The Sickness Unto Life: Nietzsche's Diagnosis of the Christian Condition

Frank Shepard

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2013

ABSTRACT

The Sickness Unto Life: Nietzsche's Diagnosis of the Christian Condition

Frank Shepard

Insufficient attention has been given to Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as a disease, while too much has been given to the theme of the death of God. Nietzsche's use of the language of health to describe Christianity is not a mere side-effect of his mid-career embrace of the natural sciences; rather, it develops out of his early investigation of the tragic and Socratic responses to *nausea*, a debilitating condition of the will. Over the course of his career, Nietzsche turns his focus from Socratism to Christianity, coming to believe that the latter response to nausea is a cure that is worse than the condition it is meant to treat. He comes to see Christianity as more relevant than Socratism to the modern European condition, and he distinguishes the two on the basis of their respective attitudes toward death (the topic of suicide) and pity (metaphysical comfort). Nietzsche develops a broadly naturalistic critique of Christianity that describes it as the lowest possible affirmation of life – something akin to a living death. As such, it is a force that disintegrates and decomposes healthy bodies – both individual and social – and produces a new kind of group – the anarchistic "herd" – that promotes the interests of the "priestly" type of human being. By focusing on the physiological, psychological, and social dimensions of Nietzsche's critique rather than its theological claims, we come to see the extent to which this critique is not limited by – and, indeed, challenges – the secular/religious divide, and how it problematizes long-held assumptions about the essence and identity of Christianity in the modern world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

the value of education and the humanities, were a constant source of motivation throughout the often-trying process of writing a dissertation. Finally, I would never have been able to pursue my degree without the love and support of Kate Mclaughlin, who sacrificed much on my behalf, and whose sacrifices served as invaluable reminders that the life of the mind, which we academics often take for granted, is a gift made possible by the labor of all.

DEDICATION

To Kate, for everything.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Numerals used in references to Nietzsche's texts refer to section numbers. Abbreviations stand for the English translations of the titles of his works. The same holds for references to Schopenhauer's texts.

Introduction

      This study is an attempt to understand Nietzsche's portrait of Christianity. More specifically, it is an attempt to make sense of Nietzsche's claim that Christianity is a disease. The crux of the problem is one of categorization: Christianity has in recent centuries served as the defining model of *religion*; what, then, does Nietzsche mean when he describes it as a disease? Are we to take Nietzsche's use of medical language to describe a religious phenomenon seriously or ought we to treat it as a rhetorical device and nothing more? Much has been written about Nietzsche's serious engagement with the sciences (medicine included) in the past few decades, and as a result it seems clear that the latter option is not viable. Both Gregory Moore and Michel Serres have demonstrated the intersection of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity with the scientific discourse of his day. Their work implies strongly that we ought to take Nietzsche's medicalized descriptions of Christianity seriously and that, to some extent, Nietzsche's arguments against Christianity depend for their strength on the validity of the scientific concepts that inform them. Serres remarks, "It would be naïve to see in [Nietzsche's use of medical language] an array of sarcasms, even if the language of abuse often derives its value from the lexicon of putrefaction. No, [*The Antichrist*] is quite simply a handbook of medicine, signed and written as such – and dated medicine at that" (32).

The particular event that dates Nietzsche's text, according to Serres, is the scientific confirmation of germ theory, i.e., the discovery of the microbial basis of many diseases. Nietzsche's most productive decade overlapped this development, and the excitement and confusion of that time have left their marks across his texts. Medicine at this time is in the process of coming to signify something new – no longer the fight of the living against death, it is now understood as the clash between macro- and micro-organisms. A diseased state ought to be understood as the product of clashing *living* interests rather than as the opposition of life and death. As Serres puts it, Pasteur's work confirms that both "*genealogy and decadence*" are products of life; it is this relation that has been overlooked by the valuations of the past: "Here, Nietzsche grasps, blindly, something to this effect: the Christian is a yeast, a micro-organism, a malefic virus that decomposes. The real battle lies in this: fermentation or decay?" (44). The novelty of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity lies in its transformation of the centuries-old discourse of health and degeneration: what appears to be opposed to life (degeneration) is actually symptomatic of its plenitude and force. When Nietzsche describes Christianity as a form of degeneration, he seems to mean both that it actively opposes the instincts of growth *and* that it does so in the name of life. When a body decomposes, it is not simply coming undone; rather, the bubbling of its flesh indicates the presence of a great feast.[1] One body's decline fuels another's

---

1   These contemporary scientific advances in the understanding of the processes of decay shine new light on our understanding of the madman's cries in these famous lines: "Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" (*GS* 125). For Nietzsche, the death of God – the decomposition of the divine body (the body of the old God) – defines the Christian condition.

rise. Decadence and degeneration are thus only ever half the story: where one party goes under, another rises. For Nietzsche, Christianity is a feast upon the strength of traditional social bodies as well as the physical bodies of the "noble type." It is both the product and an agent of a struggle between living things, expressing a contentious parasitic-relation between priestly-type and community. The processes of degeneration that Nietzsche associates with this relation signify both the undoing of some and the power of others, just as fermentation signifies both decay and vitality; and these processes are understand in terms of the prevailing scientific and pseudo-scientific conversations of the day.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Nietzsche's sensitivity to the scientific developments of his age divorced him from conversations and concerns of a more remote vintage. In fact, while Nietzsche is certainly interested in Christianity as the site of a struggle between natural forces (i.e., between various human types), that is, in the way that Christianity can be understood in terms of processes proper to the natural world at large, he is most fascinated by a feature that seems to make Christianity unique in this regard. For not only is Christianity an example of living things struggling against one another, it is also apparently an example of living things turned against life itself, i.e., turned against the highest, healthy expression of natural existence. In Christianity, Nietzsche believes he has encountered beings who are not simply sick, but rather *sick of life*. Here we find sickness as a *way of life*. How could such a thing come to thrive? This is the puzzle Nietzsche confronts in his critique of Christianity.

Nietzsche's particular use of the language of health situates him within a much older tradition of natural philosophy and story-telling grounded in a fascination with the unnatural and grotesque. Diseased forms of life featured regularly in these conversations, and it is profitable to view Nietzsche's critique of Christianity with an eye to this tradition. As suggested above, Nietzsche viewed Christianity as the site of a living struggle, but one in which the opponent is not just another living thing but rather life itself. The Christian life, with its devaluing of *this* flesh and *this* world, appears to Nietzsche as an example of nature turned against itself – a redirection of the energies that seem to animate the natural world around us. To Nietzsche's eyes, it is a monstrous growth that has invaded nearly every aspect of modern European life. When Nietzsche describes Christianity as a disease, he seems to mean that it is a perversion of (and within) nature – a deviation from the trajectory of growth. This connotation links his critique to eighteenth and nineteenth century attitudes (both philosophical and aesthetic) toward the monstrous and grotesque.

The frontiers of knowledge were marked for centuries by wonders and monstrosities. As Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park have shown, "wonder and wonders hovered at the edges of scientific inquiry. Indeed, they defined those edges, both objectively and subjectively. Wonders as objects marked the outermost limits of the natural. Wonder as passion registered the line between the known and the unknown" (13). Monsters figure prominently in this history because, as irregularities, they challenge the known order and the rule of law, and therefore cry out for

explanation.[2] In the eighteenth century, naturalists looked upon monsters as perversions of the natural order. In an age enamored of the image of the body as machine, the monstrous growth evinced reactions of disappointment and disgust: "as deformities or natural errors, monsters inspired repugnance: they were neither ominous nor admirable but regrettable, the occasional price to be paid for the very simplicity and regularity in nature from which they so shockingly deviated" (209). Interestingly, this development within the natural sciences was matched by a transformation within aesthetics, where the high esteem previously given to fantastic products of the imagination, including images of monsters, was replaced with a feeling of distaste: "monsters affronted not truth but taste; … monsters did not – and could not – violate nature's laws, but in infringing upon society's customs, they cast doubt on the stability of both orders" (212-14). Monsters remind us of the fragility of the orderly world we take for granted; they are like a seam in the otherwise perfect surface of divine reason. Monsters thus come to mark out the frontier between what is and what ought to be, and the disgust with them as natural forms reflects discomfort in the face of a world that is capable of defying our interests and expectations.

In the nineteenth century, following Romanticism, there emerged a philosophical movement that took these feelings of distaste, disgust and regret directed at the malformed and applied it to the natural world *in toto*. I am speaking of philosophical pessimism, particularly as

---

2   For instance, Daston and Park discuss the case of sixteenth-century European anatomist Jean Riolan, for whom "monsters of all sorts represented a full-scale violation of the rule of law, the health of the people, and the authority of the king" (203).

expressed by Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's pessimism looks upon human existence as a kind of monstrous birth, something that is wondrous, regrettable, distasteful, and a mark of sin (each of these having been components, at various times, of the European reaction to monsters).[3] For Schopenhauer, the world, like the monster, is something contingent, and it is from this fact that our wonder (and our philosophy) arises (*WWR* II, 170). But according to Schopenhauer, we are not content to simply marvel at the world's existence; rather, our sense of wonder quickly turns to regret:

> Even simple theism in its cosmological proof tacitly starts from the fact that it infers the world's previous non-existence from its existence; thus, it assumes in advance that the world is something contingent. What is more, in fact, we very soon look upon the world as something whose non-existence is not only conceivable, but even preferable to its existence. Therefore our astonishment at it easily passes into brooding over that *fatality* which could nevertheless bring about its existence, and by virtue of which such an immense force as is demanded for the production and maintenance of such a world could be directed so much against its own interest and advantage. (171)

Furthermore, our brooding attitude toward existence, it turns out, is also the ultimate goal of existence: "nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist" (605). This, he tells us, is "the most important of all truths", and one that has been recognized in various forms throughout human history. Indeed, it is on account of its embrace of this truth that Christianity has triumphed over all competing traditions: "The power by virtue of which Christianity was able to overcome first Judaism, and

---

3   See Daston & Park, chapter five.

then the paganism of Greece and Rome, is to be found solely in its pessimism, in the confession that our condition is both exceedingly sorrowful and sinful" (170).

Where Schopenhauer looked upon our worldly existence as something monstrous and regrettable, Friedrich Nietzsche, his most famous student, turns the astonished gaze back upon his educator's pessimism, looking upon it in much the same way. Schopenhauer said that our phenomenal existence is an appearance of the will "directed … against [the will's] own interest and advantage", i.e., that our individual lives stand in contradiction to the thing-in-itself that grounds them. Nietzsche comes to a similar conclusion about the Schopenhauerean and Christian response, i.e., the resignation of the individuated will; for Nietzsche, the renunciant appears as an anti-natural piece of nature, a living contradiction, "life turned against life". Faced with this absurdity, Nietzsche asks how it could be that nature would repeatedly produce such a thing. Where Schopenhauer saw the righteous power of the truth behind the triumph of Christianity, Nietzsche sees the tenacious grip of a contagious disease.

In a sense, Nietzsche's entire project represents an attempt to diagnose and find a treatment for the pessimistic condition, especially as it manifests itself in the Christian tradition. Nietzsche's repugnance at these pessimistic responses stems not from their portrayal of the world as a horrific place, but rather from their response to this portrayal. Nietzsche accepts the pessimistic world-view (the world can be a terrible and cruel place) but rejects the Christian and Schopenhauerean reactions to it. For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's distinction between pessimistic

and optimistic philosophies and religions is less important than the distinction between affirmative and nihilistic ones. Nietzsche concludes that Christianity and Schopenhauer offer nihilistic responses to the pessimistic truth about life, meaning that they advocate a life lived in hateful protest of this world. These living reactions to the truth about life resist all those things that Nietzsche, the naturalist, associates with health and growth; Christianity, in particular, is "directed only toward destruction" (*A* 58). From a naturalistic perspective – meaning, from a perspective grounded in observation of the natural world – these life-forms appear grotesque and monstrous and cry out for explanation. How could life come to grief over itself? How could a monstrous thing such as life be overcome by the fear of monsters – a fear that issues its own variety of monstrosity?

Nietzsche's characterization of Christianity as a disease is, in a way, a continuation of the naturalist's fascination with monsters. Nietzsche's conceptual arsenal was of fairly recent mint, however, meaning that his understanding of the monstrous and pathological was quite different from that available to the naturalists of previous centuries. For Nietzsche, monsters represent variations from the norm rather than beings of an altogether different kind or origin. Writing in the wake of Broussais and the rise of probabilistic and statistical approaches to medicine and society, Nietzsche understands the norm as the mean or average of a distribution. Monsters appear at the extremes, and their status can be either positive or negative with respect to the

average.[4] The positive extreme belongs to excellence, while the negative extreme points to degeneration and illness. According to Nietzsche, Christianity is objectionable because it cultivates negative traits and threatens to destroy healthy growth. The Dionysian is also monstrous, in its way – Dionysus himself is a monstrous creature – but it is exceptional in a positive way, affirming, promoting, and enhancing the fundamental instincts of healthy life. Nietzsche's claim that Christianity is a disease ought to be understood in this way. Dionysus and the Crucified are the two monstrous forms that occupy Nietzsche' gaze, one representing great health, the other disease.

To summarize so far: Christianity, according to Nietzsche's broadly naturalistic reading, is an agent of decomposition, feasting upon the bodies (both social and individual) of the healthy. In this it is no different than any other living thing. It is a monstrous thing, however, insofar as it appears as a living contradiction of life itself – a parasitic life-form empowered through the active destruction of health (i.e., life-affirming activities) in general. The novelty of Christianity is to be found in the fact that those who thrive by virtue of it are themselves *made sick*. The Christian takes as his enemy the natural urge to grow and prosper in this world, and this attack on strength paradoxically becomes a source of profound power. The feeling that *this* existence and *this* world are regrettable, however, comes at a high price: through its triumph, nature, the great artist, loses the capacity to take joy in itself. If, as Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy*, life can only be

---

4   A notable difference to his predecessors, for whom monsters were " neither ominous nor admirable" (Daston & Park, 209).

justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, the Christian uglification of the world might lead to the loss of any hope of living in affirmation of *this* life. Already in his first book, long before his interest in Christianity has formed, Nietzsche identifies *nausea* – in which the will collapses when confronted by the meaninglessness of life – as the great threat facing humankind. The Greeks overcame this threat through the tragic arts, which allowed them to affirm life despite its horrors. Christianity overcomes nausea by turning the will against life and finding in this opposition a source of great energy. It appeals to those who lack the strength or power to thrive in the world by giving them access to the feeling of power and strength. It is a form of "imaginary revenge" against the world. It has been successful, in part, because our social lives no longer allow us to vent our natural instincts and urges; "imaginary" relief is thus often the only mode of relief available to us. Targeted in this way, health becomes a source of guilt, i.e, un-redeemable debt; through guilt we pay a psychic toll for every inch of growth. We hate our natural selves, and take revenge upon ourselves on the basis of the feeling of guilt, and this hatred and revenge energize our otherwise flagging wills. But this response to the *nausea* of the will comes at a price: the healthy aspects of life might disappear from the world for good.

By this account, the Christian condition is thus not so much a set of beliefs as a general orientation of the will against the healthy impulses. As such, it is not confined to the church; instead, it is found everywhere that organized bodies, such as churches, show signs of decay. According to Nietzsche, Christianity was born through an anarchistic assault on the "church" of

priestly Judaism, was renewed through the Protestant assault on Rome, and is alive today through the anarchist, socialist, and democratic assaults on traditional (including religious) authorities. True Christianity thus feasts on its own success, making it difficult to identify. This is one reason that Nietzsche comes to distrust the sciences: opposition to the church and tradition is not opposition to Christianity; in fact, such rebellions have, in the past, heralded its greatest victories. Yet science might prove valuable as a source of new material for forging a new kind of art – one capable of affirming this life and restoring us to health. Nietzsche's hope is that science might help us overcome the deleterious effects of the feeling of guilt, thereby providing an antidote to the Christian disease. Christianity has cultivated in us the ability to relate to ourselves in new ways: we have learned to make ourselves our enemies – a relation that has allowed us to shape ourselves like never before, although in a manner that Nietzsche deems "sickly"; perhaps we can use these new powers to love and revere ourselves, too, and eventually attain what Nietzsche refers to as the "great health."

A Very Brief Survey of the Field

Most scholarship devoted to Nietzsche's critique of Christianity or religion falls under the umbrella of traditional philosophy of religion, meaning that it focuses on theological issues such as proofs for or against the existence of God and the relationship between religion, morality, and

science. Some recent scholarship, such as that by Tim Murphy, Julian Young, and Tyler Roberts, breaks out of this mold by examining Nietzsche's use of language and metaphor in his critique of religion (Murphy), the compatibility of his views with historical forms of religious life (Young), and the implications of his critique for our understanding of religion as a category of thought (Roberts). I do not address these issues in what follows, but I hope to complement this work by bringing attention to a dimension of Nietzsche's critique that has thus far gone largely unexamined: the intersection of this critique with the discourse of health. Other scholars, notably Gregory Moore, have undertaken detailed investigations of Nietzsche's use of the scientific literature of his day, and some of this scholarship does attend to Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. Moore's work is particularly good on this score. However, Moore's interest in connecting Nietzsche's thought to the scientific discourse of his contemporaries leads him, necessarily, to ignore or play down those aspects of Nietzsche's critique that are productively understood in relation to non-scientific concepts and concerns. The present study is an attempt to correct or supplement Moore's approach by attending to the place of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity within Nietzsche's work as a whole rather than within the broader scientific debates of his time. Where I do venture in that direction, I try to restrain myself to topics that have received relatively little attention, such as the connection between Nietzsche's work and the emerging science of probabilities.

The Chapters

The first two chapters situate Nietzsche's critique of Christianity within his work as a whole. Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is a moving target: he never finishes it, so his critique as a whole is essentially incomplete. It traces a movement without a proper ending (a "death freely chosen", as he might have put it). This moving target has a definite shape to it, starting out small and getting more substantial over time. He shows no specific interest in Christianity in his early work, but toward the end it becomes a near-obsession for him. Christianity is a growing concern for him, and yet in many ways it fits neatly into a more general set of interests that remain fairly steady over the course of his career as a writer. These interests are initially set out in *The Birth of Tragedy* and his response to them is modified over time as Nietzsche reflects critically on the limitations and prejudices of his early work. The basic topic addressed by Nietzsche concerns our feelings and thoughts about life, especially those elements that we find questionable, objectionable, and strange. More precisely, that life is found objectionable, and felt as objectionable – that we are literally sickened by it – is a matter of the utmost concern to him. Nietzsche's project is, in large part, an attempt to understand precisely how we feel and think about life, why we feel and think the way we do, and whether or not we must continue to feel and think this way. A project such as this is necessarily comparative in nature, and Nietzsche sets out on fairly standard terrain: the relation between modern Europe and ancient Greece. Which parts

of Greek culture can we moderns legitimately count as our inheritance? Is this inheritance, properly understood, a source of pride or a cause for concern? Nietzsche's answers to this fairly standard line of questioning make him "untimely." Initially Nietzsche identifies two basic orientations toward life which form a partial opposition[5]: the tragic (a synthesis of the "Dionysian" and "Apollonian") and the theoretic ("Socratic"). Our culture, he argues, has more in common with the latter than the former, and this is symptomatic (for us as well as for the Greeks) of a condition of distress and weakness. Over time he switches his focus to the opposition of the Christian and Dionysian responses to life, although without rejecting his earlier argument against Socratism. Socratism is still opposed to tragedy, but it is not as extreme a case as Christianity, nor is it as relevant to contemporary life.

Because Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is a moving target, an adequate account of this critique must trace this movement. This is all the more important in the case of Nietzsche given the importance to his writing of the themes of growth and overcoming. To present his critique divorced of its internal movements and its overcoming of obstacles would be to rob it of its own vitality and truthfulness. If Nietzsche's project represents an attempt to think and feel differently[6], then it must surely also be "the personal confession of its author and a kind of

---

5 I call this partial because they are not binary opposites; rather, they represent different ranks on the same scale, i.e., they affirm life to different degrees, one in the highest way, the other in the lowest.

6 "We have to learn to think differently – in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: to feel differently" (*D* 103).

involuntary and unconscious memoir" – one for which the immoral intentions constitute "the real germ of life from which the whole plant [has] grown" (*BGE* 6). There is surely some truth to Nehamas' claim that Nietzsche's literature is a life; a faithful description of that life will thus tell a story and not limit itself to the presentation of an argument that stands alone outside any process of development or growth.

My account of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity will trace a number of movements, all of which take place on the same "stage". The first chapter takes us to the tragic theater, a gathering spot for "men of culture" located outside the city walls in ancient Greece. The theater, in this account, is a place for transfiguration: the spectators come to mingle with the satyr chorus, hoping to find themselves transformed into satyrs themselves and to be graced with a vision of Dionysus, the original tragic hero. Here, in this place beyond the city walls, those overcome by the burdens of responsibility and the weariness that comes from the knowledge that one's actions accomplish nothing in the long run (i.e., the feeling and condition called nausea), behold a transfiguring vision that seduces their ailing wills back to health. For a time, one's life is viewed from a new perspective – that of the artist of nature who delights in the eternal creation and destruction of his playthings. This new perspective – an aesthetic one – transforms one's feelings about life.

Nietzsche's critique of Christianity unfolds on this stage as a series of substitutions, one following another as Nietzsche slowly refines his diagnosis of the modern condition – a condition

seemingly divorced from the possibility of positive transfiguration. First, Socratic ideals storm the

theater, bringing with them the perspective on life that had been enclosed behind the city walls.

The spectator no longer encounters Dionysus on the stage; rather, he sees an image of himself,

the "good" man of culture, and leaves the theater a "better" person. The satyr chorus, meanwhile, is

replaced by the moral educator who cultivates this "good" ideal through the teaching that

knowledge, beauty, and virtue are one. This is the transformation of tragedy into morality play.

Unsatisfied with this diagnosis, Nietzsche moves on. Next in line, the ascetic saint steps onto the

stage, while the chorus – which leads the spectators to their vision – is stocked by spiritual

shepherds, i.e., priests, who tend to their herd of spectators. The beautiful and tragic vision of

Dionysus has now been usurped by the ugly vision of the sickly saint. The theater that formerly

served to overcome the dangers posed by the feelings of pity and nausea now serves to increase

the quantities of these toxins in the body of the spectators; what once was a means of ascending

transfiguration has become a tool for disfiguration, leading away from health and growth and

toward decay and decadence.

One interesting thing about this particular series of substitutions is that it traces two

parallel movements: the movement of Nietzsche's thought as well as that of history. Nietzsche's

focus moves from Socratism to Christianity just as did the ancient world. These are not the only

movements that concern us. While Dionysus may have been swept from the stage by

Christianity, he has not left the scene entirely. As Nietzsche slowly develops his critique of

Christianity, which is also a critique of contemporary European culture (including its secularism), he also develops a new vision of Dionysus, that is, a new vision of transfiguration to counter the disfiguring effects of Christianity. In fact, these two developments are closely related: it is through the careful examination of the moral prejudices at work in his youthful vision of transfiguration (and perhaps also present in Greek tragedy) that Nietzsche finds his new direction. More specifically, Nietzsche's new vision of transfiguration (the overman) and new chorus (the higher men, philosophers of the future) is produced as a result of his careful struggle against pity, an instinct which had tainted his earlier views. This development also tracks a potential historical movement, as the future of humanity can be won only through the overcoming of Christian pity: "In our whole unhealthy modernity there is nothing more unhealthy than Christian pity. To be physicians here, to be inexorable here, to wield the scalpel here – that is our part, that is our love of man, that is how we are philosophers, we Hyperboreans" (*A* 7). These movements in response to pity are the subject of chapter two, which caps off my presentation of the place of the critique of Christianity in Nietzsche's opus.

Chapter three examines the social dimension of Nietzsche's critique, paying special attention to Nietzsche's discussion of social health. Here I draw on the work of Ian Hacking to help situate Nietzsche's analysis within the social scientific discourse of his age. I offer a reading of Nietzsche's later critique of Christianity (*The Antichrist*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*) in terms of the discourse about social health that was emerging in the second half of

the nineteenth century, especially in the writing of Durkheim and Galton. I argue that

Nietzsche's critique of Christianity must be understood at both the social and individual level,

and that what holds for the health of the individual living under Christian culture holds also for

the health of the Christian society. In both cases, Christianity favors processes of decomposition

over growth.

Chapter four revisits Nietzsche's relationship with Schopenhauer. Here, I examine

Nietzsche's often-overlooked discussion of Schopenhauer in the third essay of his *Genealogy*. The

primary subject is Nietzsche's account of the feeling of the sublime, which is central to

Schopenhauer's philosophy of redemption, and over the course of the chapter I explore a series of

similarities and linkages between guilt, ressentiment and the feeling of the sublime and reflect on

the implications of these associations for the critique of Christianity, which comprises the

majority of the same essay. The sublime is an especially interesting aesthetic category for our

purposes given its historical relation (emerging most strongly in the nineteenth century) with the

grotesque and malformed. It is related to the feeling of repugnance experienced at the sight of

monstrosities described above. The feeling of the sublime involves the discomfort experienced

when one confronts a hostile world, and this feeling is, for Nietzsche, at the root of the modern

Christian condition. Through an examination of the sublime we come to appreciate the expansive

nature of Nietzsche's use of the language of health, i.e., the extent to which Nietzsche's

description of Christianity as a dis-ease invokes biological concepts without calling for purely

reductive explanations. In fact, Nietzsche's critique of the sublime calls our attention to the

affective bases of the scientific life, too, and the degree to which our science depends on Christian

presuppositions.[7]

    I conclude with a brief investigation of Nietzsche's discussion of chance in the context of

his critique of Christianity. Nietzsche seemed to believe that the embrace of chance as a

fundamental feature of the world might help us to overcome the deleterious effects of the feeling

of guilt (the burden of moral responsibility taken to a crushing extreme). In this chapter, I draw

on the work of Ian Hacking to explore this topic and conclude with a consideration of the

relation of chance to the science of probabilities and statistics that was emerging during

Nietzsche's lifetime. What does our unsurpassed embrace of statistical models of the world tell us

about the legacy of Nietzsche's philosophy? Are we any less "Christian" for it? To begin to answer

this question (and I offer only the beginnings of an answer) I consider the distinction between

chance and probability through an exploration of a contemporary example of what Hacking

refers to as the "taming of chance."

---

7   Serres argues that *The Antichrist* is simultaneously biochemical treatise and sacred text. He suggests that our medical and religious discourses tend to run into one another at those points at which both invoke hygienic principles. "What are cleanliness, hygiene, health … if not an expulsion, a purification, the practice of catharsis? The new physician, he of the new science, unexpectedly returns to the standard procedures of the sacred" (33). The blurring of these boundaries is certainly at work in Nietzsche's work, but it is not clear that it undermines it. Nietzsche, like Serres, rejects the scientist's claim that he stands in a privileged space located outside of what he refers to as religion.

Chapter 1: Between Health and Death: The Undead Lives of the Ugly Saints

"There exists a right by which we take a man's life but none by which we take from him his death: this is mere cruelty." (HH 88)

"My death I praise to you, the free death which comes to me because I want it. And when shall I want it? He who has a goal and an heir will want death at the right time for his goal and heir." (Z "On Free Death")

"Verily, we have become too weary even to die. We are still waking and living on – in tombs." (Z "The Soothsayer")

Introduction

One way to initiate an attempt to understand Nietzsche's account of Christianity is to look for clues about its place within his writing as a whole. Naturally, one might expect to find such clues in Nietzsche's own review of his life and work, *Ecce Homo*. There, in his reflections on his very first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche makes the following bold claim about his youthful achievement:

> I was the first to see the real opposition: the degenerating instinct that turns against life with subterranean vengefulness (Christianity, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in a certain sense already the philosophy of Plato, and all of idealism as typical forms) versus a formula for the highest affirmation, born of fullness, of overfullness, a Yes-saying without reservation, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything that is questionable and strange in existence. (*EH* "The Birth of Tragedy" 2)

In this short passage, Nietzsche describes an opposition and includes Christianity in a list of forms that are typical of one of the opposing sides. It is sufficiently clear from the immediate

context that the other side of this opposition, that of the "formula for the highest affirmation", belongs to the "wonderful phenomenon of the Dionysian." The book's conclusion eliminates any remaining doubt about the identity of the life-affirming party, and also elevates Christianity to the head of the line on the other side: "Have I been understood? – *Dionysus versus the Crucified*. –" ("I am a Destiny" 9).

