torturous death of God by humans. In Nietzsche's view, the predominance of the crucifix in churches emphasizes not redemption from sin, but sinfulness itself. This picture does have some intuitive appeal. After all, it seems paradoxical that the Church of a loving God would have a torture device as its symbol. Particular depictions of the crucifixion, and not just a crucifix, can certainly inspire fear and guilt. We can think here of Arnulf Rainer's various crucifix paintings, or churches which have a life-size depiction of the crucifixion hanging over their entrance.

Nietzsche also offers the crucifixion the highest praise: it is a stroke of genius. And it does offer us some relief, albeit a temporary one. As I have just argued, the main focus of Nietzsche's criticism of image and use of the crucifixion in Christianity is based on the idea that on the cross Christ died *for our sins*. Our sins are here conceived of as an indebtedness to God, an indebtedness that we ourselves can never redeem – and then the one to whom we are

indebted absolves us of our debt. This act involves not any simple kind of forgiveness, but a *sacrifice*. It is this sacrifice that Nietzsche remains sceptical of:

> To devise something which could even approach the seductive, intoxicating, anaesthetizing, and corrupting power of that symbol of the 'holy cross', that horrific paradox of the 'crucified God', that mystery of an inconceivably ultimate, most extreme cruelty and self-crucifixion undertaken *for the salvation of mankind?...* (GM I:8)

This interpretation goes against much of the Christian discourse surrounding the crucifixion. For example, we can see an emphasis on the crucifixion as God's free gift of grace (Rom 5), grace being given to us through Christ (1 Jn. 1:17),[48] Christ taking away "the sin of the world" (1 Jn. 1:29),[49] similarly in Luke "repentance and forgiveness of sins" is proclaimed after Christ's death (Lk. 24: 46-47), and in Titus Paul writes that Christ offers himself up to redeem all of humankind (Tit. 2:11-14).[50] In Aquinas, Christ "endured the Passion from love and obedience" (1920: 3.49.1), Luther describes Christ as a gift offered to us by God (2012: 261-265), Kristeva defines as decisively Christian the "generous change of the 'victim' into a saving, mediating 'offering' under the sway of a loving God" (1982: 131), Swinburne describes the crucifixion as "a costly penance and reparation sufficient for a merciful God to let men off the rest" (1989: 154).

These accounts have one idea in common: that the crucifixion as a redemptive act was a *gift* from God. In other words, the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross redeems humankind from their sins, but does not require any kind of repayment. It is a gift freely given (in most accounts out of love), and perhaps an act of mercy. This act is not dependent upon some kind of compensation. The difference here is between someone giving a gift to a friend for their

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[48] "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

[49] "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

[50] "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds."

birthday, and then expecting the same to happen in return on their own birthday, and someone giving a gift with no interest in receiving anything back; selfless gift-giving.

It is precisely this notion that Nietzsche rejects. He offers scathing comments about the implausibility of a creditor sacrificing himself for the debtor "out of *love* (are we supposed to believe this? -), out of love for his debtor" (GM II:21). In the next section he tells us that anyone who listens to the sinner and hears "the shout of *love* [that] has rung out during this night of torture and absurdity, the shout of the most yearning rapture, of salvation through *love*", would turn away in horror (GM II:22). In *The Antichrist* we further read Nietzsche raise the question of "'how *could* God have let this happen!'" (AC: 41). He tells us that the response of Christians was to formulate "a horribly absurd answer: God gave his son to forgive sins, as a *sacrifice*. This brought the evangel to an end with one fell swoop. The *guilt sacrifice*, and in fact in its most revolting, barbaric form, the sacrifice of the *innocent* for the sins of the *guilty*!" (ibid.).

Another aspect of Nietzsche's critique of the crucifixion seems to be a perceived juxtaposition between humans being told that they are utterly sinful, and then being redeemed through a gift. It appears that for Nietzsche these messages are so different that the very fact they are both proclaimed by Christianity is a problem in itself. This objection seems to be present in most of Nietzsche's descriptions of the crucifixion, such as the ones quoted above, but most explicitly in the following passage from *Human, All-Too-Human*: "Christianity […] crushed and shattered man completely and buried him as though in mud: into a feeling of total depravity it then suddenly shone a beam of divine mercy, so that, surprised and stupefied by this act of grace, man gave vent to a cry of rapture and for a moment believed he bore all heaven within him." (HH I:114). In addition to the general rhetoric that we find here and in the passages quoted above, it is the phrasing of the *sudden* divine mercy, the description of "*mit Einem Male den Glanz eines göttlichen Erbarmens hineinleuchten*", that tells us what

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Nietzsche considers significant.[51] Nietzsche is attempting to show us the absurdity; first we are to believe that we are completely depraved, and then all of a sudden we are blinded by this saving light. However, this argument is not particularly compelling. The divine light would necessarily need to be of such force, of such blinding energy, precisely because of the extent of humanity's sinfulness. Again, what we find here is that Nietzsche offers us a description that may appear to offer a critique of Christian doctrines, but is in fact entirely compatible with them.

Therefore, Nietzsche objects to the idea that the innocent party, the creditor, would sacrifice themselves for the guilt of the debtor. And this becomes clear when we look at our own customs surrounding debt. Imagine that I borrowed 100 pounds from a friend. I am unable to pay her back, and in fact, this is not the first time it has happened. Perhaps the most straight-forward course of action for my friend would be to ask for the money back, and certainly to refuse lending me money in the future. If she is particularly kind, she might not hold the debt against me, and might continue to give me the benefit of the doubt. It is much more difficult to conceive of someone who will not only consider my debt to be redeemed, but will do so at great cost to herself. This is, after all, what the Gospel tells us. God sacrifices his only son, to die in an incredibly painful way, and therefore this sacrifice came at genuine cost to Himself. We might ask, and Nietzsche indeed does so, why, if God can redeem us, He decided to do so by way of the torturous death of Christ. If we conceive of God as our creditor, and He is able to redeem our debt, then why did He not simply do so, without any suffering on His part?[52]

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[51] Interestingly, Nietzsche uses a very similar phrase in *The Gay Science*; "*plötzliche Hindurchleuchten eines einzelnen Sonnenstrahls*" (GS: 139).

[52] Further to the accounts mentioned above, another important thinker who responds to this question is John Hick. In 'Is the Doctrine of Atonement a Mistake?' he argues against Richard Swinburne's account of redemption: "[I]t was, according to [Swinburne], entirely within God's free choice to establish the conditions for human salvation. But in that case God's insistence on the blood, sweat, pain and anguish involves in the crucifixion of his innocent Son now seems to cast doubt – to say the last – on the moral character of the Deity." (Hick 1994: 253). Furthermore, he argues that "the Cross has continued throughout as the central Christian

The main source of scepticism for Nietzsche appears to be the idea of a loving God; God as having redeemed humans out of love, Christ suffering on the cross because of love for humans. In this picture God is comparable to a human creditor – and is thought to exist in the same moral sphere. But when we consider God to be just like us, then how are we able to think of him an infinitely good, as a loving God? Indeed, this is what Nietzsche appears to object to; for him God is presented a creditor, and there is a debt that needs to be paid. Now this debt is not repaid by those that are indebted, but by the creditor itself, and it is repaid through extreme violence on Christ, who is both God and the son of God. Nietzsche's question of *how* God could allow it is important; we need to ask what is needed in order to adequately explain the violence of the sacrifice.

