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Nietzsche and the Philosophy of Pessimism

A Study of Nietzsche’s Relation to the Pessimistic Tradition: Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Leopardi

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This dissertation is a study of the predominantly German pessimistic tradition in the philosophy of the late nineteenth century, and of Nietzsche's complex relation to that tradition. The aim of the dissertation is firstly to analyse how pessimism came to be established as a philosophical concept by Schopenhauer and a later generation of pessimistic thinkers, and secondly to investigate how Nietzsche understood pessimism.

In the first part of the dissertation, I argue that although the term pessimism was coined in 1759, and although it was used in a philosophical context by Schopenhauer in the 1840's, it was not until Eugen Dühring and Eduard von Hartmann defined it in terms of the value of life in the late 1860's that a clear conceptual content was attributed to pessimism. After Dühring and Hartmann, philosophical pessimism was generally understood as the notion that the value of life is negative, which means that non-existence is necessarily preferable to existence. This notion of pessimism was shared, I demonstrate, by their contemporaries, regardless of whether they considered pessimism a metaphysical truth or a mental illness.

In the second part of the dissertation I argue that pessimism became a problem for Nietzsche when he read Hartmann’s *Philosophie des Unbewussten* in 1869. He was, however, no pessimist: I argue that he in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* sought to develop a philosophy of art that can help us overcome the pessimistic truth that non-existence is preferable to existence.

In the third part of the dissertation I demonstrate that a number of important themes in Nietzsche’s later phase are rooted in his early reception of philosophical pessimism. I argue that his discussions of nihilism, of the poetry and character of Giacomo Leopardi, of Hamlet, and of the eternal recurrence are best understood in relation to pessimism.

**Keywords:** Pessimism, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann, Giacomo Leopardi, Philipp Mainländer, Julius Bahnsen, Agnes Taubert, Eugen Dühring, Nihilism, Melancholy, Eternal Recurrence, Hamlet
Plus je lis les pessimistes, plus j’aime la vie.
E. M. Cioran
Contents

Preface ............................................................................................................................. 9
Introduction ................................................................................................................. 11
General Thesis ........................................................................................................... 14
On Methods and Delimitations ............................................................................. 16
On Editions, Translations, and References .............................................................. 18

PART I: THE PESSIMISTIC TRADITION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY ................................................................................................................ 22

1. Schopenhauer and the Founding of Philosophical Pessimism ......................... 23
   1.1 Previous Research on the Philosophy of Pessimism .......................................... 23
   1.2 Some Reflections on the Early History of Pessimism ........................................ 28
   1.3 The Pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer ........................................................ 31
       Interpretations of Pessimism Among the Scholars ................................................ 31
   1.4 Schopenhauer’s Use of the Concept Pessimism ................................................ 37
   1.5 Schopenhauer’s System: The Single Thought and Its Pessimistic Premises .......... 44

2. A Matter of Logic or Beer? The Post-Schopenhauerian Debate over Pessimism ................................................................................................................ 62
   2.1 Pessimism and the Value of Life: Dühring and Hartmann ............................... 62
       Eugen Dühring ........................................................................................................ 63
       Eduard von Hartmann .......................................................................................... 65
       Hartmann’s Pessimism(s) .................................................................................. 72
   2.2 Some Other Pessimists ..................................................................................... 77
       Agnes Taubert ...................................................................................................... 77
       Philipp Mainländer ............................................................................................. 79
       Julius Bahnsen .................................................................................................... 83
       Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 85
   2.3 The Anti-Pessimists ......................................................................................... 87
       Jürgen Bona Meyer ............................................................................................ 87
       James Sully .......................................................................................................... 89
       Elme Marie Caro ................................................................................................. 91
       Max Nordau ........................................................................................................ 93
2.4 Giacomo Leopardi – the “Italian Schopenhauer” .......................... 95
   Leopardi in Germany ........................................................................ 97
   Pessimism in Leopardi’s Works ...................................................... 105
2.5 Conclusions to Part I: Some Conceptual Remarks .................... 112

PART II: THE EARLY NIETZSCHE AND PESSIMISM ...................... 116

3. Nietzsche and Pessimism: 1864–72 .............................................. 117
   3.1 Pessimism in Nietzsche’s Nachlaß 1864–1869 .......................... 119
   3.2 Pessimism in Nietzsche’s Nachlaß, 1869–1872 ....................... 132
   3.3 Pessimism in Nietzsche’s Minor Works ................................. 145
   3.4 Die Geburt der Tragödie (1872) ............................................. 147
       The Dionysian, the Apollonian, and Pessimism ....................... 149
       Optimism, Socratic Science, and the Death of Tragedy .......... 160
       Birth and Rebirth of Tragedy: Greek and Wagnerian Tragedy 163

4. Nietzsche and Pessimism: 1872–78 .............................................. 169
   4.1 Pessimism in the Nachlaß, 1872–1874 .................................. 169
   4.2 Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen (1873–1876) ......................... 175
      David Strauss der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller (1873) ....... 176
      Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Histoire für das Leben (1874) 180
      Eduard von Hartmann and Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil ........ 187
      Schopenhauer als Erzieher (1874) ....................................... 193
      Pessimism in Schopenhauer als Erzieher ......................... 196
      Richard Wagner in Bayreuth (1876) .................................... 198
      Wagner and Schopenhauer .............................................. 201
   4.3 Pessimism in the Nachlaß, 1875–1878 ................................ 203
   4.4 Conclusions: The Early Nietzsche and Pessimism .............. 216

PART III: PESSIMISM IN NIETZSCHE’S LATE PHASE ..................... 218

5. Pessimistic Themes in Nietzsche’s Late Writings ...................... 219
   5.1 Pessimism and Nihilism ..................................................... 220
   5.2 Nietzsche and Hamlet ....................................................... 234
   5.3 Nietzsche and Leopardi .................................................... 246
   5.4 The Pessimistic Context of the Eternal Recurrence .......... 261

Summary ....................................................................................... 279

Bibliography ................................................................................ 286

Index .......................................................................................... 297
Research in the humanities is hard, tedious, lonesome work. Whoever says otherwise is lying.

I have, however, been fortunate enough to have been surrounded by people whose friendship and encouragement have rendered that hard work fulfilling, dispelled the tedium and offered solace from the loneliness. A large number of people – friends, family, colleagues – have therefore contributed to the completion of this dissertation. Too many, in fact, for me to thank you all individually. I hope I can repay your generosity in some other way.

Nonetheless, there are a number of people to whom I wish to express my gratitude. First and foremost I wish to thank my two supervisors, Thomas Brobjer and Mats Persson: two very dissimilar persons, both of whom I have long since come to consider my friends. I have certainly been privileged to have had Brobjer as my supervisor. Being able to discuss one’s on-going work with a renowned expert in the same field must be the ideal conditions for any graduate student. Furthermore, Brobjer has always encouraged me to challenge his opinions and interpretations, to seek my own path. I am most grateful for this. In spite of this liberty, it would be conceited of me to pretend that my understanding of Nietzsche is not influenced by Brobjer. Of course it is; and this is a debt that I gladly acknowledge.

I am no less privileged to have had Persson as my second supervisor. He has a special ability to make people with whom he talks more intelligent. Conversations with him are therefore always a highly rewarding activity: on innumerable occasions I have heard myself say something to him that I did not know that I had thought. Apart from this Socratic gift, Persson is also a very sharp-eyed reader: patient, with an extremely keen eye for inconsistencies. Hence I have untiringly and ruthlessly kept giving him new versions of my manuscript to read; and his comments have been nothing short of invaluable.

A preliminary version of this study was discussed at a seminar in Uppsala in March 2007. Dr. Christian Benne acted as opponent at that seminar, and he did a formidable job. At the time – I must confess – I could not help thinking that he did too formidable a job; with hindsight it is clear to me that his perceptive criticism has enabled me to write a much better dissertation.

During the course of the last four years, even more preliminary versions of single chapters of this study have been discussed at various seminars. Portions have also been presented at conferences in Germany and England. I am grateful to a number of people attending these seminars and conferences for their
comments and objections; but I would particularly like to thank my dear friends Shamal Kaveh, Tony Gustavsson and Jakob Kihlberg, whose readings of various chapters have been most helpful. I believe it is safe to say that they have contributed more to the final result than they can imagine.

A number of people have gone out of their way to help me in practical matters. The eminent administrative staff at the Department of History of Science and Ideas, Karin Bergsten and Ulla-Britt Jansson, deserve special mention for their efficiency and kindness. The staff at Uppsala University Library has always proved itself helpful: I am particularly grateful to the people at the interlibrary department who helped me with a large number of loans at the very last minute. Finally I wish to thank my friend and colleague Emma Nygren who volunteered to proofread the footnotes at very short notice.

Thanks to a generous grant from Stiftelsen för internationalisering av högre utbildning och forskning (STINT), I had the opportunity to spend the winter of 2005/06 in Pisa. I profited greatly from spending an extended period of time in an intellectual environment other than my home department; and all the more so because of the great number of able Nietzsche scholars residing in and around Pisa. Whatever the merit of this dissertation is, I am positive that it would be considerably smaller without that Tuscan episode. I am therefore very grateful to STINT and especially to my more than generous host, Professor Giuliano Campioni. I believe that this dissertation testifies to the fact that I have learnt greatly from him. I would also like to thank Professor Giuseppe Invernizzi, who not only presented me with a copy of his study of the philosophy of pessimism (a book that is as important for the study of pessimism as it is difficult to obtain), but who also took a wintry Saturday off to give me a spectacular tour of the sights of Milan.

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Introduction

The author of a recent study of the history of pessimism maintains that the mentality of our age is so pessimistic that we have become blind to its merits: “We live in an era in which pessimism has become the norm, rather than the exception.” ¹ Another recent historian of pessimism opens his book by declaring that it is not an attack on, but rather an endorsement of, pessimism; upon which he somewhat complacently adds: “That this will strike most readers as perverse cannot be helped.” ² Is pessimism the unquestioned axiom of contemporary thought, or is it a subversive way of thinking that has been suppressed to the point of being considered a perversion? Although this is not the question I will attempt to answer in this study, it is one of the questions that motivate my investigation. But it is not the type of question that one can hope to answer through intellectual analysis. I share the conviction that Franco Volpi expresses in his study of nihilism: philosophical problems have a history rather than a solution.³ Therefore I believe we stand a better chance of understanding the problem of pessimism through its history than by attempting to decide which of the two descriptions of our time is correct.

What does it mean to describe an era as pessimistic? Does ‘pessimism’ mean the same thing when our age is considered pessimistic as when it is said to be subject to an “imperialism of optimism”?⁴ That seems rather unlikely; it seems that both commentators quoted above use the rhetorical potential inherent in the connotations of the word pessimism. They only use different sets of connotations. In order to understand the conflict between them we have to understand the logic of the connotations that they are using.

Do those countless persons who, upon hearing that I am writing a doctoral dissertation on the history of pessimism, react with a nervous laughter and an ironic comment such as “that sounds like a lot of fun” use the term pessimism in the same way as those equally countless others who respond with a confident “then you should interview me: I’m a convinced pessimist”? Does not the irony in the first case imply a conception of pessimism as incomprehensible, perhaps

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³ Franco Volpi: *Il nichilismo* (1996; rev. ed., Roma & Bari, 2004), p. 7: “Nutriamo nei confronti del nichilismo la stessa convinzione che vale per tutti i veri problemi filosofici: essi non hanno soluzione ma storia.” (“When confronting nihilism, we cherish the conviction valid for all true philosophical problems: they do not have a solution but they have a history.”)
abnormal? And does not confidence in the second case imply that they regard the pessimistic position as privileged in one sense or another?

Both these reactions echo the attitudes towards pessimism that were very typical in the period when pessimism was taken seriously as a philosophical problem. My guess is that the incompatibility of the reactions depends on the fact that pessimism is a word with very disparate associations. This study is an investigation into the period when pessimism was debated by professional philosophers in fiery pamphlets, and when heavy books predicting that the progress of mankind will eventually lead up to a situation in which the truth of pessimism is so widely recognised that the human race will choose auto-annihilation could not only be published, but even see ten new editions in its author’s lifetime. This, I believe, is the period and the debate in which the different connotations of pessimism were established. Connotations without which the reactions sketched above would be unintelligible.

The object of my study is the usage of the term pessimism in the mainly German pessimistic philosophical tradition that took form in the late 1860’s, inspired by Arthur Schopenhauer. I will attempt to determine what conceptual content the various pessimists and anti-pessimists attribute to pessimism, taking into consideration what associations and connotations of the term that they are using in their rhetoric. In particular, I will be investigating the relation to this tradition of its perhaps most creative critic, Friedrich Nietzsche.

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Pessimism is a relatively modern concept. The first recorded use of the term is from 1759 when an anonymous journalist defined pessimism as “une disposition de l’esprit à voir le mauvais côté des choses”; whereas pessimist was defined as “celui qui voit les choses en noir”. Both definitions occur in an article in the French magazine Observateur littéraire. The German form of the word, Pessimismus dates from 1776; in 1794 it was incorporated into the English by Coleridge. Through the course of the nineteenth century, the word appears in other languages as well: Italian in 1826; Swedish in 1845, to give but a couple of examples.

The credit for having coined the German term Pessimismus belongs to Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. In one of his Sudelbücher Lichtenberg laconically observed: “Der eine mit seinem Optimismus, der andere mit seinem Pessimismus.” The fact that Lichtenberg was the first to use the term is revealing. Let us recall

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7 Georg Christoph Lichtenberg: Sudelbücher I, in: Schriften und Briefe vol. I, ed. Wolfgang Promies (München, 1968), fragment F 236: “The one with his optimism, the other with his pessimism.”
Goethe’s advice on how to use his works: “Lichtenbergs Schriften können wir uns als der wunderbarsten Wünschelrute bedienen; wo er einen Spaß macht, liegt ein Problem verborgen.” This observation is not particularly funny should not fool us: where the dowsing rod dips only slightly, water might be hidden deep down. In all its brevity, Lichtenberg’s aphorism points to a problem that any scholar of pessimism will soon confront. The possibility of a mutual understanding of optimists and pessimists is very limited. The reader will see that pessimism, depending on the observer, has been described both as a mental illness and as an incontestable a priori truth.

By its etymology, pessimism is linked to its antonym. The term pessimism was obviously chosen to create associations to optimism. Optimism too is a neologism: it was coined in 1737 characterisation of Leibniz’s notion that ours is the best possible world. But it too was coined as a pejorative term. In 1753, the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften organized a prize contest concerning the tenability of optimism. The definition of optimism was simply “tout est bien”, “everything is good”, echoing Alexander Pope’s “Whatever is, is right”. Apparently, this contest was in reality directed against Leibniz, but as he was the founder of the Akademie, he could not be attacked in person. And the fact is that the Akademie decided against optimism. We will see that this is often the case: even among the staunchest opponents of pessimism, we will find very few who are comfortable with being characterised as optimists.

The etymology of pessimism signals that the term should be understood as an element of a dichotomy. The Latin root, pessimus, means ‘the worst’. Since optimism refers to the notion that ours is the best possible world, the etymology of pessimism contains an implicit reference to the notion that we inhabit the worst possible world. Some nineteenth-century thinkers did understand pessimism in this way, but it was by no means the majority.

Four notions of pessimism can be discerned in the mid-nineteenth century. Firstly, the original usage lived on, as it does still today. According to this usage, pessimism is a (psychological or at least psychologically rooted) tendency to believe in the worst possible outcome in any given situation. Such a notion of pessimism can be discerned in a number of late nineteenth century writers.

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Richard Wagner, for example, discussing the approaching Franco-Prussian war with his wife, holds that one’s pessimism cannot be black enough:

> Da er die Lage der Welt bespricht und von einem möglichen großen diesjährigen Durcheinander spricht, sagt Richard: “Selbst wenn man mit dem schwärzesten Pessimismus die Dinge erwartet, ist man zu optimistisch, denn die entstehen immer so halb und mit lauter derartigen Kompromissen, daß nur das Niederträchtige dabei gewinnt. Der einzige Trost ist, daß das Nichtswürdige auch nichts zu gründen vermag.”

The discussion of the Wagners shows that the term pessimism could be given a psychological interpretation in the nineteenth century, even by people for whom pessimism was a serious philosophical problem. But although there are examples of such a usage of the term, it is in fact a usage that on the whole is irrelevant to the pessimistic philosophers. Secondly, pessimism is sometimes given a historico-philosophical interpretation. Pessimism then refers to the belief that mankind grows worse with the development of society. On such a usage, pessimism is thus roughly synonymous to the term decline, or, in certain contexts, to the term degeneration. This is a concept that is largely irrelevant to Schopenhauer, whose philosophy is ahistorical, but that has some relevance to a number of the pessimists following him, particularly to Eduard von Hartmann. The third conception is the notion that our world is the worst possible world. We can call this the etymological conception of pessimism. Some of Schopenhauer’s contemporaries understand pessimism in this way, but we will see that the meaning of this notion is very unclear. The fourth conception is that pessimism is the notion that existence cannot be justified, which means as much as that non-existence is preferable to existence. It can be applied to the existence of the individual, or to the existence of the world. This, I will argue, is the conception used – explicitly or implicitly – by Schopenhauer, by Hartmann, but also by their critics.

General Thesis

The thesis that I will defend in this study is quite simple. I will argue that although it is necessary to differentiate the concept of pessimism and although the term was used in at least four different senses in the debate over pessimism in the late nineteenth century, the term nonetheless had a definite primary meaning in the pessimistic philosophical tradition. This primary meaning is the

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12 Cosima Wagner: *Die Tagebücher*, 2 vols., eds. Martin Gregor-Dellin & Dietrich Mack (München & Zürich, 1976–77), 12 January 1869, vol. 1, p. 31: “When discussing the situation of the world and the possibility of a great chaos later this year, Richard says: ‘Even if one awaits things with the blackest pessimism, one is too optimistic, for things always happen half-heartedly and with such an amount of compromises that only the mean and the low have something to gain. The only comfort is that that which is worthy of nothing lacks the power to found something lasting.’”
fourth of the interpretations that I outlined above: the notion that existence cannot be justified. I will further argue that this notion in the 1860’s came to be regarded as synonymous to the notion that the value of existence is negative. This means, simply, that non-existence is preferable to existence.

I will argue that this is the conception of pessimism explicitly or implicitly used by all the leading pessimistic philosophers as well as by their adversaries in the debate over pessimism that raged in the philosophical community during a few decades after the breakthrough of Arthur Schopenhauer in the late 1850’s. In the first part of the study, I will demonstrate that such a notion is an important premise in the systems of Schopenhauer, and of a number of his pessimistic followers: Eduard von Hartmann, Agnes Taubert, Julius Bahnsen, and Philipp Mainländer. I will also demonstrate that pessimism defined in terms of this notion is used by the adversaries of pessimism, although they value pessimism differently.

My intention with this study is to contribute not only to the intellectual history of the pessimistic philosophy but also to Nietzsche scholarship. For Nietzsche remains one of the most profound participants in the debate over pessimism: insightful and yet one of the sharpest critics. In the second part of the study I will focus on Nietzsche’s attitude to pessimism during the first stage of his career. I will argue that Nietzsche understood pessimism in the same way as the pessimistic philosophers did. I will demonstrate that pessimism, in Schopenhauer’s version, is a very important premise in the early works of Nietzsche (Die Geburt der Tragödie (1872) and the Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen (1873–76)). By examining the preliminary sketches that would eventually lead up to these works, I will argue that although Nietzsche does not attribute a specific meaning to the term pessimism until he read Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewussten in 1869, his use of the concept is in fact closer related to that of Schopenhauer than that of Hartmann and the other pessimistic contemporaries of Nietzsche’s.

The third part of the study will investigate the role of pessimism in the late phase of Nietzsche’s thinking. This part of the investigation differs slightly from the first two in terms of methodology. My purpose here is to demonstrate that pessimism is a relevant theme also in the late works in which Nietzsche’s interest in pessimism is generally taken to have waned. This means that the empirically oriented approach used in the first two parts is less functional here. Instead I have chosen an interpretative approach. The aim is to try to demonstrate that four themes of varying but nonetheless great importance to the late Nietzsche – the concepts nihilism and the eternal recurrence, and his treatment of Hamlet and Leopardi – are rooted in Nietzsche’s struggle with pessimism in the early phase of his philosophical development.

Generally speaking, one can say that the first part of the dissertation describes the range of positions towards pessimism that stood open to the thinkers who took part in the debate over pessimism in the late nineteenth century. The second and third parts demonstrate how Nietzsche’s general outlook on
pessimism changes over the years: in the early phase he is arguing in a way that acknowledges the truth of the premises of the pessimists and the value of pessimism, thus occupying a fairly unique position as an insightful and sympathetic adversary of pessimism; whereas in the late phase he has adopted a position and a rhetoric vis-à-vis pessimism that belongs to the mainstream of the adversaries of the pessimists.

On Methods and Delimitations

This is a study of pessimism as a philosophical concept. The object of my study is how the term pessimism came to be given a well-defined content. The concept of pessimism is therefore the object of study of this investigation: I am trying to establish how the concept and the term were used by the pessimistic philosophers and their adversaries; I am not trying to create a model for determining whether a philosopher should be characterised as a pessimist or not.

Methodologically, this study is indebted to the historico-philological school of Nietzsche research inspired primarily by Mazzino Montinari. It is therefore an attempt…

…nach seinen Quellen zu suchen, seine ideale Bibliothek zu rekonstruieren, die Zeitgenossen, mit denen er sich auseinandersetzte, kennenzulernen, sowie auch die realen Bindungen Nietzsches mit Individuen und Kreisen seiner Zeit, die entscheidend für seine spätere Wirkung werden sollte: Vor-, Mit- und Nachwelt Nietzsches.13

In other words my aim is to describe how Nietzsche was communicating with the pessimistic tradition. In order to do this, an analysis, as thorough as possible, of the central characteristics of that tradition is necessary.14 This in its turn requires the use of a less philological method. In the first part I am thus trying to lay bare the logical structure of the arguments in the debate over pessimism. The more conventionally philological second and third parts of the investigation depend on the results presented in the first part. This should, however, not be taken to mean that the first part is a mere background to the later parts.

My investigation is loosely inspired by R. G. Collingwood’s logic of question and answer, according to which any proposition can be understood as the an-

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13 Mazzino Montinari: Nietzsche lesen (Berlin & New York, 1982), p. 6: “to seek for his sources, to reconstruct his ideal library, to get to know those of his contemporaries for whom he had an interest, as well as the actual ties that Nietzsche had to individuals and circles in his time that were to have a seminal importance for his later influence: the world before, co-existent with, and after Nietzsche.”

14 “Kritische Quellenforschung”, Andreas Urs Sommer writes, “rekonstruiert den Verstehenshorizont, innerhalb dessen bestimmte Fragen und Antworten auftauchen.” Andreas Urs Sommer: “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil kritischer Quellenforschung. Einige Überlegungen zum Fall Nietzsches”, Nietzsche-Studien 29 (2000), p. 314. On the most abstract level, this is precisely what this study aims at: I am attempting to re-create Nietzsche’s pessimistic horizon of expectations.
swer to an (only seldom explicit) question. The task for the historian of philosophy becomes, given this approach, an attempt to discover and make explicit the questions to which a given thinker’s works is an answer. Collingwood, to be sure, had more far-reaching pretension for his logic than I am willing to subscribe to: to him, the logic of question and answer is an attempt to establish an alternative logic; whereas I am using it as a heuristic and analytical tool.\textsuperscript{15}

I have chosen to study the (mainly German) tradition of pessimism in the late nineteenth century. The objection might be raised that there was a pessimism before the term was invented. This is a valid objection. It can be argued that there existed a pessimism in the Greek Antiquity; indeed, no less a classics scholar than Hermann Diels wrote a booklet on ancient pessimism, in which Hegesias is described as “der konsequenteste Pessimist des Altertums”.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, it has been argued that there is a pessimistic trait in the Gnostic tradition.\textsuperscript{17} And assertions that Hindu or Buddhist thinking contains pessimistic elements are countless.\textsuperscript{18} My choice not to include a discussion of these traditions should not be taken to mean that I think this comparative approach illegitimate. But I am interested in the usage of the term and the concept pessimism, and the choice to exclude comparisons with earlier traditions is really a corollary to this interest.

Another reason for my choice not to a discussion of pessimism in antiquity or in other traditions that doubtlessly could enrich my dissertation is the feasibility of the task: the German pessimistic tradition is small enough for being possible to investigate in detail; it is important enough, in itself and because of Nietzsche’s relation to it, to be interesting to investigate; and although it is not virgin soil in terms of attention from the scholars, it is still possible to address the fundamentals of the tradition without simply treading in the footprints of others. Including material in languages I do not read or pertaining to religious traditions with whose outlook I am not familiar would force me to rely to too great a degree on the results and interpretations of others.

But feasibility is not the only reason. My choice to limit my investigation to the German tradition (including a small number of foreigners who either partake in the discussion or are generally interpreted as being central to the tradition) is partly methodologically motivated. The pessimistic thinkers of the late nineteenth century understand themselves as pessimists; the opponents of pessimism understand themselves as opponents. The pessimistic tradition in short


\textsuperscript{16} Hermann Diels: Der antike Pessimismus (Berlin, 1921), p. 25: “the most consequent pessimist in Antiquity”.

\textsuperscript{17} Michael Pauen discusses the Gnostic tradition and attempts to insert the pessimistic philosophers of the nineteenth century into it in his Dithyrambiker des Untergangs. Gnostizismus in Ästhetik und Philosophie der Moderne (Berlin, 1994).

\textsuperscript{18} Johann Joachim Gerstering compares Schopenhauer and his disciples to Hindu and Buddhist thought in his German Pessimism and Indian Philosophy. A Hermeneutic Reading (Jawahar Nagar, 1986).
is very self-reflective. By focusing on the thinkers that understand themselves as pessimists or as opponents of pessimism, I have been able to limit my investigation to an empirical investigation into the usage of the term and concept pessimism by the analysed thinkers. A comparison with earlier “pessimisms”, be they Greek, Gnostic, or Buddhist, would force me use pessimism as an analytical concept as well.

One or two readers might miss a section dedicated to Richard Wagner. Though such a section could very well have been included, there are also several reasons against including one. For my purposes it is especially important that although Wagner had a large interest in Schopenhauer’s philosophy and certainly contributed to its popularity with his use of Schopenhauerian themes in his music dramas, he was no philosopher, and one seeks in vain for a discussion of pessimism in his works. As my investigation takes the usage of the term pessimism as its starting point, this is reason enough to exclude him.

There are a number of practical reasons too. The sheer magnitude of the Wagner scholarship means that a serious attempt at a treatment of his works would require a study of its own. Since the question of how Wagner’s reading of Feuerbach is related to his reading of Schopenhauer would be on central importance, such a study would have to have a different angle from my approach. Furthermore: although Wagner had philosophical pretensions with his theoretical writings, the pessimistic themes are much more prominent in the dramas. Comparing his treatment of pessimistic themes in the dramas (and his mature works abound in them) to how writers who are philosophers in a fairly conventional sense of the word address pessimism would cause a number of intricate problems. In addition, Wagner’s relation to Schopenhauer has been addressed in a number of thorough studies. All things considered, I have therefore chosen to limit my investigation into Wagner as much as possible. This means that I will content myself with addressing a number of his works in my discussions of Nietzsche; and I will in addition draw upon Cosima Wagner’s diaries as a source for the biographical context to Nietzsche.

On Editions, Translations, and References

Although this dissertation is a contribution to the history of philosophy, it belongs to the philological rather than the philosophical current of the discipline. For this reason I quote all sources in the original language; and for this reason I have striven to use the translations and editions of writers that I am addressing (Shakespeare, Montaigne, Leopardi, for example) with which Nietzsche was

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familiar in the chapters dedicated to him. For the sake of readability, I supply English translations of all passages that are cited in the main body of the text. When I quote German or French texts in the footnotes, I have found it unnecessary to give translations. But when texts in other languages are quoted, translations of the quotations are always provided. For Nietzsche’s and Schopenhauer’s works, I have used extant translations, relying on the translations of Walter Kaufmann and R. G. Hollingdale for Nietzsche and E. F. J. Payne for Schopenhauer.\footnote{For details concerning the translations I have used, see the bibliography.} But in most cases I have translated the quotations myself: this is the case whenever no translator is given. There exist translations of some of the quoted writers – Hartmann’s \textit{Philosophie des Unbewussten} for example was translated into English by William Chatterton Coupland in 1884 – but I have often found it more convenient to translate the quoted passages myself than to chase after these aged translations that often have been out of print for more than a century.

In a number of the books that I am quoting, spacing is used to emphasize important words. For the sake of readability and consistency, I am italicising those words instead without further comment. On a few occasions Schopenhauer and Nietzsche use Greek words in passages that I quote. On those occasions I have transcribed them to the Latin alphabet.


When referring to Schopenhauer’s and Nietzsche’s books, the following abbreviations (the standard abbreviations) and principles are used:

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<th>Schopenhauer:</th>
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<tr>
<td>W I–II</td>
<td><em>Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung</em>, I–II (1818–1844)</td>
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<td>P I–II</td>
<td><em>Parerga und Paralipomena</em>, I–II (1851)</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>Über die vierwache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde (1813/1847)</td>
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<td>E I</td>
<td><em>Preisschrift über die Freiheit des Willens</em> (1839)</td>
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<td>E II</td>
<td><em>Preisschrift über die Grundlage der Moral</em> (1840)</td>
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When quoting Schopenhauer I am giving the chapter or section number and then the page number of Hübscher’s edition followed by the page number of Payne’s translation. W II, chapter 46, p. 683/583 thus refers to chapter 46 of the second volume of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, page 683 in Hübscher’s edition, corresponding to page 583 in Payne’s.

<table>
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<th>Nietzsche:</th>
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<td>NF</td>
<td>Posthumous fragment(s)</td>
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<td>ST</td>
<td>Socrates und die Tragödie (1870)</td>
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<td>DW</td>
<td>Die dionysische Weltanschauung (1870)</td>
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<td>GG</td>
<td>Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens (1870)</td>
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<td>SGT</td>
<td>Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie (1871)</td>
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<td>GT</td>
<td>Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik (1872)</td>
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<td>PHG</td>
<td>Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen (1872)</td>
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<td>UB</td>
<td>Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen, (1873–1876), consisting of:</td>
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<td>DS</td>
<td>David Strauss der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller (1873)</td>
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<td>HL</td>
<td>Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben (1874)</td>
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<td>SE</td>
<td>Schopenhauer als Erzieher (1874)</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>Richard Wagner in Bayreuth (1876)</td>
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<td>MA I–II</td>
<td>Menschliches, Allzumenschliches, I–II (1878–80)</td>
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<td>FW</td>
<td>Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (1882)</td>
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<td>ZA I–IV</td>
<td>Also sprach Zarathustra, I–IV (1883–86)</td>
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<td>JGB</td>
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<td>Der Fall Wagner (1888)</td>
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<td>Götzen-Dämmerung (1888)</td>
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<td>EH</td>
<td><em>Ecce homo</em> (1888, posthumously published 1908)</td>
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When quoting Nietzsche’s works, I give the abbreviation, followed by the section or aphorism number, then the number of the volume of the edition of his
works, and finally the page number. For example: GT 5, KSA 1, p. 47 refers to section 5 of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, page 47 of volume 1 in the *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*. Normally, page references are not given, but since the sections of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, the two works I will be quoting most frequently, are lengthy, I have chosen to include them. Due to the multitude of English editions, I have abstained from including page references from the translations used.

For the posthumous fragments, the abbreviation NF (for *nachgelassenes Fragment*) is used, followed by the number of the fragment, the dating of the fragment, the edition and the volume and the page number. NF 58 [29], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 470 thus refers to fragment 58 [29], dated to between the autumn of 1867 and the early part (*Frühjahr*) of 1868, from volume I: 4 of the *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, p. 470.
PART I:
THE PESSIMISTIC TRADITION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY
1. Schopenhauer and the Founding of Philosophical Pessimism

Pessimism as a philosophical problem belongs in the nineteenth century. The representatives of the pessimistic current in philosophy were active in that century, the activity culminating in the 1870’s and 80’s. There are twentieth-century thinkers to whom pessimism is a genuine philosophical problem: E. M. Cioran, for example, or Ulrich Horstmann. But they are few and far between, anachronistic remnants from a bygone century. Pessimistic philosophers are like steam engines: the fact that one can find one or two of them today should not be taken to mean that they are a phenomenon pertaining to our time.

Virtually all studies of philosophical pessimism take as their starting point the philosophy of Schopenhauer. This study is no exception. The term pessimism was, as we have seen, used before Schopenhauer; we will soon see that he uses it much less frequently than one could expect; and we will also see that there was to be no universal consensus concerning its conceptual content until well after his death. Still, it was with Schopenhauer that pessimism became a philosophical problem. Schopenhauer’s metaphysical system is therefore the obvious starting-point for an investigation into the history of the philosophy of pessimism.

But before we turn to our study of Schopenhauer and his notion of pessimism, we shall see how the pessimistic tradition has been understood by earlier scholars.

1.1 Previous Research on the Philosophy of Pessimism

Five modern monographs are dedicated to the history pessimistic philosophy. One of these, Giuseppe Invernizzi’s *Il pessimismo tedesco dell’Ottocento* (1994), deals exclusively with the German nineteenth century pessimists and their opponents. His is the most thorough examination of this tradition. Two other books, Michael Pauen’s *Pessimismus* (1997) and Ludger Lütkehaus’s *Nichts* (1999), are primarily discussing the same German tradition, but they both attempt to place pessimism in somewhat larger diachronic and synchronic contexts. The fourth study, Joshua Foa Dienstag’s *Pessimism* (2006), differs by regarding pessimism as an international phenomenon. The fifth, Johann Gerstering’s *German Pessimism and Indian Philosophy* (1986), is a comparative study of pessimistic elements in
Schopenhauer and some of the other German pessimists on the one hand, and corresponding elements in Buddhist and Hindu thought on the other.

Giuseppe Invernizzi’s *Il pessimismo tedesco dell’Ottocento* is the most exhaustive investigation of the pessimistic tradition in philosophy.\(^\text{21}\) His book attributes greater importance to the adversaries of pessimism than any of the other studies do. Although Invernizzi explicitly denies that his bibliography is complete, his is the study of the pessimistic philosophy that takes the largest number of minor writers who comment upon Schopenhauer and the other pessimists into account. Invernizzi’s book is by far the most thorough investigation of the debate around philosophical pessimism. It is empirically oriented rather than aiming at proving a thesis. And it is a most thorough investigation of the tradition. This renders the book a very valuable tool. The fact that none of the other studies on pessimism refer to Invernizzi’s book is understandable: not only is it in Italian, it is also sold out since a long time. Still, it is unfortunate that the book is not more widely discussed. For *Il pessimismo tedesco dell’Ottocento* has all the virtues of a thorough and exhaustive scholarly study.

An important aspect of Michael Pauen’s *Pessimismus* is to refute the widely held notion that pessimism is a reaction to a crisis. Pauen sees an important pre-requisite for pessimism in a change of perspective, which he maintains took place in the nineteenth century. This was a change towards the perspective of the individual and affected the view of suffering and evil. Pauen maintains that whereas earlier thinkers had tended to justify suffering with reference to a larger unity – be it God, the state, or mankind – this justification became impossible as the claims of traditional metaphysics were undermined as a result of a process of secularisation. In the absence of such a unity, the suffering encountered by an individual became philosophically problematic. Once my suffering is not justified by a greater common good, the suffering becomes difficult to justify at all.

But this change of perspective is not in itself pessimistic, it is a historical pre-supposition for pessimism. A further pre-requisite can be found in a heritage from the traditional metaphysics. Pessimism presupposes that the world can be explained by a single principle. Furthermore, Pauen regards an aesthetic and rhetorical element as significant to pessimism: the pessimists incorporate stylized descriptions of pain and suffering into their theories. This is termed sekundärer Pessimismus, and is a central aspect of Pauen’s view of pessimism. Pauen defines pessimism in the following way:

Kurz zusammengefaßt ließe sich ‘Pessimismus’ daher bestimmen als eine metaphysische oder kulturhistorische Deutung, die auf einem kosmologischen oder geschichtsphilosophischen Hintergrund zu einer radikal negativen Bewertung des Bestehenden kommt. Dabei beruft sich die Bewertung zwar in der Regel auf

\(^{21}\) Giuseppe Invernizzi: *Il pessimismo tedesco dell’Ottocento. Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Bahnsen e Mainländer e i loro avversari*, Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell’Università degli studi di Milano (Firenze, 1994).
Pessimism is on Pauen’s account not a pure concept. It is a philosophical concept combined with an important rhetorical ingredient, and it can be either metaphysically or historically motivated.

Ludger Lütkehaus’ *Nichts* has a partly different scope than the other books discussed here. Whereas particularly Invernizzi’s, but also Pauen’s, books primarily are studies of the history of the pessimistic philosophical tradition, Lütkehaus has written a book that is a critical assessment of the seldom premeditated evaluation of existence (*Sein*) as better than nothingness (*Nichts*), an evaluation that Lütkehaus regards as fundamental to most modern Western thinking. His book is less conventionally academic, more personal. But the greater part of the book consists of a historical investigation into how philosophers from Leibniz and onwards have discussed the question of why the world has come to exist. Lütkehaus’ appeal for a moderate nihilism is sympathetic, but in this context the historical background is more important. Lütkehaus, just like Pauen, begins his discussion in the early modern era and traces pessimism into the twentieth century. Lütkehaus is much more exhaustive, though, and he follows the pessimistic and nihilistic themes further into the philosophy of the twentieth century.

The discussion of pessimism in Joshua Foa Dienstag’s recent book *Pessimism* differs from the other studies discussed in this section in a number of ways. First of all: whereas they all regard Schopenhauer as the founder of modern philosophical pessimism, Dienstag maintains that this credit belongs to Rousseau. Secondly: whereas the other commentators all dedicate considerable space to the German pessimistic philosophers of the 1870’s, Dienstag disregards everyone but Schopenhauer and Nietzsche completely.

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22 Michael Pauen: *Pessimismus. Geschichtsphilosophie, Metaphysik und Moderne von Nietzsche bis Spengler* (Berlin, 1997), p. 17: “Briefly summarized, ‘pessimism’ can thus be defined as a metaphysical or cultural-historical interpretation that against a cosmological or historico-philosophical background comes to a radically negative valuation of the state of things. Although the valuation in this process generally appeals to the perspective of the individual subject, the theory on the whole claims to make objective statements on the reality and the historical process; the metaphysical pessimism even believes itself to have ventured to the ‘principle of being’.”


24 To some degree this is no doubt a result of ignorance on his part, as for example when he categorically claims: “No pessimist recommends suicide (though Leopardi comes close on a number of occasions).” (Dienstag, p. 37) The fact is that two pessimistic philosophers actually do advocate suicide: Julius Bahnsen and Philipp Mainländer. There is no mention of either of them in Dienstag’s book. A similar remarkable ignorance is Dienstag’s statement that Henry Vyverberg’s *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment* (1958) is “the best (virtually the only) twentieth-century work” on pessimism as a tradition in intellectual history or political philosophy (p. 6, footnote 3). Surely the studies by Invernizzi, Pauen, Lütkehaus, and Gerstering must count for something? Dienstag does not quote any of them.
Dienstag holds pessimism to be a fundamentally modern phenomenon, connected with the modern notion of linear time. He maintains that all of the thinkers that he present as pessimists – Rousseau, Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Freud, Nietzsche, Unamuno, Cioran, and Camus – regard linear time as a source of unavoidable suffering. These thinkers are divided into four subgroups: cultural pessimists (to whom “the burdens of time appear particularly in the realms of mores and behaviors”); metaphysical pessimists (who “identified time as a fundamental structure of human experience and described it as a problem”); existential pessimists (who combine elements of the two previous types of pessimism into an ironic attitude to life); and finally Nietzsche is given a category of his own, labelled Dionysian pessimism.25

The definition of pessimism in terms of time is problematic in a number of ways. It is highly anachronistic, taking no account whatsoever what the term meant to the thinkers to whom pessimism was a genuine problem. The result is that Dienstag’s book disregards most thinkers who identify themselves with the tradition that his book purports to be an investigation of, and replaces them with others who do not. Furthermore, a definition in terms of time overemphasizes the role of time in the works of the various pessimists. It is true that time is one of the defining characteristics of individuality to Schopenhauer: but his real concern is the will. Time is only secondarily a problem. It is true that time is a factor in Leopardi’s, Schopenhauer’s, and Nietzsche’s view of boredom as an existential predicament. But once again, time is only secondarily a problem.

Johann Gerstering’s study *German Pessimism and Indian Philosophy* is an attempt to compare a number of pessimists with Buddhist and Hindu thought. He is especially interested in the responses of the German pessimists to and interpretations of key concepts in the Asian traditions, concepts such as nirvana and samsara. Gerstering defines pessimism according to its etymology: “the philosophical doctrine that this world is the worst possible, founded by A. Schopenhauer in 1819”.26

Gerstering dedicates considerable space to Schopenhauer as well as to some of the less known nineteenth-century pessimists whose acquaintance the reader will make in the course of this chapter. His book demonstrates that although Indian religious thought was no pre-requisite for the formation of a pessimistic tradition in Germany, it did influence the form of German pessimism. But in the end, the German pessimists used the Indian philosophy as a stimulus to reflection: they were fascinated by a tradition that ultimately was very different from their own.

Apart from these five monographs, two important articles on the history of the concept of pessimism deserve mention: Volker Gerhardt’s “Pessimismus” in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* and Hans Stäglich’s “Zur Geschichte

25 Dienstag, pp. 42 ff., quotations from p. 42 and p. 43 respectively.
26 Gerstering, p. 25, footnote 1.
The pessimistic philosophers exerted an important influence also on literature and the arts. There are a number of studies dedicated to this influence. In two books, Walter Hof discusses pessimistic and nihilistic themes in the German literature from 1848 to the Second World War. The influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on a number of poets, and also on the Zeitgeist is an important theme. Hof offers a simple definition of pessimism and nihilism that comes close to my own, with the important difference that Hof regards them as Weltanschauungen rather than philosophical concepts:


Wolfgang Schömel’s psychoanalytically oriented study *Apokalyptische Reiter sind in der Luft* (1985) discusses the relation of Schopenhauer’s, Nietzsche’s and Hartmann’s philosophy to pessimistic strands in German nineteenth century literature. Schömel deliberately focuses on now forgotten, epigone poets whom he maintains are particularly important to understand the mentality of a past age; of special interest to the present study are his portraits of Robert Hamerling and Paul Heyse, prominent poets of a pessimistic bent, whose translations of Leopardi contributed greatly to Leopardi’s posthumous success in Germany and to the interpretations of him as a pessimist. However, a tendency to psychological speculation greatly reduces the usefulness of his book.

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29 Hof: *Pessimistisch-nihilistische Strömungen*, p. 1: “Nihilism will be characterised as a Weltanschauung to which the ‘world’ and ‘life’ are meaningless and thus vain. It would be better, the nihilist holds, if the vanities did not exist. Pessimism regards ‘world’ and ‘life’ not as vain, but rather as bad, evil, painful, thus giving it a negative power. This world, holds the pessimist, should not be, but there should be a good, joyful, ‘healthy’ world.” ‘Nichtig’, here ‘vain’ and ‘vanities’, is a problematic term to translate. It is an adjective constructed out of the noun ‘Nichts’, ‘nothingness’.
31 Although he is today largely forgotten, Heyse was in fact once considered so prominent a poet that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1910.
32 At times, Schömel’s book reads like a parody of the psychoanalytic approach to the study of literature. When discussing the dramatist Ernst Adam von Wildenbruch, for example: “Es darf vermutet werden, daß die stets auftauchenden knabenhaft schönen Männer in Wildenbruchs
When it comes to his understanding of pessimism, Schömel regards it as a form of reaction to the idea of progress, turning it into a form of cultural criticism.

There are also a number of studies where pessimism in other contexts than nineteenth century philosophy and literature is discussed. Jeffrey Paul Von Arx’s Progress and Pessimism (1985), dealing with ideas of progress and decline in Victorian Britain, is a prominent example. Another example is Henry Vyverberg’s Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment (1958). These studies are of relatively little importance to my investigation.

Finally, there is a group of books that see our age as afflicted with pessimism, and that seek to cure this ailment. Arthur Herman’s The Idea of Decline in Western History (1997), quoted above, is one example. The undisguised moralism of Herman’s book renders it relatively useless from a scholarly point of view.

My investigation differs from those undertaken by Lütkehaus, Invernizzi, et alia, in a number of respects. Firstly, I pay greater heed than those other scholars (with the exception of Hans Stäglich) to how the usage of the term and the concept pessimism change over the decades. Secondly, I attempt to take the nineteenth-century connotations of pessimism into consideration, in order to achieve a more nuanced interpretation of the rhetoric involved in the pessimism debate. This means that although my investigation too is predominantly intra-philosophical, it is so to a lesser degree than those of the others. The first of these differences will manifest itself through the course of this chapter and the next; the second will be a little clearer from the following discussion of how the connotations of pessimism were established in the pre-philosophic usage of the term.

1.2 Some Reflections on the Early History of Pessimism

A considerable part of the confusion that we touched upon in the introduction has its roots in this difference, and not least in the very terms that were used when pessimism was discussed. The pessimistic thinkers as well as their adversaries employ a rhetoric that uses allusions to the eighteenth-century usage. We
have seen that the word pessimist was originally defined metaphorically as “he who sees things in black”. This definition is an obvious attempt to link pessimism with melancholy. The effects of melancholy have traditionally been described in the exact same terms. Take Robert Burton’s description in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621):

> [A]s he that looketh through a piece of red glass judgeth everything he sees to be red, corrupt vapours mounting from the body to the head, and distilling again from thence to the eyes, when they have mingled themselves with the watery crystal which receiveth the shadow of things to be seen, make all things appear of the same colour, which remains in the humour that overspreads our sight, as to melancholy men all is black, to phlegmatic men all is white, etc.36

The excessive black bile (in the case of natural melancholy) or black fumes from scorched substances (in the case of melancholy adust) circulating in the body of the melancholy person spread to the eyes. The melancholic, therefore, *voit les choses en noir*. To Burton, and to the ancient physicians whose works his book is a compilation of, this is a material physiological process. To the anonymous journalist behind the first definition of pessimism, it is a metaphor. Still, this is an important indication of the vicinity of pessimism to melancholy. The very phrasing of the original definition of pessimism thus creates an intimate link between pessimism and melancholy. By defining pessimism in terms of melancholy, it is implied that pessimism is a form of mental illness. But melancholy is more than just an illness. It has an ambiguity to it: through Plato’s notion of a divine madness, and the Aristotelian account of all great men as melancholics, melancholy has an air of genius, of creativity, and of subversiveness to it.37 For alongside the medical, predominantly psychopathological, melancholy discourse, there is an artistic tradition in which melancholy is seen as a special aptitude for creativity and intelligence.38

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38 The connotations of this aspect of the melancholy tradition, the connotations that the pessimists allude to, have been succinctly summed up by Andreas Walker. Walker seeks to trace these connotations to their Aristotelian roots: “Das Problem XXX,1 ist insofern revolutionär, als dass es den Anfang einer langen Kette von Schriften darstellt, welche den geistig-kreativen Menschen ein eigenes Gemütsschaffen attestieren. Damit wird den Philosophen und Dichtern, den Staatsmännern und Künstlern eine Aura des Abgründigen, Tiefsinnigen und Unheimlichen verliehen, die einerseits Unbehagen und Abscheu hervorruft, andererseits aber ebenso anzieht und fasziniert, weil sie Unsicherheit und Befremden hervorruft. Die Rede von Genie und Wahnsinn konnte erst durch das Problem XXX,1 anheben.” Andreas Walker: *Die Melancholie der Philosophie* (diss. 2001; Wien, 2002), pp. 39 ff.
One of the leading historians of pessimism, the German philosopher Michael Pauen, argues that the concepts of melancholy and pessimism must be kept apart strictly: “Deutlich zu unterschieden ist der Pessimismus auch von der Melancholie, obwohl hier ebenfalls gemeinsame Züge sichtbar werden. Doch während der Pessimist mit dem Anspruch auf objektive Wahrheit auftritt, wird die Melancholie als subjektive Prädisposition, gar als eine Krankheit begriffen.” To be sure, there are a number of differences between pessimism and melancholy. But the belief that the two subjects can be kept apart this sharply rests upon a simplification of the situation. In order to uphold this distinction one must accept the self-description of the pessimist as correct, and accept the description of melancholy presented by its adversaries. The distinction presupposes that we accept the pathological status of melancholy as given. And a distinction between pessimism as a philosophical concept and melancholy as a pathological predisposition is easy to uphold. But the distinction is challenged by anti-pessimists who regard pessimism as rooted in a pathological psychology and by melancholics who regard their melancholy as a special disposition to reach a true understanding of how the world and man function.

When adopting the perspective of the adversary, both pessimism and melancholy are an obsession with *le mauvais côté des choses*, an obsession that borders to insanity. From within, however, pessimism and melancholy manifest themselves as a special ability to see through the lies and conventions of society. The melancholic who embraces his or her melancholy sees it as the prerequisite for a form of pessimism; whereas the anti-pessimist sees pessimism as a form of melancholy. Both the melancholic and the anti-pessimist challenge the boundary. The distinction that Pauen wants is problematic because of the dual traditions of melancholy, and due to the fact that both pessimists and anti-pessimists take the associations of pessimism to melancholy for granted.

A more pressing need than upholding a distinction between pessimism and melancholy thus seems to me to be to acknowledge that pessimists and anti-pessimists alike use the connotations of melancholy for rhetorical purposes. The debate over pessimism in the nineteenth century was a philosophical debate to be sure, but both sides resort to a rhetoric in which the vicinity of pessimism and melancholy is of central importance. A more fruitful approach to the study of pessimism might therefore be to regard the pessimistic philosophical tradition as a rather special stage of the history of melancholy. The philosophy of pessimism is an attempt to create philosophy out of an experience that under certain circumstances is deemed pathological.

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39 Pauen: *Pessimismus*, p. 17: “Pessimism must be clearly distinguished from melancholy too, although common traits are visible here as well. But while the pessimist raises claims to objective truth, melancholy is understood as a subjective predisposition, indeed as a disease.”

40 Hans Stäglich notes a continuity between melancholy and pessimism mediated through the word ‘Schwarzseher’, but as he is unaware of the very first definition (he lists 1793 as the first occurrence of the word in French) his connection remains intuitive. The connection is in fact stronger than Stäglich was aware of. Stäglich, pp. 29 f.
The philosophy of Schopenhauer, the primordial pessimist, is a case at hand. To his critics he epitomised the attempt to found a philosophical system upon a pathological way of thinking; to himself he had been able to see with more clarity and less bias than earlier generations of thinkers how the world functions.

1.3 The Pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer

Philosophy begins with wonder. On the view of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), wonder is the product of suffering and death. If we lived for ever without suffering, then we would have no reason to think about the world. Death and suffering create in us the need to understand how the world is made up. Philosophy, as opposed to the sciences that each deal with an aspect of the world, has been set the task of interpreting the world in its totality. Since the world in its totality is characterized by death and suffering, so is philosophy: “die Philosophie hebt, wie die Ouvertüre zum ‘Don Juan’ mit einem Mollakkord an.”

Schopenhauer often argues by means of images and metaphors. He typically does this when his reasoning touches upon the limits of language. Of course this means that the metaphors are particularly abundant in topics that are of great importance to him. The necessity of suffering is such a topic.

In this section I will set out to investigate Schopenhauer’s use of the concept pessimism. I will attempt to demonstrate that the concept is present even before the term is. I will do this by trying to answer three questions. Firstly: How does Schopenhauer define pessimism? Secondly: How does he argue for its truth? Thirdly: What is the function of pessimism in his system? But first of all we should see how Schopenhauer’s pessimism has been addressed by the Schopenhauer scholars.

Interpretations of Pessimism Among the Scholars

We will see that ‘pessimism’ would eventually be rather narrowly defined. But that was in the late 1860’s; in Schopenhauer’s day this was not yet the case. This chapter will demonstrate what aspects of Schopenhauer’s philosophy that were picked up by the later pessimists and their adversaries. But first we shall see how his pessimism is interpreted by the Schopenhauer scholars.

That Schopenhauer was the founding father as well as the most important representative of the philosophy of pessimism is all but undisputed. An exception, as we have seen, is Joshua Foa Dienstag, who holds Rousseau to be the father and Nietzsche to be the leading representative of pessimism.

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41 W II, chapter 17, p. 200/171: “Philosophy, like the overture to Don Juan, starts with a minor chord.”
42 An exception, as we have seen, is Joshua Foa Dienstag, who holds Rousseau to be the father and Nietzsche to be the leading representative of pessimism.
is, according to most critics, the central problem of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Still, surprisingly little has been said about how he understood pessimism.

Among modern scholars, a tendency to implicitly assume that pessimism had the same content as it does today can be discerned. Several prominent Schopenhauer scholars are guilty in this matter. Arthur Hübscher dedicates a chapter to optimism and pessimism in his important biographical study Denker gegen den Strom (1973); and although he seems to regard pessimism as the central problem in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, he does not discuss Schopenhauer’s use of the concept.43 It is never made clear whether he considers it to be something beyond an anti-optimism, and it is never made clear whether he considers Leibniz’s philosophy or the notion of progress to be the form of optimism that it is directed against. Similarly, Eberhard Fromm dedicates an entire book to a discussion of Schopenhauer as an intellectual pathfinder of pessimism without discussing how Schopenhauer’s use of the concept differs from how it is used today.44 I do not mean to say that Hübscher or Fromm understand pessimism as it understood today, but since they refrain from discussing the matter, the reader is left with the impression that the use of the concept has not changed since Schopenhauer’s times. The consequences of such a belief become clear if we turn to a widely read book by Bryan Magee.

