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## PESSIMISM IN NIETZSCHE

Anasuya Agarwala

Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi, India

Nietzsche recognises and lists different kinds of pessimism in his notebooks, published posthumously as *The Will to Power*. From his perspective what they have in common is their practice of rejection or denigration – their ‘no-saying’. Pessimism, through his eyes, may then be seen as urging us to limit and eliminate some of our hopes and expectations – of transcendence to ‘better’ otherworldly realms, of an optimism that becoming can be corrected, etc. This can lead to a pervading sense of meaninglessness, enough to cause disillusionment and despair with life. But in the right hands (Nietzsche’s for instance) it could provide the means to navigate the bounded universe it describes, the universe of our world of becoming. This paper attempts to show that the pessimistic attitude is the activity involved in rejecting certain expectations and to show how pessimism thus defined may then lead to a positive conclusion.

Although Nietzsche enumerates different kinds of pessimism in his notebooks of the years 1883 through 1888, published posthumously as *The Will to Power*,<sup>1</sup> there are two versions that Nietzsche describes in the history of Western thought that are significant for this discussion because they call for completely different responses from us but also because these two influences and inspire his own version of pessimism. These are pre-Socratic Greek Classical Pessimism and Schopenhauer’s Romantic Pessimism. Nietzsche associates pessimism with the pre-Socratic philosophers and claims that their ideas reflected the culture of an early Greek world-view. The significance of Greek Tragedy, for Nietzsche, is that though pessimistic, it prompts us to embrace life emphatically, reversing the wisdom of Silenus, “The very worst thing for [us] is to die soon; the second worst [is] to die at all” (BT 23)<sup>2</sup> whereas Schopenhauer’s romantic pessimism echoes the ‘wisdom of Silenus’: “Miserable, ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship, ...The best of all things is ... not to be born, not to be, to be nothing.” (ibid. 22)

The present paper is largely descriptive and expository and is organized under three sections. The first two sections attempt to offer Nietzsche’s interpretation of pre-Socratic Greek Classical Pessimism and Schopenhauer’s Romantic pessimism respectively. The third and final section discusses Nietzsche’s own use of pessimism as a way towards life-affirmation.

### Pre-Socratic Greek Classical Pessimism

This form of pessimism was first identified by Nietzsche in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*. According to Nietzsche, “pessimism is the consequence of the absolute illogic of the world-order.” (Deinstag 2001, 926). To elaborate, pessimism is seen as an outgrowth of the view of the world as something constantly in flux, constantly in the process of becoming and thus consequently in the process of destroying. According to Joshua F. Deinstag, Nietzsche seems to understand the roots of pessimism as a kind of time-sickness, the motivation behind which is: “time is an unshakable burden for human beings because it leads to the ultimate destruction of all things – and this fate belies any principle of order that may, on the surface, appear to guide the course of events.” (ibid.) Pessimism in the broadest sense is the recognition that human existence is fundamentally time-bound, subject to the vicissitudes of time, and lacking any permanent features. (Deinstag 2004, 85)

*The Birth of Tragedy* seeks to understand the origin and decline of tragic drama in the history of Greek culture and thought. Nietzsche finds that tragic drama grew on the floor of pre-Socratic pessimistic knowledge and died by being overturned by Socratic ‘optimistic’ philosophy. With respect to the former, Nietzsche wondered how the early Greeks could respond to life positively in spite of recognising the instability of agonistic-tensional becoming about which nothing could be done. He contrasts the pessimism of the early Greeks with Socrates determining the latter to be optimistic in its worldview.

Nietzsche views Socratic philosophy as optimistic in the sense that Socratic Dialectics believes in the power of reason and rationality, not only to understand life and existence, but also to correct its ‘sickness’ through reason. Nietzsche writes: “By contrast with [early Greek] practical pessimism, Socrates is the prototype of the theoretical optimist who, with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and insight the power of a panacea.” (BT 15) Nietzsche’s critique here is that Socrates rejects

<sup>1</sup>Kauffman, W. ‘Introduction’, *Will to Power*, p. xv. For one such list cf. *The Will to Power* (1967), 527-528.