It is not surprising that Nietzsche's account of the crucifixion allows this question to be raised. In fact, many theologians and philosophers have asked whether, and why, Christ's suffering was necessary. Bonaventure, for example, holds that the suffering of Christ was necessary because it is the most effective way to shock people into pursuing a virtuous path (1963: IV.9.2). In the Question 46 of the Third Volume of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas offers a number of reasons why Christ's suffering was necessary, including that it demonstrates God's love to us, as He was willing to sacrifice his son. Luther tells us that "the main benefit of Christ's passion is that man sees into his own true self and that he be terrified and crushed by this" (2012: 426), indeed, Christ's suffering serves to make us aware of our own sinfulness and to become terrified (2012: 427). For Girard, the suffering of Christ is essential because it has a revelatory function; it allows us to finally see the violent underpinnings of our society: "the crucifixion reduces mythology to powerlessness by exposing violent contagion" (2001: 138). Nietzsche's outrage at the cruelty of the crucifixion could therefore be simply an appropriate response to the event.

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symbol because it stirs deeper, more complex emotions than are captured by any of these official doctrines" (ibid. 261).

Nietzsche tells us the crucifixion reaffirms the notion of humankind as ultimately wrong. We are told that we cannot achieve redemption ourselves, and that the only way in which we can escape our own badness is by having our God sacrifice himself on the Cross. As Roberts writes, "[Nietzsche] argues that the crucifixion marks the culmination of religious self-hatred insofar as it reflects the recognition that the debt to God could never be repaid by human beings, that only God could pay the wages of sin. In this respect, the crucifixion points to the ultimate powerlessness of human beings" (1998: 59). This account itself does not constitute a critique of the Christian redemptive narrative. It is in fact entirely compatible with Luther's account of the crucifixion as mentioned above. However, Nietzsche does move away from a Lutheran interpretation, as there is a difference in evaluation. Whereas for Luther the continual reminder of our sinfulness allows us to see our true nature, for Nietzsche it does not correspond to any real state of being. He rejects the notion that we are all ontologically sinful beings, and this is in fact one of his main critiques of Christianity; that it offers us a kind of self-understanding that is really a type of self-judgment or self-cruelty.[53]

And so, when Nietzsche rejects the idea of the crucifixion as a redemptive sacrifice, this is because he thinks it in fact perpetuates feelings of sinfulness. This does not mean that for Nietzsche Christian redemptive accounts were not redemptive at all. In fact, he tells us in the Second Essay that through the crucifixion humans found "temporary relief" (GM II:21). The relief that it offers, however, is not relief from sin. Instead, it is relief from suffering, by making our suffering more bearable through providing an explanation for it. However, this explanation for meaningless suffering *increases* feelings of sin, as the ascetic priest tells us

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[53] There is a different interpretation possible here. We might want to say that Nietzsche's discussion is not a theological one, but rather he focuses on what he sees as the consequences of this redemptive narrative. His argument is that, sure, Christianity tells us that we are all redeemed, yet that is not how it *feels*. We cannot escape our guilt and indebtedness because we are told again that we are worthless, and that God had to *kill himself/his own son* in a torturous way in order to redeem us. He is, therefore, interested in what he considers to be the psychological effects of the redemptive narratives. And so, we could interpret his claims as psychological ones, he is not concerned with whether or not we actually literally are redeemed, but rather the fact that we *do not feel as such*.

that we are to blame for our suffering. What we see here, is that, as Roberts puts it eloquently, "suffering itself is not healed, but, at the price of one kind of suffering from suffering—guilt—another—the feelings of helplessness and uncertainty—is ameliorated. Suffering is "healed" only in its transformation into hatred for this world and desire for the next." (1998: 52).

Roberts interprets Nietzsche as claiming that this is in fact the "Pauline strategy"; "to bring [guilt] to a nearly unbearable pitch in the recognition of one's worthlessness— and in preparation for surrendering to the power of grace" (ibid.). There is something to be said for this, as Paul emphasizes that all of us are sinners, and that we cannot meet the requirements of the law. However, for Paul the emphasis is not on "one's worthlessness" in order to become receptive to grace, rather what is essential for him is an awareness of our nature as such. This is fleshed out in terms of our sinful state, but also in terms of atonement through Christ. It is important that even though there is nothing contingent about our sinful state for Paul, his strategy could still work if we were not sinful, if this was merely a side note. I would argue that this more generous reading of Paul is in fact entirely compatible with Nietzsche's condemnation of Pauline soteriology. In other words, for Paul it is *true* that we are sinful, this is simply what our nature is. For Nietzsche, sin is not a 'true' state of our nature, but something posited by Christianity. This means that when he talks about Paul or Pauline Christianity, he is already assuming that the sin that is posited is false. We might therefore object to Nietzsche and say that his critical reading of Paul has a starting point that already means he is unable to represent whatever Paul's intentions might have been. However, I would argue that even if we accept sin as a true state of our nature, Nietzsche's criticism of the crucifixion can still hold sway. It seems possible that even if we accept sinfulness to be the true state of human nature and the crucifixion has redeemed our sins, Paul's texts emphasize the wrongness of our nature, rather than the fact of our salvation.

The result of the Christian narratives is, for Nietzsche, what Taubes calls a "continually self-perpetuating cycle of guilt, sacrifice and atonement" (2004: 87-88). We suffer and desire a meaning for it; the answer we are offered is that there is suffering because we are to blame, because we are sinful; this sinfulness brings with it further suffering. This suffering can be redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ; but this sacrifice increases our feelings of sinfulness and indebtedness. For Nietzsche, therefore, the Christian forms of sacrifice, as exemplified by the crucifixion, will not be redemptive.

There is a further difficulty Nietzsche raises with Christian redemptive accounts. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow* Nietzsche writes "[i]t was Christianity which first painted the Devil on the world's wall; it was Christianity which first brought sin into the world. Belief in the cure which it offered [*dagegen anbot*] has now been shaken to its deepest roots: but belief in the sickness which it taught and propagated continues to exist." (WS: 78). This passage, titled 'Belief in the sickness as sickness', suggests that even though sin and the devil continue to exist, redemption as their antidote no longer does. Unfortunately Nietzsche does not offer any further explanation, but what I will argue is that Christian redemption cannot work for the post-Christian who still struggles with sin, as these redemptive accounts are too closely tied up with the concept of God.