Because Nietzsche describes Christianity as a form of "the degenerating instinct that turns against life with subterranean vengefulness", and its opposite as "a formula for the highest affirmation" of life, it might seem reasonable to conclude that this "degenerating instinct" is the negation of life; and yet Christianity is not the negation of life itself – that is, death – but rather a saying "No" to life while remaining alive; it means to live with deep reservations about life, just as Dionysian affirmation is the "Yes-saying without reservation". In other words, if Dionysian affirmation is the "highest affirmation", Christianity (and "the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in a certain sense already the philosophy of Plato, and all of idealism") is the "lowest affirmation" of life. For Nietzsche, Christianity says "no" that falls short of choosing death. It is a living death or undead life, the apotheosis of the "No", and a life lived in protest against the world.

Sixteen years after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims that he had already identified the "real opposition" between Christianity and Dionysus (the less-real opposition presumably being that between pessimism and optimism – an opposition made famous by Schopenhauer, who used it to categorize and rank certain religious traditions, e.g.,

Christianity, Judaism, Hellenic religions, Buddhism, and Brahmanism) in that early work. This despite the fact that Christianity is virtually absent from that work, as he himself admits. Schopenhauer as the opposite of Dionysus is also barely mentioned (although Schopenhauer as the theorist of music and the will is everywhere – including in a strong supporting role in Nietzsche's analysis of the Dionysian art of tragedy).[8] This is a seemingly odd claim to make, since *The Birth of Tragedy* focuses on Socratism (Socratic moralism and rationalism, which are, of course, linked through the identification of the good and the true) as the opposite of Dionysian affirmation. If we are to take Nietzsche at his word, then there must be something that links Socratism, as critiqued in *The Birth of Tragedy*, with Schopenhauer and Christianity (and idealism, although I will leave that to the side for the moment). Furthermore, since Socratism – or, at least, the "philosophy of Plato" – is like them only "in a certain sense", there must also be a significant difference. In this chapter, I will offer a reading of those portions of *The Birth of Tragedy* that bring to light the line connecting the critique of Socrates to the philosophy of Schopenhauer and, ultimately, Christianity. What they share in common is a tendency to block the transfiguring power of Dionysian art as described in *The Birth of Tragedy*. This blocking accounts for part of the degenerative nature of these phenomena.[9] Where they differ is in their

---

8   In the next chapter I will argue that Schopenhauer's presence on both sides of the opposition explains Nietzsche's blindness to the role of pity at this early stage. Here, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche has identified nausea as the primary threat to the will. It is only later that he understands the danger posed by pity, as well as the influence of the morality of pity on his own early account of Dionysian transfiguration. I will argue that Nietzsche's realization of this influence is dramatized in portions of his *Zarathustra*.

9   The other part is attributable to pity, which is examined in the next chapter.

respective attitudes toward suicide. As noted above, Christianity is a negation of life that is not yet death. In other words, it is the lowest affirmation of life. This affirmation is made possible only on the basis of another instance of blocking. This time it is the path to suicide, i.e., a "death freely chosen", that is blocked. I will examine Nietzsche's statements on suicide to demonstrate that this description fits Nietzsche's account of Christianity and Schopenhauer's philosophy, and that, in the end, Nietzsche removes Socrates from their company on the basis of his manner of death. Taken together, the blocking of both suicide and transfiguration creates a new, sickly form of life, one lived between life and death and exemplified in the figure of the crucified Christ, the prototype for the body and life of the Christian saint. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to argue that the structural opposition established through Nietzsche's own later reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* provides an interpretive key for understanding Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. I will demonstrate the results of this interpretive key in the two chapters that follow.

To Measure the Weight of the World: Tragedy vs. the Negation of the Will

The Birth of Tragedy's explanation of the origin and decline of Greek tragedy depends, to a large extent, upon the comparison of a number of different responses to the threat of pessimism. Pessimism, in this context, ought to be understood as the judgment that life is not worth living. Nietzsche's one and only "educator", Arthur Schopenhauer, was perhaps the most famous

pessimist of the nineteenth-century, and his philosophy of the will gives voice to this "bad news" about the value of life. Schopenhauer is of interest here for his pessimism but also because Nietzsche's theory of the origin of tragedy is based on Schopenhauer's analysis of music as an appearance of the will that lies behind the world of appearances. One might even read Nietzsche's theory of the origin of tragedy in music as an attempt to use Schopenhauer's ideas about music to refute his pessimism. Nietzsche finds the basis for such a refutation in Greek tragedy, and the structure of his argument against Schopenhauer's pessimistic response to suffering will later come to structure his critique of Christianity. In order to better explain that critique, I will now address Nietzsche's response to Schopenhauer as given in his account of the rise and fall of Greek tragedy.

Nietzsche argues that tragedy is born of music, and that this origin reveals the true meaning and value of Greek tragedy. There is an analogy to be made between music and life: in tragic drama, the story that unfolds onstage arises from and is asymmetrically dependent on the music of the chorus. The chorus does not depend on (or merely supplement) the story. In fact, according to Nietzsche, the scene on stage was not originally a part of this art form; rather, there was a chorus of revelers who simply imagined the presence of Dionysus (the original "hero" of tragic drama) as in a vision. The dramatic story is thus like a dream of the chorus. The story belongs to the symbolic world of language, and this world has no direct access to the meaning of the musical world from which it sprang: "Language can never adequately render the cosmic

symbolism of music, because music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the primal unity, and therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena. Rather, all phenomena, compared with it, are merely symbols" (6). Here, Nietzsche employs Schopenhauer's reworking of the Kantian distinction between noumena and phenomena, truth and appearance. Music is a symbol of the "in-itself" of the world, and language is a symbol of the world of appearances. As symbols of the two parts of this metaphysical hierarchy, music and language are prevented from achieving a perfect union. Music symbolizes that which necessarily escapes appearance, while language symbolizes appearance, which is never capable of making the primal truth (here, music) fully present. The drama onstage is thus an appearance or vision of the satyr chorus; it is with the chorus that the most forceful and intense expression of creative power lies. The satyr, in this context, symbolizes this "genius of nature", its creative power at maximum intensity (rather than as filtered into mere appearance), and the "reveling throng, the votaries of Dionysus" – the spectators and the members of the chorus, who mingle in the orchestra pit – "jubilate under the spell of such moods and insights whose power transforms them before their own eyes till they imagine that they are beholding themselves as restored geniuses of nature, as satyrs" (8). Having been transformed in this way, these disciples of Dionysus actively seek "truth and nature in their most forceful form"; energized and empowered through this transfiguration, the reveler becomes a willing vessel for the terrible truth of the world.

The truth of the world is, of course, precisely the problem. The Dionysian men – those who thirst for the tragic arts, i.e., the eager spectators – have "once looked truly into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint" (7). This terrible wisdom about the futility of life is in tension with the demands of our social lives, defined by mores, customs, obligations, and prohibitions. In the city, people are burdened by a sense of personal responsibility that is plainly at odds with the wisdom that ultimately all our actions are for naught. The Dionysian man finds himself broken by this tension. He is at risk of becoming a hopeless pessimist, "in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will." He finds himself confronted by a terrible question: *Is life worth living?* He fears that he lacks the strength to answer in the affirmative. This question is at the root of Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy, which famously answers *No*: "nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist" (*W*2, 605). Human existence, bounded and finite, is hopelessly tainted by suffering and can momentarily approach, but never truly achieve, positive value. The best thing for human beings is to use this wisdom to temper the will, forging an attitude of renunciation that might "cut all the thousand threads of willing which hold us bound to the world, and which as craving, fear, envy, and anger drag us here and there in constant pain" (*W*1, 390).

Nietzsche does not explicitly mention Schopenhauer's pessimism in this book; however, his pessimism was not unknown to the Greeks, and Nietzsche finds a good proxy for him in the figure of Silenus (just as Schopenhauer's program finds its proxy in the above-mentioned "Buddhistic negation of the will"). Millennia earlier, so the story goes, Silenus, satyr and companion to Dionysus, offered this wisdom in response to King Midas' question, "what is the best and most desirable of all things for man": "What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you is – to die soon" (*BT* 3). It is Silenus' wisdom that threatens to overcome the vitality of the Dionysian man who flocks to the theater from the city center: "now he understands the wisdom of the sylvan god, Silenus: he is nauseated." Tragedy, according to Nietzsche, restores the Dionysian man's will to strength: "Here, when the danger to his will is greatest, art approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the sublime as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the comic as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity" (7). The satyr chorus, the transfigured form of those broken Dionysian souls, seduces them back to life: "sharing [Dionysus'] suffering it also shares something of his wisdom and proclaims the truth from the heart of the world" (8). Once repulsed by the essence of things, this troupe finds itself edified in the role of mouthpiece of the world despite the terrible nature of the message.

Nietzsche thus uses Schopenhauer's theory of music to demonstrate how the Greeks were able to overcome the danger of a pessimistic view nearly identical to Schopenhauer's own with the aid of tragedy. This is quite different from Schopenhauer's own account of tragedy. According to Schopenhauer, tragedy teaches us the doctrine of the resignation of the will. In fact, for Schopenhauer, aesthetic contemplation in general offers the masses a fleeting glimpse of the glory attained by those masters of renunciation, the saints, who retreat from the phenomenal world into a state of "pure knowing being" (*W*1 390). The saint is the heroic figure of the Schopenhauerian vision, embodying its highest ideals in the emaciated form of the ascetic renunciant. This hero is nothing like Dionysus, the hero of the tragic vision, who is an affirmation of life, "the image of nature and its strongest urges". The subject of Schopenhauer's vision, on the other hand, is emaciated, tortured, weak and despised. The spectator in the Greek theater learns to take pleasure in the beauty of the hero and his destruction, thereby affirming the beautiful and ugly aspects of existence. In contrast to this, the saintly hero of Schopenhauer's vision cultivates ugliness in an attack on all that is beautiful and sensuous in this life. The ugly saint's ideal of beauty is opposed to the healthy body and its natural urges. Faced with this aesthetic chasm, Nietzsche asks how it could be that two cultures could react so differently to pessimism. Why would one be drawn to images of health and the other to portraits of disease? More importantly, of what underlying conditions are these contrasting values the symptoms?

Schopenhauer's philosophy is not the stated enemy of *The Birth of Tragedy*; that honor is reserved for Socratic philosophy (i.e., the theoretic life). Socrates, like the Schopenhauerian saint, appears in Nietzsche's texts as a diseased figure, and through a careful comparison of their respective conditions, Nietzsche, over the course of many years, comes to identify Christianity as the true opponent of Dionysus, and to locate the uniqueness of the Christian disease – that which separates it from the Socratic illness, as well as that illness suffered by the Indian Buddhists – in its peculiar attitude toward death and health. According to Nietzsche, the heirs of Christian pessimism, Schopenhauer included,[10] are dishonest pessimists, unwilling to follow the logic of their teaching to its proper end: suicide. The Christian priest, sickly counterpart to the healthy satyr chorus, uses the vision of the saint (and The Crucified) to seduce his disciples and victims away from either death or health and into a grotesque and diseased – let us call it undead – form of life. In order to display the characteristics unique to the Christian disease, as well as what it has in common with the Socratic illness (which ended Greek tragedy), I will now briefly explore the relationship between Socrates and the figure of the saint as it appears in Nietzsche's texts.

Saint Socrates & the Christian Disease

---

10 Schopenhauer argues that Christianity, at least in its "true" form, is the view closest to this own, i.e., the view that one should deny the will to live. For a brief discussion, see Janaway, 320.

Nietzsche's explanation of the decline of tragedy focuses on the work of two well-known figures: Euripides and Socrates. Strictly speaking, it is Euripidean drama that spells the end of Greek tragedy; Nietzsche argues, however, that Euripides was a disciple of Socrates, and that it was Socrates' influence that made this downfall possible. Euripides may have been opposed to Sophocles and Aeschylus, but Socrates was "the opponent of Dionysus" (12). Socrates is described by Nietzsche as a monster, which is the first hint that he suffers from an illness. Socrates' monstrous condition is characterized in the following way: "[with him,] it is instinct that becomes the critic, and consciousness that becomes the creator – truly a monstrosity *per defectum*!" (13). This arrangement between consciousness and the instincts is the reverse of that found elsewhere, for the instincts are analogous to music, meaning that they are the loci of the truly creative forces. Consciousness is merely an appearance of the instincts and, like language (which runs through it) never has direct access to the creative womb from which it has sprung. The Socratic monster is blind to the danger faced by the Dionysian man, i.e., the tension between the knowledge of the futility of human life and the obligation to set things right. Socrates' limited vision (Nietzsche refers to his "one great Cyclops eye" (14)) sees clearly only the world of civil obligation; to him, all else is illusion, ignorance, perversion. "Wherever Socratism turns its searching eyes it sees lack of insight and the power of illusion; and from this lack it infers the essential perversity and reprehensibility of what exists. Basing himself on this point, Socrates conceives it to be his duty to correct existence" (13). The Dionysian truth, as well as the possibility

of living with it, are opposed at every turn by Socrates. That world is unreal, irrational, and unworthy. Socrates stands against nature, holding our innermost drives and forces in contempt.

Socrates' deep-seated opposition to the Dionysian world (the world of the instincts) puts him in the company of the saints who live in the world but not of it. In fact, the identification of Socrates as a saint was accomplished centuries before Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were born. Perhaps the best known supporter of this identification is Erasmus, abettor and opponent of Martin Luther. It was partly over the issue of Socrates' eligibility for salvation that Erasmus took leave of his former associate. In *The Godly Feast*, Erasmus attempts to Christianize Plato's *Symposium*, and puts the following famous plea into the mouth of one of the guests: "Saint Socrates, pray for us!"[11] Nietzsche was surely aware of the writings of the Christian humanists, and so it may be with them in mind that he associates Socrates with the figure of the saint in *Human, All Too Human*, his second full-length book, published six years after *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> All the visions, terrors, states of exhaustion and rapture experienced by the saint are familiar pathological conditions which, on the basis of rooted religious and psychological errors, he only interprets quite differently, that is to say not as illnesses. – Thus the daemon of Socrates too was perhaps an ear-infection which, in accordance with the moralizing manner of thinking that dominated him, he only interpreted differently from how it would be interpreted now. (126)

Socrates and the saints do not realize that they are ill. They misinterpret their condition according to a moral vision of the world and respond accordingly.

---

11   Quoted in Bartholin, 9.

Nietzsche is most troubled by the insistence on the existence of an intelligible, moral order opposed to the natural world. Our moral systems are creations of underlying forces which are not bound by the moral order; morality does not hold the world in its grip. The same dependencies can be posited of philosophical truths, aesthetic beauty, and even human happiness, each of which depends for its existence on forces that transcend and even contradict it. The vision associated with both Socrates and the Christian saints sees an essential connection between virtue, knowledge, beauty, and happiness. The master term in this list is knowledge, for it is through the acquisition of knowledge that one becomes virtuous and, consequently, happy (*BT* 14). Beauty is the aesthetic equivalent of virtue, and it is the term by which Euripidean art is joined to Socrates (12). Ugliness, ignorance, evil, and suffering are likewise connected as the opposites of these others, and these are deemed unreal and unworthy of existence. Socrates and the saints turn their attention to eliminating these from the world. The outlook behind this mission errs insofar as it denies or overlooks the relations of dependence between these things. Morality depends on the immoral, truth depends on untruth, and beauty depends on the horrible. The full affirmation of those things we cherish in life thus calls for the acceptance of and desire for the objectionable. The tragic arts reveal to us this chain of dependency, thereby priming us for the "highest affirmation" of life. Socratic and Christian morality, on the other hand, suffer from what Nietzsche will later refer to as the "hemiplegia of virtue."[12]

---

12 "Hemiplegia" means paralysis of one side.

> For every strong and natural species of man, love and hate, gratitude and revenge, good nature and anger, affirmative acts and negative acts, belong together. One is good on condition one also knows how to be evil; one is evil because otherwise one would not understand how to be good. Whence, then, comes the *sickness and ideological unnaturalness* that rejects this doubleness – that teaches that it is a higher thing to be efficient on only one side? … This mode of thought, *with which a definite type of man is bred*,[13] starts from an absurd presupposition: it takes good and evil for realities that contradict one another (not as complementary value concepts, which would be the truth), it advises taking the side of the good, it desires that the good should renounce and oppose evil down to its ultimate roots – it therewith actually denies life, which has in all its instincts both Yes and No. (*WP* 351, emphasis added)

The tragic arts reconcile us with the objectionable truths of life, including its meaninglessness as well as the burdens of social life, of the responsibilities of the "good" person; to deny this relief is cruel and potentially dangerous to the wills of the individuals who suffer. The illness of Socrates and the saints leads them to short-circuit the redemptive, transfiguring powers[14] of the Dionysian arts, and this short-circuiting threatens the health of humanity.

The difference between Socrates and the Christian saints, however, is to be found in their respective ends, understood as purposes and deaths. While Socrates interferes with the

---

13 The topic of breeding will be addressed in the third chapter. It is an integral part of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as a social phenomenon.

14 I take the term "transfiguration" from Nietzsche's discussion in *The Birth of Tragedy*. It occurs there in several places, but I am most interested in his analysis of Raphael's *The Transfiguration* (see Figure One). Nietzsche takes this Christian scene and interprets it as a symbolization of the relation between Dionysus and Apollo, with the ascendent Christ of the vision standing in for the latter. "Here we have presented, in the most sublime artistic symbolism, that Apollinian world of beauty and its substratum, the terrible wisdom of Silenus; and intuitively we comprehend their necessary interdependence" (*BT* 4). Tyler Roberts' recent book, *Contesting Spirit*, uses the theme of transfiguration to recast our understanding of the place of religion in Nietzsche's work. Transfiguration is understood by him in a similar way, as a kind of exaltation and metamorphosis of the real that is not its opposition (cf., 66-70. Curiously, while he does make reference to Nietzsche's use of the term "transfiguration" in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he does not mention Nietzsche's analysis of Raphael's *The Transfiguration*, which appears quite early in that work.

transfiguring process of tragedy, thereby denying a needed remedy to his fellow sufferers, he still leaves open the possibility of a dignified, noble exit from the world. Nietzsche argues that Christianity blocks both paths to affirmation. It is with respect to this latter transformation – the barring of an exit – that the Christian disease truly differs from its Socratic relative, which merely denies an important path back to health. I will now explore each of these denials so as to shed light on Nietzsche's conclusion that Christianity, not Socratism, constitutes the real danger to the future of humanity.

Against Health: the Denial of Transfiguration

Nietzsche's account of the transfigurative power of the tragic arts presents the following portrait: civilized life emerges from the instincts much as drama emerges from the music of the chorus: it is an appearance of our instinctual lives, but one that does not have access to the full depth of those lives. As domesticated animals, we suffer from an excess of energy – energy that can never be fully discharged within the confines of the city. When a person steps beyond the city walls and surveys the work that is accomplished there, he or she is overcome by a sense of the ultimate meaninglessness of it all – a sense made all the greater by the realization that she cannot simply return to the wild. The tragic arts arose as a remedy for the ailments of the will suffered by civilized human beings. They enhance life by making this tension bearable, thereby eliminating an

obstacle to the will-to-live. The satyr chorus draws our focus back to nature; it is, "the offspring of a longing for the primitive and the natural". This return to nature, however, is not a return to the wild, uncivilized past; rather, it is a turning toward and embracing of that which we have sacrificed for the sake of our civilized lives. The theater, in this context, is not a civilized affair; it is a refinement of civilized life that is able to symbolically appropriate those energies that condition and yet cannot be expressed within the life of the city. In the theater, the "man of culture" is able to look past himself and to reconnect to that which culture necessarily looks past: "A public of spectators as we know it was unknown to the Greeks: in their theaters the terraced structure of concentric arcs made it possible for everybody to actually overlook the whole world of culture around him and to imagine, in absorbed contemplation, that he himself was a chorist" (*BT* 8). Kaufmann helpfully points out that "overlook" ought to be understood in the sense of "ignore" rather than "survey"; tragic art allows us to look past the futility and burden of our civilized lives. The satyr chorus, reveling in the service of Dionysus, reminds the spectator that his life is ultimately lived in the service of the processes of nature, which that god represents. Through tragic art, we come to appreciate ourselves as artistic creations and to taste the joy of the artist who continually creates and annihilates the figures of the world.

As noted earlier, Nietzsche claims that this art form meets its doom through the collaboration between Socrates and Euripides. With this team, the operation of the Greek theater undergoes a radical change: the satyr chorus no longer channels the wisdom of the world;

now it teaches moral truths and etiquette. Where once the theater raised us above the "world of

culture" and taught us the deep wisdom of the world, now it reflects our "cultured" life back to us

in the form of a lesson for living together and solving our daily problems:

> The spectator now actually saw and heard his double on the Euripidean stage, and
> rejoiced that he could talk so well. But this joy was not all: one could even learn from
> Euripides how to speak oneself …: from him the people have learned how to observe,
> debate, and draw conclusions according to the rules of art and with the cleverest
> sophistries. … If the entire populace now philosophized, managed land and goods, and
> conducted lawsuits with unheard of circumspection, [Euripides] deserved the credit, for
> this was the result of the wisdom he had inculcated in the people. (11)

Theater, under the reign of Socratic / Euripidean values, becomes home to morality plays.[15]

Dionysus, symbol of the deep truth of the world which lies eternally behind the petty concerns of

civilized life, is replaced onstage by the image of the spectator: "through [Euripides] the everyday

man forced his way from the spectators' seats onto the stage; the mirror in which formerly only

grand and bold traits were represented now showed the painful fidelity that conscientiously

reproduces even the botched outlines of nature." Socrates, "the dialectical hero of the Platonic

drama", collaborates in this transformation, impelling the Dionysian hero of tragedy "to self-

destruction – to the death-leap into the bourgeois drama." (14). The strength and desire for the

transfiguration of the pessimistic truth that found expression in tragedy is now replaced with a

superficial optimism. Art, in these hands, ceases to transfigure; it goes nowhere, leading from

city-life to city-life; its redemptive power is short-circuited. Drawing a line from the past to the

---

15 See Figure Two for a diagram of these competing models of the theater.

present, Nietzsche describes the decline of the arts in his own day in similar terms: "Confronted with such a public [i.e., one dominated by the critical/theoretical perspective], the nobler natures among the artists counted upon exciting their moral-religious emotions, and the appeal to the moral-world-order intervened vicariously where some powerful artistic magic ought to enrapture the genuine listener" (22). Nietzsche argues that the theater audience is denied access to the truly transfiguring power of art by the seductive voice of the moralizer – the same form of seduction that he will later associate with the priest and the saint.

Socrates' Suicide and the Undead Lives of the Ugly Saints

Saint Socrates and the Christian saints bar access to the transfiguring power of the tragic arts. In effect, they deny the possibility of a return to health. The difference between them lies in their respective ends, that is, both their purposes/aims as well as their respective attitudes toward death. By the time he writes *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), Nietzsche has settled on Christianity as the true danger to the future of humanity. With this diagnosis in place, he reconsiders the case of Socrates. Socrates, he argues, presented himself to the Athenians as a physician who could cure the afflictions he saw overtaking the city: a form of decadence characterized by a general anarchy of the instincts. Socratism says: "One must be clever, clear, bright at any price: any concession to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads downward" (*TI*, "The Problem of Socrates" 10). When he

realizes that his cure is ineffective, Socrates opportunistically embraces his death sentence as a

noble way out:

> Socrates was a misunderstanding …. To have to fight the instincts – that is the formula of decadence: as long as life is ascending, happiness equals instinct. … Was this what he said to himself in the end, in the wisdom of his courage to die? Socrates wanted to die: not Athens, but he himself chose the hemlock; he forced Athens to sentence him. "Socrates is no physician," he said softly to himself; "here death alone is the physician. Socrates himself has merely been sick a long time." (11-12)

This embrace of death is to be contrasted with the attitude of the Christian priest, whose aim is

not to cure but to make sicker, and who seduces his followers to a diseased form of life by

blocking the path to health (e.g., the "genuine" arts) as well as the possibility of suicide. Even

martyrdom, the saintly counterfeit of suicide, serves only as an act of revenge against the life of

health. Between health and death there is only disease. It is for the production of a novel,

diseased kind of life – an undead life lived in protest of the world – that Christianity deserves

credit: "When Christianity came into being, the craving for suicide was immense – and

Christianity turned it into a lever of its power. It allowed only two kinds of suicide, dressed them

up with the highest dignity and the highest hopes, and forbade all others in a terrifying manner.

Only martyrdom and the ascetic's slow destruction of his body were permitted" (*GS* 131). It is

the slow, living-death of the saint that becomes Christianity's model for life.

The Christian ban on suicide, as understood by Nietzsche, is perhaps best approached

though Nietzsche's discussion of Schopenhauer. Throughout his career, Nietzsche continues to

admire his "educator" for the courage of his "untimeliness", but this admiration does not carry

over to Schopenhauer's assessment of the value of Christianity (which he believed to be closest in spirit to his own philosophy of renunciation) or the value of suffering. In the end, Schopenhauer lacked the strength and vitality to live honestly with his own pessimistic appraisal of the world. Despite his revulsion at life, Schopenhauer insisted that suicide is never an appropriate response to suffering. Instead, the will must continue willing, although only enough to maintain itself in a state of renunciation: "how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but for ever, indeed completely extinguished, except for the last glimmering spark that maintains the body and is extinguished with it" (*W*1 390).[16] Approached from the perspective of life, Schopenhauer's philosophy is suggestive of poor health. It would seem that he suffers from a sickness, that his philosophy is the symptom of some natural affliction, a still-born product of the eternal artist. Nietzsche's criticism is unflinching:

> It is not in our hands to prevent our birth; but we can correct this mistake – for in some cases it is a mistake. When one does away with oneself, one does the most estimable thing possible: one almost earns the right to live. Society – what am I saying? – life itself derives more advantage from this than from any "life" of renunciation, anemia, and other virtues: one has liberated the others from one's sight; one has liberated life from an objection. Pessimism, *pur*, *vert*, is proved only by the self-refutation of our dear pessimists: one must advance a step further in its logic and not only negate life with "will and representation," as Schopenhauer did – one must first of all negate Schopenhauer. (*TI*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" 36)

---

16 Already in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche rejects this response to suffering, which he refers to as the dangerous "Buddhistic negation of the will" (7). Schopenhauer believed (like a number of intellectuals of his day) that Christianity probably originated in India or through the influence abroad of "Eastern" – particularly Buddhist – thought. This was one strategy used to located an Aryan (non-Semitic) origin for Christianity, thus tying it to the allegedly Aryan character of European culture while still differentiating it from the "optimism" of the Greeks.

Schopenhauer found no enduring value in life lived as an appearance among appearances, and so opposed this "apparent" life to an in-itself of the will. He argued that one's life could attain value only if one were to reside in a state of indifference toward the individuated will, that is, by taking refuge in an attitude of indifference toward the differences between individual appearances of this will. All beings are of equal value when viewed from this vantage point, and so we ought not to be attached through our wills to any one of them in particular. Unegoism, anti-malice, and compassion are the keys to the redemption of life. To Nietzsche, this renunciation of the will appears as something grotesque – a monstrous birth unworthy (by its own standards) of existence. Had he accepted his pessimism honestly, Schopenhauer would have also accepted the validity of suicide. Instead, Schopenhauer places a ban on suicide and recommends the life of the living dead, that is, the life of the emaciated, suffering, tortured saints. If, as Schopenhauer argues, contemplation of the beautiful points the way toward redemption, surely the ugliness of the living dead is a warning sign and a danger.[17] Tragedy is the means by which the Greeks learned to find pleasure and joy in the uglier aspects of life, deriving pleasure from the beautiful and the destruction of the beautiful. The pessimistic performance of the saints, however, ushers a new kind of ugliness onto the stage: a piece of life turned against itself yet unwilling to leave the scene. The natural, life-affirming response to this kind of pessimism would thus be to finish nature's work and embrace death. In other words, rather than trying to negate

---

17 The value of ugliness enters into the discussion in Schopenhauer's analysis of the sublime. This is the subject of chapter four.

the life that one is by enduring in opposition to it, one ought to negate one's life. European

pessimism, with its roots in Christianity, chooses instead to inscribe itself in the world as a curse

against life and as a seduction into its own kind of undead, zombie-like existence. Perhaps it is

closer to vampirism, since as seduction to the wrong path, this pessimistic way of life drains the

living of the blood that nourishes their natural vitality. (In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche describes

Christianity as "a vampirism of pale, subterranean bloodsuckers" and the "vampire of the

imperium Romanum" (49,58).) Whatever the case, this living pessimism appears as the

interruption or short-circuit of the process of growth: what ought to embrace death embraces

instead its deferral and creates a new, sick image of life.