<sup>2</sup>Nietzsche references will use the following system: BT = *The Birth of Tragedy* (1993); WP = *The Will to Power* (1967); BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil* (1990); TI = (1968); GS = *The Gay Science* (2009); GM = *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1967); Z = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1969)



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that life has unknowable mysteries or that suffering is inevitable. Greek tragic dramain the hands of Euripides and under the influence of Socraticrationalityreflects this optimism. Unlike earlier Greek tragedy that reflected the ambiguities of life, Euripides tragic dramas rationalized it. In the vein of Socratic dialectic, the Euripidean hero is obliged to defend his actions with arguments and counter-arguments. The optimistic element in dialectic is that it rejoices “at each conclusion and can breathe only in cool clarity and consciousness.” (ibid.) Nietzsche then describes the Socratic equation Knowledge=virtue=happiness as the formula that killed tragedy. (BT 69)Though Socrates does not promise eternal happiness through this equation, heaffirms both that virtue results in happiness and that virtue can be taught. Under Socratic dialectics, then, happiness is theoretically within everybody’s grasp.(Deinstag 2001, 927)In a similar vein, Plato, after Socrates,only furthers an optimistic worldview through his doctrine of Forms: the suffering and ambiguities of this world are redeemable (for the philosopher) in the other-worldly realm of eternal Forms.

Pre-Socratic Greek tragedy, on the other hand, Nietzsche found, reflected and consummated an early Greek worldview that was more faithful to the finite conditions of life than subsequent developments in philosophy and ascetic religions. The early Greek world-view was essentially religious and mythic. Lawrence J. Hatab explains this world-view in telling us that early Greek religion was pluralistic and professed multiple deities both bright and dark that exercised opposing tensions such as life and death, measure and excess, intelligence and raw passion, etc.on humans making it essentially agonistic and dynamic. (Hatab 2005, 23) This world-view sacralised the conditions of concrete life, celebrating all its forces – benign and terrible, constructive and destructive and acceded to the fact that mortality and loss are indigenous to human existence, not to be repaired, reformed or transcended. (ibid.) Nietzsche understands tragedy as the culmination of this early Greek worldview: “Tragedy is the outlet of mystic-pessimistic knowledge.” (Attributed to Nietzsche in Deinstag 2001, 926) Thus, according to Nietzsche, the tragic outlook represented in Greek tragedy was generated from the base of pessimistic knowledge that maintained that the world is not ordered towards some goal but under the influence of tensional forces and essentially fatalistic. This kind of pessimistic understanding stands as the philosophical basis for the tragic plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles according to Nietzsche. With the narrative portrayal of a noble hero experiencing an inevitable downfall, Greek tragedy expresses the unfolding of a meaningful but finite life limited by a negative fate. (Hatab 2005, 19)He writes:

The hero of tragedy does not prove himself . . . in a struggle against fate, just as little does he suffer what he deserves. Rather, blind and with covered head, he falls to his ruin: and this desolate but noble burden with which he remains standing in the presence of this well-known world of terrors presses itself like a thorn in our soul. (Attributed to Nietzsche in Deinstag 2001, 927)

Deinstag helps us to understand the significance Nietzsche attributes to Greek tragedy by suggesting that though the ravages of time could not be cured or made right through tragedy, its depth and power could still be understood by Greek audiences. It served to lay bare the terrible situation of human existence that the pre-Socratic pessimistic philosophers describe. Its message, far from shying away from the truth of this ill-fated existence, taught the Greek to embrace life. Nietzsche then stresses the “life affirming implications of tragic drama, especially by linking it with revered divine forces and with the exuberant spirit of artistic production.” (BT 24)How Greek tragedy leads from an exposition of becoming as divinely sanctioned to its role in enabling Greek audiences to enthusiastically embrace life is presented by Nietzsche in the elaborate arrangement between two opposing forces, in the dynamic tensions between them, and their engagement with Greek audiences. At the cost of bypassing a discussion of Nietzsche’s analysis of these elements, we might simply say that the mode of presentation of Greek tragedy made the ‘Dionysian truth’ – the unalterable nature of things – not only “tolerable but irresistible.” (BT xix) The nature of Greek Tragedy, in Nietzsche’s view, not only brings the Greek closer to the eternal agonizing drama of existence, but through it, helps the Greek to come to terms with it and enthusiastically embrace life. (BT 22) In the Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche recommends aesthetic experience, as a relief from the suffering existence imposes on us. Later in his thinking Nietzsche admits that this aesthetic experience was still a ‘metaphysical comfort.’(BT 11) At the time, however, Nietzsche’s insight was the discovery of a profound ‘wisdom’ that he continued to hold to the end: the wisdom of a tragic world-view which mirrors Greek pessimism in its acceptance of plurality, tension, and change as essences of life.