At the beginning of this chapter I pointed out that different accounts of grace have in common the idea that we can strive to become receptive to grace, but it is up to God to decide whether to offer it to us. The discussion on the crucifixion further supports this statement. God sacrifices his son for our sins; this is an act that came from on high. What would this account look like after the 'death of God'? There appear to be two options; a) grace would have to become something we can give to ourselves, b) someone or something other than God would have to be able to bestow grace. With both of these options, the effectiveness of grace would diminish, however. In Christian accounts grace allows for a complete salvation from

sinfulness, as it is bestowed upon us by God, who is all-powerful and benevolent. The kind of grace that another human being could provide us with would be much more akin to forgiveness. This immanent grace, offered horizontally rather than vertically, could perhaps be fruitful. In Ricoeur's account of forgiveness he emphasizes its restorative capacity: "under the sign of forgiveness, the guilty person is to be considered capable of something other than his offenses and his faults. He is held to be restored to his capacity for acting, and action restored to its capacity for continuing" (2004: 493).[54] For Ricoeur, however, forgiveness will be related to certain transgressive acts that have been committed. It responds, in other words, to something like transgressive sin. However, in the previous chapter I have argued that post-Christian sin must be understood as existential, and not transgressive sin. If forgiveness is therefore not about a trespass against another person (or deity), the question becomes one of authority. What gives the other person the authority to offer the post-Christian redemption? Unless we want to posit a different religious or political framework that awards someone this authority, the answer would have to be that the other person does not have this authority, or certainly not the same kind of authority that a creditor would have. The redemptive framework where redemption is offered by someone outside of oneself therefore does not work for the post-Christian.

Where does this leave the post-Christian sinner? Nietzsche tells us that the crucifixion, as the pivotal redemptive moment of Christianity, did not redeem people from feelings of sinfulness. The overall Christian redemptive narratives allowed a lessening of suffering by offering an explanation, yet it thereby increased feelings of sinfulness. Furthermore, the particular structure Christian redemptive narratives take, with their emphasis on the role of God, cannot be applied to the post-Christian. We must therefore direct our attention elsewhere. Nietzsche's

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[54] This description echoes Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*; "That no one is made responsible any more, that a kind of Being cannot be traced back to a *causa prima*, that the world is no unity, either as sensorium or as 'mind', *this alone is the great liberation* – this alone re-establishes the *innocence* of becoming..." (TI IV:8)

own philosophy contains redemptive elements, and in fact Fraser even posits that Nietzsche's entire work should be understood as "a series of experiments in redemption" (Fraser: 2). Although I hesitate to support this claim, turning to Nietzsche's writings on redemption will allow us to further conceptualize redemption from post-Christian sin.

4.2 Nietzsche on redemption: genealogy

The first problem we must tackle is how pre-reflective sin-consciousness can become reflectively available to the post-Christian. After all, one of the key features of post-Christian sin is the fact that a person might not be aware of it. The genealogical method is a method of analysing the history of concepts and values. I will argue that it can be fruitful for our current project, as it allows the post-Christian to gain awareness of sin. Furthermore, not only can the genealogical method lead to an increased understanding, this understanding also already contains critical elements. Through the genealogical method we become aware of the contingency of values and concepts, and this contingency in itself is the first step towards possible change.

A good way to begin understanding the genealogical method is by looking at Nietzsche's use of it in the *Genealogy*. Even though the genealogy is presented to us as a historical account, Nietzsche is not interested in making purely factual claims about history. He is not offering a historical narrative because it would make it easier to define concepts; it is rather the historical aspect of these concepts that makes them what they are. As Paul Katsafanas writes: "the story that Nietzsche tells in the *Genealogy* constitutes a *historically grounded* critique of modern morality" (2011: 191, emphasis mine).

Nietzsche tells us that "there is a world of difference between the reason for something coming into existence in the first place and the ultimate use to which it is put" (GM II:13). This is in fact the most important principle for "all types of history". We cannot understand a

concept by looking at its use now, and that the use of concepts and values undergoes a long process; "[…] anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it" (GM II:12). We see here that not only is it important to separate the current use of something with its origin and historical trajectory, but we must also acknowledge that the development of this thing is entirely dependent on the interpretations of agents. Therefore, genealogy consists of an analysis of different forces, and the psychology of agents, at play in the historical development of concepts. Peter Kail defines it as follows; "[genealogy is] primarily an explanatory account of the emergence of some distinctive set of beliefs, practices, and associated phenomena, involving situating agents with a particular psychology in a social-cum-environmental situation to which that psychology is responsive." (2011: 214).

Raymond Geuss offers a slightly different reading. He tells us that we should interpret the genealogical method as the most accurate account of history available, and therefore that if we want to understand a concept, the way to analyse it is through this method: "the appropriate historical account is a genealogy" (Geuss 1994: 282). Geuss argues that, for Nietzsche, his own depiction of Christianity in the *Genealogy* is a more plausible account than any traditional ones: it is "historically superior" (ibid. 288). We can make sense of this claim by noting that for Nietzsche history has to be in the service of life, as he argues in 'On The Uses And Disadvantages Of History For Life'. History is not stagnant or factual, it is a process that humans must engage with; "if he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it" (UM II:3). A 'superior' historical account, as Geuss argues the genealogical method offers, therefore does not mean that it is more true, but rather that it is "in the service of the future and the present"

(UM II:4).[55] So here we are again faced with Nietzsche's condemnation of Christianity, and Christian narratives, as being inimical to life.

Furthermore, the genealogical method emphasises understanding the emergence of something through understanding the agential roles involved. In the case of God, it would look as follows:

> [T]he genealogical Nietzsche sees the concept of god being used in a particular way in a particular historical trajectory by which human beings alienate themselves in the worship of God. Although Nietzsche does think that it has brought some benefits to human culture, this historical trajectory does not represent the necessary movement of spirit or human self-consciousness. (Roberts 1998: 59).

In other words, to understand the concept of 'god' genealogically, one's analysis would focus on people's *use* of the concept through time. Roberts points out that one of the outcomes of this approach is that the history will not be understood as *necessary*, but as contingent. The genealogical method uncovers this contingency by emphasizing the use of concepts and the role specific people or forces play in their emergence or development. Kail describes this as the genealogy removing a "givenness" from moral intuitions, and for Geuss genealogy points out that things are given meaning, rather than intrinsically having it. Lawrence Hatab similarly argues that through genealogy Nietzsche is able to criticize the idea of moral purity, as he offers "a different look at the historical context out of which certain moral values arose" (2005: 39). Nietzsche confirms the importance of contingency in the following passage:

> The inquiry into the origin of our evaluations and tables of the good is in absolutely no way identical with a critique of them, as is so often believed: even though the insight