The Satyr and the Priest

The Greek arts seduce the will to a life of "the highest affirmation, born of fullness, of

overfullness, a Yes-saying without reservation, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything

that is questionable and strange in existence"; Schopenhaurian songs seduce the will to a life lived

at its lowest possible intensity, in defiance of our natural impulses. The question of suicide is

critical. How does this latter form of seduction work? Why, if it is a shipwreck of nature, has it

appeared on earth again and again? What is more, how do we account for the great number of

the afflicted, the herd of sick, pessimistic souls? Two forms of seduction are at work in the world,

and they lead to two very different outcomes. On one side we see the chorus of satyrs, who, looking up in reverence at a vision of Dionysus, their master, offer a transfiguring vision in turn to the spectators gathered before them; on the other, we espy the "good" shepherd presiding over its flock of domesticated beasts and looking up in awe at the fascinating figure of the emaciated saint which finds its ultimate expression in Paul's notion of the suffering god on the cross. Already in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche wonders about this opposition, although he has not yet identified the shepherd with the priest, focused as he was on the enduring influence of Socrates: "The satyr, like the idyllic shepherd of more recent times, is the offspring of a longing for the primitive and the natural; but how firmly and fearlessly the Greek embraced the man of the woods, and how timorously and mawkishly modern man dallied with the flattering image of a sentimental, flute-playing, tender shepherd!" The argument is that we take refuge in a counterfeit vision of nature – one overdetermined by our vanity and desire to flatter ourselves as we are. The satyr was "the archetype of man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense emotions"; he was "something sublime and divine: thus he had to appear to the painfully broken vision of Dionysian man. The contrived shepherd in his dress-ups would have offended him. … Confronted with [the satyr], the man of culture shriveled into a mendacious caricature" (*BT* 8).

Much later, in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche's focus shifts from this "tender shepherd" to the priests of pessimism. Nietzsche finds that the Christian version of the moral-world-order is much more sinister than its Socratic counterpart. The idyllic shepherd might be faulted for

presenting a counterfeit image of nature; the Christian priest, on the other hand, is anti-natural

through and through. This priest, as Christian shepherd, reacts to the realities of existence with

an intense hatred of life and through his actions and example makes life ever more questionable.

Remarking on *The Birth of Tragedy* in his autobiography, Nietzsche notes that while the Greeks

found salvation through the affirmative synthesis of beauty and dissonance, Christianity, for its

part, "negates all aesthetic values" (*EH*, "The Birth of Tragedy" 2). This remark is meant to explain

the relative absence of Christianity from that early publication, which was concerned solely with

aesthetic values. Now Nietzsche sees that Christian pessimism seduces through a new kind of

ugliness. This is Schopenhauer's vision again, which makes an ideal of the emaciated and sick

renunciant saint. This vision is the bulwark against suicide, and thus the "saving" power of the

pessimistic siren song. Christianity wills into existence, through its most extreme exemplars, a

most unnatural-looking form of life. Ironically, it is only on the basis of an intense will and desire

that the ideal of renunciation is able to do its work:

> The ascetic priest is the incarnate desire to be different, to be in a different place, and
> indeed this desire *at its greatest extreme*, its distinctive fervor and passion; but precisely this
> power of his desire is the chain that holds him captive so that he becomes a tool for the
> creation of more favorable conditions for being here and being man – it is precisely this
> *power* that enables him to persuade to existence the whole herd of the ill-constituted,
> disgruntled, underprivileged, unfortunate, and all who suffer of themselves, by
> instinctively going before them *as their shepherd*. (*GM* III 13, some emphasis added)

This priestly shepherd is the sick counterpart to the healthy satyr; he is the servant of the

crucified just as the satyr serves Dionysus; and like the tragic hero, the priest works in the service

of life by seducing nature's many "mistakes" to life. But this is a life of mere existence, and a form

of life that stands in condemnation of life. In fact, the spirit of condemnation is its greatest source

of power, and this bulwark against death comes at a great cost. The danger here is that healthy

individuals might come to grief at the sight of those who are sick of life. This is why Nietzsche

argues for the value of suicide, which can involve a positive, life-affirming relation to death in

contrast to the life-denying message of willful renunciation: "life itself derives more advantage

from this than from any 'life' of renunciation, anemia, and other virtues: one has liberated the

others from one's sight; one has liberated life from an objection." Suicide, under certain

conditions, represents the final, life-encompassing act of a creative will, one that seeks to make of

its life a means to something higher in this world – an idea expressed in the second epigraph

attached at the opening of this chapter: "My death I praise to you, the free death which comes to

me because I want it. And when shall I want it? He who has a goal and an heir will want death at

the right time for his goal and heir" (*Z* "On Free Death"). This is the Dionysian counterpart to

Christian martyrdom, in which the suicide leaves the world as a curse upon it. Nietzsche believes

that the Christian songs of seduction make the world ugly – ever uglier, in fact – and thus make

it increasingly difficult to find life worth living. The Schopenhaurean and Christian responses to

suffering lead to a vicious cycle by which the aesthetic justification of life becomes increasingly

difficult. The mere sight of this sickness makes sick, which begets yet more sickness. Nietzsche's

greatest fear is that Christian pessimism has unleashed a contagious disease upon the world, and nothing less than the future of humanity is at stake.

I hope to have demonstrated that Nietzsche's later critique of Christianity is based on the basic opposition found in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* – a book in which Christianity is barely mentioned. I have argued that Nietzsche developed his critique of Christianity in part through a consideration of its similarities and differences with respect to Socratism (via a comparison of Socrates and the ascetic priest), and that the primary difference is to be found in their respective attitudes toward death. In the next chapter I return to *The Birth of Tragedy* to explore another topic that differentiates his early work from his later critique of Christianity: pity. Much of Nietzsche's mature development can be understood as a reaction to his early, uncritical treatment of pity.

Figure One

Raphael, *The Transfiguration*

Figure Two

Dionysus Versus Socrates / Euripides in *The Birth of Tragedy*

Parts of a Greek Theater
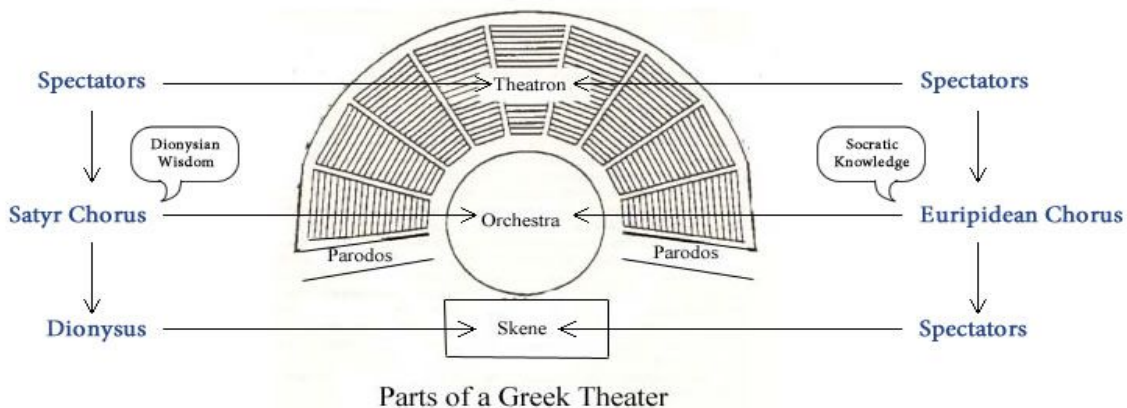
Note: As noted before, Nietzsche argues that the spectators and the chorus mingled in the same space in early forms of the theater.

Chapter 2: Against Comfort: Nietzsche's Critique of Pity

In parting. – Not how one soul comes close to another but how it moves away shows me their kinship and how much they belong together. (*HH*, "Mixed Opinions and Maxims" 251)

Where are your greatest dangers? – In pity. (*GS*, 271)

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims that the Dionysian revelry of the satyric chorus – the transfigured form of the civilized spectators – generates a particular kind of metaphysical comfort: "the Greek man of culture felt himself nullified in the presence of the satyric chorus; and this is the most immediate effect of the Dionysian tragedy, that the state and society and, quite generally, the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature" (*BT* 7). This early interpretation of the metaphysical comfort provided by tragedy implies that the highest experience is one that obliterates the individual ego and finds refuge in a feeling of primal unity with others, and that this primal unity is found in the heart of nature, which stands here in contrast to the heart of the city from which the spectators come. This high estimation of the un- or anti-egoistic is likely attributable to Nietzsche's interest in Schopenhauer, just as his later rejection of it is attributable, at least in part,

to his abandonment of the philosophy of Schopenhauer and his "valet",[18] Wagner. It has become

commonplace to explain Nietzsche's rejection of Schopenhauer as a consequence of his rejection

of the Kantian distinction between a world of appearances and the world as thing-in-itself.[19] This

distinction does play a role in Nietzsche's early work. For instance, the passage cited above makes

a distinction between the "heart of nature" and the world of culture, and it is clear that Nietzsche

models this relation, in part, on the distinction between appearance and thing-in-itself: "the

contrast between this real truth of nature and the lie of culture that poses as if it were the only

reality is similar to that between the eternal core of things, the thing-in-itself, and the whole

world of appearances" (8). While rejection of the thing-in-itself is certainly part of Nietzsche's

intellectual development,[20] I would like to draw attention to a related topic that I believe is more

closely linked to Nietzsche's personal interests: pity. When Nietzsche reflects back on his early

work and its close ties to Schopenhauer and Wagner, he expresses the most regret not about the

---

18 cf. *GM* III 5.
19 Kaufmann's footnotes for sections seven and eight rehearse this claim. More recently, Brian Leiter and
    Maudemarie Clark have made similar claims. Leiter: "By the early 1880s at the latest, Nietzsche begins to have
    doubts about the intelligibility of the Kantian idea of the noumenal world, of a way things are in-themselves
    quite apart from how human beings represent them to be" (15). This change in metaphysical doctrines is used to
    justify a story about Nietzsche's development: while he started out as a Romantic who was skeptical about
    science, his "mature" work embraces scientific truth and demotes the value of the arts in relation to the sciences.
    In other words, this particular change is used to bolster the case for turning Nietzsche into something resembling
    a contemporary philosophical naturalist. I will tell a different story.
20 It should be noted that in what appears to be a draft for a new preface for *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes
    that the "antithesis of a real and an apparent world is lacking here: there is only one world, and this is false,
    cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning" (*WP* 853). A charitable reading of this claim might argue that
    Nietzsche's use of the language of the thing-in-itself was meant to show the relation of dependence between
    nature and culture (as between music and language) but not to posit a metaphysical antithesis. Culture is clearly
    part of nature and not its opposite. Furthermore, both culture and nature are seductive. The point is that this lie of
    culture is harmful to our health while other seductions of nature can heal us.

doctrine of the thing-in-itself, but rather about the fact that these two figures – two giants of Romanticism – proved themselves to have been driven by a deep need for metaphysical comforts. In Nietzsche's estimation, the ideas associated with such comforts are merely symptomatic of the real concern: these two men lacked the strength to affirm life. He concludes, in retrospect, that their pessimism was not, as he had initially hoped, born of the same underlying health that characterized the Dionysian men who found redemption in tragedy.

Nietzsche's analysis of tragedy began with the argument that the pessimism of the tragic arts – that is, the fascination they exhibit with unpleasant, at times horrifying themes – was symptomatic of an abundance of health, while the optimism proper to the Greeks of Socrates' day and the period that followed – a period normally counted as the highpoint of that civilization (and as one of the high water marks of the Western world in general) was by contrast symptomatic of a decline in strength. The analysis concluded with the argument that the late resurgence of pessimism in nineteenth century Germany, as heralded by Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will and Wagner's music, was symptomatic of the dawn of an age of great health – a rebirth of the glory of the tragic age of the Greeks and the overcoming of the superficial optimism that colored the Socratic, theoretically-minded culture reigning in Europe. Speaking of the characteristics of those who might herald or realize the rebirth of tragedy and the reinvigoration of artistic culture, he had originally posed the following rhetorical question: "*would it not be necessary* for the tragic man of such a culture, in view of his self-education for

seriousness and terror, to desire a new art, *the art of metaphysical comfort*" (18)? Fourteen years later

he responds to his younger self, "'Would it not be *necessary*?' – No, thrice no! O you young

romantics: it would *not* be necessary! But it is highly probable that it will *end* that way, that *you*

end that way – namely, 'comforted,' as it is written, in spite of all self-education for seriousness

and terror, 'comforted metaphysically' – in sum, as romantics end, as *Christians*" (*BT*, "Attempt at

a Self-Criticism", 7). Wagner and Schopenhauer both came to praise Christian values and

Christian morality – the value of the unegoistic and the morality of pity – and the decisive

difference between them and the Dionysian men lies in their need for these things. Nietzsche's

early mistake was that he did not yet recognize this distinction, that he had not yet learned to ask

this fundamental question: "is it hunger or super-abundance that has here become creative" (*GS*

370)?[21]

 Nietzsche's misunderstanding was not limited to the significance of Schopenhauer's and

Wagner's pessimism. His lack of sensitivity to the motive force behind their creations also led

him to mischaracterize, to a certain degree, the transfiguring experience generated in Dionysian

revelry; his misjudgments had "obscured and spoiled Dionysian premonitions with

Schopenhauerian formulations" (*BT*, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism", 6). While Nietzsche's early

work explicitly rejected the appeal of the doctrine of the resignation of the will, his reliance on

---

21   This particular aphorism, titled "What is Romanticism?", is a reflection on his early reaction to Greek tragedy
 and its relation to contemporary developments in German culture. Nietzsche argues that his early treatment of the
 subject had failed to recognize the defining characteristic of Romanticism: that it suffers from "the
 impoverishment of life".

the doctrine of the thing-in-itself reveals the extent to which the longing for such a comfort was still at work. The desire for proximity, for "primal unity", the desire to escape from the solitude of the self – this desire conditions his description of the experience of transfiguration. In hindsight he sees such a desire as a sign of underlying weakness and he makes it his task to determine the conditions necessary to wanting the opposite ideal: the solitude of the sovereign individual who emerges as the goal and fulfillment of the labor of culture. Rather than a journey back to the womb of nature, the new goal represents a passage through the life of culture to a new, higher kind of life.

From Nausea to Pity

As noted in the previous chapter, the sickness treated by the tragic arts is *nausea*. The Dionysian men have "once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint" (7). Nietzsche's mature criticism of his earlier position finds fault primarily with his hopeful association of nineteenth century German culture with the health proper to the culture that spawned Greek tragedy. That said, Nietzsche does see in Wagner's eventual turn to Christianity a clue to the error of his earlier work: Nietzsche had been ignorant of the

fundamental difference between the philosophical pessimism of the ancient Greeks and that proper to Romanticism, that the former was born of an "over-fullness of life" and "super-abundance" while the latter was born of "impoverishment" and "hunger".[22] Nietzsche's early view of tragedy was wrong on two counts: first, he misjudged the creative force behind Wagner's and Schopenhauer's works; and second, he mischaracterized the creative force behind Greek tragedy. In both cases, Nietzsche's view was not sufficiently critical of the instinct of pity. Toward the middle of his career, Nietzsche begins to argue that the instinct of pity is born of hunger and impoverishment,[23] and the stark difference between ancient Greeks and modern European estimations of its value ought to have tipped him off to the fundamental difference between these two ages. He failed to appreciate its significance in the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the music of Wagner, and because of his reliance on these for his analysis of the Greeks, he unwittingly projected certain elements integral to pity into his account of Dionysian transfiguration, which was the goal of Greek tragedy.

Wagner and the romantics, despite their "self-education for seriousness and terror", eventually succumbed to the metaphysical comforts provided by Christianity (*BT*, "Attempt" 7). Nietzsche, writing fourteen years after his flirtation with Romanticism, hopes to prevent himself

---

22 "Who knows on the basis of what personal experiences, I understood the philosophical pessimism of the nineteenth century as if it were the symptom of a superior force of thought, of more audacious courage, and of more triumphant fullness of life than had characterized the eighteenth century .... You see, what I failed to recognize at that time both in philosophical pessimism and in German music was what is really their distinctive character – their romanticism" (*GS* 370).

23 "Pity is essentially ... an agreeable impulse of the instinct for appropriation at the sight of what is weaker. But it should be kept in mind that 'strong' and 'weak' are relative concepts." The instinct for appropriation "strives for superabundant substitutes and wants to regenerate itself" (*GS* 118).

and his readers from succumbing to the seductions of metaphysical comforts: "No! You ought to

learn the art of *this-worldly* comfort first; you ought to learn to laugh, my young friends, if you

are hell-bent on remaining pessimists. Then perhaps, as laughers, you may some day dispatch all

metaphysical comforts to the devil – metaphysics in front." *The Birth of Tragedy*, too, played host

to a weakness for metaphysical comforts. This weakness attached itself to Nietzsche's account of

the fruits of tragic transfiguration, as can be seen in the following passage from that early work:

> Perhaps we shall have a point of departure for our inquiry if I put forward the proposition
> that the satyr, the fictitious natural being, bears the same relation to the man of culture
> that Dionysian music bears to civilization. Concerning the latter, Richard Wagner says
> that it is nullified [*Aufgehoben*] by music just as the lamplight is nullified by the light of
> day.[24] Similarly, I believe, the Greek man of culture felt himself nullified in the presence of
> the satyric chorus; and this is the most immediate effect of the Dionysian tragedy, that
> the state and society and, quite generally, *the gulfs between man and man give way to an*
> *overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature*. (*BT* 7, emphasis
> added)

It is here, in his glorification of the overcoming of interpersonal boundaries, that the instinct of

pity has secretly taken root. Analyzing the birth and death of tragedy, Nietzsche has succeeded in

identifying the threat of nausea for the human will but he has not yet discovered the danger of

pity. An examination of Nietzsche's account of Christian pity will bring to light its association

with the desire for proximity to others and the flight from ourselves – in other words, its negative

relation to Nietzsche's new vision of Dionysian transfiguration.

---

24 The lamplight in the light of day appears again in *The Gay Science* 125, where the madman "who lit a lantern in
the bright morning hours, ran to the market place" to announce the death of God. In this case it would seem that
civilized life still obscures the madman's message.

Nietzsche's intellectual journey moves from a struggle against nausea to one against both pity and nausea, and this movement tracks his shift of focus from Socrates to Christianity ("Dionysus versus Socrates" gives way to "Dionysus versus the Crucified"). Evidence of this movement can be found in a story he tells in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In the second section of the fourth book, titled "The Cry of Distress", Zarathustra is revisited by the soothsayer who had taught him "the great weariness" in the second book. He repeats this teaching on his second visit – "All is the same, nothing is worth while, the world is without meaning, knowledge strangles" – but this time to little effect. In his commentary, Kaufmann describes this as the teaching of the great nausea, and its kinship with the nausea-inducing wisdom presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* is clear to see. After noticing a change in Zarathustra, the soothsayer brings a new challenge:

> "Do you not hear anything yet? … Does it not rush and roar up from the depth?"
>
> Zarathustra remained silent and listened, and he heard a long, long cry, which the abysses threw to each other and handed on, for none wanted to keep it: so evil did it sound.
>
> "You proclaimer of ill tidings," Zarathustra said finally, "this is a cry of a man; it might well come out of a black sea. But what is human distress to me? My final sin, which has been saved up for me – do you know what it is?"
>
> "*Pity!*" answered the soothsayer from an overflowing heart, and he raised both hands. "O Zarathustra, I have come to seduce you to your final sin."
>
> … At last he asked, as one hesitant in his own mind, "And who is it that calls me?"
>
> "But you know that," replied the soothsayer violently; "why do you conceal yourself? It is *the higher man* that cries for you!"

The teaching of nausea is followed by the teaching of pity. It was the same seductive power of pity, I believe, that brought Nietzsche to write those words he later rejects in his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism": "*would it not be necessary* for the tragic man of such a culture [one in which the spirit of tragedy has been reborn], in view of his self-education for seriousness and terror, to desire a new art, *the art of metaphysical comfort*" (18)? It is plausible that the story told in *Zarathustra* is autobiographical in this regards. Whatever the case, the fate of the higher man is tied to pity in Nietzsche's writing, and the relationship between them eventually informs Nietzsche's notion of transfiguration as he moves his focus from the dangers presented by Socratic moralism to those brought on by Christianity.

Pity & the Metaphysical Comfort of the Primal Unity/Community

As noted earlier, the particular metaphysical comfort that taints Nietzsche's analysis of tragedy involves the feeling that one has abolished the distance between himself and others as well as the assurance that one has returned in some sense to the "heart of nature." It might initially seem unreasonable to refer to this particular comfort as a form of pity, since pity is typically associated with compassion for those who suffer; however, pity is a complex term in Nietzsche's writing and it forms a major node in the network of terms that he uses to describe Christianity. Nietzsche's texts from *Human, All Too Human* onward exhibit a steady interest in

pity and this interest first manifests itself in his critical examination of the morality of selflessness that was championed by his one-time "educator" Schopenhauer.[25] The glorification of a disciplined attitude of indifference towards one's ego and one's personal interests are hallmarks of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy – a philosophy that identifies compassion (*Mitleid*, one of the two primary terms Nietzsche associates with the concept of pity[26]) as the basis of all truly moral actions. Nietzsche's analysis of the transfigurative power of tragedy includes a rejection of Schopenhauer's doctrine of the negation of the will, but it retains a high estimation of the longing for intimacy that is, at the same time, a desire to negate the integrity of the personal ego: "the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature." Although often overlooked, this particular kind of intimacy is, in fact, part of the Western tradition of pity, going back at least to the time of Homer. Martha Nussbaum summarizes the elements of this tradition as follows:

> Pity is a painful emotion directed at another person's pain or suffering. It requires, and rests upon, three beliefs: first, the belief that the suffering is significant rather than trivial; second, the belief that the suffering was not caused by the person's own fault; and third, the belief that one's own possibilities are similar to those of the sufferer, that the suffering shows things "such as might happen" in human life. (Nussbaum, 141)

It is the third belief that is at play in the desire for proximity expressed by Nietzsche's vision of the Dionysian festival. As Nussbaum notes, this belief – "the most subtle and controversial" of the

---

25 I make this claim primarily on the basis of the content of Nietzsche's work from *HH* on; however, it receives confirmation from Nietzsche himself in his preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he states that his ideas about the origin of morality make their first appearance in *HH* and that the real problem motivating this interest was the "value of the 'unegoistic', the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice" (*GM* P 2, 5). I discuss this passage in more detail below.

26 See Nussbaum, pp. 140-1, for a brief overview of the German terms Nietzsche refers to in his critique of pity.

three, but "one on which the ancient tradition emphatically insists" (142) – implies that "the pain of another will be an object of my concern only if I acknowledge some sort of community between myself and the other – to the extent that I am able, in imagination, to see that suffering as a possibility for me and to understand, on the basis of my own experience, what its meaning might be for the person who has it." Pity, according to this view, involves a particular interpretive stance: at bottom, the spectator and the sufferer are united by suffering.

Insight & Pity

Nietzsche's critique of pity is grounded in his belief that suffering is not homogeneous, and that the suffering involved in pity is not truly shared. The imaginary community that makes the traditional interpretation of pity possible is thinkable only insofar as the difference between your suffering and the suffering I undergo at the sight of your suffering is obscured. The ideology of pity teaches me to view my suffering as if it were the same as yours: in the feeling of pity, I experience your suffering; through pity, the "gulf" that separates us is abolished. While Nietzsche typically refers to pity as an instinct, it is clear from his critique that it also involves a hermeneutics of suffering that relies on the assumption of a deep psychological affinity between persons. "Selflessness" makes sense only on the basis of some such affinity and some method for accessing it. In pitying another, I believe that I am ignoring my personal interests and adopting

another's perspective (and the burdens proper to it) as my own. I think that I share that person's suffering in two ways: first, I experience it as my own, and second, I take some of that burden for myself, i.e., I try to relieve that person of their suffering. Nietzsche's critique of this ideology denies that the pitier's suffering is the same as that of the pitied, which means that pity is not truly selfless; it also rejects the idea that pity is beneficent, that is, that it truly reduces suffering. In fact, he will argue that pity increases suffering – "pity makes suffering contagious" (*A* 7).

"The truth is: in the feeling of pity – I mean that which is usually and misleadingly called pity – we are, to be sure, not consciously thinking of ourself but are doing so *very strongly unconsciously* .... An accident which happens to another offends us .... It is misleading to call the *Leid* (suffering) we may experience at such a sight, and which can be of very varying kinds, *Mit-Leid* (pity), for it is under all circumstances a suffering which he who is suffering in our presence is *free* of: it is our own, as the suffering he feels is his own" (*D* 133). My suffering at the sight of the suffering of another is determined by my circumstances and not by some process whereby their suffering is communicated to me. My suffering, i.e, the spectator's suffering, might arise in response to any number of things: for instance, the sight of the other person's misfortune might "make us aware of our impotence, and perhaps of our cowardice, if we did not go to assist him. Or it brings with it in itself a diminution of our honor in the eyes of others or in our own eyes. Or an accident and suffering incurred by another constitutes a signpost to some danger to us; and it can have a painful effect upon us simply as a token of human pain and vulnerability and

fragility in general." The final item on this list of possible causes of the suffering proper to the feeling of pity comes closest to the traditional account insofar as it acknowledges some susceptibility to suffering that is held in common among human beings. This acknowledgement, however, yields no special insight to me about *your* suffering and its relation to me, nor does it help me to understand the particular nature of my suffering at the sight of your suffering; there is nothing about this very general sense of vulnerability that points to your specific condition or its relevance to my life and interests. That I suffer from the reminder, brought on by the sight of your suffering, that all humans are vulnerable, does not bring me any closer to your suffering. Your suffering is merely the occasion for my own and not its kin. "That pity ... is the *same kind of thing* as the suffering at the sight of which it arises, or that it possesses an especially subtle, penetrating understanding of suffering, are propositions contradicted by *experience*, and he who glorifies pity precisely on account of these two qualities *lacks* adequate experience in this very realm of the moral." The suffering proper to pity is not the same as the suffering of the pitied and it yields no special knowledge or insight about the condition of the one pitied. "But whenever people *notice* that we suffer, they interpret our suffering superficially. It is the very essence of the emotion of pity that it strips away from the suffering of others whatever is distinctively personal. Our 'benefactors' are, more than our enemies, people who make our worth and will smaller" (*GS* 338). Thus it is not the case that by virtue of the feeling of pity, aroused at the sight of another's suffering, "I am able, in imagination, to see that suffering as a possibility for me and to

understand, on the basis of my own experience, what its meaning might be for the person who has it."[27] In fact, this particular interpretive strategy diminishes the significance of our suffering by divorcing it from its context. This understanding of pity teaches us to misread suffering and to foreclose on the possibility that this particular case of suffering – whether mine or another's – might have some value, that it might be necessary to dwell with it for some time. Pity compels us to act to reduce suffering, whatever its particular qualities, whatever its value. "Pity has a singular piece of impudence for its companion: for, because it is absolutely determined to render assistance, it experiences no perplexity as to either the means of cure or the nature and cause of the illness, but gaily sets about quackdoctoring at the health and reputation of its patient" (*HH*, "Mixed Opinions and Maxims" 68). "The whole economy of my soul and the balance effected by 'distress' ... – all such things that may be involved in distress are of no concern to our dear pitying friends; they wish to *help* and have no thought of the personal necessity of distress .... It never occurs to them that, to put it mystically, the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell" (*GS* 338).