The early Greek world-view was pessimistic in that instead of trying to construct a systematic, ordering philosophy, as Socrates and Plato were to do, the pre-Socratics grasped the chaotic and disordered nature of the world and only attempted to cope with it as much as possible. They did not try to correct it, escape it, or deny the pessimistic view of the world. Nietzsche associates this kind of pessimism with the Ionian philosophers who preceded Socrates. In this regard he attributes to Democritus the doctrine that “the world [is] without moral and aesthetic meaning” and calls this “the pessimism of accidents.” (Attributed to Nietzsche in Deinstag 2001, 926) He goes on to describe Anaximander as a ‘true pessimist’ and quotes his fragment: “Where the source of things is, to that place they must also pass away, according to necessity for they must pay penance and be judged for their injustices, in accordance



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with the ordinance of Time.” (ibid.) For Nietzsche the tragic world-view of the pre-Socratics with its acceptance of the tentional forces of becoming names a pessimism that does not impose a rational order to the world that may then redeem earthly existence.

### Schopenhauer’s Romantic Pessimism

Much later in notes on The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche writes: “The antithesis of classical pessimism is romantic pessimism ... the pessimism of Schopenhauer.” (Attributed to Nietzsche in Deinstag 2001, 928) In contra-distinction to Classical Pessimism stands Schopenhauer’s pessimism that leads directly to a life-denying nihilism. Schopenhauer and his follower Hartmann represent for Nietzsche the pessimistic philosophy popular in his day. Before coming to Nietzsche’s interpretation of Schopenhauer, I want to briefly discuss Nietzsche’s criticism of Hartmann’s pessimism of sensibility because it reflects, if not the most popular, certainly a more simplified version of German pessimism of the nineteenth century.

Appearing after Schopenhauer, and greatly influenced by him, Hartmann admits that his is “a thoroughly pessimistic view of human activity, one in which the human being’s only hope rests in the final redemption from misery of volition and existence into the painlessness of non-being and non-willing.” (Jensen 2006, 44) That is, he accepts that suffering necessarily belongs to existence and can cease only with the cessation of existence itself. Nietzsche contends that Hartmann’s nihilism and rejection of life is the conclusion of a kind of reverse utilitarianism. According to him, Hartmann’s pessimism poses the question of life in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. Finding that the pains of life outweigh its pleasures, Hartmann concludes that it is better to reject life. (Deinstag 2001, 929) Nietzsche objects to this line of thought as simplistic when he writes: “Whether it be hedonism or pessimism or utilitarianism or eudaemonism: all these modes of thought which access the value of things according to pleasure and pain . . . are naiveties.” (BGE 225)Nietzsche considers these positions to be simplistic or naïve because they take the reports of pleasure and pain at face value, assuming that nothing other than simple pleasures can count as a justification of life. In his calculations of pain versus pleasuresHartmann’s pessimism turns out to be no more than a mathematical calculation of people’s feelings. Nietzsche writes of such pessimism:

The sum of displeasure outweighs the sum of pleasure; consequently, it would be better if the world did not exist” --- “the world is something that rationally should not exist because it causes the feeling subject more displeasure than pleasure”—chatter of this sort calls itself pessimism today! . . . I despise this pessimism of sensibility: it is itself a sign of deeply impoverished life. I shall never permit such a meagre one as Hartmann to speak of his “philosophical pessimism. (WP 372)