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[55] Ted Sadler, in *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption*, argues that redemption through truth in Nietzsche should be understood as a "comprehensive existential orientation". Sadler talks about concepts such as 'highest reality' and 'absolute truth', and argues that for Nietzsche redemption is found in Dionysian affirmation, and that "Nietzschean redemption is rather the liberation from everything 'worldly' at the same time as it is liberation into the authority of the 'essential' (other-worldly self)" (Sadler: 162). Sadler's reading of Nietzsche relies almost entirely upon *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Will to Power*, which can be seen in his insistence that for Nietzsche redemption involves a rejection of the *principium individuationes*, which only appears in *The Birth of Tragedy* (ibid. 168). As such, the philosophical interpretation Sadler offers fails to convince, and he is mistaken in suggesting that it is key to Nietzsche's philosophical project of redemption that we turn away from "the empirical self" (ibid.).

into some *prudenda origo* certainly brings with it a feeling of a diminution in value of the thing that originated thus and prepares the way to a critical mood and attitude toward it. (WP: 254)

Nietzsche here acknowledges that gaining knowledge, or even accepting something as true may not lead to any genuine transformation. He tells us that all the genealogical method can do is to make us aware of the contingency of, for example, concepts. By being aware of this contingency, we are free to take up a critical attitude towards it, but the genealogical method itself is not this critical attitude. However, as Reginster tells us, "even though a genealogical inquiry is not yet a critique of moral values, it may nevertheless be necessary for it" (2006: 198). We cannot rely on the genealogical method to directly generate change, but what genealogy can do is offer new insight into the origin and emergence of values, concepts, and other aspects of our life.

This should not be undervalued. A person could be struggling with post-Christian sin without being aware of exactly what it is that she is dealing with, her sense of sinfulness could be interpreted by the post-Christian as being caused by something else. Perhaps she thinks that it is particular to herself, or that one event in her life caused this. Through the genealogical method, it would become possible for the post-Christian to become aware of the historical and cultural elements that were in play in the origin, emergence, and promotion of feelings of sinfulness, and that the configuration of sin she experiences may be an off-shoot of this tradition.

However, this increased awareness does not in itself cause any change. It appears that we have taken one step in the right direction, but still fall short of offering an account of redemption that would allow the post-Christian to move on from her sin-consciousness. The question we must ask here is how this increased knowledge can become motivational. How can an awareness of the contingency of one's self-understanding lead to a motivation for

change? This is a question Nietzsche does not provide an answer for, but it must be taken very seriously. It is not obvious that knowledge of post-Christian sin-consciousness will automatically lead to a desire to change it, let alone the possibility of changing it.

Once a person is aware of her existential sin as a form of self-understanding, there are a number of options open to her. Existential sin can either be understood as a problem that needs to be solved, or as an aspect of life that, now she understands it, can be affirmed. For much of this thesis, I have suggested that we ought to take the first approach. Existential sin is a remnant of Christian thought that still linger for the post-Christian, but it no longer suits her. To solve existential sin, perhaps all we need is awareness. Once the post-Christian understands that the way in which she relates to herself, and indeed, to much of the world, is tainted by remains of a religion she rejects, she will want to reject those remains. And, as these fragments, in the form of existential sin, become reflectively available to her – they turn into propositions that she can deny, as she denied God. This, indeed, is what the genealogical method can help her do. By becoming aware of the contingencies and historicity of her self-understanding, by bringing to the surface these cultural remainders of Christianity, she can move away from them. And this is how she can transform from one of the atheists in the marketplace, into someone who acknowledges the impact of the death of God. She now understands the extent of Christianity's influence.

This seems reasonable enough, and I do not wish to argue that it is necessarily a mistake to pursue this avenue. However, it strikes me as overly optimistic. Firstly, it assumes that awareness leads to a desire and possibility to change things. This, as I argued earlier in this chapter, might not be the case. Secondly, and more importantly, existential sin is responsive to the ontological problem of meaningless suffering, and offers us a way to deal with this problem. We might therefore suggest that rejecting existential sin is undesirable, particularly if there are no alternatives available. However, I will show that Nietzsche's account of life

affirmation can be understood to offer such an alternative.

4.3 Nietzsche on Redemption: life-affirmation

At the end of the Second Essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche offers us a glimpse of what redemption might look like for him:

> But at some time, in a period stronger than this brittle, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the *redeemer* of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength allows him no rest in any remote retreat and beyond, a spirit whose seclusion is misunderstood by the common people, as if it were a flight *from* reality – while it is only a further steeping, burrowing, plunging *into* reality, from which he may at some time return to the light, bearing the *redemption* of this reality: its redemption from the curse which the previous ideal has laid upon it. (GM II:24)

Nietzsche is talking about a single immanent individual, a 'redeemer', "*der erlösende Mensch*".[56] The parallel with Christ is striking here. In contrast, in *The Antichrist* Nietzsche describes a "*Typus eines Erlösers der Menschheit*", a type of saviour of humankind. This saviour needs to be understood to stand in direct opposition to the redeemer of GM II:24. The difference is to be found in the world that is embraced: the redeemer in the *Genealogy* plunges "into reality", and is oriented towards "redemption of this reality". The type of redeemer in *The Anti-Christ* exhibits a "hatred for every reality", and aims their redemption at "a world that has become completely 'internal', a 'true' world, an 'eternal' world." (AC: 29).[57]

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[56] As argued by Fraser (2002) and Conway (1989), we can understand the redeemer in this passage as the *übermensch*, the type of higher human that Nietzsche describes in other works such as *Twilight* and *Zarathustra*. Nietzsche's use of this redeeming figure leaves open many questions. Firstly we have to ask, what makes this individual able to be a 'redeemer'? Do they have access to truth that others do not? Or are we meant to understand them more as an exemplar? In order to answer these questions for Nietzsche, an analysis of the figure of Zarathustra in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is necessary. There, Zarathustra is portrayed as a prophet, as a teacher, and as an exemplar. For a detailed analysis, see for example Lampart 1986, Conway 1989, Ansell-Pearson 1992, and Loeb 2010.

[57] There is evidence within *The Antichrist* that Nietzsche considered Christ to be closer to the first kind of redeemer than the second. In section 31 he writes that the way in which we understand Christ now is greatly distorted, and in section 32 that we should understand Christ as a "free spirit", who does not wage war on this world.

For Nietzsche, Christianity entails a turning away from this life, an orientation towards the next life. One of the recurring themes in Nietzsche's writings on Christianity is that this religion promotes an orientation towards a different world, instead of embracing our world. We can find this thought in sections such as *Genealogy* II:21-22 and III:11; *Twilight of the Idols* IV:2, V:1, V:5, IX:34, and IV 2; *The Gay Science* 130, 344, and 346; *Ecce Homo* III 'BT':2, and III 'WC':2. Furthermore, in *Daybreak* 94 Nietzsche writes that Christianity has sacrificed this world for the punishment of sins. In *Beyond Good and Evil* we read that Christianity "invert[s] all love of the earthly and of supremacy over the earth into hated of the earth and earthly things – *that* is the task the Church imposed on itself." (BGE: 62). In the *Genealogy*'s final section Nietzsche tells us that the ascetic ideal expresses a "hatred of the human […], [a] yearning to pass beyond all appearance, change, becoming, death, desire […]|" (GM III:28). In *Twilight* one of the phases of the 'Real World' becoming a fable Nietzsche attributes specifically to Christianity: "The real world unattainable for now, but promised to the wise man, the pious man, the virtuous man ('to the sinner who repents')" (TI IV:2). In a passage in *The Will to Power* Nietzsche writes that the Christian meaning for suffering "is supposed to be a path to holy existence", and as such "[t]he Christian denies even the happiest lot on earth: he is sufficiently weak, poor, disinherited to suffer from life in whatever form he meets it. The god on the cross is a *curse on life*, a signpost to seek redemption from life […]". (WP: 1052, italics mine).