The Seductive Power of Pity

If pity is not what we take it to be, why do we find the traditional account compelling?

---

27 Cf. Foucault on Nietzsche and genealogy: "Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (380).

Nietzsche has already shown that acts of pity are not selfless acts;[28] they are motivated by our

own personal interests and qualities. In acts of pity, we react primarily to our own distress and

only secondarily, if at all, to that of the one pitied. This does not yet explain the appeal of the

traditional account. The question, then, is why selflessness is an attractive ideal, regardless of its

achievability in practice. A possible explanation is given in the first book of *Thus Spoke*

Zarathustra in a section called "On Love of the Neighbor": "You crowd around your neighbor

and have fine words for it. But I say unto you: your love of the neighbor is your bad love of

yourselves. You flee to your neighbor from yourselves and would like to make a virtue out of that:

but I see through your 'selflessness.'" That the "selflessness" proper to the love of the neighbor is

the same as that associated with pity is made clear in *The Gay Science*, written just prior to

Zarathustra:

> How is it at all possible to keep to one's own way? ... I know, there are a hundred
> decent and praiseworthy ways of losing *my own way*, and they are truly highly 'moral'!
> Indeed, those who now preach the morality of pity even take the view that precisely
> this and only this is moral – to lose one's *own* way in order to come to the assistance
> of a neighbor. I know just as certainly that I only need to expose myself to the sight
> of some genuine distress and I am lost. (*GS* 338)

The morality of pity is a seduction away from ourselves and we are tempted by this seduction

because it is experienced as a relief. We unburden ourselves (and not the one pitied) through pity:

"All such arousing of pity and calling for help is secretly seductive, for our 'own way' is too hard

and demanding and too remote from the love and gratitude of others, and we do not really mind

---

28 Nietzsche makes the stronger argument that truly selfless acts are impossible.

escaping from it – and from our very own conscience – to flee into the conscience of the others

and into the lovely temple of the 'religion of pity.'" I misread my own suffering at the sight of

your suffering because good reading is difficult and unpleasant; my own laziness and desire for

comfort keep me from attending to myself in a rigorous way. Furthermore, this same desire for

comfort is expressed in the longing to believe that my pity makes a difference in the world, that it

somehow reduces the quantity of suffering in the world (in this sense, pity is a powerful reaction

to the *nausea* discussed above and in the previous chapter). In reality, however, my refusal to

attend to the particularity of my suffering virtually guarantees that I will not get to the bottom of

it. As a result, pity actually prolongs suffering. Additionally, as noted above, my acts of pity might

rob the one pitied of the potentially positive value of their own suffering; in this way, my pity also

undermines their ability to attend to their suffering and thus to affirm a life that includes such

suffering. The hermeneutics of pity appeals to us because it is the easier path, at least in the short

run. It comforts us now.[29] In fact, pity is merely a child of the longing for comfort – perhaps its

most extreme offspring. In pity, suffering itself repels us, regardless of context: "if you experience

suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, worthy of annihilation, and as a defect of existence, then

it is clear that besides your religion of pity you also harbor another religion in your heart that is

perhaps the mother of the religion of pity: the *religion of comfortableness*." The need for

---

29 This focus on the present and expedient is to be contrasted with the perspective of the tragic artist: "The
   profundity of the tragic artist lies in this, that his aesthetic instinct surveys the more remote consequences, that he
   does not halt shortsightedly at what is closest at hand, that he affirms the large-scale economy which justifies the
   terrifying, the evil, the questionable – and more than merely justifies them" (*WP* 852). The trailing thought
   seems to be that the tragic artist would also have us will these things.

metaphysical comfort that infects Nietzsche's early account of tragedy is genealogically tied to pity.

How has the hermeneutics of pity gained its appeal? In other words, why do I feel comforted by the flight to the conscience of the other and distressed by the prospect of a turn to myself? What has conditioned these feelings in me? We have already seen that laziness is part of the answer; however, laziness does not explain the unpleasantness associated with attendance to the particularity of one's own suffering. Nietzsche's description of pity as involving two consciences – our own, from which it allows us to escape; and the "conscience of the others" that serves as our resting place – gestures toward an answer. This description dovetails neatly with the discussion of neighbor-love in *Zarathustra*, which was written not long after: "The *you* is older than the *I*; the *you* has been pronounced holy, but not yet the *I*: so man crowds toward his neighbor." In the immediately preceding section, titled "On the Thousand and One Goals", Nietzsche writes: "The delight in the herd is more ancient than the delight in the ego; and as long as the good conscience is identified with the herd, only the bad conscience says: I." These two passages strongly suggest that the comfort provided by the feeling of pity has been conditioned in us by the feelings associated with these two consciences. The so-called good conscience lures us to the *you*, the herd, the neighbor. This herd and this delight are older than the individual and its delight in itself. Likewise, the bad conscience leads us away from the *I*, from ourselves. The good conscience is attached to the group, and this association is more ancient

and firmly entrenched than any good feelings we might manage to attach to the ego. Our moral inheritance has for a long time shaped our feelings about ourselves and the vector of these feelings plays into the operation of the instinct of pity.

The Prehistory of Pity

In *Human, All-Too-Human* and *Daybreak*, Nietzsche offers a lengthy examination of prehistoric systems of morality – systems which ruled for millennia and which predate the relatively late and short-lived morality of pity. These early forms of morality bred us to be suspicious of the "free human being", i.e., the person who does not act for the sake of custom. For instance, in part two of *Human, All-Too-Human,* Nietzsche writes:

> The origin of mores may be found in two thoughts: "society is worth more than the individual," and "enduring advantage is to be preferred to ephemeral advantage" – from which it follows that the enduring advantage of society must be given precedence, unconditionally, over the advantage of the individual, especially over his momentary well-being but also over his enduring advantage and even his continued existence.

Similarly, in *Daybreak*: "The free human being is immoral because in all things he is determined to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition: in all the original conditions of mankind, 'evil' signifies the same as 'individual', 'free', 'capricious', 'unusual', 'unforeseen', 'incalculable'." He concludes,

> Every individual action, every individual mode of thought arouses dread; it is

> impossible to compute what precisely the rarer, choicer, more original spirits in the whole course of history have had to suffer through being felt as evil and dangerous, indeed through *feeling themselves to be so*. Under the dominion of the morality of custom, originality of every kind has acquired a bad conscience; the sky above the best men is for this reason to this very moment gloomier than it need be. (*D* 9)

We no longer live under this ancient system of morality, but we have inherited the feelings associated with it; the reasons may no longer appeal to us, but we still respond to the individual with feelings of displeasure, suspicion, and fear.[30] The hermeneutics of pity, which values selflessness over egoism, has appropriated these feelings and deployed them toward new ends. According to Nietzsche, if the morality of custom was aimed primarily at strengthening the community or group, the morality of pity aims at the formation of a particular kind of group: the herd, i.e., a community of those who suffer from life and seek revenge against life – against all that grows, accumulates force, and climbs ever higher.[31] For this type of human being, suffering is an objection to life itself and justifies hatred of life. Members of this type "experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, worthy of annihilation, and as a defect of existence." In the morality of pity, the good conscience is no longer attached to the community as such (which, for most of human history, has been aristocratic and hierarchical – at least in the case of "healthy societies"[32]) but is rather attached to a community of equals – a community of those united by

---

30 "for when the habit of some distinguishing action is *inherited*, the thought that lies behind it is not inherited with it (thoughts are not hereditary, only feelings)" (*D* 30).

31 Nietzsche refers to the passage from *Human, All-Too-Human* quoted above in his preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "One should compare in particular what I say in *Human, All-Too-Human* ... volume II, section 89, on the 'morality of mores,' that much older and more primitive species of morality which differs toto caelo from the altruistic mode of valuation" (*GM* P 4).

32 See *A* 57 and *BGE* 257, which discuss hierarchy as a rule of nature and as necessary to the process of growth. This topic will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

their hatred of suffering and of life – the imaginary community that is part of the traditional account of pity. The herd-member is anti-aristocratic, democratic, egalitarian –- all in the interest of taking revenge against life.[33] The bad conscience, under the reign of this morality, attaches its corrosive effects to both the old forms of society as well as to the individual who is relatively healthy, i.e., who exhibits all the qualities of a healthy living creature. In this way, the morality of pity is a recent modification of the historical relationship between the community, which is ancient, and the individual. Nietzsche's concern about pity can thus be understood as concern for the future of the individual: to what extent does the morality of pity obstruct the process by which the individual with a *good conscience* might be bred – this individual who is a very late fruit[34] and who has learned "*to feel differently*"?[35] It is here, in the confrontation between the morality of pity, which is the morality of the herd, and the future existence of the individual with a good conscience, that we can detect the outlines of Nietzsche's new, historicized vision of transfiguration. If the individual with a good conscience represents the "task nature has set itself in the case of man" (*GM* II 1), pity represents the "danger of dangers" (*GM* P 6).[36]

---

33 The forces behind this appropriation of these ancient moral sentiments are discussed at length in the next chapter.

34 I take this image from the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche describes the sovereign individual in these terms. The relation of this individual's "conscience" to the bad conscience is the subject of that essay. Interestingly, in the preface to the same book, Nietzsche describes his recent awareness that the question of the value of the instinct of pity is at the heart of his life-long interest in morality as late fruit: "our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit – related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of one will, one health, one soil, one sun. – Whether you like them, these fruits of ours? – But what is that to the trees! What is that to us, to us philosophers!" (*GM* P 2). One implication of this passage is that Nietzsche's path to his own will and health has passed through the critique of pity – that pity was the obstacle to be overcome.

35 "We have to *learn to think differently* – in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*" (*D* 103).

36 Nussbaum's essay on Nietzsche's critique of pity, cited above, misunderstands Nietzsche's primary concern.

The seductive power of pity appropriates the bad conscience, which points us to the

community (most recently, that of the herd and "neighbor") and away from ourselves; the *feeling*

of pity – which bundles the distress associated with solitude and the seeking after self-knowledge

with the comfort found in the community – bids us to take flight from ourselves and to

---

Nietzsche worries that pity seduces us away from the goal of self-knowledge and care for the self, and that it does this by falsifying the suffering of pitier and pitied. Through pity, we imagine ourselves as interchangeable with others and come to concern ourselves with problems that do not correspond to our own deepest needs and our own bits of "spiritual fatum" (*BGE* 231). Because of the bad hermeneutics encouraged by pity, we risk not gaining insight about the special nature of our own suffering – what it is that makes us suffer, and why. What's more, the morality of pity views suffering as an objectionable piece of the world. Pity is a danger because it prevents us from affirming this life without reservation. Pity is a form of comfort, and Nietzsche's project is the attempt to determine how far we can go toward the elimination of the needs for such comforts. Can we learn to desire this world, this life, and this body with all the suffering that comes with them? Nussbaum reveals her blindness to this aspect of Nietzsche's critique when she counters what she takes to be his notion of strength with one derived from pity: "There is, in short, a strength ... in the willingness to be a mortal animal living in the world" (160). This is precisely Nietzsche's interest. How much strength would be required to affirm this existence with one's will? Not to just accept it, i.e., be willing to live with it, but to want it fervently.

Nussbaum reduces Nietzsche's position to that of the Stoics, arguing that he preaches solitude as a means to avoid pity. She insists that his isolation was "comfortable bourgeois solitude" and that he "probably never saw or knew an acutely hungry person, or a person performing hard physical labor" and so consequently never understood the significance of "basic vulnerability" (as opposed to "bourgeois vulnerability") for life. If my reading is correct, this misses the point entirely. First, her argument is that Nietzsche simply had not been exposed to true suffering. Had he witnessed it, he would have understood pity. But this argument presupposes the hermeneutic model Nietzsche draws into question. Nietzsche's argument is not that such exposure is bad because it communicates dangerous suffering to us; rather, he argues that such communication is impossible. Nietzsche does not preach solitude as a means to avoid pity; rather, solitude is the experience of one who is free of pity. The solitude of such a one is contrasted with the imaginary sense of community conjured up through pity. Nietzsche's solitude is a feeling of solitude more than any actual physical or social isolation. It is the feeling one gets from an awareness of one's singularity and one's personal fate. It is the feeling of one who becomes what one is. Nussbaum's complaint about Nietzsche's position on pity seems to be that he failed to be someone else.

Another shortcoming of her critique is that she conflates Nietzsche's position with that of the state or community. For instance, she refers us to Nietzsche's discussion of mercy in the second essay of the *Genealogy* where he describes the merciful community as one that is sufficiently strong to freely discharge the debts of an individual offender. It is true that Nietzsche praises this position – he praises all phenomena proper to healthy organisms – but he is not especially interested in advocating this as policy; rather, he is outlining the conditions that might be necessary for the emergence of an individual with a good conscience. A merciful community would be one that no longer labeled those who act as individuals "evil".

misinterpret our own personal suffering and the value of this suffering for our lives.

> Is it your wish, my brother, to go into solitude? Is it your wish to seek the way to yourself? Then linger a moment, and listen to me. "He who seeks easily gets lost. All loneliness is guilt" – thus speaks the herd. And you have long belonged to the herd. The voice of the herd will still be audible in you. And when you will say, "I no longer have a common conscience with you," it will be a lament and an agony. Behold, this agony itself was born of the common conscience, and the last glimmer of that conscience still glows in your affliction. (*Z* "On the Way of the Creator")

It is this desire to quit oneself and take up residence in the "conscience of the others" that taints

Nietzsche's early account of transfiguration: "*the gulfs between man and man give way to an*

overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature." It is on this point that

Nietzsche, reflecting back on his youthful work, finds that he was also a romantic, susceptible to

the appeal of metaphysical comfort. That this form of comfort points in the direction of

Christianity is demonstrated, first of all, by Nietzsche's observation that Wagner and his fellow

romantics ended "'comforted,' as it is written, in spite of all self-education for seriousness and

terror, 'comforted metaphysically' – in sum, as romantics end, as *Christians*" (*BT*, "Attempt at a

Self-Criticism", 7). This association is also made clear by Nietzsche's description of Christianity

in *The Antichrist*. There, Nietzsche compares those who harbor the "pathos" called "faith" – a

pathos that develops out of what he calls the "theologian's instinct", which is clearly related to the

instinct of pity[37] – unfavorably with his desired audience, the "Hyperboreans". He opens the book

---

37 Nietzsche describes the theologian's instinct as the "instinctive arrogance" that assumes the right, "on the basis of some higher [i.e., spiritual] origin, to look at reality from a superior and foreign vantage point" (*A* 8). The link between this and pity is strongly suggested in the previous section, where Nietzsche says that "pity is the *practice* of nihilism. ... It multiplies misery and conserves all that is miserable, and is thus a prime instrument of the advance of decadence: pity persuades men to *nothingness*! Of course, one does not say 'nothingness' but

with the following plea: "Let us face ourselves. We are Hyperboreans; we know very well how far

off we live" (*A* 1) – a clear reference to the notion of the friend that he elsewhere contrasts with

the neighbor: "I teach you not the neighbor, but the friend. ... My brothers, love of the neighbor I

do not recommend to you: I recommend to you love of the farthest" (*Z* I "On Love of the

Neighbor"). The distance between friends stands in clear contrast to the radical proximity

between neighbors – between those who flee from themselves. The *faithful* Christian, on the

other hand, cannot face himself: "*faith*: closing one's eyes to oneself once and for all, lest one

suffer the sight of an incurable falsehood" (*A* 9). Christianity teaches us to flee from ourselves and

to take refuge in the comforts of an imaginary community. We have already seen Nietzsche's later

argument against the imaginary community and the belief in the communication of suffering

traditionally accorded to pity and counted in its favor. Nietzsche also argues that not only does

pity not give us special insight into suffering, whether our own or another's, it actually creates

---

'beyond' or 'God,' or '*true* life,' or Nirvana, salvation, blessedness" (7). The contrast of a beyond or true life with this world is clearly an example of the arrogance associated with the theologian's instinct. Another link between pity and this instinct can be found in the relation of "faith" to knowledge or insight: "The pathos which develops out of [the theologian's instinct] calls itself f*aith*: closing one's eyes to oneself once and for all, lest one suffer the sight of an incurable falsehood. This faulty perspective on all things is elevated into a morality, a virtue, a holiness; the good conscience is tied to faulty vision; and no *other* perspective is conceded any further value once one's own has been made sacrosanct with the names of 'God,' 'redemption,' and 'eternity'" (9). Thus pity, faith, and nihilism (the slandering of this world) form a unity in Nietzsche's thought.

Interestingly, as a form of "*active* nihilism", pity is linked directly to nausea, the subject of the previous chapter and the effect of pessimism. By "conserv[ing] all that is miserable", pity makes the world gloomier, much as the bad conscience does. "[Pity] preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends those who have been disinherited and condemned by life; and by the abundance of the failures of all kinds which it keeps alive, it gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect" (7). Pity magnifies the dangers of nausea and makes it more likely that we will succumb to a hopeless pessimism. Pity is the force that makes the images of suffering discussed in the previous chapter attractive. Nietzsche did not yet realize this danger when he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*.

conditions unfavorable to such insights. If we are to have access to the powers of Dionysian

transfiguration, to gain the capacity to truly affirm *this* life, we must re-educate our feelings about

ourselves and about the role and value of suffering for our lives. This task will require a special

kind of self-knowledge, a "*chemistry* of the moral, religious and aesthetic conceptions and

sensations, likewise of all the agitations we experience within ourselves in cultural and social

intercourse, and indeed even when we are alone" (*HH* 1). As the religion of pity, Christianity is

an obstacle to self-knowledge; succumbing to the influence of pity makes such insight into one's

suffering impossible.

If the goal of Dionysian transfiguration is the affirmation of this life and this world,

complete with its suffering, then Nietzsche's early account associated it with the wrong

sensations. That account glorified the feeling of proximity proper to the instinct of pity – a form

of comfort – where it should have glorified the feeling of solitude proper to the individual who

has learned to feel positively about her departure from the herd. This is not the solitude of the

libertarian utopia – the domain of the lonely cowboy who depends on no one and is completely

self-sufficient – rather, this is the solitude of one who no longer feels her individual interests as

evil – the solitude of one who has emerged from that community of feeling. This individual

understands well her relation to the community and all that she owes to it, and she wills herself

as the fulfillment and perfection of all the labor it represents. For it is only on the basis of

thousands of years of spiritual labor that she has access to the height and depth of feeling that

make the "good conscience" possible. The good conscience and the feeling of responsibility proper to it will be forged from the "bad conscience" that first gave us our souls. "First, peoples were creators; and only in later times, individuals. Verily, the individual himself is still the most recent creation. …Verily, the clever ego, the loveless ego that desires its own profit in the profit of the many – that is not the origin of the herd, but its going under" (*Z* "On the Thousand and One Goals").

Chapter 3: Priestly Power & the Social Effects of Christianity

Introductions to the sociological study of religion typically trace its origins back to the second half of the nineteenth century, to the writings of Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim. Nietzsche, an older contemporary of Durkheim, is rarely mentioned in connection with this particular history, although he is often otherwise associated with Marx and Freud as a co-creator of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" and ideological critique. Nietzsche, like Marx and Freud, offers us a technique for uncovering the hidden forces that shape our conscious lives. By this account, religion is to be understood as a form of ideology that cloaks the underlying structures and processes in which the consciousness of the believer is embedded, concealing the true self and its motives from view. While accurate as far as it goes, this presentation of Nietzsche's critical work on religion overlooks the manner in which his writing echoes themes proper to the history of sociology, particularly as this new discipline developed in France over the course of the nineteenth century. More specifically, it misses certain affinities between Nietzsche's analysis of Christianity and Durkheim's early theoretical work on social norms. Like Durkheim, Nietzsche employs the language of norms and health in a manner consistent with contemporary developments in the practice of reasoning about social bodies. In what follows, I will present a selection of Nietzsche's statements about the social impact of Christianity and consider how they relate to the Durkheimian paradigm of sociological analysis. It is my belief that attending to this

context (contemporary sociology) sheds light both on Nietzsche's use of the language of health as well as on the relation of his critique of Christianity to the major paradigm in the sociological analysis of religion.

Before initiating my presentation of Nietzsche's position, I would first like to address an issue regarding my selection of material. I speak here not so much of the selection of Nietzsche's work as of my decision to read this selection alongside Durkheim's early work rather than his later material on religion, especially his enormously influential *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, published in 1912. The selection of texts that interest me were written by Nietzsche around the time Durkheim was researching and writing about suicide and crime (the late 1880's through the early 1890's), at least a decade before his seminal work on religion. The contemporaneity of these works by Durkheim and Nietzsche is one reason to read them together. Another is that the themes at work in this particular selection of Nietzschean texts have strong affinities with those found in Durkheim's early work. The issues of social health and normality are not prominent in his later work, but that is not to say that they are not operative there. A comparison of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity with the Durkheimean paradigm ought to attend to these affinities because they might give us good reason to read Nietzsche's critique alongside Durkheim's work on religion differently.

Tyler Roberts' recent book on Nietzsche and religion, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche,*

Affirmation, Religion, makes a brief attempt to situate Nietzsche's philosophy within the sociological tradition by relating his "death of God" material to the Marxian and Durkheimean approaches, which he describes as "two prominent examples" of the sociological paradigm that "treat[s religion] primarily in terms of its social function, where religious beliefs are a reflection of social values or meanings and religious rituals are the means by which these binding forces are affirmed" (10). Adding that recent scholars have updated this paradigm by recognizing the actively creative rather than merely repetitive and sustaining character of ritual, Roberts argues the Nietzsche's discussion of the death of God sounds a similar theme by pointing to the radically disorienting and disturbing consequences of this event. After the death of God, "there is no longer anything to hold us together, or hold us in place, and so circumscribe our world as a meaningful one." Roberts goes on to say that Nietzsche's "death of God" material does not signify the end of religion but rather serves as a revelation of the need for a reassessment of our understanding of the religious. Nietzsche, he argues, offers an affirmative vision of the religious life that is meant to be contrasted with the West's dominant, nihilistic vision. Nietzsche's critique of religion does not step outside of it so much as try to transform it from within.

This is not the place for a detailed engagement with Roberts' thesis about the place of religion in Nietzsche's work. I mention Roberts' comments only because they exemplify an approach to Nietzsche's critique of religion that, while insightful, does not pay sufficient attention to Nietzsche's remarks about the social dimension of religion. Roberts is almost

certainly right that Nietzsche does not intend the death of God to signify the end of religion; however, I believe this argument ought to be altered so that we speak not of religion but of Christianity. One of the finer points of Nietzsche's "death of God" material is that, despite his expiration, God's shadow still darkens the day: "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too" (*GS* 108). This theme continues in aphorism 125, perhaps the most famous on this topic, where the madman complains that "this tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men." A similar sentiment is voiced years later in *The Antichrist*, this time in Nietzsche's voice: "all the concepts of the church have been recognized for what they are, the most malignant counterfeits that exist …. We know, today our *conscience* knows, what these uncanny inventions of the priests and the church are really worth, *what ends they served* in reducing mankind to such a state of self-violation that its sight can arouse nausea …. Everybody knows this, *and yet everything continues as before*" (38). It seems to me that Nietzsche's focus is not the disorienting and disturbing consequences of the death of God but the fact that these consequences have not come to pass, that "everything continues as before." More specifically, Nietzsche draws our attention to the puzzling fact that Christianity retains its power despite the death of God. Roberts is thus right to look past the question of divinity for the significance of religion (read: Christianity), but perhaps wrong to focus solely on the issues of meaning and transcendence. In addition to these themes, Nietzsche also has much

to say about Christianity as a force that shapes the social body, and it is here, rather than in the question of meaning, that he engages with the sociological tradition most directly.

The particular sociological discussion of interest here developed primarily in France and can be represented by Comte, at the early period, and Durkheim and Galton (in England) toward the end. The problem that defines this discussion is the following: what is the significance of the mean, average, or most common state, that is, of the *normal*? Comte, who coined the term "sociology", famously deployed the contemporary (and novel) medical sense of normal in the social field. Broussais, Comte's primary influence in this matter, had already revolutionized medicine by defining the pathological so that it corresponds to a deviation from the normal state of an organ. Prior to this, the pathological had been understood as corresponding to its own laws, thereby differing from the normal in kind; with Broussais, the pathological came to be understood as a variation of the normal rather than as a properly distinct state (cf. Hacking, chapters ten and nineteen). Comte's use of this terminology to describe social states occurred in the 1850's and, as Hacking notes, this act of translation involved an additional "twist" on the meaning of normal, which "ceased to be the ordinary healthy state; it became the purified state to which we should strive, and to which our energies are tending. In short, progress and the normal state became inextricably linked" (168).

Durkheim and Galton, writing at the end of the century, developed Comte's marriage of

medicine and sociology in their own ways, each one emphasizing and elaborating a different aspect of its complex structure. Separating Durkheim and Galton from Comte, however, are several decades during which statistical and probabilistic modes of reasoning became increasingly widespread, exerting an irresistible influence over the development of the concept of normality. Durkheim, for his part, was truer to Broussais' usage; for him, the normal state (average) of a social body is also the ideal, i.e., the moral good: pathology represents deviation from this healthy norm (178). Galton, on the other hand, runs with Comte's ideas about progress and looks upon the normal state as mediocre and thus as something to be improved upon. Unlike Comte, however, Galton weds his vision of progress to the Normal distribution that is often used to describe a group. According to this view, some exceptions to the normal state represent excellence and are thus worthy of esteem. Here, the healthiest specimens might emerge some distance from the norm: "some extremes were not pathological but superb. The right and the good are to be found at the right end of the Normal curve of talent or virtue." In these two competing views of the normal (Durkheim and Galton) we find a tension between "two kinds of progress": "The normal stands indifferently for what is typical, the unenthusiastic objective average, but it also stands for what has been, good health, and for what shall be, our chosen destiny. That is why the benign and sterile-sounding word 'normal' has become one of the most powerful ideological tools of the twentieth century" (169). It is on the unsteady terrain defined by this tension that portions of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity unfold.

In the first part of what follows I will attempt to make the case that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity intersects with these developments in sociology. There are several points of contact. First, and most obvious, is Nietzsche's emphatic use of the language of health and disease to describe Christianity. This very general connection is tightened by Nietzsche's manner of discussing the social manifestations of the Christian "disease": the sickness in question involves a change in the distribution of social types across a population. There is also reason to believe that Nietzsche understood this disease on the model of pathology adopted by Comte and Durkheim from Broussais, at least insofar as it involves a disturbance of the normal function of a certain component of the social body (the priest). Second is his association of the moral with the average (or, more typically, the "common", "mean", and "base"). In Nietzsche's hands, this identification of the common and the good, which is quite similar to Durkheim's position, becomes a cause for concern: the dogmatic universalization of the "good" of the majority threatens the health of those exceptional beings who find their good elsewhere. Third, related to the second point above, Nietzsche's discussion of "higher types" invokes the language of statistical exceptionality, aligning his position with Galton's (whom he is known to have read with interest) and against Durkheim's. Nietzsche's rants against the "last man" and the triumph of mediocrity can be read as gestures in this direction, too, as they reveal a notion of progress that finds its driving force in the cultivation of exceptional specimens and traits rather than the preservation of the mean or

average. Reading Nietzsche's critique of Christianity against the backdrop of these formative developments within sociology helps us to appreciate both the extent to which his analysis was engaged in the cutting-edge debates of his era – debates which set the stage for the sociological study of religion in the century to come – as well as the extent to which his use of medicalized language to describe Christianity was serious and not merely hyperbolic or figurative, as many have argued. In other words, Nietzsche's use of the language of health to describe and explain Christianity might be stylistic, but we must be careful to allow this designation to refer to styles of thinking; in this case, Nietzsche's style is consistent with the new style of reasoning based in statistics that would eventually colonize nearly every aspect of our lives.

The arguments of primary interest to me can be found in several of Nietzsche's later published works: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Antichrist*. The particular themes I want to explore are the social function of the priestly-type, the relation between types, and the relation of social health to the arrangement of these types. The goal is to better understand what Nietzsche's means when he describes Christianity as a disease and when he credits the spread of this disease to the priests. This goal is furthered by a certain degree of comparative work; for example, Nietzsche's account of Christianity often makes reference to other religious traditions. I will focus on two: Judaism and Brahmanism. These comparisons reveal to us the specific characteristics of Christianity as well as its historical significance. The first theme is developed in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, while the other two are presented in

Nietzsche's notorious comparisons of Christian morality to the Brahmanic "law of Manu" (*The Antichrist* and *Twilight of the Idols*). For the comparison with Judaism, I will focus on the historical account given in *The Antichrist*.