Pessimism, Bryan Magee states in his The Philosophy of Schopenhauer (1983), is a way of looking at the world, and is logically independent of all general philosophy. Schopenhauer was a pessimist, and pessimism is compatible with his philosophy, but so is optimism: “The traditional identification of him in terms of his pessimism is largely irrelevant to a serious consideration of him as a philosopher: I am tempted to say that it is a view of his writings which leaves his philosophy out.”45 Magee’s argument hinges on a particular conception of philosophy: by delimiting philosophy in this way, Magee comes close to subscribing to the conception of philosophy of the logical positivists. But his understanding of pessimism clearly is no less important to Magee’s argument than his notion of philosophy. Unlike Hübscher and Fromm, Magee does offer the reader a definition of sorts of pessimism. Magee relates the story of how he as a child was taught the difference between an optimist and a pessimist:

Two men who are drinking together shoot simultaneous glances at the bottle they are sharing, and one thinks to himself: “Ah good, it is still half full” while at the same moment the other thinks: “Oh dear, it’s half empty already”. The point is, of course, that they would have no argument about how much wine there is in the bottle, or about the accuracy of any measurement, photograph or drawing, and yet the same fact is being not only seen but responded to in completely different ways.46

43 Hübscher: Denker gegen den Strom, chapter VIII.
This is a notion of pessimism that comes close to the eighteenth century use of the concept: Magee’s pessimist sees the world in black. And this is how the term is normally used today. But it is not how it was used by Schopenhauer. If we assume that Schopenhauer understood pessimism in this way we cannot get his philosophy right.

Andreas Dörpinghaus’s dissertation *Mundus pessimus* (1997) does not presuppose an anachronistic interpretation of pessimism. To Dörpinghaus, it is Schopenhauer’s notion of this world as the worst of all possible worlds that constitutes pessimism. He maintains that Schopenhauer’s pessimism is an attempt to refute optimism in its Leibnitian form. Although Schopenhauer occasionally uses the word pessimism to describe his own philosophy, Dörpinghaus means that Schopenhauer’s pessimism always remains criticism of optimism in the first place: “Jedoch kann sich der Pessimismusbegriff nie von der Optimismus-Kritik lösen. Es bleibt bis zum Schluß ein antithetisches Verhältnis. Der Nicht-Optimismus bleibt die Negativ-Formel zur Bestimmung der Schopenhauerschen Philosophie.”

An interpretation similar to Dörpinghaus’ is offered by Rudolf Malter. Alluding to Schopenhauer’s harsh judgment of Leibniz in the title, Malter discusses Schopenhauer’s criticism of Leibniz in “Eine wahrhaft ruchlose Denkungsart”. Schopenhauers Kritik der Leibnizschen Theodizee”. Although pessimism is a theme only implicitly considered, this is still an important paper to the present discussion. Malter holds that Schopenhauer considered Leibniz to be his antipode, and that Schopenhauer’s notion of a renunciation of the world is his counterpart to Leibniz’ theodicy: “Das heißt Optimismus gegen Pessimismus gestellt. So sieht Schopenhauer den Philosophen Leibniz: als Antipoden schlechthin, – und er sieht richtig.”

Malter’s comments on his use of the term pessimism are not very extensive, but by placing optimism and pessimism in the context of Leibniz’ theodicy and Schopenhauer’s criticism of it, he comes close to Dörpinghaus’ view of pessimism as the thesis of this world as the worst of all possible worlds. Leibniz was an optimist. Schopenhauer was a pessimist. Leibniz proposed a theodicy; Schopenhauer criticized that theory. This interpretation has, as we will see, some textual support; and furthermore it has some support from Schopenhauer’s contemporaries.

At least four commentators understand pessimism as the notion that non-existence is preferable to existence. But none of them get all the details right. Christopher Janaway comes close to defining pessimism in terms of whether

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47 Andreas Dörpinghaus: *Mundus Pessimus. Untersuchungen zum philosophischen Pessimismus Arthur Schopenhauers* (diss. Duisburg; Würzburg, 1997), pp. 38 f.: “But the concept of pessimism can never be distinguished from the criticism of optimism. It remains an antithetical relation to the end. Non-optimism remains the negative formula for a characterisation of the Schopenhauerian philosophy.”

48 Rudolf Malter: “Eine wahrhaft ruchlose Denkungsart’. Schopenhauers Kritik der leibnizschen Theodizee”, *Studia leibinitiana* XVIII (1986), p. 179: “That means juxtaposing optimism and pessimism. This is how Schopenhauer sees Leibniz the philosopher: as the very antipode, – and he sees correctly.”
existence is preferable to non-existence in the paper “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism”: “Thus, with regard to pessimism, I shall take Schopenhauer’s prime question to be: What value does existence have? and more particularly: What is the value of my being what I am?” Schopenhauer, we will see, states that the aim of our existence is the knowledge that it would be better not to exist; Janaway, on my view correctly, takes this to be the answer to that prime question. His paper is thus an investigation how Schopenhauer comes to that conclusion. Janaway finds it difficult to accept Schopenhauer’s conclusion: “it is difficult to see why I should reject or think badly of existence simply on the ground of its containing some suffering.”

In a paper on Schopenhauer’s optimism, really an attempt to find a way to avoid the pessimism using Schopenhauer’s own premises, David E. Cartwright comments on his pessimism: “Schopenhauer’s pessimism is not based on any observations concerning those things which may accidentally – every once in a while – frustrate us. It is based on his analysis of our fundamental condition. To live is to desire; to desire is to suffer. To suffer, however, is not worthwhile. This meant for Schopenhauer that our life was not worthwhile.” To my mind, this is fully correct; this is how Schopenhauer argues for pessimism. For reason that will become apparent, I am less convinced by his attempt to create an optimistic alternative to pessimism that respects Schopenhauer’s premises.

Julian Young adopts a similar position to Cartwright in “A Schopenhauerian Solution to Schopenhauerian Pessimism”, although his paper to a certain degree is written against Cartwright’s. But he attempts to distance Schopenhauer’s system yet another step from metaphysics. He holds Schopenhauer’s arguments for pessimism to be strong, but not so strong that his claims that life can never be bearable are valid. Thus Young proposes to use Schopenhauer’s philosophy to offer a “this-worldly solution to pessimism”. This solution can be described as a form of Epicureanism, a life characterized by altruism, pursuit of knowledge, and creative activities.

The three studies by Janaway, Cartwright and Young all attempt to establish Schopenhauer’s use of the concept pessimism more or less as I do. But there is one important difference. As we will see, all three of them neglect the difference between abstract and intuitive knowledge, and hence between pessimism and asceticism in Schopenhauer’s philosophy. The full importance of this will eventually be clear to the reader; suffice it here to say that Schopenhauer’s pessimism is more radical than they assume.

50 Ibid., p. 332.
A position fairly similar to that of Janaway *et alia* is developed by Mark Migotti in “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism and the Unconditioned Good”. Migotti holds that the central aspect of Schopenhauer’s pessimism is the “prohairetic thesis”, by which he refers to “the claim that life is not choiceworthy”, or that no human life can be preferable to non-existence. However, Migotti argues that since there is a will-less state that is not painful (the experience of art), and since Schopenhauer presupposes that suffering and pleasure are mutually exclusive, life can actually be preferable to death; it is only prior to life that non-existence is preferable. As my discussion of Schopenhauer will show, I take him to mean that the aesthetic state is actually a form of non-existence. This in its turn means that I take Schopenhauer’s view of the suffering inherent in life is more radical than Migotti believes.

Michael Pauen dedicates a chapter to Schopenhauer in his study *Pessimismus* (1997). Pauen regards pessimism as a radically negative interpretation of being (*Sein*) that was a result of a change of perspective with regard to suffering. Pauen’s discussion of Schopenhauer is aimed at illustrating this thesis. Therefore he lays great stress on the fact that Schopenhauer’s pessimism is based on metaphysical considerations rather than empirical studies (on Pauen’s terminology: *sekundärer Pessimismus*). But Pauen also holds that Schopenhauer and the other pessimists hold on to an important premise of optimist metaphysics:

Tatsächlich erweist sich der Schopenhauersche ‘Wille’ in seiner Allmacht als *Abbild*, in seiner Verworfenheit und Ignoranz als *Gegenbild* jenes Gottes, dessen systematischen Rolle er übernimmt. An die Stelle des schlechthin Guten tritt das radikal Böse, das aufgrund seiner Allmacht die beste gleich in die schlechteste aller möglichen Welten verwandelt.

Pauen’s book is a very important work on the history of pessimist philosophy. He has done a formidable job positioning pessimism within the history of modern metaphysics. However, here his diachronic approach makes him seek similarities where he should look for differences. For the will stands in a completely different relation to Schopenhauer’s system than God does to the world in a Christian philosophy. The Schopenhauerian ‘will’ stands in a metonymical relation to the world. For lack of a better word, Schopenhauer names the thing in itself ‘will’ as the human will is an *Erscheinung* of the will experienced from the inside. This fact enables Schopenhauer – at least that is what he claims – a certain, albeit indirect, access to the thing in itself. The will is transcendental. God stands in another relation to the world: God is transcendent.

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54 Pauen: *Pessimismus*, p. 112: “In its omnipotence the Schopenhauerian ‘will’ actually turns out to be the *reflection* of, and in its depravity and ignorance the *contrasting picture* of God, whose systematic role it takes over. The place of the absolute good is taken by the radical evil, which immediately turns the best world into the worst of all possible worlds by means of its omnipotence.” Pauen here resorts to visual metaphors (*Abbild*, *Gegenbild*) that are difficult to render into English.
Schopenhauer’s will and the Christian God means confounding two very different concepts. This means that although Schopenhauer and his followers did try to reduce the world to one principle, this one principle is so fundamentally different from the principle of earlier metaphysicians that it makes no sense to subsume them under the same heading. Pauen, it seems to me, confounds Christianity with German idealism.

Ludger Lütkehaus’ interpretation of Schopenhauer’s pessimism unites the anti-theodicy with the notion that life is something that should not be. This, I think is fundamentally correct. However, he holds that the nothingness that the ascetic aspires to actually justifies existence on Schopenhauer’s view: “Gerade die Nichtigkeit und das Leiden des Lebens macht es für die Zwecke der Erlösung zum besten aller möglichen Leben.” This, Lütkehaus concludes, means that life is indeed justified: “Nun ist das Leben, zuvor das Rechtfertigungsbedürfste, aber nicht zu Rechtfertigende, ganz und gar gerechtfertigt.”

To Invernizzi, the basis of Schopenhauer’s pessimism is moralistic: it is found in Schopenhauer’s thesis “che il mondo – considerato spassionatamente – non dovrebbe esistere, ovvero che il non essere del mondo sarebbe in sé più positivo – o comunque meno negativo – del suo esistere”. This leads Invernizzi to conclude, like Lütkehaus, that the existence of the world is a means to the negation of the will.

* * *

The Schopenhauer scholars can be divided into three groups with regard to how they look upon Schopenhauer’s pessimism. The first group understands pessimism more or less as the term is normally used today: as a (psychological) tendency to assume the worst possible outcome of any given situation. This, I maintain, is an anachronistic usage of the concept, a usage which hinders a correct understanding of Schopenhauer. The second group understands pessimism as the notion that ours is the worst of all possible worlds. This is a usage with a long history: we will see that an important contemporary critic of Schopenhauer adheres to it. It has some textual support too: Schopenhauer does express this opinion. But such an interpretation either diminishes the radicality of Schopenhauer’s pessimism, reducing it to a mere anti-optimism, or is in need of further interpretation. In the latter case it is more often than not subsumed under the

55 Lütkehaus, p. 217: “Precisely the nothingness and suffering of life makes it to the best of possible lives for the purpose of redemption.” “Hence life, previously in need of justification but impossible to justify, is now completely justified.” A similar interpretation is offered by Ortrun Schulz: Schopenhauers Kritik der Hoffnung (Frankfurt/M., Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2002), pp. 124 ff. To Schulz, there is a form of hope that is compatible with pessimism: namely transcendent hope (transzendente Hoffnung), a hope of nothingness. If life is hell (“Die Hölle – das ist das Leben selbst.” p. 126) then this is the only form of hope that does not bind us to existence.

56 Invernizzi, p. 32: “that the world – considered dispassionately – ought not to exist, or that the non-being of the world would in it self be more positive – or at least less negative – than its existence.”
third category. The third group interprets pessimism as the notion that non-existence is preferable to existence. This is the way the concept was used by the pessimists of the 1870’s, and therefore it is the most relevant usage for anyone interested in the reception and influence of Schopenhauer’s ideas on his near-contemporaries. However, I do not think that any of the representatives of this group has been able to describe the role of pessimism in Schopenhauer’s system satisfactorily. The rest of this section represents my attempt to do so.

1.4 Schopenhauer’s Use of the Concept Pessimism

As more than one critic has noted, ‘pessimism’ is not a word often encountered in the pessimistic writings of Schopenhauer.57 It does not occur at all in the first edition of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1818), it occurs a few times in the second edition (1844) and in Parerga und Paralipomena (1851). The situation is similar if one goes to Schopenhauer’s notebooks and manuscript remains. The word Pessimismus does not occur until 1828; the cognates pessimistisch and Pessimist occur slightly more often, but it is obvious that it is not until his late writings that the word acquires any significance at all to Schopenhauer. It is also evident that the significance that it did acquire was relatively limited, at least if the extent of Schopenhauer’s importance for the more outspoken pessimists that followed is taken into consideration. The fact the word ‘pessimism’ hardly occurs at all in the most important book by a philosopher whose name more than that of anyone is associated with pessimism is in itself interesting. It is even more interesting as Schopenhauer is generally considered to be a philosopher whose thoughts ripened early.

In Schopenhauer’s day, pessimism was clearly not a well-defined philosophical concept. In the 1870’s it would become rather narrowly defined, but this was not yet the case in Schopenhauer’s lifetime. In the reviews of the first edition of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, none of the reviewers use the term pessimism in reference to Schopenhauer’s work.58 This should not surprise us: it was after all through him that it became a widely discussed problem.

57 See, for example, Volker Spierling: Schopenhauer-ABC (Leipzig, 2003), p. 170: “Fast könnte man sagen, ‘Pessimismus’ fungiert nicht als Hauptbegriff in der durch und durch pessimistischen Philosophie Schopenhauers.” – “One could almost say that ‘pessimism’ does not function as a central concept in the through and through pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer.”

58 The reviews – five reviews were published between 1819 and 1825 – have been reprinted in an early issue of the Jahrbuch der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft. None of the reviewers uses the word pessimism. One of them, J. G. Rätze, describes himself as an optimist; another, F. E. Beneke, regards as the main fault of the book “daß Herr Schopenhauer die moralische Seite der Welt nur unvollkommen und nach ihrer düresten Seite, die religiöse aber gar nicht abgebildet habe”; yet another, Jean Paul, praises the book as “ein genial-philosophisches, kühnes, vielseitiges Werk, voll Scharfsinn und Tiefsinn, aber mit einer oft trost- und bodenlosen Tiefe”, and finishes his review by remarking: “Zum Glück kann ich das Buch nur loben, nicht unterschreiben.” Reinhard Piper (ed.): “Die Zeitgenössischen Rezensionen der Werke Arthur Schopenhauers. Zweiter Teil: 1819–1825”, Jahrbuch der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft 6 (1917), pp. 116, 141, and 178. Had these critics be-
A number of Schopenhauer’s contemporary commentators regard pessimism as the notion that ours is the worst possible world. This is indeed an idea that Schopenhauer expressed; and he formulated it against Leibniz’ notion that we inhabit the best of all possible worlds:

Sogar aber lässt sich den handgreiflich sophistischen Beweisen Leibnitzens, daß diese Welt die beste unter den möglichen sei, ernstlich und ehrlich der Beweis entgegenstellen, daß sie die schlechteste unter den möglichen sei. Denn möglich heißt nicht was Einer sich etwan sich vorphantasiren mag, sondern was wirklich existiren und bestehn kann. Nun ist die Welt so eingerichtet, wie sie seyn mußte, um mit genauer Noth bestehn zu können: wäre sie noch ein wenig schlechter, so könnte sie nicht mehr bestehn. Folglich ist eine schlechtere, da sie nicht bestehn könnte, gar nicht möglich, sie selbst also unter den möglichen die schlechteste.59

If the notion that pessimism is the opposite of Leibniz’ optimistic theodicy, then pessimism is a negative doctrine. In Schopenhauer’s day, this was the opinion of one of his most influential critics. The critic in question is John Oxenford, whose essay “Iconoclasm in German Philosophy” (1853) was one of the first articles dedicated to Schopenhauer.60 Not only was Oxenford one of the first to discuss Schopenhauer, he was also immensely important for his rise to popularity in the last years of his life. Oxenford writes that although Schopenhauer’s teachings are genial and amusing, they are disheartening, and opposed to the aspirations of the present world:

All that the liberal mind looks forward to with hope, if not with confidence – the extension of political rights, the spread of education, the brotherhood of nations, the discovery of new means of subduing stubborn nature – must be given up as a vain dream, if ever Schopenhauer’s doctrine be accepted. In a word, he is a professed ‘Pessimist;’ it is his grand result, that this is the worst of all possible

59 W II, chapter 46, p. 683/583: “But against that palpably sophistical proof of Leibniz that this is the best of all possible worlds, we may even oppose seriously and say that it is the worst of all possible worlds. For possible means not what we may picture in our imagination, but what can actually exist and last. Now this world is arranged as it had to be if it were to be capable of continuing with great difficulty to exist; if it were a little worse, it would be no longer capable of continuing to exist. Consequently, since a worse world could not continue to exist, it is absolutely impossible; and so this world itself is the worst of all possible worlds.”

60 Giuseppe Invernizzi demonstrates that the notion of pessimism as the opinion that ours is the worst possible world was shared by Rudolf Seydel (later professor of philosophy at Leipzig) in his Schopenhauers philosophisches System dargestellt und beurtheilt (1857); Invernizzi, p. 97. And Arthur Hübscher quotes a philosophical dictionary from c. 1830 that defines pessimism as the notion that the world is “grundschiect” and pessimists as “die, welche alles schwarz sehen”; W. F. Krug: Allgemeines Handwörterbuch der philosophischen Wissenschaften (1827–34), quoted from: Hübscher: Denker gegen den Strom, p. 177.
If anything, this quotation shows that Oxenford does not have a clear notion of what Schopenhauer’s pessimism is. It is a negation of the idea of progress at the same time as it is the notion that our world is the worst possible, and the notion that our world had better not exist. Is pessimism a political or a theological idea? Or is it perhaps a cultural, or a metaphysical idea? Oxenford’s opinion on the matter is not at all clear.

In a letter to Julius Frauenstädt, Schopenhauer comments on the recent volume on Leibniz in Kuno Fischer’s Geschichte der neueren Philosophie, and particularly on how Fischer plays out Schopenhauer against Leibniz:


It is dangerous to draw too far-reaching conclusions from this letter. Schopenhauer is obviously trying to ridicule Fischer’s interpretation rather than commenting on how his own philosophy is related to that of Leibniz. But it seems that we should be careful not to exaggerate the state of opposition between them. Not least should we be careful not to reduce pessimism to a mere anti-optimism.

The second edition of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1844) is more than twice as long as the first. Rather than rewriting twenty-five year old passages, Schopenhauer chose to write a second volume, which, largely, copies the structure of the first. The second volume contains relatively little that adds to the philosophical content of the work. Its imagery, on the other hand, is much more concrete, its metaphors much more memorable, and its rhetoric much

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62 Letter to Julius Frauenstädt, 15 July 1855, Gesammelte Briefe, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Bonn, 1978), p. 368: ‘Incurably corrupted by Hegelianism, he constructs the history of philosophy according to his aprioristic patterns, and then I as a pessimist am the necessary opposite to Leibniz the optimist: and this is deduced from the fact that Leibniz is supposed to have lived in a time of hopefulness, I on the other hand in a desperate and unhappy time. Ergo, if I had lived around 1700 I would have been a well-groomed, optimistic Leibniz, and he would have been me if he had lived today! – That’s how crazy Hegelianism makes you. Furthermore my pessimism took form between 1814 and 1818 (when it appeared in its entirety); which was the most hopeful time, after the liberation of Germany. The greenhorn doesn’t know that!’
more flamboyant. It is here that we come across the term pessimism. Schopenhauer uses the word so unequivocally that we might extrapolate a definition.

On Schopenhauer’s view, like the view of so many of the early German idealists, religion is a form of Volksmetaphysik, popular metaphysics for the people. It corresponds to philosophy, but it expresses its ideas in allegories rather than through concepts. Pessimism is the opinion that existence itself is the root of all evil. This notion is allegorically expressed in the doctrine of the original sin. Pessimism is the opinion that this world is something that this world had better not be. Optimism is the notion that the world justifies itself through its existence.

A later chapter gives another important clue. In a comment on the Church Father Clement of Alexandria, Schopenhauer brings together pessimism and asceticism:

Im besagten dritten Buche der Stromata des Klemens tritt der Antagonismus zwischen Optimismus, nebst Theismus, einerseits, und Pessimismus, nebst asketischer Moral, andererseits, mit überraschender Deutlichkeit hervor. Dasselbe ist gegen die Gnostiker gerichtet, welche eben Pessimismus und Askese, namentlich

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63 W II, chapter 17, p. 198/170: “I cannot, as is generally done, put the fundamental difference of all religions in the question whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or atheistic; but only in the question whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, in other words, whether they present the existence of this world as justified by itself, and consequently praise and commend it, or consider it as something which can be conceived only as the consequence of our guilt, and thus really ought not to be, in that they recognize that pain and death cannot lie in the eternal, original, and immutable order of things, that which in every respect ought to be. The power by virtue of which Christianity was able to overcome first Judaism, and 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, whereas Judaism and paganism were optimistic.”

64 For a critical discussion of Schopenhauer’s views on religion, see: Jörg Salaquarda: “Schopenhauer und die Religion”, Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch 69 (1988), pp. 321–332. Salaquarda holds that the fact that Schopenhauer sees religion as a lesser form of philosophy and ignores the numinous element of religion means that his critique of religion really does not afflict it.
Pessimism and asceticism stand against optimism and theism. We will eventually see what the relation of the two are; it is however important to note that Schopenhauer is explicitly linking them with each other. It is also important to note that Schopenhauer here too is using the term pessimism in the context of a discussion of religion.

There is one passage where Schopenhauer is using the word *Pessimismus* in a non-religious context. In a footnote Schopenhauer quotes a newspaper report of a snake hypnotising a squirrel into throwing itself into the mouth of the snake. Schopenhauer comments that this episode is important, “als Argument zum *Pessimismus*”; for it shows that nature is cruel and atrocious (*entsetzlich*). However, this footnote was added at a very late stage. It was not included in any of the editions that were published in Schopenhauer’s lifetime; it was first included in Frauenstädt’s 1877 edition of Schopenhauer’s collected works.

Schopenhauer uses the term *Pessimismus* on a couple of occasions in *Parerga und Paralipomena* as well. There too it is used in the context of a discussion of religion with the purpose of characterising certain religions:


The comment on the meaning of pessimism is briefer here than in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, but in the light of that work, it is clear that the fact that life is a result of our guilt means that it is something that ought not to be. Pessi-
mism, that is, means that non-existence is preferable to existence. Shortly afterwards, Schopenhauer repeats his claim that the question of optimism vs. pessimism constitutes the fundamental difference between the religions:


Pessimism is a term that Schopenhauer does not use to describe his own philosophy. It is a term used to designate religions that describe existence as such as sinful. And although Schopenhauer often writes that his philosophy corresponds to the ethical and metaphysical core of Christianity and Buddhism (these two religions convey the same message in different allegories), thus implying that his philosophy is pessimistic, he does not use that term to describe his philosophy – not in his works, at least.70 This is an important point to note. The fact that Schopenhauer introduces the concept in a religious context explains why he defines it in terms of a justification, which, particularly in German, is a term with strongly theological connotations.71 But the religious context also means that the term, when it is used as a philosophical concept, needs interpretation. A posthumous fragment gives us a further clue to Schopenhauer’s use of the concept pessimism. In a manuscript from 1828, when discussing the pantheism of Spinoza, Schopenhauer writes:

Bleibt bei mir außer der Welt noch ein weiter Raum leer, für die positive Erkenntniß dessen, was wir nur negativ als Verneinung des Willens kennen, und

69 P II, § 181, pp. 427 f./388: “The fundamental difference in religions is to be found in the question whether they are optimism or pessimism, certainly not whether they are monotheism, polytheism, Trimurti, Trinity, pantheism, or atheism (like Buddhism). For this reason, the Old and New Testaments are diametrically opposed and their amalgamation forms a queer centaur. The Old Testament is optimism, the New Testament is pessimism. [...] The only exception in the Old Testament is the Fall, but there it remains unused like an hors d’oeuvre until Christianity again takes it up as its only suitable point of contact.”

70 We have seen that he does refer to himself as a pessimist in letters, though, and we will see that he does it in his posthumous papers as well. And people visiting Schopenhauer also report him having characterised himself as a pessimist; see Schopenhauer: Gespräche, ed. Arthur Hübscher (1933; rev. ed., Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1971), for example pp. 220 and 345.

71 Neither Schopenhauer nor any of the other pessimists is discussed in the article on justification in the Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie (A. Peters: “Rechtfertigung”, in: Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, vol. 8: R–Sc, eds. Joachim Ritter & Karlfried Gründer (Darmstadt & Basel, 1992), columns 251–266), but Kant’s and Schleiermacher’s usage of the term is included in the discussion of the Christian theological tradition, rather than the various philosophical traditions that Peters also discusses.
was manches mit ihrem theos gemein haben könnte. Bei ihnen [den Pantheisten] füllen theos und Welt zusammen sich aus und alles. Dies aber läßt sich zusammenfassen darin, daß Pantheismus wesentlich Optimismus ist; meine Lehre aber Pessimismus.\textsuperscript{72}

Schopenhauer’s comment is clear enough: pessimism is a philosophical doctrine that corresponds to the renunciation of the world. Pessimism is a philosophical position that corresponds to that which goes on in the mind of the person who is renouncing the world. Schopenhauer renders the intuitive knowledge of the person renouncing the world in philosophical concepts. I will argue that this means that pessimism to Schopenhauer means that non-existence is preferable to existence.

A passage from the second volume of \textit{Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung} lends support to this interpretation. Schopenhauer here describes the knowledge that it would be better not to exist as the purpose of existence:

\begin{quote}
Als Zweck unsers Daseyns ist in der That nichts Anderes anzugeben, als die Erkenntniß, daß wir besser nicht dawären. Dies aber ist die wichtigste aller Wahrheiten, die daher ausgesprochen werden muß; so sehr sie auch mit der heutigen Europäischen Denkweise im Kontrast steht: ist sie doch dagegen im ganzen nicht-islamisirten Asien die anerkannteste Grundwahrheit, heute so gut, wie vor dreitausend Jahren.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

This, I take it, is the positive knowledge that corresponds to the renunciation of the world. The knowledge that we non-existence is preferable to existence is the motive for the ascetic renouncing the world; when the same knowledge is expressed verbally it is what constitutes pessimism. The same idea is expressed allegorically in Christianity and the other pessimistic religions.

The rest of this chapter is an attempt to demonstrate that this notion, the concept of pessimism, is a premise in Schopenhauer’s system even before he uses the term.

\textsuperscript{72} HN III, pp. 463 f.: “Beyond the world, a space remains empty in my teachings for the positive knowledge of that, which we only know negatively as renunciation of the will, and which could have something in common with its theos. In them theos and world together fill up themselves and everything. But this can be summarised in the phrases that pantheism essentially is optimism; whereas my doctrine is pessimism.”

\textsuperscript{73} W II, chapter 48, p. 709/605: “In fact, nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist. This, however, is the most important of all truths, and must therefore be stated, however much it stands in contrast with the present-day mode of European thought. On the other hand, it is nevertheless the most universally recognized fundamental truth of the whole of non-Mohammedan Asia, today as much as three thousand years ago.”
1.5 Schopenhauer’s System: The Single Thought and Its Pessimistic Premises

Schopenhauer’s philosophy consists, so its author claims in the preface of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, of a single thought. It is a very complex thought, but still it is a single thought. The first edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1818) amounts to 725 pages, but that was the shortest expression of that thought that Schopenhauer could find.\(^7^4\) The purpose of this section is to provide the reader with an overview of some of the most important areas of Schopenhauer’s system, in order to demonstrate how pessimism, understood as the notion that non-existence is preferable to existence, is an ever-present premise upon which the one thought, in its every aspect, depends.

The first premise upon which Schopenhauer’s system is based is that the world is my representation: “‘Die Welt ist meine Vorstellung’: – dies ist eine Wahrheit, welche in Beziehung auf jedes lebende und erkennende Wesen gilt”.\(^7^5\) All knowledge, all sensual impressions have a common form: they are objects to a subject. A representation cannot be imagined without a subject. And similarly, a subject has to have an object; a subject without an object is equally unthinkable. The subject–object relation is the form of everything in the world of representations. The world of representations is also characterised by being subject to the law of sufficient reason, which was the subject of Schopenhauer’s doctoral dissertation *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* (1813). This means that everything that happens in the world of representation happens for a reason. All changes, and changes occur ceaselessly, are caused by something. Causality has three forms, depending on the medium:

\[\text{Die Kausalität also, dieser Lenker aller und jener Veränderung, tritt nun in der Natur unter drei verschiedenen Formen auf: als Ursache im engsten Sinn, als Reiz und als Motiv. Eben auf dieser Verschiedenheit beruht der wahre und wesentliche Unterschied zwischen unorganischem Körper, Pflanze und Thier, nicht auf den äußern anatomischen oder gar chemischen Merkmalen.}\]

\(^7^4\) John E. Atwell’s attempt at giving a more succinct definition of the single thought in his *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World. The Metaphysics of Will* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 1995) is, to say the least, somewhat strained: “The double-sided world is the striving of the will to become fully conscious of itself so that, recoiling in horror at its inner, self-divisive nature, it may annul itself and thereby its self-affirmation, and then reach salvation.” (p. 31)

\(^7^5\) *W* I, § 1, p. 29/3: “The world is my representation: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being”. Rudolf Malter holds that this has to be accepted before the rest of Schopenhauer’s system, and that therefore his claim that his system can be entered from any point is false; see his *Arthur Schopenhauer. Transzendentalphilosophie und Metaphysik des Willens*, Quaestiones. Themen und Gestalten der Philosophie 2 (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1991), p. 54.

\(^7^6\) *G*, § 20, pp. 61 f./69 f.: “Thus causality, this director of each and every change, now appears in nature in three different forms, namely as cause in the narrowest sense, as stimulus and as motive. It is precisely on this difference that the true and essential distinction is based between inorganic bodies, plants, and animals, and not on external anatomical, or even chemical characteristics.”
But that is not the whole truth. The world is something beyond the sum of the representations of the world. The world is will. ‘Will’ is Schopenhauer’s metonymical designation of the *Ding an sich*, the Kantian thing in itself. We experience all things from the outside. We see trees and houses and people, we hear birds and cars, we smell flowers, etc. We stand in a subject–object relation to them. But there is one exception: our own body. My relation to my body is something completely different. True, I can see my hands and feet, but I can also move them. They respond to my will. But although I can control my hands and feet with my will, I cannot control my will. My will is a force more fundamental than my intellect or reason. I am my will; my body is a manifestation (*Erscheinung*) of my will. My will is causality experienced from the inside. My actions are controlled by motives, but motive is simply the form causality adopts in humans. I am no more free to act differently than a predator who has spotted an animal, or for that matter a stone that is falling. Causality takes three different forms: I choose to get a cup of coffee because I want to drink coffee (motive); the wolf attacks a lamb out of instinct (stimulus); the stone falls because of gravity (causality proper). The difference between the three cases is the medium through which causality works: they are all manifestations of the same basic force, namely: the will.

The thing in itself exists beyond plurality. Time and space and causality are the three forms of knowledge (*Formen des Erkennens*) with the help of which one’s representations of the world are formed; this means that plurality is a function of time and space. In one sense, the thing in itself is therefore one, Schopenhauer holds. It is not one in the sense that an object is one: the object’s oneness is conceived as the opposite of a plurality. Neither is the oneness of the thing in itself the oneness of a concept: the concept’s oneness is the result of an abstraction process from plurality. The oneness of the thing in itself consists in its being situated beyond the very possibility (*Möglichkeit*) of plurality.

Strictly speaking, it is as incorrect to state that the thing in itself is one as it is to state there are a multitude of things in themselves. Although Schopenhauer states that the thing in itself is not one in the sense that an object is one, his arguments for the thing in itself’s being will actually presupposes just such a oneness. The thing in itself is designated will as the will is the fundamental drive underlying all human action. The thing in itself is one; therefore the manifestation of the thing in itself in man and the manifestation in any other entity must bear a strong resemblance. This is an oneness of the ordinary kind: Schopenhauer’s argument presupposes a unity. It seems more plausible to assume that Schopenhauer regarded the oneness of the thing in itself as a premise for his system than that is a failed conclusion on his part.

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77 W I, § 23, p. 158.
78 Cf. Magee: *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, p. 139: “He is clear about its logical status. He knows that he has not proved it, but holds that this is because no such doctrine could be proved: the principle of sufficient reason, which is the organon of proof, has its application only within the
The fact that I experience my willing from the inside creates the illusion that I would be free to choose differently – choose to get a glass of water instead of the cup of coffee, say – but that is only an illusion. A falling stone, Schopenhauer writes in a memorable epigram, would choose to continue its fall if it had consciousness: “Spinoza sagt epist. 62), daß der durch einen Stoß in die Luft fliegende Stein, wenn er Bewußtsein [sic] hätte, meinen würde, aus seinem eigenen Willen zu fliegen. Ich setze nur noch hinzu, daß der Stein recht hätte.” My choice is no different from the choice of the stone to keep on falling.

The force that makes me mount the stairs to get a cup of coffee is the same force that makes the stone fall. This force is labelled ‘the will’ since the individual will is the manifestation of it that we have the most direct relation to. The thing in itself manifests itself (erscheint) as among other things my will.

Schopenhauer’s system is dualistic, although its two aspects stand in an unequal relation to each other. The world is on the one hand representation (Vorstellung) or manifestation (Erscheinung). This is the aspect of the world that we encounter whenever we use our senses. Schopenhauer often refers to the line of demarcation between the two aspects of the world with the scholastic concept principium individuationis, the principle of individuation, and with a metaphor borrowed from Hindu iconography: the veil of Maya. On the other hand the world is will, the thing in itself. This is an aspect of the world that is only indirectly available, through certain forms of knowledge. The world of representation is a manifestation of the will. In a sense, therefore, the representational level is inferior to the will.

The metaphysics of will is the core of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. A falling stone is a manifestation of the will, and so is my urge to drink coffee. The will is a blind, goalless striving. It therefore occupies a role similar to that of reason in the systems of Fichte and Hegel, with the all-important difference that the will is completely irrational. The will manifests itself as different levels (Stufen) of representations. An animal is a higher level of manifestation compared to a tree, which in its turn is a higher level manifestation compared to a stone. The highest level of manifestation is man. The difference between animals and plants is that the former are equipped with understanding (Verstand) whereas the latter are not. The difference between man and animals is that man is equipped with reason (Vernunft) whereas animals are not. That means that man has access to the past and to the future in a way that animals do not. This means that human suffering takes different forms than animal suffering: concerns for the future
and memories of the past can be painful to us. But it also means that man can compare different motives instead of just acting on the impulse that is the strongest at present. Understanding and reason are, however, only tools of the will.

Understanding and reason are very powerful tools. Understanding is the tool that turns us into sapient, sentient beings. The highest form of causality, motives, acts through understanding. Understanding, in its turn, is a means to *anschauliche Erkenntnis*, roughly: graphic, or concrete knowledge, one of the three forms of knowledge in Schopenhauer’s system. We will see that the differentiation of knowledge is a crucial part of Schopenhauer’s argument.

Man shares understanding with the animals. Reason distinguishes us from them. Reason gives us access to the past and to the future. For an animal, only the present exists. The faculty of reason gives us the ability to compare phenomena in the present with phenomena of the past; and it gives us the ability to imagine future phenomena and compare the present phenomena with them. This means that we do not have to act on the first impulse. We often act against the first impulse, realizing that in the long run, our interests are better served by abstaining to act on them. Reason has no influence on the will, but it might help us see what it is that we really want. The faculty of reason also gives us language. Language consists of concepts; formulating a thought in words means translating an intuitive idea into concepts. In the process, the thought loses its ability to influence us to act. Once a thought is formed, the motivational power that it had when it was not yet a thought is lost. Instead it becomes intersubjective. It can be communicated to others, criticized and understood. By being translated into concepts, the thought can be raised to the level of abstract knowledge (*Wissen* or *abstrakte Erkenntnis*).

The opposite of abstract knowledge is feeling (*Gefühl*). This concept is very important for Schopenhauer’s notion of philosophy.

Der Begriff, den das Wort *Gefühl* bezeichnet, hat durchaus nur einen negativen Inhalt, nämlich diesen, daß etwas, das im Bewußtseyn gegenwärtig ist, nicht Begriff.

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82 This is what makes Dienstag regard time as the prime concern of Schopenhauer and the other pessimists: “As the primary form of the sentient mind, time organizes all our experiences; and this, for Schopenhauer, is where our problems begin.” Dienstag, p. 89. But time is only one of the factors determining the form that the suffering takes: the suffering itself is in the will; it takes place beyond the phenomenal world, beyond time.

83 It should be noted that Schopenhauer deviates from the Kantian and Idealistic usage of the concepts reason and understanding. To Schopenhauer, reason has much more limited powers; and in this he resorts to the pre-Kantian use of the concepts. See Franco Volpi’s enlightening discussion in his: “Schopenhauers Unterscheidung von Vernunft und Verstand und ihre begriffs-geschichtliche Relevanz”, in: Wolfgang Schirmacher (ed.): *Zeit der Ernte. Studien zum Stand der Schopenhauer-Forschung. Festschrift für Arthur Hübscher zum 85. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1982), pp. 279–297.

84 Schopenhauer operates with two different words for knowledge: *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen*. The former is a more general term, whereas the latter exclusively designates intellectual knowledge. Payne translates *Wissen* as ‘rational knowledge’.
Everything that is present in the mind that is not abstract knowledge formulated by reason is feeling. This explains how the word feeling can be used to designate phenomena so different as lust, indignation, and hatred. Schopenhauer’s examples also include moralisches Gefühl and ästhetisches Gefühl, literally ‘moral’ and ‘aesthetic feeling’. They have nothing in common except that they are contents of the consciousness and that they are not abstract. A feeling is therefore the first stage of any abstract knowledge; the role of reason is to translate non-abstract knowledge into concepts in order to make them communicable. All abstract knowledge stems from a non-abstract representation that at some point has been rendered into concepts. Each discipline of science, for example, ultimately consists of observations of nature that have been conceptualised and introduced into a system consisting of other observations that have been turned into abstract knowledge. Just like the sciences, philosophy has the task of turning observations of the world into abstract knowledge, making it available to others. Philosophy differs from the sciences in that its object is not one particular field of knowledge, but the representational world in its totality:

We all know what the world is, as the world always is the object of a subject. The world is my (somebody’s) representation of the world. But to make the stream of experiences accessible to others, it has to be formulated in words; it has to be translated into concepts. The task of philosophy is to translate the

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85 W I, § 11, p. 87/51: “The concept denoted by the word feeling has only a negative content, namely that something present in the consciousness is not a concept, not abstract knowledge of reason. However, be it what it may, it comes under the concept of feeling. Thus the immeasurably wide sphere of this concept includes the most heterogeneous things, and we do not see how they come together so long as we have not recognized that they all agree in this negative respect of not being abstract concepts.” The italics are Schopenhauer’s.

86 W I, § 15, pp. 123 f./82: “Indeed, it might be said that everyone knows without further help what the world is, for he himself is the subject of the knowing of which the world is representation, and so far this would be true. But this knowledge is a knowledge of perception, is in the concrete. The task of philosophy is to reproduce this in the abstract, to raise to a permanent rational knowledge successive, variable perceptions, and generally all that the wide concept of feeling embraces and describes merely negatively as not abstract, distinct, rational knowledge.”
experience of the world in its totality into abstract knowledge. But it is not the sum of the experiences that Schopenhauer is interested in, but in their essence.\textsuperscript{87} The different sciences deal with different aspects of the world, and ideally, science can therefore be said to aim at translating the sum of the experiences of the world into concepts. Philosophy, on the other hand, addresses the question what the essence of the world is. The fundamental form of all experience is the subject–object relation. By taking this as its starting-point, and by use of self-introspection as a method, philosophy can reach an insight into the metaphysical core of the world. We experience the existence of death and suffering in the world, and this brings us to reflect. Introspection leads Schopenhauer to conclude that the world is will, manifesting itself as the world as representation, and that the reason for the suffering is precisely that the world is will.

The world is will. The world is a ceaseless striving for a goal that can never satiate the will. Unfulfilled willing is suffering. This means that life, always and by necessity, is characterised by suffering. Pain (\textit{Schmerz}) and pleasure (\textit{Wollust}) are not representations: “Man hat aber gänzlich unrecht, wenn man Schmerz und Wollust Vorstellungen nennt: das sind sie keineswegs, sondern unmittelbare Affektionen des Willens, in seiner Erscheinung, dem Leibe: ein erzwungenes augenblickliches Wollen oder Nichtwollen des Eindrucks, den dieser erleidet.”\textsuperscript{88}

Schopenhauer’s arguments for the necessity of suffering are of a manifestly deductive character. Life is characterised by suffering; and as opposed to the mere representations, the suffering is genuine. It manifests itself as a representation (as that is the common form of all knowledge), but it goes much deeper. When I experience hunger, my hunger is on the one hand a representation (there must be an object corresponding to the subject, and the subject–object relation is the form that all representations have in common), but it also has a direct impact on the will. The hunger that I feel is more tangible than my person.

My hunger is the expression of a true deficiency. The same is true for every expression of the will in the body (indeed in nature). Hunger, lust, tiredness, etc. are all deficiencies: they are all strivings, they all presuppose that one does not possess what one wants. All wants are states of suffering. This is one of the central presuppositions of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Happiness, on the contrary, is always negative. All happiness consists of a fulfilment of a wish. But unlike the wish itself, its fulfilment does not transcend the limits of the world of representation. The fulfilment of a wish has no positive value: it is nothing but the temporary cessation of the want.

\textsuperscript{87} Cf. Malter: \textit{Arthur Schopenhauer}, pp. 27 f.

\textsuperscript{88} W I, § 18, p. 144/101: “However, we are quite wrong in calling pain and pleasure representations, for they are not these at all, but immediate affections of the will in its phenomenon, the body: an enforced, instantaneous willing or not-willing of the impressions undergone by the body.”
Alle Befriedigung, oder was man gemeinhin Glück nennt, ist eigentlich und we-nsentlich immer nur negativ und durchaus nie positiv. Es ist nicht eine ursprüng-
lich und von selbst auf uns kommende Beglückung, sondern muß immer die Be-
friedigung eines Wunsches seyn. Denn Wunsch, d. h. Mangel, ist die vorher-
gehende Bedingung jedes Genusses. Mit der Befriedigung hört aber der Wunsch
und folglich der Genuß auf. […] Unmittelbar gegeben ist uns immer nur der
Mangel, d. h. der Schmerz. Die Befriedigung aber und den Genuß können wir
nur mittelbar erkennen, durch Erinnerung an das vorhergegangene Leiden und
Entbehren, welches bei seinem Eintritt aufhörte.89

This means that unhappiness is tangible; happiness is not. Pain is tangible;
painlessness is not. Illness is tangible; health is not. The same goes for the elation
between all wants and their fulfilments. The want is an aspect of the will; its
fulfilment is a mere representation. As a result, the fulfilment is accompanied by
feelings of disappointment. It turns out that the object of one’s wishes was in
fact just a chimera; the will cannot be satisfied and is therefore a ceaseless striv-
ing.

Life is characterised by willing, that is wishing. Either one does not obtain
what one wishes for, or one does obtain it only to realize that obtaining it was
worth nothing. The first is a state of pain; the second is a state of boredom.
Schopenhauer’s notion of boredom is not psychological so much as ontological:
it is not a feeling but a reflection of the emptiness of all life.90 Pain and boredom
are the fundamental elements of life: “Sein [des Menschen] Leben, schwingt
also, gleich einem Pendel, hin und her, zwischen dem Schmerz und der Langen-
weile, welche beide in der That dessen letzte Bestandteile sind.”91

The strongest expression of the will in man is sexuality. Schopenhauer cha-
acterises the genitals as “der eigentliche Brennpunkt des Willens”.92 The will
strives to perpetuate itself and sexuality, procreation, is an obvious part of this.
We are no less determined by our character in this context than in any other.

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89 W I, § 58, pp. 399 f./319: “All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and
essentially always negative only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us
originally and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a wish. For desire, that is to say,
want, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and there-
fore the pleasure cease; […]. What is immediately given to us is always only the want, i.e. the pain.
The satisfaction and privation can be known only indirectly by remembering the preceding suffer-
ing and privation that ceased on their entry.”

90 This has been stressed by, among others, Lütkehaus: “Auch diese Langeweile ist nicht in dem
Sinn psychologisch zu verstehen, daß man ihr bei gehöriger Animierung oder Diätek der Seele
schon beikommen könnte, nicht als pathologisches Gefühl, als Décadence-Symptom, sondern
ontologisch.” Lütkehaus: Nichts, p. 180. Wolf Lepenies has noted that boredom went through a
process of democratisation in the eighteenth century when the privileges of the nobles (among
them idleness) were challenged, but that it somehow retained elitist connotations: “Mit der Nivel-
lierung der Langeweile zu einem allgemeinmenschlichen Merkmal ist der elitäre Zug nicht auf-
gegeben. Zum Adel stilisiert sich nun empor, wer sich rühmen darf, die eigene Misere zu durch-

91 W I, § 57, p. 390/312: “Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and
boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents.”

92 W I, § 60, p. 412/330: “the real focus of the will”.
The will infallibly draws us towards a partner that can compensate for our inadequacies. A physically weak person will be attracted to strong persons, for example, and the shy will be attracted to outgoing, social persons. 93 Interestingly, Schopenhauer’s theory implies that a sexuality that is not aimed at reproduction might be a sign of greater intellectual forces. To natural man and to the animals, reproduction is the highest goal in life: as purely natural beings they can aspire to nothing higher. 94 Schopenhauer actually comes very close to likening non-reproductive, on Schopenhauer’s terminology unnatural, sexuality to artistic creativity and intellectual greatness. 95

Life is unhappy by necessity, as it is ultimately will and the will is always unfilled. Schopenhauer’s argument is hedonistic: he weighs suffering against pleasure and comes to the conclusion that since all pleasures are negative single instance of suffering is enough to render the value of existence negative. This hedonistic calculus will become much more elaborate and explicit in later pessimists, notably Eduard von Hartmann, but its rudiments are to be found in Schopenhauer. This is the context in which Schopenhauer develops his theory of pessimism. Pessimism has nothing to do with the contingencies of life, but concerns its most fundamental conditions.

Unhappiness is the problem. The will is the cause of the unhappiness. The fulfilment of one’s wishes is no solution, as this only directs the will towards

93 There are a few exceptions to this. Schopenhauer maintains that one inherits one’s character from the father and one’s intellect from the mother. This means that men’s intelligence is an unimportant factor to women (since the father’s intelligence will not be bequeathed to the offspring), whereas characteristics that betray a strong character are very important. On this theory, men should find women’s intelligence a very important characteristic, but Schopenhauer admits that this is not always so. The reason for this Schopenhauer sees in vanity, which makes men prefer beauty over intelligence.

94 W I, § 60, p. 412.

95 This, I take it, might very well be one of the reasons behind the interest for Schopenhauer among the writers of the décadence. In the character of Des Esseintes, the protagonist of Huysmans’ À rebours, to whom Schopenhauer’s “théorie du Pessimisme était, en somme, la grande consolatrice des intelligences choisies, des âmes élevées”, the search for unnatural pleasures has led to both impotence and intellectual refinement. Joris-Karl Huysmans: À rebours (1884), ed. Marc Fumaroli (Paris, 1999), p. 180. Schopenhauer’s views on sexuality also exerted a considerable influence on the décadents through Wagner. It was particularly the conception of love in Tristan und Isolde is indebted to Schopenhauer, as for example Dieter Borchmeyer has demonstrated: “Kein Zweifel, hinter der Idee des zwanghaften Eros steht Schopenhauers ‘Metaphysik der Geschechtsliebe’, die Wagner solches Kopfzerbrechen bereitet hat.” Dieter Borchmeyer: Richard Wagner. Ahasvers Wandlungen (Frankfurt/M., 2002), p. 232. Cf. Thomas Mann’s recollection of reading Schopenhauer as a teenager in the 1890’s: “Einsam-unregelmäßige, welt- und todsüchtige Jugend – wie sie den Zaubertrank dieser Metaphysik schlürfte, deren tiefstes Wesen Erotik ist, und in der ich die geistige Quelle der Tristan-Musik erkannte!” Thomas Mann: Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen (1918, Frankfurt/M., 2004), p. 91. For a discussion of Schopenhauer and decadence, see Arthur Hübscher: “Schopenhauer bei Wagners Zeitgenossen”, Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch 61 (1980), pp. 61–69; see also Erwin Koppen: Dekadenter Wagnerismus. Studien zur europäischen Literatur des Fin de siècle, Komparatistische Studien, Band 2 (Berlin & New York, 1973), pp. 85 ff. Édourd Sans stresses the importance of Wagner for Schopenhauer’s popularity in the 1850’s: he rightly states that Wagner’s fame was a more important factor than the industry of Schopenhauer’s disciples; Sans, pp. 280 ff.
another goal. Hence, the solution must be the cessation of the will. There are three situations in which man does not suffer. Only one of them is permanent; none of them is open to more than a small minority of mankind. They are all basically a particular form of knowledge.

** The first solution is art.⁹⁶ Art is a theme of great importance to Schopenhauer; the third of the four books of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung is exclusively dedicated to the arts. The central concept in Schopenhauer’s discussion is ‘Ideas’. As the choice of word implies, Schopenhauer alludes to Plato. He even claims to correct Plato: in a sense, he turns Plato upside down.⁹⁷ For on Schopenhauer’s view, art is not a doubly falsified picture of the world, but a true description of the world.

Schopenhauer uses the term ‘Idea’ to denote the primordial forms of all things (die Urformen aller Dinge). They are an intermediary form between the will and the representations. Like the will, they are beyond plurality and beyond change. But the Ideas manifest themselves in the world of representations. The Ideas describe different stages or levels (Stufen) of the will’s objectification. There is a clear hierarchy amongst the arts: architecture, representing the lowest level as it can only present heaviness and lightness, comes last in the hierarchy of the art forms; tragedy, capturing the essence of human life, the highest level of the will’s objectification, comes first. First, at least, among the mimetic art forms. Music is a case aside. Music does not reproduce any Idea. Music is a depiction of the will.

As true art depicts Ideas, it gives us the opportunity to behold the world from a different point of view than the ordinary. In the arts we see the true, unchangeable form of things. We do not see a particular landscape, we see the world as it is; we do not see a particular horse or dog, we see the essential form that all dogs or horses share. Even in the case of portraits, we see something beyond the mere person, we see the character of the person depicted.⁹⁸ The arts give a true description of the world as it is outside the subject–object relation that characterizes the world of representations. Art therefore takes us beyond our own individuality:

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⁹⁶ The literature on Schopenhauer and the art is very large. For an introduction to the theme and a bibliography, see Dale Jacquette (ed.): Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts (Cambridge, 1996)
⁹⁷ I agree with Julian Young, who holds that it is precisely because Schopenhauer aims at refuting Plato that it is possible for him to use the term ‘Ideas’: “For Schopenhauer’s endeavour is to refute Plato by describing art in just those terms which, for Plato, render an activity respectable and important.” Julian P. Young: “The Standpoint of Eternity. Schopenhauer on Art”, Kant-Studien 78 (1987), p. 436.
⁹⁸ Schopenhauer holds that each person’s character in a sense (gewissermaßen) is the manifestation of a unique Idea. A portrait therefore does not aim at depicting the Idea of man (that is rather the task of tragedy) but at the Idea, i.e. the true character, of the person depicted. See W 1, § 45, p. 285.
In the experience of art – a true, profound experience that is accessible only to the very few – one actually ceases to be an individual. “It is fundamentally a matter of ‘losing individuality’ in the knowing subject”, John Atwell writes on Schopenhauer’s view of the experience of art. “What exactly then has to be lost? What exactly is individuality in the knowing subject? Quite simply put, it is egoism.” Since egoism is the basic mode of being, ceasing to be egoistic amounts to ceasing to be. The experience of art allows us to temporarily cease to will. The roots of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics are in Kant’s idea of a disinterested observation as the fundamental art experience; but Schopenhauer takes this idea further. Through art one ceases to will: that is one ceases to be in an important sense. This means that the experience of art, on Schopenhauer’s account, demonstrates the truth of pessimism. The experience of art is a state of relative happiness; it is a state on non-suffering. And the reason is that we momentarily cease to be. The experience of art demonstrates that non-existence is preferable to existence.

Music differs from the other arts in not depicting an idea, but the will itself. Just like the world of representations, music is a copy (Abbildung) of the will. It therefore has a much higher status than the other arts, in that it does not depict a certain aspect of the world, but the world in its totality.