Nietzsche tells us in these passages that Christian doctrines constitute a denial of this world. He fleshes this out in several different ways: he focuses on the crucifixion, on the figure of God, but also on the message of asceticism and the rejection of sensuality. They have in common a particular grounding in the distinction between our world and another world. The explanation that the priest offers for suffering, as described in Chapter 2, relies on positing

another world: we are sinners now, but God has redeemed us, and in the next life there will be no suffering. As Clark puts it:

> Nietzsche believes that the ascetic ideal originally closed the door to "suicidal nihilism." It did so by explaining human suffering as punishment for sin and by providing a goal: the overcoming of one's attachment to life, which the great ascetics carried to extremes of self-torture. This explanation and the related goal saved the will, making it possible for human beings to affirm life, to find living and the pursuit of other goals worthwhile. However, the cost was a devaluation of human life. The ascetic ideal's answer to nihilism made later outbreaks of nihilism inevitable because it deprived human life of intrinsic value, treating it as valuable only as a means to its own negation: nirvana, heaven, for example. (Clark 1990: 252)

The crucifixion emphasizes the otherworldly nature of God, by emphasizing the miraculousness of God becoming human. Sensuality is rejected, because if we embrace our sinful natures we will not be redeemed in the next life. Indeed, Nietzsche suggests throughout his works that Christianity condemns sensual desires and bodily drives as a whole. For example, in *Human, All-Too-Human* 141 Nietzsche writes that the saint uses his sensual desires in order to see his life as a battlefield between good and evil. Nietzsche argues that the saints and ascetics deny themselves anything of a sensual nature whilst knowing that this will only increase their appetite for it, which in turn increases a feeling of sinfulness because their desires and thoughts are also considered transgressions. By denying ourselves in this life, by living ascetically, we will be able to enjoy eternal life. For Nietzsche these kinds of descriptions display precisely what makes the ascetic priest's Christianity a life-denying religion, a religion that denies this world and instead focuses on another.

We could perhaps say that this is a misrepresentation of Christianity. Despite Christ telling us that his "kingdom is not from this world" (1 Jn. 18:36), Christianity does not ask us to deny that we exist in this world. It gives us guidelines on how to live *now*,[58] and in Christ it gave us

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[58] Nietzsche himself writes in *The Gay Science* 353: "The true invention of the religion-founders is first to establish a certain way of life and everyday customs that work as a *disciplina voluntatis* while at the same time removing boredom; and then to give just this life an *interpretation* that makes it appear illuminated by the

an exemplar of how we ought to act in this world. However, when it comes to redemption, we can certainly make the case that the emphasis is strongly on the afterlife. Nietzsche is arguing against a specific form of Christianity that upholds a worldview reminiscent of Platonism.[59] The ascetic priest promotes precisely this kind of picture. We can leave open the question of whether the priest offers a distortion of Christianity, by acknowledging that at the very least the strong emphasis on an afterlife has been an influential view within Christianity. This view can be summarized as follows: we will not experience redemption in this life, as salvation will be found in the next life. In the early Christian Church, we can already find *The Apostles' Creed*, containing the statement that Christians shall believe "the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting". The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* fleshes this out: "each will be rewarded *immediately after death* in accordance with his works and faith" (Catechism 1021, italics mine). The fourth of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* states that "the penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self, that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven" (Luther 2012: 67). Although acts in this world will decide whether salvation is received, this salvation itself exists for the Christian only after this life. For this reason, we are oriented not merely towards our life in this world, but also towards another world, another life.[60]

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highest worth, so that henceforth it becomes a good for which one fights and under certain circumstances even gives one's life."

[59] A different view can be found in, for example, Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, particularly Volume III. He focuses on the "actuality of human existence" and argues for an "autonomous human self-understanding", which does not rely on positing the realm of God as separate from humanity.

[60] The positing of another world is of course not particular to Christianity. Nietzsche argues that it is a part of most religions, as well as part of the message the 'ethical teacher' offers; "The ethical teacher makes his appearance as the teacher of the purpose of existence in order that what happens necessarily and always, by itself and without a purpose, shall henceforth seem to be done for a purpose and strike man as reason and an ultimate commandment; to this end he invents a *second, different existence* and takes by means of his new mechanics the old, ordinary existence off its old, ordinary hinges" (GS:1, italics mine). Nietzsche here echoes Schopenhauer's article *On Man's Need for Metaphysics*, where Schopenhauer argues that in order to live with the suffering in this world, we need to receive an explanation for it *and* we need to be able to believe in another realm. However, Nietzsche moves away from Schopenhauer by arguing that the 'metaphysical need' is in fact a consequence of religion; "The metaphysical need is not the origin of religion, as Schopenhauer has it, but only a late offshoot of it. Under the rule of religious ideas, one has got used to the idea of 'another world (behind, below, above)' and feels an unpleasant emptiness and deprivation at the annihilation of religious delusions – and from this feeling

These orientations are not necessarily conflicting. Salvation may be in another world, but we can only achieve it through our lives *now*, and therefore an orientation towards the other realm exists in the correct orientation towards *this* world and existence. And so, Nietzsche's description of a denial of life is appropriate for the ascetic, but appears not quite accurate for the Christian. However, Nietzsche does not say that Christianity is removed entirely from this life. What he talks about instead is that Christianity is *oriented towards* another world. Meaning, peace and salvation are all to be achieved in the next life, and we understand this life *in relation to* the afterlife. Suffering in this world is explained partly by referring to another world. Therefore, even when we offer a reading of Christianity as speaking to us about this life and offering us guidance in living it, there is still an orientation towards another realm. We can turn to section 1052 from *The Will to Power*: "[o]ne will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be *the path to a holy existence*; in the latter case, being is counted as holy enough to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering" (italics mine). The difference here is a difference between affirming this life *for the sake of* a possible salvation after this life, and affirming this life *for the sake of* this life itself. The first is the Christian redemptive narrative of the ascetic priest, and the second we can find in what Nietzsche calls the "affirmation of life".

Nietzsche criticizes the ascetic priest's Christianity for not embracing this world or this life, but instead finding meaning in a different world. It appears then, that the 'affirmation of life' must constitute an attitude wherein we find meaning solely in *this* world. The orientation of life-affirmation must furthermore contain some kind of embracing of life, as Nietzsche criticizes Christianity for denying life and turning away from it.