In the broadest terms proper to this discussion, Nietzsche's complaint about Christianity is that it transforms healthy social bodies into sick ones, that it *ruins* health. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche compares the "holy lies" of the Brahmanic and Christian priests, and condemns the latter for the ends to which they lie: "That 'holy' ends are lacking in Christianity is *my* objection to its means. Only *bad* ends: poisoning, slander, negation of life, contempt for the body, the degradation and self-violation of man through the concept of sin – consequently, its means too are bad" (56). By contrast, the law of Manu is "an incomparably spiritual and superior work". At the end of this comparison, Nietzsche repeats this point about ends, this time adding that the fundamental distinction to be made is "whether one preserves or *destroys*" (58). Echoing a statement made several sentences earlier, he concludes "one may posit a perfect equation between *Christian* and *anarchist*: their aim, their instinct, are directed only toward destruction." The law of Manu's aim was "to 'eternalize' the highest conditions of life's *prospering*, a great organization of society", while Christianity, for its part, "found its mission in putting an end to precisely such an organization *because life prospered in it*." The holy lies of Christianity are objectionable because they are deployed in an attempt to destroy those "great" organizations in which life prospers.

The body of the comparison between the law of Manu and Christianity is about the kind of organization that Christianity seeks to destroy. These organizations are structured by a caste system, and this system, while certainly based on objectionable presuppositions about human nature, is sanctioned, according to Nietzsche, by nature.

> The *order of castes*, the supreme, the dominant law, is merely a sanction of a *natural order*, a natural lawfulness of the first rank, over which no arbitrariness, no "modern idea" has any power. In every healthy society there are three types which condition each other and gravitate differently physiologically, each has its own hygiene, its own field of work, its own sense of perfection and mastery. Nature, not Manu, distinguishes the pre-eminently spiritual ones, those are are pre-eminently strong in muscle and temperament, and those, the third type, who excel neither in one respect nor in the other, the mediocre ones – the last as the great majority, the first as the elite (57).

The claim here seems to be that the law of Manu is consistent with the aims of prosperous life, even if it is ultimately unsuccessful or even injurious. "Healthy" societies are subdivided by type, and these types live together while, at the same time, pursuing the conditions of flourishing proper to them. These are social types, and they seem to be coordinated with one another toward a common goal despite their differentiation into separate physiological, hygienic, and work-related spheres. There is a division of labor (and morality and physiology) at work in these societies that is sanctioned by nature itself. "The order of castes, the *order of rank*, merely formulates the highest law of life; the separation of the three types is necessary for the preservation of society, to make possible the higher and highest types." Whatever Christianity is, it upsets this organization of types and leads to destruction rather than toward preservation and

the production of the "higher" and "highest."

Nietzsche's description of the three types is interesting. The "elite", "highest" type, the "eminently spiritual" one, is also that of "*the fewest*". The highest are thus exceptions in both qualitative and quantitative senses. This type has the privilege (which Nietzsche will say is equivalent to a right) of representing "happiness, beauty, and graciousness on earth." They have no right, on the other hand, to indignation or pessimism; these are "the privilege of the chandalas", i.e., the outcastes, a group not included among the three social types. We will return to the chandalas shortly. The spiritual type *rules* the social body, although not as king or warrior; rather, this type rules, it seems, through its power to represent what is highest "on earth." They are served through veneration.

The second type is "pre-eminently strong in muscle and temperament." These beings are in charge of "order and security"; they are the "guardians of the law" who serve in the roles of warrior and king. This type works in the service of the highest type, doing "everything gross in the work of ruling for them." They are the spiritual types' "retinue, their right hand, their best pupils." This last qualification suggests a certain degree of mobility between types: the higher type trains under the guidance of the highest type, presumably so as to one day rise to their ranks. A similar notion can be found toward the end of the section of *Beyond Good and Evil* called "What is Religious". There, Nietzsche says that religion "gives to some of the rules the instruction and opportunity to prepare themselves for future ruling and obeying: those slowly ascending classes

… receive enough nudges and temptations from religion to walk the paths to higher spirituality, to test the feelings of great self-overcoming, of silence and solitude" (61). Nietzsche gives no indication of the quantitative aspect of this particular group, but they must outnumber the "fewest".

Finally we come to the third caste, those who "excel neither in one respect nor in the other, the mediocre ones." Nietzsche says that this group is "the great majority." This group is thus characterized in both qualitative and quantitative terms, just like the first group. This group carries out the orders and instructions passed down from the two higher groups, thereby realizing the ends of the social organization as a whole. The field of work proper to this caste includes "handicraft, trade, agriculture, *science*, the greatest part of art, the whole quintessence of *professional* activity" – in other words, nearly every area of economic and cultural life is presided over by the mediocre. This is not a condition imposed on the powerless but rather the sanction of nature: "to be a public utility, a wheel, a function, for that one must be destined by nature: it is *not* society, it is the only kind of *happiness* of which the great majority are capable that makes intelligent machines of them. For the mediocre, to be mediocre is their happiness; mastery of one thing, specialization – a natural instinct."

This social organization, divided neatly into three cooperative yet distinct types, aims at the prospering of life and at the production and cultivation of the higher and highest types. Each types pursues its own prospering and together they produce what is "most venerable", thereby

renewing through their work the possibility of their own affirmation, both as distinct types and as components of a coordinated whole. Nietzsche presents Christianity against this backdrop. The Christian is contrasted with the highest type according to their respective attitudes toward mediocrity, which describes the majority of the population and is a "presupposition" of a "high culture". While "it would be unworthy of a more profound spirit to consider mediocrity as such an objection", the Christians "undermine the instinct, the pleasure, the worker's sense of satisfaction with his small existence", making the majority "envious" and teaching them "revenge" (*A* 57). Where the spiritual castes use religion to give the majority "an inestimable contentment with their situation and type, manifold peace of the heart, an ennobling of obedience, one further happiness and sorrow with their peers and something transfiguring and beautifying, something of a justification for the whole everyday character, the whole lowliness, the whole half-brutish quality of their souls" (*BGE* 61), Christianity appropriates "religious presuppositions" to turn the majority against life and the imperatives of a healthy society.

Nietzsche offers a similar characterization of Christianity in the first aphorism of the third essay of the *Genealogy*, which is the basis of the essay as a whole. While listing the various meanings of the ascetic ideal according to the type of person who adopts it, he writes "in the case of the physiologically deformed and deranged (the *majority* of mortals) [the ascetic ideal is] an attempt to see themselves as 'too good' for this world, a saintly form of debauch, their chief weapon in the struggle against slow pain and boredom" (*GM* III 1). Here, the mediocre (the

majority) are described as deformed and deranged, but this physiological fact is not what motivates them to adopt the ascetic ideal; rather, they adopt that ideal to remedy their boredom and pain. This description of the majority brings to mind Zarathustra's speech to the cripples in the second book of *Zarathustra* ("On Redemption"). In that speech, Zarathustra argues that redemption for them would not come in the form of a cure for their disfigurement, but rather in freedom from the spirit of revenge. The true curse is not disfigurement or imperfection but the feeling of regret directed at one's existence and the desire for revenge against the world that brought it forth. Here, as there, the distress that afflicts the mediocre is attitudinal rather than physiological. Christianity sickens or destroys by turning the majority against the world, persuading them to "see themselves as 'too good'" for it. A healthy spirit can look up toward perfection without feeling the bite of revenge, while the perfect few look down upon the rest with tenderness and gratitude (*A* 57). It follows that a healthy society will be one in which the relations between types have not been poisoned by the spirit of revenge.

Health and the Outcaste

Our picture is not yet complete, for we have not accounted for the chandalas mentioned above, the outcastes who count among their privileges pessimism and indignation. Nietzsche discusses them at length in separate comparison of the law of Manu and Christianity, found in

Twilight of the Idols ("The Improvers of Mankind"). This time, the two are compared as systems of "breeding" and "taming", respectively. Again, these systems are distinguished according to their ends. The law of Manu's task "is to breed no less than four races at once: one priestly, one warlike, one for trade and agriculture, and finally a race of servants, the Sudras" (3).[38] The problem in this case involves an unintended outcome of this process: there is a certain amount of noise in the system in the form of "the unbred man, the mish-mash man, the chandala." This is the group of people who do not fit into the desired types – they defy the aims of the system. In order to manage this segment of the population, the priests (who presumably were the authors of the laws) made the chandalas sick by denying them the resources necessary to healthy living – a practice that ultimately failed, leading to "murderous epidemics, ghastly venereal diseases", etc. The law of Manu was thus hopelessly flawed, but its intention was noble: the creation of a social organization that would promote the flourishing of life.

Christianity is a system of taming rather than breeding. Here, the primary aim is the weakening of the strong through spiritual impoverishment and disease. What was a secondary and derivative aim of the system of Manu is here the primary purpose: making sick so as to control. The being who results from such a process is "like a caricature of man, like a miscarriage: he had become a 'sinner,' he was stuck in a cage, imprisoned among all sorts of terrible concepts. And there he lay, sick, miserable, malevolent against himself: full of hatred against the springs of

---

38 This text, written just before *The Antichrist*, divides the mediocre into two castes. Nothing more is said of this division here and this difference is of little consequence for the larger argument.

life, full of suspicion against all that was still strong and happy. In short, a 'Christian'" (2). "Aryan"

morality employed various disciplinary measures to control that segment of the population who

did not fit into their organizational scheme. These measures included actions and rules that

would make them physically ill. Christianity, on the other hand, aims to make everyone feel like a

chandala, an outcaste. The chandalas represent the opposite of the Aryan system, while in

Christianity they represent the ideal subject. "Christianity, the revaluation of all Aryan values, the

victory of chandala values, the gospel preached to the poor and base, the general revolt of all the

downtrodden, the wretched, the failures, the less favored, against 'race': the undying chandala

hatred as the *religion of love*" (4). If Aryan morality aimed at the creation of a healthy, flourishing

social body, Christianity aims at the corruption of all such bodies through the deliberate

cultivation of those who *feel* disenfranchised by life, who are envious of all health, and who view

the world through vengeful eyes.

This discussion confirms that the sickness in question here is not physiological so much as

attitudinal: the sick person is one who resents or regrets his place in society and the world. Such a

person is an outcaste by definition: he or she rejects the social body's organizational scheme. A

healthy social body is coordinated and self-affirming; the chandala negates the social body and

works against it. In the society governed by the law of Manu (according to Nietzsche's

speculative account) both the perfect being and the chandala are exceptional. They fall outside of

the mean. The difference is that the elite serve a positive, constructive role with respect to the

social body while the chandala's role is negative and destructive. Both types are *abnormal*, but one

points toward health and perfection, the toward sickness and destruction. This suggests a link

with Galton's eugenicist theories, which Nietzsche is known to have read[39] – a connection made

all the stronger by Nietzsche's talk of breeding. What interests me here, however, is the link with

the statistical reasoning that underlies much of Durkheim's and Galton's work, that is, the

manner in which the health and functioning of a social body is understood according to the

distribution of types across a population. It seems to me that Nietzsche's image of society as a

pyramid *(A* 57) is in competition with another vision: society understood on the model of the

Normal distribution. The pyramid describes the healthy (or "high") society with its clear

hierarchy and broad base. But this image omits the chandala, who is conceptualized as an

exception to this norm; in other words, the pyramid is that society's internal image of itself, and

not a full accounting of the social situation. To account for all types, as Nietzsche attempts in his

discussion of the chandalas, we need a distribution that trails off at both ends. A healthy society

would be one that seeks to improve the average or mediocre by valuing and cultivating

exceptional traits that emerge at the positive extreme, initiating a process of progressive

enhancement. Nietzsche argues that we have inherited different values, and that we tend to react

negatively to exceptions and to the chance event. The higher type, when it has appeared among

us, has done so "as a fortunate accident, as an exception, never as something *willed*. In fact, this

---

39 Gregory Moore argues that both Nietzsche and Galton were caught up in a widespread obsession with the topic
   of cultural degeneration that transcended the narrow concerns of the early pioneers of eugenics. See Moore, part
   two.

has been the dreaded – almost *the* dreadful – and from dread the opposite type was willed, bred, and *attained*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick human animal – the Christian" (*A* 3). This passage suggests that the distinction between taming and breeding is somewhat misleading: we have been practicing eugenics for a very long time; the choice before us is which extreme we want to pursue. Christianity is a system of breeding that leads to stagnation (the "last man", the preservation of the mean) and even degeneration (the pursuit of traits found at the negative extreme). Nietzsche wants to recover these "means of production" in the name of health.

The discussion of the chandalas brings to mind another aspect of the functionalist paradigm at work in Durkheim's early work, namely, the functional role of abnormality in social cohesion. According to Hacking, such a role was unthinkable prior to the appropriation of Broussais' model of normality according to which abnormality (pathology) is mere variation of the normal and not different in kind. The adoption of this model by criminologists led to heated international debates in which Durkheim participated (and to which Nietzsche makes several references[40]). Durkheim's functionalist account of crime views it as a necessary component of a healthy (normal) society – necessary in part because human nature is necessarily variable, and thus there will always be those who fall outside of the mean; but it is also necessary because it fulfills a function: "a principle of conduct will stay in place only if it is offended against. Without infractions principles would lose their force and society would lose its bounds. Thus crime … is

---

40 In particular, see Nietzsche's references to the work of Lombroso in *Twilight of the Idols.* He mentions Galton and Lombroso on the issue in some of his late letters, too. See Moore, pp. 142-3.

essential for the preservation of society" (Hacking, 173-4). The cohesion of society depends on the continual reassertion of its principles against an antagonistic backdrop. Criminality is thus in a certain sense both a precondition and a necessary by-product of social life. The existence of *some* crime is therefore consistent with social health and not opposed to it as its negation.

Nietzsche's critique of morality in *Twilight of the Idols* employs similar reasoning. The creation of a moral system such as that expressed in the law of Manu necessarily involves immoral means. ("*All* the means by which one has so far attempted to make mankind moral were through and through immoral" ("Improvers" 5).) The majority of individuals are imperfect and exhibit variety in their constitutions; perfection is only for the few. Some individuals will necessarily fall outside of the bounds established by the moral system, and the imposition of this system will transform them into "outcastes". As outcastes, they become subject to various procedures of control and management that seek to preserve the integrity of the system that excludes them. In Durkheim's model, these are the criminals; in Nietzsche's they become the indignant, anarchic, and pessimistic chandalas. The moral system affirms itself through their exclusion and strengthens itself by making them ill. Some degree of sickness is thus essential for the preservation of the system, but too much or too little signals disaster.[41]

---

41 Durkheim: "There is no occasion for self-congratulation when the crime rate drops noticeably below the average level, for we may be certain that this apparent progress is associated with some social disorder" (quoted in Hacking, 173). Nietzsche's complaint about the "improvers of mankind" (he names as examples Manu, Plato, Confucius, and the "Jewish and Christian" teachers (*TI* "Improvers" 5)) seems to be twofold: first, these moralists do not acknowledge the immorality of their means, i.e., they are dishonest; second, he seems to question their *right* to these means. It is not immorality itself that is the problem – Nietzsche is, after all, an *immoralist* – but rather the ends to which it is employed (health or destruction?) and the means by which it is justified (honest or dishonest).

Durkheim believed in the autonomy and reality of deterministic social forces, and he

explained statistical regularities by reference to them.[42] Later in his career he identified religion

(more specifically, the distinction between the sacred and the profane) as the most fundamental

of these forces and produced an enormously influential account of its operation that is still

required reading for students of religion.[43] According to this model, religious rituals and beliefs

renew social bonds, thereby maintaining the conditions necessary for the survival and flourishing

of individuals. Christianity is to be understood as a sophisticated and complex manifestation of

this basic fact (cf. Durkheim, 2-4). Nietzsche's account of Christianity as a social phenomenon

seems to rely on similar functionalist presuppositions, but his analysis leads us in a very different

direction. Christianity is not merely a late and complex form of religion but rather a radically

disruptive mutation of traditional, natural social forms. Nietzsche calls upon the figure of the

priest to explain the transformation of the social body wrought by Christianity, and this

transformation is regarded by Nietzsche as historically contingent and exceptional (relative to

---

42 Cf. Hacking, 177-8.
43 His most complete definition is the following: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (*Elementary Forms*, 44). Durkheim argues that religious thought arises from the "collective effervescence" experienced when "collective life … rises to a certain intensity" (424). Interestingly, he feels he must distinguish between this altered state of "psychic activity" and the delusions stemming from intoxication and drunkenness, although he allows for a strong resemblance between them. "If … it can be said that religion does not do without a certain delirium, it must be added that a delirium with the causes I have attributed to it *is well founded*" (228). It is no coincidence, he says, that saints, etc., sometimes exhibit "pathological" symptoms, but this does not speak to the ultimate reality of the phenomenon experienced (i.e., social reality). In this case, the delusions point to something quite real. (This is one of several places where we can detect the influence of William James' arguments about religion.)

most of human history). Moral systems appear to operate as social forces, a la Durkheim, but Nietzsche does not give them the same autonomy that Durkheim does; rather, for Nietzsche, moral systems express and mediate the relations between groups. Christian morality is especially objectionable because of the way it transforms attitudes about the social order. This transformation reflects the triumph of the priests over the social body as a whole.

His unfavorable comparison of Christianity with the Brahmanic society of the law of Manu finds priests on both sides. This suggests the possibility that Christian priests are not like other priests, i.e., that Nietzsche does not find all priests equally objectionable. This possibility is confirmed in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche offers a detailed account of the dangers unique to Christianity. Nietzsche describes the ascetic priest as the "predestined savior, shepherd, and advocate of the sick herd" (*GM* III 15). This description suggests that the priest serves a social function; consequently, if we are interested in the distinctive characteristics of Christianity, we might ask whether the Christian priest's relation to society differentiates him from other kinds of priests. Nietzsche mentions non-Christian priests, Jewish and Brahmanic priests for instance, and so we know that the priestly-type is not exclusive to Christianity. Furthermore, in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche states that the priest appears "regularly and universally … in almost every age", "belongs to no one race", "prospers everywhere", and "emerges from every class of society". Indeed, the priest's mode of valuation is "one of the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena" (*GM* III 11). Why, then, does

Nietzsche single out Christianity rather than priestly-ness in general as the "danger of dangers"?

I will argue that Christianity's distinctive accomplishment is that it represents the victory of

priestly interests over all other interests. If the priest is the type of being that thrives in the

service of the sick, Christianity represents the transformation of society in such a way that it

promotes the flourishing of the priestly type at the expense of other types.

 If Christianity represents the triumph of the ascetic priest over all other types, then it

must be the case that the priests have not always been in a position of dominance. Nietzsche's

analysis of the work of the priest suggests that he has served an important function for most of

human history and that the danger he poses has emerged only recently. For a very long time –

indeed, for much of our prehistory – the ascetic priest served as a prophylactic between the

healthy types and the sick, or, in the words of *The Antichrist* and *Twilight of the Idols*, between the

castes and the outcastes. "You will guess what, according to my idea, the curative instinct of life

has at least *attempted* through the ascetic priest": "to render the sick to a certain degree *harmless*,

to work the self-destruction of the incurable, to direct the *ressentiment* of the less severely afflicted

back upon themselves … and in this way to *exploit* the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purpose

of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming." The techniques deployed by the ascetic

priest helped to manage the sick population and keep them from endangering the healthy: "a

kind of concentration and organization of the sick on one side (the word 'church' is the most

popular name for it), a kind of provisional safeguarding of the more healthily constituted, the

more fully achieved, on the other, and the creation of a *chasm* between healthy and sick – for a long time that was all! And it was much! *Very much!*" (16). The great danger presented by Christianity appears to have occurred sometime recently and it represents the breaching of this ancient protective barrier.

A glance at Nietzsche's account of the genesis of Christianity, presented in *The Antichrist*, confirms this picture. Nietzsche argues that the people of Israel faced a grave crisis around the time of the Davidic monarchy. Prior to this time, the Israelites had worshipped a "natural" and national God, that is, a God who served the natural interests of the people (strength, growth, power, etc.) through its powers as a natural being. Then, this God and his ways abruptly stopped working: "anarchy within, the Assyrian without" (25).[44] At this time, Nietzsche argues, the Israelites faced a choice: either they could reject their god and look for a new one, or they could find a way to hold on to him at any cost. Fatefully, they chose the latter, putting the priests in charge and entrusting them with the task at hand. "The concept of God becomes a tool in the hands of priestly agitators, who now interpret all happiness as a reward, all unhappiness as punishment for disobeying God, as 'sin': that most mendacious device of interpretation, the alleged 'moral world order,' with which the natural concepts of cause and effect are turned upside down once and for all" (*A* 25).

---

44 Tim Murphy explains that this is likely a reference to the internal divisions of the monarchy following the death of Solomon as well as the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians around 722 B.C.E. (Murphy, 98).

Through these reforms, a priestly hierarchy is formed: the "holy" and "chosen" people of

God. This is the backdrop for the emergence of Christianity, which is "*not* a counter-movement

to the Jewish instinct, [but] its very consequence, one inference more in its awe-inspiring logic"

(24). The priestly reaction against all natural forms, which include social hierarchies, is carried to

its logical extreme: the priestly rejection of the priestly hierarchy ifself.

> The "holy people," who had retained only priestly values, only priestly words for all
> things and who, with awe-inspiring consistency, had distinguished all other powers
> on earth from themselves as "unholy," as "world," as "sin" – this people produced an
> ultimate formula for its instinct that was logical to the point of self-negation: as
> *Christianity*, it negated even the last form of reality, the "holy people," the "chosen
> people," the Jewish reality itself. This case is of the first rank: the little rebellious
> movement which is baptized with the name of Jesus of Nazareth represents the
> Jewish instinct *once more* – in other words, the priestly instinct which can no longer
> stand the priest as a reality". (27)

The priestly power of the Jewish people first attacks the priestly hierarchy itself (the first

manifestation of Christianity) and then spreads to the Roman Empire, corrupting the grand

edifice that had been assembled over centuries. "Christianity was the vampire of the *imperium*

Romanum: overnight it undid the tremendous deed of the Romans" (58). "The whole labor of the

ancient world *in vain* … Not vanquished – merely drained. Hidden vengefulness, petty envy

become master. Everything miserable that suffers from itself, that is afflicted with bad feelings,

the whole ghetto-world of the soul *on top* all at once" (59).[45] Christianity is the hatred of

---

45 It's important to note that Nietzsche here combines social designations with feelings. He speaks of the feeling of
impoverishment, the "ghetto-world of the soul", etc. Nietzsche is not positing a direct correlation between social
or economic impoverishment or even mediocrity and the moral orientation under critique; rather, Nietzsche is
interested in those who feel this way about themselves (whatever their physical or social characteristics) and who
interpret their lives and their relations to others and the world accordingly.

hierarchy itself and the longing for an anti-natural society in which the healthy hierarchical

relations are overturned. In its origin it was "a rebellion against 'the good and the just,' against

'the saints of Israel,' against the hierarchy of society – *not* against its corruption, but against caste,

privilege, order, and formula; it was the *disbelief* in the 'higher man,' the No to all that was priest

or theologian" (27). With Christianity, certain priestly instincts become mobile, spreading

throughout the social body, attacking the old forms. The whole natural hierarchy of the ancient

world turned upside down and flattened into a new ideal form: the herd. This suggests to me that

the Christian priests were members of the spiritual caste of Jewish society who became ill, i.e.,

became chandalas, and used their power (their functional position within society) to exact

revenge in a way not available to other outcastes. This seems to be a real possibility for priests in

general, in light of Nietzsche's characterization of them in the first essay[46], at least in those cases

when they constitute the aristocracy; but here this potential is unleashed by the contingent

political situation of the time.

The priestly power proper to Christianity is distinctive by virtue of the fact that it turns

the herd against the social structures it was created to protect. This is why Nietzsche calls it

"chandala revenge." As noted earlier, Nietzsche refers to this ancient form of the herd – its

functioning in the service of health and life – as a "church" (*GM* III 16). With Christianity, the

priest abruptly abandons his traditional functional role and breaches the "chasm" that used to

---

46 "There is from the first something *unhealthy* in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling in them" (*GM* I 6).

separate sick (church) and healthy (caste system); it is the "invention of a still more abstract form of existence, of a still more unreal vision of the world than is involved in the organization of a church. Christianity *negates* the church" (*A* 27). The meaning of this negation is made clear in Nietzsche's discussion of the Renaissance and the Reformation. As for the first, Nietzsche refers to it as the "*revaluation of Christian values*, the attempt, undertaken with every means, with every instinct, with all genius, to bring the *counter*-values, the *noble* values to victory" (*A* 61). What from the perspective of Christian history (especially Protestant history) appears as the corruption of the church was, from Nietzsche's adopted perspective – the perspective of life – a symptom of the return of strength. "Attacking the decisive place, in the very seat of Christianity, placing the *noble* values on the throne *here*, I mean, bringing them right into the instincts, in the the lowest needs and desires of those who sat there! … *Cesare Borgia as pope*. Am I understood? Well then that would have been the victory which alone I crave today: with that, Christianity would have been *abolished*." The Reformation, however, intervened and once again negated the "church." In this case, the church represents a great social structure reclaimed by powers working in the service of the instincts of life. Luther, like the Jesus of the Gospels (27), was not fighting against the corruption of a hierarchy but was fighting hierarchy itself. "Luther saw the *corruption* of the papacy when precisely the opposite was more than obvious: the old corruption, the *peccatum originale*, Christianity no longer sat on the throne. But Life! But the triumph of life! But the great Yes to all high, beautiful, audacious things! And Luther *restored the church*: he attacked it"

(61). Christianity, a force of corruption, restored itself to power by attacking the signs of life that were emerging within the structures it had invaded long ago. If Luther had been a priest of the ancient, health-preserving variety, he presumably would have worked to keep the Christians out of Rome and organized into a proper "church"; instead, he united them in opposition to it.[47]

Nietzsche also complains that Christianity has cheated us "out of the harvest of the culture of *Islam*. The wonderful world of the Moorish culture of Spain … was *trampled down*." The motive: "it owed its origin to noble, to *male* instincts, because it said Yes to life even with the rare and refined luxuries of Moorish life" (60). Furthermore, the Germans were manipulated by their love of money into fighting for the church in the Crusades. They should have known better who to side with. The Islamic culture of the Moors was "really more closely related to *us*, more congenial to our senses and tastes than Rome and Greece", and so there should not have been "any choice between Islam and Christianity, any more than between an Arab and a Jew. The decision is given; nobody is free to make any further choice. Either one *is* a chandala, or *is* not." Elsewhere, the religion of the ancient Israelites is also valued highly; it is only when the priests assume power that Jewish society becomes questionable. It is the power of the priestly type over Christianity and portions of Judaism that offends Nietzsche.