Die Musik ist nämlich eine so unmittelbare Objektivation und Abbild des ganzen Willens, wie die Welt selbst es ist, ja wie die Ideen es sind, deren vervielfältigte Erscheinung die Welt der einzelnen Dinge ausmacht. Die Musik ist also keineswegs gleich den andern Künsten das Abbild der Ideen, sondern Abbild des Willens selbst, dessen Objektität auch die Ideen sind: deshalb eben ist die Wirkung der Musik so sehr viel mächtiger und eindringlicher, als die der andern Künste: denn diese reden nur vom Schatten, sie aber vom Wesen.
Music is not only the most powerful art form; its ontological status is on a par with that of the representational world. A little bit later Schopenhauer resorts to yet an epigram to elaborate on the meaning of this: “Man könnte demnach die Welt eben so wohl verkörperte Musik, als verkörperten Willen nennen”.  

This is one of Schopenhauer’s most influential ideas. It was to become central to Wagner, and we will see that Nietzsche too made extensive use of it.  

In the experience of art on transcends one’s individuality and beholds an aspect of the world (an Idea) or the world in its entirety (the will manifested as music) as it really is, independent of all interest. The world is beautiful, Schopenhauer holds. Being part of the world is not. This is his response to the optimists’ appeal that he look out into the world. “Inzwischen heißt ein Optimist mich die Augen öffnen und hineinsehn in die Welt, wie sie so schön sei, im Sonnenschein, mit ihren Bergen, Thälern, Strömen, Pflanzen, Thieren, u. s. f. – Aber ist denn die Welt ein Guckkasten? Zu sehen sind diese Dinge freilich schön; sie zu sein ist ganz etwas Anderes.”  

Through the arts one sees the world as it is, but in the process of seeing, one ceases to be a willing subject. One becomes a pure subject of knowledge. This means on the one hand that the wisdom inherent in the arts is much more profound than the wisdom one can gain through other studies. For as the art deals with Ideas, it deals with necessities. Through tragedy one gets to know the human nature as such.  

The experience of art demonstrates that pessimism is true: it gives us the opportunity to experience non-being and hence non-suffering. It is because non-existence is preferable to existence that art is a pleasing experience. Art lets us experience how it is to not exist. In a sense, therefore, all true art is pessimistic. Art is always a celebration of nothingness. This turns the life of the artist into a rather sad story. The artistic activity is in itself painless (at least the contemplation that is at heart of the aesthetic experience), but the objectivity of the artistic genius makes the artist see the painfulness of life clearer. This makes Schopenhauer talk of a melancholy of the genius: “Im Ganzen und Allgemeinen jedoch beruht die dem Genie beigegene Melancholie darauf, daß der Wille zum Leben, von je hellerem Intellekt er sich beleuchtet findet, desto deutlicher das Elend seines Zustandes wahrnimmt.”  

This melancholy is an example of

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102 W I, § 52, p. 330/262 f.: “Accordingly, we could just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will”.  

103 W II, chapter 46, p. 680/581: “However, an optimist tells me to open my eyes and look at the world and see how beautiful it is in the sunshine, with its mountains, valleys, rivers, plants, animals, and so on. But is the world then a peep-show? These things are certainly beautiful to behold, but to be them is something quite different.”  

104 This is why the attempts to use Schopenhauer’s premises to create a form of life that is worthy of living (see the papers by Janaway, Young, Cartwright, and Migotti discussed in the beginning of this section) do not solve the problem posed by pessimism.  

105 W II, chapter 31, p. 454/383: “On the whole, however, the melancholy accompanying genius rests on the fact that, the brighter the intellect enlightening the will-to-live, the more distinctly does it perceive the wretchedness of its condition.”
the importance of melancholy for the pessimistic rhetoric. The state of mind of the genius is melancholic as the genius, characterised by the independence of his or her intellect from the will, perceives the world as it actually is. The melancholy of the genius thus results from his or her pessimism.\(^{106}\)

The experience of art is will-less and hence painless, but it is an exception. It cannot be a permanent solution to the problem posed by the will. Hunger, tiredness, or any other function of the will sooner or later breaks the concentration. This sets some limits to the subject matters suitable for art. As the true experience of art consists in our momentarily ceasing to will, phenomena that incite the will – sexually suggestive poses, food, and anything that disgusts us – are unsuitable.

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Compassion (Mitleid) is the second solution to the problem posed by the will. Schopenhauer dedicates considerable space to this solution: paragraphs 61–67 (particularly 66–7) in the first volume; and chapter 47 in the second volume of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung discuss compassion. He also dedicated an entire book to this subject: the second of Die beiden Grundproblem der Ethik, with the title Preisschrift über die Grundlage der Moral. As its title implies, this text was written as an answer to a prize question, posed by the Royal Danish Society of Science. Although it was the only entry, it did not win the contest. Like the meditation on the Ideas in the experience of art, compassion presupposes a form of knowledge by means of which one transcends one’s individuality.

The aim of Schopenhauer’s ethics is not to create a list of rules that one has to obey in order to be a good person or act rightly. Nor is it an enquiry into the language of morals. The aim is the same as that of the rest of his philosophy: to interpret the world as it appears to us and to give an account of it in terms of abstract knowledge. Ethics therefore has the purpose of explaining the behaviour of people. Moral commands are useless. “You ought not to lie” either means: “If you lie, you will be punished”, or “You ought not to want to lie”. In the first case, following the command means that one acts on an egoistic motive, and that can never be a moral action. The other case is mere nonsense. The will is free on Schopenhauer’s account, but it is free in virtue of being situated beyond the representations. When manifesting itself as representations, it is subject to the principle of sufficient reason. It is, in other words, subject to the

\(^{106}\) In a discussion of the relation of melancholy to boredom in Schopenhauer’s works, Lothar Pikulik maintains that the main difference between the two is that melancholy is a state rooted a privileged knowledge and characterised by a certain freedom from the will; in a state of boredom, on the other hand, one has no special knowledge and is subject to the will: “Während die Langeweile auch bei Erstarrung der Lebenskräfte stets am Gängelband des Willens fortgeht, also alles andere als Resignation des Lebenstriebes bedeutet, ist die Melancholie ein vom Willen gelöster, in Schopenhauers Wertung: erlöster, Zustand.” Lothar Pikulik: “Zweierlei Krankheiten zum Tode. Über den Unterschied von Langeweile und Melancholie im Lichte der Philosophie Schopenhauers. Mit einer Anwendung auf die Literatur”, in: Udo Benzenhöfer et. al.: Melancholie in Literatur und Kunst, Schriften zur Psychopathologie, Kunst und Literatur (Hürtgenwald, 1990), p. 192.
three categories of time, space, and causality. The freedom of the will, therefore, applies to the will qua will. It does not apply to the will qua manifestation (Erscheinung) of the will. The freedom is a transcendental freedom. This means that we are free to chose, but that we cannot chose differently than we actually do: “Demzufolge ist zwar der Wille frei, aber nur an sich selbst und außerhalb der Erscheinung: in dieser hingegen stellt er sich schon mit einem bestimmten Charakter dar, welchem alle seine Thaten gemäß seyn und daher, wenn durch die hinzugekommenen Motive näher bestimmt, nothwendig so und nicht anders ausfallen müssen.”\textsuperscript{107} As objects in the world of representations, we are subject to causality. The difference between a falling stone and a human being making a choice is only the medium through which causality exerts its influence. In a given situation, I cannot chose to act in more than one way. To act differently would be to break the laws of causality; it would be no different from a stone choosing to defy the laws of gravity. If the stone could choose, it would choose to fall. Our actions are determined by our character.\textsuperscript{108} And our character is immutable, ahistorical, as it is grounded in the will, thus transcending the principle of individuation. Qua will, we are free to chose, but this choice manifests itself in our character. Qua individual we cannot act against our character. To claim that someone ought not to lie amounts to claiming that that person ought to will differently. That would be the same as blaming them for not being another person.\textsuperscript{109}

Schopenhauer’s ethics, on the other hand, is descriptive. His aim is giving a description of how people act in any given situation. He holds that there are four, or for all practical purposes three, types of motives. We act either out of concern of ourselves (egoism), concern of another person (altruism), will to injure another person (cruelty), or out of a will to injure ourselves (this is a motive that Schopenhauer mentions for completing the system: in reality, it is virtually never the true motive).

We are all one. There is one will, and we are all manifestations of that will. Metaphysically, all men are literally the same entity. In the world of representa-

\textsuperscript{107} E I, chapter V, p. 137/87: “Consequently, the will is indeed free, but only in itself and outside the appearance. In the latter, on the other hand, it already manifests itself with a definite character to which all its deeds must conform, and consequently turn out necessarily thus and not otherwise when they are determined more specifically by the motives that enter.”


\textsuperscript{109} Julian Young seeks to question Schopenhauer’s claims to have created a non-normative moral philosophy: “For to represent something as the saintly life, as the life of a practical pilgrim or moral hero, is to represent it as an ideal of human action, something we ought to do what we can to live up to. So Schopenhauer advocates denial of the will, recommends it as ‘the road to salvation’ (WR II p.634).” Julian Young: Willing and Unwilling. A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (Dordrecht, Boston & Lancaster, 1987), p. 126. But this argument consists in a re-interpretation of the term ‘ought to’. Schopenhauer’s point is precisely that if we do not want to be the kind of person who can lead a moral or saintly life, then no amount of commands can change our will.
tions the will manifests itself as different individuals, but beyond the veil of Maya, we are all one. In the world of representations we appear (Erscheinung, ‘manifestation’, also means ‘appearance’) to be divided. But in fact, the belief that other people are distinct from ourselves is a deep mistake. “In Folge dieses Egoismus ist unser Aller Grundirrhum dieser, daß wir einander gegenseitig Nicht-Ich sind.”

As suffering is tangible and happiness is not, and as the will is real whereas the division into individuals is not, the suffering of the other ought to be relevant for me. The pain of the other is my pain, as pain is an immediate affection of the will, not a representation, and there is only one will. My individuality on the other hand is a function of my being a subject, that is a representation. But as we are knowing and willing subjects, we act as if the division between individuals represented the true state of things. Our actions are normally motivated by egoism; we all tend to be prone to the fundamental mistake of believing that the suffering of another person is of less importance to us than our own suffering. “Die Haupt- und Grundtriebfeder im Menschen wie im Thiere ist der Egoismus, d. h. der Drang zum Daseyn und Wohlseyn.” Egoism is a form of ignorance on Schopenhauer’s account. The egoist fails to see that individuality is an illusion whereas suffering is real, no matter whom it affects. Egoism therefore is amoral rather than immoral.

Actions carried out with another’s suffering as its goal are immoral, however. Cruelty, the wish to inflict pain, is positively wicked. So is malice (Schadenfreude): it differs from cruelty only in lacking the means to inflict damage. Morally, they are on a par. Schopenhauer is not interested in trying to make the malicious and cruel change. But he holds that their cruelty is a sign, indeed evidence, that they are evil. One’s character is on the whole something of which one achieves knowledge a posteriori. It is through one’s actions that one realises who one is.

The will to damage oneself is, as was remarked earlier, in practice never a motive. Suicide is, on Schopenhauer’s view, not an act carried out with the will to annihilation. Suicide is a misdirected expression of the will to live. It is an expression of discontent with how life is, not with existence as such.

The last remaining category, actions out of concern for another’s well-being, is the only morally laudable category. These actions are all carried out out of

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110 W II, chapter 47, p. 704/600: “In consequence of this egoism, the most fundamental of all our errors is that, with reference to one another, we are not-I.”

111 As what matters is the suffering per se and not the sufferer, the suffering of an animal is in principle no less important than that of a man. Schopenhauer was one of the first, perhaps the first philosopher to take the plight of animals seriously. “Mitleid mit Thieren hängt mit der Güte des Charakters so genau zusammen, daß man zuversichtlich behaupten darf, wer gegen Thiere grausam ist, könne kein guter Mensch seyn.”

112 E II, § 14, p. 235/131: “The chief and fundamental incentive in man as in the animal is egoism, that is, the craving for existence and well-being.”

113 E II, § 5, p. 167.
compassion (Mitleid). On Schopenhauer’s view, it is something of a miracle that these actions occur at all. The faculty of understanding (the senses) is a tool of the will. It took form to aid the will. Understanding and knowledge is the means through which the will operates in man. We see and hear and know in order that we may achieve what we want. We are no different than an animal: just as a wolf ruthlessly attacks a lamb whenever the opportunity arises, so do we try to take advantage of every situation. The only difference lies in our having reason, which gives us the opportunity to assess the situation more cunningly, to take into consideration the future. A wolf will kill as many sheep as possible. To a human, the possibility to household with resources stands open: reason makes us take the future into consideration. But that is not a matter of greater moral sensitivity; it is a matter of our understanding that we, in the long run, are better off if we act considerately towards our neighbours. Our sensitivity is as much a matter of egoism as the wolf’s killing the sheep. And the whole of nature acts on an analogous principle.

Compassion is the great exception to this. The truly compassionate individual acts on another’s interest. In a world that is a manifestation of the will, egoism is the norm. Compassion therefore is an unnatural motive. Compassion consists in one’s tearing the veil of Maya, realizing that the suffering of the other is no different from my suffering. Not only does the compassionate individual realise this, but he acts on this realisation. The suffering of the other leads to action in exactly the same way as one’s own suffering normally does: “Sobald dieses Mitleid rege wird, liegt mir das Wohl und Wehe des Andern unmittelbar am Herzen, ganz in der selben Art, wenn auch nicht stets in dem selben Grade, wie sonst allein das meinige; also ist jetzt der Unterschied zwischen ihm und mir kein absoluter mehr.”

Although being motivated by concern for another’s well-being goes against nature, and although Schopenhauer rhetorical strategy (against Hegel and the other German idealists mostly) consists of his claiming to present a feasible picture of the world, corresponding to modern science, Schopenhauer does not really address the question of whether acts of compassion actually occur. Or rather, he addresses the question in a way very typical of him: Schopenhauer offers a number of examples from literature. He is not interested in demarking acts of true compassion from acts of pretended compassion. He is not interested to set up criteria that determine whether an action is compassionate or not. The fundamental question is very easy to Schopenhauer: acts of compassion are evidence that the agent is good. Determining which action is right for the agent in any given situation is easy; acting upon that knowledge is, on the contrary, only possible for a good person. Compassion is a matter of character.

114 E II, § 16, pp. 248/144: “As soon as this compassion is aroused, the weal and woe of another are nearest to my heart in exactly the same way, although not always in the same degree, as otherwise only my own are. Hence the difference between him and me is no longer absolute.”
It is a matter of an action’s inner worth. It is a matter of mankind’s essence. Matters of mankind’s essence can only be addressed by art and by philosophy.

Compassion, too is a certain type of knowledge. Compassion consists in an intuitive knowledge that the other is not a not-I, but an I-once-again. It consists in an intuitive knowledge that individuality is an illusion, and that at bottom the suffering of another person is as much my suffering as the suffering that I experience in my own body. Compassion is, in short, the intuitive counterpart of the abstract knowledge that Schopenhauer puts forward in the chapters dealing with ethics in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung and Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik.

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But the theory of ethics does not crown Schopenhauer’s œuvre. And compassion is not a permanent answer to the problem posed by the will. When acting out of compassion, we do not will and therefore do not suffer, but constantly acting out of compassion seems to be beyond the grasp of even the most altruistic individual.

The compassionate individual sees that the difference between me and my neighbour is an illusion. At bottom we are one, and therefore acting against nature, against egoism, becomes possible. But he does not see what we are. He sees that the suffering is more real than the individuality, but he does not see that the suffering is the will and that individuality is a representation. He has reached, that is, an intuitive knowledge corresponding to Schopenhauer’s ethics, but he has not reached the counterpart to his metaphysics of will.

The ascetic reaches a deeper knowledge than the compassionate individual.\(^\text{115}\) The ascetic manages to see not only that I am one with the suffering other, but that I am in fact one with the world in its entirety. The ascetic furthermore sees that the world is a ceaseless and goalless striving, and that life therefore has to be characterised by suffering and death. The ascetic, in short, reaches an intuitive insight into the state of things, an insight which corresponds fully to Schopenhauer’s philosophical system; the only difference is that Schopenhauer’s knowledge is intellectual and therefore communicable, but lacking the motivational force that the ascetic’s intuitive knowledge has.

The ascetic’s knowledge is of the same kind as the compassionate individual’s. It is a form of compassion. But it is not compassion towards one individual or a number of individuals. The ascetic’s knowledge is compassion with the world in its entirety. And it is not until this stage is reached that the power of the will can be broken. The ascetic comes to realise that even an attempt to help another person is a manifestation of the will. Even the attempt to help another therefore increases the suffering. Once this is intuitively understood, the ascetic manages to cease willing. He turns his back to the world, and starves to death,

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\(^{115}\) Different commentators refer to the person who manages to renounce the will by different names: ‘metaphysical hero’, ‘saint’, etc. I shall reserve the term ‘ascetic’ for this kind of person.
with a content smile upon his face. One can therefore say that asceticism on Schopenhauer’s account is compassion with the world in its entirety.

This is a point that has been eloquently made by Julian Young:

By living the life of sympathetic identification with others the holy person comes to an intuitive realisation of the truth of philosophical pessimism. He realises that suffering characterises not just his life, but all possible life; that life, as such, is suffering. He realises, therefore, the futility of moral action, of action aimed at the relief of suffering, and that the solution to suffering can never be found in this but only in another world. Hence, he rejects, ‘denies’ this world and turns his being towards the transcendent.¹¹⁶

Asceticism is the result of the insight that is the foundation of all morality, only taken one step further. Paradoxically, this leads to the rejection of morality. It does this because the pessimistic insight that no life is worth while, is more correct than the insight that the suffering of the other is every bit as real as my suffering. The latter insight is only partly true, whereas the insight of the ascetic and the intellectual knowledge that it corresponds to, pessimism, are completely true.

Pessimism is therefore not the conclusion of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. It is rather a premise. The conclusion is the denial of the will in the ascetic. This presupposes the truth of pessimism. Asceticism is the result of the intuitive insight into the truth of pessimism by the ascetic. Schopenhauer’s philosophy is an analogical phenomenon, but consists of intellectual knowledge. The conclusion of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung is famous: “Wir bekennen es vielmehr frei: was nach gänzlicher Aufhebung des Willens übrig bleibt, ist für alle Die, welche noch des Willens voll sind, allerdings Nichts. Aber auch umgekehrt ist Denen, in welchen der Wille sich gewendet und verneint hat, diese unsere so reale Welt mit allen ihren Sonnen und Milchstraßen – Nichts.”¹¹⁷ Nothingness is preferable to existence. But nothingness is not synonymous to pessimism. Nothingness, the negation of the will, is the result of the intuitive insight that pessimism is true.

That pessimism is true means to Schopenhauer that non-existence is preferable to existence because the world is will, and the will can never be satisfied. This is what it means that existence cannot be justified.

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In this chapter we set out to answer three questions. We wanted to see, firstly, how Schopenhauer defines pessimism; secondly how he argues for its truth; and thirdly what its function in his system is. We are now in a position to answer

¹¹⁷ W I, § 71, p. 508/411 f.: “On the contrary, we freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, for all who are still full of the will, assuredly nothing. But also conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing”.

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those questions. We have seen that Schopenhauer defines pessimism as the notion that existence cannot be justified. This is in its turn a notion that needs interpretation, not least because Schopenhauer introduces it in the context of a discussion of religion, and religion is on his own account a form of metaphysics expressed in allegories. We noted that some of Schopenhauer’s contemporaries (and some modern scholars) interpreted pessimism as the notion that ours is the worst possible world: that is as an anti-theodicy. Against this, we have argued that it should rather be interpreted as the notion that non-existence is preferable to existence.

Furthermore, we have seen that although Schopenhauer did not include the term pessimism in any of his published works until 1844, the notion that non-existence is preferable to existence is present in his system much earlier. In the first edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, this notion is present as a tacit premise; the fact that Schopenhauer made it explicit in the second edition is primarily a rhetorical move. Schopenhauer argues for the truth of pessimism by demonstrating that willing always, by necessity, leaves us unsatisfied, due to the nature of the will, the metaphysical principle that the world is a manifestation of. This leads him to the conclusion that pleasure is intangible whereas suffering is real, which means that the hedonistic value of life is always negative. The notion that existence cannot be justified is a crucial premise in Schopenhauer’s system. It is an important component in his view of art as a palliative to the sufferings of the will. By ceasing to be a subject of willing, by ceasing to will, the person enjoying a work of art temporarily ceases to live. It is also an important component in his account of asceticism as a way to negate the will. The ascetic, the person crowning the system of Schopenhauer, turns the intellectual doctrine of pessimism into a motive for ceasing to will altogether.
2. A Matter of Logic or Beer? The Post-Schopenhauerian Debate over Pessimism

If there is a philosophical counterpart to the decadent movement in the arts, then it must surely be the predominantly German pessimistic tradition of that took form in the late nineteenth century. The fascination with death and decline that permeates the pessimistic tradition is echoed in the arts as well. The notion of sexuality as the most basic force in man that is visible so much of the literature, the music, and the visual arts of the last decades of the nineteenth centuries has its correspondence in this tradition. The usage of themes and images from the melancholy tradition is no less wide-spread among the pessimists than among the novelists of the décadence.

Pessimism, of course, was much more than just the fin de siècle atmosphere with which we might associate it today. Pessimism was above all a philosophical concept. And like most philosophical concepts, its meaning was gradually established through its usage. It is my general thesis that pessimism was established as a philosophical concept in the late 1860’s. I regard Eduard von Hartmann as the most important of a number of thinkers who contributed to its establishment by interpreting Schopenhauer’s rather vague usage of the term as a judgement on the negative value of life.

2.1 Pessimism and the Value of Life: Dühring and Hartmann

We saw that pessimism was not a particularly clear notion to Schopenhauer’s contemporaries. None of the early reviewers of his works described him as a pessimist. The critics of the 1850’s did use the terms pessimism and pessimist, but the meaning of the terms is very vague. We saw that to Oxenford, it was unclear whether pessimism is a political, theological, or metaphysical concept. It seems that this incertitude was widespread at the time. Giuseppe Invernizzi, whose Il pessimismo tedesco dell'Ottocento contains the most extensive treatment of pessimism in the philosophy of nineteenth century Germany, demonstrates that
a number of the more important readers of Schopenhauer in the 1850’s and early 60’s have a very vague notion of pessimism.\footnote{Invernizzi states that Julius Frauenstädt for example, Schopenhauer’s literary heir and editor of an edition of his works that still form the basis of Hübischer’s modern critical edition, demonstrates “una notevole incertezza circa la reale natura del pessimismo schopenhaueriano, di cui egli parla spesso, ma senza mai affrontare a fondo il problema.” (“a notable uncertainty regarding the true nature of the Schopenhauerian pessimism, of which he often talks, but without ever going to the bottom with the problem.”) Invernizzi, p. 67. And adversaries of Schopenhauer associate pessimism with the absence of ideals (Seydel), or atheism (Hoffmann and Thilo): Invernizzi, pp. 97, and 98 f. Cf. the discussion of the reception of the \textit{Parerga} in Rüdiger Safranski’s biography, where Safranski sees the fact that the pessimism is moderated, partly concealed, in the \textit{Parerga} as an important reason for its success: “In Schopenhauers ‘Philosophie für die Welt’ gibt es einen Pessimismus zum halben Preis; als Grundierung dringt dieser Pessimismus überall durch, doch werden gerade nicht die radikalen Konsequenzen der Verneinung gezogen.” Rüdiger Safranski: \textit{Schopenhauer und die wilden Jahre der Philosophie. Eine Biographie} (1987; Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1998), p. 499.}

From the late 1860’s the vagueness around the concept of pessimism disappears. At that time, a usage is established, and in the 1870’s, the decade of philosophical pessimism, the usage of the term is remarkably consistent. It seems to me, although this is difficult to ascertain empirically, that two philosophers are primarily responsible for this change: Eugen Dühring and Eduard von Hartmann. With them, pessimism becomes associated with the question of the value of life.\footnote{“Die Frage nach dem ‘Werth des Lebens’ stellen, die in der Schopenhauer-Nachfolge, zumal bei Nietzsche, so obstinat wird, heißt jedenfalls fragen, ob das ‘Daseyn’ etwas ist, das sein soll oder nicht lieber nicht.” Lütkehaus, p. 174.}

Eugen Dühring

Although Eugen Dühring (1833–1921) was the author of a number of books, he has entered the annals of the history of philosophy mainly as a result not of any of them, but because of a book of another. Friedrich Engels’ \textit{Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft} (1878), the so-called \textit{Anti-Dühring}, has ensured Dühring some attention from later generations. In his day, Dühring was a much-read writer, though. Among his numerous books on economics, Judaism, ethics, and general philosophy, Dühring published a book dedicated to an attempt to refute Schopenhauer’s pessimism: \textit{Der Werth des Lebens} (1865). Dühring denies that he is an optimist; he even seems to consider the superficiality of optimism as a worse evil than the inconsolableness of pessimism. But \textit{Der Werth des Lebens} nonetheless is Dühring’s attempt to salvage Schopenhauer’s important contributions to Kantian philosophy from his pessimism.\footnote{Eugen Dühring: \textit{Der Werth des Lebens. Eine philosophische Betrachtung} (Breslau, 1865), p. vi: “[I]ch [bin] allerdings ein Anhänger Schopenhauers […], sobald es gilt, diesem Philosophen seine einzige Stellung nach Kant zu vindiciren.”}

As we have seen, to Schopenhauer pessimism was the notion that existence is impossible to justify. Among his contemporaries, we also saw, there was no agreement on how to understand this notion. With Dühring this notion is given
a very specific interpretation. In a chapter on death, Dühring alludes to Schopenhauer’s phrasing of pessimism. Having suggested that death is not an evil to the person who dies, he comes to discuss its effect on the mourning survivors. Their grief is presented as a most terrible torment, upon which Dühring adds: “Wenn irgend wo so befindet sich hier das Bestreben, unser Dasein zu rechtfertigen, in Verlegenheit.” 121 Since Dühring’s entire book is an attempt to prove that life has a positive value, this is clearly how he uses the notion of a justification of existence. The notion that existence can be justified thus becomes synonymous to the notion that life has a value.

With Dühring’s book the question of pessimism vs. optimism thus becomes a matter of establishing the value of life. And of course (his book being an attempt to save Schopenhauer’s philosophy from its pessimism), he eventually comes to the conclusion that a number of things render life valuable. Love and honour are the foremost of Dühring’s goods. 122 But he also maintains that a number of things that are described by Schopenhauer as evils are in fact blessings in disguise. Death is one example: the contrast between non-being and being makes us feel and appreciate life more strongly. 123 And instead of regarding other people as an evil – apart from Schopenhauer, Dühring points to the doctrine of Malthus as an example of this – they can be seen as a source of profound happiness.

By investigating love, death, society, and knowledge, Dühring comes to the conclusion that none of them is a hindrance to a valuable existence. Hence pessimism cannot be a scientific truth. The choice between pessimism and optimism is based on emotion, not on reason. The pessimist thus is a certain type of person, a person who exaggerates the difficulties and miseries of life and disregards the elements that bring us joy. Pessimism is therefore founded in a distorted view of life: “das Leben erscheint öde und kahl, weil es vom Standpunkt eines verdorrten Gemüths betrachtet wird.” 124 Pessimism hence has a conceptual content, it denotes the notion that life has no positive value, but this notion is itself a sign of a pathological spirit.

Der Werth des Lebens had a certain success: the book went through seven editions in Dühring’s lifetime (and an eighth was published in 1922, the year after his death). But I believe that the contribution that the book made to the redefi-


124 *Ibid.*, p. 186: “life appears bleak and desolate, because it is seen from the standpoint of a barren mind.”
The definition of the concept of pessimism is a better measure of its success. From the late 1860’s, there is a consensus about the meaning of the term pessimism among the many philosophers and journalists who address the term; in the light of the vagueness of the commentators from the 1850’s, this consensus is quite notable. Dühring, to be sure, should not be given all the credit for this, but he must still be regarded as a decisive factor. There is another thinker who must be considered even more important, though. Ironically, it was a man much despised by Dühring. That man was Eduard von Hartmann.

Eduard von Hartmann

Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) began his career as an officer. However, a knee injury soon forced him to give up his military career; and instead he studied natural science and philosophy at the University of Berlin. Hartmann was an extremely productive writer who published in virtually all fields of philosophy, and more often than not his publications are books of remarkable size. Still, he owed his considerable fame to one work only: Philosophie des Unbewussten (1869). By the time of the publication of the book, its author was 27 years old. It was an instant success, and went through ten editions in Hartmann’s lifetime.

The present section will present Hartmann’s system, with particular attention dedicated to the aspects of it connected to pessimism. I will attempt to demonstrate that Hartmann at first took over Schopenhauer’s usage of the concept of pessimism unchanged, although he argued for it in a somewhat different way, but that he later differentiated the concept and introduced an historical aspect of pessimism. As in the Schopenhauer section, I will attempt to answer three questions: Firstly: How does Hartmann define pessimism? Secondly: How does he argue for the truth of pessimism? Thirdly: What function does pessimism have in his system? In order for us to be able to answer those questions we will

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125 When Hartmann is studied today, it is usually in connection to Nietzsche and/or Schopenhauer. And as the connection to them consists in his pessimism as it is expressed in Philosophie des Unbewussten, this is the work and the aspect of his philosophy that are usually highlighted. The present study is no exception: I will base my discussion of Hartmann on Philosophie des Unbewussten and on a few minor works, particularly Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus (1880). One recent study of Hartmann’s philosophy does pay attention to other aspects of his works: Jean-Claude Wolf: Eduard von Hartmann, Ein Philosoph der Gründerzeit (Würzburg, 2006). Wolf’s book opens with a chapter on Hartmann’s pessimism, but he treats this theme as a detail in a much larger system (“Bekannt geworden ist Hartmann als Philosoph des Pessimismus, obwohl der Pessimismus nur eine Seite seiner Philosophie ist, genauer genommen ein integraler Teil seiner Hedonismuskritik.” Wolf, p. 21) and dedicates considerable space to Hartmann’s later works and generally take him much more seriously as a thinker than most other commentators do. Too seriously, perhaps. Hartmann’s problems are not the problems of our time, and I do not really see the point in demonstrating, for example, that neither optimism nor pessimism is scientifically founded (Wolf, p. 171). I consider an historical approach to a thinker such as Hartmann, who obviously is historically rather than philosophically interesting, to be more fruitful than a philosophical.
first give an overview of Hartmann’s system as it is presented in Philosophie des Unbewussten.

Like Schopenhauer, Hartmann holds that the suffering of man depends on his will. But he considers Schopenhauer’s model not to be complex enough. The concept corresponding to Schopenhauer’s will in Hartmann’s system is the unconscious. The unconscious is the metaphysical principle that underlies each and every aspect of our empirical reality. Unlike the will, the unconscious is not blind. On the contrary, the unconscious is guided by unerring unconscious representations (unbewußte Vorstellungen). Hartmann’s unconscious is thus a wider concept than Schopenhauer’s will, including also the representations.126 The unconscious, manifesting itself as the driving force behind all human action and generally all living creatures, does nothing that is not aimed at achieving its goal. This goal is the extinction of all life; the extinction of the unconscious.

Unlike most of the pessimist philosophers, who in an at least nominally Kantian fashion base their systems on an analysis of human perception and understanding, Eduard von Hartmann attempts to create a scientific basis for his philosophy by survey of the various natural sciences. Although Hartmann – like most of the pessimists – claims to be the true heir of Kant, he chooses a different path altogether. Most of the first 150 pages of Philosophie des Unbewussten are dedicated to the physiology of plants and invertebrates, and to descriptions of vivisections of animals. Hartmann did not carry out these experiments himself, but quotes from a number of textbooks.127 By showing that invertebrates act as if they were conscious, Hartmann wants to demonstrate that they have unconscious representations that they act upon.128 And similarly, vivi-

126 Several commentators see this as an influence from the then popular monistic thinking of Ernst Haeckel. See for example Pauen: Dithyrambiker des Untergangs, pp. 81 f.

127 A fair amount of the criticism that Hartmann encountered form his contemporaries was aimed at the scientific basis of his system, which was deemed amateurish and based on a tendentious choice of (sub-standard) scientific studies. See for example James Sully: Pessimism. A History and a Criticism (London, 1877), p. 202: “[I]t must be confessed that Hartmann’s attempts to base his random ‘discoveries’ of intuition in inanimate nature on science and induction is about as startling an anachronism as one could well find in the history of thought. In truth, his method, so far from being ‘inductive,’ is as unscientific as that of any of the teleologists of a bygone century.” The fact is, though, that one of the acutest critics of the scientific pretences of Hartmann’s philosophy was – Hartmann himself. In 1872 he anonymously published a book, Das Unbewusste vom Standpunkt der Physiologie und Descendenztheorie. Eine kritische Beleuchtung des naturphilosophischen Theils der Philosophie des Unbewussten aus naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen (Berlin, 1872), dedicated to a critical discussion of the scientific parts of Philosophie des Unbewussten. Interestingly enough, Sully refers to this book with respect (p. 204, footnote and pp. 455 f.). In later editions of Philosophie des Unbewussten, Hartmann re-wrote much of the scientific sections, incorporating the results from his anonymous book and adding, among other things, an extensive discussion of Darwin’s theories.

128 In doing this he deviates from Schopenhauer in a way that Wolf regards as highly important: “Bemerkenswert ist die terminologische Abweichung von Schopenhauer: Versteht dieser unter ‘Vorstellung’ die bewusste Repräsentation der Welt, so versteht Hartmann unter ‘Vorstellung’ ein Attribut des unbewussten Geistes. Aus der Sicht der strikten Anhänger von Schopenhauer ist dies nicht nur ein Missbrauch der Sprache, sondern auch Verrat, nämlich eine Aufweichung von Schopenhauers polemischen Abgrenzungen gegen die Identitätsphilosophie Schellings und die Geistesspekulationen Hegels.” Wolf, p. 100.
sections of higher mammals demonstrate that they act as if they were conscious after the organs that harbour their consciousness have been destroyed: “Junge Hunde, bei welchen ich das grosse und kleine Gehirn mit Ausnahme des verlängerten Marks zerstört hatte, suchten mit der Vorderpfote meine Hand zu entfernen, wenn ich sie unsanft bei den Ohren fasste.” The motto of his book “Speculative Resultate nach inductiv-naturwissenschaftlicher Methode” (“speculative results achieved through an inductive-scientific method”) is no joke.

But during the course of the book the character of the unconscious gradually changes. The purpose of the first, empirical scientific part is to demonstrate that all instincts presuppose unconscious representations. This is why the dogs defend themselves and decapitated frogs and chickens try to flee, and this is also why humans tend to seek partners who make up for their own short-comings. In the beginning of the book, ‘the unconscious’ is a vague term used almost metaphorically. Soon, however, it becomes the basic metaphysical principle underlying human reality.

The unconscious is particularly present in sexuality. Love (die Geschlechtsliebe), Hartmann writes, is a demon much feared by the ancient writers for its power to make humans act as if they were intoxicated. We would call its effects upon us absurd, were not its effects so dangerous.

Was ist denn nun aber jener Dämon, der sich so spreizt und in’s Unendliche hinaus will, und die ganze Welt an seinem Narrenseile tanzen lässt, was ist er endlich? Sein Ziel ist die Geschlechtsbefriedigung, so viel er sich auch drehen und wenden mag, um es zu verhüllen und zu verleugnen, und so viel er sich mit hohlen Phrasen breit macht. Just like Schopenhauer, Hartmann maintains that the sexual drive leads us to seek a partner who will compensate for our own short-comings. A short person will be attracted by tall persons; a weak person will be attracted by physical strength, etc. Love and sexuality have nothing with happiness to do – that is an illusion that the more intelligent people see through easily. Their purpose is to bring the human race nearer to perfection.

The unconscious is the driving force not only in the individual’s life, but also behind language (language is too complex to be the product of one individual or of a cooperation between individuals; instead, Hartmann holds, it is the result of a mass instinct, much like the organisation of a bee-hive), and in history.

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129 Eduard von Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten. Versuch einer Weltanschauung (Berlin, 1869), p. 90: “Young dogs, whose cerebrum and cerebellum with the exception of the medulla oblongata I had destroyed, sought to remove my hand with the fore paw when I grabbed them violently by the ear.” Hartmann is quoting from Rudolph Wagner’s Handwörterbuch der Physiologie (1842–53).

130 Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 179: “But what then is this demon, that puts on airs and strives for infinity, and lets the whole world dance in its puppet strings, what is it ultimately? Its goal is sexual satisfaction, no matter how it may twist and turn to hide and deny that, and no matter how it tries to make itself important with hollow phrases.”
tory to Hartmann has a very precise goal. Hartmann is an outspoken believer in historical progress, something obviously very rare among pessimists. He believes that society develops towards greater freedom and that man develops both intellectually and morally. But the political, intellectual and moral progress does not lead to greater happiness. On the contrary: the intellectual progress makes us see through prejudices and illusions that hitherto concealed things that make us unhappy. The moral progress makes us feel injustices that we suffer or see more acutely. And the political progress makes those cases seem worse because they are rarer.

The unconscious never errs. It has created mankind for a reason, and it directs the course of history towards its goal for a reason. That reason is annihilation. Mankind is the tool of the self-destruction of the unconscious. The suffering of all living things is unavoidable. In mankind, the unconscious has developed the capacity to understand this unavoidability. This has also endowed mankind with the capacity to, potentially at least, break free from the suffering. This is only possible through a complete annihilation of all life. And this in its turn is a collective task. As we have seen, Schopenhauer held annihilation to be possible in rare cases for ascetics. To Hartmann, this is “ebenso thöricht und nützlos, ja noch thörichter als der Selbstmord, weil es langsamer und qualvoller doch nur dasselbe erreicht: Aufhebung dieser Erscheinung, ohne das Wesen zu alter-

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131 Hartmann regarded his philosophy as a synthesis of Schopenhauer’s and Hegel’s systems, and it is of course the philosophy of history that is the Hegelian element. A number of modern commentators follow him in this: see for example Dienstag, p. 175, footnote 27; Magee: The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, p. 306; or Pauen: Pessimismus, p. 123. An exception is Jean-Claude Wolf, who maintains that this synthesis is a cliché best forgotten; its absurdity hinders readers from taking Hartmann seriously (Wolf, p. 97).

132 Michael Pauen wants to see Hartmann’s paradoxical combination of progress and pessimism as an important element in the cultural critique of his day: “Hartmann bekennt sich ausdrücklich zum Fortschrittsprinzip, doch eine qualitative Entwicklung, eine Vermehrung des menschlichen Glücks gilt ihm als verhängnisvolle Illusion. Schließlich übt er sich auch in emphatischen Prophezeiungen einer besseren Zukunft, doch die Welt des Lichtes und der Glückseligkeit, die er ver- spricht, ist das reine Nichts. Hartmann liefert damit – mehr noch als Schopenhauer – der Kulturkritik ihre zentralen Themen und er bedient sich dabei jener Geste der Entlarvung, die oben als charakteristisch für den gnostischen Theorietypus bezeichnet worden war: Erkenntnis ist hier eingestandenermaßen Desillusionierung – doch gerade damit bereitet sie die Erlösung vor.” Pauen: Dithyrambiker des Untergangs, p. 83.

133 In a later book, Hartmann specifies that morality necessarily is opposed to happiness – and this goes not only for human beings, but would be valid for beings on other planets, or in a life after death too: “Die Antinomie zwischen Sittlichkeit und Glückseligkeit ist schlechterdings unlösich für die Sphäre der Erscheinungswelt; soweit die Formen von Raum, Zeit und Ursachlichkeit Geltung haben – also nicht blass für unser Erdenleben, sondern auch für das Leben auf andern Weltkörpern und für eine etwaige zeitliche Fortsetzung des Individuallebens nach dem Tode ist diese Antinomie unhörwändig und unüberwindlich.” Hartmann: Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus (Berlin, 1880), p. 17.

The only solution to the suffering caused by the will lies in a commitment to the world process, to the development of history. Eventually, mankind (or perhaps a higher being than man) will have evolved to such a level that we, mankind as a collective, can choose to cease existing.136

The force by means of which the development of the world process takes place is the destruction of illusions.137 Hartmann likens the history of mankind to the life of a human being, and holds that the childhood, the youth, the manhood, and old age of a human being correspond to Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Reformation up until today, and a near future. The three stages up until today are all characterised by certain illusions; Hartmann refers to them by the term Illusionenstufen, illusion levels or stages. Antiquity and the childhood are characterised by the belief in immanent worldly happiness; they believe in factors such as youth, and love, and freedom as contributing to our happiness. But soon man comes to see through these illusions: Hartmann tries to demonstrate that the values of the first illusion stage are either negative values (health and youth are but the absence of illness and old age), or consist of a mixture of happiness and suffering where the suffering is necessarily heavier (such as love). This insight makes the child mature; the destruction of the illusions pushes the child and mankind respectively into the second stage.

The second stage of the illusion is characterised by the belief in a transcendental happiness. Through Christianity, mankind comes to belief in a personal happiness beyond death, and likewise, youth typically brings with it a phase of religious idealism. Hartmann tries to demonstrate that the beliefs of this phase too are illusions. The personality is so intimately tied to the body, particularly to the molecules of the brain, that a belief in a continuity of the personality beyond death is untenable. When this insight is reached, when the illusions of the second illusion stage are destroyed, one partly regresses to the first stage. For in the third stage, too, one does believe in an immanent happiness. But one does not believe it to be at hand for one personally.

The illusion of the third stage is the idea of progress. One believes that one can contribute to the happiness of man by committing oneself to the progress of the society. Hartmann holds that this too is an illusion: and he attempts to demonstrate that although the medical sciences advance, we can never avoid

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135 Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 636: “just as foolish and useless, in fact even more foolish than suicide, since it achieves the same thing, only slower and more painfully: the annihilation of this manifestation, without changing the essence.”

136 Ludger Lütkehaus, always fond of a clever expression, describes Hartmann’s redemption through a progress to annihilation as “gloriose[r] Einfall einer nihilistischen Science-fiction” Lütkehaus, p. 239.

death, we can never avoid the effects of old age. And although the wealth of society rises, enabling us to fight poverty, this progress also causes an increased sensitivity to suffering that actually makes us experience the poverty that remains more strongly than we did before.

Once these three sets of illusions have been seen through – and mankind is not there yet – then we will pass into the old age. This will be characterised by the absence of illusions, by a form of melancholy wisdom caused by the insight that happiness is impossible. When this happens, redemption from the suffering becomes possible. Like Schopenhauer, Hartmann alludes to the melancholy of genius to explain the state of mind of the person who manages to see the world as it really is: “Dann wird sie in jener erhabenen Melancholie, welche man bei Genies oder auch bei geistig hochstehenden Greisen gewöhnlich findet, gleichsam wie ein verklärter Geist über ihrem eigenen Leibe schweben”.¹³⁸ Melancholy, just as on Schopenhauer’s view, is far from a pathological condition. Like Schopenhauer before him, Hartmann presumes that pessimism is associated with clear-sightedness and genius.

Our life would be happier if it were possible to return to a primordial state of nature. But that is impossible. The only thing we can do is to strive for the painlessness of nothingness; and this can only be achieved through commitment to the world process. It is only by attempting to help the world process to its goal that we can contribute to the nothingness.¹³⁹ Hartmann thus regards it as the basic principle of his practical philosophy that one must take part in life rather than isolating oneself, and that one must work for the progress of mankind.

Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins (1879), a work that Hartmann characterises as his second main opus (Hauptwerk), he declares pessimism to be the most durable foundation for ethics:

Sehen wir von diesen anderswo hingehörenden metaphysischen Fragen ab, so haben wir hier nur soviel zu constatiren, dass der Pessimismus das wirksamste Antidot gegen den Egoismus, das Vehikel seiner Selbstaufhebung ist, und dass

¹³⁸ Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 625: “Then they will hover like an unearthly spirit above the body in that sublime melancholy that one normally finds in geniuses and in intellectually superior old people”.

¹³⁹ Giuseppe Invernizzi succinctly summarises Hartmann’s teleology: “Posto però che una felicità positiva è irraggiungibile e che la causa della ineludibile infelicità è il volere, e posto che, conseguentemente, il non volere, in quanto assenza di dolore, risulta eudemonologicamente preferibile al volere, si apre la via per comprendere teleologicamente il senso dello sviluppo della coscienza: essa è lo strumento per la realizzazione della negazione della volontà.” (“Given that positive happiness is unattainable and that the cause of the unavoidable unhappiness is willing, and given that, consequently, non-willing, to the extent that it is absence of pain, is eudaimonologically preferable to willing, the road to a teleological understanding of the direction of the development of consciousness lies open: it is the instrument for the realisation of the negation of the will.”) Invernizzi, p. 183.
er eben dadurch zum dauerhaftesten und tragfähigesten theoretischen Unterbau einer positiven Ethik wird, indem er vor allem Eintritt einer ethischen Motivation an die Stelle der Selbstsucht die Selbstverläugnung setzt.\textsuperscript{140}

Pessimism functions as a foundation for morality because it can convince man that egoism does not lead to pleasure but to increased suffering. Once pessimism becomes the motive for a person, that person will no longer contribute to the common suffering in a much lesser degree than otherwise. And the greater the number of people who become convinced of the truth of pessimism, the easier will the progress of the world process be:

Mit anderen Worten heisst dies: nur durch den Aufbau einer sittlichen Weltordnung von Seiten vernünftiger selbstbewusster Individuen kann der Weltprozess seinem Ziel entgegengeführt und nur durch schliessliches Bewusstwerden der negativen absolut-eudämonistischen Bedeutung dieses Zieles kann dasselbe wirklich erreicht werden.\textsuperscript{141}

Becoming conscious of the negative eudaimonological meaning of the goal of the world process is the same thing as becoming a pessimist on Hartmann’s account. For it is through the gradual insight of the truth of pessimism on behalf of its members that man reaches greater moral and political maturity. Man-kind develops intellectually and morally through the destruction of the illusions. And since the basic principle of Hartmann’s practical philosophy is the obligation to commit oneself to the progress, the pessimist is obliged to try and spread the pessimistic gospel. The pessimists must depict pessimism as an attractive outlook on life. Hartmann himself does his best. In a brief autobiographic sketch from 1874, Hartmann describes his life as idyllic, almost epicurean in its humble joy. He lives in a harmonious marriage; a small beautiful child plays on the floor with the family dog; a small select group of friends ensure him and his wife intellectual conversations. Hartmann finishes the sketch by quoting a philosophical friend, who had recently observed: “wenn man wieder

\textsuperscript{140} Eduard von Hartmann: \textit{Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins. Prolegomena zu jeder künftigen Ethik} (Berlin, 1879), p. 53: “If we disregard these metaphysical questions that belong elsewhere, then we have here only to observe that pessimism is the most powerful antidote against egoism as well as the vehicle to its self-abolishment, and that it therefore becomes the most durable and strongest theoretical foundation for a positive morality, since it replaces self-interest with selflessness even before any ethical motivation has entered the picture.”

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 871: “This means, in other words: only through the construction of a moral world-order by reasonable and self-conscious individuals can the world process be brought closer to its goal, and only through the consciousness-raising of the negative absolute-eudaimonistic import of this goal can it be reached.” Invernizzi claims that the scope of this book was to convince both the pessimists and their adversaries that a pessimist must always be a good citizen, ready to sacrifice himself or herself for the common good: “anche se si è pessimisti – sembra dire Hartmann – si può e si deve essere dei buoni cittadini, pronti al sacrificio per il bene comune e per il progresso dello stato cui si appartiene.” (“Even if one is a pessimist – Hartmann seems to say – one can be and has to be a good citizen, always prepared to sacrifice for the common good and for the progress of the state to which one belongs.”) Invernizzi, p. 202.
The serenity and joy that Hartmann’s friend noticed on the faces of the pessimists are due to the fact that pessimism, at least Hartmann’s metaphysical pessimism, does not lead to apathy and powerlessness. On the contrary, Hartmann holds: pessimism inspires to courage and strength:

Wenn irgend etwas im Stande ist, den Menschen in seinem schweren Beruf Muth, Kraft, Rüstigkeit, Ausdauer und Gleichgültigkeit gegen jedes Risico der Pflichterfüllung zu verschaffen, so ist es der Pessimismus; wie die Menschen leben, als ob es gar keinen Tod gäbe, bloss darum, weil sie überzeugt sind, dass jede Bemühung, ihm zu entfliehen, schlechthin nutzlos wäre, so werden sie auch praktisch so leben, als ob es kein Leid gäbe, sobald nur erst der Pessimismus in ihnen die Überzeugung geweckt hat, dass das Leid abgesehen von der Form seiner Erscheinung, ebenso unentrinnbar ist wie der Tod.143

Courage, strength, and resilience can be the effects that pessimism has upon us. Therefore it can help us in the task of dealing with life. One of the most visible aspects of Hartmann’s pessimism is his tendency to pose as a pessimist. This self-stylisation is typical of the pessimists, and has been amply termed secondary pessimism by Michael Pauen.144

Hartmann’s Pessimism(s)

Although Hartmann is more than willing to pose as a pessimist, he does not define pessimism. The pessimists rarely do. But one of his comments on how Schopenhauer uses the word give a strong indication as to how he understood the term:

Der (Welt als W. und V. 3. Aufl. Bd. II. S. 667–668) versuchte Beweis, dass diese Welt die schlechteste unter allen möglichen sei, ist ein offenbares Sophisma; überall sonst will auch Schopenhauer selbst nicht weiter behaupten und beweisen, als dass das Sein dieser Welt schlimmer sei als ihr Nichtsein, und diese Behauptung halte ich für richtig. Das Wort Pessimismus ist also eine unangemessene Nachbildung des Wortes Optimismus.145

142 Hartmann: “Mein Entwicklungs gang” (1874), in: Jean-Claude Wolf (ed.): Eduard von Hartmann. Zeitgenosse und Gegenspieler Nietzsches (Würzburg, 2006), p. 40: “if one wants to see content and joyful faces, then one has to go to the pessimists!”

143 Hartmann: Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus, p. 141: “If anything is capable of inspiring man to courage, strength, stamina, perseverance and indifference to risks in his difficult task of fulfilling his duty, then it is pessimism; just as people live as if there were no death just because they are convinced that any effort to flee it would be simply useless, they will also live as if there were in practice no suffering, once pessimism has awoken the conviction that suffering, apart from its form of appearance, is as unavoidable as death.”


145 Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 540: “The attempted proof (in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, third ed., vol. II, pp. 667–668) that this world is the worst of all possible worlds is evidently a sophism; nowhere else does Schopenhauer want to state and prove anything else than
Hartmann thus attempts to refute the conception of pessimism of Schopenhauer’s contemporaries: pessimism is not the opinion that our world is the worst possible world. That is just sophistry. The true content of Schopenhauer’s pessimism is the opinion that non-existence is preferable to existence. And in this sense of the word, Hartmann too is clearly a pessimist.\footnote{See for example the conclusion of chapter C XII: “Wir begannen dieses Capitel mit der Frage, ob das Sein oder das Nichtsein der bestehenden Welt den Vorzug verdiene, und haben diese Frage nach gewissenhafter Erwägung dahin beantworten müssen, dass alles weltliche Dasein mehr Unlust als Lust mit sich bringe, folglich das Nichtsein der Welt ihrem Sein vorzuziehen wäre.” \textit{Ibid.}, p. 626.} It is difficult to determine to what degree Hartmann’s notion of pessimism is indebted to Dühring, but he was apparently familiar with \textit{Der Werth des Lebens}, since he quotes the book.\footnote{Hartmann: \textit{Ibid.}, p. 570. It is a quotation from \textit{Der Werth des Lebens}, pp. 113 ff., where Dühring argues that passionate love is possible in a marriage, which is one of the factors that on his account render life valuable.} Regardless of whether he was influenced by the notion of pessimism of that book, though, Hartmann clearly endorses an interpretation of pessimism in terms of the value of life, just like Dühring. And with Hartmann’s system, the truth of pessimism becomes, in principle at least, possible to establish empirically.

The empirical establishment of the truth of pessimism is an important difference between Hartmann and Schopenhauer. Whereas the impossibility of pleasure outweighing suffering to Schopenhauer is a synthetic a priori (or possibly an analytical truth) – suffering is tangible and pleasure is illusory – Hartmann regards the overweight of suffering as a contingent truth. He does acknowledge the positive worth of pleasure, but maintains that every activity that brings us pleasure brings us an even greater quantity of pain. The pleasures of love are real, but they are outweighed by the anxieties and the despair that love also causes; the pleasures that music or works of art produce in those properly educated and talented are real, but they are outweighed by the discomfort of crowded and badly heated concert rooms and museums.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 556 ff. and p. 588.}

Pessimism has to be dealt with as scientifically. Schopenhauer’s intuition is not enough, Hartmann holds, to provide pessimism with a scientific basis. The balance of pain against pleasure must be ascertained empirically. This is obviously a difficult task, but it is possible to carry it out. This demonstrates that the notion of a justification of existence has become entwined with the notion of life’s value. Hartmann thus seconds Dühring’s interpretation that a justification of existence would amount to a demonstration of the positive value of existence.

In the first edition of \textit{Philosophie des Unbewussten}, Hartmann rarely uses the word pessimism. The last of the three parts into which \textit{Philosophie des Unbewussten}
are divided is dedicated to the question whether happiness can outweigh suffering in the life of a human or of mankind, and Hartmann comes to the conclusion that it cannot. But he seems reluctant to define himself a pessimist. At least, that is, in the first edition of the work.