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grows now 'another world', but this time only metaphysical and not a religious one." (GS: 151)

A small note on the complexity of the current topic is needed. Affirmation of life is bound up with nihilism, *amor fati*, the eternal recurrence, and a Dionysian approach to life. In this thesis I have not delved into these concepts, and explaining each in detail would overwhelm us in material. Therefore, I suggest a specific orientation towards life-affirmation that narrows our focus. The current chapter concerns possibly redemptive avenues for the post-Christian sinner, and we are thereby interested in looking at life-affirmation as *redemptive*. The question we want to focus on is whether life-affirmation can be a redemptive attitude for the post-Christian sinner to take up. Will it redeem her from her sense of sinfulness? In order to answer this question, it is not necessary to offer a comprehensive overview of life-affirmation in Nietzsche. Nor will we need to understand the specific nature of nihilism or the Dionysian drives. *Amor fati* will be explored as an interpretation of life-affirmation, but the overarching objective of this section will be to assess whether life-affirmation can map onto post-Christian sin as a possible redemptive avenue.[61]

4.4 Life-affirmation and suffering

So what is life-affirmation? There are several passages in Nietzsche's texts that offer an answer to this question. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche talks about the "highest affirmation", which we can find in the Dionysian. This highest affirmation consists of "a yes-saying without reservation, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything questionable and alien about existence" (EH III 'BT':2). He continues to describe an "affirmation of transience *and destruction*" (ibid. 3). In *Twilight of the Idols* we read;

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[61] For Nietzsche on nihilism, see Van Tongeren 2010, Pippin 1999, Franks 2013, and Reginster 2006 – the latter of which contains a detailed analysis of the relation between nihilism and life-affirmation. Béatrice Han-Pile's 2009 paper 'Nietzsche and *Amor Fati*' gives what is perhaps the most convincing account of *amor fati*, by understanding it as a medio-passive form of *agapic* love. Other relevant texts include Stern 2013, and Owen's 'Modernity, Ethics and Counter-Ideals: Amor Fati, Eternal Recurrence and the Overman' in Owen 1998. For eternal recurrence, Löwith 1997 and Hatab 2005 are the most comprehensive, further interesting accounts include chapters in Reginster 2006, May 1999, Strong 1988, and Clark 1990.

> Saying yes to life,[62] even in its strangest and harshest problems; the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types – *that* is what I called Dionysian, *that* is the bridge I found to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* to escape horror and pity, not to cleanse yourself of a dangerous affect by violent discharge […] but rather, over and above all horror and pity, so that *you yourself may be* the eternal joy in becoming. (TI X:5).

It appears therefore, that we should understand the affirmation of life as being a Yes to life: affirming life in all its facets, and doing so wholeheartedly. Nietzsche focuses in particular on suffering, on "horror and pity", "destruction" and the "hardest problems". Instead of attempting to find explanations for suffering that lessen their impact, and turning away from the destructive aspects of life, we should embrace them. Suffering should not be condemned as a part of life that does not belong, as something that is wrong and needs fixing. We saw earlier in chapter 2, that Nietzsche argues that human beings struggle most of all with *meaningless* suffering. For Nietzsche, the intense drive to explain and ground suffering would be satisfied by understanding it to be a fundamental and necessary part of life.

If we affirm life and suffering in the way Nietzsche intends it, then the question of why suffering exists at all would be answered by pointing out that suffering is a part of life, in the same way that love or joy are parts of life; "suffering results inevitably from the engagement with life" (Roberts 1998: 165). Life-affirmation can take over the role of existential sin in responding to the ontological problem of meaningless suffering. In response to the question of why there is suffering, we would say that there is suffering because this is necessary for life. Suffering is a fact of our existence: "all becoming and growth, everything that guarantees the future involves pain" (TI X:4).[63] It is important to affirm suffering precisely because it is an essential part of our lives: the thought goes that suffering is there whether we like it or not, we

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[62] German: "*Jasagen zum Leben*", translated as "affirmation of life" by Hollingdale, and as "saying Yes to life" by Large and Norman.
[63] German: "alles Werden und Wachsen, alles Zukunft-Verbürgende *bedingt* den Schmerz" – *bedingt* is translated by Large as "presupposes", and by Hollingdale as "postulates".

might as well take up as healthy an attitude towards it as we can. Life-affirmation therefore has a redemptive element to it; it redeems us from the *problem* of meaningless suffering.

However, for Nietzsche we must not only accept suffering, but also "show that suffering is good for its own sake" (Reginster 2006: 15). It is still possible to accept suffering as necessary to life, but to retain an orientation towards another world. Schopenhauer, for example, acknowledged the necessity of suffering, and argued that as a consequence the only appropriate attitude towards life is one of denial. Indeed, when we become overwhelmed by the fact that suffering is inevitable this can lead to despair and an unwillingness to embrace life. In order to clarify exactly how life-affirmation differs from these kind of orientations, Reginster helpfully employs the categories of resignation and concealment:

> [*Ecce Homo,* II 10] contrasts a genuine affirmation of life (the "love" of it) with two other attitudes one might adopt toward suffering, which we might call respectively resignation and concealment. Resignation is the acceptance of aspects of life we deplore but recognize to be inevitable (for example, suffering). Concealment, by contrast, designates the effort to mask the necessity of those deplorable aspects. (ibid. 229)

The attitude of resignation entails an acknowledgment of suffering as necessary, but still designating this suffering as undesirable. In the case of concealment, we might acknowledge suffering as necessary, but will believe that it is not much of a problem. Reginster offers two different ways in which Nietzsche fleshes out concealment: idealism and counter-adaptation. Idealism will sound familiar to us: it is to argue that suffering in this world is merely an illusion, as there is a *true*, real world after this life. Counter-adaptation refers to an attitude of extreme adaptability: "dissatisfied or frustrated, because they always manage to convince themselves that what they get is what they want, and that what they fail to get they did not want anyway" (ibid. 230). Although the idealist and adaptive individual can both acknowledge suffering as necessary to this life, they are still unable to affirm suffering as desirable for its own sake, i.e. not as means to an end. Life-affirmation requires us to look at

our life, and to affirm it wholeheartedly. When I affirm suffering as necessary, I am affirming it as necessary for my life: "Nietzsche's conception of life-affirmation goes far beyond life-enhancement; it aims for a global affirmation of all life conditions, even those that run counter to one's interests […]." (Hatab 2005: 47).