We must note here that Nietzsche’s criticism against Hartmann is not that his calculations are wrong. Nietzsche would certainly not think that life and existence would be justified if pleasures outweighed pain. Nietzsche’s objection is not just that such a view is simpleminded but more to the point that such calculations are themselves impossible. (Deinstag 2001, 929) Nietzsche objection against Hartmann is that he assumes that it is possible to stand outside life as a whole and thence calculate its advantages and disadvantages. According to Nietzsche, however, it is inconceivable to gain a perspective from which to make such an assessment. He writes: “one would have to be situated outside life, and on the other hand to know it as thoroughly, as all who have experienced it, to be able to touch upon the problem of value of life at all.” (TI 55) He harkens back to his reliance on weak and decadent psychologies when he says that there is no evidence for such a ‘true world’ but only a ‘weak psychological need’ for it to exist. Opposed to metaphysical philosophies that distinguish an other- worldly reality on the basis of which the world of phenomena is judged to be merely apparent, and thus an error, Nietzsche declares the reality of this world as the only reality: “The grounds upon which ‘this’ world has been designated as apparent establish rather its reality –another kind of reality is absolutely undemonstrable.” (ibid. 49) For him, the world itself, as the pre-Socratics saw, is in a constant state of transformation and becoming. This renders such wholesale assessments of life transient and ultimately useless. (ibid.) We may summarize Nietzsche’s positionwith the following quotation:

Becoming is of equivalent value every moment; the sum of its values always remains the same; in other words, it has no value at all, for anything against which to measure it, and in relation to which the word ‘value’ would have meaning, is lacking. The total value of the world cannot be evaluated; consequently, philosophical pessimism belongs among comical things. (WP 708)

The definitive statement of philosophical pessimism in Nietzsche’s day was: “it would be better if the world did not exist.” (WP 701)But it is Schopenhauer who inaugurates this school of thought. According to Schopenhauer, the suffering in existence gives cause to believe that nonexistence would have been preferable.(Janaway 2017, 157) From an essay entitled ‘The Vanity of Existence’ Schopenhauer describes his world-view:



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The vanity of existence is revealed in the whole form existence assumes: in the infiniteness of time and space contrasted with the finiteness of the individual in both; in the fleeting present as the sole form in which actuality exists; in the contingency and relativity of all things; in continual becoming without being; in continual desire without satisfaction; in the continual frustration of striving of which life consists. (Schopenhauer 1970, 49)

Schopenhauer’s pessimism issues in a nihilism that because no true satisfaction is possible, ‘it would be better if [this world] did not exist.’ Like Hartmann after him, “Life,” for Schopenhauer, “is a constant suffering...a business that does not cover its costs.” From this perspective it almost seems as if life short-changes us – we plod and strive but are never given our dues. Thus, we ought to lament human existence. Schopenhauer’s solution is to withdraw away from it into a state of will-less self-negation. It is in this sense that Schopenhauer’s pessimism echoes the ‘wisdom of Silenus’ quoted earlier: ‘Miserable, ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship . . . The best of all things is ... not to be born, not to be, to be nothing.’

But the cost-benefit analysis of life was only one element of Schopenhauer’s argument against life, and for Nietzsche, a minor one. Nietzsche’s main criticism against Schopenhauer is that he made a moral judgement against life. (Deinstag 2001, 929)Schopenhauer recognized the fundamental disorder of the world. His pessimism rejected all forms of optimism – of worldly and otherworld redemption from finite existence as philosophically unjustified. This should ideally have led him back to something like the tragic view of the pre-Socratics. Instead, according to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer made a moral judgment against life and not merely an economic calculation in its disfavor: on learning that becoming has no overall goal nor end in view and responding by embracing the natural chaos in existence, as Greek tragedy did, Schopenhauer devised a final strategy to keep it at bay: he sat in judgment and deemed it ‘evil’. But how? Based on what is this pronouncement made? Nietzsche seems to suggest that it is from the position of an imagined ‘good’ against which our transient everyday world can be measured. Nietzsche writes

given these two insights, that becoming has no goal, and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value, an escape remains: to pass judgment on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a true world. (WP 13)

This view is pessimistic to the extent that it rejects the optimism inherent in the idea of an ordered universe but nihilistic because it passes a negative judgment against the world as a whole by postulating a ‘true world’. Nietzsche writes with reference to Schopenhauer: “the unconditional, representing the highest perfection, cannot possibly be the ground of all that is conditional, Schopenhauer wanted it otherwise and therefore had to conceive of this metaphysical ground as the opposite of the ideal –as ‘evil, blind will’: that way it could be that ‘which appears.’ That which reveals itself in the world of appearances” (ibid. 17)