“Hartmann vertritt keinen Pessimismus tout court,” Jean-Claude Wolf states, “sondern ‘nur’ einen Pessimismus in Bezug auf die Möglichkeit einer positiven Glücksbilanzierung.” But with Dühring’s and Hartmann’s interpretation of pessimism as a negative answer to the question of the value of life, the term pessimism becomes synonymous with pessimism with regard to the possibility of a positive balance of happiness (Glücksbilanzierung). To Hartmann’s contemporaries, we will see that pessimism would have meant precisely this when the term is used in the unqualified sense. That this is what it meant to Hartmann is evident from Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus, the book where he gives the most succinct comment on his use of the concept:

Pessimism with regard to the possibility of a positive balance of happiness is philosophical pessimism. This kind of pessimism is what Hartmann regards as “Pessimismus tout court”. And given this definition, Hartmann is a pessimist. In the first edition of Philosophie des Unbewussten, this is the only kind of pessimism that is discussed. But later, Hartmann saw it necessary to differentiate between two types of pessimism. In Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus, Hartmann describes himself as a pessimist when it comes to the possibility of a surplus of happiness over suffering: he usually only refers to this as pessimism, but occasionally he also describes himself as a eudaimonological pessimist. And he also introduces another sense of the word, “evolutionistischer Pessimismus” and “evolutionistischer Optimismus” (evolutionary pessimism/optimism). In this sense of the word, Hartmann is an optimist. He believes in the development of mankind, in a moral and intellectual progress; but he believes that this progress is a tool of the unconscious to bring about the annihilation of man-

149 Wolf, p. 14: “Hartmann does not defend pessimism tout court, but ‘only’ a pessimism with regard to the possibility of a positive balance of happiness.”
150 Hartmann: Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus, pp. 69 f.: “Philosophical pessimism concerns itself with the question whether the pleasure balance of the world is negative; this is a purely theoretical question, which can only be solved with intellectual means. Pessimism is an intellectual activity concerning the sum of the feelings of pleasure and pain; but it is in itself no more feeling than biology is a real process of life in the organism, it is in itself no more painful than the teaching of narcosis is anaesthetising.”
151 Ibid., p. 24.
kind. Hartmann, that is, combines an evolutionary optimism with a eudaimonological pessimism.\footnote{This, of course, is a very atypical form of optimism, since it has the consummation of pessimism as its goal.} In a passage added to a later edition of *Philosophie des Unbewussten*, Hartmann writes that optimism and pessimism on their own both lead to quietism; only by uniting them can this be avoided:

Es ist jetzt auch ersichtlich, wie nur die hier entwickelte *Einheit* des Optimismus und Pessimismus, von der jeder Mensch ein unklares Abbild als Richtschnur seines Handelns in sich trägt, im Stande ist, einen energischen, und zwar den denkbar stärksten Impuls zum thätigen Handeln zu geben, während der einseitige Pessimismus aus nihilistischer Verzweiflung, der einseitige und wirklich con-
sequente Optimismus aus behaglicher Sorglosigkeit zum Quietismus führen muss.\footnote{Hartmann: *Philosophie des Unbewussten*, 2 vols. (9th ed., Berlin 1882), vol. II, pp. 403 f.: “Now it is also visible how only the *unity* of optimism and pessimism that was developed here, and of which every human carries around an unclear image that functions as a guiding principle for his actions, can give an impulse as energetic and as strong as can be imagined to vigorous action, whereas the one-sided pessimism must lead to quietism on account of its nihilistic despair, and the one-sided and truly consequent optimism must lead to quietism on account of its comfortable unconcern-
edness.” This passage is added to a paragraph from p. 638 of the first edition. In this edition, Hartmann also distinguishes between his own metaphysical pessimism and the political and social pessimism of certain contemporaries of his, and adds that his pessimism embraces political and social optimism: vol. II, pp. 375 f. The passage in question is added to a paragraph from p. 615 of the first edition.}

These distinctions are not included in the first edition of the book; but apparently Hartmann has come to see the need to differentiate the concept. It is important to note that Hartmann’s ideas have not changed from 1869: we have seen that Hartmann then too argued for the need of a commitment to the idea of progress in order to solve the problem posed by the impossibility of a positive balance of happiness. But he did not describe that notion as optimism. The eudaimonological pessimism is still the most important form of pessimism. But it is no longer the only form. Historical or evolutionary pessimism has by now become a possible concept. An idea that is usually referred to in terms of degeneration or decline now becomes defined as a form of pessimism – and by one of the leading pessimists at that.

To return to the three questions formulated in the beginning of this section, Hartmann defines pessimism in two different ways. He defines it as the opinion that existence is worse than non-existence. This form of pessimism is labelled ‘philosophical pessimism’, ‘eudaimonological pessimism’, or more frequently ‘pessimism’. He also defines pessimism as the opinion that mankind, or society, or indeed the world is deteriorating. This type of pessimism is labelled ‘evolu-
tionary pessimism’. Hartmann argues for the truth of the first type of pessi-

mism, but not of the second. He argues that pessimism must be treated scienti-
ically, that the negative eudaimonologial value of life, the truth of pessimism, can only be established empirically, by measuring the pleasure of mankind
against its suffering. Although he does not hold all pleasures to be illusory, he does maintain that suffering always weighs more heavily. Finally, (eudaimonological) pessimism in Hartmann’s system serves as a catalyst in his optimistic philosophy of history. The knowledge of the truth of pessimism will spread due to the progress of man, and will eventually become a motive for the self-destruction of all life.

I believe that Hartmann’s introduction of the evolutionary pessimism is an important reason behind the conceptual confusion regarding pessimism. Hartmann was an important factor behind the interpretation of pessimism as the notion that life has no positive value. And this interpretation, we will see in the next two sections, had a hegemonic standing in the 1870’s. But then Hartmann redefined it in a way that made the notion of historical decline to also be a form of pessimism. By defining the question of progress vs. decline as a special case of optimism vs. pessimism he contributes to the two concepts being confused.\footnote{It is also possible that Hartmann is reacting to a change in the general usage of the concepts pessimism and optimism, that his differentiation is a consequence of rather than the reason for this change. Either way it is clear that a change occurs in Hartmann’s usage between 1869 and 1880, and that this change can also be discerned on a greater scale among a later generation of writers.}

This confusion is not visible in the works of the contemporaries or near-contemporaries of Hartmann. This chapter aims to demonstrate that Hartmann’s contemporaries, be they pessimists or anti-pessimists, take Dühring’s and Hartmann’s interpretation of Schopenhauer’s conception of pessimism for granted. For Bahnsen, for Taubert, for Mainländer, pessimism \textit{tout court}, to borrow Jean-Claude Wolf’s phrase, means pessimism with regard to the possibility of a positive balance of happiness. And the same goes for their adversaries, for thinkers such as James Sully or Elme Marie Caro. But to a later generation of thinkers, this is not how ‘pessimism’ was used as a matter of course. This, I take it, is why for example Oswald Spengler saw himself obliged to explain that his \textit{Untergang des Abendlandes} was not a pessimistic work, although it predicts the eventual decline of the Western civilisation.\footnote{In the pamphlet \textit{Pessimismus?}, Spengler writes that ‘Vollendung’ (‘consummation’) in a sense had been a better word than ‘Untergang’. It had expressed the same idea, but would not have had the same associations to disasters. “[E]s gibt Menschen, welche den Untergang der Antike mit dem Untergang eines Ozeandampfers verwechseln.” Oswald Spengler: \textit{Pessimismus?} Schriftenreihe der Preußischen Jahrbücher, 4 (Berlin, 1922), p. 4. Spengler admits that he is a pessimist when it comes to the goal of mankind. But such a pessimism is in fact not at all pessimism: “Nein ich bin kein Pessimist. Pessimismus heißt: keine Aufgaben mehr sehen.” (p. 15)} Had he written his book forty or forty-five years earlier, he probably would not have been accused of being a pessimist.

There is an important difference between Schopenhauer’s and Hartmann’s notions of pessimism with regard to the relation between the theoretical doctrine and the practical consequences of it. Schopenhauer, as we saw, regarded pessimism (being a philosophical doctrine) as a purely theoretical entity, a sys-
tem of abstract knowledge. It corresponds to the concrete (anschaulich) knowledge of the ascetic. There is thus a rigid line of demarcation between the theoretical doctrine (pessimism) and the form of life that acts upon the knowledge at the heart of pessimism (asceticism).

In Hartmann on the other hand the difference between the theoretical and the practical aspect of pessimism is less distinct. Pessimism is the result of knowledge of the unconscious, just like the knowledge of the will is the basis of pessimism to Schopenhauer. But to Hartmann the theoretical knowledge of the pessimist is the knowledge that, once it is widespread enough, will lead to the negation of the world. Although pessimism is a theoretical doctrine it can function as a motive.

Hartmann was by far the most famous and most widely read of the pessimists of the generations after Schopenhauer. In his wake followed a number of thinkers who to a varying degree criticised him but nonetheless wrote within his horizon, adopting in particular his usage of the concept of pessimism. It is to three of the foremost of these thinkers that we shall turn next.

2.2 Some Other Pessimists

In the pessimistic philosophical tradition of the late nineteenth century, Schopenhauer clearly was the heavyweight champion of the world. The only serious contender to the title was Hartmann. There were however enough pessimistic philosophers to create a pessimistic school of sorts, albeit a heterogeneous school characterised by interior criticism. This section will present a number of the most important representatives of this school. The section is not a complete survey; rather, it aims at presenting a number of fairly disparate thinkers who are universally seen as some of the most prominent pessimists. As in the previous section, we will attempt to answer three questions. Firstly: How do the pessimists define pessimism? Secondly: How do they argue for its truth? Thirdly: What function does pessimism have in their systems?

Agnes Taubert

In Hartmann’s *Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus*, and in a number of works by the same author, a book entitled *Der Pessimismus und seine Gegner*, written by a certain A. Taubert is often quoted with approval. Hartmann always refers to the author of that book as A. Taubert; he goes to some length to avoid using a personal pronoun. Even when he reports the death of Taubert at the

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age of 33 he refrains from using the first name, or the feminine personal pronoun.\textsuperscript{157} It is as if Hartmann wanted to give the impression that he is in no way personally acquainted with this A. Taubert. This impression is not correct: A. Taubert was in fact his wife.\textsuperscript{158}

Agnes Taubert (1844–1877) is not a particularly original thinker. Her book is an apology for her husband, and as such it is well written, stylistically less clumsy than Hartmann’s books, and with a rather drastic sense of humour. She goes to some length to defend the discussion of sexuality of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, and accuses the opponents of pessimism of a prudishness that might be appropriate in a girls’ school, but that is unworthy of philosophy:

\begin{quote}
Gewisse nicht wegzuleugnende Dinge nicht sehen zu wollen, ist, namentlich bei der Behandlung sexueller Fragen, eine beliebte Gouvernantenmanier, eine Manier, die freilich allen Denen, welche gewisse Dinge zu verbergen wünschen, äusserst angenehm ist. So liegt es im Interesse der Kirche, alle ihre Anhänger gleich dem Vogel Strauss mit unter die Flügel gestecktem Kopf zu erhalten und sie ja nicht sehen zu lassen, was doch klar zu Tage liegt. Derlei Rücksichten aber hat die Philosophie nicht zu nehmen und überlässt sie Denen, welche diese Mittel nöthig haben.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

The fact that Taubert feels called upon to defend the pessimists against these accusations can give us a hint as to how pessimism was looked upon by the contemporaries. The important role of sexuality in the metaphysics of the pessimists did not go unnoticed. I suspect that it is an important reason why the novelists and artists of the \textit{décadence} were fascinated by pessimism.

Of particular interest to our theme is the fact that Taubert gives a very succinct definition of the problem of pessimism: “Das Problem des Pessimismus wird sich also auch so fixiren lassen: steht da s Leben an eudämonologischem Werthe \textit{über} oder \textit{unter} dem Nichtleben, ist das Sein der Welt ihrer Nichtsein oder das Nichtsein der Welt ihrem Sein vorzuziehen?”\textsuperscript{160} The problem of pessimism is a matter of measuring the eudaimonological value of life in order to determine whether existence is preferable to non-existence or not. Just like Hartmann, Taubert regards the truth of pessimism to be empirically ascertainable. Schopenhauer’s intuition had a touch of genius, but it has to be completed

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{157} Hartmann: \textit{Philosophie des Unbewussten} (9th ed.), preface to the 8th edition: vol. I, p. XXXIII. In this context Hartmann actually uses a masculine pronoun, referring to \textit{Der Pessimismus und seine Gegner} as “seine Schrift”, “his book”.
\textsuperscript{158} See Pauen: \textit{Pessimismus}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{159} A. [Agnes] Taubert: \textit{Der Pessimismus und seine Gegner} (Berlin, 1873), p. 38: “Not to want to see certain things that cannot be explained away, especially when dealing with sexual matters, is a popular behaviour among governesses, and is very comfortable to those who want to keep certain things hidden. Thus it lies in the interest of the church to have all its followers hide their heads under the wing like the ostrich, and not let them see what lies in broad daylight. Philosophy does not have to display such discretion, and leaves it to those who have a need for such means.”
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 22 f.: “The problem of pessimism can be fixated in this way: does life stand \textit{above} or \textit{below} non-existence in terms of eudaimonological value, is the existence of the world preferable to its non-existence, or is the non-existence of the world preferable to its existence?”
\end{flushleft}
with a scientific base, and this, Taubert claims, was supplied by Hartmann. All this is yet another indication that Schopenhauer’s vague conception of pessimism is becoming a well-defined philosophical concept.

The originality of Taubert is clearly limited. She is a Hartmannian, an epigone. She is interesting mainly because she expresses Hartmann’s ideas in a more succinct form and with a clearer style. There are, however, at least two original pessimists, both of whom attempt to radicalize Schopenhauer’s pessimism, both of whom advocate suicide, and both of whom regard Hartmann as an opponent: Philipp Mainländer and Julius Bahnsen.

Philipp Mainländer

Philipp Mainländer (1841–1876) was born as Philipp Batz. In 1860, during a long stay in Naples – Mainländer was destined to become a merchant and spent several years at various companies in Italy to learn the trade – he coincidentally discovered *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* in a bookshop, much like Nietzsche would discover the book five years later. Some works of poetry, drama and novels aside, Mainländer’s production consists of a single philosophical work: *Die Philosophie der Erlösung* (two volumes, 1876–86). Although Mainländer would never become a philosopher by profession (the leading Mainländer scholar, Winfried Müller-Seyfarth, characterises him as “der klassische Privatgelehrte”), he would remain a Schopenhauerian for his entire life. But he maintains that Schopenhauer went too far: Schopenhauer’s philosophy is transcendent; he goes beyond what experience and introspection allow him to say. Mainländer’s philosophy is thus an attempt to rectify the faults of Schopenhauer’s philosophy.

One of the faults of Schopenhauer is that he tries to explain everything with a single principle, that he supposes that the will must be a single unity (*Einheit*). There was such a unity, Mainländer admits, and that unit was God. But God is dead, God preferred non-existence to existence, and the world is the means by which he took his life: “Aber diese einfache Einheit *ist gewesen*; sie ist nicht mehr. Sie hat sich, ihr Wesen verändernd, voll und ganz zu einer Welt der Vielheit zersplittert. *Gott ist gestorben und sein Tod war das Leben der Welt.*”

God had the choice of either continuing his existence or ceasing to be. He chose the latter. The world is the means through which he ceases to be: God, as absolute being, needed the world to enter transform into absolute nothingness.

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161 Ibid., pp. 1 f.


163 Philipp Mainländer: *Die Philosophie der Erlösung*, 2 vols. (1876–86), in: *Schriften I–II*, ed. Winfried H. Müller-Seyfarth (Hildesheim, Zürich & New York, 1996–2001), vol. 1, p. 108: “But this single unity has been; it is no more. Changing its essence, it split up into a world of plurality. *God has died and his death was the life of the world.*”
That God would prefer nothingness to being is taken for granted by Mainländer: as has been stressed by Bernd Gräfrath, Mainländer regarded his own human existence to be evidence enough that non-existence is preferable to existence under any circumstances.\textsuperscript{164}

Like Schopenhauer, Mainländer regards the will as the fundamental aspect of any living being. But Mainländer does not conceive of a single will as Schopenhauer did; to him, there is a multitude of wills. When God died, the absolute unity became a world of plurality. The individual wills are all branded by their origin: everything in the world has a will to death; what appears as a will to life is only a manifestation of the will to death that is not yet ripe for death.

Since Mainländer’s multiple wills are not manifestations of a single will, death amounts to the destruction of the individual. Death is redemption. This means that Schopenhauer’s and Hartmann’s argument against suicide – that it does not achieve the total destruction that it aims at – is not valid to Mainländer. He has therefore entered the annals of the history of philosophy as the advocate of suicide.

Mainländer himself was one of those who go out into the silent night through the door that always stands open. When he received his copies of \textit{Die Philosophie der Erlösung} from the publishing house he used them to build a platform. He then climbed the platform and hanged himself.\textsuperscript{166} Redemption to the redeemer.

Even if suicide is a legitimate solution, it is only a solution to one individual. The world as a whole needs a collective solution. Mainländer sees this in a political development. Life is characterised by pain and boredom: this is one of the many ideas that Mainländer has in common with Schopenhauer. But boredom is worse. The boredom that man will experience in a state where all suffering is removed will therefore make him feel the will to death more intensely. Hence Mainländer predicts and advocates a Social Democratic ideal state, a state in


\textsuperscript{165} Mainländer, vol. I, p. 349: “May he, who no longer endures carrying the burden of life, throw it away. May he, who can no longer endure the assembly hall of the world, or as Jean Paul says, the great servant’s chamber of the world, step out through that door ‘that always stands open’ into the silent night.”

which no one will suffer. In such a state, boredom will get the better of mankind; it will embrace absolute death.

Absolute death is achieved through virginity. This is the only secure renunciation of the will to life. To the immanent philosopher the only acceptable explanations are those that make no reference to a transcendent world. “Deshalb giebt es für sie nur eine vollkommen sichere Verneinung des Willens zum Leben; es ist die durch Virginität.”167 When Mainländer discusses sexuality, he often refers to it as a demon, ein Dämon. This demon has great power over us, and no virtue is therefore so difficult to uphold as chastity. Chastity presupposes that we learn not to despise and hate death, but to actually love it: “Keuschheit ist Liebe zum Tode.”168

Love to death can only arise in us, according to Mainländer, when the knowledge that non-existence is better than existence enflames (entzündet) us. Only when the insight that death is always preferable to life arises in us can we gain the strength to chastity. Through virginity only can absolute death be reached: when death comes to the person who has abstained from procreation, it is absolute, it amounts to complete redemption.169 Mainländer himself, it might be added, made a vow of chastity, on his mother’s grave.170

Mainländer’s premise is that non-existence is preferable to existence. And this is by no means a tacit premise in his system: it is on the contrary a conviction that Mainländer expresses explicitly on a number of occasions. He is, by any standards, a pessimist; and he certainly is a pessimist when judged by the standards of his times. Mainländer’s argument for the truth of pessimism is fairly original, though. He maintains that the optimist and the pessimist want the same thing: the difference between them is a matter of maturity. The optimist, just like the pessimist, wants as much happiness and as little suffering as possible. The difference is that the optimist does not know that the only form of happiness possible lies in non-existence: “Wer ist denn Optimist? Optimist ist mit Nothwendigkeit der, dessen Wille noch nicht reif ist für den Tod. […] Und wer ist ein Pessimist? muß es sein? Wer reif ist für den Tod. Er kann so wenig das Leben lieben, wie jener vom Leben sich abwenden kann.”171 This indulgence towards those who do not share his own views, this tolerance with

167 Mainländer, vol. I, p. 219: “Hence there is only one perfectly certain denial of the will to life; and it is through virginity.”

168 Ibid., vol. I, p. 216: “Chastity is love for death.” In the posthumous second volume of Die Philosophie der Erlösung, Mainländer draws up the statutes for a Graal order dedicated to the redemption of mankind. The order, the motto of which is “Vaterlandsliebe, Gerechtigkeit, Menschenliebe und Keuschheit”, stands open for anyone who has reached the age of twenty and is unmarried; Mainländer, vol. II, pp. 437 ff.


171 Mainländer, vol. I, pp. 348 f.: “Who, then, is an optimist? He, whose will is not yet ripe for death is by necessity an optimist. […] And who is a pessimist? Who must be one? He who is ripe for death. He can love life no more than the optimist can turn away from it.”
Mainländer is similar to Hartmann in a number of respects. In different ways they both see the solution to the problem of pessimism in a political/historical progress that the individual should dedicate himself to. Mainländer may have held Hartmann’s notion of a common decision to cease existing to be preposterous – the second volume of Die Philosophie der Erlösung contains some highly ironic comments on it – but the parallels are nonetheless striking. It is not the purpose of the present study to decide whether Mainländer’s view that the boredom experienced in a future Social democratic ideal state will lead to mankind’s redemption through chastity is more or less absurd than Hartmann’s technical solution to the problem of pessimism. My task is rather to determine in what relation they stand to the pessimistic tradition. The concept of knowledge is an important aspect of Mainländer’s system that is closer related to Hartmann than to Schopenhauer. For like Hartmann, Mainländer regards the insight that non-existence is always preferable to existence as the catalyst that will lead bring about the absolute nothingness that is the goal of all of existence. Mainländer holds that pessimism has to be enflamed (entzündet) in order for it to become a motive, but it is not a distinct form of knowledge as in Schopenhauer’s case but rather a matter of maturity. Pessimism and asceticism are therefore not two separate modes of knowledge as they are in Schopenhauer.

But Mainländer’s intuitive approach to pessimism is similar to Schopenhauer’s rather than to Hartmann’s. He does not feel obliged to provide a method and a set of criteria that prove the truth of pessimism; just like Schopenhauer he is content that his own description of human existence, based on his own experience of life (and corroborated by a number of poets and thinkers) is enough to establish that we all would be better off if we did not exist.

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172 Cf. Invernizzi, p. 304: “Si può quindi affermare che il cammino del mondo è segnato, che il non essere prima o poi è destinato a vincere. Dall’alto di questa certezza Mainländer può guardare con distacco alle vivaci discussioni fra pessimisti ed ottimisti.” (“One can therefore affirm that the path of the world has been blessed, that non-being is destined to win out sooner or later. From the height of this certainty, Mainländer can detachedly observe the lively discussions among pessimists and optimists.”)

173 Mainländer, vol. II, p. 640: “Nachdem aus allen Erdtheilen in Berlin telegraphische Meldungen eingelaufen sind, worin die Anzahle Derjenigen, welche die Welt vernichten wollen, angegeben ist, addiren Sie die Willensverneiner und finden, daß die Majorität etwa 10,000 Menschen beträgt. Sie stoßen einen Freudeschrei und eilen alsbald in die Französische Straße, wo Sie, sagen wir, 10,000 Depeschen aufgeben des Inhalts: /Morgen Mittag um zwölf Uhr präcise findet Welterlösung statt./ Alle haben sich gleichzeitig zu tödten./Mordinstrument nach belieben.”

174 Cf. Lütkehaus, p. 249: “Mit Hartmann teilt Mainländer die Überzeugung, daß die Welt als die umgekehrte Leibniz-Welt die beste aller möglichen ist, weil sie ins Nichts führt und das auf dem kürzestmöglichen Weg tut.”
Julius Bahnsen

As we have seen, the philosophy of pessimism can be regarded as an antithesis of sorts to German idealism. In both traditions empirical reality is interpreted as a manifestation of a metaphysical principle. The difference is that to the idealists that principle is rational, whereas to the pessimists, the defining characteristic of the principle is its utter irrationality. The irrationality of the world is taken to its extreme by Julius Bahnsen (1830–1881).

Bahnsen was the only one of the pessimistic philosophers who was personally acquainted with Schopenhauer. Like most of the pessimists he made an attempt at an academic career, but, again like virtually all of his pessimist colleagues, with little success. Instead he worked as a school teacher and wrote profusely on a number of philosophical subjects. A few examples suffice to illustrate the diversity – but also the common traits. In 1867 he published a book on characterology, a study aimed at providing a systematic account for Schopenhauer’s doctrine of characters; or to use Bahnsen’s description, to create a “phenomenology of the will”.

In 1872 he published a book on the philosophy of history, with the purpose of correcting Hartmann’s notion of history. In 1877, he wrote an aesthetic tract, in which the tragic is characterised as the law of the world and humour is the best way of handling that law. The themes and the subjects vary, but they nonetheless form a system. In book after book, Bahnsen made reference to a forthcoming work that would weave the threads together into a system. Finally, in the last years of his life he fulfilled that promise by publishing a first volume of Der Widerspruch im Wissen und Wesen der Welt in 1880; a second volume was published posthumously in 1882.

Bahnsen characterises his doctrine as Realdialektik, a term that is more or less impossible to translate into English. Bahnsen maintains that the defining characteristic of the basic principle of the world is that it is self-contradictory.

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176 Julius Bahnsen: *Zur Philosophie der Geschichte. Eine kritische Besprechung des Hegel-Hartmann’schen Evolutionismus aus Schopenhauer’schen Prinzipien* (Berlin, 1872). Bahnsen admits that he, just like Hartmann, combine Hegelian and Schopenhauerian elements to a history of philosophy, but whereas Hartmann retains Hegel’s logic, Bahnsen retains the dialectic (p. 2 and *passim*). His book is then an attempt to demonstrate that Hartmann’s world process is evolving dialectically rather than logically.


179 This has been succinctly stated by Invernizzi: “Essere pessimisti infatti significa per Bahnsen riconoscere che la contraddittorietà che si manifesta nella realtà non dipende dai limiti della nostra facoltà conoscitiva, ma è qualcosa di essenziale alla realtà stessa.” (“In fact, to be a pessimist means to Bahnsen to acknowledge that the contraditoriness that manifests itself in reality does not depend on the limits of our cognitive faculties, but is essential to reality itself.”) Invernizzi, p. 210.
philosophy is dialectical in that it attempts to embrace that contradiction. Thereby it implores us to accept the fact that world is irrational and that life therefore is meaningless. The will is a will to non-willing, and hence the contradiction. The world can therefore not be comprehended with the help of logic. “[D]ie Welt ist absolut unfähig, logisch begriffen zu werden, weil in ihrem Wesen an sich das directe Gegentheil alles logisch ‘Correctem’.”

In a sense, Bahnsen’s pessimism is more extreme than that of the other pessimists. His pessimism is overtly nihilistic. Already in the 1872 *Zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, Bahnsen characterises his position as a “hoffnungslos pessimistischen Nihilismus”. The other pessimists see a form of redemption from the suffering in a renunciation from the will as a distinct possibility: to Schopenhauer asceticism can provide a redemption, to Hartmann it is a collective act of destruction, and to Mainländer redemption comes in the form of chastity and suicide. Bahnsen, by contrast, regards the belief in redemption as a form of youthful yearning (“eine Stück titanischen Jugenddranges”). After the intoxication of the idea of redemption and world destruction, the insight dawns upon man that he must resign, that he must accept that the suffering is inevitable. To Bahnsen, the road of resignation leads to humour. Humour lets us accept that life is meaningless and painful and that death will provide no end. It is only by accepting the meaninglessness of life that life can be bearable:

Ein jeder gräbt und wühlt im Schooss der Mutter Erde nach dem, womit er seinem Dasein einen absoluten Werth zu verleihen hofft, und merkt darüber nicht, dass es ihm dabei ergeht wie Einem, der sein Notizbuch suchen muss und darüber den guten Einfall wieder vergisst, welchen er darin eintragen wollte.

Rather than seeking for something that redeems us or makes our existence worthwhile, we should accept the self-contradictory nature of the world and that fact that this contradictoriness leads to the impossibility of a happy life. Once this has been acknowledged and accepted one can make the best of the situation. A life characterised by the insight that non-existence on all accounts is better than existence is worse than not living at all. But it is, for what it is worth, better than living a life under the delusion that life can actually be happy.

But if the contradictoriness of life is too hard to bear, then Bahnsen sees no reason why we should put up with it. For even if death or suicide does not solve

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180 Bahnsen: *Der Widerspruch im Wesen und Wissen der Welt*, vol. 1, p. 81: “The world is absolutely incapable of being grasped with logic, for it is in its very essence the direct opposite of everything logically ‘correct’.”


183 Bahnsen: *Das Tragische als Weltgesetz*, p. 133: “We all dig and rummage in the bosom of Mother Earth for whatever it is that we hope will give our existence an absolute value; but we do not notice that we act like someone who has to seek his notebook and in the process forgets the idea that he wanted to write down in it.”
the problem of the contradictoriness of the world, at least it spares us from the discomfort of experiencing it: “Das ich-gewordene Wollen erfreut sich vor allen anderen Formen des Willens des höchsten Privilegiums: Ernst machen können mit dem Nicht-Wollen.”

Conclusions

In order to evaluate the form of pessimism represented by Taubert, Mainländer and Bahnsen we set out to answer three questions. We wanted to see how they define pessimism; how they argue for its truth; and what function pessimism fulfils in their systems. We are now in a position to answer these questions.

We have seen that Taubert provides an explicit definition of pessimism. Her definition is probably the most comprehensive comment on how pessimism was used by any of the pessimists or their adversaries. The problem of pessimism consists in determining whether the eudaimonological value of existence is greater than that of non-existence in order to determine whether existence or non-existence is preferable. Taubert hence bases her discussion on Hartmann’s notion of pessimism, but she transforms his implicit notion into an explicit definition. Their usage of the concept is similar to that of Mainländer and Bahnsen: they too consider pessimism to be the notion that non-existence is preferable to existence. But they have a different set of criteria for establishing the truth of pessimism.

To Mainländer and to Bahnsen, the truth of pessimism is no less of a scientific truth than it is to Taubert or Hartmann. Like them they claim to have provided Schopenhauer with a scientific basis, correcting his faults, finding imminent alternatives where he strayed into transcendent territories. Particularly Mainländer’s, but also Bahnsen’s forms of pessimism are much more in the spirit of Kant (and Schopenhauer) than Hartmann’s and Taubert’s are. Hence the critical analysis of the faculties of the mind occupy a more crucial role, whereas the quantitative measurements of suffering versus pleasure that constitute the criterion for the truth of pessimism on Hartmann’s and Taubert’s view lose all meaning. To both Mainländer and Bahnsen the truth of pessimism is a synthetic a priori: to Mainländer the truth of pessimism is the result of the fact that the world is a manifestation of the will to death, and this is proved by introspection and careful analysis; to Bahnsen the truth of pessimism is the result

184 Bahnsen: Der Widerspruch im Wissen und Wesen der Welt, vol. II, p. 64: “The will-turned-into-I enjoys the highest privilege compared to all other forms of will: to be able to bring about the non-willing.”

185 Invernizzi observes that almost none of the participants in the discussion over pessimism try to clarify the conceptual significance of pessimism; and I cannot but agree. But when he claims that “per trovare un’indagine approfondita della questione bisogna attendere fino ad uno studio relativamente tardo di Hartmann” (in order to find a deepened investigation into this question, one has to wait until a relatively late study by Hartmann”; Invernizzi, p. 376), by which he refers to Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus, I have to say that he is exaggerating. For Taubert is attempting to do this some seven years before Hartmann.
of the fact that the world is the manifestation of a principle that is at heart self-contradictory, and this too is proved by introspection and analysis.

The role occupied by pessimism in the systems of our three pessimists is fairly similar. To Taubert and to Mainländer pessimism is the motive that will lead the individual to the least painful life imaginable and that eventually will lead mankind to its redemption. To Bahnsen there is no hope for redemption. But to him too the insight into the truth of pessimism might help one find the life containing the least amount of suffering: for once one accepts the contradictory character of the world one can lead a life characterised by humour. To all three of them, thus, it is only by acknowledging that life can never be worthwhile that life can become bearable at all.

All the pessimists thus agree that knowledge of how the world functions leads to pessimism. By investigating the world, through scientific study or through theoretical contemplation and introspection, one eventually comes to realise that the world is really a manifestation of the will, of the unconscious, or of the will to death. This insight in its turn amounts to the insight that non-existence is preferable to existence. And this, although they have different criteria for how to establish its truth, is what pessimism amounts to in the eyes of all the prominent pessimists. They also agree that although pessimism is painful, its truth has to be spread. A truth that hurts is preferable to a pleasant delusion. This preference for truth over well-being is one of the factors in virtue of which the pessimists see themselves as intellectually and morally superior to their opponents: “Die Pessimisten treten auf als die einsamen Vorkämpfer einer Wahrheit, die verkannt wird, weil die feige und verblendete Masse das Schreckliche nicht zur Kenntnis zu nehmen wagt.”

This claim to possess courage and clarity of vision is an important element of the rhetoric of the pessimists. To the pessimists, their pessimism is not an obsession with the negative aspects of existence. This is one of the points where the rhetoric of the pessimists draws upon the vicinity to the melancholy tradition. In Renaissance philosophy and medicine, melancholy was thought to inspire contemplation and speculation. Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl have demonstrated how Marsilio Ficino for example held melancholy to lead the mind to a higher form of contemplation. The black bile was thought to be related to the centre of the earth and would therefore stir the mind to investigation; furthermore Saturn, the planet of melancholy, is the highest of the planets which has important consequences: “Saturn ist es, der den Geist zu der Betrachtung höherer und geheimerer Dinge anleitet und der selbst, wie Ficino an mehr als einer Stelle sagt, die ‘göttliche Kontemplation’ bedeutet.” At the same time this

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186 Pauen: *Pessimismus*, p. 213: “The pessimists act as lonesome champions of a truth that is denied because the cowardly and blinded mass does not dare take note of the terrible.”

187 Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl, pp. 374 f.: “It is Saturn which leads the spirit to the reflection of higher and more secret things and that even, as Ficino says on more than one occasion, means ‘divine contemplation’.” They refer to Ficino’s *De vita triplici* and a letter to Jacopo Antiquario: *Ibid.*, p. 375, footnotes 56 and 57.
meant that the contemplative natures were more afflicted by the sorrow that is also a symptom of melancholy.

When the pessimist can claims to have seen through the happiness of the ordinary people as an illusion or a lie it is therefore with the melancholy tradition as example. Just like the melancholic, the pessimist pays with his or her personal well-being for a privileged insight into the essence of the world. And just like the melancholic, the pessimist is declared to be ill on account of precisely those characteristics that they themselves regard as courage and clarity.

The next section will provide a number of examples of the strategies of the adversaries of pessimism. The reader will find that just as the vicinity of pessimism and melancholy could be used by the pessimists, so it could by their opponents.

2.3 The Anti-Pessimists

The pessimistic philosophies of the thinkers presented in this chapter represent an important strand in the late 18th century philosophy. But it would nonetheless be mistaken to characterize that period as the era of pessimism. As this section will make clear, the pessimists were by no means unopposed. This section will present a number of the adversaries of pessimism. The choice of writers included is not entirely free from arbitrariness (but then again: no choice could be entirely free from arbitrariness). But even though this may be so I hold it to be representative enough that I can confidently assert that I would have achieved the same results, had I chosen to investigate a different set of thinkers.

We will investigate this group of thinkers too by seeking the answer to three questions. Firstly: how do they define pessimism? Secondly: How do they argue against the truth or tenability of pessimism? Thirdly: How do they explain pessimism?

Jürgen Bona Meyer

One of the voices warning against the dangers of pessimism was Jürgen Bona Meyer (1829–97), professor of philosophy at the University of Bonn from 1868. Apart from works on Aristotle and Kant, Meyer wrote several popular works and pamphlets. Two of these are directed against pessimism. How can it be, Meyer asks in his Weltelend und Weltschmerz (1872), that pessimism spreads in Germany at a time when its people has made greater progress in scientific, social and political matters than at any other point of time in history?188

The greater part of Weltelend und Weltschmerz is an attempt to prove that sources of happiness that Schopenhauer declared to be illusory and that Hart-

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188 Jürgen Bona Meyer: Weltelend und Weltschmerz. Eine Rede gegen Schopenhauer’s und Hartmann’s Pessimismus gehalten im wissenschaftlichen Verein zu Berlin (Bonn, 1872), p. 3.
mann declared to be a mixture of some pleasure and a much greater quantity of pain have in fact a positive value. Love, sympathy, good health and youth, for example, all have a positive quality that contributes to making us happy. Towards the end of the pamphlet, Meyer returns to the question why pessimism has become so popular in his era of progress and prosperity. His diagnosis is that the German people was full of hope after the events of the late 1840’s, but that the results of the strivings were so meagre and the factors that stood in the way of progress became so strong that a hopelessness spread. But now, presumably after the founding of the German Reich and the victory in the Franco-Prussian war, hope is returning. In this context, Meyer draws an interesting parallel between German pessimism and Russian nihilism:

Wenn hiemit die Zeichen der Zeit richtig gedeutet sind, dann mag der Pessimismus noch eine Weile im Russischen Nihilismus hausen, in der traurigen Zerfahrenheit unseres einst ederen Nachbarvolkes seinen Anhang suchen; Seele unseres deutschen Volkes aber kann dieser Pessimismus kaum noch sein und gewiß nicht bleiben.¹⁸⁹

That pessimism is a German phenomenon that corresponds to Russian nihilism is a notion that will be fairly widespread later and that will be important to our discussion of Nietzsche’s late philosophy. Meyer’s pamphlet is an early example of this notion.

Schopenhauer’s pessimism, Meyer states in another pamphlet, Arthur Schopenhauer als Mensch und Denker (1872), is not philosophically valid, it does not follow from his philosophical position. Although he does argue against what he takes to be Schopenhauer’s pessimism, most of his arguments have an ad hominem character, and are designed to describe pessimism as a pathological phenomenon. In particular, Meyer defines pessimism as a form of pathological melancholy: “Wir können in diesem seinem Pessimismus nichts weiter sehen, als das Zeugniß eines krankhaft erregten schwarzgalligen Temperaments.”¹⁹⁰

But when Meyer shortly thereafter addresses the philosophical content of Schopenhauer’s pessimism, his characterisation makes it clear that it is in fact Hartmann’s notion of pessimism that his polemics are directed against: “Die Frage, ob in der Welt Glück oder Unglück überwiegen, ist mit Hilfe einer alle Unlust und alle Lust abwägenden Erfahrung unbedingt nicht zu entscheiden. Es fehlt dazu die rechte Wage und es fehlt auch das rechte Maß.”¹⁹¹ To Schopenhauer’s pessimism, Meyer states in another pamphlet, Arthur Schopenhauer als Mensch und Denker (1872), is not philosophically valid, it does not follow from his philosophical position. Although he does argue against what he takes to be Schopenhauer’s pessimism, most of his arguments have an ad hominem character, and are designed to describe pessimism as a pathological phenomenon. In particular, Meyer defines pessimism as a form of pathological melancholy: “Wir können in diesem seiner Pessimismus nichts weiter sehen, als das Zeugniß eines krankhaft erregten schwarzgalligen Temperaments.”¹⁹⁰

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¹⁸⁹ Jürgen Bona Meyer: Arthur Schopenhauer als Mensch und Denker (Berlin, 1872), p. 44: “We can see nothing else in this pessimism of his than evidence of a pathologically disturbed melancholy temperament.” In Weltelend und Weltschmerz, too, Meyer implies that pessimism is a form of melancholy when he characterises pessimism as “[die] Klagen schwarzgalliger Philosophen” (p. 4).

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¹⁹¹ Meyer: Arthur Schopenhauer, p. 44: “The question whether happiness or unhappiness overweighs, is definitely not to be answered with the help of a calculation of all experience of pleasure.
The question of whether pleasure or pain weighs more heavily is not a matter that needs to be addressed empirically: the fact that the world is will means that all pleasure is merely negative, and that a single instance of suffering is enough to prove pessimism true. As we have seen, it is with Dühring’s interpretation of pessimism as a judgement on the value of life, and particularly Hartmann’s use of a measurement of pleasure vs. pain as a criterion for the truth of pessimism that this use of the concept becomes established.¹⁹²

James Sully

Pessimism was a predominantly German problem. All of the protagonists of the philosophical debate concerning pessimism were Germans. But in the ranks of the opponents of pessimism, a number of foreigners are enlisted. A prominent example is the English psychologist James Sully (1842–1923).

Sully was the author of a number of works on various aspects of psychology. In 1877 he published *Pessimism. A History and a Criticism*, a massive tome of almost 500 pages dedicated to a critical discussion of pessimism. Sully characterises a number of thinkers as pessimists: Leopardi, Taubert, and Bahnsen; but his focus is on Schopenhauer and Hartmann.

In the introduction to his book, Sully notes that pessimism must not be interpreted according to its etymology. “It is true that Schopenhauer, the founder of this speculative creed, half seriously contends that the world is as bad as it can be, consistently with its bare existence. But the essence of philosophical pessimism is something less than this, namely, the denial of happiness or the affirmation of life’s inherent misery”.¹⁹³ He therefore defines optimism as any theory which “distinctly attributes to the world and to human life a decided worth”, and pessimism as all doctrines “which distinctly deny this value to life”.¹⁹⁴ Although Sully regards Schopenhauer as a profounder thinker than Hartmann, his use of pessimism is clearly that of Hartmann and Dühring rather than Schopenhauer.

The bulk of Sully’s book consists of a critique of the scientific pretensions of the pessimists, particularly of Hartmann. His examination of the pessimism in

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¹⁹² This, ironically, is something that Meyer shows awareness of in *Weltend und Weltscherz*, pp. 7 f. There he writes that to Schopenhauer the weighing of pleasure against displeasure is determined a priori, and that Hartmann is the first to take the idea of a measurement seriously.

¹⁹³ Sully: *Pessimism*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 5. Cf. p. 7, where “the main question raised by modern pessimism” is characterised as “the worth of human life”; cf. also p. 156: “By optimism and pessimism we must mean, therefore, the hypotheses that the world is on the whole good, or conducive to happiness, and so better than non-existence, and that the world is on the whole bad, or productive of misery, and so worse than non-existence.”. Joshua Foa Dienstag claims that the analyses of Sully and similar writers “are fairly simplistic and often conceive pessimism as merely positing an excess of pain over pleasure in life” (Dienstag, p. 6, footnote 3). But this is a misunderstanding: the excess of pain over pleasure is the criterion for the truth of pessimism; it is not its definition.
the light of contemporary psychology, physiology, and biology leads him to the
conclusion that the scientific foundation of pessimism is worth nothing. It is
based, Sully claims, on a tendentious interpretation of aged and/or second-rate
works.

Sully maintains that a measurement of pleasure vs. pain such as Hartmann
holds to be the solution of problem of pessimism is impossible. Therefore he
approaches the problem from another direction. Instead of investigating
whether there is any true pleasure and whether it weighs more heavily than the
pain, Sully considers the existence of happiness. And this leads him to affirm
that happiness is indeed possible. Arguing analogously with Dühring, Sully
holds that a number of factors that the pessimists give as evidence for the truth
of pessimism actually prove the possibility of happiness. The brevity of life, for
example, makes us appreciate life all the more.195

Sully thus regards pessimism to be flawed. Still, he does not describe himself
as an optimist. Pessimism and optimism have a common fault: they both lead to
passivity. Instead Sully borrows a term from George Eliot to describe his own
position: meliorism. “By this I would understand the faith which affirms not
merely our power of lessening evil – this nobody questions – but also our ability
to increase the positive good.”196 Pessimism and optimism both are caused by a
distorted outlook on life. The optimist is naïve, whereas the pessimist exagger-
ates the hardship that he or she encounters. Sully’s description of the psycho-
logical roots of optimism and pessimism are very similar to that of Dühring,
whom he quotes on a number of occasions. But being a psychologist, Sully
draws more far-reaching conclusions of the pessimist’s psyche than Dühring
does. He discusses climactic factors of pessimism (the cold and wet climate of
northern Europe is an important explanation of why pessimism is so widely
spread in Germany, and can be found in Britain, in Russia, etc., but only rarely
in southern Europe), and how national character can influence the matter (and
of course, the German national character is particularly prone to pessimism).
The most important factor is the individual’s character, though, and in certain
cases, notably Schopenhauer’s, Sully resorts to psychopathology to explain the
mind: “There s little doubt that medical men would regard Schopenhauer as
suffering from some form of hereditary disease, probably brain-disease.”197 But
Schopenhauer is a particularly severe case. In most cases it is not so bad; on
numerous occasions, he describes the roots of pessimism to be a melancholic
disposition: “Pessimism is the natural outcome of the carping, fault-finding

195 Ibid., p. 320.
196 Ibid., p. 399.
197 Ibid., p. 82. Sully quotes a pamphlet by Carl von Seidlitz to support this diagnosis. Seidlitz, a
physician in the then German town of Dorpat (today Tartu in Estonia) uses descriptions of
Schopenhauer’s forebears, as well as tables of the width of the forehead and the distance from the
root of the nose to the back of the head (Seidlitz’s tables show that Schopenhauer’s head was
considerably larger than those of Kant, Schiller, Napoleon, etc.) to diagnose Schopenhauer as a
pathological megalomaniac. Carl von Seidlitz: Doktor Arthur Schopenhauer vom medicinischen Stand-
punkt aus betrachtet (Dorpat, 1872).
disposition.”198 As we will see, other thinkers hold pessimism to be the symptom of much worse ailments.

Elme Marie Caro

We have seen that it is something of a topos among the anti-pessimists to describe pessimism as a pathological phenomenon. Some of the anti-pessimists go much further than others in declaring pessimism to be a disease. A rather extreme example is Elme Marie Caro (1826–1887), professor of Literature at Sorbonne and member of the Académie française. His description of the psychological aspects of pessimism is deeply indebted to Sully’s Pessimism, but whereas Sully implies rather than states that pessimism is pathological, Caro explicitly calls pessimism an illness of the brain (une maladie du cerveau) rather than a doctrine, adding: “À ce degré, le système ne relève plus de la critique, il revient de droit à la clinique; il faut l’y laisser.”199

Although pessimism on Caro’s account is an illness, he does give a definition of sorts. Having quoted an essay on Buddhism by the theologian-philologist Max Müller who writes that existence is the prime evil on the Buddhists’ account, Caro adds: “Voilà le premier et le dernier mot du pessimisme.”200 Existence is evil. This reads like an inexact version of the notion that the value of life is negative and that non-existence therefore is preferable to existence.

Throughout his book, Caro describes pessimism as a German phenomenon, even quoting a ‘prominent chemist’ who claims that pessimism is caused by the immoderate beer consumption of the Germans. The chemist expands on his thesis: “Il n’y a pas de danger, ajoutait-il, qu’elle [la philosophie du pessimisme] s’acclimate dans les pays de la vigne ni surtout en France; le vin de Bordeaux éclaircit les idées et le vin de Bourgogne chasse les cauchemars.”201

Still, Caro presents Leopardi and not, say Hölderlin, as the poet of pessimism. To retain pessimism as a German problem, he goes to considerable length to turn Leopardi into a German poet. When Caro for instance argues against Leopardi’s image of Antiquity as a pessimistic era, this tendency becomes very visible. He quotes two verses from his poem “Ultimo canto di Saffo” where Leopardi has Sappho say: “Arcano è tutto,/Fuor che il nostro dolor.”202 Caro then comments: “Ce n’est plus l’inspirée, la possédée de Vénus qui parle ici, c’est quelque blonde Allemande rêvant d’un Werther inconnu, séparée de lui par des obstacles infranchissables et s’écriant ‘que tout est

198 Sully: Pessimism, p. 423.
200 Ibid., p. 24.
201 Ibid., p. 278: “There is no danger that it [the philosophy of pessimism] acclimatises itself in the wine countries or elsewhere in France, he added; for the Bordeaux makes the ideas clear, and the Bourgogne chases the nightmares away.”
mystère, hormis notre douleur.” 203 We find the reason for this odd interpretation in the final chapter of his book. After having several times asked himself why the concept of Nirvana (Caro interprets pessimism as a variation of the concept of Nirvana) became so prominent in German culture in the early 19th century, just as Germany was being united and began to rise to glory, Caro claims to have come to understand that pessimism is a reaction of the Germans, at heart a peace-loving people, to its being forced to military discipline and sacrifices in the name of war.

Le pessimisme est l’envers du triomphe dans un peuple qui n’est pas belliqueux par nature, qui l’est devenu par nécessité et par politique, que l’on contraint à mener le rôle d’un conquérant malgré lui, et qui à travers son triomphe a des visions de sa vie tranquille d’autrefois et comme la nostalgie du repos. S’il ne peut se reposer ailleurs, il aspire au néant.204

Pessimism is thus a disease that haunts the German people for having challenged the position of France in European politics.205 Le pessimisme au XIXe siècle was, it is important to remember, written in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war; its patriotic analysis of the inherently German qualities of pessimism could count on popular support. And Caro’s book proved to be popular: it went through four editions in 11 years. Apparently, it contributed to a polarisation of French reception of Schopenhauer, which proved unfavourable to Schopenhauer’s name.206

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203 Caro, p. 13: “This is no longer a woman inspired, indeed obsessed by Venus who speaks here, but some blonde German dreaming of an unknown Werther separated from her by unsurpassable obstacles, and who cries out ‘everything is concealed except for our pain’.”

204 Ibid., p. 287: “Pessimism is the reverse of the triumph of a people that is not bellicose by nature, which has become it by necessity and through politics, which has been forced to play the role of the conqueror in spite of itself, and which has visions of its tranquil life from times gone by in the middle of their triumphs and feels a nostalgia for the calm. If it cannot rest in any other way, it longs for nothingness.”

205 A similar analysis is actually made by Walter Hof. Hof claims that pessimism and nihilism easily can be brushed aside (abgetan werden) by setting them a great and dignified goal. Once the goal is reached, however, the feelings of emptiness return. This was the case after the Franco-Prussian war: “Die politischen Geister – sie vor allem huldigen jener kurzschlüssigen Auskunft der ‘großen Ziele’ – waren sehr erstaunt, als gerade nach 1871 eine Pessimismuswelle die deutschen Gemüter ergriff. Wie hätte sie ausbleiben können, da man mit der Dynamik der Ziele nur an Symptomen kuriert hatte?” (“The political minds – they embrace this short-circuiting information of the ‘great goals’ more than anyone – became very surprised as a wave of pessimism overcame the German mind just after 1871. How could it have failed to appear, when the dynamic of the goals only had cured the symptoms?”) Walter Hof: Pessimistisch-nihilistische Strömungen in der deutschen Literatur, p. 179.

206 Anne Henry, expert on Schopenhauer’s role in French culture, describes the influence of Caro and similar authors such as the Schopenhauerian Jean Bourdeau, who according to Henry was “no less stupid than Caro”, and whose Schopenhauer anthology was very widely diffused, as detrimental to Schopenhauer’s reputation as a thinker. Schopenhauer did, however, find receptive readers as well: Henry, herself a Proust scholar, points to Proust and Maupassant as examples. See her “La réception française de Schopenhauer”, in Anne Henry (ed.): Schopenhauer et la création littéraire en Europe (Paris, 1989), pp. 32 f.
Max Nordau

In the 1890’s Max Nordau (1849–1923), German physician and journalist of Jewish descent, originally from Budapest but for most of his adult life living in Paris, become notorious for the book *Entartung* (1892–93), one of the best-selling books of the decade, in which Nordau attacked any number of manifestations of modern society for the physiological degeneration that they cause to mankind. Later, he would be no less notorious as one of the leading Zionists. In the 1880’s, he was among other things one of the loudest voices in the debate over pessimism.

Pessimism is a minor theme in Nordau’s *Die conventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenschheit* (1883). In a chapter where he seeks pathological explanations for a tendency to discontentment with society on behalf of modern man he describes pessimism as one of its manifestations. “In der Philosophie […] ist die Modestromung der Pessimismus. Schopenhauer ist Gott und Hartmann ist sein Prophet.”207 In his *Paradoxe* (1885), a collection of essays discussing such themes as psycho-physiology of the genius, or gratitude, Nordau addresses pessimism at greater length. One of the longest essays of the book is dedicated the question how optimism is related to pessimism in the modern culture.

Nordau distinguishes between three types of pessimism. Firstly, he distinguishes between scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) and practical pessimism. Those two forms are both honest. The third form of pessimism, on the other hand, is a form of hypocrisy: *geheuchelte Schwarzseherei* is the characterisation that Nordau uses, literally “a hypocritical seeing in black”.

Scientific pessimism is an attempt to pass judgement on the world in its entirety, either from the standpoint of morality (*Sittlichkeit*) or with regard to how ill it is adapted to our purposes. “Weshalb ist, weshalb dauert eine solche Welt”, Nordau’s pessimist asks himself, “und wäre es nicht klüger und moralischer, sie würde in das Urnichts zurückgeschmettert, aus dem sie hervorgegangen sein soll, – was aber erst noch zu beweisen wäre?”208 Although Nordau’s comments on his use of the concept are less than exhaustive, he apparently regards scientific pessimism as the notion that non-existence is preferable to pessimism.

Nordau’s argument against the scientific form of pessimism consists in an attempt to ridicule its advocates for putting themselves at the centre of the universe. Whether the problem with the world is that it is immoral or that it is ill adapted to mankind’s purposes, the scientific pessimists use an anthropocentric scale of measurement. The pessimist believes that he is the master of creation, and is saddened by the discovery that the world does not function according to his wishes. “Darüber wird man verstimmt, man bringt die üble Laune in ein

207 Max Nordau: *Die conventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenschheit* (1883; Leipzig, s. a.), p. 12: “In philosophie, pessimism is the current in fashion. Schopenhauer is god, and Hartmann is his prophet.”
208 Max Nordau: *Paradoxe* (1885; 7th ed., Leipzig, s. a.), p. 2: “Why is there such a world, and why does it remain, and would it not be wiser and more moral if it were thrown back into the primordial nothingness from which it is supposed to have taken form, – which has to be proved first.”
System und nennt sie Pessimismus. Das Kind, das die Hand nach dem Mond ausstreckt und zu greinen beginnt, weil es ihn nicht erreichen kann, ist in seiner Art auch ein Pessimist, ohne es zu wissen. Nur heilt man seinen Pessimismus leicht mit etwas Gerstenzucker.”209 Scientific pessimism, Nordau concludes, is really a form of optimism. The pessimist is really just someone who has higher hopes and expectations for life than life can stand up to. The pessimist is therefore just a particularly optimistic person on Nordau’s account.