In the *Genealogy* the ascetic priests treat life as something that should be rectified, as "a mistake which one rectifies through action" (GM III:12). They negate life by asserting that value is to be found in another world, the ascetic priests thus "juxtapose this life to a completely different form of existence, which it opposes and excludes, *unless* it somehow turns itself against itself, *denies itself*" (ibid.). The ascetic priests' valuation of life is therefore *counter* to life, and as such it is a value that for Nietzsche should not be asserted when we affirm life. This particular value of the priests is directly opposed to life-affirmation as such, and easily identifiable as such. Immanent life-affirmation would not be possible if meaning is to be found outside of this world. In the case of post-Christian sin, it is less obvious whether this is inimical to 'life', as there is no conscious affirmation of another world. More importantly, post-Christian sin-consciousness is pre-reflective. Before she can begin to figure out if her sense of sinfulness is contrary to life, the post-Christian sinner must first become aware of its existence. Life affirmation is not an approach meant to give us knowledge of how we are constituted. It already starts from a position of knowledge; knowledge of what life is, knowledge what is and is not good for life. The post-Christian sinner does not find herself in this position.

It is therefore worth raising the question whether life affirmation, and specifically the affirmation of suffering, might also help deal with post-Christian sin-consciousness. The link between suffering and sin that Nietzsche establishes relies on the need for an explanation of suffering. If, with life affirmation, this need is channelled into an acceptance of suffering as simply a part of life, then no longer will sin be required as a solution – the problem is no

longer there. We can think of this as a paradigm shift – the first paradigm that explained meaningless suffering was existential sin, but now there is the possibility of a new paradigm wherein this suffering is explained by life affirmation.

By stating it thus, it appears that life affirmation undertakes a critical re-evaluation of the meaning of suffering. However, if we read it in terms of Blumenberg's account of answer and question positions, we can see that the change from existential sin to life-affirmation can also be thought of as maintaining the same paradigm. Both sin and life-affirmation answer the question of meaningless suffering, and as such find themselves within the same system of world explanation. Life-affirmation does not "destroy the question itself critically" (Blumenberg 1983: 66), but rather offers a different answer to the 'great question' of meaningless suffering.

This is precisely how we should understand Nietzsche's project of life affirmation. When there is no answer available to the problem of meaningless suffering, we can fall into nihilism. This is why Nietzsche tells us that the ascetic priests saved the will: by positing sin as the explanation for suffering, "man was saved, he had a meaning, from now on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of 'non-sense'; from now on he could will something" (GM III: 28). We must understand the answer the ascetic priest gives as an attempt to engage with the problem of meaningless suffering and make life more bearable. For Nietzsche, "[…] ascetic ideals are honored […] precisely because of the honest confrontation with the meaning problem, even if the response is to find no meaning in finite life." (Hatab 2005: 44).

It is this "meaning problem" that life affirmation attempts to find a solution to. As such, it offers an alternative to sin: instead of human beings being responsible for suffering, suffering

ought to be looked at as an indispensable part of life.[64] However, Roberts argues that there is an important difference between Nietzsche's account of life-affirmation and the Christian conception of sin. He argues that the Christian account is deeply reactive: life itself is understood in relation to suffering, in the sense that "suffering, life itself, then becomes a problem that one must solve in order to live." (Roberts: 165). In contrast, Roberts argues, we should understand Nietzsche's account as showing us that "an answer to the question of suffering" (ibid. 165) is not necessary in order to find meaning in life. According to this account, the problem of meaningless suffering will no longer occupy a central position in the human experience once suffering is acknowledged as a necessary part of life.

There is a significant difference in the evaluation of suffering between Nietzsche and Christian accounts. Nietzsche does not condemn suffering, nor consider it something we ought to strive to get rid of. For Nietzsche, whatever picture the 'ideal world' may refer to, it is not one without suffering. The Christian picture shows us the opposite: suffering is a difficult and undesirable part of life, and one of the reasons why this life is not as good as the next: the better, even perfect, world after this one does not contain *any* suffering. Although Nietzsche's account does provide an answer to the problem of meaningless suffering, it furthermore contains an evaluation of suffering that is radically different from that proposed by Christianity.

We need to consider what it means to affirm meaningless suffering. The way in which I have described the post-Christian's response suggests that it is fully up to her: once she becomes aware of her existential sin, she can choose to reject it and answer the problem of meaningless suffering differently. This choice is presented as a free, emotionally detached choice, where

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[64]We can look at Löwith to strengthen this reading: "The death of God means the resurrection of the man who is abandoned to his own responsibility and command, the man who finally has his most extreme freedom in 'freedom toward death.' At the peak of this freedom, however, the will to the nothing inverts itself into the willing of the eternal recurrence of the same." (Löwith 1997: 37)

existential sin either does or does not correspond with other beliefs the post-Christian reflectively holds. These beliefs need not necessarily be religious. For example, if she understands herself as a free agent in the world, able to make her future and put an imprint upon the world, she will most likely want to reject existential sin. If, on the other hand, she understands the world as filled with suffering, is immensely troubled by how humankind is destroying earth, and believes her conscience to be the key to navigating the world, she may wish to affirm existential sin.

Presenting this decision as such is somewhat misleading. As Hamilton points out, there is always an element of luck involved here: "if one is able to look the tragedy of life squarely in the face and find things in life that make it nonetheless worthwhile, then this is largely a matter of luck." (2016: 146). The ways in which the post-Christian understands the world, and the beliefs she holds, are not merely a matter of reflection: they are impacted by our culture, by our education, by our temperament: in other words, by contingent circumstances.

The demands of life affirmation are significant, and perhaps even excessive. Why is it not enough to accept suffering as a part of life and not as desirable? And why is it furthermore not even sufficient to accept and love suffering as a means to an end, rather than in itself? The excessiveness of Nietzsche's demand is brought out particularly strongly if we consider the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche writes:

> What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must 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 over 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 power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this again and innumerable times again?' would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed

would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for thus ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (GS: 341)

The final sentence is key here, what the eternal return demands is for a person to be well-disposed towards herself and her life to such an extent that she would happily live it over and over again. This is the exact opposite of what the ascetic priest's message demands of us. There, we are told that this life is one of sin and misery, but that once it is finished for us, there will be relief in a different world. This orientation is therefore one where there will be radically different possibilities open to us after our lives, and that these possibilities are precisely what we should look forward to as they will be without suffering. For Nietzsche, there is no such future available to us. Instead, we have to think of our life as being repeatedly infinitely, and we should strive for desiring this to come to fruition. This means that, for example, I ought to desire to relive the death of my mother. On a larger scale, it means that I ought to desire to live in a world where Rohingya are systematically murdered, women in India raped, and gay men in Chechnya detained for no reason. It means that I ought to desire a world with, for example, a history of slavery, segregation, and the Holocaust.

These things I cannot and will not desire. And so, when we look at what life-affirmation demands of us, we have to seriously consider that it might be demanding the impossible. Maudemarie Clark insists that within Nietzsche's account we must be able to affirm life through eternal return whilst "preferring a world that is just like ours except for the absence of Hitler […]" (Clark 1990: 281). Indeed, many commentators struggle with what seems to a thoroughly unethical view in Nietzsche's account of life-affirmation: if saying 'yes to life' means designating all past suffering as desirable, we would be considering acts of cruelty, violence and pain as desirable. When I struggle to accept the suffering that cancer forced my mother to go through, any suggestion that I should not only accept this suffering as necessary, but also designate it as desirable would be felt as unreasonable and unethical.