Nietzsche suggests that something similar is happening with the modern rise and spread of progressive, egalitarian, anti-aristocratic, even anarchistic political movements. He has a "free

---

47 Cf. Foucault: "German Catholicism, in the sixteenth century, retained enough strength to turn against itself, to mortify its own body and history, and to spiritualize itself into a pure religion of conscience" (377).

spirit" who is sympathetic to these ideals say the following in response to his analysis of the

development of Christianity out of Judaism:

> The "redemption" of the human race (from "the masters," that is) is going forward; everything is visibly becoming Judaized, Christianized, mob-ized (what do the words matter!). The progress of this poison through the entire body of mankind seems irresistible …. – To this end, does the church today still have any *necessary* role to play? Does it still have the right to exist? Or could one do without it? *Quaritur.* It seems to hinder rather than hasten this progress. But perhaps that is its usefulness. … – Today it alienates rather than seduces. – Which of us would be a free spirit if the church did not exist? It is the church, and not its poison, that repels us. – Apart from the church, we, too, love the poison.– (*GM* I 9)

Here we see the interesting claim that the progressive redemption of humanity from hierarchical

rule – the progressive spread of Jewish and Christian values – is, if anything, slowed by the

church. If "church" here means the ancient form of the herd which was created to protect the

healthy from the sick (a definition given in the third essay of the same book), then this statement

might mean that the spread of the sickness that was traditionally contained by the church is

slowed down by the existence of the church, i.e., by the continued success of those disciplinary

measures put in place by the priests to prevent the spread of disease. If this is the case, then the

Christian church has always been a retarding influence on the spread of Christianity – it

represents the remainder of the more ancient form of priestly power. The poison spreads most

efficiently when the spirit of Christianity does not feel at home in any church. The herd is mobile

when opposed to the church. The church appears to the free spirit as something anachronistic

and crude, as something out-of-sync with modern taste ("Certainly it has, over the years, become

something crude and boorish, something repellent to a more delicate intellect, to a truly modern taste. Ought it not to become at least a little more refined?"). Perhaps the organization of the church appears to the free spirit as a throwback to times when aristocratic values were still operative; perhaps he feels that the true church must finally leave these structures behind just as political reality has left aristocratic structures behind. Whatever the case, we encounter here a spirit who is repelled by the organized body known as the church and who would prefer, instead, to see the "poison" flow unimpeded through the social body. With progressive ideals, we feel the promise of redemption approaching through the disintegration of such bodies[48] and the creation of what Nietzsche calls "the herd."

---

48 Nietzsche makes it clear that he does not favor the opposite ideals – those of political conservatism, broadly construed – either: "We 'conserve' nothing; neither do we want to return to any past periods; we are not by any means 'liberal'; we do not work for 'progress'" (*GS* 377). Nietzsche believes that what we take for "progress" really represents decline. Liberals err in their estimation of their values. Conservatives also err insofar as their obsession with the past betrays their fear or hatred of change and of the future. Nietzsche's position represents the attempt to meld together a good conscience about authority, serving higher ends and looking with contempt at lower ones, with a positive valuation of becoming and of the future. The ongoing process of degeneration ought to be viewed as a necessary condition for future growth. Politicians who cry for a return to the past simply echo those moralists who blindly praise the authority of tradition without appreciating the necessity for creating new values and new customs. "Even the politicians have aped the preachers of virtue at this point: today there are parties whose dream it is that all things might walk backwards like crabs. But no one is free to be a crab. Nothing avails: one *must* go forward – step by step further into decadence (that is *my* definition of modern 'progress'). One can *check* this development and thus dam up degeneration, gather it and make it more vehement and *sudden*: one can do no more" (*TI*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 43). The degeneration of a type, while potentially dangerous to health, also presents new opportunities for growth: "the continual fight against ever constant *unfavorable* conditions is … the cause that fixes and hardens a type. Eventually, however, a day arrives when conditions become more fortunate and the tremendous tension decreases …. At these turning points of history we behold … a splendid, manifold, junglelike growth and upward striving …. The dangerous and uncanny point has been reached where the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life transcends and *lives beyond* the old morality; the 'individual' appears, obliged to give himself laws and to develop his own arts and wiles for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption" (*BGE* 262).

For Nietzsche, the traditional church and priest function in the service of social health by containing the negative effects of pessimism, nausea, ressentiment and revenge. The interplay between system and "noise" strengthens the bounds of the system and makes the "breeding" and cultivation of higher types possible. The church reinforces the order of rank that is essential to the processes of life. The church is thus, in a certain sense, a social sacrifice. It symbolizes the conditions necessary for the flourishing of certain "types", although in a negative fashion. Durkheim defines the church as a "society whose members are united because they imagine the sacred world and its relations with the profane world in the same way, and because they translate this common representation into identical practices" (41). For Durkheim, the church is the community, although as seen and experienced in an idealized manner. Despite this difference, both argue for the important functional role of the church: it strengthens the social organism. Nietzsche's account of Christianity, however, historicizes the phenomenon of the church in a way that is completely at odds with Durkheim's account. According to Durkheim, the disruption of traditional ways of life by rationalization and secularism represents a logical progression that finds its roots "in the very beginnings of history" (Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 6). The separation of morality and religion is not a radical disruption but rather the unfolding of a potentiality present from the origin: "it is … certain that when we broke that bond definitively we were following in the mainstream of history. If ever a revolution has been a long time in the making, this is it" (7). By this account, Christianity and the secular reforms that have issued from it are

continuous with the primary thrust of history.

Nietzsche's account of Christianity is quite different. According to the selection of texts reviewed above, Christianity marks a significant departure from the traditional forms of social life that have existed for much of human history. In fact, referring to Christianity as a religion obscures its essential characteristic: that it represents a disruptive and unhealthy transformation of the function of religion in society.[49] With Christianity, healthy social arrangements are disrupted, higher types are made sick, the mediocre learn to hate their ideals, and the interests of the indignant (sick) are put first. Ultimately, however, the priestly type comes out ahead. As the "predestined savior, shepherd, and advocate of the sick herd", this type stands to benefit the most from the transformation of the world into a "hospital". If health points to the positive end of the normal distribution, then Christianity points to the other extreme. Judged from this perspective, Christianity is best understood as a form of negative eugenics:

> Christianity has been the most calamitous kind of arrogance yet. Men, not high and hard enough to have any right to try to form *man* as artists; men not strong and farsighted enough to *let* the law of thousandfold failure and ruin prevail, though it cost them sublime self-conquest; men not noble enough to see the abysmally different order of rank, chasm of rank, between man and man – *such* men have so far held sway over the fate of Europe, with their "equal before God," until finally a smaller, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something eager to please, sickly, and mediocre has been bred, the European of today – (*BGE* 62)

The potentially disruptive consequences of the death of God are not Nietzsche's focus; rather, he

---

49 See *BGE* 61-2 for an interesting discussion of this topic. Section 61 discusses the healthy uses of religion, while 62 discusses the unhealthy uses: "one always pays dearly and terribly when religions do *not* want to be a means of education and cultivation in the philosopher's hand but insist on having their own *sovereign* way, when they themselves want to be the ultimate ends and not means among other means."

is interested in the fact that this disruption has not come to pass. The selective effects of Christian rule continue unabated. The real disruption occurred with the emergence of Christianity out of priestly Judaism. Durkheim would likely attribute this fact – the ultimate irrelevance of the death of God for the way we live together – to the essential compatibility of science and reason with the interests of the moral community. Our theological beliefs are not necessary for the cohesion of society, but they signify truths that are. The danger, according to him, is that we might strip away the religious elements from morality without trying to replace them with proper rational substitutes. Without this moral core, society would deviate wildly from its norms, becoming pathological. Moral progress demands that we find the "moral realities" hidden in our religious conceptions and resurrect them according to the rational standards of our times (*ME*, 9-13). In this way, the social forces that bind us together (our norms) are refreshed and renewed. For Nietzsche, whose model of society is closer to Galton's conception of the normal, Christian morality does not express moral truths; rather, it expresses the interests of a particular social type. This type – the priest – is both powerful (originally from the spiritual caste) and sick (an outcaste, i.e, harboring the spirit of revenge against society). In this sense, he is an exception to the mean, but on the negative side of the distribution, i.e., on the side leading toward degeneration. The essential factor here, then, is not God but the spirit of revenge against natural, social hierachies. Christianity mocks the very idea of a natural order of rank, carrying this attitude right into its primary symbol, the cross, which depicts the punishment of earthly kingship. Progress, for

Nietzsche, comes not through the rational rehabilitation of our moral integrity but from the overcoming of morality itself – that is, the overcoming of priestly rule and the embrace of its antithesis found at the opposite extreme. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this extreme is personified by Dionysus, the god of wine and intoxication. Durkheim's conception of the normal locates health at the mean and pathology at the extremes; thus, religious "intoxication" only resembles pathological symptoms.[50] For Nietzsche, as for Galton, abnormality, while sometimes pathological, can also signify excellence (a developmentally positive pathology). The priest and the god of wine thus mark out opposite extremes of the social distribution, as well as opposite directions for development. I believe this is the model Nietzsche had in mind when he wrote the final lines of his autobiography: "Have I been understood? – Dionysus versus the Crucified. –" (*EH* "Destiny" 9).

---

50 See note 43.

Chapter 4: Sickness is Sublime

A recent collection of essays on the sublime notes the remarkable resilience of this
concept over the past two and a half centuries, evidenced most dramatically by its revival during
the height of postmodernism.[51] Part of the explanation given for the sublime's adaptability to
diverse contexts and uses relies on its apparently loose association with its early "religious"
overtones: "partially escaping from these quasi-religious catacombs, however, the realm of the
sublime expanded in the nineteenth century beyond the excesses of nature to embrace almost any
area of human experience marked by great wealth or power" (8). Eventually, the sublime came to
focus "on the immanent rather than on the transcendent, on the objects of the world and on our
powers of imagination rather than on the sacred and the mystical" (14). For this commenter, our
ongoing interest in the sublime is linked to its capacity to function in both "religious" and "non-
religious" contexts, and for "religious" and "non-religious" ends. This capacity is called into
question by another contributor to the same book, who argues that the sublime "has come to be
the place where thought about religious truth, revelation, and other more or less unusable
concepts have congregated" (84). This author argues "against the sublime" in part because it serves

---

51 One author states that the sublime was rehabilitated to serve the interests of critique: "the postmodern critique
    found in the sublime a device for exploring" alternatives to the "reductive and one-dimensional [modernist]
    conception of the human condition as rational, progressive, and benign" (Hoffmann, 3).

to "smuggle covert religious meaning into texts that are putatively secular" (75). In other words, the sublime ought to be abandoned as an analytic tool because it threatens the stability of the secular/religious divide. Whether celebrated or despised, the concept of the sublime has come to symbolize the uncomfortable relation between past and present identities (religious life/secular life, modern self/post-modern self, etc.).

The uncomfortable relation between Christianity and modernity features prominently in Nietzsche's later writing, and much of his critique of Christianity is motivated by his suspicion that Christian values, such as the nihilistic devaluing of "nature" and the glorification of "selflessness", continue to influence us despite the recent demise of Christian dogma. In the previous chapter, I argued that, according to Nietzsche, guilt is one Christian invention that has persisted despite the "death of God" and that its hold on us is evidence that Christianity has strengthened itself through the progressive ideals that have displaced the church from centers of power. A proper understanding of Christianity will thus not reduce it to the "religious" ("faith", "God", "ritual", etc.) but will analyze it instead through reference to the standard of health and the interests of power. In what follows, I will explore a series of similarities and linkages between the Christian concept of guilt and the feeling of the sublime and reflect on the implications of this association for the critique of Christianity.

Of course, Nietzsche does not explicitly associate the sublime with either guilt or

ressentiment, and so part of my argument will involve a demonstration of this association.[52] This

demonstration will rely on two observations: first, Nietzsche does address the related concept of

beauty in the third essay of the *Genealogy* (*GM* III 5-8), which is also where he describes guilt as

ressentiment turned back against the sufferer (III 15, 20). This discussion of beauty refers explicitly

to the aesthetic philosophies of Schopenhauer and Kant, both of whom present the beautiful

alongside the sublime as if the two form a natural pair. It is thus at least plausible that Nietzsche's

account of beauty would be followed at some point by an account of the sublime, especially when

one considers the relative importance Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's "educator", placed on the

latter.[53] Second, the language Nietzsche uses to describe guilt later in the same essay echoes

language used by Schopenhauer and Kant to describe the sublime. And so when, after reading an

---

52 To my knowledge, no one has made this connection before. The sublime has been connected by many
   commentators with Nietzsche's presentation of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. For example, R. Kevin
   Hill argues in a recent book that Nietzsche's Dionysian principle was inspired by his reading of the sublime as
   presented in Kant's third critique (55). Nuno Nabais interprets the Dionysian/Apollonian pair as a reworking of
   the sublime/beautiful pair as it figures in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy. He argues that Nietzsche's
   treatment anticipates the postmodern theory of the sublime (cf. 10-11). Bart Vandenabeele argues that it is the
   relation of the Apollonian and Dionysian that stands in for the sublime in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but he puts the
   focus on Schopenhauer's treatment rather than Kant's (cf. 97ff.). The association of the Dionysian/Apollonian
   pair with the beautiful and the sublime is quite plausible, although I would follow Vandenabeele in finding the
   primary influence in Schopenhauer rather than Kant, although the intimate relation between Kantian and
   Schopenhauerean aesthetic theories means that both are relevant for an understanding of *The Birth of Tragedy*.
   This early connection with the sublime is consistent with my presentation of the development of Nietzsche's
   critique of Christianity. As I argue below, over time Nietzsche will become suspicious of the structure of the
   sublime – especially since this structure is also at work in guilt. As Nietzsche slowly distances himself from
   those elements of his early thought that were too close to romanticism, he develops a new vision of Dionysus,
   and this new vision does not retain a connection to the sublime. Indeed, as I will argue below, Nietzsche's later
   position is quite critical of the experience of the sublime and his positive ideals (the sovereign individual, the
   philosopher of the future) are described in terms that are at odds with the sublime.
53 In the appendix to the first book of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer remarks, "by far the
   most excellent thing in [Kant's] *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* is the theory of the sublime. It is incomparably
   more successful than that of the beautiful, and gives not only, as that does, the general method of investigation,
   but also a part of the right way to it, so much so that, although it does not provide the real solution to the
   problem, it nevertheless touches on it very closely" (532).

account of beauty, one encounters the striking similarity in imagery and structure between

Nietzsche's description of guilt and Schopenhauer's and Kant's descriptions of the sublime, one

is justified (I believe) in postulating a connection between the two. The argument that relies on

this association is not that the sublime represents the secular form of guilt, or that it is a mask

that allows guilt to infiltrate our secular vocabulary, but rather that both guilt and the sublime are

instances of *ressentiment* turned back against the sufferer – a condition that sickens its victims and

serves the interests of priestly power. Nietzsche's analysis, if correct, reveals the extent to which

the focus on the divide between the religious and the secular, transcendence and immanence, etc.

loses sight of the psychological basis of these phenomena and their implications for our health

and flourishing.

The Beautiful

Nietzsche discusses beauty in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* in an attempt

to explain what the ascetic ideal means in the case of philosophers. Nietzsche's choice of

philosopher is Schopenhauer, which follows naturally from the earlier section about the meaning

of the ascetic ideal in the case of artists – a discussion that ended with the complaint that Wagner

was merely Schopenhauer's valet, i.e., that he lacked the "courage for the ascetic ideal" on his own

terms. Wagner's success was made possible by the popularity of Schopenhauer's philosophy in

Germany at the time – particularly insofar as this philosophy included a very high estimation of

the value of the musician – and so the ascetic ideal meant nothing to Wagner but a gateway to

fame. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, "had the courage to be himself" (*GM* III 5) and thus

provides a better window onto the meaning of ascetic ideals.

Nietzsche argues that Schopenhauer misunderstood his own relation to the ascetic ideal,

and that this misunderstanding was due to his exposure to the "spell of the Kantian definition"

(6) of the beautiful: "'That is beautiful,' said Kant, 'which gives us pleasure *without interest*.'" This,

Nietzsche tells us, is not beauty as it is known to the creator but rather as it is known to a

particularly impoverished spectator – one who shows a "lack of any refined first-hand experience"

– one who has not known "an abundance of vivid authentic experiences, desires, surprises, and

delights in the realm of the beautiful". The Kantian perspective approaches beauty "with the

naivete of a country parson".

Schopenhauer, it seems, was at bottom a different kind of person. He "stood much closer

to the arts than Kant [did]" and thus ought to have adopted a different perspective. The tension

between his personal relation to the arts and his attachment to the Kantian definition of beauty

led him to interpret Kant's "'without interest' in an extremely personal way, on the basis of one of

his most regular experiences": the torment of "sexual interestedness." The sexual desires are, of

course, forms of creative potency. The intensity of Schopenhauer's sexual impulses thus

differentiates him from Kant as someone who is intimately familiar with the perspective of the

"creator." Contemplation of the beautiful was experienced by Schopenhauer as a calming of the sexual impulses, and he interpreted this experience as the achievement of a "disinterested" and "will-less" state. The ascetic ideal, understood here as the fight against these impulses ("without interest" interpreted as "without sexual interest"[54]) came to serve Schopenhauer's life in two ways: first, at a very personal level (that is, in a manner consistent with with his personal qualities), the fight against sexual excitement served as a powerful stimulant of the will and seduction to life. Schopenhauer, "who treated sexuality as a personal enemy", "*needed* enemies in order to keep in good spirits"; without them, he "would *not* have persisted, … he would have run away: but his enemies held him fast, his enemies seduced him ever again to existence; his anger was … his balm, his refreshment, his reward, his specific against disgust, his *happiness*" (7). In other words, his animosity toward the sexual instincts – his version of the ascetic ideal – protected him from the debilitating effects of *nausea*. This animosity expressed in the relation of one's instincts (the instincts turned against themselves) provided a meaning and a task for his life, and in this case the meaning of this ideal for the philosopher is that "he wants to gain release from a torture" (6). Consequently, Schopenhauer's did not interpret the ideal of disinterested contemplation "in a Kantian sense" but rather from "an 'interested' viewpoint, even from the very strongest, most personal interest: that of a tortured man who gains release from his torture".

Nietzsche argues that the ascetic ideal – here, the struggle against sexual excitement –

---

54 Schopenhauer's "without interest" means, also "will-less." Schopenhauer describes the will in erotic terms, as a kind of longing that is not (yet) attached to any particular object. Cf. Nussbaum, "Nietzsche", 348.

also served Schopenhauer in a way typical of philosophers in general: it provides "an optimum condition for the highest and boldest spirituality and smiles"; through it, he "affirms *his* existence and *only* his existence" (7). The philosopher, like any creature, "instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power". For the philosopher, the moral virtues of "poverty, humility, and chastity" serve this very practical end: they make the energy normally devoted to the pursuit of wealth, fame, or sexual satisfaction available to the "dominating spirituality" that rules them. For instance, regarding chastity – the "virtue" most relevant in the case of Schopenhauer: the genuine philosopher does not pursue it out of "any kind of ascetic scruple or hatred of the senses" but rather out of deference to the "maternal instinct" that protects the interests of their creative "pregnancy": "their 'maternal' instinct ruthlessly disposes of all other stores and accumulations of energy, of animal vigor, for the benefit of the evolving work: the greater energy then *uses up* the lesser" (8). The ascetic ideal – which originated among the priests and other contemplative types who appeared on earth before the philosophers (9-10) – is appropriated by the philosopher as a means to his true end: spiritual creativity (the creation of values). It does not represent, as it does in the case of the ascetic priest, a hatred of sensuality; rather it is a means by which the "greater" task (spiritual creation) "uses up" the lesser (sexual satisfaction, pursuit of fame and wealth, etc.) by putting their energies in its service. This is how life of all forms pursues growth: through mastery, appropriation, exploitation, etc. With this in mind, the manner in which Schopenhauer

misunderstood his relation to the ascetic ideal becomes clear. While he believed that aesthetic

contemplation liberated him from the bonds of sensuality, in actuality it simply allowed his

sensuality to find expression in a higher form: "sensuality is not overcome by the appearance of

the aesthetic condition, as Schopenhauer believed, but only transfigured and no longer enters

consciousness as sexual excitement." The ascetic ideal sublimates the sexual energies into

something higher, more "spiritual." Schopenhauer's mistake was in believing, with Kant, that the

"spiritual" stands opposed to the "sensual" as a fundamentally different mode of being. We are

sensual through and through.

Nietzsche's description of Schopenhauer's understanding of the beautiful is reasonably

consistent with Schopenhauer's own presentation of the same.[55] This is important for our

purposes because it suggests that Nietzsche was a good reader of Schopenhauer and that he

would almost certainly have been just as familiar with his presentation of the sublime. We ought

to expect that, were he to present Schopenhauer's notion of the sublime, he would do so in a

manner as faithful as his presentation of the beautiful. I believe that Nietzsche's discussion of

guilt and ressentiment (two closely related concepts) meets this expectation, although without

explicitly acknowledging the connection. We also ought to expect that Nietzsche's explanation of

Schopenhauer's relation to the sublime would be similar to his explanation of Schopenhauer's

---

55 Cf. Schopenhauer, *W1* , 169-207. For a discussion of Schopenhauer's aesthetics and the relation of aesthetic
contemplation to truth, see Foster.

relation to the beautiful, especially insofar as Schopenhauer took these two things to be nearly identical.[56] To determine whether this is the case, I will briefly present Schopenhauer's account of the sublime followed by some speculation about how Nietzsche might explain it. This will prepare us for the next step, which will be to consider the sublime in relation to Nietzsche's account of guilt and its relation to ressentiment.

Will & Representation

As Nietzsche says, "Schopenhauer made use of the Kantian version of the aesthetic problem", i.e., he adopted the distinction between interested and disinterested viewpoints. This distinction relies on another: the sensual and the super-sensual, or nature and reason. According to this distinction, a rational outlook is one that is free of the influence of the demands of our sensuous natures. This distinction corresponds to the more famous one between the world as it appears to us (the phenomenal world) and the world as it is in-itself. Schopenhauer interprets Kant's model in the following way: all of human knowledge and experience is conditioned by certain forms (e.g., time, space, and causality), and these forms adhere to the phenomena but not to things-in-themselves (*W*1, 170-1). He then argues that Kant implies that knowledge of a thing as it is in-itself would, if possible, be necessarily quite different. He puts the following

---

56 "For in the main [the feeling of the sublime] is identical with the feeling of the beautiful, with pure will-less knowing, and with the knowledge, which necessarily appears therewith, of the Ideas out of all relation that is determined by the principle of sufficient reason" (*W1*, 202).

words in Kant's mouth:

> Therefore [a thing], as we perceive it at this particular time, in this given place, as an individual that has come into existence and will just as necessarily pass away in the connexion of experience, in other words, in the chain of causes and effects, is not a thing-in-itself, but a phenomenon, valid only in reference to our knowledge. In order to know it according to what it may be in itself, and so independently of all determinations residing in time, space, and causality, a different kind of knowledge from that which is alone possible to us through the senses and understanding would be required. (172-3).

True knowledge of a thing, if such knowledge is possible, would pertain to whatever remains of that thing once all the determinations contributed by time, space, and causality have been removed. At this point, Schopenhauer modifies Kant's position by combining it with Platonic Idealism. According to Schopenhauer, true knowledge, in the Kantian sense, corresponds to knowledge of the Platonic Ideas, the "real archetypes" of things that "always are but never become and never pass away" (171). Thus,

> In order to bring Kant's expression even closer to Plato's, we might also say that time, space, and causality are that arrangement of our intellect by which the *one* being of each kind that alone really exists, manifests itself to us as a plurality of homogeneous beings, always being originated anew and passing away in endless succession. The apprehension of things by means of and in accordance with this arrangement is *immanent*; on the other hand, that which is conscious of the true state of things is *transcendental*. (173)

The possibility of transcendental knowledge, especially its appearance in intuition, is one of Schopenhauer's special contributions to the discussion.

Schopenhauer also claims that the Kantian thing-in-itself is the will "in so far as it is not yet objectified, has not yet become representation" (174). The relation between will and

representation (the Kantian in-itself and appearance) is manifest in the dual relation of the subject of knowledge to his body. For the subject of knowledge, the body is known both as a representation, and thus as something inserted into the causal chain of the world, subject to time, space, and causality, and also as something known immediately, that is, known without mediation by these forms. This second relation corresponds to the will, the in-itself of the phenomena (100). The act of willing and the movement of the body are not two separate acts; the will does not cause the movement (how could it, since the will is not subject to causality?). Rather, these correspond to one act known under two different relations: one mediated by the determinations of knowledge, the other unmediated and pure. The body is the "objectivity" of the will (103). At the same time, however, this objectivity is special insofar as it is linked to the will. This special relation makes the body, as representation, unlike all other representations *for me*. However, we can, on the basis of this special relationship, assume that all other representations stand in a similar relation to something like my will (105). Because plurality adheres only to phenomena, we must conclude that all representations correspond in some way to will, and not to wills (128). Will is the "innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing and also of the whole. It appears in every blindly acting force in nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of man, and the great difference between the two concerns only the degree of the manifestation, not the inner nature of what is manifested" (110).

The notion that there are degrees of manifestation, or objectification, of the will, is crucial

to Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory. He argues that these different degrees or "grades of the objectification of the will are nothing but Plato's Ideas" (129). The scale of objectivity moves from the most general to the highly individual. The most universal of all such phenomena (i.e, objectifications of the will) is "being-object-for-a-subject", that is, "representation in general" (175). This corresponds to the most fundamental distinction available to us: will and representation. At this level, the Idea is the "immediate, and therefore adequate, objectivity of the thing-in-itself" (174). All other forms of phenomena "multiply the Idea in particular and fleeting individuals" and thus express the will indirectly. "Between [a particular thing] and the thing-in-itself the Idea still stands as the only direct objectivity of the will, since it has not assumed any other form peculiar to knowledge as such, except that of the representation in general, i.e., that of being object for a subject" (175). Between the Idea and its individual manifestations lies the principle of sufficient reason, which individualizes the objectifications of the will and puts them into relation with one another. Only at the level of Idea, abstracted from individualization, do we find an immediate objectivity of the will.[57]

Human beings are complex things, made of many parts and having many needs – in other words, we correspond to the objectification of the will at higher grades. Human knowledge developed along with this complexity and serves the will by contributing to the stability of these complex forms (176). These complex objectifications of the will (human beings) maintain

---

57 For a discussion of the relation of the Ideas to the principle of sufficient reason, see Zöller, 35-6.

themselves through knowledge, which provides them with a utilitarian causal understanding of the world and themselves. This kind of knowledge – human knowledge – is, by definition, knowledge of the world as it is mediated by the principle of sufficient reason (causality, etc.). This knowledge of particular things in relation to one another is to be distinguished from the true knowledge of things as they may be in themselves (as seen above), i.e., knowledge of the Ideas which have not yet submitted themselves to the principle of sufficient reason. To make the transition from "common" knowledge to this other, higher form of knowledge, we must break free from the service of the will, that is, from the web of relations that exist between things insofar as they are determined by the principle of sufficient reason. These relations of the body to objects comprise the *interests* of the individual (177), and so we can say that the ascent to true knowledge is made possible through the removal of these interests, hence the distinction between interested and disinterested knowledge. The capacity to achieve this special kind of insight is called *genius*, and this capacity is present in all people in varying degrees (184-94).

   This finally brings us to Schopenhauer's aesthetic philosophy. Schopenhauer tells us that art, "the work of genius", is the "kind of knowledge … that considers what continues to exist outside and independently of all relations, but which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and is therefore known with equal truth for all time." Art "repeats the eternal Ideas apprehended through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding element in all the phenomena of the world" (184). The artist is one in

whom the capacity for this kind of knowledge is strong and who can thus repeat it "in a voluntary and intentional work", i.e., a work of art (195). The rest of us, who lack the higher grades of this capacity, remain spectators who can experience this knowledge through aesthetic contemplation (whether of nature or works of art) but who cannot repeat it ourselves.

Schopenhauer states that aesthetic contemplation has "two inseparable constituent parts: namely, the knowledge of the object not as an individual thing, but as Platonic Idea, in other words, as persistent form of this whole species of thing; and the self-consciousness of the knower, not as individual, but as *pure, will-less subject of knowledge*" (195). These parts are united by their "abandonment of the method of knowledge that is bound to the principle of sufficient reason" (196). Put differently, the ascent to a kind of knowledge not subject to this principle involves two changes, one objective, the other subjective. On the objective side is knowledge of the thing as Idea, while on the subjective is knowledge of oneself as un-individuated and free of interest (objective relations). The feeling of the sublime pertains to the subjective side (while beauty pertains to both), and so I will limit my discussion to that aspect of Schopenhauer's aesthetics.