Practical pessimism, which Nordau seems to regard as particularly common among poets (Byron, Lenau, Leopardi, and Heine are all labelled practical pessimists), is a form of insanity. It does not take the form of a system as the scientific pessimism, but is rather a feeling that life and the world are insufferable. “Einen solchen Pessimismus kann man nicht widerlegen, nur zergliedern. Er ist immer die Begleiterscheinung einer Gehirnerkrankung, die entweder bereits voll ausgebrochen oder erst im Keime vorhanden ist.”210 The practical pessimism therefore needs very little discussion. The same goes for the third form of pessimism, the hypocritical kind. It is simply an attempt to be considered interesting by being different than the majority of people.

Pessimism therefore is either a form of optimism, or a mental illness, or an insincere attempt to appear interesting by being eccentric. Nordau is unusual in that he actually embraces the label optimist. “Die Wahrheit ist, daß der Optimismus, ein grenzenloser, unentwurzelbarer Optimismus, die Grundanschauung des Menschen bildet, das instinktive Gefühl, das ihm in allen Lagen natürlich ist.”211

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The adversaries of pessimism share a number of characteristics. They refer to pessimism as the problem of the value of life. They accept, that is, Dühring’s and Hartmann’s definition of pessimism, rather than the notion of pessimism as an anti-theodicy presented by Leopardi, by certain contemporaries of Schopenhauer, and by a number of modern Schopenhauer scholars. Virtually none of them refer to themselves as optimists.212 But they all dispute the scientific status of pessimism. By attempting to prove that positive pleasure and happiness is

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209 *Ibid.*, p. 10: “Therefore one is disheartened, one inserts the bad mood into a system and calls it pessimism. The child that tries to reach the moon and begins to cry because it is too distant is a pessimist in his own way, without knowing it. The only difference is that its pessimism is easily cured with some sweets.”

210 *Ibid.*, p. 11: “Such a pessimism cannot be refuted, only analysed. It is always a symptom of a brain disorder, which has either fully broken out, or is yet to develop.”

211 *Ibid.*, p. 27: “The truth is that optimism, a boundless, ineradicable optimism, forms the basic outlook of man, and is the instinctive feeling that is natural to him in all situations.”

212 In 1879, Hartmann writes that one positive result of the recent discussion of pessimism is that “der triviale Optimismus einschliesslich des intellectualistischen (d. h. künstlerischen und wissenschaftlichen) Optimismus als ein von allen denkenden Deutschen aufgegebener Posten ist”. Hartmann: *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins*, p. 850. Perhaps this is more that just rhetoric: virtually none of the adversaries of pessimism embrace the description as optimist. Nordau is a rare exception.
possible they turn the question of life’s value into a psychological phenomenon. And once it has become a psychological phenomenon, they argue – sometimes implicitly or cautiously, but more often than not very vocally – that pessimism is a pathological phenomenon.

These pathological accusations go in two general directions, connecting pessimism to two different medical traditions or discourses. There is, firstly, a tendency to explain pessimism as a result of a psychological tendency to exaggerate the suffering that one is subject to, and to compare this existence to an ideal existence which is often located in ancient Greece but that, on the critics view, is a utopia. These critics, and we have seen that Dühring, Meyer, and Sully are in their ranks, often describe pessimism as a form of melancholy. Secondly, a number of critics declare pessimism to be a form of madness: a variety of madness often associated with sexual abnormalities. The references to these abnormalities hint to another medical discourse: the widespread fear of degeneration that kept physicians and novelists alike busy in the late nineteenth century. To a number of anti-pessimists, with Nordau and Caro in the front rank, pessimism was conceived as one of many manifestations of the physiological degeneration of modern man.

Elme Marie Caro with his accusations of mental illness, German alcoholism, and German hubris represents one extreme in the debate over pessimism; Eduard von Hartmann, whose faith in the progress of man’s intellectual and moral capacities is so great that the development towards a collective, cosmic suicide becomes a matter of logic, represents another. It is not easy to imagine a compromise between the two views.

2.4 Giacomo Leopardi – the “Italian Schopenhauer”

A number of poets have been considered as forerunners of pessimism. We have already seen how Schopenhauer created a pessimistic canon of ancient and modern poets and thinkers who, he maintained, had presented a picture of the world similar to his, only less systematically. Although pessimists and adversaries of pessimism alike agree that the philosophical pessimism is a modern phe-

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213 For a comparison of the debates over degeneration in various European countries, see the brilliant study by Daniel Pick: *Faces of Degeneration. A European Disorder, c. 1848–c. 1918*, Ideas in Context (1989; Cambridge, 1996). See also Torbjörn Gustafsson: *Själens biologi. Medicinen, kulturen och naturens ordning 1850–1920* (diss. Uppsala; Stockholm/Stehag, 1996), where links are established between science (physiology, phrenology, and anthropology, exemplified by a number of leading Swedish representatives of the disciplines) and culture in the 19th century.

214 This theme is much more obvious in Nordau’s *Entartung*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1892–93), where Nordau has resorted to a much shriller tone of voice. Here, pessimism, decadent literature, modern fashion, the music of Wagner, and a number of other phenomena are deemed to be manifestations of degeneration. “Die Degenerierten und Irren sind die vorbestimmte Gemeinde von Schopenhauer und Hartmann und sie brauchen blos den Buddhismus kennen zu lernen, um zu ihm bekehrt zu werden.” (vol. I, p. 34) But *Entartung* was published too late to be of interest to our discussion.
nomenon, most of the pessimists go to some length to show that most of the great minds in the history of mankind have been proto-pessimists. In this canon of pessimistic poetry, the Italian count, poet, and philologist Giacomo Leopardi holds an exceptional position. Hardly anyone is considered a poet and a thinker as frequently and unproblematically as he is.

Leopardi was born into a penniless noble family in the town of Recanati in the region of Le Marche in central-eastern Italy in 1798. Apart from the noble heritage, Leopardi’s biography reads like a parallel life, a bios parallelos, to that of Nietzsche. At a remarkably young age, Leopardi proved himself to be a very talented philologist, teaching himself Greek, Hebrew, and a number of other languages, and writing philological papers of impressive quality. But soon enough, Leopardi gave up philology and turned to literature instead, writing poetry, philosophical dialogues, aphorisms and various essays. He was offered a philological professorship in Bonn, but turned down the offer on account of the cold German climate: both meteorologically and culturally, Leopardi regarded the German climate as inhospitable to make life bearable. Like Nietzsche, he was constantly plagued by ill health; like Nietzsche he led a nomadic existence, travelling continuously in a vain search for a town where the climate, the women, and the libraries were to his liking. Nietzsche eventually found Turin; and similarly Leopardi finally made the city of Naples his home in 1833. But it did not remain his home for very long. He died in Naples 1837.

For all his dislike of German culture – he agreed with Madame de Staël’s description of Germany as la patrie de la pensée, but for reasons that will become apparent, this was to him a negative characteristic – Leopardi has been more appreciated in Germany than in any other country with the exception of his

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215 Taubert is typical: “Der Pessimismus ist so alt wie die Reflexion des Menschen über sich und sein Leben.” Taubert, p. 1.

216 The laments of a number of Leopardi scholars and readers that he is not taken seriously as a thinker are quite incomprehensible. See for example Dienstag, p. 50, or to mention a specialist, Volker Steinkamp: Giacomo Leopardi’s “Zibaldone”. Von der Kritik der Aufklärung zu einer “Philosophie des Scheins”, Bonner romanistische Arbeiten, Band 37 (diss. Bonn, 1990; Frankfurt/M., Bern, New York, Paris, 1991), pp. 7 ff. But the interpretations of him are legion: political interpretations by the likes of Walter Binni, Sebastiano Timpanaro, and more recently Antonio Negri; thematic studies that compare his ideas to several ancient thinkers, as well as to Rousseau, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche by a number of scholars, including some of the very best Nietzsche scholars (Campioni, Brusotti); and not least the proceedings of the Italian and German Leopardi societies: I would say that very few poets have been taken so seriously as thinkers.


218 The most important of Leopardi’s works are: Canti, a collection of poems written between 1818 and 1837; Operette morali, a volume of dialogues and prose sketches with philosophical themes written between 1824 and 1832; Pensieri, a collection of aphorisms posthumously published in 1845. Apart from these works and the philosophical diary Zibaldone (published posthumously in 1898), Leopardi was the author of – among other things – a fairly large number of philological papers, translations of ancient writers, and essays on literature. I am quoting the recent Meridiani edition of Leopardi’s works: Poesie e prose, I meridiani, ed. Mario Andrea Rigoni, 2 vols. (Milano, 1998), and Zibaldone, I meridiani, ed. Rolando Damiani, 3 vols. (Milano, 1997).

219 Steinkamp, p. 41.
native Italy. The first German translation of his poetry, by Karl Ludwig Kanne-
gießer, appeared in 1837, the year of the poet’s death; thereafter new trans-
lations (and re-issues of old ones) have been published regularly.\textsuperscript{220}

If Leopardi was favourably received in Germany, this is particularly the case
in the pessimist circles. As one critic observes, Leopardi has been characterised
as a pessimist more or less since his lifetime: “Die Charakterisierung von Leo-
pardis Denken als Pessimismus ist nicht nur fast so alt wie dieses selber, son-
dern kann auch als ein Topos der Leopardi-Rezeption vor allem des neunzehn-
ten aber auch noch des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts gelten.”\textsuperscript{221} The description
of Leopardi as a pessimist is a topos in the German reception of Leopardi in par-
ticular. This section will give a brief overview of some of the key figures in the
German reception of him, with regard to how they described him as a pessimist.
Of these, none is more important than Schopenhauer.

Leopardi in Germany

Schopenhauer was of immense importance for the interest in Leopardi in Ger-
many. But in his collected works, there is only one reference to him, and one
introduced at a very late stage at that. In the second volume of \textit{Die Welt als Wille
und Vorstellung}, in the seminal chapter “Von der Nichtigkeit und dem Leiden des
Lebens”, Schopenhauer states that no modern writer has addressed the question
of the vanity and suffering of life more thoroughly than the Italian poet Leop-
ardì:

\begin{quote}
Keiner jedoch hat diesen Gegenstand so gründlich und erschöpfend behandelt,
wie, in unsern Tagen, Leopardi: Er ist von demselben ganz erfüllt und durch-
drungen: überall ist der Spott und Jammer dieser Existenz sein Thema, auf jeder
Seite seiner Werke stellt er ihn dar, jedoch in einer solchen Mannigfaltigkeit von
Formen und Wendungen, mit solchem Reichthum an Bildern, daß er nie Üe-
berdrüß erweckt, vielmehr durchweg unterhaltend und erregend wirkt.\textsuperscript{222}
\end{quote}

This entire paragraph is an addition included in the third edition of the book,
from 1858.\textsuperscript{223} It is not included in the manuscript: Schopenhauer apparently
added it when reading the proofs. There are some ten changes made at that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[220] For details, see the recent bibliography of the reception of Leopardi in the German speaking
world: Adrian La Salvia: \textit{Leopardi. Rezeption im deutschsprachigen Raum/Ricezione nell’area di lingua
\item[221] Steinkamp, p. 148: “The characterisation of Leopardi’s thinking as pessimism is not only as old
as it is, but is also a topos of the Leopardi reception of the nineteenth century in particular, but
also of the twentieth.”
\item[222] W II, Chapter 46, p. 689/588: “But no one has treated this subject so thoroughly and exhaus-
tively as Leopardi in our own day. He is entirely imbued and penetrated with it; everywhere his
theme is the mockery and wretchedness of this existence. He presents it on every page of his
works, yet in such a multiplicity of forms and applications, with such a wealth of imagery, that he
never wears us, but, on the contrary, has a diverting and stimulating effect.”
\end{footnotes}
stage: the inclusion of the paragraph on Leopardi is far greater in extent than any of the other. The fact that he chose to include this passage, the only reference to Leopardi in Schopenhauer’s published writings, is evidence that Schopenhauer at the time found Leopardi an important figure. It also suggests that Schopenhauer had only very recently been acquainted with his writings: had he known them earlier, he would have included the reference to him at an earlier stage.

A letter from Schopenhauer’s friend Adam von Doß to the philosopher seems to have been the occasion that drew his attention to the Italian poet.

Lesen Sie ja, verehrter Meister, die Operette morali u. die Pensieri [Leopardis] dieses südlichen Doppelgängers im Pessimismus, wenn Sie ihn noch nicht kennen, was wohl der Fall sein dürfte, weil sonst gewiß Sie mich auf ihn aufmerksam gemacht hätten. Uebrigens haben wir doch einmal von Leopardi gesprochen, nämlich während meines Aufenthaltes in Frankfurt in Mai 1850, aber freilich nur auf Veranlassung einer wenige Monate zuvor in den Blättern für litter. Unterhaltung erschienene Anzeige seiner gesammelten Briefe. Einige Stellen aus denselben verbieten mir schon damals den ungewöhnlichen Beobachter u. Denker, als welchen ich nun den mir theuer gewordenen Autor der Operette morali näher kennen gelernt habe...224

Doß adds that he by directing Schopenhauer’s attention to Leopardi is repaying an old debt: Schopenhauer had made him discover Lichtenberg, and now he finally has an opportunity to draw Schopenhauer’s attention to a writer of similar stature. Schopenhauer responds on the 14th of March: “Leopardi’s operette morali und die pensieri habe ich mir bestellt bei Frisch in Manheim [sic] und werde sehnen. Schade, daß Sie nicht Jahr und Druckort angegeben haben. Denn die opera omnia will ich nicht.”225 Doß advised Schopenhauer to order only the first two volumes of the seven-volume set. Schopenhauer obviously heeded the advice: his library contained the first two volumes (each amounting to 359 pages in octavo) of Leopardi’s Opere. Edizione accresciuta ordinata e corretta secondo l’ultimo intendimento dell’autore da Antonio Ranieri (1856).226 These volumes contain Canti (a collection of poems), Le operette morali (philosophical dialogues), Pensieri (a collec-

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224 Letter from Doß, 20 February 1858, in: Schopenhauer: Gespräche, ed. Arthur Hübischer, pp. 154 f.: “But do read, honourable Master, the Operette morali and the Pensieri by Leopardi, this southern doppelganger in pessimism, if you are not yet familiar with him, which is probably the case, as you in that case without doubt would have drawn my attention to him. Incidentally, we have already talked about Leopardi once, during my visit to Frankfurt in May 1850, but that was just occasioned by an article a few months before that in the Blätter für litterarische Unterhaltung that mentioned the publication of his collected letters. A number of passages in them betrayed already then the exceptional observer and thinker that I have come to know better and cherish through the Operette morali…” The square brackets and the ellipsis are the editor’s.

225 Schopenhauer: Gesammelte Briefe, p. 425: “I have ordered Leopardi’s operette morali and pensieri through Frisch in Manheim [sic] and will see. Too bad that you did not give me the year and place of publication. For I do not want the opera omnia.”

226 HN V, pp. 480 f.
tion of aphorisms) and some volgarizzazioni, translations from Greek and Latin, including Leopardi’s translation of Epictetus’ Enchiridion.227

Schopenhauer had the habit of annotating his books heavily. As the editor of the catalogue of his library puts it: “Die ganze Weltliteratur weist keinen Schriftsteller von ähnlicher Bedeutung auf, der seine gesamte umfangreiche Bibliothek so wie Schopenhauer zu einem Archiv eigener Bekenntnisse ausgestaltet hätte.”228 It is therefore noteworthy that the Leopardi volumes contain very little annotations: just one quotation from Goethe’s Faust, written down in the margin of the dialogue “Dialogo di Torquato Tasso e il suo genio” in Operette morali: “Werd ich zum Augenblicke sagen:/Verweile doch, du bist so schön!”229

In Schopenhauer’s manuscript remains, there is one reference to Leopardi. Adding to an older manuscript (the editor dates it to around 1826), where Schopenhauer discusses Bacon’s statement that suspicion is the result of ignorance, Schopenhauer writes: “nach den Maximen Leopardi’s: ‘L’impostura è anima della vita sociale’ und ‘il mondo è una lega di birbanti contro gli uomini da bene, e di vili contro i generosi’, denke und handle ich.”230 Both these dicta are quotations from the Pensieri: the first is a sentence from aphorism XXIX (in its totality, the sentence reads: “L’impostura è anima, per dir così, della vita sociale”, “imposture is, so to speak, the soul of social life”), and the second from aphorism I.

Only one reference to Leopardi in the published writings and one in the manuscript remains. In the letters there are some more. In a letter to David Asher (3 January 1859), Schopenhauer writes that Voß’sche Zeitung has published German translations of Leopardi:


228 Arthur Hübscher, foreword to HN V, p. XII: “The entire world literature knows no writer of a similar importance who has turned his voluminous library into an archive of his own confessions.” Cf. the second appendix (pp. 185–206) of Sandro Barbera’s Une philosophie du conflit. Études sur Schopenhauer, tr. Marie-France Merger (Paris, 2004) for a discussion of Schopenhauer’s marginal notes, how they can be put to use for a better understanding of the philosopher, and a discussion of the limitations of the editorial principles of Hübscher’s catalogue of Schopenhauer’s library.
229 HN IV: 2, p. 112: “I think and act in accordance with Leopardi’s maxims ‘imposture is the soul of social life’ and ‘the world is a league of scoundrels against honest men, and of the contemptible against the high-minded’” The translation of Leopardi is J. G. Nichols, from Thoughts and The Broom, tr. J. G. Nichols (London, 2002).
230 HN V, p. 481.
231 Schopenhauer: Gesammelte Briefe, p. 440: “Aunt Voß, v. November 28, appendix, review of Sturm & Kompaß. – The same v. December 12 to January 1 publishes translations of my spiritual relative Leopardi (whom I read in the original language with great délice), and very dignified mention of me, in the beginning and particularly in the end. The Wiener has also mentioned me a few times more. Lindner sends me all of this.”
The Lindner referred to in the letter was a certain Ernst Otto Lindner, publisher of Voß’sche Zeitung, and at the time occupied with translating some of Leopardi’s dialogues into German. On the 7th of January, Schopenhauer writes to Lindner: “Schon seit 2 Monaten war ich mit Leopardi beschäftigt und habe dessen prosaische Aufsätze (an die poetischen gehe ich erst jetzt) mit größtem delitto gelesen. Da dachte ich: ‘wenn doch Jemand diesen Autor übersetzen wollte!’ Und sogleich kommt der doctor indefatigabilis, den noch nicht ausgesprochenen Wunsch zu erfüllen.”232 The rest of the letter is filled with comments on Lindner’s translation: in several letters to other addressees, Schopenhauer expressed doubts that Lindner’s Italian was good enough to translate Leopardi.

In the autumn of 1858 the Turin-based periodical Rivista contemporanea published Francesco De Sanctis’ dialogue Schopenhauer e Leopardi, where Schopenhauer’s philosophy is confronted with that of Leopardi. The lines of the protagonists of this dialogue, A and D, consist of paraphrases and quotations from the works of the two. In the dialogue, De Sanctis underlines that Leopardi has created a poetry that corresponds to the philosophy of Schopenhauer: “Leopardi e Schopenhauer sono una cosa. Quasi nello stesso tempo l’uno creava la metafisica e l’altro la poesia del dolore. Leopardi vedeva il mondo così e non sapeva il perché. […] Il perché l’ha trovato Schopenhauer con la scoperta del ‘Wille’.”233

The publication of De Sanctis’ dialogue pleased Schopenhauer greatly. It was, apparently, Lindner who directed Schopenhauer’s attention to it; in a letter to him from 14 February 1859 Schopenhauer begs him to send him the dialogue: “Werther Freund,/ Schicken Sie, schicken Sie den Dialog, meine brennende Neugier eiligst zu befriedigen: hier ist nicht daran zu denken, daß er sich vorfinde, in diesem Abdera.”234 And, after having read the text, he writes to the same recipient (23 February):

Es ist ein wichtiger Fortschritt, der mir Italien eröffnet. – Hab’ es 2 Mal sehr aufmerksam gelesen und muß erstaunen, wie sehr dieser Italiener sich meine Phil angenommen hat und wie wohl er sie verstanden hat: er exerpiert nicht, wie die deutschen Professoren, namentl Erdmann, meine Schriften, ohne wahres Verständniß und nach der Seitenzahl. Nein, er hat sie in succum & sanguinem vertirt und hat Al-

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232 Ibid., p. 441: “I have occupied myself with Leopardi for two months already and have read his prose writings with the greatest delitto [delight] (I am about to begin reading his poetry now). Then I thought: ‘if only someone would want to translate this author!’ And immediately the doctor indefatigabilis comes along to fulfil the not yet uttered wish.”

233 Francesco De Sanctis: Schopenhauer e Leopardi (1858), in: Opere vol. XIII, eds. Carlo Muscetta & Antonio Perna (Torino, 1960), p. 444: “Leopardi and Schopenhauer are one and the same thing. Almost simultaneously one of them created the metaphysics and the other the poetry of suffering. Leopardi saw the world like that but did not know why. […] Schopenhauer found out why with the discovery of the ‘Wille’.”

234 Schopenhauer: Gesammelte Briefe, p. 447: “Esteemed friend,/send, oh do send the dialogue to satisfy my burning curiosity as quickly as possible: it is unthinkable that one could find it here in this Abdera.”

After having read De Sanctis’ dialogue, most of the references to Leopardi serve the purpose of expressing content with having found an intelligent and reasonably sympathetic critic in Italy. In letters to Carl G. Bähr (26 February 1859), Carl Schütz (27 February), Adam von Doß (1 March), Julius Bahnson (2 March), and David Asher (9 March). In the letter to Doß, Schopenhauer gives a summarizing assessment of Leopardi: “Mit großem Genusse habe ich ihn wiederholt gelesen: doch gefällt mir seine Prosa bei weitem besser, als seine Verse: nur ein Paar Gedichte haben meinen vollen Beifall, die recantazione und einige andere.”

There is a clear tendency in the references to Leopardi in the letters: in the letters to Adam von Doß, who first recommended Schopenhauer to read Leopardi, Schopenhauer talks about the works of Leopardi, generally praising them. In the letters to the other addressees, Leopardi is per se less interesting than the use Schopenhauer can have of him.

Some anecdotes reported by visitors show that he did consider Leopardi to be related to himself, and that on account of his being a pessimist. The musician Robert von Hornstein, who apparently became a Schopenhauerian after meeting Richard Wagner in 1855, quotes Schopenhauer as saying: “Wissen Sie

235 Ibid., pp. 447 f.: “It is an important progress, which opens up Italy to me. – I’ve read it twice with great attention and I’m amazed of the degree to which this Italian has made my philosophy his own and well he has understood it: he does not quote my books like the German professors, such as Erdmann, without true understanding and according to the page number. No, he has digested it in succum & sanguinem and has everything at hand, just where he needs it. He is also convinced of the truth and is full of enthusiasm; still he believes that he has to show a sarcastic sneer now and then to amuse his audience. P. 405, 6 he praises me celestially and is thereby unjust to Leopardi – whom I often read with admiration. I accept the invectives against me at the end: for they amount to the fact that the giovane Italia no more than our rabble from 1848 have found their man in me. Perhaps this man is a sbandito, in Zürich.” The Italian term ‘sbandito’ means banished, and De Sanctis, critic of Neapolitan origin, was in fact banished from Italy and lived in exile in Zürich where he served as a very popular lecturer at the Hochschule. Later he would become the first minister of education of united Italy. See Peter Brand & Lino Pertile (eds.): The Cambridge Companion to Italian Literature (1996; rev. ed. Cambridge, 1999), pp. 444 f., and Gordon A. Craig: The Triumph of Liberalism. Zürich in the Golden Age, 1830–1869 (New York, 1988), p. 149.

236 Schopenhauer: Gesammelte Briefe, pp. 448 ff.

237 Ibid., p. 450: “I have read him repeatedly with great pleasure: but I like his prose much better than his verse; only a couple of poems have my full approval, the recantazione and a few others.”

238 Wagner’s favourite dog Peps had just died, and rather than working with his music he spent his time mourning and reflecting on Schopenhauer when he and Hornstein met in Seelisberg in the Swiss alps: “Er begann mit der Partitureinschrift der Walküre, einer Zweitschrift, aber die Lust am Komponieren und Instrumentieren wollte sich nicht einstellen. Statt dessen grübelte er über Entsagung und Weltverzicht, bekehrte den zur Unzeit sich einstellenden, immer verworren
auch, daß in einem Jahre die drei größten Pessimisten zugleich in Italien waren? Doß hat es ausgerechnet, Byron, Leopardi und ich. Doch hat keiner den anderen kennen gelernt.” 239 And Bernard Miller also quotes Schopenhauer as comparing Leopardi’s pessimism to his own:

Schopenhauer bemerkte … daß die Leopardische Philosophie nicht nur innerlich, sondern auch äußerlich mit der seinigen in Verwandtschaft steht. Leopardi wurde erst 20 Jahre nach seinem Tode bekannt, gleich wie Schopenhauers Philosophie erst 40 Jahre nach ihrer ersten Veröffentlichung eine Anerkennung in weiten Kreisen erlangt hat. Auch Leopardi ist übrigens, wie Schopenhauer sich ausdrückte, “Pessimist gleich ihm selbst”. 240

Schopenhauer was 70 years old in 1858 when he discovered Leopardi. He died two years later. He obviously discovered him too late to be influenced by him. Schopenhauer seems, a brief period in 1858 aside, to have regarded Leopardi rather as a means to further his own philosophy than as a thinker or poet, interesting in his own right. Leopardi did belong, though, to the group of writers whom Schopenhauer regarded as his forebears. Like Plato, Dante, and Shakespeare, Leopardi testified to the pain and vanity inherent in life. Like those other members of Schopenhauer’s private canon, what they actually said was of less importance than the fact that Schopenhauer could put them to use in service of his own philosophy.

Still Schopenhauer was important for Leopardi’s raising fame in Germany. By stressing the similarities between Leopardi’s and his own works in letters and particularly in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, Schopenhauer made sure that Leopardi came to be considered a pessimist. Not least was he important because his own fame made subsequent readers of Leopardi associate to him. The fact that Schopenhauer was a famous pessimist made Leopardi’s critics and translators point to similarities to Schopenhauer in order to take advantage of his fame.

An important role in the process of defining him as a pessimist is played by Leopardi’s translators. In the introduction to his volume of translations of Leopardi’s poems (published in 1866), Robert Hamerling points to similarities

239 Schopenhauer: Gespräche, p. 220: “Do you know that the three greatest pessimists were in Italy in one and the same year? Doß has figured it out, Byron, Leopardi and I. But none of us got to know any of the others.”
240 Ibid., p. 345: “Schopenhauer commented … that the Leopardian philosophy is not only internally but also externally related to his own. Leopardi did not become known until 20 years after his death, just like Schopenhauer’s philosophy received no recognition in wider circles until 40 years after it first was published. And moreover, Leopardi is, as Schopenhauer put it, ‘pessimist like himself.’” The ellipsis is the editor’s. Commenting on the phrase ‘Leopardische Philosophie’, the editor Hübscher writes in a note: “Von einer ‘Philosophie’ Leopardis hat Sch. kaum gesprochen.” – “Sch. hardly spoke of a ‘philosophy’ of Leopardi.”
between Leopardi’s pessimism and that of Schopenhauer. Most of the short preface consists of a biographical sketch that stresses the unhappiness, melancholy and ill health of Leopardi. But he also comments on the content and spirit of Leopardi’s poetry, and he does so by comparing it to Schopenhauer: “Aber vielleicht ist der Pessimismus Leopardi’s dem deutschen Geiste und Wesen näher gerückt, seit der Philosoph Arthur Schopenhauer ein Mann der Mode geworden. Zum mindesten wird das deutsche Publikum aus dieser Uebertragung Leopardi’s erfahren, daß der Pessimismus älter ist als die Schopenhauer’sche Philosophie.”241 Hamerling’s preface makes it clear that he regards Leopardi as a more original thinker than Schopenhauer.

In 1869, three years after Hamerling’s edition, Gustav Brandes published a new translation of Leopardi’s poetry. He too introduced it with a biographical sketch. But although his introduction is much more extensive, and although he is obviously dissatisfied with Hamerling’s translations, there are a great number of similarities between their introductions. They both rely heavily on Antonio Ranieri’s Notizia intorno agli scritti, alla vita ed ai costumi di Giacomo Leopardi (1845), a memorial publication by Leopardi’s closest friend; they both attempt to explain Leopardi’s poetry with his health and unhappiness; and they both describe him as a poetical counterpart to Schopenhauer. Brandes writes that Leopardi’s lack of belief in man was formed “aus pessimistischen philosophischen Anschauungen”.242

Both Brandes and Hamerling are obviously trying to create an interest for Leopardi, and the attempts to link his poetry with pessimism are an aspect of this. Paul Heyse, writing a decade after Hamerling and Brandes (1878), can take Leopardi’s success for granted. He explains his success with the popularity of philosophical pessimism:

Seitdem der Pessimismus als philosophische Doctrin in Deutschland Eingang gefunden hat und täglich lauter als die einzig befriedigende Lösung aller Tages- und Menschheitsfragen gepriesen wird – in seltsamem Gegensatz zu dem glorreichen politischen Aufschwunge der Nation –, seitdem ist auch der Dichter des Pessimismus aus dem Dunkel getreten, das noch immer für die Augen der großen deutschen Welt alle italienischen Menschen und Dinge zu umhüllen pflegt.243

242 Giacomo Leopardi: Dichtungen, tr. Gustav Brandes (Hannover, 1869), p. 34: “out of pessimistic philosophical conceptions”. A little later, Brandes also explains the lack of success of Leopardi’s satire Paralipomeni della batracomiomachia with its pessimistic radicalism: p. 72.
243 Giacomo Leopardi: Giacomo Leopardi, 2 vols., tr. Paul Heyse (Berlin, 1878), vol. II, p. 1: “Since pessimism has found a footing in Germany and with every passing day is being praised more loudly as the only satisfying solution to all questions of the day and of mankind – in peculiar contrast to the glorious political progress of the nation –, since that moment the poet of pessimism too has stepped out of that dusk that still enshrouds all Italian persons and things in the eyes of the greater German world.” Heyse also refers to his translation as “dieses Erbauungsbuch des Pessimismus, diese Codification des Weltschmerzes” (p. 3).
Heyse’s introduction contains more references to Leopardi as a pessimist, and more comparisons with Schopenhauer than the introductions of the other translators. And although his text does not have the conceptual rigidity of a philosophical treatise, it is clear that ‘pessimism’ is no mere metaphor here. On two occasions, Heyse uses phrases that are variations on the central tenet of pessimism: “Wenn Nichtgeborenwerden das Beste ist, und besser als Leben jedenfalls ein früher Tod”; and more abstractly: “Nichtsein sei besser als Sein”. But Heyse stresses that there is a valorous trait in Leopardi; he maintains that Leopardi’s suffering and gloominess turned his life into a glorious act of defiance against fate. And this means that Leopardi’s pessimism does not lead to hopelessness; on the contrary: Leopardi’s very existence is to Heyse testimony of the value of life:

Das Leben […] kann nicht absolut wertlos sein, eitel glück- und trostverlassen, eines Schattens Traum, und diese fälschlich für die beste erklärte Welt nicht schimmer als keine sein, wenn ein hochherziger, kühner, vorurtheilsloser Geist, wie Leopardi, der alle gehäufte Bitterkeit eines Menschenlebens erfahren, gleichwohl mit Tagen und Stunden geizen und zu einer Zeit, wo ihm alle Fähigkeit zum Schaffen zerstört war, an dem bloßen Athemholen unter tausend Schmerzen so inbrünstig festhalten konnte.

Although Leopardi is a pessimist, his pessimism does not lead to a negation of life. And neither, Heyse seems to think, does he produce such an effect in his readers. A similar interpretation is proposed by De Sanctis in his dialogue Schopenhauer e Leopardi. De Sanctis writes that Leopardi produces an effect contrary to the ideas that he expresses: “Non crede al progresso, e te lo fa desiderare: non crede alla libertà, e te la fa amare. Chiama illusioni l’amore, la gloria, la virtù, e te ne accende in petto un desiderio inesausto.”

Needless to say, the critics of pessimism did not agree with this particular interpretation of the example set by Leopardi. A number of the adversaries of pessimism cite Leopardi as one of the pessimists. James Sully quotes Leopardi as a representative of the “pessimistic movement in modern poetry”, and adds that in his works, “despair of life […] seems to rise to its highest pitch, uttering

244 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 18 and 29: “If not being born is the best thing, and early death on all accounts is better than life”; “non-being is better than being”.
245 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 18 f.: “Life cannot be absolutely worthless, vain, empty of happiness and of comfort, cannot be the dream of a shadow, and this world, wrongly declared to be the best, cannot be worse than no world, when a noble, valiant, unbiased spirit like Leopardi, who had experienced all the assembled bitterness of a human life, and still economised with his days and hours, at a time when all his ability to create had been destroyed still could clutch so ardently to the very act of breathing in spite of a thousand pains.”
246 De Sanctis, p. 465: “He does not believe in progress, and makes you desire it: he does not believe in liberty, and makes you love it. He calls love, glory, virtue illusions, and he ignites an unquenchable desire for them in your breast.” Shortly afterwards he writes that Leopardi and Schopenhauer both are pessimists, but adds that Leopardi does not preach “l’assurda negazione del ‘Wille’”, ibid., p. 466.
itself in piercing cries.” 247 Elme Marie Caro dedicates a whole chapter of his book on pessimism in the nineteenth century to Leopardi. He denies that Byron or Chateaubriand are pessimists: their complaints about the vanity and painfulness of life are expressions of romantic self-aggrandisement rather than of pessimism. Leopardi, on the contrary, has a philosophy. Caro even holds him to be more of a philosopher than Schopenhauer: “Sur deux points seulement, le pessimisme de Leopardi diffère de celui de Schopenhauer, et je n’hésite pas à dire que le poète est le plus philosophe des deux, parce qu’il reste dans une mesure relative de raison.” 248 These two points are firstly that Leopardi contents himself with observing the suffering in life without trying to explain it with a transcendental metaphysical principle, and secondly that he does not seek other-worldly solutions to the suffering but rather advocates a form of stoicism. Max Nordau presents Leopardi as one of the representatives of practical pessimism, which to him is a symptom of a diseased brain. In Leopardi’s case, his pessimism had its roots in sexual abnormalities: “Leopardi litt an gewissen geschlechtlichen Verirrungen, die dem Irrenarzt wohlbekannt sind.” 249

Pessimism in Leopardi’s Works

The characterisation of Leopardi as a pessimist by pessimists and anti-pessimists alike is the principal reason why Leopardi, a non-philosopher and a non-German, is included in this study of the history of a fundamentally German philosophical problem. Once again, we will have reason to ask three questions: Firstly: How does Leopardi define pessimism? Secondly: How does he argue for its truth? Thirdly: What function does it have in his system?

We immediately run into a problem. For Leopardi does not have a system in the sense that the thinkers we have hitherto discussed have systems. In the Zibaldone, the large philosophical diary that Leopardi kept between 1817 and 1832, he often talks of “il mio sistema”. 250 But he does not present a coherent system of metaphysics.

Several of Leopardi’s poems, dialogues and aphorisms express sentiments and ideas very similar to those of the pessimists. In the poem “Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell’Asia”, partly quoted in the first section of Nietzsche’s

248 Caro, p. 75: “On two points only does the pessimism of Leopardi differ from that of Schopenhauer, and I do not hesitate to say that the poet is more of a philosopher, for he retains a relative amount of reason.”
249 Nordau: Paradoxe, p. 11: “Leopardi suffered from certain sexual aberrations with which the psychiatrist is more than familiar”.
250 Leopardi: Zibaldone, I meridiani, ed. Rolando Damiani, 3 vols. (Milano, 1997), especially pp. 945 ff. (this refers, as is customary, to the pagination of the manuscript). For a discussion of the meaning of Leopardi’s system, see Steinkamp, pp. 27 ff. Steinkamp maintains that Leopardi’s distinction between a system (which is necessary) and the love for a system (which limits the thought inappropriately) reflects the criticism of Leibniz, Spinoza and Descartes by the Enlightenment philosophers.
Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben, Leopardi has his protagonist, a melancholy shepherd, cry out to the moon: “Dimmi, o luna: a che vale/Al pastor la sua vita,/La vostra vita a voi?” The rest of the poem is dedicated to the shepherd’s meditations on the meaninglessness of the suffering that characterizes life, interspersed with envy towards his animals which are never assailed by boredom.

The impossibility of happiness is the theme of several of the Operette morali as well. This work is a collection of moralistic dialogues, modelled, apparently, on the dialogues of Lucian. In “Dialogo di Malambruno e di Farfarello”, a dialogue toying with the Faust myth, Leopardi has the giant Malambruno offer his soul to Farfarello, one of the demons from Dante’s Inferno. Malambruno does not want power or wealth or the infallible seductive powers. He wants a moment of happiness: “Fammi felice per un momento di tempo.” This, Farfarello swears, is impossible. Not even the Devil himself could achieve that. Eventually, Malambruno accepts the situation and asks to be liberated from unhappiness at least. This is possible, provided that he can cease to love himself above everything else (supremamente). Malambruno observes that this will be possible after death. All living beings necessarily love themselves above everything else and desire their own happiness. And as long as they have this desire (desiderio) they cannot avoid being unhappy. For the absence of happiness is experienced as unhappiness: “negli uomini e negli altri viventi la privazione della felicità, quantunque senza dolore e senza sciagura alcuna, e anche nel tempo di quelli che voi chiamate piaceri, importa infelicità espressa.” In dreamless sleep

251 Leopardi: Canti, p. 84, verses 16 ff. In J. G. Nichols’ translation: “Tell me, O moon, the use/Of the shepherd’s life to him,/Of your lives there to you.” Leopardi: The Canti. With a Selection of His Prose, tr. J. G. Nichols (1994, Manchester, 1998), p. 94. All English translations of Leopardi’s poetry are from this volume. Interestingly, Hamerling translates these verses “Sag an, o Mond, was frommet/Dem Hirten wohl sein Leben/Und dir das deinige?” (Leopardi: Gedichte, p. 91) which actually removes the poem from the pessimistic context when compared to the original. For the original’s “a che vale […] la vita?” could be translated as “what is the value of life?”, an expression frequently used by the pessimists and their adversaries. In Hamerling’s translation, he asks “what good is life?” (“was frommet […] das Leben?”). This too is a reasonable translation, but the result is nonetheless a totally different question, related to the meaning rather than to the value of life.

252 For an interesting discussion of Leopardi’s relation to Lucian and further references, see: Emilio Mattioli: “Leopardi e Luciano”, in: Leopardi e il mondo antico. Atti del 1° Convegno Internazionale di studi leopardiani (Rezzonati 22–25 settembre 1980) (Firenze, 1982), pp. 75–98, particularly pp. 85–98. Mattioli regards Lucian as much more important than a mere source; he maintains that Leopardi’s choice of writing dialogues was an important ideological move (he points to Hegel’s resistance to the dialogue as a philosophical genre), and that Lucian was an important “strumento espressivo del pensiero materialistico che è alla base delle Operette morali” (“instrument of expression of the materialistic thought that forms the basis of the Operette morali”) (p. 98).


254 Ibid., p. 40/101: “in man as well as in other living creatures, the absence of happiness involves utter unhappiness, even if without pain or misfortune – which is the case also in the midst of what you call pleasure.”
we can achieve a state deprived of unhappiness, but whenever we experience life we can never cease to be unhappy. If absence of unhappiness is better than unhappiness, the demon and the giant conclude, then “assolutamente parlando, il non vivere è sempre meglio del vivere.”255 Pessimism is not a word used by Leopardi in this context, but in this dialogue and a number of others, he has his protagonists come to pessimistic conclusions, and furthermore, these conclusions are the result of arguments remarkably similar to Schopenhauer. The desire (desiderio) for happiness is what makes man unhappy: wanting to be happy makes man egoistic, and egoism makes him unhappy.

In the Zibaldone too, the impossibility of happiness is a recurrent theme. Leopardi argues that man is endowed with a drive to seek pleasure (happiness, he holds, essentially consists of pleasure). But this desire is without limits, both with regard to the duration and the extensions of the pleasures. This means that we always are disappointed; for no pleasure is eternal, no pleasure is immense.256

The dialogues contain a number of other pessimistic themes. Two dialogues more than the other present intellectual and moral perfection as a factor that increases the suffering of an individual: “Dialogo della natura e di un’anima” and the highly ironical “Dialogo di Tristano e di un amico”. In the first of these, Nature salutes a soul about to be born with the phrase “grow up and be unhappy”. This is no malice on account of Nature; she has great hopes for this soul, but the excellence that it might achieve will be paid for in increased suffering. When the soul asks if excellence and extraordinary unhappiness are the same thing, Nature answer that this is almost the case: “Nelle anime degli uomini, e proporzionatamente in quelle di tutti i generi di animali, si può dire che l’una e l’altra cosa siano quasi il medesimo: perchè l’eccellenza delle anime importa maggiore intensione della loro vita; la qual cosa importa maggior sentimento dell’infelicità propria; che è come se io dicessi maggiore infelicità.”257

The theme of the dialogue of Nature and the soul is echoed in “Dialogo di Tristano e di un amico”, albeit with an added tone of criticism against society.258 Tristan, a self portrait of Leopardi’s encounters a friend who has recently read Tristan’s book and complains that it is melancholy. Tristan answers that the foolishness that life is unhappy had got hold of him, but that he now was cured. The friend finds this hard to believe, but Tristan maintains that he now believes in all the great truths discovered by the nineteenth century: he believes in the

255 Ibid., p. 40/103: “in absolute terms, not living is always better than living.”
256 Leopardi: Zibaldone, p. 165 (12–20 July 1820).
257 Leopardi: Operette morali, pp. 41 f./107: “One could say that in the souls of men, and proportionately in those of all kinds of animals, the two things are almost one and the same, for excellence of soul implies greater intensity of life, which implies greater awareness of one’s own unhappiness.”
infinite perfectibility of man, in the progress of mankind, in the continuous growth of knowledge, and in the superiority of the nineteenth century over all other epochs. He claims to be convinced of these truths, although we moderns are children compared to the ancient Greeks, although ever fewer specimen of the truly learned are seen, and although all centuries, even the most barbarian, believe themselves to be the greatest of all epochs. He is convinced of these truths, and professes to embrace “la profonda filosofia de’ giornali”, the profound philosophy of the newspapers. Finally the interlocutor realises that Tristan is ironical. Tristan throws away his mask and admits that he is as melancholy and unhappy as he has ever been, and that he used to envy the stupid and those convinced of their own importance. Now his envy takes an even more pessimistic form: “Oggi non invidio più nè stolti nè savi, nè grandi nè piccoli, nè deboli nè potenti. Invidio i morti, e solamente con loro mi cambierei.”259 This dialogue thus combines the pessimistic idea of death as enviable (but then again: without a metaphysical explanation such an idea is far too widespread to allow us to characterise the dialogue as pessimistic on account of it) with an idea of decline.

The combination of an idea of decline in combination with a pessimistic (or quasi-pessimistic) theme is evident also in “Dialogo di Plotino e di Porfirio”. This dialogue takes its starting-point in a brief anecdote from the history of philosophy: in his biography of Plotinus, Porphyry relates how Plotinus one day talked him out of committing suicide. Leopardi creates a dialogue of some fifteen pages out of Porphyry’s brief description of the episode, discussing the reasons for and against suicide. Porphyry brings forward the vanity of everything but boredom (noia) as a reason for the rationality of suicide.260 The pleasures of life are vanities, Porphyry maintains, pain is more often than not vanity, and so is fear. “Solo la noia, la qual nasce sempre dalla vanità delle cose, non è mai vanità, non inganno; mai è fondata in sul falso.”261 Be that as it may, Plotinus answers, suicide is nonetheless contrary to nature. But Porphyry is unwilling to accept the normative status of nature. It might well be, he holds, that it

259 Leopardi: Operette morali, p. 220/505: “Now I envy neither the stupid nor the wise, neither the great nor the small, neither the weak nor the powerful. I envy the dead, and only with them would I change places.”


was contrary to the nature of the ancients, who were stronger than we, to com-
mit suicide; it might well be that it is contrary to the nature of primitive peoples,
who are less sensitive than we, to commit suicide.\textsuperscript{262} But our nature has
changed, and it is not against our nature to take our lives.\textsuperscript{263} For to us, death is
“il maggior bene dell’uomo”, the greatest good of man.\textsuperscript{264} But when Porphyry
states that it is enough that takings one’s life be useful (\textit{utile}) for it to be correct
to do it, Plotinus protests. Although there are moments in any man’s life when
it does not seem worth while to continue living, this feeling quickly recedes and
leaves place for a new hope, which rekindles our lust for life. Suicide is there-
fore always an ill-considered act. And suicide is an egoistical act at that; a person
who kills himself shows no concern for the other. This is the argument that
convinces Porphyry: Plotinus begs him, from a friend to another, not to kill
himself; instead he asks that they share the suffering. “Viviamo, Porfirio mio, e
confortiamoci insieme: non riusciamo di portare quella parte che il destino ci ha
stabilita, dei mali della nostra specie. Si bene attendiamo a tenerci compagnia
l’un l’altro; e andiamoci incoraggiando, e dando mano e soccorso scambievol-
mente; per compiere nel miglior modo questa fatica della vita.”\textsuperscript{265}

The “Dialogo di Plotino e di Porfirio” shows that the pessimist label sits
rather uncomfortably on Leopardi. He has his protagonists establish that life is
vain, that non-existence is preferable, at least given the weak nature of modern
man. But he affirms life in spite of the dreariness, the pain, and the vanity. Sev-
eral scholars point to Leopardi’s high estimate of valour and courage, and this
affirmation of life in spite of its vanity is an expression of this estimate.\textsuperscript{266} This

\textsuperscript{262} The opinion that we have become much weaker than the ancients was dear to Leopardi. In the
preface to his translation of Epictetus’s \textit{Enchiridion}, Leopardi comes to the conclusion that this
means that stoicism is more suitable to us than to the ancients. For stoicism to him is essentially a
philosophy for the weak. See the “Preambolo del volgarizzatore” in: \textit{Manuale di Epitteto}, in: \textit{Poesie e

\textsuperscript{263} Cf. Leopardi: \textit{Zibaldone}, p. 1980 (23 October 1822), where Leopardi compares suicide to medi-
cine: medicine is contrary to nature but can still is useful; and likewise suicide can be useful al-
though unnatural. The state of modern man Leopardi maintains is “lontanissimo dal naturale”
(“very far from the natural”) and therefore the fact that something is contrary to nature is not a
valid argument.

\textsuperscript{264} Leopardi: \textit{Operette morali}, p. 203. Cecchetti translates this phrase with “the most desirable thing
thing for man, and the best” (p. 465).

\textsuperscript{265} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 208/477: “Let us live, my dear Porphyry, and let us comfort each other. Let us not
refuse to bear that part of the ills of our species destiny has assigned us. Let us keep each other
company; let us encourage each other, and let us help and support each other so that we may
complete as well as we can this labor of life, which will undoubtedly be brief.”

\textsuperscript{266} In an attempt to formulate a Leopardian ethic based primarily on “La ginestra”, one of Leopardi’s most important poems, Hans Gerd Ingenkamp observes: “Die Grundlage des richtigen
Handeln ist das Edelsein des Handelnden. Damit zieht Leopardi bereits einen Trennungsstrich
zwischen seiner und anderen Ethiken, z.B. einer Gesetsethik, einer intellektualistischen Ethik,
einer pragmatischen Ethik usw. im weiteren Sinne gehört eine Adelsethik zu den ästhetischen
Handlungskonzepten.” Heinz Gerd Ingenkamp: “Der Ginster. Giacomo Leopardi über das
würdige Leben und Sterben”, \textit{Schoenauer-Jahrbuch 73} (1992), p. 148. Such an ethic could easily be
formulated on the basis of a number of the \textit{Operette morali}, apart from the “Dialogo di Plotino e di
Porfirio”, the “Dialogo di un venditore di almanacchi e di un passeggero” comes to mind.
valour can, to be sure, be interpreted as a form of pessimistic pose, as a form of secondary pessimism to use Pauen’s term. But the roots of this theme go too deep for it to be a mere pose. Leopardi holds reason and knowledge to be imical to life. Reason and the seeking of knowledge leads us to the fundamental truth about life: life is vain; the only thing palpable is the noia, the boredom. Therefore it is crucial that we do not know too much. “La scienza distrugge i principali piaceri dell’animo nostro perché determina le cose, e ce ne mostra i confini […]. L’incertezza se una cosa sia on non sia del tutto è pur fonte di una grandezza, che vien distrutta dalla certezza che la cosa realmente è.”267 We need illusioni, illusions that give us something to live for.268 Such illusions can be aesthetic or moral ideas and values: to the young Leopardi patriotism for example was an important illusion.

Although Leopardi does not use the term pessimism in his poetry or prose works, he does define the word. In fact, the Italian term pessimismo was coined by Leopardi. In a Zibaldone entry dated 22 April 1826, Leopardi writes:

Tutto è male. Cioè tutto quello che è, è male; che ciascuna cosa esiste è un male; ciascuna cosa esiste per fin di male; l’esistenza è un male e ordinata al male; il fine dell’universo è il male; l’ordine e lo stato, le leggi, l’andamento naturale dell’universo non sono altro che male, nè diretti ad altro che al male. Non v’hè altro bene che il non essere; non v’hà altro di buono che quel che non è; le cose che non son cose: tutte le cose sono cative. Il tutto esistente; il complesso dei tanti mondi che esistono; l’universo; non è che un neo, un bruscolo in metafisica. L’esistenza, per sua natura ed essenza propria e generale, è un’imperfezione, un’irregolarità, una mostruosità.269

Leopardi continues for another half page, listing reasons why everything is evil. This passage has been used as an argument for characterising him as a pessimist.270 But Leopardi goes on to comment:

267 Leopardi: Zibaldone, vol. I, pp. 1464 f. (7 August 1821): “Science destroys the principal pleasures of our soul, because it determines the things, and shows us their limits […]. The uncertainty whether a thing is or is not complete is also a source of greatness, which is destroyed by the certainty what the thing really is.”

268 Volker Steinkamp stresses the importance of the illusions in the Zibaldone: “Der Mensch bedarf für sein Glück nicht der Wahrheit, als vielmehr eines gewissen Maßes an Unwissenheit, damit er sich nicht des imaginären Charakters der piaceri bewußt wird.” Steinkamp, p. 61.

269 Leopardi Zibaldone, vol. II, p. 4174: “Everything is evil. This means that everything that is, is evil; that anything exists is an evil; everything that exists, exists for an evil reason; existence is an evil and aimed at evil; the purpose of the universe is evil; the order and the state, the laws and the natural process of the universe are nothing but evil, nor aimed at anything else than evil. There is no other good than non-being; there is nothing good but that that does not exist: all things are bad. Everything that exists; the complex of the many worlds that exist; universe; it is all but a stain, a metaphysical bread-crum. Existence, in its nature and very general essence, is an imperfection, an irregularity, a monstrosity.” The translation of the terms male and cattivo has caused me some difficulty. Cattivo, here ‘bad’, is often translated as ‘evil’, but Leopardi obviously wants to stress that pessimism regards existence as morally reprehensible; hence my choice to translate male with ‘evil’ although it normally is more of a generic term than cattivo.

270 Gerhardt: “Pessimismus”, column 387.
This passage shows at least that the description of Leopardi as a pessimist is deeply problematic. Leopardi regards pessimism as more tenable than optimism, but the pessimist’s claims to knowledge are nonetheless unreasonable. Leopardi himself would clearly not accept to be labelled a pessimist. But then, the passage also shows that Leopardi defines pessimism in another way than Schopenhauer or the generation of pessimists following him. Leopardi’s pessimism too regards existence as evil (“l’esistenza è un male e ordinata al male”; “[n]on v’è altro bene che il non essere”), but this is not, as I have argued is the case for the German pessimists, the central tenet of his pessimism, but only an aspect of a larger complex. In Leopardi’s eyes, pessimism is more closely connected to optimism than in Schopenhauer’s or Hartmann’s eyes. Leopardi is not a part of the pessimistic tradition; there most certainly are similarities, but when Leopardi is ranged among the pessimists, he is replanted in a garden where he does not belong.

Leopardi’s notion of pessimism is not that of Schopenhauer, as I have argued that he should be interpreted. Neither is it that of Dühring, Hartmann, and their contemporaries.272 Leopardi’s use of the term is directed against Leibniz. It is not a positive idea, but rather a form of anti-optimism or anti-theodicy. Consequently, the other two questions we set out to answer in this section, how Leopardi argues for the truth of pessimism, and what the function of pessimism in his system is, are quickly solved. He doesn’t argue for its truth, and it serves no function in his system (granted he has a system). If however, we pay attention to the definition less zealously and instead focus on the use of pessimistic themes in his writings, the result is somewhat more ambiguous. Several of Leopardi’s poems and dialogues can be interpreted as pessimistic. They express ideas that come close to those of the pessimistic philosophers who were fond of regarding him as an ally. But there are several important differences between his

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271 Leopardi: Zibaldone, vol. II, p. 4174: “This system, although it goes against our ideas, which believe that the purpose can only be good, would perhaps be more tenable than that of Leibniz, of Pope, etc. that everything is good. But I would not dare to extend it to say that the existent universe is the worst of all possible universes, thus substituting optimism with pessimism. Who can know the limits of possibility?” As we have seen, the Italian dictionary Lo Zingarelli lists 1826 as the year of the first use of the word: Lo Zingarelli, entry “pessimismo”, p. 1316.

ideas and those of the German pessimists. Leopardi agrees with them that knowledge stands in opposition to life, but he goes against them in preferring life over knowledge by affirming the *illusioni*. His writings contain an ethic that can easily be interpreted as an affirmation of life in spite of its meaninglessness. And most importantly: the ideas expressed in his poems, dialogues and aphorisms that bear a resemblance to the pessimism of for example Schopenhauer are not metaphysically motivated. Cesare Luporini has suggested that nihilism is a better characterisation of Leopardi’s position than pessimism. This seems to me fundamentally correct: Leopardi’s problem is the nothingness rather than the worthlessness of life.