Schopenhauer’s identification of Kant’s thing-in-itself as ‘Infinite will’, according to Nietzsche, betrays a dualistic thrust between reality and appearance inherent in the history of western philosophy.He writes of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics:

One has become atheistic. But has the ideal itself been renounced? – At bottom, the last metaphysicians still seek in it true “reality,” the “thing-in-itself” compared to which everything else is merely apparent. It is their dogman that our apparent world, being so plainly not the expression of this ideal, cannot be ‘true’ – and that, at bottom, it does not even lead us back to that metaphysical world as its cause. (WP 15)

Nietzsche maintains that despite his atheism, Schopenhauer did not renounce the absoluteness of the ideal. In Nietzsche’s words, “he sneaks it by”. Nietzsche’s objection is that while Schopenhauer denied the possibility of goal or purpose, he still forged an ethics out of his pessimism recasting morality as a denial of our natural tendencies. Schopenhauer prescribes an ethic of world-rejection, resignation, and self-negation as the only authentic form of ‘salvation’. He finds this salvation in aesthetic contemplation where we might achieve a temporary form of relief from the pains of the suffering will. (Hatab 2008, 31) It is in this sense that Nietzsche considers Schopenhauer’s pessimism to be romantic. Schopenhauer believes that suffering may be escaped by non-willing. According to one commentator, Schopenhauer’s prescription to withdraw the will provides the best illustration of the ascetic ideal as described in Nietzsche’s The Genealogy of Morality:

Let us then honor “redemption” in the great religions; but it is a little difficult to remain serious when faced with the esteem in which deep sleep is held by these people, who are too tired of life, too tired even for dreaming—deep sleep, that is, as already an entering into brahma, as achieved uniomystica with God. [ . . . ] Let us bear in mind that what is expressed [here] . . . is simply the same esteem as that of the clear, cool, Greek-cool, but suffering Epicurus: the



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hypnotic feeling of nothingness, the rest of the deepest sleep, in short, absence of suffering—this may count already as the highest good, as value of values for those who suffer and are thoroughly out of sorts. (GM III)

While Nietzsche criticizes Schopenhauer’s conclusions, he admires his methodology. Nietzsche accusation is that Schopenhauer betrayed the logical outcome of his own pessimism at the last moment by rejecting the implications of his ontology based solely on a moral basis. For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer did not in the end have the courage of his own convictions: “a pessimist, a world-denier and a God denier, who comes to a halt before morality – who affirms ... what? Is that actually a pessimist?” (BGE 109) The world does not have an order. Schopenhauer trying to preserve moral order based on transcendental projections, according to Nietzsche, suggests a suspension of his own logic. Deinstag paraphrases Nietzsche’s criticism when he writes: “When morality can no longer claim to base itself in the real world of events, it is free to condemn the world in toto and to develop into ‘genuine philosophical suicidalism.’” (Deinstag 2001, 930) Schopenhauer falls prey to ‘philosophical suicide’ by uncoupling morality from his ontology and basing it instead on traditional assumptions. Ultimately, for Nietzsche, the problem was not that Schopenhauer was too pessimistic, but rather, he wasn’t pessimistic enough. In bowing before morality, Schopenhauer couldn’t see the powerful implications of his own pessimism.

In critiquing Schopenhauer, Nietzsche believes that he is ‘deepening’ and ‘first really experiencing’ pessimism “in the energy of its logic, as anarchism and nihilism, as analytic.” (WP 11) Though Nietzsche rejects Schopenhauer’s conclusions, he respects his pessimism’s critical spirit in deconstructing western optimism of order and stability. Thus he accepts that suffering is inescapable and that pain is intrinsic to a world of flux and disorder. But states: “I do not account evil and the painful character of existence as a reproach to it.” For Nietzsche Pessimism recognizes that “becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing” and pessimism does not sit in judgment of this condition from the position of a ‘true’ world. (WP 12) In purifying pessimism of morality, Nietzsche thinks he is intensifying it by making available the possibility of truly realizing its implications – a thorough negation of all order, all values and thus a space to create new values precisely because things are not fixed.