In order to offer an alternative explanation for meaningless suffering that can usurp the position of existential sin in Western European culture, we may not have to go as far as Nietzsche's concept of life-affirmation goes. He offers us a starting point by arguing that suffering is, necessarily, a part of life. He further argues that in order to flourish we need to embrace this suffering as desirable. This further step he takes is not necessarily in order for life-affirmation to be an effective answer to the problem of meaningless suffering. A resignation that comes from understanding all suffering to be inherently a part of life, and as such necessary and unavoidable can take the sting out of the problem of meaningless suffering. Nietzsche does not advocate resignation, but a powerful affirmation, a 'yes' to the suffering that I have seen and endured.

The problem of meaningless suffering concerns suffering that we consider to be without rhyme or reason and possibly unjust. The paradigm of existential sin responds to these instances of suffering not only by explaining that humankind is essentially guilty and therefore deserving of punishment, but also by positing another world in which there will be no more suffering. Some theologians might be comfortable arguing that a child's death from leukaemia is related to guilt, but it will be difficult for most people to accept this explanation. However, emphasizing that the child is now somewhere where she can no longer suffer can be an immense source of comfort. Life-affirmation cannot provide this second kind of comfort, as there is no other pain-less realm that we can look forward to. It can explain the suffering of this child by pointing to the facts of our existence: there is no rhyme and reason to suffering, many suffer unjustly, and this is part of what it means to be human. For Nietzsche, we should add "and this is good!" For the person struggling with meaningless suffering, it would actually suffice to say "and this is difficult and frustrating." In order to respond to meaningless suffering, we need not create a framework in which it is to be affirmed as desirable, but rather we need a framework that allows us to understand the role of suffering in

relation to us as human beings, and the world. Acknowledging the fact that suffering is a necessary part of life does precisely this. Acknowledging the fact that suffering is not related to our guilt, but that it is largely a game of chance further aids our understanding. We need to go to the lengths Nietzsche went through in order to make life with meaningless suffering bearable: suffering is a fact of life, but need not be desired.

Conclusion

> I stand before my highest mountains and before my longest hike: therefore I must descend deeper than I ever climbed before: – descend deeper into suffering than I ever climbed before, down into its blackest flood! (TZ, 'The Wanderer')

One way in which this current philosophical project can be understood is as making a distinction between parts of our relation to ourselves and the world that are fixed, and parts that may appear fixed but are in reality no more than very hard to get rid of. The question of meaningless suffering is fixed, as it is a part of what it means to be a human being as such. Existential sin is not fixed, but has proven itself to be extremely persistent. In many ways, understanding the tenacity of existential sin was the main motivation for this thesis: why is existential sin still a pernicious part of the human experience in Western Europe when there is a clear decline in the number of people that consciously affirm Christian beliefs?

The answer to this question, I have argued, lies in the fact that existential sin responds to an ontological problem. As such, it captures something fundamental about the human experience. Nietzsche convincingly shows us that existential sin is a product of Christianity, and tied to a particular cultural trajectory. It is therefore itself not ontologically necessary, but existential sin continues to resonate with us because it is responsive to the problem of meaningless suffering.

In this thesis I focused not on the problem of meaningless suffering, but rather on establishing a robust account of existential sin that can help us understand its relevance for contemporary

society. In order to do so I first offered a detailed account of sin in Christian thought. Although not comprehensive, it included discussions of many pivotal texts in the history of sin. Through exploring these texts, I established existential sin as a category of sin that concerns human nature, rather than specific acts. Texts such as Paul's Romans and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* offer accounts of existential sin that describe it as a terrible burden and illness, a state of human nature that comes with significant suffering.

It is precisely this type of description of sin that we can also find in Friedrich Nietzsche's work. In the second chapter of this thesis I argued that we should understand Nietzsche's account of sin, particularly as expounded in his *Genealogy,* as thoroughly rooted in the Christian tradition. This chapter thereby argued against certain commentators of Nietzsche, who represent his project in the genealogy as wholly secular. It is in fact when we place Nietzsche in direct conversation with the Christian tradition that his powerful descriptions of existential sin can be adequately understood.

However, it is pivotal to this thesis that existential sin does not remain an excuslively religious category. Although rooted in Christianity, I show in the third chapter that existential sin as a form of self-understanding has taken on a life of its own after the 'death of God'. By looking at Nietzsche's account of the 'death of God' and the shadows that remain, I argue that it is indeed possible for such thoroughly religious concepts to remain a part of a culture even if a process of secularization has taken place. Existential sin has become a cultural memory that is cemented within Western European culture, and therefore available as a form of self-understanding even for post-Christians. In responding to an ontological problem, existential sin has become a category that itself appears to be fundamental to the human experience.

The final chapter serves to argue that existential sin is not fixed, and that there are methods of redemption from sin available to us. Given that existential sin is so deeply rooted in Christian

thought, I first look at Christian accounts of redemption. Following Nietzsche, I argue that these forms of redemption are not available for the post-Christian sinner. I therefore turn to two forms of redemption found in Nietzsche's work: the genealogical method and life-affirmation. Although genealogy can allow the post-Christian sinner to become aware of her sense of sinfulness, it does not offer us a robust theoretical account of how this would allow her to change it. Life-affirmation appears more promising: it allows the post-Christian to take up a different orientation towards her own life. In particular, by designating all suffering as a necessary part of life, we can offer a different way of responding to the problem of meaningless suffering. However, I argue that Nietzsche's account of life affirmation requires too much in its emphasis on depicting suffering not only as necessary but *desirable*. The affirmation of suffering can be a viable alternative to existential sin in its response to the ontological problem of suffering, and designating suffering as desirable is therefore not necessary.

A final thought on the topic of the affirmation of suffering. To affirm suffering means to look it squarely in the eye and acknowledge that it is a fundamental part of human existence. In other words, to affirm suffering means to know and understand the extent and inescapability of suffering. In the fourth chapter of this thesis I argued that this knowledge, and acceptance thereof, can redeem us from the problem of meaningless suffering. This argument assumes that an awareness of the inescapability of suffering can be a relief to us, because at least we understand why there is such seemingly gratuitous suffering. It is entirely possible, however, that this knowledge leads to despair rather than relief. One might say that the happiness of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden before they ate of the fruit can never be matched by any happiness achieved on earth. Lev Shestov tells us that "the fallen man […] puts all his trust in knowledge, while it is precisely knowledge that paralyzes his will and leads him inexorably to his downfall." (1968: 222). This thought should be taken seriously, and any further

exploration of existential sin might want to consider the possibility that it has proven more persistent than the affirmation of suffering precisely because it does not require us to acknowledge the truth of suffering: that it is pervasive, indifferent, and overwhelming.

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