Still, it is no wonder that he was, and indeed still is, widely regarded as a pessimist. The associations that the word pessimism carried in late nineteenth century Germany made the portrayal of Leopardi as a pessimist attractive to pessimists and anti-pessimists alike. In the eyes of the pessimists, his lamenting of the vanity of life, his use of pessimistic themes such as the descriptions of boredom as an existential predicament and the faculties of knowledge and reason as a threat to the blissful ignorance that is the closest thing we have to happiness, made him the perfect precursor. To the anti-pessimists, the rumours of madness and sexual perversions that surrounded Leopardi made a characterisation of him as a pessimist fit perfectly with their strategy of declaring pessimism a pathological phenomenon.

2.5 Conclusions to Part I: Some Conceptual Remarks

The establishment of pessimism as a philosophical concept can be said to have taken place in three phases. Before the first, Schopenhauerian phase, the most important event was the coining of the term. It was not used in a philosophical context, and its meaning was at best vague. The first phase of the philosophical usage of the concept is initiated by Schopenhauer. With him, pessimism becomes a philosophical concept. It is given a content, namely the notion that existence cannot be justified. But as the discussions among his contemporaries

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show, it was not at all clear how this notion should be understood. In the second phase, Eduard von Hartmann and Eugen Dühring are the protagonists. Through their works pessimism comes to be defined in terms of the value of life. Pessimism becomes the notion that the value of life is less than zero. In the third phase, the Hartmann-Dühring usage of pessimism becomes more or less universally accepted. The various pessimists that follow in the generation after Hartmann diverge from him in a number of ways, challenging his criteria for establishing the truth of pessimism, or rejecting the path to redemption that he sketches out; but they all accept his interpretation of pessimism as the notion of life’s worthlessness. Likewise, the various adversaries of pessimism go to some length to characterise pessimism as an absurd doctrine and a pathological phenomenon; but nevertheless they all accept the conceptual content that Dühring and Hartmann attributed to pessimism.

We have distinguished between four usages of pessimism in the late nineteenth century. It was used, firstly, to refer to a tendency to assume the worst possible outcome of any given situation. This usage is a continuation of the first, non-philosophical, usage of the term and it corresponds to how the term is generally used today. Secondly, it was used in a historico-philosophical sense, referring to the decline of mankind or (Western) civilisation. Thirdly, it was used to describe the notion that ours is the worst possible world. This form of pessimism is so vague that it is in need of further interpretation; it is generally subsumed under the fourth category, and I shall therefore not treat it separately but will consider it as a special case of the fourth form of pessimism. Fourthly, and I have argued that this was the primary philosophical usage of the term, it was used to refer to the notion that existence cannot be justified: a notion that with the success of Eduard von Hartmann was taken to mean that non-existence is preferable to existence.

In this section I will attempt to demonstrate the difference between these three – once category three above has been subsumed under category four – usages by juxtaposing them with the forms of optimism that they correspond to. For pessimism and optimism form a very obvious dichotomy. With Collingwood, we can say that pessimism and optimism can be regarded as two opposite answers to a common question. However, the three forms of pessimism between which we have distinguished are answers to three different questions.

The first form of pessimism, the tendency to assume the worst possible outcome, or as it was originally defined, to see things in black, is clearly a psychological notion. The question that this is an answer to refers to the psychological make-up of an individual. The question is something like: What is X’s general outlook on life? The answer is that X, the pessimist, has a tendency to exaggerate the negative sides of anything that he experiences, whereas Y, the optimist exaggerates her experiences in the opposite direction. Both tendencies are often enough interpreted as abnormalities: pessimism as a form of (pathological) melancholy, optimism as a form of naïveté.
The historico-philosophical form of pessimism and its corresponding form of optimism can also be seen as two opposite answers to a single question. Here, the question in its most abstract form is: Are things improving? In the context of the debate concerning pessimism, it is generally put to a metaphysical use: Is mankind’s situation improving? It can be applied to morals: Is mankind improving? It can also be applied to politics: Is society improving? Pessimism and optimism in this respect therefore correspond to a belief in the decline and in progress, respectively.

The third and fourth forms of pessimism concern the evaluation of the world; we can call it metaphysical pessimism. In its most abstract phrasing the question is: Can existence be justified? This question came to be interpreted by Dühring and by Hartmann as a question whether or not life has a positive value. This means as much as: Is existence preferable to non-existence? When applied to an individual’s life, it means as much as: Is life worth living? The pessimist answers these questions with a no, the optimist with a yes. The criteria for determining the answer to this question is whether the amount of happiness is greater than the amount of suffering.²⁷⁵

When reduced to their fundamental question in this way, it is easy to see that the three forms of pessimism are indeed very different from one another. And this might help explain the conceptual confusion around pessimism. In the introduction we saw that Lichtenberg noted a chasm between the pessimist and the optimist that prevented any mutual understanding; and we saw that this chasm has not disappeared since then.

The chasm depends to an important degree upon the fact that the pessimists and their adversaries use the same term without acknowledging that they refer to different forms of pessimism. The pessimistic philosophers use the term in the third sense: as a philosophical concept that serves an important function in their various systems. Their adversaries show awareness that this is how they use the term – all the anti-pessimists that we have discussed allude to the notion

²⁷⁵ Though this might seem as a utilitarian interpretation of pessimism, the differences between the two are in fact much greater than the similarities. They share the criteria for determining the answer to their basic questions, but the questions they ask are totally different. Apparently, Schopenhauer owned no books by any of the great utilitarian philosophers. The catalogue of his library in HN v contains nothing by any of the Mills and nothing by Bentham. For Schopenhauer, the question whether suffering or happiness is the greater is answered *a priori*: as suffering is real (belonging to the noumenal sphere) and happiness is illusory (belonging to the phenomenal sphere), happiness cannot exceed suffering. For Hartmann, pessimism is in principle an empirical question, although suffering is always greater. For an interesting discussion of pessimism in a consequentialist guise, see George W. Harris: “Pessimism”, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 5 (2002). Harris comes to the conclusion that although pessimism is correct as far as the evaluation of the amount of suffering and happiness is concern, a life can contain goods that make us up with a fairly large amount of suffering: “The ultimate grounds for pessimism or optimism are first and foremost in our personal values, the values that give us reasons for living from own points of view. Which attitude we take is a function both of luck and of character. We need the modicum of good luck to be given an adequate chance at a good life, and having the chance we need the courage to seize the day. If we have both, then life can be better than death.” (p. 285)
that non-existence is preferable to existence – but they claim that this philosophical usage is in fact only a symptom of a pessimism of the first type. When it comes to a number of modern critics of pessimism there is a confusion of the second and third types of pessimism. Arthur Herman for example is obviously equating pessimism and decline in his *The Idea of Decline in Western History*, but to a number of the thinkers that he addresses – Nietzsche, for example – decline is not at all what pessimism primarily meant. A very different example of the same form conceptual confusion is Joshua Foa Dienstag, who attempts to recreate a pessimistic tradition out of which he hopes to create an alternative to the idea of progress, an idea that he considers to be harmful. But the fact is that the historico-philosophical and the metaphysical forms of pessimism are logically independent. We have just seen that a number of the most prominent nineteenth-century pessimists, Hartmann, Taubert and Mainländer, actually combined metaphysical pessimism with a historico-philosophical optimism.

This confusion is further deepened by the fact that optimism, a concept whose meaning is taken for granted to an even higher degree than pessimism, is only rarely used to refer to the metaphysical form of optimism. When the term is used in a philosophical context, it seems that it is more often than not used to refer to the belief in progress, to the historico-philosophical form of optimism. Pessimism, this entire chapter has striven to demonstrate, is used in its metaphysical sense when it is used in philosophy. Pessimism is therefore not the opposite of optimism when both terms are used in their most common philosophical sense.
PART II:
THE EARLY NIETZSCHE AND PESSIMISM
Although this is a study of Nietzsche’s relation to a number of the leading representatives and critics of a tradition that was of central importance to him, this is not a study of influence. At least, it is only secondarily a study of influence. Schopenhauer’s and especially Hartmann’s importance to Nietzsche does not lie in his copying their ideas, but in developing his own ideas in dialogue with theirs. This dialogue is not very visible in the published works. True, Die Geburt der Tragödie is saturated with Schopenhauerian terminology and with allusions to pessimism, but the choice to include this terminology is rather Nietzsche’s attempt to stage himself as a Schopenhauerian than a Schopenhauerian element in his ideas. Nietzsche uses Schopenhauer much like he uses Hamlet or Sophocles, much like Schopenhauer used Hamlet and Sophocles: to create a pessimistic tradition. But Nietzsche’s actual struggle to come to terms with pessimism is not seen in Die Geburt der Tragödie. In order to see that struggle, we have to examine the posthumous fragments (I will henceforth use the German term Nachlass) and letters from the period.

Nietzsche did read the major works of the major pessimists. He read all of Schopenhauer’s works as well as a volume of posthumous fragments from 1865 and onwards; he read a number of works by Bahnsen from the late 1860’s to the early 1880’s; he read Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewussten shortly after its publication and read a number of other works by him; he read Mainländer’s Die Philosophie der Erlösung in 1876, the year of its publication; and he read a number of works critical of pessimism and of the pessimists. But he sold or gave away many of the most important works. A copy of Schopenhauer’s collected works is preserved in the Nietzsche archives in Weimar, but this is a copy that Nietzsche bought in 1875. Even though some of the nine volumes contain annotations, they cannot help us see what aspects of Schopenhauer’s works that attracted Nietzsche’s attention when he read him the first time. The situation is similar with regard to Hartmann: Nietzsche bought and read and as the present chapter will demonstrate responded to Hartmann’s version of pessimism. But Nietzsche sold his copy of the book in 1875. Preserved in the archives are some of Hartmann’s later and lesser books. Therefore I have chosen not to examine

\[276\] In a forthcoming book by Thomas Brobjer: Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context. An Intellectual Biography scheduled for publication in 2008, Nietzsche’s reading of philosophy, including the pessimistic philosophers, is discussed. For attempts to date Nietzsche’s reading and for comments on marginal notes, etc., I refer the reader to this book, which Brobjer has kindly made available to me in manuscript.
the underlinings and marginal comments that Nietzsche left in his books. A study of the traces in the works that are extant is unlikely to yield interesting results since we do not have Nietzsche’s copies of any of the works most important for understanding his relation to pessimism.\(^\text{277}\)

This chapter is divided into four sections, two dealing with Nietzsche’s Nachläß, one dealing with some minor works, and one dealing with his first book, Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik (1872). The Nachläß sections differ from the sections on the published books in several respects. Firstly, the Nachläß sections are more empirical. These sections aim at describing how Nietzsche’s discussion of pessimism takes form. In order to do this, a fairly extensive use of quotations is necessary. Secondly, the status of the Nachläß is different from that of the published books. The Nachläß material consists of notebooks. Parts of it are reflections that will later be used in his books, or in university lectures or in letters. Parts of it are dead-ends, ideas that are abandoned as soon as they are written down. Parts of it are quotations from books that Nietzsche was reading at the time (and although the editors of the critical edition and legions of scholars have identified a large number of these quotations, many more remain unidentified or indeed undiscovered). The Nachläß as a totality nevertheless testify to the formation of Nietzsche’s ideas.

In his notebooks, Nietzsche seems much more occupied with pessimism as a problem than he is in his published writings.\(^\text{278}\) This is often the case with Nietzsche. His thoughts take form in the notebooks, but then only the thoughts themselves, not the process that led up to them are transferred to the books. This is in accordance with Nietzsche’s ideas on style, as a brief aphorism in Menschliches, Allzumenschliches makes clear: “Die meisten Denker schreiben schlecht, weil sie uns nicht nur ihre Gedanken, sondern auch das Denken der Gedanken mittheilen.”\(^\text{279}\) Sometimes, as in the case of pessimism, this stylistic


\(^{278}\) In GT, the word ‘Pessimismus’ is used four times: three times in section 15 and once in section 20; the word is used only once in the UB: in section 5 of the SE. He also uses ‘pessimistisch’ three times in Die Geburt der Tragödie and twice in the Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen (GT 9 (twice), GT 10, DS 6 and SE 4) and ‘Pessimist’ twice in the Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen (DS 6 and DS 8).

\(^{279}\) MA I, 188, KSA 2, p. 163: “Most thinkers write badly because they communicate to us not only their thoughts but also the thinking of their thoughts.” This aphorism is in itself an example of that principle, as a notebook entry containing a preliminary version testifies to: NF 19 [22] October–December 1876, KSA 8, p. 336: “Die meisten Schriftsteller schreiben schlecht weil sie
principle prevents the reader from seeing the problem that he is actually trying to solve. One sees the solution, but not the problem; and not understanding the problem, one fails to understand the solution.

This means that our discussion of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, which of course is the central part of this chapter, will have to be preceded by a rather lengthy investigation into how Nietzsche’s thoughts on pessimism take form in the *Nachlaß* of the years leading up to that book. *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is the answer if we use Collingwood’s terminology; in order to understand it we have to find out what question it is an answer to.

3.1 Pessimism in Nietzsche’s *Nachlaß* 1864–1869

The term ‘Pessimismus’ is not frequent in the *Nachlaß* from Nietzsche’s student years. This should not surprise us as Nietzsche primarily occupies himself with philological topics during these years. ‘Pessimismus’ and related terms occur a few times, but interestingly enough not (or only once) in a Schopenhauerian context. More often than not, the term appears in fragments that are lists of essays and presentations that Nietzsche is planning on ancient themes. There are at least six such lists where an entry reads “pessimism in Antiquity” (“Pessimismus im Alterthum”). Furthermore, a list with the heading “general reading” (*Gesamtlektüre*) contains the entry “Zum Pessimismus u. Optimismus.” Two other fragments imply that Nietzsche associated pessimism with art: “Optimismus und Pessimismus bei den Griechen. Wichtig für Geschichte der Philosophen un<d> des Dramas.” And secondly: “Eine Sammlung aller

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280 NF 52 [66], Frühjahr 1867–Winter 1867/68, KGW I: 4, p. 276 (list headed “Themata”); 52 [68], early 1867–Winter 1867/68, KGW I: 4, p. 277 (list headed “Vorträge”); NF 57 [60], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 429 (Subsection headed “Vorträge über folg. Themata” on a list headed “Augenblickliche Aussichten und Vorsätze”); NF 57 [62], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 430 (list headed “Essays”); NF 64 [2], early 1868–autumn 1868, KGW I: 5, p. 19, fragment heading: “Collegien”; and NF 69 [11], early 1868, KGW I: 5, p. 50, fragment headed “Beiträge zu der Kritik der griechischen Lyriker. II.” Fredrik Agell writes that Nietzsche’s philological writings were meant to lead up to a magnum opus presenting a “spekulativ panoramabild av en enhetlig, grekisk livsvärld” (“speculative panorama of a homogenous Greek life-world”). Pessimism in Antiquity, Agell holds, was to have served as the fundament of this opus. Fredrik Agell: *Frågan efter livets mening. Om kunskap och konst i Nietzsches tänkande* (diss. Stockholm; Stockholm/Stehag, 2002), p. 145.

281 NF 75 [44], February 1868–October 1869, KGW I: 5, p. 276. Fragment heading: “Zur Gesamtlektüre”, number five on a list of nine entries, the other dealing with philological issues.

282 NF 64 [1], early 1868–autumn 1868, KGW I: 5, p. 18: “Optimism and pessimism among the Greeks. Important for the history of the philosophers and of drama.” Entry number three of ten on a list with the heading “Aufgaben” (“tasks”).

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Apart from these lists one of very few references to pessimism is the description of the influence of the father of Nietzsche’s friend Mushacke in a fragment where Nietzsche looks back on his first two years as a student in Leipzig:

> Auch unsere Unterhaltungen nährten meine verbitterte Laune; da waren es die Sarkasmen des vortrefflichen Mushacke, seine Einblicke in die höhere Schulverwaltung, sein Zorn über das jüdische Berlin, seine Erinnerungen aus der Zeit der Junghegelianer, kurz die ganze pessimistische Atmosphäre eines Mannes, der viel hinter die Kulissen geschaut hat, die meiner Stimmung neue Zufuhr gaben. Ich lernte damals mit Behagen schwarz sehen, nachdem es mir selber, wider meine Schuld wie mir schien, schwarz gegangen war.284

Interestingly, the pessimistic atmosphere of the elder Mushacke comes from his having seen behind the scenery. Although the description is admittedly brief and metaphoric, it is in consonance with the Schopenhauerian pessimism. But then he obviously associates pessimism with *Schwarzseherei*: the pessimism of Mushacke made Nietzsche appreciate seeing in black.

If pessimism is more or less absent from the early *Nachlaß*, the same goes for its antonym: optimism too is all but absent from the notebooks, and the usage is vague when Nietzsche does use it. It is especially interesting to note, though, that Nietzsche associates optimism with teleology from a very early date. For example in the spring of 1868: “Optimismus u. Teleologie gehen Hand in Hand: beiden liegt daran das Unzweckmäßige zu bestreiten als etwas wirklich Unzweckmäßiges.”285 This is particularly important to our theme as an important part of Nietzsche’s later criticism of Eduard von Hartmann’s philosophy consists in the accusation that its teleological character turns it into an optimistic doctrine. And a little later he accuses optimism of drawing illegitimate conclusions:

> Was Hamann von Kants Optimismus (Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus) sagt, gilt überhaupt von dem Optimismus “seine Einfälle sind blinde Jungen, die eine eifertige Hündin geworfen – – er beruft sich aufs Ganze, nur ich kann nicht anders. Ich bin schwarzseherisch.”

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283 NF 67 [1], early 1868–early 1869, KGW I: 5, p. 29: “A collection of all judgments on art in Antiquity. Ancient pessimism.”
284 NF 60 [1], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 509: “Our conversations too nourished my embittered temper; especially the sarcasms of the eminent Mushacke, his insights into the higher school administration, his rage over Jewish Berlin, his memories of the time of the Young Hegelians, in short the entire pessimistic atmosphere of a man who has looked behind the scenes a lot fed my mood. It was then I learned to enjoy seeing things in black, after my life, without my blame it seemed to me, had turned black.”
285 NF 62 [4], April/May 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 549: “Optimism and teleology go hand in hand: both attempt to deny that the purposeless really is purposeless.” Cf. NF 62 [17], April/May 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 554: “Schätzung der Teleologie in ihrer Würdigung für die menschliche Ideenwelt. Die Teleologie ist wie der Optimismus ein aesthetisches Produkt.”
The usage of the terms pessimism and optimism is too scarce and too imprecise to allow us to draw any definite conclusions as to how Nietzsche thought of these concepts. A reasonable conclusion seems to be that pessimism is a theme that Nietzsche has some interest in, but that he still does not have a very clear opinion what the term means. The Nachlaß contains a number of fragments where Nietzsche discusses the philosophy of Schopenhauer that are of direct relevance to our theme. The first time that Schopenhauer is mentioned in Nietzsche’s Nachlaß is in an entry from the autumn or winter of 1865. The fragment simply consists of a list of three of Schopenhauer’s books:

Schopenhauer, über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde 3. Aufl. 1864. Leipzig Brockhaus
Schopenhauer, die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik. 2. Aufl. 1860. Leipzig Brockhaus

Having read Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, Nietzsche sets himself the task of reading Schopenhauer’s other books. This is not the only time that he does so: a list from 1868 with the heading “Zu lesen sind” repeats the intention to read Über den Willen in der Natur. But the quotations from and references to Schopenhauer’s works in the Nachlaß are mainly to Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.

In the Nachlaß from the period, Schopenhauer is mentioned a number of times. Nietzsche apparently plans to write an essay on him: for example, a list headed Essays from 1867/68 contains the entry “Schopenhauer als Schrift-

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286 NF 62 [56], April/May 1868, KGW 1: 4, p. 577: “What Hamann says of Kant’s optimism (Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus) is valid for optimism as such, ‘its ideas are blind whelps thrown away by a hasty she-dog – – it draws on the entirety to judge the world. But for that a knowledge is necessary that is not a patchwork. To draw conclusions of the fragments from the entirety is just like judge something known from the unknown’. The fragment gives a page reference: ‘Hamanns Schriften’ Th. I. S. 491”.

287 NF 38 [1], October 1865–end of 1865, KGW 1: 4, p. 79. In a letter to his mother and sister, probably dated 9 December 1865, Nietzsche writes that he wishes Parerga und Paralipomena and Rudolf Heim’s (sic: the name is Haym) Schopenhauer und seine Philosophie for Christmas: KSB 2, p. 101.

288 NF 62 [48], April/May 1868, KGW 1: 4, p. 572. Über den Willen in der Natur is the first entry on a fairly lengthy list, including authors such as Schelling, Herder, Helmholtz, Virchow, etc.

289 See, for example, NF 57 [1], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW 1: 4, p. 373, where the first volume of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung is quoted. See also NF 62 [29], April/May 1868, KGW 1: 4, p. 561, and NF 62 [30], April/May 1868, KGW 1: 4, p. 561, both of which quote the second volume. But he also quotes from Parerga und Paralipomena, for example in NF 57 [55], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW 1: 4, p. 426.
steller”.

And in a number of fragments in which Nietzsche looks back on his development in the past couple of years, Schopenhauer’s importance to him is stressed. A list headed *Leipziger Aufenthalt* begins with the entry “Einwirkung Schopenhauers”. And the next fragment, a similar list of important events from his Leipzig days, begins with the entry “Wohnung bei Rohn. Weiter Schopenhauers Bekanntschaft.” The fragment ends with the phrase “Über Schopenhauer als Schriftsteller.”

Although these fragments are very brief, Nietzsche underlines the importance of Schopenhauer to him by the prominent position Schopenhauer is given in them. But a number of fragments where Nietzsche discusses Schopenhauer’s philosophy are more important. It is especially important to note that Nietzsche is aware of contradictions and flaws in Schopenhauer’s philosophy from a very early point. In the autumn or winter 1867, for example, Schopenhauer’s attempt to explain the empirical world as manifestations of a single principle is declared to be a failure:

Zu Schopenhauer.

Ein Versuch, die Welt zu erklären unter einem angenommenen Faktor.
Das Ding an sich bekommt eine seiner möglichen Gestalten.
Der Versuch ist mißlungen.
Schopenhauer hielt es für keinen Versuch.
Sein Ding an sich war von ihm erschlossen.
Daß er selbst das Mißlinge nicht sah, ist daraus zu erklären daß er das Dunkle Widersprechende in der Region nicht fühlen wollte wo die Individuation aufhört.
Er mißtraute seinem Urtheil.
Stellen.

In a series of fragments from this period, Nietzsche develops his critique of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. The fragment just quoted implies that Nietzsche regards the attempt to explain the world in terms of a single principle as the core of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. The fragment following that one confirms this. Alluding to the motto of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, the Goethean phrase “ob nicht Natur zuletzt sich doch ergründe”, Nietzsche writes that Schopenhauer purported to have solved the riddle of the world (*Räthsel der Welt*). In this context, Nietzsche sums up this riddle in a formula that he de-

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290 NF 57 [62], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 430: “Schopenhauer as a writer” The other entries are: Offenbach, Wagner as a poet, pessimism in Antiquity, and Goethe’s ethics.
291 NF 58 [50], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 493: “Schopenhauer’s influence”. According to the editors these words were crossed over by Nietzsche.
292 NF 58 [51], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 494 and p. 495: “Living with the Rohn’s. Furthermore acquaintance with Schopenhauer.” “On Schopenhauer as writer.”
293 NF 57 [51], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 418: “On Schopenhauer. An attempt to explain the world from a stipulated factor. The thing in itself takes on one of its possible forms. The attempt is failed. He deduced his thing in itself. That he himself did not see the failure can be explained by the fact that he did not want to feel the obscure contradiction in the region where individuation ends. He did not trust his judgment. Places.”
Nietzsche’s criticism of Schopenhauer focuses especially on two things. Firstly, it focuses on the designation of the thing in itself as will. In another fragment following immediately upon the ones just quoted, Nietzsche raises four possible objections against Schopenhauer’s use of the term will: a) Schopenhauer uses the term will as a hidden category (versteckte Kategorie); b) Schopenhauer replaces the Kantian x with will by means of poetic intuition, his logical proofs are not good enough; c) the characteristics that Schopenhauer ascribe to the will are far too precise for an entity that is unthinkable; d) although it is possible that there is a thing in itself that is the Schopenhauerian will, this possibility is so far-fetched that we can almost disregard it.

Secondly, Nietzsche’s criticism focuses on the status of the intellect in relation to the will. On Nietzsche’s account there is something very problematic about the status of the intellect in Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Schopenhauer’s argument presupposes that the intellect belongs to the noumenal sphere, although he expressly holds that it belongs to the phenomenal sphere. Nietzsche neatly sums up his criticism in a comparison of Schopenhauer’s choice of designating the thing in itself as will to an attempt to solve an equation that comes to the conclusion that x must be equal to x:

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\text{Das Schopenh\aeuersche Ding an sich würde also zugleich principium individuationis sein u. Grund der Necessitation sein: mit andern Worten: die vorhandene Welt. Sch\openhauer wollte das x einer Gleichung finden: und es ergibt sich aus seiner Rechnung, daß es \(= x\) ist dh. daß er es nicht gefunden hat.}
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These critical themes will become more explicit and more refined in later years. As the reader will note in later chapters, Nietzsche later maintains that the will cannot be the thing in itself, will is in itself a manifestation of a more fundamental force, the term will is anthropocentric. He will also maintain that it is impossible to break with the will by means of the intellect, for the intellect is a tool of the will. But already here, rudiments of these arguments are present in Nietzsche’s notebooks.
A somewhat later fragment contains a discussion of Schopenhauer’s ethics. This discussion is more appreciative than the fragments we have just quoted, but Nietzsche sees an important problem with Schopenhauer’s ethics, too. Schopenhauer’s ethics contains no imperatives and it has, Nietzsche notes, been attacked for this. Unjustly so, Nietzsche holds: “Das Ding was die Philosophen Charakter nennen, ist eine unheilbare Krankheit. Eine imperative Ethik ist eine solche, welche mit den Krankheitssymptomen zu thun hat und indem sie gegen diese kämpft, den Glauben hat den einheitlichen Grundstock, das Urübél zu beseitigen.” And in this respect Schopenhauer is superior to his critics. Philosophically, it does not matter whether a person’s character manifests itself in action or not: it is the character itself which deserves praise or blame. Schopenhauer’s critics focus on the manifestations (Äußerungen) of the character; they focus on the surface rather than the essence of the person. This means that a Volksethik as Nietzsche terms this position is similar to the police. By means of punishments and rewards it tries to control the behaviour. Schopenhauer’s ethics, on the other hand, concerns itself with the ethical aristocracy.

But Nietzsche does see a fundamental problem with Schopenhauer’s ethics. It shares this problem with Christianity:

Zugegeben zB. daß die Lehre Schopenhauers (doch auch des Christenthums) von der erlösenden Kraft der Leiden wahr ist, so wäre es eine Sorge für das “allgemeine Wohl” die Leiden nicht zu mindern, ja vielleicht sie zu mehr, nicht nur für sich, sondern für andere. An dieser Grenze wird die praktische Ethik häßlich, ja consequente Menschenquälerei. Ähnlich ist die Wirkung des Christenthums entnervend, wenn es gebietet, vor jeder Art von Obrigkeit Respekt zu [sic] haben etc. insgleichen jedes Leiden oh<e> Versuch der Abwehr über sich er- gehn zu lassen.

If suffering is a good thing, then suffering should be embraced. This comes remarkably close to the position of Nietzsche in his later works. The differ-

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298 NF 75 [45], February 1868–October 1869, KGW I: 5, p. 276: “That thing that the philosophers call character is an incurable disease. An imperative ethics is one that deals with the symptoms of the disease and by fighting these believes that it fights back the actual source, the primordial evil.”

299 NF 75 [45], February 1868–October 1869, KGW I: 5, p. 277: “Granted e.g. that Schopenhauer’s (and Christianity’s) doctrines about the redeeming power of suffering are true, then care for the ‘common good’ would not mean reducing the suffering, but perhaps even increasing it, not just for oneself, but for others. At this limit practical ethics becomes ugly, indeed consequent torture. Similarly Christianity has a weakening effect when it dictates respect for all kinds of authority etc. and to accept any suffering without attempting to defend oneself.”

300 For example FW 325, KSA 3, p. 553: “Wer wird etwas Grosses erreichen, wenn er nicht die Kraft und den Willen in sich fühlt, grosse Schmerzen zuzufügen?”
ence of course is that Nietzsche did not regard suffering as a means to something else, but something worth embracing in its own right, as an expression of the will to power. But here, the practical consequences of an ethics that regards suffering as something good are deemed ugly and cruel.

* * *

Nietzsche’s awareness of the contradictions in Schopenhauer’s system contrasts sharply with the descriptions of Schopenhauer’s effect on him. A long fragment entitled “Rückblick auf meine zwei Leipziger Jahre 17 Oktober 1865–10 August 1867” testifies to how the magic radiated by Schopenhauer’s very name bound Nietzsche and his friends together, and how they searched for new acquaintances worthy of initiation.


The fact that Nietzsche sees contradictions in Schopenhauer’s system is obviously not a problem. Nietzsche and his friends are Schopenhauerians in spite of these contradictions. A letter to his friend Paul Deussen from the same period makes clear that Nietzsche regards Schopenhauer’s philosophy as a Weltanschauung that cannot be destroyed by reason.302 This is the answer to a letter from Deussen that is no longer extant. But from Nietzsche’s letter it is clear that Deussen had asked him to write an apology for Schopenhauer, something that Nietzsche answers that he cannot do. He claims that he has found a foot-

301 NF 60 [1], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 517: “At night, especially Saturdays, we would be found in Simmer’s newly founded wine bar. My friend Mushacke would come, as would von Gersdorff, with whom I had plenty to discuss after he in Göttingen had experienced and put up with things similar to what I had in Bonn. These two friends were the first to whom I connected the full power of a Schopenhauerian battery, since I had been able to observe that they would be sensitive to such views. From then on, the three of us felt vividly united in the magic of that one name. We looked vividly for other natures too, that we would want to draw into the same net. Of these, one is worth notice, one named Romundt from Stade in Hannover.” In a letter to his mother from 31 January 1866, Nietzsche writes that he, Mushacke, and Gersdorff would meet once every two weeks and that they are schopenhauering together (“wo geschopenhauert wird”). KSB 2, p. 109.

ing (“…meine Füße einen Grund gefunden haben”) and adds that this is a highly individual apology.

In the “Rückblick” just quoted, Nietzsche also describes how he came to read Schopenhauer for the first time. In a second-hand book shop, Nietzsche found *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*:


As an account of the actual discovery and purchase of the book, this is probably not reliable. Not only does it seem too stylised, implying that his discovery of Schopenhauer was as important as St. Augustine’s discovery of the Bible; some two years had furthermore passed since the discovery of the book in the autumn of 1865. But even if the fragment should not be taken at face value, it testifies to Nietzsche’s wish to pose as a Schopenhauerian. The mythological demon whispering to him to buy the book, and the exaggerated descriptions of his eagerness to read the book and of the effect it had on him (a little later in the same fragment, Nietzsche claims that the book made him try to limit the amount of sleep to four hours per night, until practical reality in the form of the university student’s need for continuous study made him abandon that habit) serve to stress the exceptional nature of the experience of reading Schopenhauer. This is all the more interesting in the light of the fact that Nietzsche obviously saw important flaws in Schopenhauer’s system. In spite of these flaws, he depicts himself as a follower of Schopenhauer in almost religious terms.

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303 NF 60 [1], autumn 1867–early 1868, KGW 1: 4, p. 513: “I do not know what demon it was that whispered to me: ‘Take this book home with you’. That happened in any case, against my habit not to spend money too freely on books. At home I threw myself down in a corner of the sofa with my purchased treasure and began to let that gloomy genius exert its influence on me. Here, every line screamed of privation, renunciation, resignation, here I saw a mirror in which I beheld the world, life, and my own mood in a terrifying magnificence. Here the full, disinterested solar eye of the arts looked at me, here I saw illness and health, banishment and refuge, hell and heaven.”

There is one aspect of Schopenhauer’s writings that Nietzsche is unfailingly positive of: his style. A long fragment on style in philosophy confirms that this admiration is present in Nietzsche’s student days too. Unlike most philosophers, Nietzsche writes, Schopenhauer has a style. That style is no mere aesthetic trifle is evidenced by the conclusion of this fragment, which is also the first instance where Nietzsche explicitly connects Schopenhauer and pessimism:

Es ist dies das Zeitalter Schopenhauers; ein gesunder Pessimismus, der zum Hintergrund das Ideal hat, ein manneskräftiger Ernst, eine Abneigung gegen das Hohle, Substanzlose und Zuneigung zum Gesunden u. Einfachen.305

It is in virtue of having a style that Schopenhauer has this attraction to things simple and healthy. It seems that this is also the source of his “healthy pessimism”. It is important to note that not even here, where Schopenhauer is credited as an adherent to pessimism, does Nietzsche seem to regard pessimism as a philosophical problem. Schopenhauer’s pessimism consists in his masculine earnestness, and in his attraction to that which is healthy and simple. Pessimism is not a philosophical concept. But neither is it a psychological disposition. Rather it seems to be something like a familiarity with the ways of the world.

The fragment on style continues with an important reflection on Schopenhauer’s role that seems to anticipate one of the central theses of Die Geburt der Tragödie.

Schopenh<auer> ist der Philosoph einer wieder<er>weckten Classicität, eines germanischen Hellenenthums.

Sch<openhauer> ist der Philosoph eines regenerirten Deutschlands, in so fern stand er auch weit über seiner Zeit, die ihm jetzt anfängt näher zu kommen<en>. Er ist nüchterner als seine Zeitperiode, zugleich gesünder, doch auch schöner u. idealer als selbe, vor allem aber wahrer. Erist [sic] der kräftigste Brustsänger aus den Philosophen.306

Schopenhauer is the philosopher of a rejuvenated Germany as well as of a reborn classical spirit. This is one of the very first instances of Nietzsche discussing the problem of how to rejuvenate Germany and German culture. In Die Geburt der Tragödie the most important figure in that process is ; here he attributes to Schopenhauer a role similar to Wagner’s in that book.

305 NF 75 [20], February 1868–October 1869, KGW I: 5, p. 241: “This is the age of Schopenhauer; a healthy pessimism whose background is the ideal of a masculine earnest, repugnance against everything hollow and unsubstantial, and attraction to that which is healthy and simple.”
306 NF 75 [20], February 1868–October 1869, KGW I: 5, p. 241: “Schopenhauer is the philosopher of a reborn classicism, of a German Hellenism./Schopenhauer is the philosopher of a rejuvenated Germany, and as such he was much greater than his time, that has not been trying to catch up with him until now. He is soberer than his era, healthier, but also more beautiful and ideal, and above all truer. He is the truest philosopher: the singer with the strongest voice in the philosophical choir.”
From the late autumn of 1868 on, Nietzsche associates Schopenhauer with Wagner. Nietzsche’s admiration for Wagner was at its peak in the late 1860’s, particularly after having made the personal acquaintance with Wagner in November 1868. When Nietzsche recounts their meeting in a letter to Rohde, one of the things that he stresses is that he discussed Schopenhauer with Wagner.  

And in a Nachlaß fragment, Schopenhauer and Wagner are put forward as two counter-examples to the negative influence of certain aspects of the profession of philology:

Denken wir an Schopenhauer an Richard Wagner an die unverwüstliche Energie, mit der sie den Glauben an sich unter dem Halloh der ganzen gebildeten Gesellschaft aufrecht erhielten: und wenn es nicht erlaubt ist sich auf die deos maximos zu berufen so bleibt uns immer noch der Trost, daß den Käuzen das Recht zu existieren nicht versagt werden darf u daß zwei sich verstehende u. herzensein<ig>ge Käuze ein fröhliches Schauspiel für die Himmlischen sind.

From a very early period, Nietzsche harboured doubts about philology. Al- ready here, before he was appointed professor, these doubts are easily dis-
cerned. One aspect of this is that at this time, Wagner and Schopenhauer begin to seep into Nietzsche’s thinking on philological themes. Another example is a list that bears the heading “Beiträge zu der Kritik der griechischen Lyriker. II” where an entry reads “R<ichard> W<agner> u. Sch<openhauer>.” \textsuperscript{310} This list contains, apart from this entry, only philological themes. And that is no coincidence. It seems that Nietzsche already here is using Wagner and particularly Schopenhauer as points of reference when interpreting ancient thinkers. Yet another example is a brief comment on Antisthenes’ view of pleasure and pain: “Antisthenes hält die Lust nur für die Abwesenheit des Schmerzes: wie Schopenhauer.” \textsuperscript{311}

Apart from Schopenhauer, the pre-Basel Nachlaß contains one reference to a pessimistic philosopher. A fragment from the highly productive autumn or winter 1867/68, contains a reference to Julius Bahnsen: “Zunächst liegt philosophische Beschäftigung weiter von der Ethik ab als andere Studien, Jurisprudenz, Theologie selbst Medizin u. Naturwissenschaften. ve<r>gl. Bahnsen I. p. 347.” \textsuperscript{312} Since the only multi-volume works by Bahnsen are Der Widerspruch im Wissen und Wesen der Welt, published in 1880/82, and Beiträge zur Charakterologie from 1867, this must be a reference to the latter. In a letter to Gersdorff, Nietzsche recommends him to read this book, which, he writes, contains “wirklich viel gute Gedanken und Beobachtungen”. \textsuperscript{313} The page that Nietzsche refers to contains a discussion of a fundamental conflict in the pedagogical discipline between intellectual and moral training: “der schlimmste Feind sittlicher Selbstерziehung ist einseitig intellectuelle Ausbildung.” \textsuperscript{314}

Neither the lengthy critical discussions of Schopenhauer nor the reference to Bahnsen concern pessimistic themes. The autobiographical fragments stress the importance of Schopenhauer, but although Nietzsche goes out of his way to make clear that it was particularly the gloomy, disillusioned view of life that Schopenhauer’s works contains that interested him, it seems that pessimism as an intellectual, philosophical problem was not very relevant to Nietzsche in the phase of his first contact with Schopenhauer. The pre-Basel Nachlaß and letters show that Nietzsche did not associate pessimism with Schopenhauer in this

\textsuperscript{310} NF 69 [11], early 1868, KGW I: 5, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{311} NF 74 [20], March 1868—May 1869, KGW I: 5, p. 105: “Antisthenes considers lust to be nothing but the absence of pain: like Schopenhauer.”
\textsuperscript{312} NF 58 [29], autumn 1867—early 1868, KGW I: 4, p. 470: “All philosophical activity is first and foremost more distant from ethics than other studies are, law, theology, even medicine and science. Cf. Bahnsen I. p. 347.”
\textsuperscript{313} Letter to Gersdorff, 1 December 1867, KSB 2, p. 239: “really a lot of good thoughts and observations”. The only extended discussion of Nietzsche’s relation to Bahnsen is Reinhold Grimm: “Embracing Two Horses: Tragedy, Humor, and Inwardness; Or, Nietzsche, Vischer, and Julius Bahnsen”, Nietzsche-Studien 18 (1989), pp. 203–220. Ironically, this article addresses the concepts of tragic and comic in Das Tragische als Weltgesetz und der Humor als ästhetische Gestalt des Metaphysischen, one of the books by Bahnsen that there is no sign that Nietzsche read.
\textsuperscript{314} Bahnsen: Beiträge zur Charakterologie, vol. 1, p. 347: “The worst enemy of a moral self-education is one-sided intellectual training.”
period. He considers pessimism all but exclusively in the context of ancient philosophy.\footnote{We have to be really careful with claims such as Elisabeth Kuhn’s that “[d]er Pessimismus wird von Nietzsches Schopenhauer-Rezeption im Winter-Semester 1865/66 an zum Thema”. Elisabeth Kuhn: “Nietzsches Quelle des Nihilismus-Begriffs”, Nietzsche-Studien 13 (1984), p. 258.}

Neither does Nietzsche describe himself as a pessimist in the letters; in fact, he hardly touches upon pessimism at all. Nietzsche certainly had an interest in pessimism, but it seems to have interested him as a general outlook on life, not as a theoretical, philosophical problem. He wanted to be a pessimist, he wanted to be regarded as a pessimist, but there are virtually no intellectual reflections on pessimism. Pessimism thus cannot be said to be a theme in the fragments of this period. The word is rarely used; the few instances on which Nietzsche does use it are to brief to allow us to make any inferences to the meaning he ascribes to it; from the context it is at least not possible to ascertain that he associates the term with the question of the value of life. That question is not addressed by Nietzsche in these years.

The letters from his student and Basel years contain numerous examples that Nietzsche saw himself as a Schopenhauerian.\footnote{For example: letter to Gersdorff, 7 April 1866: “Drei Dinge sind meine Erholungen, aber seltne Erholungen, mein Schopenhauer, Schumannsche Musik, endlich einsame Spaziergänge.”} His letters to school and university friends such as Rohde, Gersdorff and Deussen testify that Schopenhauer was important to him, but that the identity as a Schopenhauerian was perhaps even more important. And the letters from them to Nietzsche show that the entire circle of friends shared the fascination for Schopenhauer. But this Schopenhauerianism is rather juvenile: their letters contain various plans for societies and publications in Schopenhauer’s honour but very little analysis or discussion of his ideas.

When Nietzsche came to Basel in 1869, a common interest in Schopenhauer was one of the factors that made a friendship with Burckhardt possible. Once Nietzsche had made friends with Richard and Cosima Wagner he gained access to another circle where pessimism was an important topic of discussion.\footnote{In a letter to Rohde, Nietzsche describes the company of Richard Wagner as “mein praktischer Kursus der Schopenhauerschen Philosophie”. Letter to Rohde, 16 June 1869, KSB 3, p. 17.} Cosima Wagner’s diaries show that she and her husband discussed the philosophy of Schopenhauer on a great number of occasions.\footnote{The index of the diaries lists 152 references to Schopenhauer. But since a number of these are discussions running over several pages, the actual figure is greater.} One of these occasions is
particularly interesting, as it shows that the Wagners regarded Nietzsche’s identification of himself as a pessimist as something close to a character flaw:

Abends Brief von Pr. Nietzsche, welcher uns freut, da seine Stimmung uns Besorgnis eingeflößt hatte. In Bezug hierauf sagt R., er besorge, daß die Philosophie Schopenhauer’s am Ende einen schlimmen Einfluß auf solche jungen Leute habe, weil sie den Pessimismus, welcher eine Form des Denkens, der Anschauung sei, auf das Leben nun wenden und sich daraus eine praktische Hoffnungslosigkeit bilden.319

The Wagners seem to hold that Nietzsche, in a sense at least, takes pessimism too seriously. Rather than using pessimism as an intellectual tool, he lets it determine his general outlook on life. Pessimism is a form of thinking, and should not be allowed to influence one’s life. To the young and immature Nietzsche, pessimism could be dangerous, as he does not realise this.

Cosima Wagner’s diaries also show that pessimism is a theme present in rather unexpected contexts. When Richard Wagner and Nietzsche have a dispute over Nietzsche’s vegetarianism, for example, the discussion is pessimistically tinged:


319 Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher, vol. i, p. 199 (17 February 1870): “In the evening a letter from pr. Nietzsche, which pleases us as his mood had caused us some worry. Speaking of this, R. says that he fears that the philosophy of Schopenhauer in the end may have a bad influence on these young people, since they apply pessimism, which is a form of thinking and of reflection, to life, out of which a hopelessness in practical matters takes form.”

320 Ibid. , vol. i, p. 152 (19 September 1869): “Coffee with prof. Nietzsche; unfortunately he annoys R. through a promise not to eat meat and only to eat vegetables that he has made. R. regards this as nonsense, and arrogance, and when the pr. says that it is ethically important not to eat animals, etc. R. answers that our entire existence is a compromise, which can only be atoned for by producing something good. Drinking milk is not enough, it turns one into an ascetic. In order to do something good in our climate we need good nourishment etc. When the prof. gives R. right and still stands by this abstinence, R. becomes angry.” It turns out that Nietzsche was convinced by Wagner’s arguments, though. In a letter to his friend Carl von Gersdorff, written a week after the discussion, Nietzsche relates the conversation with Wagner (without implying that he had annoyed him) and describes at length why vegetarianism is impossible for the intellectually productive: “Der Canon, den die Erfahrung auf diesem Gebiete giebt, ist der: geistig productive und gemüthlich intensive Naturen müssen Fleisch haben. Die andere Lebensweise bleibe den Bäckern und Bauern, die nichts als Verdauungsmaschinen sind.” Letter to Gersdorff, 28 September 1869, KSB 3, p. 58.
Existence is something that has to be atoned for. Existence, that is, is in itself evil: we have to make good for the sin of existing by creating something valuable. By weakening us, vegetarianism prevents us from doing that.\textsuperscript{321} Vegetarianism hinders us from justifying existence. Although the term pessimism is not used in this context it is still an important premise in Wagner’s argument. The (otherwise morally superior) vegetarian diet is wrong because of the problem of pessimism. Atoning for the sin of existence stands in conflict to the concern for the animals; and existence is clearly a greater sin than the slaughter of innocent animals.

With the friendships of the Wagners and Burckhardt, Nietzsche gained access to contexts where Schopenhauer was of great concern. In that year he also came to read Hartmann’s interpretation of Schopenhauer, and although they did not convince Nietzsche, they seem to have given him a clearer conception of pessimism. I believe that these two facts combined can help explain the changed role of pessimism in Nietzsche’s thought around this time.

3.2 Pessimism in Nietzsche’s Nachlaß, 1869–1872

From 1869 Nietzsche’s attitude to pessimism gradually changes. We will see that he begins to treat pessimism as a theoretical doctrine that has practical consequences. In that process, he attributes a much more precise content to the concept. This section will investigate how the central tenets of Die Geburt der Tragödie take form in his notebooks. I will demonstrate that pessimism is much more visible in the Nachlaß and in the preliminary versions of the book than in the finished version. In particular, Nietzsche comes to associate pessimism with art. Art is the solution to the practical problem that pessimism poses. I hold Nietzsche’s reading of Eduard von Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewussten to be a catalyst in the change in his use of the concept.

Nietzsche read Philosophie des Unbewussten as early as 1869.\textsuperscript{322} Although he is critical of Hartmann from the very start, it is not until he has read him that he attributes a meaning to the term pessimism. And although he had by then been reading Schopenhauer for four years, it is not until after reading Hartmann that he discusses Schopenhauer’s philosophy as a form of philosophical pessimism. He seems to have returned to Hartmann’s book when working on the second Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung. There, he presents Hartmann as a philosophical parodist; in fact, in the light of the harsh criticism in that book, the tone in the early

\textsuperscript{321} This is an argument that Nietzsche himself will later use: In FW 145, KSA 3, p. 491, for example, Nietzsche writes that those in whose interest it is to limit the people’s capacity to think and feel advocate a vegetarian diet.

\textsuperscript{322} The first reference to Hartmann is a letter to Carl von Gersdorff dated 4 August 1869 in which he recommends him to read Philosophie des Unbewussten: “Ein wichtiges Buch für Dich ist ‘Hartmann's Philosophie des Unbewußten’, trotz der Unredlichkeit des Verfassers.” KSB 3, p. 36.
letters and Nachlaß comes as something of a surprise.³²³ For even when Nietzsche is criticising Hartmann in the first phase of his acquaintance with his thinking, something like respect is discernible in some of his comments, as for example in this letter to his friend Rohde:

Über Hartmann mit Dir einmündig und einmüthig. Doch lese ich ihn viel, weil er die schönsten Kenntnisse hat und mitunter in das urtale Nornenlied vom fluchwürdigen Dasein kräftig einzustimmen weiß. Er ist ein ganz gebrechlicher contrakter Mann – mit etwas Bosheit, scheint mir, hier und da auch kleinlich und jedenfalls un dankbar. Und das ist für mich ein Halt in der Ethik und der ethischen Beurteilung von Menschen und Thieren.³²⁴

This ambivalence towards Hartmann is typical of Nietzsche at this time. Hartmann is weak and mean, and yet Nietzsche reads him often enough. After the publication of Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche asked his editor Fritzsch to send a copy of the book to Hartmann.³²⁵ It contrasts with the attitude of the Wagner s, for example, to whom Nietzsche lent Philosophie des Unbewussten, but who returned it after a mere week, appalled by the book.³²⁶ Still, Nietzsche’s discussions of Hartmann in his Nachlaß are on the whole very critical. He reads him often enough but although he implies that Hartmann’s pessimism is one of the reasons why he reads him, Nietzsche is obviously not convinced by his form of pessimism. He is in fact constantly trying to refute him.

Three anti-Hartmannian themes can be discerned in the Nachlaß of the period 1869–1872. Firstly, Nietzsche criticises the idea that life or the will can be negated through knowledge. This is an argument that he had been using against Schopenhauer for a long time already, but that is sharpened when it is used

³²³ One reason for the low estimation of Hartmann’s importance for Nietzsche’s thinking is the fact that the polemics against Hartmann in HL is very obvious whereas the fragments in which he discusses pessimism and Schopenhauer in relation to Hartmann are buried in the Nachlaß.

³²⁴ Letter to Rohde, 11 November 1869, KSB 3, p. 73: “I share your opinions of and attitudes to Hartmann. But I read him much, since he has the most beautiful pieces of knowledge and from time to time joins in powerfully in the ancient song of the Norns about the cursedness of existence. He is a man of weakly constitution – with some meanness, it seems to me, occasionally smallish and at any rate ungrateful. And to me that is of relevance to ethics and to the ethical judgment on humans and animals.” This letter was written in response to a letter from Rohde in which he gives the following characterisation of Hartmann: “Hast Du etwa E. v. Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewußten’ gelesen? Plündert Schopenhauer, schimpft aber auf ihn: setzt dem Willen, thuend als gebäre Er ihn soeben, zwei blinde Augen ein, einen unbewußten Intellect, womit das Ganze zu einer Art Maulwurf wird. Lange schauerliche Wüsten scholastischer Leere durchzieht das Buch; hat man aber den Ärger über die Frechheit gegenüber Schopenhauer> allmählich verwunden, so liest man vieles mit großem Antheil. Dumm ist die sogenannte naturwissenschaftliche Methode darin.” Letter from Rohde, 5 November 1869, KGB II: 2, p. 74.

³²⁵ Undated letter to Ernst Wilhelm Fritzsch, second half of April 1872, KSB 3, p. 310.

against Hartmann. Secondly, Nietzsche is emphasizing art as a means of protection against the passivity caused by the knowledge of the world’s essence. On Hartmann’s account, art will lose its significance as man evolves. This is one of the central arguments against Hartmann in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* (see section 4.2 below). Thirdly, Nietzsche sides with art against science during this period. For although he only rarely criticises the endorsement of a science that aims at the destruction of the illusions explicitly, he still considers it harmful. All three themes can be discerned in the following fragment:

Weltvernichtung durch Erkenntniß! Neuschaffung durch Stärkung des Unbewußten! Der “dumme Siegfried” und die wissenden Götter! – Pessimismus als absolute Sehnsucht zum Nichtsein unmöglich: nur zum Bessersein!


Nietzsche dismisses Hartmann’s conceptions with a fair amount of scorn. And it would be wrong to suggest that he is influenced by *Philosophie des Unbewussten*: but that is because influence is too crude a concept to accurately describe the relation. As the choice of words implies Nietzsche is accepting Hartmann’s description of the problem of pessimism even if he does not take his solution seriously. The *Nichtsein*, the non-being that pessimism longs for is a destruction of the world. This is clearly Hartmann’s notion of pessimism rather than Schopenhauer’s or Bahnsen’s. Science, furthermore, is characterised with the very Hartmannian term ‘destroyer of illusions’. But science does not have the power to bring about the nirvana that the pessimists dream of. For art protects us against the excess of knowledge that science leads to. This means that Nietzsche does not accept Hartmann’s notion of science as the driving force in the world process, and that he does not accept his notion that art must necessarily be weakened with the strengthening of science. On the contrary. Although it is not explicit at this stage, Nietzsche’s notion of art as a positive force that makes life possible in spite of the disillusionment caused by science presupposes that art can grow stronger as science grows.

Although the fragments dealing with pessimism often are an attempt to come to terms with Hartmann, it is by no means the only form of context in

327 NF 3 [59], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, pp. 75 f.: “Destruction of the world through knowledge! Recreation through the strengthening of the unconscious! The ‘stupid Siegfried’ and the knowing gods! – Pessimism is impossible as an absolute longing to non-being: only to being better! Art is a secure positive factor against the desirable nirvana. The question is only asked to idealistic natures: mastering of the world through positive action: firstly through science, as the destroyer of illusions, secondly through art, the only remaining form of existence: since it cannot be dissolved by logic.”
which pessimism is discussed. An important context is that of the importance of art, which is a field in which Nietzsche tries to rectify Schopenhauer. From an early date, Nietzsche acknowledges an important difference to Schopenhauer in the role of art in their philosophies. As is made clear by a letter to Rohde, Nietzsche holds his philosophy of art to be of great importance, and an aspect of his thinking where he differs from Schopenhauer:

Das Studium Schopenhauer’s wirst Du überall bemerkt haben, auch in der Stilistik: aber eine sonderbare Metaphysik der Kunst, die den Hintergrund macht, ist so ziemlich mein Eigenthum, nämlich Grundbesitz, aber noch nicht mobiles, gemünztes Eigenthum.  