Deinstag argues that the belief that pessimism must lead to resignation makes one of two errors. Either it mistakes Schopenhauer’s version of pessimism to be the whole of pessimism or it sees no other alternative to the realization that we live in a disordered, tragic, immoral world. He argues further that the belief that human beings will be disappointed at the prospect of a constantly changing world with no inherent purpose or goal stems from the belief that human beings are creatures of order and that we are discomposed by chaos. For Nietzsche, however, we are no different from the world that we are condemned to. Instead, we ourselves are constantly transforming and developing. Nietzsche envisions this world as a “Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying . . . without goal. Do you want a name for this world? . . . This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides.” (WP 1067)

Pessimism in Nietzsche’s hand according to him, restores, according to him, an ‘innocence’ to becoming whereby one may honestly confront the question of meaning without the assumptions of earlier prejudices. One no longer view existence as an error, or punishment, and therefore worthy of condemnation. Rejecting moral categories as evaluative models to judge life restores the innocence of becoming, however, not in the sense that we replace ‘guilt’ with another moral category of ‘innocence’. As we have seen, for Nietzsche, becoming cannot be attributed with praise or blame. He writes: “one cannot judge, measure, compare the whole, to say nothing of denying it” (ibid. 402) Morality causes us to judge the world as a whole and to judge it negatively. The first is an impossibility, the second is based on an impossibility. To restore the innocence of becoming to the world means to restore it to ourselves and to confront the chaotic world not as a creature fallen from it but as part of that which we find most threatening. (Deinstag 2001, 935). This makes available the possibility of judging life on its own terms.

Nietzsche alleges in *The Gay Science* that Schopenhauer’s pessimism represents “an impoverishment of life”, the reaction of a suffering individual who takes “revenge on all things by...branding his image on them, the image of his torture.” (GS 236) This criticism becomes more severe in *The Twilight of the Idols*: “Instead of saying simply I am no longer worth anything, the moral lie in the mouth of the decadent says: Nothing is worth anything—life is not worth anything.” (TI 98) For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer was simply not psychologically “strong enough to say a new Yes” to life (WP 525).

### Nietzsche’s Pessimism of Strength

Nietzsche asks in his ‘Attempt at Self-Criticism’ to *The Birth of Tragedy*

is pessimism necessarily a sign of decline...as it ...now is, to all appearances, among us ‘modern’ men and Europeans? Is there a pessimism of Strength? (BT 3)



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Telling us elsewhere

that there still could be an altogether different kind of pessimism... this premonition and vision belongs to me as inseparable from me, as my propium and ipsissimum... I call this pessimism of the future – for it comes! I see it coming! – Dionysian Pessimism.(GS 155)

Countering Schopenhauer’s pessimism of weakness with his own pessimism of strength Nietzsche explains it by saying that it “is a measure of the degree of strength of will to what extent one can do without meaning in things, to what extent one can endure to live in a meaningless world because one can organize a small portion of it oneself.” (WP 318)

Nietzsche introduces the idea of a pessimism of strength in a latter edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* perhaps because his version of pessimism draws, in addition to Schopenhauer’s method, from the pessimism underlying Greek Tragedy. That is, he takes from Greek Tragedy what he considers to be its essence – the figure of Dionysus, and names his own pessimism “Dionysian Pessimism.” Before we come to what “Dionysus” means to Nietzsche, it is important to understand what Nietzsche means by a pessimism of strength.

In his notes, Nietzsche refers to pessimism as a kind of hammer, one used to break down and break apart traditional ways of thinking. (See WP 80, 1055). Wielding pessimism as a tool means in the first place to “teach destructive ways of thinking.” (Attributed to Nietzsche in Deinstag 2001, 933) In denying the existence of any natural order to the universe and emphasizing the continuous flux of becoming and time, pessimism is critical of any universalizing system or morality, be it Christian, atheistic, or scientific as well as utilitarian, or democratic and socialist ideology. Nietzsche considers this destruction to be significant on its own: “the hammer: a teaching which through setting lose the death-seeking pessimism brings about an extraction of the most vital.” (ibid.) But if destruction is a necessary prelude, it isn’t the end; the effect of pessimism is not only critical. The metaphor of a hammer is apt because a hammer is used to deconstruct but it is also used to construct and build. Nietzsche writes that pessimism, “in the hand of the strongest becomes simply a hammer and instrument with which we can make oneself a new pair of wings.” (ibid.) Here lies the difference between Nietzsche’s pessimism and that of those he admired. They came to an end with the destruction of certain expectations. They taught one to be at peace with the worlds’ chaos, or, in Schopenhauer’s case to resign oneself to it, but not to seek to shape it. Nietzsche describes his alternative as:

Our pessimism: the world does not have the value we thought it had...Initial result: it seems worthless;...simply in this sense are we pessimists, namely, with the will to admit this revaluation to ourselves unreservedly and not to tell ourselves the same old story, not to lie to ourselves...