The Sublime

The sublime belongs to the subjective part of aesthetic contemplation, meaning that it pertains to the subject and not to the Idea, while the beautiful pertains to both. Schopenhauer

describes the difference between the beautiful and the sublime as follows:

> The difference between the beautiful and the sublime depends on whether the state of pure, will-less knowing, presupposed by any aesthetic contemplation, appears of itself, without opposition, by the mere disappearance of the will from consciousness, since the object invites and attracts us to it; or whether this state is reached only by free, conscious exaltation above the will, to which the contemplated object itself has an unfavorable, hostile relation, a relation that would do away with contemplation if we gave ourselves up to it. (209)

A beautiful object pulls us effortlessly into a contemplative state and away from the interested relations of the will. A sublime object, on the other hand, is repulsive rather than attractive; it requires conscious effort on our part to break free of our interested relation to it. Repulsion and attraction, in this context, refer to the relation of the subject to the will. The beautiful attracts the subject away from the will, while the sublime intensifies our willful interest in the object. The propensity to attract or repel the subject lies not in the object itself (as Idea) but rather in its relation to us as mediated by the principle of sufficient reason. The more significant the object is to us in terms of these relations, the more the subject is repulsed from the will-less state. Beautiful objects "easily become representatives of their Ideas"; but these same objects under different circumstances might become sublime simply because their relation to the subject arouses great interest: "these very objects, who significant forms invite us to a pure contemplation of them, may have a hostile relation to the human will in general, as manifested in its objectivity, the human body. They may be opposed to it; they may threaten it by their might that eliminates all resistance, or their immeasurable greatness may reduce it to naught" (201). The feeling of the

sublime occurs when the subject is able to "forcibly tear himself from his will and its relations, and, giving himself up entirely to knowledge, may quietly contemplate, as pure, will-less subject of knowing, those very objects so terrible to the will" (Ibid).

The feeling of the sublime is more or less intense depending on the degree of hostility or repulsion encountered in one's relation to the object. Judging by Schopenhauer's examples, hostility seems to be measured by the scale of danger in question. At the low end of things, we might experience the feeling of the sublime when, for example, upon viewing a beautiful desert scene, we are reminded of the absence there of life-supporting resources. More tempestuous environments – "semi-darkness through threatening black thunder-clouds; immense, bare, overhanging cliffs shutting out the view by their interlacing; rushing, foaming masses of water; complete desert, the wail of the wind; the wail of the wind sweeping through the ravines" – give rise to more intense feelings of the sublime. The scale of intensity reaches its upper limit only in those cases when "personal affliction … gain[s] the upper hand"; otherwise, so long as we "remain in aesthetic contemplation, the pure subject of knowing gazes through this struggle of nature, through this picture of the broken will, and comprehends calmly, unshaken and unconcerned, the Ideas in those very objects that are threatening and terrible to the will. In this contrast is to be found the feeling of the sublime" (204). The "full impression of the sublime" is thus located in the highest degree of contrast:

> Simultaneously, [the subject] feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of
> will, which the slightest tough of these forces can annihilate, helpless against

powerful nature, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in face of stupendous forces; and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object is the supporter of this whole world, the fearful struggle of nature being only his mental picture or representation; he himself is free from, and foreign to, all willing and all needs, in the quiet contemplation of the Ideas" (205).

To summarize: the feeling of the sublime corresponds to a subjective change in one who makes the transition from "common" knowledge to the knowledge of things as they are apart from time, space, and causality, i.e. as Ideas, the immediate (adequate) objectivity of the will. This feeling arises from subjective rather than objective conditions: the sublime requires a hostile environment and a subject who is able to avoid personal affliction. The feeling of the sublime thus involves the capacity to turn inward, away from action in relation to a hostile world of objects and toward the pure, will-less contemplation of Ideas. The feeling of the sublime is the feeling of one who has triumphed, through his spirituality, over the power of the world.

Before moving on to Nietzsche's account of guilt and ressentiment, I would like to consider the sublime in relation to Nietzsche's analysis of Schopenhauer's account of beauty. You will remember that Nietzsche rejects Schopenhauer's belief that his experience of the beautiful is truly free of interest. Nietzsche argues that Schopenhauer experienced the beautiful as someone who has been released from torture, and that this is a very "interested" perspective. In Nietzsche's analysis, what Schopenhauer had described as the effortless transition from our everyday experience of things to a contemplative state actually comes to correspond to the outcome of two

struggles, one at the personal level, and one at the level of the type. At the personal level, the story Schopenhauer tells himself about his antithetical relation to the will (here, the sexual appetites) serves as a seduction to life. Schopenhauer's philosophy is the tool by which the instincts of life energize Schopenhauer's will (quite the opposite of the will-less state Schopenhauer believes he has attained). By viewing his life this way, the man who was in danger of succumbing to nausea (the resignation of the will) becomes energized like one who has been released from torture. Ironically, the doctrine of the resignation of the will is in actuality a powerful stimulant of the will. At the level of the type (Schopenhauer as philosopher), Schopenhauer's appreciation of beauty is the means by which his dominating instinct (spiritual creativity) is able to exploit his sexual energies for its own ends. If at the personal level aesthetic contemplation was a tool for survival, at the typical level it is a means to flourishing. Contemplation of the beautiful does not raise one out of the web of sensuous relations; rather, it transfigures these relations into a higher form (from sexuality to spirituality). If we accept Nietzsche's analysis, then we might come to the conclusion that Schopenhauer's experience of the beautiful (as explained by Nietzsche) is much closer to his account of the sublime than he recognizes. Schopenhauer's account of the beautiful suggests that in this feeling, one literally forgets oneself (as a sensuous, willing creature). In the sublime, on the other hand, everything depends on the contrast, in one's consciousness, of oneself as a finite being subject to the power of nature as communicated through the relations that tie the will to the world, on the one hand,

and oneself as pure, will-less subject of knowledge surrounded by the only truly real things, the eternal Ideas, on the other. Here, it is essential that one not forget oneself – one's dual nature must be kept in consciousness for the feeling to subsist. To the extent that the experience of the beautiful is actually produced through a struggle between contrasting elements (at both the personal level and the typical level), it is better described as a case of the sublime. If we are going to identify a difference between the experience of the beautiful and that of the sublime, perhaps we ought to look to the energies at play. The contemplation of beauty is tied to our erotic energies. Beauty is not the opposite of sexual interestedness, but only its transfigured form. Likewise, the feeling of the sublime ought to have its specific energies. Given the hostile quality of the examples given by Schopenhauer, perhaps we ought to expect these energies to be aggressive and violent. With this in mind, we now turn to Nietzsche's account of guilt and ressentiment.

Guilt & Ressentiment

To understand the relation of the sublime to guilt and ressentiment, it is necessary to examine the figure of the priest. He is introduced in the first essay of the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche contrasts the priestly-aristocratic and the knightly-aristocratic modes of valuation. From the very beginning, the priest is described as unhealthy, impotent and averse to the world

around him: "There is from the first something unhealthy in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling in them which turn them away from action and alternate between brooding and emotional explosions, habits which seem to have as their almost invariable consequence that intestinal morbidity and neurasthenia which has afflicted priests at all times" (*GM* I 6). Here we already find several points of correspondence to Schopenhauer's description of the sublime. First, there is the withdrawal from the world and from action. This theme recurs later when Nietzsche says of priests that they are "the most evil enemies … because they are the most impotent." The idea here is that the inability of the priests to act in the world – their impotence – leads them, in their vengefulness, to carry out a form of unworldly retaliation – what Nietzsche calls "spiritual revenge". As noted above, Schopenhauer argues that the hostility of nature toward human interests is overcome through the withdrawal from the world of nature to the safety of the world of Ideas. Hostility is overcome through the activity of the mind. Nietzsche offers a parodic retelling of this argument in the figure of the priest who withdraws from the world out of impotence and who also overcomes hostility through the activity of the mind – although here it is because this is the only kind of activity available. What in Schopenhauer appears as the triumph of true knowledge over the distresses of natural life is, in Nietzsche's text, a habit of the diseased. In fact, he strongly suggests that such habits worsen the disease ("... habits which seem to have as their almost invariable consequence that intestinal morbidity and neurasthenia which has afflicted priests at all times").

After introducing the priests and describing their contribution to the world we inhabit, Nietzsche begins his discussion of the "slave revolt in morality", which took place when the priestly mode of valuation, which favors those who occupy the low end of the social hierarchy, comes to dominate those at the top. *Ressentiment*, of course, means resentment, but Nietzsche's use of the word emphasizes its reactive nature. It is always a secondary, derivative phenomenon, originating in response to some primary event or relation. The noble or high forms of morality all stem from an initial affirmation of themselves. The traits of the noble type characterize "goodness". By contrast, slave morality originates as a negative response to the noble values. The slaves do not belong to a single type, but rather are simply those who are not noble. The slaves in this context form a group composed of many types and thus share no essential traits. Where the nobles act and thereby affirm their *goodness*, the slaves re-act with resentment toward this action and this idea of the good. The slaves' reaction is tethered to the nobles' action. Furthermore, this reaction is of a fundamentally different character than the initial action insofar as it is *ideal* or *imaginary,* i.e., it is a re-action in a different domain: "the slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge" (*GM* I 10). This is the "spiritual revenge" devised by the priestly aristocracy, but now in the hands of the common, low, and unfortunate masses excluded from every aristocracy. As with Schopenhauer's triumph over the hostile appearance of the natural world, undertaken from the

relative safety of the imagination, the slave's response is a triumph carried out in the relative safety of an inner retreat. The person of *ressentiment* withdraws from the world and triumphs over it through this "imaginary revenge". And just as Schopenhauer argues that the feeling of the sublime is aroused in response to a threatening environment, Nietzsche argues that "slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli to act at all – its action is fundamentally reaction" (*GM* I 10). For this imaginary revenge to be worthy of the name, however, it must arouse a reaction from the nobles on its own turf. The nobles must be drawn to battle in the land of Ideas.[58]

Of course, *ressentiment* is only half of the picture. At this point, in the first essay, it still expresses a social relation. The man of *ressentiment* imagines that he is higher and better than the noble individual, and he accomplishes this reversal through the revaluation of noble values. The "good" of the noble system of valuation becomes "evil", while the "bad" of that same system becomes "good." In this transformation, a pair of distinctions that were related by degree (good as higher, bad as lower, etc.) becomes a binary opposition (good as the opposite of evil). The content of the slave's good is simply the negative image of the noble's good, such that what now counts as good is one who chooses to *not* act, to *not* be strong, etc. Good is defined as the withdrawal from

---

58 Nietzsche describes Socrates' life and legacy along these lines: "Is the irony of Socrates an expression of revolt? Of plebeian *ressentiment*? Does he, as one oppressed, enjoy his own ferocity in the knife-thrusts of his syllogisms? Does he *avenge* himself on the noble people whom he fascinates? As a dialectician, one holds a merciless tool in one's hand; one can become a tyrant by means of it; one compromises those one conquers. The dialectician leaves it to his opponent to prove that he is no idiot: he makes one furious and helpless at the same time. The dialectician renders the intellect of his opponent powerless. Indeed? Is dialectic only a form of *revenge* in Socrates?" (*Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates" 7).

the qualities that define healthy, noble life. With this transformation, the battleground shifts to new terrain. In the case of guilt, however, *ressentiment* is turned inward and directed against itself, and it is here that we encounter a better analog for the sublime.

In the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche tells us that guilt is one of the priest's strongest medicines but that it exacts a terrible cost. We have already seen that in the first essay, Nietzsche suggests that the inward turn of the priests ("imaginary revenge") causes a kind of "morbidity." He goes on to say that the priests have developed their own cures for this consequence of their lifestyle, and then blames these balms for many of the world's ills: "as to that which they themselves devised as a remedy for this morbidity – must one not assert that it has ultimately proved itself a hundred times more dangerous in its effects than the sickness it was supposed to cure? Mankind itself is still ill with the effects of this priestly naïveté in medicine!" (*GM* I 6). A little later in the same essay, Nietzsche refers to the cures in the priest's arsenal as the "instruments of culture" and condemns them as "a disgrace to man and rather an accusation and counterargument against 'culture' in general'!" (*GM* I 12). Much later, in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche returns to these priestly cures as he describes the history of asceticism. In this discussion, Nietzsche brings our attention to what he calls the priest's "guilty" means of combatting displeasure. He says of these that "they all involve one thing: some kind of an orgy of feeling – employed as the most effective means of deadening dull, paralyzing, protracted pain" (*GM* III 19). He describes the essence of these techniques in the following way: "To wrench the

human soul from its moorings, to immerse it in terrors, ice, flames, and raptures to such an extent that it is liberated from all petty displeasure, gloom, and depression as by a flash of lightning" (*GM* III 20). It is difficult not to hear in this an echo of Schopenhauer's description of the feeling of the sublime – a feeling aroused through the imaginary confrontation with natural forces such as "the storm of tempestuous seas [in which] mountainous waves rise and fall, are dashed violently against steep cliffs, and shoot their spray high into the air. The storm howls, the sea roars, the lightning flashes from black clouds, and thunder-claps drown the noise of storm and sea" (*W*1, 204). This aspect of the feeling of guilt serves purpose a similar to that ascribed by Nietzsche to beauty earlier in the same essay: it energizes a will overcome by nausea.

There is more to guilt than this arousing effect, however. The feeling of guilt arises when the man of *ressentiment* turns his vengeful eye against himself. The sufferer "receives from his sorcerer, the ascetic priest, the *first* hint as to the 'cause' of his suffering: he must seek it in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a *punishment*" (*GM* III 20). The feeling of guilt can arise only where one retains in consciousness the extreme contrast between one's "guilty", deceptive nature and some notion of the *good*, traditionally understood as the moral perfection of the True God. The feeling of guilt requires the "hypnotic gaze of the sinner, always fixed on the same object (on 'guilt' as the *sole* cause of suffering); everywhere the bad conscience, … everywhere the past regurgitated, the fact distorted, the 'jaundiced eye' for all action". The contrast between good and the evil *within* is essential to the feeling of guilt. It is, on

this account, structurally similar to Schopenhauer's concept of the sublime, for which a similar contrast is necessary: that between one's natural, finite self and the self as pure, will-less subject of knowledge who has freed himself from the entanglements of the sensuous world. It is the role of this contrast – the requirement that it be fixed in consciousness – that distinguishes the feeling of the sublime from that of the beautiful, which lacks this requirement and which seems to depend, for its specific qualities, on the forgetting of one's sensuous self rather than on the contrast of this self with another.

Nietzsche's most detailed discussion of guilt occurs toward the end of the second essay of the *Genealogy.* There, Nietzsche states that guilt is the means by which the person who has learned to turn his instincts against himself (the art of ascetic discipline) is able to join this skill with "religious pretenses" to "drive his self-torture to its most gruesome pitch of severity and rigor" (*GM* II 22). Here, as in the case of *ressentiment* described above, a contrast is constructed through an abstraction. There, the slave morality is created as the negative image of the noble morality and used as a weapon against the nobles. Here, the "holy God" is created as the negative image of sensuous existence and used as a tool for self-torture. The "holy God" thus has no essential qualities of his own – he is merely the antithesis of all that is natural and his qualities are those that produce the desired effect in the given circumstances. In other words, this god does not have to appear as a god at all. What matters is the contrast between high and low, where the low is associated with one's natural, sensuous being. Similarly, just as the gradated relation

between good and bad become the binary opposition between good and evil there, here the gradated relation between god and humanity (as different levels of the natural world) becomes the strict binary opposition between anti-natural spirit and natural world. This opposition gives cruelty its highest degree of contrast and thus also its greatest intensity of sensuous power. The "psychical cruelty" of guilt combines the tremendous pleasure of venting one's drive to hurt with the suffering of one who feels "guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for" and thus viscerally convinced of his "absolute unworthiness" (Ibid.). This is the maximum form of the "pleasure of being allowed to vent [one's] power freely upon one who is powerless, the voluptuous pleasure '*de faire le mal pour le plaisir le faire*,' the enjoyment of violation" (5). In the feeling of guilt, aggressor and victim, master and slave are combined in one soul. This is the sublime contrast carried to its extreme, and it is at the heart of the disease Nietzsche associates with Christianity. This imaginary act of revenge against the natural world, including the body – *especially the body* – is a sickness, "the most terrible sickness that has ever raged in man".

If, in Nietzsche's diagnosis of Schopenhauer's condition, the experience of beauty represents the transfiguration of the sexual energies into a higher, "spiritual" form of sensuality (but not into anti-sensuality), the sublime must represent the transfiguration of the aggressive energies, specifically the drive to cruelty, into a higher form of … power? Something to consider in this comparison of the beautiful and the sublime is their correspondence to different types. In the experience of beauty, Schopenhauer, as a philosopher, found a path to his highest flourishing

– the release and consolidation of his spiritual energies. Who flourishes on account of the

sublime? It cannot be the case that the warrior type flourishes, for this experience belittles the

warrior's strength and shines the light of value on the willpower of those who refrain from doing

harm to others through worldly activity. At most, we might see exaltation here for the "spiritual"

warriors – the contemplative beings, such as priests and philosophers, who live in competition

with the warrior types. But the long-term consequence of the feeling of the sublime is *sickness*,

and, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is the ascetic priest – shepherd to the sick and

suffering – who thrives during the plague. The philosopher, who for most of history has been

forced by circumstance to misunderstand himself as a priest, is carried away from the conditions

of his highest flourishing by this experience, while the masses who already suffer from life find

some temporary relief but no true cure for what ails them.[59] The feeling of the sublime is thus a

tool for the dominance of the priestly types, and through it these sickly masters erect their heaven

on earth: "to *make* sick is the true, secret purpose of the whole system of redemptive procedures

constructed by the church. And the church itself – is it not the catholic madhouse as the ultimate

ideal? The earth altogether as a madhouse?" (*A* 51). The sublime is the transfiguration of force

into a higher form of power – one especially well-suited for the interests of the priestly types.

The ascetic priest might find advantage in the experience of the beautiful, too. The

explanation Nietzsche gives of the beautiful earlier in the third essay of the *Genealogy* pertains to

---

59 This topic is discussed at length in the previous chapter.

its function for the philosophical type; however, as he explains in the section that immediately

follows, the philosopher has so far always misunderstood himself, believing that he is a priest. We

might expect, then, to find a priestly interpretation of the experience of the beautiful at work in

what passes for philosophy. If the sublime involves the conscious contrast between guilty *is* and

righteous *ought*, the beautiful involves the temporary forgetting of the sensuous self, i.e., our

guilty nature. Beauty, by this account, corresponds to the feeling of redemption. These are the

poles of Christian experience as described by Nietzsche as early as 1878 in *Human, All-Too-*

Human[60] – the shattering of the soul through the creation of an internal enemy followed by the

need for redemption, a temporary respite from battle. The cycle is powered by one's ability to fix

ideas in one's consciousness for a time, and then to forget oneself when necessary. Thus it is no

coincidence, I believe, that the same essay that investigates the creation of guilt (the second essay

of the *Genealogy*) also concerns itself with the investigation of the natural processes that may have

led to the formation of the faculty of memory.

Conclusion: Science, Religion, & the Sublime

I opened this chapter with a reference to recent discussions of the sublime that seek to

determine its value in a post-modern, or perhaps post-post-modern world. The status of the

---

60 Cf. sections 132-142, where Nietzsche discusses the need for redemption, on the one hand, and various ascetic
practices that find an enemy within, on the other. Over time, the latter make the former necessary. Taken
together, the two form a cycle.

sublime as an analytic or interpretive tool seems to depend to some degree on its relation to the religious. The driving question behind many of these discussions is whether or not the feeling of the sublime has some legitimate role to play in a world in which true knowledge is understood as the rightful product and property of the scientific disciplines. The fear, as expressed by Elkins, is that our continued use of the sublime endangers the secular/religious divide; the sublime is a trojan horse packed with religious ideas ready to infiltrate our secular fortress. The hope, as expressed by the editors, is that the sublime might be productively deployed within the scientific disciplines as a way to capture the details of the process of knowledge formation: "the best of science also makes claims to the sublime, for in science as well as in art, each day brings the entirely new, the extreme, and the unrepresentable. … Science is continually faced with describing that which is beyond previous experience and common sense. That, too, might be a definition of the sublime" (Hoffmann, "Editor's Preface"). The Nietzschean analysis of the sublime suggests that the opposition of science and religion is a false one, and that the value of concepts such as guilt and the sublime must be measured by reference to the standard of health and the interests of power. For, as we have seen, Christianity has little to do with "religion" and much to do with priestly power – a power grounded in bad health.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Nietzsche argues that Christianity does not end with the death of God. If anything, the overcoming of Christian dogma by the Christian virtue of "truthfulness" is the latest means by which Christianity "negates the church". This is how it

began, by negating the priestly Jewish culture that spawned it, and also how it renewed itself during the Reformation, when it attacked the "signs of life" that had shot up during the Renaissance throughout the Catholic hierarchy in Rome. If the triumph of scientific knowledge over Christian dogma is also a triumph for the ascetic ideal,[61] then an analysis of the sublime that bases itself on the distinction between science and religion will not take us very far. Christianity, according to Nietzsche, makes use of "religious" as well as "scientific" presuppositions and so cannot be reduced to either one. The questions we ought to be asking concern ourselves: which instincts dominate us, and which conditions will allow us to flourish? If our goal is self-knowledge, that is, if we take ourselves to be philosophers, then we ought to approach the sublime with suspicion not because it is "religious" but because it may not be a path to *our* highest flourishing. (It may instead be a path to the dominance of priestly power.) Likewise, the pursuit of self-knowledge might not be furthered by a scientific sublime that emerges through the taming of wonder. A chemist who contributed to the book discussed above describes the sublime in these terms:

> Why not, then, embrace the wonder of feeling that grips one on looking at the workings of the ribosome or the atmosphere, or the beauty of a molecule shaped like a Ferris wheel, or a distant dust cloud across a galaxy? Why not accept that point when one feels one knows something that is really deep and universal? Or has made a molecule – part tinkered, part designed – almost always beyond what one thought one could make. And crafted that understanding, that molecule, in a way that brings

---

61 "No! This 'modern science' – let us face this fact! – is the *best* ally the ascetic ideal has at present, and precisely because it is the most unconscious, involuntary, hidden, and subterranean ally! They have played the same game up to now, the 'poor in spirit' and the scientific opponents of this ideal" (*GM* III 25).

the scientist in harmony with others and the universe? Why not come to peace with
the sublime? (150).

Here, the sense of wonder and the comfort of familiarity and unity combine to give rise to the

sublime feeling of discovery.[62] According to Nietzsche, this kind of knowledge, and thus this

form of the sublime, is of no service to us if our goal is self-knowledge, i.e., knowledge of what is

most intimate to us. The drive to know the world is motivated, at bottom, by "the instinct of

fear": "Is it not the *instinct of fear* that bids us to know? And is the jubilation of those who attain

knowledge not the jubilation over the restoration of a sense of security?" (*GS* 355). The sublime

that is composed of wonder/familiarity can thus be reduced to fear/security – the same basic

structure found in Schopenhauer's aesthetic sublime (fear of a hostile world, comfort among the

Ideas). In both cases, one overcomes the natural world through the activity of the mind – a

triumph that Nietzsche elsewhere associates with the aggressive instincts. Motivated by fear, we

attack in the only way available to us – by seeking an imaginary revenge. While this process may

produce a sense of security and even power, it does not lead the self-knowledge

sought by the genuine philosopher. The assimilation of the unknown to the known produces

familiarity instead: "How easily these men of knowledge are satisfied! … When they find

something in things – under them, or behind them – that is unfortunately quite familiar to us,

---

62 There is a striking similarity between this notion of the sublime and Nietzsche's early vision of transfiguration,
which was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy: "the Greek man of culture felt himself nullified in
the presence of the satyric chorus; and this is the most immediate effect of the Dionysian tragedy, that the state
and society and, quite generally, the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity
leading back to the very heart of nature" (*BT* 7). I discuss this passage at length in chapter two.

such as our multiplication tables or our logic, or our willing and desiring – how happy they are right away! For 'what is familiar is known': on this they are agreed." But self-knowledge would require a different procedure – one whereby what is most familiar to us (and also most comforting) would be made strange. This is the philosopher's problem of knowledge: "What is most familiar is what we are used to; and what we are used to is most difficult to 'know' – that is, to see as a problem; that is, to see as strange, as distant, as 'outside us'" (Ibid.).

The sublime, insofar as it merely comforts us, or brings us the pleasures of self-torture, does not lead the philosophical spirit along the path of realization. It corresponds, instead, to "what the common people take for wisdom", i.e., the wisdom of the "priestly type", and not to what the genuine "seeker after knowledge" seeks:

> I think that it is precisely from what the common people take for wisdom (and who today is not "common people") – this clever, bovine piety, peace of mind, and meekness of country pastors[63] that lies in the meadow and *observes*[64] life seriously while ruminating – that the philosophers have always felt most remote, probably because they were not sufficiently "common people" or country pastors for that. It is likely that they of all people will be the last to learn to believe that the common people could possibly understand anything of what is most remote from them: the great *passion* of the seeker after knowledge who lives and must live continually in the thundercloud of the highest problems and the heaviest responsibilities (by no means as an observer, outside, indifferent, secure, and objective). (*GS* 351)

The sublime knowledge of the priestly types and the common people they serve originates in the spectator's perspective, and is thus far removed from those "vivid authentic experiences, desires, surprises, and delights in the realm of the beautiful" that belong to the *creator*. Schopenhauer

---

63 Recall that Nietzsche refers to Kant as a "country parson" in his analysis of the beautiful.
64 Recall, also, that Kant's perspective is that of the spectator rather than the creator.

misunderstood himself, and adopted the wrong perspective, not realizing that he "stood much closer to the arts" than the country parson who supplied him with his definition of beauty. The genuine philosopher will be one who emerges from the ascetic "caterpillar form" with the strength necessary to fold the basic structure of the sublime back onto itself: he will learn to relate to the spiritual as a moment of the sensual rather than as the antithesis of the sensual; he will seek out the solitude of one who has become strange rather than submit to the comforts of what is familiar; he will attempt to insert "man" back into nature rather than seek to tame nature through an act of "imaginary revenge". This is the philosopher of the future, as described in the previous chapter, and if he is *antichristian* then his *sublime* will eschew *other-worldly comforts* for "the art of *this-worldly comfort*": "you ought to learn to laugh, my young friends, if you are hell-bent on remaining pessimists. Then perhaps, as laughers, you may someday dispatch all metaphysical comforts to the devil – metaphysics in front" (*BT*, "Attempt", 7). Laughter, not science, is the opposite of Christianity and its ascetic ideal: "the ascetic ideal has at present only *one* kind of real enemy capable of *harming* it: the comedians of this ideal" (*GM* III 27). If the sublime is meant to raise us higher, then it must lift our feet up within this world and allow us to stand up as affirmations of the earth and bodies on which we stand rather than draw us out of this world into its antithesis to stand in protest of *this* life. "Raise up your hearts, my brothers, high, higher! And don't forget your legs! Raise up your legs, too, good dancers; and better: stand on your heads! This crown of the laugher, the rose-wreath crown: I crown myself with this crown;

I myself pronounced holy my laughter. I did not find anyone else today strong enough for that"

(*BT*, "Attempt", 7).

Conclusion

What is Jewish, what is Christian, morality? Chance done out of its innocence; misfortune besmirched with the concept of "sin." (A 25)

      Nietzsche's philosophical project offers the interested reader a robust defense of the value of the arts (broadly construed); however, this defense is also a cautionary tale, for while art may be our salvation, it is also our greatest danger. Our "spiritual" creations – the stories we tell ourselves in images and words (and even equations), the songs we sing, and the music we play – are requirements of life; without them, the will would collapse like a sail in a windless sky. Our creations nourish us in a very real sense, and like all sources of nourishment, they are capable of producing a variety of different effects: the will might be stimulated or calmed, made whole or shattered. Nietzsche's critique of Christianity represents his attempt to determine the impact of Christianity on the will. He concludes that, while comforting for some, Christianity produces long-term effects that have been devastating for many and that continue to put the future enhancement of humanity at risk. Though as a "spiritual" creation Christianity protects us, at least temporarily, from the nausea of the will, it also promotes conditions that give rise to even more dangerous forms of nausea in the long run. The "imaginary revenge" that turns the tables on the strong and healthy and thereby removes many dangers from the world has, over time,

transformed the way we see ourselves and the manner in which we react to the world in such a way that the very sight of us now makes us sick. The Christian struggle against *danger* in the world, carried out through the devaluation of the "animal instincts", creates a positive feedback loop that eventually becomes the "danger of dangers": we now *suffer* from the debasement of humanity itself. We are attracted to a "degenerated" ideal, and this seduction threatens to derail the exceptional specimens in our midst.