This comment refers to *Sokrates und die griechische Tragoedie* that Rohde had just read, an essay from 1871 where Nietzsche is developing ideas that will later be included in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. Obviously influenced by Schopenhauer, but differing from him when it comes to the metaphysics of art: this is in fact an apt description of Nietzsche’s philosophy in the early phase. He will develop this metaphysics further in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, but a number of Nachläß fragments where the ideas of that book take form demonstrate the importance of pessimism to that metaphysics. Pessimism is the problem that art is the solution to. A common denominator of the fragments where Nietzsche discusses the relation of art to pessimism is the idea that knowledge leads to pessimism, and that art therefore is necessary to save man. Often Nietzsche claims that pessimism is impossible since understanding (*Verstand*) and logic are tools of the will. Since the will strives to affirm itself (it is a will to life) its tools can only be used for the affirmation of life, not to negate it.

Die Tragödie ist die Naturheilkraft gegen das Dionysische. Es soll sich leben lassen: also ist der reine Dionysismus unmöglich. Denn Pessimismus ist praktisch und theoretisch unlogisch. Weil die Logik nur die *mechan* des Willens ist.

The Dionysian needs to be mitigated; the Dionysian is the artistic expression of something that manifests itself as pessimism when expressed philosophically. But pessimism is untenable, as logic, the very rules of the philosophical dis-

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328 Letter to Rohde, 4 August 1871, KSB 3, p. 216: “You will have noted the study of Schopenhauer everywhere, in the style too: but a curious metaphysics of art that forms the background is my property, real estate, but not yet mobile, capitalised property.” Commenting on this passage from this letter, Mazzino Montinari writes: “Questa innovazione consiste nel fatto che la volontà di Schopenhauer in Nietzsche non viene negata nella contemplazione estetica, ma anzi essa stessa ‘giocando con se stessa’ si giustifica nell’esistenza in quanto fenomeno estetico.” (“This innovation consists in the fact that Schopenhauer’s will is not negated in the aesthetical contemplation, but on the contrary that it ‘playing with itself’ is justified as aesthetical phenomenon.”) Montinari: *Che cosa ha detto Nietzsche*, ed. Giuliano Campioni (1975; 2nd ed., Milano, 2003), p. 85.

329 NF 3 [32], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 69: “Tragedy is a natural medical power against the Dionysian. Life has to be possible: therefore the pure dionysianism is impossible. For pessimism is illogical in practice and in theory. Since logic is a *mechan* of the will.”
Art is the most important of the factors that stand against truth. We will see that the process outlined in this fragment is more exhaustively described in Die Geburt der Tragödie, but its content is the same. The will (in Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche will differentiate his terminology and describe this metaphysical principle as das Ur-Eine) uses art to prevent us from the horrible knowledge that the intellect would otherwise lead us to. The will cannot allow us to become convinced pessimists, and in order to prevent that conviction to take root, art and certain other factors such as morality are invented. Pessimism, another fragment from the same period makes clear, is impossible in the practical realm. It can never be anything other than a theoretical problem:

Der Pessimismus ist unpraktisch und ohne die Möglichkeit der Konsequenz! Das Nichtsein kann nicht Ziel sein.


330 NF 3 [33], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 69: “What was the intention of the will? which after all is one. The tragic thought was now brought into the world, as a rescue from truth through beauty, unconditional subordination under the Olympian against the most horrible knowledge. Thereby the will won yet another possibility to be: conscious willing of life in the individual, according to the tragic thought obviously not directly, but through art./Therefore a new art comes now, tragedy.” Cf. NF 9 [61], 1871, KSA 7, p. 297 where the link between the Dionysian and pessimism through the mysteries and tragedy is made explicit: “Das Dionysische als Mutter der Mysterien, der Tragödie, des Pessimismus.”

331 NF 3 [95], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 86.: “Pessimism is unpractical and without the possibility of a consequence. Non-being cannot be a goal./Pessimism is possible only in the realm of concepts. Existence is bearable only with the belief in the necessity of the world process. This is the great illusion: the will makes us hold on to existence and turns any conviction into an opinion that makes existence possible. This is the reason why the belief in Providence is so ineradicable, because it helps us past the evil. Hence also the belief in immortality.”
Art, and as a couple of fragments from the period make clear, morality make us believe in the value of our existence.\textsuperscript{332} We have to believe in the value of the life that we lead to be able to affirm life (which is what the will wants us to do), and art and morality ensure this belief. We can see clearly here just how greatly Nietzsche’s metaphysics of art differs from that of Schopenhauer. Rather than offering respite from the will, Nietzsche regards art as an affirmative force. Hence he does not believe in the capacity of art or of morality to break the will’s power. On the contrary:

\begin{displayquote}
Die Weltverneinung ist ein unglaublicher Standpunkt: wie ließ ihn der Wille zu?
Erstens ist er verbunden mit dem höchsten Wohlwollen, er hindert nichts, er
ist nicht aggressiv.
Zweitens wird er sofort wieder eskamotirt durch eine andersartige Verherrli-
chung des Daseins, Unsterblichkeitsglauben, Sehnsucht zur Seligkeit.
Drittens ist der Quietismus auch eine Daseinsform.\textsuperscript{333}
\end{displayquote}

This fragment illustrates why pessimism is practically impossible. The knowledge that the world is will and that non-existence would be preferable to existence does not lead to negation of the world. Pessimism does not have the power to bring us to the non-willing that it promises, regardless of that non-willing is the result of Schopenhauerian asceticism or a Hartmannian collective negation. Pessimism can lead to quietism (\textit{Quietismus}), an ascetic way of life that aims at a negation of life. But quietism is not a negation of life: it is, as a number of fragments dedicated to the concept demonstrate, a form of life stripped of that which makes life bearable.

Nietzsche’s discussion of quietism begins with a discussion of different strategies to handle pessimism. A fragment from the autumn/winter of 1870/71 contrasts four different religions against each other. At the centre of all of them there is the notion of death as non-existence.

\begin{displayquote}
“Die Fidschier opfern sich selbst: sie halten es für Recht, ihre besten Freunde
umzubringen, um sie von dem Elend dieses Lebens zu befrein; sie betrachten es
wirklich für ihre Pflicht, daß der Sohn seine Eltern erdrosseln müsse, wenn er
darum gebeten wird.”

Der indische Philosoph, wenn er denkt, er habe Alles gelernt, was die Welt
ihn lehre könne, und der sich darnach sehnt, in die Gottheit aufzugehen, schrei-
tet ruhig in den Ganges.
\end{displayquote}

\textsuperscript{332} For example NF 3 [73], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 79: “Moral im Dienste des Willens. Unmöglichkeit des Pessimismus.” This is a draft in the form of a list of contents under the common headline “Socrates und der Instinct”. See also NF 8 [78], winter 1870-71–autumn 1872, KSA 7, p. 251: “Die Ethik auch als eine \textit{mechane} des Willens zum Leben: nicht der Vernich-
tung dieses Willens.”

\textsuperscript{333} NF 5 [31], September 1870–January 1871, KSA 7, pp. 100 f.: “Denial of the world is an in-
credible standpoint: how could the will allow it?/Firstly it [the will] is connected with the highest
satisfaction, it hinders nothing, it is not aggressive./Secondly it is instantly conjured away by some
other glorification of existence, belief in immortality, longing for bliss./Thirdly quietism is also a
form of existence.”
This fragment underlines the difference between pessimism as a theoretical doctrine and the practical consequences of the doctrine. The four religions in the fragment represent four different attitudes to non-existence. The Fijians, I take it, represent a naïve form of pessimism. If existence is an evil, then killing becomes a duty. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche will characterise the position of the Fijians as 'practical pessimism'. The Indian philosopher represents pessimism. His knowledge of the world leads him to affirm suicide. The Jewish fear of death stems from the same source; in this case the pessimistic knowledge leads to fear of death rather than the embracing of it. Judaism represents optimism. The Greeks have the same knowledge, to a higher degree than the other cultures, presumably: not only are the Greeks the model people in Nietzsche's eyes, the expression “[b]ei aller pessimistischen Erkenntniß” furthermore implies that their knowledge is greater than that of the others. The Greeks know that the world is will; they know that life has no value. They know this better than either of the other cultures. Unlike the other groups, the pessimistic knowledge of the Greeks does not lead them to the action of pessimism: it does not, that is, lead to suicide. Neither does it lead to fear of death. They are saved from the practical consequences of pessimism by art.

In Buddhism, and the Indian philosophy of the fragment just quoted may safely be assumed to be a reference to Buddhism, there is no art that makes the pessimistic knowledge at the core of its teachings productive. There is no art that makes life seem worth while. In the absence of art, pessimism becomes a practical issue as well as a theoretical one; on Nietzsche's terminology the knowledge of the Buddhist leads to Quietismus:


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334 NF 5 [50], September 1870–January 1871, KSA 7, pp. 105 f.: “The Fijians sacrifice themselves: they hold it to be right to kill their best friends to liberate them from the misery of this life; they really consider it to be their duty that the son must strangle his parents when he is asked to.” /The Indian philosopher who, once he thinks that he has learnt everything that the world can teach him, longs to become one with the deity, treads calmly into the Ganges./The Jewish religion has an unspeakable fear for death, the principal aim of their prayer – long life./– In the Greeks this too is very moderate. In spite of all the pessimistic knowledge it never comes to the act of pessimism.” According to the commentary volume KSA 14, the quotation in the first paragraph is from *Beiträge zur vergleichende Religionswissenschaft* (1869), the first volume of Max Müller's *Essays*, Nietzsche owned this book (*Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek*, p. 401), which according to Elisabeth Kuhn was an important source for Nietzsche's notion of nirvana: Elisabeth Kuhn: *Friedrich Nietzsches Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus*, Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung Band 25 (diss. Basel 1988; Berlin & New York, 1992), pp. 19 f. and 37 f.
The Buddhist does not have art, and his pessimism therefore makes him strive to negate life. The Buddhist knows more than the German free thinker. But the illusions (and *Wahngebilde* is really much stronger than ‘illusion’, perhaps ‘delusion’ would be a better term) that cause the free thinker to know less also have the power to fill him with courage and creativity. Like Siegfried in Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen*, that Nietzsche alludes to in this fragment, the German free thinker does not know fear. He is courageous, but his courage is a form of ignorance. The Buddhist does not share this ignorance, since he lacks art, since he is not deceived by the illusions of the artistic ideal. Therefore he lacks the courage to take up the struggle with the world. This in its turn leads to quietism. Knowledge leads to pessimism; knowledge makes us understand that existence cannot be justified. We need art to fool us into believing in the value of life.

As another fragment from the same period demonstrates, tragedy uses pessimism, in the form of an illusion of non-existence, to liberate us from the quietism of the Buddhists and from the suicide impulses that torment the Fijians and the Jews:

> Indem die Tragödie eine Welterlösung ahnen lässt, giebt sie die erhabenste Illusion: die Freiheit vom Dasein überhaupt.
> Hier ist Nothwendigkeit des Leidens – aber ein Trost.
> Der Illusionshintergrund der Tragödie ist der der buddhistischen Religion.

Tragedy makes us realise the necessity of suffering, but it is presented in such a way as to actually offer us comfort. The actual mechanisms of this process are discussed in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. It is important to note the anti-Schopenhauerian polemics inherent in the notion of the will’s triumph in the

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335 NF 5 [44], September 1870–January 1871, KSA 7, p. 104: “The Buddhist lacks art, hence the quietism. Illusions of artistic ideals always exhibit themselves to the German free thinker: hence his creation in the beautiful, hence his struggle with the world. All knowledge of the truth is unproductive: we are the knights who understand the birds’ voices in the forest, we follow them.”

336 Cf. Richard Wagner: *Siegfried*, act II, in: *Dichtungen und Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*, 10 vols., ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Frankfurt/M., 1983), vol. III, pp. 216 f., where Siegfried after having tasted the blood of Fafner understands the birds and is shown the way to the sleeping Brünnhilde by a forest bird, a *Waldvogel*. Siegfried’s courage is a result of him not understanding what fear is: his courage is a form of ignorance, an ignorance shared by the German free thinker, but not by the Buddhist.

337 NF 5 [102], September 1870–January 1871, KSA 7, pp. 120 f.: “As the tragedy lets a redemption of the world be hinted, it gives us the most powerful illusion: *freedom from existence* as such. Here we have a necessity of suffering – but a comfort. The illusion background of tragedy is the same as that of the Buddhist religion. Here the bliss in knowing the highest misery is disclosed. In it the will triumphs. It considers its most horrible configuration as the *source* of a possibility of existence.”
bliss of knowing the highest suffering. According to Schopenhauer, art lets us see the world as it is without being a willing subject. Art therefore temporarily frees us from suffering. On Nietzsche’s account, art makes us feel, understand the suffering inherent in the world, but far from making us want to negate the will, it actually makes us want to affirm it. Art exists because the will needs something that makes man want to affirm life. In that process, tragedy uses one aspect of pessimism (the notion of non-existence as an ideal) to solve the practical problem that the pessimistic knowledge (the knowledge that the world is will) causes.

The reference to Buddhism in this fragment is also important. Tragedy has the same “illusion background” (Illusionshintergrund) as Buddhism. Buddhism is often used by Nietzsche as a metaphor for pessimism. The illusion that is common to tragedy and Buddhism is the notion of an absolute freedom from existence. Buddhism/pessimism adopts a totally different attitude towards this idea than does the tragic artist (or spectator). In tragedy, this illusion is used to help us affirm life; in Buddhism and in pessimism, the very same illusion is set as a goal, but it is a goal that cannot be achieved.

Art makes us believe in the value of life. And no art form is more powerful than tragedy. Tragedy functions as a vent that lets out the knowledge of life’s meaninglessness and suffering. Nietzsche therefore defines tragedy as the victory of beauty over truth:


This dense fragment prefigures one of the central arguments of Die Geburt der Tragödie. The Greek world developed its tragic art to handle the tragic knowl-

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338 For the purposes of the present study, it is particularly important that Nietzsche in a discussion of the three types of cultures in GT designates a culture that lacks art and therefore lacks the means to channel the pessimistic insights into the essence of the world as Buddhist. But that is not the only example. Elisabeth Kuhn demonstrates that Schopenhauer is an important source for Nietzsche use of the concept nirvana, and that it is used primarily in the context of his treatment of pessimism in the Nachlaß. Kuhn: Friedrich Nietzsches Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus, p. 17.

339 NF 3 [45], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 73: “The Greek world is a flower of the will. From where did the triggering elements come? From the flower itself. The tremendous feeling for beauty that absorbed the idea of truth eventually let it go. The tragic world view is the boundary: beauty and truth balance each other. Tragedy is first and foremost a victory of beauty over knowledge: the horror of an approaching transcendental world is artistically created, and thereby its dissolving excess is avoided. Tragedy is the vent of the mystical-pessimistic knowledge, directed by the will.”
edge of the world that it had come to possess. The will needs something to protect man from an excess of knowledge: art, and especially tragedy, fulfils this office.

A brief fragment from 1869/70 contains an example of Nietzsche associating pessimism with melancholy: “Anaximander. Melancholie und Pessimismus. Mit der Tragödie verwandt.” This is one of very few occasions where Nietzsche is explicitly relating pessimism to melancholy. But although he only rarely does so, the vicinity of pessimism and melancholy is something that Nietzsche is constantly, albeit implicitly, alluding to. In July 1871, Nietzsche wrote a poem “An die Melancholie” (“To Melancholy”), which illustrates Nietzsche’s ambiguous attitude to pessimism. The central character of the poem addresses a vulture that screams out in the hope that the central character is dead. But he is not dead; he is sitting in a lonely desert, gazing inwards: “um in sich/Des Daseins Abgrund blitzend aufzuhellen”. The poem illustrates how

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340 NF 3 [84], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 82: “Anaximander. Melancholy and pessimism. Related to tragedy.” This is from a draft to a project entitled “Die vorplatonischen Philosophen” that Nietzsche planned but abandoned. There are several other drafts, all of them consisting of lists of pre-Socratic philosophers who are characterised by a few words. As far as I have been able to find out, this fragment is the only one where Anaximander is labelled both a pessimist and a melancholic. Cf. NF 16 [17], summer 1871–early 1872, KSA 7, p. 399, where the entry on Anaximander reads: “2. Anaximander. Schule. Pessimismus.” In later fragments, such as NF 19 [89], KSA 7, p. 449, and NF 21 [22], KSA 7, p. 530, both from summer 1872–beginning of 1873, Anaximander is labelled a tragic thinker, but neither a pessimist nor a melancholic. Paolo D’Iorio points to Anaximander as one of Nietzsche’s Schopenhauerian masks in the period 1872/73: “Le premier masque schopenhauerien est celui d’Anaximandre. En Anaximandre, Nietzsche reconnaît ‘le premier philosophe pessimiste’, parce que, en opérant une scission entre le monde métaphysique de l’être et le monde physique du devenir, il a posé le problème de la valeur de l’existence.” Paolo D’Iorio: “L’image des philosophes préplatoniciens chez le jeune Nietzsche”, in: ‘Centauren-Geburten’. Wissenschaft, Kunst und Philosophie beim jungen Nietzsche, eds. Tilman Borsche, Federico Gerratana & Aldo Venturelli, Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung 27 (Berlin & New York, 1994), p. 394. In Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen, an unfinished text from 1872 that is D’Iorio’s main interest in the cited paper, Nietzsche is using Schopenhauer to interpret a fragment from Anaximander, a “[r]äthselhafter Ausspruch eines wahren Pessimisten”. PHG 4, KSA 1, p. 818. And a few pages later, Nietzsche writes that Anaximander directed a question to the entire existence: “Was ist euer Dasein werth? Und wenn es nichts werth ist, wozu seid ihr da? Durch eure Schuld, merke ich, weilt ihr in dieser Existenz. Mit dem Tode werdet ihr sie büßen müssen.” Ibid., p. 820.


342 NF 15 [1], July 1871, KSA 7, p. 389: “in order to in himself/ light up the abyss of existence with a flash of lightning”. 141
the introspection, the seeking for knowledge on the one hand enlightens the seeker. But on the other hand it also leads to a death-like state. The insights and enlightenment of the melancholy seeker cause a passivity that is just like that of the pessimist.

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Knowledge thus plays a crucial role in Nietzsche’s notion of pessimism, and in this he follows the representatives of the tradition. Knowledge of the world’s essence is the medium through which the Schopenhauerian ascetic reaches his state of denial of the will. It is the means predicted by Hartmann to bring about the auto-annihilation of mankind. And although Nietzsche, as we have seen, does not accept the possibility of a denial of the will through knowledge, knowledge of the world’s essence is still the core of pessimism. The central notion of pessimism (when used as a metaphysical concept) is the idea that existence (of man or of the world) cannot be justified. This notion, we saw in chapter 2, was interpreted as the notion that life has no value and that non-existence therefore is preferable to existence. On Schopenhauer’s account, this is a priori true, since the world is will and the suffering therefore is unavoidable. In the Nachlaß from the years preceding Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche is clearly wrestling with this idea, trying to find a way to avoid Schopenhauer’s conclusions.

Der Pessimismus ist die Folge der Erkenntniß vom absolut Unlogischen der Weltordnung: stärkster Idealismus wirft sich in Kampf gegen das Unlogische mit der Fahne eines abstrakten Begriffs, z.B. Wahrheit, Sittlichkeit usw. Sein Triumph Leugnung des Unlogischen als eines Scheinbaren, nicht Wesentlichen. Das “Wirkliche” ist nur eine idea.343

This fragment sums up an important theme of the Nachlaß. Too much knowledge of the world leads to the insight that it is illogical. Just as we have seen earlier, morality is one of the illusions that we can create that makes life bearable. This is an idea that remains central to Nietzsche throughout his development. That the world order is illogical means that the world lacks a meaning. The world is illogical; knowledge of the world makes our lives more difficult as it robs us of the illusion that there is a meaning of life. Idealism becomes necessary: man comes to need to believe in Truth, in Morals, etc. in order to be able to believe that the world’s lack of logic is a contingent quality.

On Nietzsche’s account, art is the most important of the illusions that make us believe in life’s meaningfulness in spite of the pessimistic knowledge of the

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343 NF 3 [51], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 74: “Pessimism is the consequence of the knowledge of the absolute illogicalness of the world order: the strongest idealism takes up the struggle against the illogical with the banner of an abstract concept, e.g. Truth, Morality, etc. Its triumph is the repudiation of the illogical as something illusory, not essential. ‘Reality’ is only an idea.”
world’s illogicalness that makes life meaningless. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, art can justify existence. But even before he formulates the idea of a justification of existence through art, he sees art as necessary in making life worth living.

Nietzsche is not yet using the categories of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, but as we will see, the relation of art and science is similar in that work. Science strives for knowledge, for the destruction of illusions. We have already seen that the result of an excess of knowledge leads to pessimism. The fact that Nietzsche does not use that term here only underlines that his main concern is not pessimism as a theoretical doctrine but rather the corresponding practical problem. Nietzsche’s concern is not whether non-existence is preferable to existence, but how to handle the consequences of the opinion that non-existence is preferable. *Quietismus* is one of the terms that Nietzsche uses to denote that state; in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, the term he uses is *praktischer Pessimismus*.

The quoted fragment links quietism to science by the destruction of illusions, which is said to be the driving force behind science. The notion that science aims at the destruction of illusions is not original to Eduard von Hartmann. But Nietzsche’s use of this notion nonetheless seems indebted to him.\(^{345}\) Not only is it formulated in a series of fragments where Nietzsche explicitly refers to Hartmann, obviously written while he was reading or just had read him; the use of the terms *Illusion* and *Vernichtung der Illusion* is similar to the use of these terms by Hartmann, to whom the destruction of illusions is the driving force in history. For example, Nietzsche formulates the idea that we must create new, higher illusions in explicit polemic with Hartmann:

> Bei Hartmann ist die Willensverneinung eine Verirrung und die Bejahung des Lebens die eigentliche Pflicht. Zuletzt sollen gar die Majoritäten auf der Erde für die Vernichtung und die Rückkehr in’s Nichts abstimmen!

Dagegen unsre Lehre, dass das Bewusstsein nur durch immer höhere Illusionen gefördert und entwickelt wird.\(^{346}\)

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\(^{344}\) NF 3 [60], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 76: “The only possibility of life: in art. Otherwise one turns away from life. The drive of the sciences is the complete destruction of the illusions: quietism would be the result – if there were no art.”

\(^{345}\) In an important article that stresses the importance of Hartmann to Nietzsche in the early phase, Francesco Gerratana underlines that Nietzsche’s use of the concept illusion is indebted to Hartmann: “Der Gebrauch des Wortes ‘Illusion’ in den oben angeführten Stellen sowie seine zentrale Stellung in GT (s. GT 18 S. 115f., mit dem der PU nachgebildeten Ausdruck ‘Illusionsstufen’) hängen übrigens m.E. höchstwahrscheinlich selbst mit Nietzsches PU-Lektüre zusammen: erst bei Hartmann wird Illusion zu einem regelrechten terminus technicus des Pessimismus”. Gerratana, p. 407, footnote 34.

\(^{346}\) NF 29 [52], summer–autumn 1873, KSA 7, pp. 649 f.: “In Hartmann the denial of the will has gone lost and the affirmation of life is the actual duty. In the end the majorities of the world
Hartmann’s notion of a cosmic suicide as the only tenable solution to the problem of pessimism attracts Nietzsche’s scorn (as it has attracted the scorn of many readers). But more important is Nietzsche’s faith in the illusions. We have here something of a key to Nietzsche’s philosophy. Knowledge does not benefit life. It leads to an insight into the worthlessness of life, into the truth of pessimism. And against this insight we need illusions. In the Geburt der Tragödie Nietzsche has attempted to demonstrate that the highest form of illusion is provided by the synthesis of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in tragedy.347

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In this section we have seen that pessimism gains a much greater importance in the Nachlaß from 1869 than it had before that date. This is partly explicable from the fact that the earlier fragments mostly concerned philological matters whereas philosophical themes gradually become more important. But it is not only a quantitative difference: Nietzsche’s treatment of pessimism changes radically around 1869. It becomes a philosophical problem that has both a theoretical and a practical side. The theoretical side of pessimism seems to be developed in dialogue with Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewussten that Nietzsche read in 1869. Nietzsche seems to regard pessimism as a preference of non-existence over existence that is caused by the destruction of illusions carried out by science. And he seems to regard the non-existence that pessimism aims at as the result of a world process à la Hartmann. But Nietzsche does not take Hartmann’s notion of a negation of the will through a future auto-annihilation of mankind seriously. He does not believe in a negation of the will at all. Nietzsche holds pessimism to be impossible.

Where there is no art, there is nothing to protect us from the knowledge of the world and particularly the knowledge that the world is illogical, that science leads to. This produces a form of quietism. This quietism is not a negation of the will to life, and this is important to note. It is rather a state of despair and hopelessness. There can be no negation of the will, for the will would not allow that. The will strives for affirmation and mankind is one of the means by which it takes place. This means that the destruction of the illusions that pessimism advocates can lead to a state of despair, but not to the painless nothingness that the pessimists promise.

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347 A number of scholars stress the importance of F. A Lange to Nietzsche, particularly during the period that Die Geburt der Tragödie was conceived. See for example Porter: The Invention of Dionysus, pp. 9, 17 ff. and passim. Porter argues that Die Geburt der Tragödie is a form of conceptual poetry (Begriffsdichtung). I believe that he is right in this. But I believe that he exaggerates the extent to which Lange and Schopenhauer are mutually exclusive. A similar position, but one that attributes greater importance to Schopenhauer is argued for by Agell, p. 118 and passim.
This section, dealing with preliminary and alternative versions of ideas that are given their final form in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, has shown that pessimism is a very important concept when Nietzsche was writing the book. In the book itself the term pessimism will be all but obliterated, but pessimism will be an even more important theme. But before we turn to that work, we most briefly address the presence of pessimism in Nietzsche’s minor works from around the time of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*.

### 3.3 Pessimism in Nietzsche’s Minor Works

Before Nietzsche published *Die Geburt der Tragödie* he had published a number of philological papers. But he had also written a number of essays on philosophical and cultural themes. Some of these, particularly *Das griechische Musikdrama*, *Socrates und die Tragödie*, and *Die dionysische Weltanschauung*, contain preliminary versions of central arguments of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. My aim here is not to describe the development of all the central themes of that book through their various stages, but rather to demonstrate that the importance of pessimism to Nietzsche that we have discerned in the Nachlaß is visible in these writings too.

*Socrates und die Tragödie*, a lecture that Nietzsche held in February 1870, deals with the death of tragedy. This is a theme almost as central to *Die Geburt der Tragödie* as is that of the origin of tragedy, and just like in the book, Nietzsche maintains that it died at the hands of Socrates and Euripides. Nietzsche’s criticism of Euripides is lengthier in the lecture than in the book, but otherwise most of the lecture can be found in the book too. There is one significant difference, though. In *Socrates und die Tragödie*, Nietzsche explicitly describes tragedy as pessimistic: “Die Tragödie, aus der tiefen Quellen des Mitleidens entstanden, ist ihrem Wesen nach pessimistisch. Das Dasein ist da etwas sehr Schreckliches, der Mensch etwas sehr Thörichtes.”

348 Once Nietzsche has introduced the dichotomy Apollonian–Dionysian, this element will be described as Dionysian. The fact that it is characterised as pessimistic at this point is a very important point to note. Its full importance will not become evident until after the discussion of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, but it is already here evident that tragedy has its root in a pessimistic sphere.

An allusion to Schopenhauer’s definition of pessimism in Nietzsche’s philological lectures is revealing. In his *Encyclopaedie der klassischen Philologie*, prepared for the summer semester of 1871, Nietzsche applies Schopenhauer’s division of the religions into pessimistic and optimistic to Christianity and the religion of the Greeks:

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348 ST, KSA 1, p. 546: “Tragedy, originating in the deep founts of compassion, is pessimistic to its essence. In it, existence is something very horrifying, mankind is something foolish.”
Denn die Frage zu berühren über Heidnisch u. Christlich: diesen zu entgegnen, daß es keine eigentliche Scheidung ist: die Urfrage ist, pessimistisch oder optimistisch gegen das Dasein. Sowohl im Christenthum als im Heidenthum giebt es die ernsthaftesten Stellungen zB. die Mysterien, der Untergrund der Tragoedie, Empedokles; das ganze 6te Jahrhundert: während in der Verweltlichung der Kirche u. ihren staatlichen Ansprüchen ein heidnisches, dh. optimistisches Element liegt.349

Nietzsche’s remark is too similar to Schopenhauer’s use of pessimism vs. optimism as the fundamental criterion of division of religions (also quoted above in section 1.4) to be a coincidence:

Den *Fundamentalunterschied* aller Religionen kann ich nicht, wie durchgängig geschieht, darin setzen, ob sie monotheistisch, polytheistisch, pantheistisch, oder atheistisch sind; sondern nur darin, ob sie optimistisch oder pessimistisch sind, d.h. ob sie das Daseyn dieser Welt als durch sich selbst gerechtfertigt darstellen, mithin es loben und preisen, oder aber es betrachten als etwas, das nur als Folge unserer Schuld begriffen werden kann und daher eigentlich nicht seyn sollte [...].350

This allusion underlines that Nietzsche’s use of the concept ‘justification’ (of central importance in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*) belongs to a pessimistic context rather than a theological. By alluding to the very passage where Schopenhauer defines pessimism in terms of impossibility of justification of existence, Nietzsche also indicates how he understands justification. It is Schopenhauer’s use of the context, rather than Luther’s, that Nietzsche is alluding to.351

Nietzsche used the gods Dionysus and Apollo in relation to the arts in *Socrates und die Tragoedie* and in *Das griechische Musikdrama*, another lecture that he held.

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349 Encyclopaedie der klassischen Philologie (SS 1871), § 7, KGW II: 3, p. 370: “For when it comes to the question of Pagan and Christian: answer that there is no real difference: the primordial question is, pessimistic or optimistic to existence. In Christianity as well as in Heathendom there are the most earnest positions, e.g. the mysteries, the basis of tragedy, Empedocles; the entire 6th century: while there is a pagan, i.e. optimistic, element in the secularisation of the church and its governmental ambitions.”

350 W II, chapter 17, p. 198/170: “I cannot, as is generally done, put the *fundamental difference* of all religions in the question whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or atheistic; but only in the question whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, in other words, whether they present the existence of this world as justified by itself, and consequently praise and commend it, or consider it as something which can be conceived only as the consequence of our guilt, and thus really ought not to be”.

351 Volker Gerhardt correctly observes that the question of justification is connected to pessimism, by pointing to what he holds to be the first use of the concept of justification, in a segment of *Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie* (1871), where Nietzsche talks of the justification of human evil as the ethical foundation of the pessimistic tragedy (“Rechtfertigung des menschlichen Uebels, [… als den] ethischen Untergrund der pessimistischen Tragödie”, SGT, KSA 1, p. 617). However, Gerhardt holds that the word *Gerechtfertigung*, justification, belongs to a Lutheran-protestant context: Volker Gerhardt: *Pathos und Distanz. Studien zur Philosophie Friedrich Nietzsches* (Stuttgart, 1988), p. 47. But Nietzsche is alluding to Schopenhauer’s usage of the term: the pessimistic context is far more important, since Nietzsche’s usage is only indirectly connected to the theological usage.
shortly before that. But it is not until Die dionysische Weltanschauung from the summer of 1870 that he uses the two gods as a dichotomy that symbolises the two types of art that he wants to distinguish between. In this text, Apollo is used as a symbol for the dreamlike mimetic arts, and Dionysus for music, the effect of which is likened to intoxication. It is important to note that he no longer refers to tragedy as a pessimistic art form in this text. This is the case even though a myth that expresses the central tenet of pessimism is prominent in the text. With the introduction of the Dionysian–Apollonian dichotomy, the term pessimism becomes more or less redundant to Nietzsche.

In Die dionysische Weltanschauung we also find the first example of the myth of Silenus that is central to Die Geburt der Tragödie. Nietzsche alludes to the myth of how the satyr Silenus, a companion of Dionysus, was caught by king Midas. The satyr disclosed the best thing for man to the king: “Die Philosophie des Volkes ist es, die der gefesselte Waldgott dem Sterblichen enthüllt: ‘das Beste ist nicht zu sein, das Zweitbeste bald zu sterben’. Dieselbe Philosophie ist es, die den Hintergrund jener Götterwelt bildet. Der Grieche kannte die Schrecken und Entsetzlichkeiten des Daseins, aber er verhüllte sie, um leben zu können: ein Kreuz unter Rosen versteckt nach dem Goetheschen Symbol.”

Silenus’ wisdom corresponds to pessimism as the term was used in Nietzsche’s day. This makes it obvious that although Nietzsche is no longer describing the insight that we need art to handle as pessimism, this is in fact what he is referring to.

3.4 Die Geburt der Tragödie (1872)

It was not an unprecedented event when Nietzsche was appointed professor in 1869. At age twenty-four he was not the youngest professor in the history of the European university system; and he was not the first to be appointed professor before he graduated. But the appointment was of course a very bold and unusual move by the University of Basel. During the two and a half years that passed between Nietzsche’s appointment and the publication of his first book, Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik in 1872, Nietzsche proved to be a

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352 DW 2, KSA 1, p. 560: “It is the philosophy of the people that the chained forest god discloses: ‘the best thing is not to be, the second best to die soon’. The same philosophy forms the background of that world of gods. The Greek knew the horrors and terrors of existence, but he veiled them to be able to live: a cross hidden among roses according to Goethe’s symbol.” In Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens, Nietzsche is quoting a more extensive version of the myth from Aristotle: GG, KSA 1, p. 588.

353 Lionel Gossman dedicates the 14th chapter of his study Basel in the Age of Burckhardt. A Study in Unseasonable Ideas (2000, Chicago & London, 2002) to an investigation into Nietzsche’s role in the intellectual climate of Basel. He holds that in Basel, a small, ancient town, governed by a small elite consisting of a few patriarchal families, a climate that was very open to unorthodox, unseasonable ideas developed. According to Gossman, the probability that any other university would have offered Nietzsche a chair at that time and under these circumstances is very small.
successful and popular teacher. He continued his philological work, publishing on Homer and Diogenes Laertius among other things. During these two and a half years, Nietzsche's extraordinary (außerordentlich) professorship was transformed into a full professorship, which apart from the higher status also meant a considerable increase in his salary. The University of Basel had in short a lot of prestige invested in the young professor Nietzsche when he published his first book; the expectations upon it were considerable.

But rather than proving Nietzsche’s worth as a scholar, Die Geburt der Tragödie all but destroyed Nietzsche’s credibility.354 His most ferocious critic, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff accused him of lacking both knowledge and love for the truth; and his teacher Ritschl who had recommended him for the professorship reacted with dismay.355 For rather than a solid, thorough philological study, Nietzsche wrote an essay of sorts, with a preface dedicated to Wagner, developing a Schopenhauerian metaphysics of music and warning for the dangers of the ideals of science (Wissenschaft).

Die Geburt der Tragödie is written within a pessimistic horizon. But three of its themes are of particular relevance to Nietzsche’s relation to pessimism. Firstly the notion that tragedy is a synthesis between a Dionysian and an Apollonian element, where particularly the vicinity of the Dionysian to pessimism is important. Secondly the extensive criticism of the optimistic Socratic science that is blamed for having destroyed the Dionysian and thereby destroyed the possibility for art to justify human existence. Thirdly the idea of a rebirth of German culture through a revival of the tragic spirit of Greek tragedy in the form of Wagnerian music drama. In this section I will argue that pessimism plays an intricate but nonetheless extremely important role in these themes. More specifically, I will demonstrate that the Dionysian has a strongly pessimistic element, but that this element must be sublimated by the Apollonian into tragedy to be bearable: when that occurs, the spectator is led to affirm life in spite of the pessimistic truth of the Dionysian that non-existence is preferable to existence.

I will further argue that the Socratic optimistic science that destroyed tragedy made pessimism come true in its attempt to rid art of its pessimistic element. Finally, I will demonstrate that various strategies to come to terms with the

354 Christian Benne demonstrates that Nietzsche represented a philological ideal that was about to become antiquated, meaning that Die Geburt der Tragödie was only partly to blame for Nietzsche’s damaged reputation: “Für die philologische Rezeptionsgeschichte der folgenden Generationen ist damit auch das Schicksal des Philologen Nietzsche besiegelt. Selbst wenn er die Tragödienschrift nie verfasst hätte, wäre sein Ruf dem wissenschaftlichen Zeitgeist zum Opfer gefallen.” Benne: Nietzsche und die historisch-kritische Philologie, p. 296.

problem of pessimism are present in Nietzsche’s discussion of the role of Wagner’s music drama in the rebirth of tragedy.

The notion that Die Geburt der Tragödie contains an attempt to overcome Schopenhauerian pessimism is in itself not original. A few commentators do describe Die Geburt der Tragödie as a pessimistic work.\textsuperscript{356} But the majority of the scholars discussing the book rather regard it as anti-Schopenhauerian. Walter Kaufmann and Georges Goedert are two examples of prominent scholars who embrace this position.\textsuperscript{357} And in the literature dealing specifically with Nietzsche’s view of art several commentators stress the central importance of affirmation of life in the aesthetics of Die Geburt der Tragödie.\textsuperscript{358} I agree, on the whole with this position. I would maintain, though, that neither Kaufmann nor any of the scholars that follow him have seen how important pessimism is as a premise to Nietzsche’s overcoming of pessimism. One could indeed even argue that the overcoming of pessimism with the help of pessimism is the central theme of the book.

The Dionysian, the Apollonian, and Pessimism

Art, it can be argued, is Nietzsche’s main concern. A number of Nietzsche’s works are primarily dedicated to art and artists (for example the three books dedicated to Wagner: Richard Wagner in Bayreuth, Nietzsche contra Wagner, and Der Fall Wagner); and in several works that discuss other themes art is still a very

\textsuperscript{356} Julian Young is a case at hand. Young holds that as Dionysian art seduces man to a continued life and provides a metaphysical comfort, etc., Die Geburt der Tragödie is pessimistic and life-denying: “None of these turns of phrase [the phrases in italics] suggests human existence to be a particularly attractive state of being. And it should be borne in mind, too, that ‘intoxication’, the central metaphor for Dionysianism, though not necessarily, nonetheless most naturally, carries with it pessimistic associations.” Julian Young: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art (1992, Cambridge, 1993), p. 48. By now it should be clear to the reader that I hold such a definition to be anachronistic.

\textsuperscript{357} Walter Kaufmann Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (1950; 4th ed., Princeton, 1974), p. 131: “Instead of proving himself in his first book as an unswerving follower of Schopenhauer – as has so often been taken for granted – Nietzsche discovers in Greek art a bulwark against Schopenhauer’s pessimism. One can oppose the shallow optimism of so many Western thinkers and yet refuse to negate life. Schopenhauer’s negativistic pessimism is rejected along with the superficial optimism of the popular Hegelians and Darwinists: one can face the terrors of history and nature with unbroken courage and say Yes to life.” Georges Goedert holds that Die Geburt der Tragödie is an attempt to overcome Schopenhauer’s pessimism through a life-affirming philosophy that justifies the tragic character of being by ennobling the tragic as the ultimate source of beauty: “Damit ist Schopenhauers Pessimismus überwunden. Das Leben, so kann interpretiert werden, darf nicht verneint werden wegen des in ihm enthaltenen Leidens. Es wird auch nicht bejaht trotz des Leidens, sondern dank dem Leiden.” Georges Goedert: “Nietzsche und Schopenhauer”, Nietzsche-Studien 7 (1978), pp. 3 f.

\textsuperscript{358} According to Roger Hollinrake, the first example of a tragedy that lives up to the affirmative concept of tragedy of Die Geburt der Tragödie was – Also sprach Zarathustra. Roger Hollinrake: Nietzsche, Wagner, and the Philosophy of Pessimism (London, Boston & Sydney, 1982), p. 192. In a similar vein, Anna-Lena Carlsson presents the life-affirming interpretation of tragedy in Die Geburt der Tragödie as an alternative to Schopenhauer’s asceticism. Anna-Lena Carlsson: “…Is it Hunger or Superabundance That Has Here Become Creative?”. Nietzsche on Creativity in Art & Life (diss. Uppsala, 2005), pp. 66 f.
important concern (*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, for example, or *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*). But nowhere is art more important than in Nietzsche’s first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. Nowhere does he discuss art at such great length, and nowhere does he attribute to art such importance to philosophy and to life as here.

We have seen that Nietzsche’s Nachlaß from the years immediately preceding *Die Geburt der Tragödie* contains a fairly extensive discussion of art as a solution to the problem of pessimism. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche uses a different terminology. He does not talk of art as a remedy against pessimism here (as we have seen him do); in fact, on the few occasions on which he does use the term pessimism he is not addressing the problem of pessimism.359 But although the terminology is different, Nietzsche is still addressing the same problem. For the aim of his book is to show how art can justify existence. We have seen that Nietzsche’s discussions of pessimism in the Nachlaß more often than not are discussions of Hartmann rather than of Schopenhauer. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Schopenhauer’s presence is much more notable. The discussion of art in the book is greatly indebted to Schopenhauer (although he deviates from Schopenhauer’s view on a number of very important points). Hartmann is largely irrelevant to this discussion, but the attempt at a philosophy of history in the second half of the book contains a few allusions to Hartmann’s philosophy, and on a few occasions Nietzsche is using his terminology. But even if Hartmann is not particularly visible in the discussion of art as solution to the problem of pessimism, he is still very important to the book. For as the discussion in section 3.2 has demonstrated, Nietzsche’s understanding of pessimism is developed in a continuous struggle to refute Hartmann.

In his discussion of the role and importance of art, Nietzsche makes clear that it can protect us from the problem that pessimism is an expression of. Art is not primarily man’s concern, but the concern of the *Ur-Eine*, the striving that is the core of existence and that corresponds to Schopenhauer’s will.360 Art is a means through which man is made to want to continue living. In this context Nietzsche alludes to and distances himself from Schopenhauer’s notion of pessimism:

359 Nietzsche uses the term *Pessimismus* four times in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*: three times in GT 15 and once in GT 19 (I am not counting the preface to the 1886 edition). The three references in GT 15 are all to a practical pessimism; I will argue that the use of this term is a form of polemics against Hartmann. In GT 19, the origin of the idyllic tendency of the opera is interpreted as a “Trostmittel gegen jenen Pessimismus […] zu dem gerade die Ernstgesinnten jener Zeit […] am stärksten gereizt waren.” (p. 122) This is admittedly a vague use of the term: here Nietzsche seems to be giving it a psychological meaning.


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Denn dies muss uns vor allem, zu unserer Erniedrigung und Erhöhung, deutlich sein, dass die ganze Kunstkomödie durchaus nicht für uns, etwa unserer Besserung und Bildung wegen, aufgeführt wird, ja dass wir ebensowenig die eigentlichen Schöpfer jener Kunstwelt sind: wohl aber dürfen wir von uns selbst annehmen, dass wir für den wahren Schöpfer derselben schon Bilder und künstlerische Projektionen sind und in der Bedeutung von Kunstwerken unsre höchste Würde haben – denn nur als aesthetisches Phänomen ist das Dasein und die Welt ewig gerechtfertigt: während freilich unser Bewusstsein über diese unsre Bedeutung kaum ein andres ist als es die auf Leinwand gemalten Krieger von der auf ihr dargestellten Schlacht haben.361

This passage is a form of polemics against Schopenhauer in two respects. The context makes it clear that the loosely romantic notion of the artist as a vessel or medium through which art flows is directed against Schopenhauer’s notion of art as a will-free form of knowledge of the phenomenal world. But more importantly, the notion of a justification of existence as an aesthetic phenomenon is directed against pessimism in its Schopenhauerian form, according to which existence cannot be justified. However, it is not a simple rejection of pessimism: pessimism plays an intricate role in Nietzsche’s discussion of tragedy. This section will demonstrate the presence of pessimism both as a threat that has to be overcome and as a means to overcome that very threat.

The discussion of art in Die Geburt der Tragödie is based on the two categories of the Dionysian and the Apollonian.362 They are Naturtriebe, drives or instincts, that among other things can manifest themselves as different forms of arts.

Um uns jene beiden Triebe näher zu bringen, denken wir sie zunächst als die getrennten Kunstwelten des Traumes und des Rausches; zwischen welchen physiologischen Erscheinungen ein entsprechender Gegensatz, wie zwischen dem

361 GT 5, KSA 1, p. 47: “For to our humiliation and exaltation, one thing above all must be clear to us. The entire comedy of art is neither performed for our betterment or education nor are we the true authors of this art world. On the contrary, we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art – for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified – while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it.”

Apollinischen und dem Dionysischen zu bemerken ist.” The Apollonian art is in essence a dream art: everything that occurs in it is seen as beautiful, just as when dreaming the dreamer is aware of dreaming, and is elated by the dream, wishing to keep on dreaming. The Apollonian state is characterised by a schöner Schein, an understanding of and lust in the forms, the surface of things. Nothing is superfluous or ugly; everything is seen as beautiful. But the Apollonian art is a Schein, a word that among other things means ‘illusion’; we are always aware that the art work is not the true reality. It is a form of illusion in the service of life. The Apollonian art par excellence is painting and sculpture (die bildende Kunst) – although Nietzsche in discussing Apollonian art mostly draws his examples from literature.

In the Dionysian, the reflexivity that characterises the Apollonian is totally absent. In the Dionysian state one manages to see through the surface of reality: to tear the veil of Maya, as Nietzsche expresses it with reference to Schopenhauer. One sees that the beautiful appearance of the world is but an illusion; one sees that the world at the core is a ceaseless and goalless striving, das Ur-Eine, which means that life essentially is suffering. However, one does not suffer in the Dionysian state. Instead one experiences a feeling of bliss which comes from identification with das Ur-Eine. One is no longer an individual; all boundaries are suspended, one feels as one with the world. As becomes clear later, in a sense one actually does experience the pain and suffering of the world, but not in one’s person. The archetypically Dionysian art form is music.

According to Nietzsche, there is an enormous difference between the Greeks and the barbarians when it comes to the manifestations of the Dionysian. The feasts in celebration of Dionysus amongst the barbarians were basically orgies: unbridled sexuality was central to these feasts. This, of course, is in keeping with the pessimistic tradition: Schopenhauer’s will and Hartmann’s unconscious find their strongest expressions in sexuality. Amongst the Greeks, the Apollonian stood up against the Dionysian. This means that the Greek feasts in honour of Dionysos did not turn the participants into animals. Instead the Dionysian was sublimated and manifested itself as art: as music. Or, to be precise, as the musical element in tragedy.

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363 GT 1, KSA 1, p. 26: “In order to grasp these two tendencies, let us first conceive of them as the separate art worlds of dream and intoxication. These psychological phenomena present a contrast analogous to that existing between the Apollinian and the Dionysian.”

364 Julian Young speculates that Nietzsche might have been what is called a lucid dreamer, a person who is always aware of dreaming: Young: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art, pp. 155 f., footnote 9. Whether or not this was actually true of Nietzsche is beside the point: but Nietzsche’s discussion of dream art does presuppose a view of dreams similar to this state.

365 His first example (GT 1, KSA 1, p. 26), clearly meant to be important, is a quotation from Wagner: “Mein Freund, das grad’ ist Dichters Werk/dass er sein Träumen deut’ und merk’/Glaubt mir, des Menschen wahrster Wahn/wird ihm im Traume aufgethan:/all’ Dichtkunst und Poëterei/ist nichts als Wahrtraum-Deuterei.” This is from the third act of Die Meistersinger. The translation offered by Kaufmann reads: “The poet’s task is this, my friend,/to read his dreams and comprehend./The truest human fancy seems/to be revealed to us in dreams:/all poems and versification/are but true dreams interpretation.”
Many of the basic notions are inherited from Schopenhauer: the division of the arts into music (which expresses the metaphysical core of the world)\textsuperscript{366} and mimetic art (which gives an objective depiction of the phenomenal world) echoes Schopenhauer; the image of the world as an irrational, violent striving that manifests itself as a beautiful phenomenal world is reminiscent of Schopenhauer’s will and representation. But Nietzsche has nonetheless left Schopenhauer behind him at several important points. For although the tearing of the veil of Maya is an important aspect of Schopenhauer’s philosophy as well, it is not achieved through art. Through compassion (\textit{Mitleid}), one realizes intuitively that the boundaries that separate individuals are illusory; in the face of someone else’s suffering, one realizes that I am truly one with the sufferer. The ascetic, of course, has seen even more, and has reached a full understanding of the nature of the world.

To Nietzsche, neither compassion nor asceticism can serve as a means to the suspension of individuality. The intuitive insight into the truth of pessimism that constitutes Schopenhauer’s asceticism is absorbed by the Dionysian in his system. Nietzsche holds that the Greeks created their gods out of a deep need.\textsuperscript{367} Just what this need is disclosed by the myth of how king Midas tricked and caught the satyr Silenus, traditionally one of Dionysus’s followers. As a ransom to set Silenus free, Midas wanted to know the key to happiness for man. Reluctantly, the satyr revealed the answer: there can be no happiness for man; the best thing is never to have been born; the second best is to die immediately:

\begin{quote}
Elendes Eintagsgeschlecht, des Zufalls Kinder und der Mühsal, was zwingst du mich dir zu sagen, was nicht zu hören für dich das Erspriesslichest ist? Das Al- lerbeste ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zu sein, nichts zu sein. Das Zweitbeste aber ist für dich – bald zu sterben.\textsuperscript{368}
\end{quote}

This myth is how the Dionysian manifests itself when it forms a synthesis with the Apollonian. As we have had reason to note on a number of occasions, German nineteenth century philosophy had a term for this notion; that term is \textit{Pessimismus}. And unless we keep in mind that this is what pessimism meant in

\textsuperscript{366} See GT 16, KSA 1, p. 107: “Wir verstehen also, nach der Lehre Schopenhauer’s, die Musik als die Sprache des Willens unmittelbar und fühlen unsere Phantasie angeregt, jene zu uns redende, unsichtbare und doch so lebhaft bewegte Geisterwelt zu gestalten und sie in einem analogen Beispield uns zu verkörpern.”

\textsuperscript{367} GT 3, KSA 1, p. 34: “Derselbe Trieb, der sich in Apollo versinnlichte, hat überhaupt jene olympische Welt geboren, und in diesem Sinne darf uns Apollo als Vater derselben gelten. Welches war das ungeheuere Bedürfniss, aus dem eine so leuchtende Gesellschaft olympischer Wesen entsprang?” “For the same impulse that embodied itself in Apollo gave birth to the entire Olympian world, and in this sense Apollo is its father. What terrific need was it that could produce such an illustrious company of Olympian beings?”

\textsuperscript{368} GT 3, KSA 1, p. 35: “Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and of misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born: not to be, to be \textit{nothing}. But the second best for you is – to die soon.”
Nietzsche’s day (in a philosophical context at least) we simply cannot get his relation to pessimism right.369

To Nietzsche, the pessimistic Dionysian truth represents the pinnacle of wisdom of the Greeks, and there are a number of ancient thinkers who express the same idea: Theognis, Herodotus, Plutarch, etc.370 Amongst Nietzsche scholars, there is a fair amount of discussion about the most likely source for Nietzsche’s day (in a philosophical context at least) we simply cannot get his relation to pessimism right.

369 In an otherwise well-argued study on Die Geburt der Tragödie that stresses the importance of the philosophy of F. A. Lange to Nietzsche, James I. Porter maintains that pessimism is an ambiguous term: “‘Pessimism’ is plainly an ambiguous term; indeed, it is doubtful whether it has any literal meaning, not least because Nietzsche (I believe) feels that pessimism is an incoherent position for anyone to hold.” James I. Porter: The Invention of Dionysus. An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy, p. 174, footnote 21. Somewhat later he adds: “The labels ‘pessimism’ and ‘optimism’ are susceptible to endless stipulation, which is one of their weaknesses.” Ibid., p. 175, footnote 22. But it is not correct that ‘pessimism’ was ambiguous or susceptible to endless stipulation in Nietzsche’s day. On the contrary: the usage was remarkably consistent. Porter fails to see this as his book contains no discussion of Hartmann or any of the other pessimistic or anti-pessimistic writers among Nietzsche’s contemporaries. On the whole, I believe Porter’s interpretation to be correct: Nietzsche is attempting to (re-)create a set of myths necessary for man to live, and he is doing this with Lange’s Begriffsdichtung as a model. But Porter does not see that the problem that the Begriffsdichtung is a solution to is the philosophical pessimism of Schopenhauer and of Hartmann.