That is precisely how we find the pathos that impels us to seek new values. In sum: the world might be far more valuable than we used to believe;...while we thought we accorded it the highest interpretation, we may not have given our human existence a moderately fair value. (WP 22)

Nietzsche argues that the lack of an overall meaning in the universe is not an argument that adequate meaning cannot be generated by individuals. The inference from there being ‘no natural or God-given meaning to the world or life as a whole’ to ‘there is no meaning at all’ is a “tremendous generalization.” (ibid 14) The pessimism of strength uses the tool of pessimism to deny all established values and expectations but it also overcomes meaninglessness in its construction of new values. A pessimism of weakness cannot endure meaninglessness. Nietzsche repeatedly tells us that it needs to invent world-interpretations that inevitably lead to life-denial because it arises from a psychological weakness. In the case of pessimism of strength however, the withdrawal of an overarching account of the world’s value or meaning only impels one to seek ‘new values’. Nietzsche pessimism advises each of us individually to forge/craft a meaning in life out of smaller ones with the result that when they are gathered together, ‘the world may be far more valuable than we used to believe.’

Although Nietzsche’s Dionysian Pessimism of Strength enables a ‘revaluation of values’, he does not specify what this new set to values are. It would be unfair to demand this of him knowing that for him “will to a system is a lack of integrity” (TI 26). One of his fundamental messages in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is that the formulation of new values is something we should undertake for ourselves. (Z 103) But we are not left simply with the vague injunction to ‘create your own values’. Deinstag is instructive here when he tells us that Dionysian pessimism is not meant to serve a value system but is rather an ethos by which we may live a good life following the withdrawal of overarching meaning. This pessimism is then better understood as a sort of art of living, a life practice



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that Nietzsche recommends. We get a sense of what Nietzsche meant by Dionysian from The Birth Of Tragedy but the term kept evolving in his later works. Drawing from his various works it becomes apparent that it is a Yes that evolves from a No. The No is the no-saying of pessimism in general, but to what are we giving assent? What does Nietzsche mean when he says that Dionysian Pessimism says Yes to life? What does life-affirmation consist of? As we have seen, one cannot judge life as a whole or to ‘the world as it is and should be.’ Deinstagis helpful here when he tells us that “the assent can only be a kind of gamble or risk taking. It is an affirmation in the dark, an approval given in ignorance. Above all, it is a decision to welcome the unknown future and accept the unseen past rather than cling to a familiar present.” (Deinstag 2001, 933) He quotes a reference from Nietzsche’s notebooks to indicate the Yes-saying of Dionysian pessimism.

My new way to “yes”. My new version of pessimism as a voluntary quest for fearful and questionable aspects of beings. . . A pessimist such as that could in that way lead to a Dionysian yes-saying to the world as it is: as a wish for its absolute return and eternity: with which a new ideal of philosophy and sensibility would be given.

And he further remarks that the phrase “fearful and questionable” is carefully chosen to specify what is at issue. What is most ‘fearful and questionable’ is not what is cruel or disgusting about human life but those aspects of existence that we have “the greatest difficulty in grasping and affirming.” (Deinstag 2001, 933) These are those aspects that are the most threatening to our sense of order, so much so that that we have denied they’re very being. It is in this sense that we initially find them fearful and questionable. Dionysian pessimism is distinguished from Hartmann’s or Schopenhauer’s sense of pessimism in the sense that it embraces the ‘fearful and questionable’ instead of denying them in a will to nothingness. But a further aspect of accepting the fearful and questionable is that it is accompanied with joy: realize in oneself the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which also encompasses joy in destruction...” (TI 121) He asks in The Gay Science “as regards sickness, should we not be almost tempted to ask whether we could in general dispense with it?” (GS 7) The pessimists of his day certainly did. But Nietzsche goes on to suggest: “it is great pain only which is the ultimate emancipator of the spirit; for it is the strong suspicion which makes an X out of every V, a true, correct X, i.e., the antepenultimate letter. . .” (ibid.) Almost as an ode to pain and suffering Nietzsche writes:

It is great pain only . . . that compels us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths, and divest ourselves of all trust, all good-nature, veiling, gentleness, and averageness, wherein we have perhaps formerly installed our humanity. I doubt whether such pain “improves” us; but I know that it deepens us. . . One emerges from such a long, dangerous exercises in self-mastery as another being, with several additional notes of interrogation, and above all, with a will to question more than ever, more profoundly, more strictly, more sternly, more wickedly, more quietly than has ever been questioned hitherto. . . Life has itself become a problem. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one sullen. Even love of life is still possible—only one loves differently (ibid.)

He ends this entry in telling us in that the strong willed enjoy a joy in destruction. “The charm, however, of all that is problematic, the delight in the X, is too great in those more spiritual and more spiritualized men, not to spread itself again and again like a clear glow over all the trouble of the problematic, over all the danger of uncertainty. . . We know a new happiness.” (GS 7)

According to Nietzsche, sexuality symbolizes for the ancient Greeks, the affirmation of pain and suffering that accompanies any growth. Accepting sexuality, with its constant dissolution of boundaries, involves admitting that we are ourselves essentially flux and change. The “violation of the self, that is intrinsic to sexuality, is simultaneously painful and pleasurable, and the simplest and best evidence that our own nature is as unstable and tumultuous as that of the rest of the universe. (Deinstag 2001, 933) The Dionysian is the “triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; true life as collective continuation of life through procreation” where rebirth comes at the cost of suffering. Nietzsche writes: “In the teaching of the mysteries, pain is sanctified: the pains of childbirth sanctify pain in general—all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, postulates pain . . . all this is contained in the word Dionysus. (TI what I owe 4) Under Christian morality, for Nietzsche, the repression of sexuality represents the repression of the ‘fearful and questionable’ as such. (Deinstag 2001, 933) Finally,

The word Dionysian means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the veryday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states: an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same. . . (WP 539)

Nietzsche’s alternative then is based on the human capacity to create meanings of a temporary nature in our own corner of the cosmos that goes beyond evaluating things based purely on the criterion of eternal, stable, or absolute or the moral standards of good and truth. What is required for this is an indefatigable strength of spirit to face the conditions of becoming honestly and still not resign oneself to absolute meaninglessness in life. The question is whether one has the strength to endure this meaninglessness because one



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has the strength to create one's own meaning and thereby order one's life meaningfully. Nietzsche's inspiration comes from art: "Art represents the organization of a small portion of an otherwise meaningless world that gives purpose to an individual existence." (Deinstag 2001, 932) Art is not an attempt to fight the pattern of existence but an effort to shape that pattern into something recognizable. (ibid.) Similarly, Nietzsche's project for life affirmation urges us to find joy in the conditions of becoming because without conventional prejudices, parts of it may be re-appropriated creatively. Rather than telling us what to create, it is the value of creating as such that Nietzsche celebrates. (Solomon 2002, 174.)

The pursuit of earthly happiness, for Nietzsche, requires an ability to create new values that remain faithful to the conditions of this world including and especially those aspects that we find most 'fearful and questionable.' Under this new kind of pessimism, it is mistaken to think of suffering as "evil, hateful, [ . . . ] a defect of existence" in the first place. (Janaway 2017, 165) As we saw with the symbol of sexuality, for Nietzsche, pain and pleasure are interconnected such that according to him growth and enrichment may only be achieved through some form of suffering. Thus, a life cleansed of suffering would be incapable of a kind of enrichment necessary for well-being. Nietzsche thus advocates a kind of reconciliation with suffering so that one may affirm life without wishing that suffering away. He recommends, instead, interpreting and understanding one's suffering in a way that makes it meaningful to oneself. Accordingly, suffering is not bad in itself; rather, its value depends upon its place in someone's particular life and the meaning one gives to it. Dionysian pessimism, in the last analysis, is an ethos that drives this reevaluation of values through which suffering is not negated but reinterpreted in the context of newly constructed values.

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