The epigraph above suggests that part of the danger posed by Christianity comes from its relation to chance. Christianity moralizes chance events by looking upon them as the enigmatic signs of divine purpose or judgment. We have already seen similar processes of moralization at work, notably with the creditor/debtor relation and the notion of god in the production of Christian guilt as described in the second essay of the *Genealogy*. There, Nietzsche argues that the moralization of our sense of indebtedness to our ancestors (or origin) reverses the movement toward liberation from the feeling of responsibility that should follow from the rise of atheism. As early as *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues that the health of the will depends upon the possibility of freeing ourselves, at least temporarily, from the burdens of responsibility. Prior to the Christian moralization of the feeling of responsibility, we felt indebted to our ancestors or gods for every victory, every good fortune, and every realization of our purposes. With the rise of atheism, this long-standing, and at times crippling sense of duty should begin to recede from the world. Christianity undoes this possibility by transforming the feeling of indebtedness into the

feeling of guilt. Every good fortune in this world (good health included) is now seen as an affront to God and a cause for punishment; every bad fortune as a sign that such punishment has been exacted. Christianity stands for the will to "infect and poison the fundamental ground of things with the problem of punishment and guilt so as to cut off once and for all [any] exit from this labyrinth of 'fixed ideas'" (*GM* II 22). The Christian's hunger for signs of guilt and punishment leaves no safe refuge for the chance event.

This aspect of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity serves as an apt conclusion to this study insofar as it brings his work into conversation with developments that were emerging during Nietzsche's lifetime but that have transformed our world profoundly in the years since his death, namely, the statistical revolution and the explosive growth of probabilistic reasoning across nearly every domain of life. Nietzsche seemed to think that we might free ourselves from the crushing power of the feeling of guilt (the product of the moralization of the feeling of indebtedness) through the embrace of scientific findings that cast doubt on the doctrine of free will, especially insofar as this doctrine conceives of the will as a causal force at work in a system of mechanical causation (i.e., nature). The nineteenth century discourse on statistics frequently grappled with the question of free will, and it is thus not surprising that Nietzsche took an interest in it. In what follows I will briefly attend to Nietzsche's discussion of chance as an antidote to Christianity and then consider the fate of his views in light of recent cultural trends.

Purpose, Necessity, & Chance

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche argues for three different phases in our relation to chance: one ancient, one Christian, and one emerging in the present. The first of these situates blind fate outside of the world of purposes, and the eruption of this realm into the realm of purposes is experienced as a relief:

> This belief in the two realms is a primeval romance and fable: we clever dwarfs, with our will and purposes, are oppressed by those stupid, arch-stupid giants, chance accidents, overwhelmed and often trampled to death by them – but in spite of all that we would not like to be without the harrowing poetry of their proximity, for these monsters often arrive when our life, involved as it is in the spider's web of purposes, has become too tedious or too filled with anxiety, and provide us with a sublime diversion by for once *breaking* the web – not that these irrational creatures would do so intentionally! (*D* 130)

Nietzsche refers to this arrangement of the two realms as "that secret defiance of the gods encountered among many peoples" and gives as examples the Moira of the Greeks, the sacrificial economy of ancient India and Persia, the "twilight of the gods" of the Scandinavians. This relation to the realm of chance serves to unburden the subject of the great weight of purpose. There is an indeterminacy in the world or behind it that may overcome the determination of even the strongest wills (the gods). Redemption from the burden of responsibility (whether to one's own purposes or those of others) arrives through chance.

Christianity, "whose basic feeling is neither Indian nor Persian nor Greek nor Scandinavian", modifies this arrangement and in the process radically transforms the status of

chance. The non-Christian version positions the realm of chance as the horizon of the realm of purposes; Christianity adds another layer to the picture by projecting its all-powerful, all-knowing God behind this horizon. Now we have three concentric circles where there used to be two: God (purpose) as the outer circle, Chance (blind fate) at the middle, and our world of finite wills (purpose) on the inside. Christianity

> bade us to worship the *spirit of power* in the dust and even to kiss the dust itself – the sense of this being that that almighty "realm of stupidity" was not as stupid as it looked, that it was *we*, rather, who were stupid in failing to see that behind it there stood our dear God who, though his ways were dark, strange and crooked, would in the end "bring all to glory". This new fable of a loving god who had hitherto been mistaken for a race of giants or for Moira and who himself span out purposes and nets more refined even than those produced by our own understanding – so that they *had* to seem incomprehensible, indeed unreasonable to it – this fable represented so bold an inversion and so daring a paradox that the ancient world, grown over-refined, could not resist it, no matter how mad and *contradictory* the thing might sound.

The realm of chance is still horizon, only now it is the horizon of human knowledge rather than of the realm of purpose. This epistemological horizon represents a break in the realm of purpose: it results from some limitation of ours that separates our knowledge of purposes from the purposes that condition the world. God's purposes "*had* to seem incomprehensible, indeed unreasonable to" us because of our "stupidity." The realm of stupidity, i.e., the realm of blind fate, is removed from the *real* world and repositioned within the human mind as the limit of our finite understanding.

The Christian model underpins our modern notions of the sublime, particularly the Kantian version of the sublime: the apparent counter-purposiveness of the world disturbs us, but

this unpleasant feeling is transformed into pleasure as we are reminded of our participation in the rational order, which transcends the empirical world of the senses. The highest good is the determination of the will by the rational moral law, a state of freedom that transcends the blind necessities of the causal order to the phenomenal world. It also corresponds to Schopenhauer's reworking of the Kantian model according to which contemplation of beauty in the objects of a hostile world leads the subject to a state of pure, will-less knowing, where the world of appearances, which is tied to the interests of the will, gives way to the disinterested world of Ideas, the adequate objectifications of the will itself. Whatever the case, the experience of this version of the sublime ultimately reminds us of the superiority of moral purposes over the apparently amoral forces of the world. The fear of a hostile, indifferent world is countered by the recognition of the ultimate harmony of the cosmos with rational human interests. Here, indeterminacy is an illusion: all things are determined by God (or Reason, the moral law, etc.); we are simply too stupid to *see* it. The blindness of fate is really our blindness; God, for his part, is all-seeing. The world is transparent to the eyes of perfect reason.

Following his presentation of these two *fables*, Nietzsche states that "in more recent times men have in fact come seriously to doubt whether the slate that falls from the roof was really thrown down by 'divine love' – and have again begun to go back to the old romance of giants and dwarfs."[65] He then states that it is "high time" for us to "learn" that "in our supposed favored

---

65   The example of the slate falling from a roof is likely a reference to Spinoza's discussion of contingency in the appendix to the first book of his *Ethics*: "For example, if a stone has fallen from a roof onto someone's head and killed him, they will show ... that the stone fell in order to kill the man. For if it did not fall to that end, God

realm of purposes and reason the giants are likewise the rulers! And our purposes and our reason are not dwarfs but giants! And our nets are just as often and just as roughly broken *by us ourselves* as they are by slates from the roof! And all is not purpose that is called purpose, and even less is all will that is called will!" This lesson suggests that our two realms are really one, and that chance and purpose are not opposed to one another in the way we imagine – whether we imagine chance as a force that limits the power of purposes, or as an illusion brought on by our inability to fully understand the order of the world: "And if you want to conclude from this: 'so there is only one realm, that of chance accidents and stupidity?' – one will have to add: yes, perhaps there is only one realm, perhaps there exists neither will nor purposes, and we have only imagined them."

Nietzsche's lesson reworks the old dualism of chance and purpose and reverses a portion of the Christian version of this dualism. In the Christian version, the appearance of chance in the world is an illusion caused by our ignorance. With perfect knowledge (or reason, etc.) all chance would disappear from the world. By contrast, in Nietzsche's lesson, purpose and will are figments of our imagination and chance is real. It is important to note that Nietzsche makes a subtle shift at this point: the opposition chance/purpose is replaced, in his lesson, by chance/necessity. The absence of purposes is not the free reign of chance and the total absence of order; rather, we

---

willing it, how could so many circumstances have concurred by chance (for often many circumstances do concur at once)? … [T]hey will not stop asking for the causes of causes until you take refuge in the will of God, that is, the sanctuary of ignorance" (II/81). Spinoza's example serves his argument against the doctrine of final causes. Here, that would mean denying that the man's death can be traced back to God's will through a causal chain such that we would be justified in saying that God used all the intermediate causes in order to bring about the man's death. For Spinoza, such causal chains are infinite and every step follows necessarily from its predecessor. No finite event can be traced back to God as a final cause.

mistake necessities for purposes and acts of the will: "Those iron hands of necessity which shake the dice-box of chance play their game for an infinite length of time: so that there *have* to be throws which exactly resemble purposiveness and rationality of every degree." Chance may be the opposite of purpose, but it is not the opposite of necessity. Thus, even if the world is governed by necessity, it is not on that account free of chance.

Our experience of purposiveness *had* to happen, but this inevitability does not make its occurrence any less chancy. This necessity is not reducible to mechanical determinism; it is a different kind of lawfulness – the lawfulness of chance, i.e., statistical law. In his book *The Taming of Chance*, Ian Hacking states that Nietzsche "grasped the most difficult philosophical lesson about chance to which we have thus far been exposed. Necessity and chance are twinned, and neither can exist without the other. Neither explains the other, no more than heads explains tails" (148). This means that the "presence of law in the universe" does not make it "any the less chancy" (147). While it is certain that given an infinite number of "throws" combinations of the dice that resemble purpose will occur, this certainty does not eliminate the chance that attends to the throwing of any such combination. The number of throws does not modify the chance attached to each event. "The good player does not fool himself, and accepts that there is exactly one chance, which produces by chance the necessity and even the purpose that he experiences. Not even a long run of universes would annul the chance that brought into being our world, and only the false consciousness of a bad gambler could make it seem otherwise" (148).

Notice that in the Christian perspective, what "*had* to seem incomprehensible, indeed unreasonable" was chance, while here necessity, by chance, *has* to resemble purpose and will. Notice also Nietzsche's careful qualification: he says that "perhaps" this is the case. Perchance, there is only chance. It is probable to some degree, but not certain. This hedge is important, for it differentiates the reasoning behind his lesson from that found in the Christian fable. As he points out in his description of it, the Christian doctrine involves a contradiction: "if our understanding cannot divine the understanding and the purposes of God, whence did it divine this quality of its understanding? And this quality of God's understanding?" In other words, how can we know that chance is an illusion, an artifact of the finitude of our understanding in relation to God's, if we do not have access to God's understanding? How do we get there from here? Such an argument is unreasonable in the extreme. Nietzsche's argument, which is structurally similar, involves no such contradiction, but it does not provide certainty. What it does provide is plausibility grounded in probabilistic reasoning. In the Christian case, knowledge that chance is an illusion requires access to God's reason, something that the case explicitly denies (for if we had such access, there would be no illusion). This view thus requires some extraordinary or miraculous form of knowledge. In Nietzsche's case, we know only that it is certain, given an infinite number of throws,[66] that there

---

66 Nietzsche firmly believed that the universe has no beginning or end, i.e., that it was not created at some point in time and that it would never achieve a final state (*WP* 1066; cf. 1058, 1062, 1064, 1067). Hacking explains that it is important to note that he does not infer this from the improbability that our universe, which is "finely tuned", would appear by chance, for such an inference is fallacious. Hacking thus distinguishes Nietzsche's argument from similar sounding critiques of the argument from design. Nietzsche arrives at his belief in the infinite duration of the universe by other means.

would be combinations that exactly resemble purpose. We thus have an explanation for the appearance of purpose that requires no miraculous knowledge. However, we cannot be certain that what appears as purpose is not really purpose; for that, we would "have to have already been a guest in the underworld and beyond all surfaces, sat at Persephone's table and played dice with the goddess herself." In either case (Christian or Nietzschean) certainty about the *reality* of the phenomenon in question requires a transcendent perspective. But the Nietzschean case at least provides a plausible alternative. We can explain the appearance of purpose on the basis of chance without contradiction, but we cannot do the same for the appearance of chance on the basis of purpose.[67]

The reestablishment of chance as an irreducible feature of the world, coupled with the questioning of the reality of purposes and will (they are not rejected outright, but we are at least made suspicious of them) must, like the other two "fables", have some consequence for our experience of responsibility. The primeval fable of the two realms was appealing, Nietzsche says, because it provided relief from the burden of purposes; the realm of chance makes freedom possible by limiting the reach of the many nets of purpose that entangle us. The Christian fable, on the other hand, creates a vicious cycle whereby the feeling of responsibility grows exponentially while the feeling of power decreases, resulting in a sense of extreme worthlessness. While it's true that I participate in a greater purpose, I cannot align myself with it on my own.

---

67 This is different from the appearance of chance on the basis of necessity, i.e., strict determinism.

Righteousness requires something from beyond: revelation, divine intuition, God's grace, etc. Whatever redemption is available to me (God's sacrifice for my sins) is temporary and serves, in the long run, to compound my sense of indebtedness. Nietzsche's telling of the fable would appear to take us back to the earlier view by finding a way out of the net of purposes without having to deny the existence of order in the world (the literal reverse of the Christian position) or rely on the postulation of purposeful agents (human or otherwise) who make us their playthings. By distinguishing necessity and chance (which were previously bound together as blind fate) while questioning purpose, Nietzsche makes his fable compatible with contemporary scientific models of the world and thus appropriates for his ends their aura of truthfulness (for *we* cannot really return to polytheism – at least not from here). Nietzsche himself wrote that contemporary scientific theories were productive of a redemptive effect not unlike that achieved through certain religious doctrines: for example, the "celebrated founder of Christianity … regarded himself as the innate son of God and as a consequence felt himself to be sinless; so that, through this conceit … he attained the same goal, the feeling of complete sinlessness, complete unaccountability, which nowadays everyone can acquire through scientific study" (*HH* 144). Nietzsche's fable is compatible with and complementary to scientific critiques of the will and purpose and so likely productive of similar effects: freedom from the doctrine of sin (i.e., guilt). Nietzsche's fable might succeed where atheism has thus far failed because it targets the doctrine of purposes rather than the belief in God. It is faith in an order of purposes behind the world –

the "moral world order" (*A* 25) – that gives Christianity its strength; God is not necessary for such a faith. This is not exactly a return to the primeval fable, because that fable still retains purposes and, more importantly, does not operate in relation to the doctrine of sin. Nietzsche's is a fable for *our* times.

The question to ask at this point is whether or not the embrace of chance achieves this goal. Our world has embraced chance in ways Nietzsche could probably not have imagined. Over the course of the last three centuries, chance has steadily invaded nearly every aspect of our daily lives, leading to what one book calls the "empire of chance":

> The empire of chance began with an unsteady foothold in gambling problems some three hundred years ago and now sprawls over whole conceptual continents. All of the natural and social sciences belong to its territories, and there have been conquests – cliometrics, statistical comparisons of literary style – even in the humanities. It also encompasses important parts of law, medicine, industry, and practical economics, and, in its descriptive statistical aspect, has breached almost every wall. Insofar as we listen to weather reports, ponder political polls, undergo medical tests, pursue the sciences, plot the standard of living index, buy insurance, or even read the newspaper, we are all its subjects. (Gigerenzer, 271)

Ian Hacking has described this process as the "taming of chance", an expression meant to draw our attention to a seeming paradox: "the more the indeterminism, the more the control" (2). Our concept of chance started out as the opposite of determinism and thus symbolized what could not be controlled. Chance was blind caprice, lack of purpose, madness. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, chance was "tamed" as scientists, philosophers, and mathematicians began to recognize the autonomy of statistical laws, and with this recognition came the

possibility of managing chancy phenomena. Coupled with the discovery that chance permeates the natural and social worlds, the "taming of chance" has dramatically transformed the way we live in and relate to the world around us.

Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality suggests that the embrace of chance might alter our feelings about responsibility. But an interesting thing has occurred: the empire of chance has spawned new and powerful normative technologies, and these have increased the self-regulating power of our moral valuations. The discovery of statistical laws of society sets up the possibility of a feedback effect: "Statistical in nature, these laws were nonetheless inexorable; they could even be self-regulating. People are normal if they conform to the central tendency of such laws, while those at the extremes are pathological. Few of us fancy being pathological, so 'most of us' try to make ourselves normal, which in turn affects what is normal" (Ibid.). With objective representations of human behavior in the form of statistics, "normal", rendered as average or mean, comes to symbolize either a natural state to which we ought to conform, or the "merely" average state of affairs that stands in need of improvement (cf., 160-9). Either way, these new representations provide a focal point for deliberations on public policy and personal behavior, and open entirely new possibilities for what it means to be responsible.

There is a strange collusion between guilt and chance. Nietzsche describes the experience of guilt as the "hypnotic gaze of the sinner" seeking out the meaning of his suffering "in a piece of the past" ("everywhere the past regurgitated"). This hyper-sensitivity to omens and the minutiae

of one's life is an extremely effective means of energizing the will of the despondent: "the old depression, heaviness, and weariness were indeed *overcome* through this system of procedures; life again became *very* interesting: awake, everlastingly awake, sleepless, glowing, charred, spent and yet not weary – thus was the man, the 'sinner,' initiated into *this* mystery" (*GM* III 20). Interest in life is renewed through the obsessive collection of clues about oneself and one's standing before God. Guilt thus cultivates a drive to a certain kind of biographical knowledge. Michel Foucault's analysis of what he calls "pastoral power" uncovers a phenomenon that operates in a similar manner by setting up a link between the practice of self-examination and the feeling of obedience toward one's spiritual guide, i.e., the priestly figure, creating a "peculiar type of knowledge": "This knowledge is particular. It individualizes. It isn't enough to know the state of the flock. That of each sheep must also be known. … The shepherd must be informed as to the material needs of each member of the flock and provide for them when necessary. He must know what is going on, what each of them does – his public sins. Last but not least, he must know what goes on in the soul of each one, that is, his secret sins, his progress on the road to sanctity" (309-10). "Pastoral power" contains within it a tension between the obligation to care for the group as a whole as well as for the particular needs of each individual sheep. The "hypnotic gaze of the sinner" yields up to priestly power a totalizing knowledge of his body and soul, and the priest, for his part, puts this confessional knowledge to use in the management of the flock and each of its sheep. This vision of responsibility, which is very old, is appropriated in the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries by theorists of the state, and finds new possibilities for expression in the

emerging science of statistics. The drive to collect this particularizing and totalizing knowledge

expands its reach with the contingent development of new institutions and bureaucracies capable

of surveying the population with unheard of efficiency and consistency; the resultant collections

of information land in the hands of researchers eager to extend Newton's victories by finding the

natural laws of society, leading, finally, although not easily and certainly not in a straight line, to

the recognition of statistical law.

Well over a century after Nietzsche penned his analysis of Christianity, we are witness to

a vast expansion of confessionary practices. With the advent of social media, those of us who live

tethered to networked devices feel strangely compelled to record and share the endless minutiae

of our everyday lives. What makes the explosive growth in digital confessions especially

interesting is its intersection with the rapid proliferation of tools for the democratization of data

analysis. The principles and techniques that businesses and governments have been using for

decades to analyze and improve their systems of governance are now available to the general

public, and this has given rise to what famed British scientist and web entrepreneur Stephen

Wolfram calls "personal analytics." In a popular introduction to the practice published as an

article in *Wired* magazine, Wolfram writes,

> Every day – in an effort at "self awareness" – I have automated systems send me a
> few e-mails about the day before. I've been accumulating data for years and though I
> always meant to analyze it I never actually did. But with Mathematica and the
> automated data analysis capabilities we just released in Wolfram|Alpha Pro, I

thought now would be a good time to finally try taking a look – and to use myself as an experimental subject for studying what one might call "personal analytics."

Now that we interact with personal computers on a regular basis, and use these devices for (or at least during) many if not most of our daily activities, we also have entirely new kinds of information about ourselves that we can expose to various computational processes for analysis. We makes confessions to our computers both consciously and unconsciously: sometimes these confessions are typed or spoken by us directly into the devices for storage or immediate publication; other times (all times?) these devices automatically log information about our behavior, such as our location, and the nature of our interactions with them (what programs we use, how long we use them, to whom we communicate, what we read, etc.). Our very use of these machines creates information ripe for analysis. This development mirrors that which emerged in the nineteenth century with respect to the development of measures of the state (statistics): "There is a sense in which many of the facts presented by the bureaucracies did not even exist ahead of time. Categories had to be invented into which people could conveniently fall in order to be counted. The systematic collection of data about people has affected not only the ways in which we conceive of a society, but also the ways in which we describe our neighbor. It has profoundly transformed what we choose to do, who we try to be, and what we think of ourselves" (Hacking, 3).

The possibility of data-driven personal transformation is a source of great hope for Wolfram:

What is the future for personal analytics? There is so much that can be done. Some of it will focus on large-scale trends, some of it on identifying specific events or anomalies, and some of it on extracting "stories" from personal data.

And in time I'm looking forward to being able to ask Wolfram|Alpha all sorts of things about my life and times –   and have it immediately generate reports about them. Not only being able to act as an adjunct to my personal memory, but also to be able to do automatic computational history –   explaining how and why things happened –   and then making projections and predictions.

As personal analytics develops, it's going to give us a whole new dimension to experiencing our lives. At first it all may seem quite nerdy (and certainly as I glance back at this blog post there's a risk of that). But it won't be long before it's clear how incredibly useful it all is –   and everyone will be doing it, and wondering how they could have ever gotten by before. And wishing they had started sooner, and hadn't "lost" their earlier years.

In this vision, the computer program assumes the role of priest, keeping tabs on our lives and providing guidance for our every move. While the motivating force behind the adoption of these practices is certainly not identical with that behind the confessional – we are not seeking salvation in the after-life, for instance – the sense that we owe it to ourselves to seek out our meaning in the data of our lives remains. As with the feeling of guilt, the body and its life are mortified – smeared across time in a spread of data, offering their entrails for examination. In fact, the compulsion to analyze ourselves in this way is arguably much stronger now that we have the means to record ourselves effortlessly throughout the day. A great sense of responsibility is still at play, but it is not clear to what it attaches itself, other than some vague notion of a "new dimension to experiencing our lives", or maybe, as seems more likely, the fear of not experiencing an important aspect of life, one not readily available through the living of it. Perhaps this is all

that is needed to keep the barking hounds of nausea at bay.

This much is clear: we are compelled to tell stories about ourselves, to spin our lives into webs of purpose. Nietzsche's *oeuvre* begins and ends with this fact in mind. *The Birth of Tragedy* seeks the peculiar healing power of Greek tragedy, while *Ecce Homo* seeks the unifying principle or "organizing 'idea'" (*EH* "Why I am so clever" 9) of his own life. These endpoints serve as contrasts to the narrative power of the Christian moral world order; they are experiments in liberation from the burden of guilt. For Nietzsche, as for the Greeks, chance events provide a diversion from the self-imposed weight of purpose. We seem to require some sense of purpose, but our health requires some way to wriggle free of it, too. Nietzsche's hope that the embrace of chance as a fundamental feature of the world might be part of a healthy response to the disease brought on by Christianity does not seem to have been realized through our subsequent widespread adoption of statistical and probabilistic technologies. Hacking's description of the history of this process as the "taming of chance" suggests why this ought not be surprising: the statistical and probabilistic sciences have been deployed in our efforts to eradicate all danger from the world. Probabilities tame chance by making its regularities appear over the course of many trials. To view one's life as one of many trials (many possible lives) is to ignore the chance that accompanies the singularity of each life; it is to refuse *amor fati*. Such a person is what Hacking refers to as a "bad player", that is, one who "tries to calculate and play with the odds, as if his game, his life, were one of a large number of games." The good player, on the other hand, "does

not fool himself, and accepts that there is exactly one chance, which produces by chance the necessity and even the purpose that he experiences." He knows that "not even a long run of universes would annul the chance that brought into being our world" (148). Extending this categorization, I would add that, for Nietzsche, the bad player of life seeks a profit to be spent when the game is over, and so plays in a manner that deliberately minimizes risk. The good player of life, on the other hand, is attracted to the risk alone and pays no mind to what may come when the table is cleared. Nietzsche's version of Christianity corresponds to the former through its teaching of an after-life and the belief that each of us has freedom with respect to our natural lives by virtue of our fundamental spiritual equality and is thus free to be other than nature has fashioned us. This attitude, while it may keep us going, ultimately diminishes the game. Nietzsche's Dionysian vision is an attempt to play at life from a love of the game itself and thus a love of the chance that makes this life unlike any other. Nietzsche tells us that such a love of chance might be necessary if we are ever to find the strength to become what we are.

Bibliography

Bartholin, Erasmus and Lynda G. Christian. "The Figure of Socrates in Erasmus' Works." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 3, no. 2 (October, 1972): 1-10. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2540101

Clark, Maudemarie. "The Development of Nietzsche's Later Position on Truth." In *Nietzsche*. Edited by John Richardson and Brian Leiter. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001.

Daston, Lorraine & Katherine Park. *Wonders and the Order of Nature*. Zone Books, 1998.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche And Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. Columbia University Press, 1983.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields. The Free Press, 1995.

– – – . *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*. Edited by Everett K. Wilson. Translated by Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schurer. The Free Press, 1973.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Translated by Donald F. Brouchard, Sherry Simon, et al. In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology (Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 2)*. Edited by James D. Faubion. The New Press, 1999.

Gigerenzer, Gerd, Zeno Swijtink, Theodore Porter, Lorraine Daston, John Beatty, Lorenz Krüger.

The Empire of Chance: How Probability Changed Science and Everyday Life. Cambridge, 1990.

Hacking, Ian. *The Taming of Chance*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Hill, R. Kevin. *Nietzsche's Critiques: The Kantian Foundations of His Thought*. Clarendon, 2003.

Hoffmann, Roald & Iain Boyd White, eds. *Beyond the Infinite: the Sublime in Art and Science*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Janaway, Christopher. "Schopenhauer's Pessimism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, edited by Christopher Janaway, 318-43. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Leiter, Brian. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Morality*. Routledge, 2003.

Moore, Gregory. *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

– – – . "Nietzsche, Medicine & Meteorology." In *Nietzsche and Science*. Edited by Gregory Moore and Thomas Brobjer. Ashgate, 2004.

Murphy, Tim. *Nietzsche, Metaphor, Religion*. SUNY Press, 2001.

Nabais, Nuno. *Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of the Tragic*. Translated by Martin Earl. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Antichrist*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. In *The Portable Nietzsche*. Penguin Books, 1977.

– – – . *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Vintage Books, 1966.

– – – . *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Vintage

Books USA, 1967.

– – – . *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Edited by Maudemarie Clark and Brian

Leiter. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

– – – . *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Translated by Walter

Kaufmann. 1st ed. Vintage, 1974.

– – – . *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Edited by R. J. Hollingdale. 2nd ed.

Cambridge University Press, 1996.

– – – . *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, Edited with Commentary by Walter Kaufmann*.

Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Vintage Books, 1969.

– – – . *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. In *The Portable Nietzsche*.

Penguin Books, 1977.

– – – . *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. In *The Portable Nietzsche*. Penguin

Books, 1977.

– – – . *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. 8th printing. Vintage, 1968.

Nussbaum, Martha. "Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism." In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality:*

Essays on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals. Edited by Richard Schacht. First

Printing. University of California Press, 1994.

– – – . "Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus." In *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*.

Edited by Richard Schacht. First Printing. University of California Press, 1994.

Roberts, Tyler. *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion*. Princeton University Press, 1998.

Serres, Michel. "*The Antichrist:* A Chemistry of Sensations and Ideas". Translated by Chris

Bongie. In *Nietzsche in Italy*. Edited by Thomas Harrison. Anma Libri, 1988: 31-52.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. 2 Vols. Translated by E.F.J. Payne.

New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969.

Spinoza, Benedict. *A Spinoza Reader: the Ethics and Other Works*. Edited and translated by Edwin

Curley. Princeton University Press, 1994.

Vandenabeele, Bart. "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Aesthetically Sublime." *Journal of*

Aesthetic Education 37, no. 1 [2003]: 90-106.

Wolfram, Stephen. "The Personal Analytics of My Life." *Wired*. March 18, 2012.

http://www.wired.com/business/2012/03/opinion-wolfram-life-analytics/.