370 Theognis, one of the Ancient writers for whom Nietzsche harboured a professional interest as a philologist, is an important example: “It is best for all mortals not to be born and not to look upon the rays of the piercing sun, but once born it is best to pass the gates of Hades as quickly as possible and to lie under a large heap of earth.” Theognis, lines 425–428, in: Greek Elegiac Poetry. From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. & tr. Douglas E. Gerber (Cambridge, Ma. & London, 1966), p. 235. Nietzsche owned two volumes of Theognis in Greek, one of which contains the elegiac poetry: Nietzsche’s persönliche Bibliothek, p. 591. A similar notion is expressed by Herodotus: “She then in her joy at what was done and said, came before the image of the goddess and prayed that her sons Cleobis and Biton, who had done such great honour to the goddess, should be given the best boon that a man may receive. After the prayer the young men sacrificed and ate of the feast; then they lay down and never rose up more, but here ended their lives.” Herodotus: Histories, The Loeb Classical Library, tr. A. D. Godley (Cambridge, Ma. & London, 1893), book I, § 32, p. 37. Nietzsche bought an eleven-volume edition of Herodotus’ Histories in German translation in 1875 (Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek, pp. 287 ff.), but is of course likely to have read him before that. Plutarch is another example: Nietzsche possessed several volumes of Plutarch’s collected works in an edition published by Metzler, including the 22nd volume, translated by Johann Christian Felix Bähr, which includes the “Trostschritt an Apollonius”. Nietzsche’s persönliche Bibliothek, p. 486. In this text, Plutarch relates the legend of Mida and Silenus: “O vergänglicher Saame eines müheseligen und harten Schicksals, warum zwingt Ihr mich Das zu sagen, was nicht zu wissen Euch nützlicher ist; denn durch Unkunde der eignen Noth wird das Leben frei von Betrübniß; für den Menschen aber ist es keineswegs das Beste, geboren zu werden und an der Natur des Höchsten Antheil zu nehmen; das Beste für Alle und Jede ist nicht geboren zu werden; das Zweite nach Diesem und das Erste unter den übrigen Dingen, die dem Menschen zustehen, ist, sobald als möglich nach der Geburt, wieder zu sterben.”, Plutarch: “Trostschritt an Apollonius”, in Plutarch’s moralische Schriften, III, tr. Joh. Christian Felix Bähr, in: Plutarch’s Werke, vol. 22 (Stuttgart, 1829), p. 330. (“Ephemeral offspring of a travelling genius, and of harsh fortune, why do you force me to speak of what it were better for you men not to know? For a life spent in ignorance of one’s woes is most free from grief. But for men it is utterly impossible that they should obtain the best thing of all, or even have any share in its nature (for the best thing for all men and women is not to be born); however, the next best thing to this, and the first of those to which man can attain, is, after being born, to die as quickly as possible.” Plutarch: “A Letter to Apollonius”, 27d–e, in: Moralia, vol. II, tr. Frank Cole Babbitt, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Ma. & London, 1962).)
Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{371} But to Nietzsche the point is precisely that it is a piece of knowledge common to all Greeks. Greek culture, Greek art and Greek philosophy are saturated with the pessimistic Dionysian truth.\textsuperscript{372}

Nietzsche gives four examples of the Dionysian myth, two ancient and two modern. Sophocles’ Oedipus tragedies and Shakespeare’s \textit{Hamlet} are cited as examples of a version of the Dionysian myth in praise of passivity, whereas Aeschylus’ \textit{Prometheus Bound} exemplifies an active variety of the myth. Wagner’s \textit{Tristan und Isolde} is quoted in another context to show that the spirit of Greek tragedy is present in Wagner’s dramas as well. Oedipus, Hamlet, Prometheus, and Tristan and Isolde have two things in common, and these two things should help us understand what the function of the Dionysian is and in what relation it stands to pessimism. These tragic figures have all sinned against nature, and as a result of that sin they possess a privileged knowledge of the world’s essence and man’s lot. Oedipus, Nietzsche says, can solve the riddle of nature because he has sinned against the holiest commands of nature by murdering his father and marrying his mother:


What, then, is this Dionysian wisdom of Oedipus? Oedipus gives vent to a notion of life that echoes the myth of Silenus, and I will argue that this is why Nietzsche cites him as an example. In \textit{Oedipus at Colonus}, Sophocles’ last tragedy, he has Oedipus lament existence: “Not to be born comes first by every reckoning; and once one has appeared, to go back to where one came from as soon

\begin{footnotes}
\item[371] David E. Cartwright points to a fragment of Aristotle’s as a possible source: “Reversing Silenus’ Wisdom”, \textit{Nietzsche-Studien} 20 (1991), p. 312, footnote 8. Barbara von Reibnitz mentions Aristotle too (Fragment 40 in Rose’s edition of \textit{Aristotelis Fragmenta} (1870) that Nietzsche used) but she also points to Nietzsche’s interest in the earlier versions of this judgment on life’s value, for example in Theognis; Reibnitz, pp. 127–30. We have seen that Nietzsche is actually quoting Aristotle’s version of the myth of Silenus in \textit{Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens} (GG, KSA 1, p. 588) from December 1870.
\item[372] In \textit{Schopenhauer als Erzieher}, written two years after \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie}, Nietzsche states that all Greek philosophers really say the same thing: “wenn man seine Ohren etwas aufmacht, sagen sie alle dasselbe.” SE 3, KSA 1, p. 361.
\item[373] GT 9, KSA 1, p. 67: “It is this insight that I find expressed in that horrible triad of Oedipus’ destinies: the same man who solves the riddle of nature – that Sphinx of two species – also must break the most sacred natural orders by murdering his father and marrying his mother. indeed, the myth seems to wish to whisper to us that wisdom, and particularly Dionysian wisdom, is an unnatural abomination; that he who by means of his knowledge plunges nature into the abyss of destruction must also suffer the dissolution of nature in his own person.”
\end{footnotes}
as possible is the next best thing.” This, I take it, is the Dionysian wisdom of Oedipus. He has reached this insight that it would be better not to exist by breaking against the order of nature. His blindness is one part of the price he has to pay for this, but the weight of the Dionysian wisdom is no less of a burden. The Dionysian wisdom is contrary to nature. It expresses an insight that, if it were to be universally recognised, would lead to the extinction of mankind.

Nietzsche’s interpretation of Hamlet will be dealt with at length in section 5.2 below, but it is clear that Hamlet too possesses an insight that non-existence is preferable to existence. In a pessimistic context, “to be or not to be” can hardly be interpreted in any other way. Like Oedipus, he owes this insight to the unavenged murder of his father and the subsequent unlawful remarriage of his mother to his father’s killer. The fact that Hamlet, unlike Oedipus, is not the perpetrator of these deeds is comparatively unimportant.

Prometheus exemplifies an active form of the Dionysian myth. He too has sinned against nature. His fate is interpreted as a justification of human evil (“Rechtfertigung des menschlichen Uebels”) and is furthermore an expression of the suffering inherent in the essence of the world (“das Unheil im Wesen der Dinge”). Having rebelled against Zeus by giving the fire to mankind he is fettered to a rock as punishment. As a result of his rebellion, he too has been endowed with knowledge of the world. Just like Oedipus, his knowledge is of the kind that one is better off not having. This is in particular illustrated by Io, who finds Prometheus and implores him to reveal the goal of her wanderings. Prometheus is reluctant to do so: “Ignorance of this were better for thee than to know thereof.” But like Midas in the myth of Silenus, Io persists and is finally told of the sufferings that lay in wait for her. This puts Io in a state of despair: “What gain have I then in life? Why did I not hurl myself amain from this rugged rock, that so I had been dashed to earth and freed from all my sufferings? Better it were to die once for all than linger out my days in misery.”


375 This use of Oedipus as a symbol of pessimism is rooted in the pessimist tradition. Oedipus’ lament is one of many literary examples that Schopenhauer quotes to support his notion of life’s suffering and nothingness: W II, chapter 46, pp. 687 f. And Eduard von Hartmann cites Oedipus at Colonus as an example of the resigned wisdom that characterises mankind in its final stage, once all illusions have been seen through: “Dann wird sie in jener erhabenen Melancholie, welche man bei Genies oder auch bei geistig hochstehenden Greisen gewöhnlich findet, gleichsam wie ein verklärter Geist über ihrem eigenen Leibe schweben, und wie Oedipus auf Kolonos in dem vorgefühlten Frieden des Nichtseins die Leiden des Seins gleichsam nur noch als fremde fühlen, nicht mehr ein Leid, sondern nur noch ein Mitleid mit sich selbst.” Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 625.

376 And of course Hamlet is interpreted as an ally by more or less all of the pessimists. A number of examples are given in section 5.2 below.

377 GT 9, KSA 1, p. 69: “The misfortune in the nature of things”.


379 Aeschylus, lines 747–751, p. 281.
knowledge of Io’s fate that Prometheus imparts to her thus makes her realise that death would be preferable to life.

The Dionysian is not equivalent to the content of the Dionysian knowledge. The Dionysian is not a philosophical notion, it is not pessimism. The Dionysian is a Naturtrieb, a striving to dissolve the limits of individuality and to become one with the world. It can manifest itself as sexuality and as intoxication, but also as music. But when attempting to give a conceptual content to the Dionysian, Nietzsche draws on myths and literary themes that express a form of pessimism. All of the examples that Nietzsche uses contain central characters who explicitly claim to prefer non-existence over existence. Nietzsche’s notion of the Dionysian is thus very similar to the asceticism in Schopenhauer’s philosophy: both concepts denote an intuitive understanding of the world based on an insight that transcends the phenomenal world; and both concepts describe an insight that, if translated into philosophy, corresponds to pessimism.380

This is evident from Nietzsche’s brief discussion of Tristan und Isolde in Die Geburt der Tragödie. This is a work for which Nietzsche retained great respect even when he had come to consider Wagner’s other works to be an extremely dangerous manifestation of a pathological spirit.381 In Die Geburt der Tragödie, it functions as Nietzsche’s prime example of a modern tragedy in which the spirit that allowed Greek tragedy to justify existence takes form again. Nietzsche maintains that there could be a form of true musicians to whom music is the first language, and who thereby are capable of judging music directly, without the need of scenic action and images.

An diese ächten Musiker richte ich die Frage, ob sie sich einen Menschen denken können, der den dritten Act von “Tristan und Isolde” ohne alle Beihilfe von Wort und Bild rein als ungeheuren symphonischen Satz zu perzipiren im Stande wäre, ohne unter einem krampfartigen Ausspannen aller Seelenflügel zu verathmen? Ein Mensch, der wie hier das Ohr gleichsam an die Herzkammer des Weltwillens gelegt hat, der das rasende Begehren zum Dasein als donnern-

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380 This, I take it, is why Giorgio Colli has claimed that Schopenhauer’s importance to Die Geburt der Tragödie does not consist in Nietzsche using the rational structure of his metaphysics, but that Schopenhauer functioned as a gateway to a mystical experience of the world: “Difatti non è stata la costruzione razionale del filosofo tedesco ad agire in modo decisivo su Nietzsche: Schopenhauer è il tramite di un’altra esperienza, è il portatore della visione del mondo di un’interna civiltà.” (“In fact it is not the rational construction of the German philosopher that has a decisive effect on Nietzsche: Schopenhauer is the rite of passage to another experience, he is the bringer of the vision of the world of an entire civility.”) Giorgio Colli: Scritti su Nietzsche (1980; Milano, 1995), p. 18.

What Nietzsche describes here is an exact counterpart to the experience of the Schopenhauerian ascetic. Like the ascetic, the person capable of fully understanding Wagner’s music will feel the infinite suffering of the Ur-Eine, and this will be a motive for inaction. It will be too painful an experience for any human to bear. This would be the effect of the Dionysian, if it were not tempered by the Apollonian. The Apollonian restores our belief in the individuality of the tragic hero: it restores our belief that Isolde’s longing to be united with Tristan in the eternal night of death the fate of an individual – a particularly moving fate to be sure, but still the fate of an individual. And this is precisely what it is not, on Nietzsche’s account. To him it is a description of mankind’s fate enshrouded in a tragic myth. Nietzsche quotes Isolde’s last lines and characterises them as a metaphysical swan song in which the Dionysian wisdom is turned into an image through Apollonian craft: “In des Wonnemeeres/wogendem Schwall,/in der Duft-Wellen tönendem Schall,/in des Weltathems/wehendem All – /ertrinken –/unbewusst – höchste Lust!” Isolde’s wish to cease to be as an individual is the mythical counterpart to Schopenhauer’s ascetic breaking free from the will to live. If her swan song is translated into philosophy then the result is akin to Schopenhauerian pessimism.

Our discussion of the examples that Nietzsche gives of the Dionysian myth in Greek and modern tragedy thus leads us to conclude that the Dionysian, when it forms a synthesis with the Apollonian, manifests itself as a myth that expresses a mythical knowledge that corresponds to Schopenhauerian pessimism. But Schopenhauerian pessimism is not a position that Nietzsche is satisfied with. Nietzsche holds the Dionysian knowledge to have been universally shared by the Greek artists and thinkers. They needed a means to cope with this knowledge. For at the same time as the Dionysian truth is an expression of the highest wisdom of the Greeks, it is also an insight that they had to overcome in order to be able to live. The Greeks invented their gods out of necessity: in the presence of such gods, life is worth while; therefore, they had to be invented.

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382 GT 21, KSA 1, p. 135: “To these genuine musicians I direct the question whether they can imagine a human being who would be able to perceive the third act of Tristan und Isolde, without any aid of word and image, purely as a tremendous symphonic movement, without expiring in a spasmodic unharnessing of the all the wings of the soul? Suppose a human being has thus put his ear, as it were, to the heart chamber of the world will and felt the roaring desire for existence pouring from there into all the veins of the world, as a thundering current or as the gentlest brook, dissolving into a mist – how could he fail to break suddenly?”

383 GT 22, KSA 1, p. 141: “In the rapture ocean’s/billowing roll,/in the fragrance waves’/ringing sound,/in the world breath’s/wafting whole –/to drown, to sink –/unconscious – highest joy!”

384 I would say, though, that Tristan’s and Isolde’s duet in the second act is an even better example of the tragic myth. Isolde’s “Der uns vereint,/den ich dir bot,/laß ihm uns weih’n,/dem süßen Tod!”, and their “Du Isolde,/Tristan ich,/nicht mehr Tristan,/nicht Isolde” capture the will to cease existing and to suspend the limit between their individualities better to my mind. Richard Wagner: Tristan und Isolde, act III, in: Dichtungen und Schriften, vol. IV, pp. 52 and 53.
The gods are a manifestation of the Apollonian. They justify the suffering of man; because of them Silenus’s judgement is reversed: in a world which contains the beauty of the Greek gods, the worst thing must be to die immediately, and the second worst to die at all.\textsuperscript{385} Apollo and the other gods were invented to make life appear worth living. The myth makes life worth while. Normally, life seems to us more valuable than the dream, but in a sense this is not true. For the \textit{Ur-Eine} strives to manifest itself as a beautiful illusion, \textit{ein schöner Schein}. The dream-like illusion of tragedy, where the Dionysian has spurred the Apollonian to its extreme, is so beautiful that it makes us forget that life is not in itself worth living. The beauty of the Apollonian form seduces us into an affirmation of life in spite of the pessimistic Dionysian truth.\textsuperscript{386}

In tragedy, the Dionysian element suspends the \textit{principio individuationis}, making the spectator become one with the chorus and with the other spectators, indeed with the world. But the Apollonian recreates individuality; to be precise, it recreates the individuality of the tragic hero. Thus it fools us into the belief that the fate of the hero is of direct relevance to the hero only. Through this belief we can affirm life in spite of our knowledge that non-existence really is preferable.\textsuperscript{387} The stronger the Dionysian is, the stronger the Apollonian has to grow, and the more beautiful will the synthesis become:

\begin{quote}
Der Mythus schützt uns vor der Musik, wie er ihr anderseits erst die höchste Freiheit giebt. Dafür verleiht die Musik, als Gegengeschenk, dem tragischen Mythus eine so eindringliche und überzeugende metaphysische Bedeutsamkeit, wie sie Wort und Bild, ohne jene einzige Hülfe, nie zu erreichen vermögen; und insbesondere überkommt durch sie den tragischen Zuschauer gerade jenes sichere Vorgefühl einer höchsten Lust, zu der der Weg durch Untergang und Verneinung führt, so dass er zu hören meint, als ob der innerste Abgrund der Dinge zu ihm vernehmlich spräche.\textsuperscript{388}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{385} GT 3, KSA 1, p. 36: “das Allerschlimmste sei für sie, bald zu sterben, das Zweiterschlimmste, überhaupt zu sterben”.

\textsuperscript{386} Margot Fleischer characterises Nietzsche’s metaphysics in \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie} as “Erleösungsmetaphysik”, a metaphysics of redemption. But in spite of similarities to the redemption in Schopenhauer and Wagner (Fleischer points to the redemption through love in \textit{Tristan und Isolde}), Nietzsche’s redemption is purely aesthetical and does not, as do Wagner’s and Schopenhauer’s, commence with death. Fleischer: “Dionysos als Ding an sich”, p. 87.


\textsuperscript{388} GT 21, KSA 1, pp. 134 f.: “The myth protects us against the music, while on the other hand it alone gives music the highest freedom. In return, music imparts to the tragic myth an intense and convincing metaphysical significance that word and image without this singular help could never have attained. And above all, it is through music that the tragic spectator is overcome by an assured premonition of a highest pleasure attained through destruction and negation, so he feels as if the innermost abyss of things spoke to him perceptibly.”
The profounder the pessimistic insight communicated through the Dionysian is, the stronger is the effect of the tragedy on the spectators. And the stronger the effect, the more attractive it will make life appear. The insight that non-existence would be preferable to existence therefore leads to the affirmation of life. The intuitive insight that corresponds to philosophical pessimism has to be overcome. But in order for man to be able to overcome it, it has to grow strong, it has to be affirmed. If the pessimistic insight dies out, the result is as we shall see that pessimism becomes true. Life can be justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon, that is: through art. In itself life is not worth living. And if art is removed from the picture, the only thing that remains is the truth about the value of life. The greatest danger to the pessimistic element in art is the optimism inherent in science. On Nietzsche’s account, that optimism is embodied by Socrates.

Optimism, Socratic Science, and the Death of Tragedy

Schopenhauer and Hartmann both value knowledge highly. Philosophers tend to do that. To both of them, the pursuit of knowledge leads to a bleak picture of human existence, but both of them find that pursuit worth while nonetheless. Even if it makes us realise that life is necessarily unhappy and that any happiness that we might believe that we experience is illusory (Schopenhauer) or at best a small amount of happiness mixed with an immeasurably greater amount of pain (Hartmann), it is still preferable to seek knowledge than not to. To both of them, knowledge is more important than happiness, indeed than life. Nietzsche differs from the pessimists in this respect. To him, knowledge is not to be sought at any cost. To him, life is more valuable than the quest for truth. The search for knowledge must be subordinated to life. This is the reason for Nietzsche’s animosity towards science in the early phase. It is not an outright denial of the value of science, but rather a warning of the consequences when science and the scientific ideal are given a free rein and are applied to the wrong areas of life.\(^{389}\)

When tragedy died it did so at the hands of a man who elevated the scientific spirit to an ideal. That man was Socrates. But Socrates was not alone in perpetrating this deed. He had an ally in Euripides, and it is with his tragedies that the downfall of tragedy begins. The tragic heroes of Aeschylus and Sophocles are Apollonian manifestations of the Dionysian, Nietzsche states. They are masks of Dionysus. The tragic heroes of Euripides are a mask in a different sense:

\(^{389}\) Cf. Alexander Nehamas: *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* (1985; Cambridge, Ma. & London, 2002), p. 55: “Nietzsche claims that many of our most central beliefs are false, and that, far from hurting us, these beliefs have so far produced some of the greatest benefits.”
On Nietzsche’s account, the Socratic aesthetic (*aesthetischer Sokratismus*) is very simple. It is the application of an optimistic, scientific way of thinking on art. Its first commandment is that art has to be comprehensible: “alles muss verständig sein, um schön zu sein.” Consequently, the only form of art that Socrates understood was Aesop’s fables. How could he have understood tragedy, Nietzsche asks, where there is so little reason? “Man vergegenwärtige sich nur die Consequenzen der sokratischen Sätze: ‘Tugend ist Wissen; es wird nur gesündigt aus Unwissenheit; der Tugendhafte ist der Glückliche’: in diesen drei Grundformen des Optimismus liegt der Tod der Tragödie.” Optimism turns the virtuous hero into a dialectician, and creates a need for a visible tie between virtue and knowledge, between belief and morals; and it introduces moral concepts such as poetic justice and *deus ex machina* into art. But true art, and particularly Dionysian art, is not and cannot be moral. This made Socratic optimism drive out the Dionysian element of tragedy.

Socrates represents the type of theoretical man. This is a type of man that just like the artist is characterised by his enjoyment of the things at hand which makes his life meaningful to him. If it were not for this enjoyment, his life would be marred by a practical pessimism, Nietzsche writes. The theoretical man is driven by a profound *Wahnvorstellung*: he believes that thinking can follow the thread of causality into the deepest abyss of being, and not only understand, but actually can rectify being. Through the belief that knowledge can grasp being as such, its practitioners are driven towards the limits of the knowable. But when they reach these limits, science must fail. Seeing that logic breaks down at these limits, a new form of knowledge dawns of the theoretical man: “*die tragische Erkenntnis*, die, um nur ertragen zu werden, als Schutz und Heilmittel die Kunst braucht.” Although Nietzsche does not expound on the nature and content of the tragic knowledge, his discussion of the relation of art to knowledge in the *Nachlaß* can give us some clues. Pessimism, we have seen Nietzsche

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390 GT 12, KSA 1, p. 83: “Even Euripides was, in a sense, only a mask: the deity that spoke through him was neither Dionysus or Apollo, but an altogether newborn demon, called *Socrates*. This is the new opposition: the Dionysian and the Socratic – and the art of Greek tragedy was wrecked on this.”

391 GT 12, KSA 1, p. 85: “To be beautiful everything must be intelligible”.

392 GT 14, KSA 1, p. 94: “Consider the consequences of the Socratic maxims: ‘Virtue is knowledge; man sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy.’ In these three forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy.” Interestingly, the preliminary version of this passage in ST reads: “In diesen drei Grundformen des Optimismus ruht der Tod der pessimistischen Tragödie.” ST, KSA 1, p. 547.

393 GT 14, KSA 1, p. 95: “Die optimistische Dialektik treibt mit der Geissel ihrer Syllogismen die *Musik* aus der Tragödie: d.h. sie zerstört das Wesen der Tragödie, welches sich einzig als eine Manifestation und Verbillichung dionysischer Zustände, als sichtbare Symbolisirung der Musik, als die Traumwelt eines dionysischen Rausches interpretiren lässt.”

394 GT 15, KSA 1, p. 101: “*tragische Erkenntnis*, which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy.”
state on a number of occasions, is a result of knowledge, of knowledge of the illogicalness of world order,\textsuperscript{395} and that hence art is needed as a vent that reduces the pressure of that knowledge.\textsuperscript{396} In the light of that discussion, an interpretation of the tragic knowledge as the pessimistic knowledge that the world is the \textit{Ur-Eine} and that existence therefore cannot be justified seems reasonable.

With the death of Socrates, science becomes a form of art that protects the theoretical man against the tragic knowledge that the collision with the limits of knowledge caused. For the dying Socrates becomes a myth of science. He was elevated above fear of death through knowledge and reason, and this makes him present existence as comprehensible and thus justified ("das Dasein als begreiflich und damit gerechtfertigt erscheinen zu machen")\textsuperscript{397}. After Socrates, wave after wave of philosophy schools were founded, spinning a net of thoughts over the globe. If, Nietzsche writes, this energy (\textit{Kraft}) had not been put to use in the service of knowledge, but instead had been used to further the practical and egoistic goals of states and individuals, then it had resulted in a practical pessimism. This practical pessimism is exemplified by how the Fijians, according to Nietzsche, kill their parents and friends out of a sense of duty:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{[E]}\textit{in praktischer Pessimismus, der selbst eine grausenhafte Ethik des Völkermordes aus Mitleid erzeugen könnte – der übrigens überall in der Welt vorhanden ist und vorhanden war, wo nicht die Kunst in irgend welchen Formen, besonders als Religion und Wissenschaft, zum Heilmittel und zur Abwehr jenes Pesthauchs erschienen ist.}\textsuperscript{398}
\end{quote}

We have already encountered these Fijians in section 3.2. In the fragment where Nietzsche discusses them, they are contrasted with the Indians, the Jews, and the Greeks. The Fijians kill their friends and family; the Indians drown themselves in the Ganges; the Jews sublimate the practical pessimism into an optimistic religion, whereas the Greeks have the strongest means against it in tragedy. In \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie}, Nietzsche makes clear that science can function as an art too. It is not as efficient as tragedy, but it is better than nothing.

The term ‘practical pessimism’ is probably an allusion to Hartmann, according to whom, as we have seen, the progress of the Unconscious leads to the

\textsuperscript{395} For example the fragment NF 3 [51], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 74 (quoted in section 3.2 above): “Der Pessimismus ist die Folge der Erkenntnß vom absolut Unlogischen der Weltordnung”.

\textsuperscript{396} See NF 3 [45], winter 1869-70–early 1870, KSA 7, p. 73 (quoted in section 3.2 above): “Die Tragödie ist das Ventil der mystisch-pessimistischen Erkenntnß, dirigirt vom Willen.”

\textsuperscript{397} GT 15, KSA 1, p. 99.

\textsuperscript{398} GT 15, KSA 1, p. 100: “a practical pessimism that might even have generated a gruesome ethic of genocide motivated by pity, and which incidentally is, and was, present in the world wherever art did not appear in some form – especially as religion and science – as a remedy and a preventive for this breath of pestilence.” As observed above, GT 15 contains three references to a practical pessimism. The passage quoted is followed by a reflection of Socrates the theoretical optimist as the opposite of practical pessimism (p. 100); and a little earlier Nietzsche had observed that theoretical man just like the artist is protected “vor der praktischen Ethik des Pessimismus” by his fondness of the things with which he occupies himself (p. 98).
gradual disappearance of art, and finally to a form of cosmic suicide out of compassion. In a sense, Nietzsche gives Hartmann right. In a society with no art, there will be a collective wish to auto-annihilation. And as the following discussion will demonstrate, Nietzsche seems to consider the development of our culture into such a state as a distinct possibility. But rather than accepting this development, Nietzsche implores us to seek protection against it. This means reviving that ultimate form of protection that the Greeks had.

Birth and Rebirth of Tragedy: Greek and Wagnerian Tragedy

Towards the end of the book, Nietzsche distinguishes between three types of cultures: the Socratic or Alexandrine, the artistic or Hellenic, and the tragic or Buddhist cultures. These cultures can be said to represent the three possible ways to handle the problem of pessimism that Nietzsche discerns. With a very Hartmannian turn of phrase, Nietzsche characterises them as Illusionsstufen, stages or grades of illusions.399 But although Nietzsche’s use of that term is indebted to Hartmann, Nietzsche deviates from him in a number of ways. Unlike Hartmann, Nietzsche does not regard the development through these stages as teleological. They are connected, but not as stages in a gradual development.

Nietzsche does not expound on the Buddhist culture in Die Geburt der Tragödie, but a number of Nachlaß fragments allow us to create a sketch of it. We have seen that Nietzsche holds Buddhism to be a religion without art. Its quietism is a result of this: it is a pessimistic religion without the means to channel the pessimistic insight. This makes it a tragic culture.400 The tragic knowledge is the knowledge that theoretical man finds when he is confronted with the limits of the knowable. He finds that his science cannot help him; and as we have noted above, it seems likely that the content of this knowledge is that the world is the Ur-Eine and consequently that pessimism is true, that existence cannot be

399 Porter regards this term as an ironic allusion to Schopenhauer: “‘Grades of illusion’ [Stufen der Illusion] all too vividly recalls Schopenhauer’s ‘grades of objectivation’ [Stufen der Objektivation] (IV. 1.1, §25); Nietzsche has made Schopenhauer’s metaphysics into the illusion that it is.” Porter: The Invention of Dionysus, p. 190, footnote 5. This seems to me a far-fetched interpretation that pays too little attention to the context where Nietzsche introduces the concept. Since Nietzsche (but not Schopenhauer) is using the term to designate different stages in the development of cultures, and since Hartmann, who as we have seen is important for Nietzsche’s development around this time, uses the same term in roughly the same way, it seems more reasonable to assume that it is Hartmann that Nietzsche is alluding to. Especially if one bears in mind that Nietzsche’s concern is to avoid the development towards a disillusioned stage where nothing remains to man other than the will to annihilation. Furthermore, Porter’s quote is quite inexact: Nietzsche uses the form “Illusionsstufen” (GT 18, KSA 1, p. 116) which obviously does not recall Schopenhauer’s “Stufen der Objektivation”. As far as I can see Nietzsche is nowhere using the form “Stufen der Illusion”.

400 The difference between a tragic culture and tragic art, i.e. tragedy, is crucial here. The tragic culture is characterised by its tragic knowledge. Tragic culture cannot channel its tragic knowledge since it has no art. One could therefore just as well say that it is the absence of a tragic art that makes the tragic culture tragic.
justified. Art is, as we have seen, needed as a means of protection against this knowledge.

According to Nietzsche, Western culture is Alexandrine: it is characterised by its belief in science, in rationality and in knowledge. Art is possible in such a culture. We have seen that there is an artistic element in science that led to the formation of philosophy schools after the example of Socrates. But the primary artistic incarnation of the Alexandrine culture is the opera. Whereas tragedy has its origin in the dark pessimistic abysses of the Dionysian, opera is the artistic incarnation of the optimism of the theoretical man: its presupposition is that any feeling human is an artist.401

To Nietzsche, Wagner’s music drama obviously does not belong in this category (and Wagner himself had ceased to classify his own works as operas after Lohengrin).402 On the contrary, Wagner is the device with the help of which the Alexandrine culture can be overcome. For although opera has managed to weaken the power of Dionysus it has not been able to kill it off. From time to time, in Bach, in Beethoven, in Wagner, the demon of music climbs out of its abyss, and the Socratic optimism of the theoretical culture is powerless against it. German philosophy and German music have a common root in the tragic Weltanschauung, and in the Greek tragic culture there is the greatest example imaginable to follow.

The Alexandrine culture will, I take it that Nietzsche means, develop into a Buddhist culture if it follows its natural course. Two factors point in that direction. Firstly, optimism in the form of a belief in the power of science and knowledge spurs the theoretical man to seek knowledge, driving him towards the limits of the knowable. There, he will be confronted with the tragic knowledge that the world is an irrational striving and that science cannot help him. This is the insight that characterises the Buddhist culture. Secondly, the hostility to the Dionysian inherent in Alexandrine culture is a threat to art as such (this is implied in Die Geburt der Tragödie but becomes explicit in the first and second of the Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen).403 And the Buddhist culture is characterised by the absence of art, the absence of the one thing that can help us deal with the tragic knowledge. The Alexandrine culture thus carries the seed of a Buddhist culture in its bosom. The affirmation of the established order will eventually


402 Borchmeyer: Richard Wagner, p. 205.

403 I agree with Robert Rethy’s comment on music: “Music is in fact the generative power that gives birth, not only to tragedy, but to the whole art, even in some sense to man.” Robert Rethy: “The Tragic Affirmation of the Birth of Tragedy”, Nietzsche-Studien 17 (1988), p. 22. If Rethy’s interpretation is correct, then the threat to the Dionysian is a threat to all art, since music is the Dionysian art form.
lead to a development to a Buddhist culture. Another way of putting this is that
the affirmation of optimism will bring about pessimism.

But the Alexandrine culture could also, if the remnants of the Dionysian are
properly strengthened when they come to light, develop into a Hellenic culture. If the pessimistic elements of German culture are affirmed, they can be used to
overcome pessimism. And this, of course is Nietzsche’s task.\footnote{This was not
lost on his contemporaries. An important aspect of Wilamowitz-Möllendorff’s
attack on Nietzsche in his \textit{Zukunftspfologie}! was that Nietzsche had no right to take advantage of
the prestige of his professorship in a book that was an anti-scholarly work of art. Wilamowitz-
Möllendorff suspects that Nietzsche’s aim was to create a “dionysisch-apollinisches kunstwerk”
rather than “historie und kritik”, and adds that Nietzsche has every right to do this, as long as he
does not do it as a professor of philology. Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, p. 32.}
His book is not
a scholarly tract, but is primarily an action, a call to arms as it were. Nietzsche
holds that his day and age has a unique possibility to evolve into a Hellenic cul-
ture. The courage of Kant and Schopenhauer and the musical genius of Wagner
are means to counter the Socratic dominance over our culture. As Nietzsche’s
discussion of \textit{Tristan und Isolde} (referred to above) makes clear, the Dionysian
finds a very strong expression in Wagner’s dramatic art.

Nietzsche’s hopes for a revitalising of German culture through Wagnerian
music drama are by no means an idea unique to him. Thomas Brobjer points to
Oswald Marbach’s lecture “Die Wiedergeburt der dramatischen Kunst durch
die Musik” as a possible source for Nietzsche.\footnote{Thomas H. Brobjer: “Sources of
and Influences on Nietzsche’s \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}”, \textit{Nietzsche-
Studien} 34 (2005), pp. 292 ff.}
This text contains a number of
similarities to Nietzsche in its views on the role of music and the choir in an-
cient drama, and on the need for a rebirth of the dramatic arts through Wagner;
furthermore, it was included in a book by Marbach that he sent to Nietzsche in
January or February 1870. But a more important example is Wagner himself. In
\textit{Beethoven} – an essay written in celebration of the centenary of Beethoven’s birth
in 1870, whose importance to \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie} has been stressed by a
number of commentators (including Brobjer) – Wagner writes: “Gewiß darf es
uns erscheinen, daß unsere Zivilisation, soweit sie namentlich auch den künstle-
rischen Menschen bestimmt, nur aus dem Geiste unserer Musik, der Musik,
welche Beethoven aus den Banden der Mode befreite, neu beseelt werden
könnte.”\footnote{“It seems certain to us that our civilisation, to the degree at least that it determines the artistic
man, could only be reanimated by the spirit of our music, the music that Beethoven liberated
from the chains of fashion.” Richard Wagner: \textit{Beethoven} (1870), in: \textit{Dichtungen und Schriften}, vol. IX,
gen deutlich von Wagners theoretischen Schriften, vor allem von \textit{Oper und Drama} (1851) und
\textit{Beethoven} (1870) inspiriert. Auch den Tribschener Gesprächen verdankt Nietzsche entschiedene
Anregungen, gerade was die griechische Tragödie betrifft.”} Although Wagner is not explicit about it, the context leaves no room
for doubt that it is through the spirit of his own music that modern civilisation
can be reanimated. Nietzsche was not only presented with a copy of the book:
as the diaries of Cosima Wagner make clear, Nietzsche also listened to Wagner
Very few of the building blocks of Die Geburt der Tragödie are unique. The notion of music as a direct representation of the world is borrowed from Schopenhauer, and is shared by Wagner. The notion of a rebirth of the spirit of Greek tragedy in Wagner’s music drama that will rejuvenate German culture has at least two precursors in Wagner’s and Marbach’s works referred to above. The concepts Dionysian and Apollonian have a fairly long history before Nietzsche. But the use of pessimism in forging together these elements into a whole is something unique. Pessimism is a threat to life. Still, it must be affirmed in order to be avoided. For the problem with optimism is really that it makes pessimism come true.

* * *

In conclusion to this section, let us make an attempt at an interpretative determination of how the Dionysian relates to the use of the concept pessimism in the tradition. Life is in itself not worth living; this is the problem that Nietzsche is struggling with in Die Geburt der Tragödie. Life is not worth living because the world is at bottom the Ur-Eine, an incessant striving without a goal; and this means that life, the phenomenal reality that the Ur-Eine manifests itself as, is ultimately suffering. Alluding to Eduard von Hartmann, Nietzsche describes the insight of these facts as practical pessimism, a state of mind characterised by feeling of meaninglessness that in its turn leads to a death-wish. Practical pessimism is the result of the absence of art since art has the power to channel the impact of the pessimistic insight. If we attempt to bring Nietzsche’s discussion in relation to the pessimistic tradition, we can conclude that the intellectual knowledge of the Ur-Eine and of life’s meaninglessness and suffering constitutes philosophical pessimism. But to Nietzsche, pessimism is primarily an existential rather than an intellectual problem. It is the practical rather than the philosophical pessimism that he is trying to come to terms with. Philosophical pessimism might lead to practical pessimism, Nietzsche seems to mean, but it can also – this is what Schopenhauer’s example can teach us – inspire valour and courage.408
Let us now see how Nietzsche’s concept of the Dionysian relates to the problem of pessimism. The Dionysian is a striving to suspend individuality, the *principio individuationis*. Unmediated, the Dionysian will manifest itself as sexuality. But it can also manifest itself as art, as music, which as we have seen is the Dionysian art form *par excellence*. Music suspends individuality and allows us (the listener, the musician, the composer) to become one with the *Ur-Eine*. If it were not for human imperfection, music would destroy us; if music could exert its full effect on us, the experience of the infinite suffering of the *Ur-Eine* would be unbearable. In tragedy, the Dionysian reaches its full strength. It can do that since the beauty of the Apollonian saves us from the impact of the Dionysian. In the synthesis with the Apollonian in tragedy, the Dionysian manifests itself as a myth that expresses the Dionysian truth that non-existence is preferable to existence.

The Dionysian truth is central to tragedy, and it corresponds to philosophical pessimism. Tragedy is thus the link that connects pessimism to the Dionysian. In tragedy, the Dionysian manifests itself as a myth that is equivalent to philosophical pessimism. The tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Shakespeare and Wagner all contain central characters that would prefer non-existence over existence. If Oedipus or Isolde were philosophers, and if they were writing in the 1870’s, they would be pessimists. The existence of the tragic hero cannot be justified; but his or her destiny justifies the existence as such. It is because of the pessimism of the characters in the tragedies that the spectators are saved from pessimism.

A *Nachlaß* fragment from shortly after *Die Geburt der Tragödie* gives a succinct description of the relation of philosophy to art and to knowledge. It shows just how great the distance is between Nietzsche and the pessimists.

> Das absolute Wissen führt zum *Pessimismus*: die Kunst ist das Heilmittel dagegen. Die Philosophie ist zur Bildung unentbehrlich, weil sie das *Wissen* in eine künstlerische Weltenkonzeption *hineinzieht* und sie dadurch veredelt.\(^{409}\)

The importance of philosophy does not consist in the truths that it entails, then, but in its inserting those truths in an artistic scheme. Philosophy ennobles knowledge, that is, by turning it into art. Philosophy can take the knowledge of the world that leads to pessimism and put it to use in an artistic scheme through which it becomes subordinated to life. Instead of leading to quietism or practical pessimism, pessimism can become an element in a life-affirming scheme. This is the task that Nietzsche set himself in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*.

In the beginning of this section we had reason to note that a number of scholars claim that *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is a pessimistic work, whereas others deny that this is the case. Whether or not Nietzsche was a pessimist when he

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\(^{409}\) NF 19 [52], summer 1872–beginning of 1873, KSA 7, p. 436: “Absolute knowledge leads to *pessimism*; art is the medicine against that. Philosophy is indispensable to *culture*, for it draws knowledge into an artistic conception of the world and thereby ennobles it.”
wrote *Die Geburt der Tragödie* obviously depends on how we understand the concept of pessimism. Given a modern interpretation of the concept, Nietzsche’s evident anti-optimism could be used to argue in favour of a classification of him as a pessimist. On the modern interpretation, an intermediary position between the two seems difficult to imagine. But this was not how Nietzsche’s contemporaries used the concept. Therefore I take the principal question to be what function the pessimistic element in the book has, rather than whether Nietzsche should be classified as a pessimist or not. Furthermore, the question whether Nietzsche should be described as a pessimist or not often fails to take into consideration that pessimism to Nietzsche has a practical and a theoretical aspect. In this he differs from the other thinkers who discuss the problem of pessimism. Nietzsche is struggling with the problem of practical pessimism, and therefore he seeks a totally different form of solution to the problem than the thinkers we have discussed in the first part of this study. Rather than simply accept or simply deny that non-existence is preferable to existence, he seeks to create a philosophy that allows us to affirm life although life is inherently unhappy and not worth living. In doing that, he attributes an important role to an equivalent of philosophical pessimism. Therefore I would rather describe Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* as an opponent to pessimism than as a pessimist. But he is an extremely insightful and sympathetic opponent of pessimism.
4. Nietzsche and Pessimism: 1872–78

The years after the publication of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* are an important time in Nietzsche’s development. Doubts that he had long harboured if his way of life and the general orientation of his thinking are right grew stronger. Yet he felt compelled to write two essays celebrating two figures who epitomise this way of life and this orientation of thought. His writings of this period are thus characterised by a strong ambivalence. On the one hand we will see that he deepens the discussion of certain themes from *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, but on the other hand he seems to find this discussion too narrow and restricting.

This chapter is divided into three parts. A discussion of pessimism in Nietzsche’s *Nachlaß* from the years 1872 to 1874 is followed by a section in which the four *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, the four essays on various cultural problems are addressed. Finally, the development of the discussion of pessimism is pursued to the year 1878.

4.1 Pessimism in the *Nachlaß*, 1872–1874

From c 1872 onwards, Nietzsche’s discussion of the impossibility of pessimism becomes less theoretical. The tendencies that we discerned in the preceding period, the greater prominence of pessimism in the *Nachlaß* as compared to the published works, the attempts to avoid the conclusions of pessimism in combination with a certain respect for the courage of the pessimists, etc. can still be seen during the period 1872–74. His arguments change character, though. They gradually come to be moral rather than metaphysical. As before, they are still aimed at the philosophy of Hartmann, rather than that of Schopenhauer; even when Nietzsche is not naming his opponent is it clear who he has in mind.

History, on Hartmann’s account, is driven by a gradual destruction of the illusions of mankind. Each stage in history is characterised by a set of illusions, and these correspond to the illusions of a stage in an individual’s life. Antiquity corresponds to childhood (they are characterised by the belief in an immanent happiness); the Middle Ages correspond to youth (belief in transcendent happiness); whereas the modern age corresponds to manhood (belief in the idea of progress, that is in an immanent happiness available to mankind through a common progress); and finally Hartmann envisions a future age that corresponds to old age (a melancholy wisdom after all illusions have been penetrated).

Although drawing a parallel between history and the stages in an individual’s life is far too unoriginal to prove conclusively that Nietzsche is attacking Hartmann, the context of this fragment leaves little doubt that Hartmann is in fact Nietzsche’s target. Not only is the fragment followed by countless others where Nietzsche alludes to key concepts of Hartmann’s philosophy (of which Weltprozess is the most frequent), he also explicitly attacks Hartmann, employing an argument that will later be used in a refined version in the second Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung. The problem with Hartmann’s philosophy, on Nietzsche’s account, is that it glorifies mediocrity. And Nietzsche’s criticism of mediocrity is based on the effect it has on modern culture as a whole. Dedicating oneself to the world process, which is the task that Hartmann sets the pessimists of his day, equals justifying the least challenging aspects of modern thinking.

Jeder Versuch, das Gegenwärtige als das Höchste zu begreifen, ruinirt die Gegenwart, weil er die vorbildliche Bedeutung des Geschichtlichen leugnet. Die schrecklichste Formel ist die Hartmannsche “sich dem Weltprozess hinzugeben”.

Wohin es führt, die Geschichte als einen Prozess anzusehen, zeigt E. von Hartmann p. 618 (woraus mir der ungeheure Erfolg klar wird). Die historische Ansicht verbrüdert sich hier mit dem Pessimismus: nun sehe man die Consequenzen!412

410 NF 29 [48], summer–autumn 1873, KSA 7, p. 646: “Against the parallel of history with youth, manhood and old age: there is not a trace of truth to it! Five to six thousand years is nothing, and particularly not a unity, since new peoples arise constantly and old ones go into hibernation. In the end it is not a matter of peoples, but of persons, the nationality is usually only the consequence of stiff government rules, i.e. a form of training through extensive violence and discipline, in combination with the constraint to marry, talk, and live together.”

411 Eduard von Hartmann: Die Philosophie des Unbewussten, chapter C XII.

412 NF 29 [51], summer–autumn 1873, KSA 7, p. 647: “Any attempt to interpret the present as the highest ruins the present, since it denies the importance of the past as an example. The most awful formula is Hartmann’s ‘to dedicate oneself to the world process’ /What it leads to when one regards history as a process is shown by E. v. Hartmann p. 618 (from whence his terrific success becomes clear). Here the notion of history fraternises with pessimism: and look at the consequences!”
This fragment allows us to pinpoint what aspects of Hartmann’s philosophy that attracted Nietzsche’s attention in this period. Nietzsche bought and read the first edition of Philosopie des Unbewussten in 1869, but sold his copy of the book in 1875.\(^\text{413}\) The editors of the critical edition of Nietzsche’s work assume that he used the fourth edition (1872) when preparing the second of the Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen. This assumption is shared by a number of scholars. But in this fragment at least, that clearly belongs to the preliminary sketches for that Betrachtung, Nietzsche is definitely referring to the first edition. For on page 618 of the first edition, we read:

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\text{Die Methode der Zukunft wird immer ausschliesslicher die inductiv-naturwissenschaftliche, und der Grundcharakter der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit nicht Vertiefung, sondern Verbreitung. So werden die Genies immer weniger Bedürfnis, und daher auch immer weniger vom Unbewussten geschaffen; wie die Gesellschaft durch den schwarzen Bürgerrock nivellirt ist, so steuern wir auch in geistiger Beziehung mehr und mehr auf eine Nivellirung zur gediegenen Mittelmässigkeit hin. […\ldots] Ein ähnliches Verhältniss findet bei der Kunst statt, obwohl diese für die Zukunft immer noch günstiger gestellt ist, als die Wissenschaft.}\(^\text{414}\)
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\(^{413}\) Nietzsche sold the book to C. Detloff’s Buchhandlung in Basel on June 16, 1875: see Nietzsche’s persönliche Bibliothek, p. 276.

\(^{414}\) Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 618: “The inductive-scientific method will become the method of the future all the more exclusively, and the basic character of the scientific work will not be deepening but spreading. Hence the need for geniuses will become ever smaller, and therefore the unconscious will produce ever fewer of them; just as the black suit of the bourgeois has become levelled, we are steering towards a levelling to solid mediocrity in intellectual matters too. […\ldots] A similar process is taking place with regard to art, although it still is more positive to the future than science is.” Nietzsche’s quotations in NF 29 [52], KSA 7, p. 649 from Hartmann, p. 637, in NF 29 [59], KSA 7, p. 654 from Hartmann pp. 619, 610 and 638, and in NF 29 [66], KSA 7, pp. 658f. from Hartmann, pp. 291, 640, 637 and 296 corroborate that he was in fact using the first edition. In the commentary volume KSA 14, the editors refer to the fourth edition of Philosophie des Unbewussten, and likewise, Jörg Salaquarda states – without backing his statement with any kind of source reference or argument – that Nietzsche was using the fourth edition when writing Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil: “Studien zur zweiten unzeitgemäßen Betrachtung”, Nietzsche-Studien 13 (1984), pp. 1–45, p. 38. The same goes for Wolfert von Rahden: “Eduard von Hartmann ’und’ Nietzsche. Zur Strategie der verzögerten Konterkritik Hartmanns an Nietzsche”, Nietzsche-Studien 13 (1984), pp. 481–502, here p. 485. But there is no sign of Nietzsche buying or borrowing a fourth edition of the book, whereas he apparently bought a copy of the first edition in 1869 and sold it in 1875. No copy of the fourth edition is listed in Nietzsche’s persönliche Bibliothek, nor in Luca Crescenzi: “Verzeichnis der von Nietzsche aus der Universitätsbibliothek in Basel entliehenen Bücher (1869–1879)”, Nietzsche-Studien 23 (1994), pp. 388–442. And all of the passages from Philosophie des Unbewussten quoted in HL (all of them are quoted in HL 9) can be found in the first edition of the book: HL 9, p. 312, lines 18 f. is from Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 638; p. 315, lines 3 f. from Hartmann, p. 618; p. 315, lines 4–8 from Hartmann, p. 619; p. 315, lines 10–12 from Hartmann, p. 296; p. 315, lines 17 f. from Hartmann, p. 610; p. 315, lines 20–22 from Hartmann, pp. 637 f.; p. 316, lines 10–12, 12–16, and 18–22 from Hartmann, p. 638; p. 316, lines 16–18 from Hartmann, p. 636; p. 316, lines 18–22 from Hartmann, p. 638; p. 317, line 29–p. 318, line 6 from Hartmann, p. 637; p. 322, lines 11–13 from Hartmann, p. 618; and p. 322, lines 20–23 from Hartmann, p. 625.
With the progress of man (or more precisely of the unconscious, manifesting itself as a progress of man), the need for scientific and artistic genius will diminish and eventually disappear. Hence the levelling (Nivellierung) and hence the mediocrity. This is exactly where Nietzsche finds fault with Hartmann: to him, the heightened intellectual and moral capacities of the average man does not compensate for the loss of genius. On the contrary: the goal of mankind lies in its highest specimen. This is an argument that is best characterised as a moral argument; it recurs on several occasions; and it is brought to a head in the portrait of Hartmann as a philosophical parodist in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*. But it is repeated in several variants in the *Nachlaß*:

Hartmann is important, because he kills the notion of a world process by being consequent. In order to put up with it he sets the conscious redemption and freedom from illusions and the choice of destruction as its telos. [- - -]

Das Ziel der Menschheit kann nicht am Ende liegen, sondern in den höchsten Exemplaren, die, zerstreut durch Jahrtausende, zusammen alle höchsten Kräfte, die in der Menschheit verborgen sind, repräsentieren.

Überdies: *Weltprozeß!!* Es handelt sich doch nur um die Lumperei der menschlichen Erdflöhe!415

Hartmann is consequent in endorsing the dedication to the world process. And precisely in virtue of his consequence can he be used as a target in the second *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung*. He accepts the consequences of the idea of the world process, and the result is so ludicrous that Nietzsche can label him a philosophical parodist.

Towards the end of this long fragment, Nietzsche levels an extremely severe criticism against Hartmann. His book is disgusting, in its striving for paradoxes in combination with a carte blanche on behalf of the cultural philistines.


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415 NF 29 [52], summer–autumn 1873, KSA 7, pp. 648 f.: “Hartmann is important, because he kills the notion of a world process by being consequent. In order to put up with it he sets the conscious redemption and freedom from illusions and the choice of destruction as its telos. [- - -]

The goal of mankind cannot lie in its endpoint, but in its highest specimen, who although strewn out through the millennia together represent all the highest powers that are hidden in mankind./Furthermore: world process!! It is nothing other than the trifles of the human earth-fleas.”

Hartmann’s philosophy presents his contemporaries as the highest stage in the history of the Unconscious, and he sees the affirmation of the reigning order and of the idea of progress as the duty of the pessimists, the higher men. That is, his pessimism justifies the life of the Bildungsphilister, the cultural philistine. This means that Hartmann is just as much of a philistine as David Strauß, or, which a somewhat earlier fragment makes clear, as another of the self-proclaimed enemies of pessimism, Jürgen Bona Meyer:


Nietzsche therefore attacks the opponents of pessimism on the same grounds as he attacks Hartmann. As we have seen in section 3.3 above, Nietzsche had echoed Schopenhauer’s definition of pessimism in the philological Encyclopädie der klassischen Philologie, compiled for use during the summer semester of 1871; thereby he had agreed with Schopenhauer that the question whether a religion (or a religious attitude) is pessimistic or optimistic is to be given precedence over the question whether it is heathen or Christian. This is no longer valid. As we have seen, Hartmann served as paragon of pessimism from a few years from 1869 and on. The comparison of Hartmann to David Strauß and Jürgen Bona Meyer:

\[\text{Jetzt lernt man gar, seiner eigenen Philisterhaftigkeit recht herzlich froh zu sein – der Philister hat seine Unschuld verloren (Riehl). Der Philister und der windige “Gebildete” unserer Zeitungsatmosphäre reichen sich brüderlich die Hand und unter dem gleichen Jauchzen vernichtet der Bonner Afterphilosoph Jürgen Bona-Meyer den Pessimismus und Riehl Jahn oder Strauß die neunte Symphonie.}\]

\[\text{Nietzsche therefore attacks the opponents of pessimism on the same grounds as he attacks Hartmann. As we have seen in section 3.3 above, Nietzsche had echoed Schopenhauer’s definition of pessimism in the philological Encyclopädie der klassischen Philologie, compiled for use during the summer semester of 1871; thereby he had agreed with Schopenhauer that the question whether a religion (or a religious attitude) is pessimistic or optimistic is to be given precedence over the question whether it is heathen or Christian. This is no longer valid. As we have seen, Hartmann served as paragon of pessimism from a few years from 1869 and on. The comparison of Hartmann to David Strauß and Jürgen Bona Meyer:}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize \textit{Daher der Erfolg bei der Litteraten-Masse (das heisst nämlich jetzt “Erfolg” überhaupt: die vermögen es schon, das Publikum zum Kaufen aufzureizen)!}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize \textit{Hartmann’s philosophy presents his contemporaries as the highest stage in the history of the Unconscious, and he sees the affirmation of the reigning order and of the idea of progress as the duty of the pessimists, the higher men. That is, his pessimism justifies the life of the Bildungsphilister, the cultural philistine. This means that Hartmann is just as much of a philistine as David Strauß, or, which a somewhat earlier fragment makes clear, as another of the self-proclaimed enemies of pessimism, Jürgen Bona Meyer:}}\]

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\[\text{\footnotesize Matthew 17:25}]

\[\text{\footnotesize Unter dem gleichen Jauchzen vernichtet der Bonner Afterphilosoph Jürgen Bona-Meyer den Pessimismus und Riehl Jahn oder Strauß die neunte Symphonie.}\]

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\[\text{\footnotesize Unter dem gleichen Jauchzen vernichtet der Bonner Afterphilosoph Jürgen Bona-Meyer den Pessimismus und Riehl Jahn oder Strauß die neunte Symphonie.}\]
Meyer therefore indicates that the question of pessimism and optimism is no longer the overriding principle of classification. Schopenhauer is still esteemed, though. He is praised for his skills as a writer, his elegant style and his clarity. But he is also respected for his courage. Although Nietzsche is gradually moving away from the metaphysical outlook of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, there still remains a rest of admiration for his lack of need of hope in life.


We have, to briefly conclude our discussion of the *Nachlaß* of 1872–74, noted three important things. Firstly, although Nietzsche’s interest in pessimism gradually decreases, it is still an important theme in the *Nachlaß* of this period, and it is still Hartmann’s, rather than Schopenhauer’s version of pessimism that is his main concern. Secondly, Nietzsche discusses pessimism from a moral rather than a metaphysical point of view. Pessimism is attacked, not (as he did earlier) on account of flaws in its logic, but on account of its accepting and accentuating the mediocrity of modern man and modern society. Thirdly, Nietzsche no longer uses the question of optimism vs. pessimism as an overriding principle of classification of religions, thinkers, and writers. A thinker can be a pessimist and still be a cultural philistine, which explains how Hartmann can be grouped together with optimists such as Strauß and Meyer. The fact that Nietzsche still values Schopenhauer no longer depends on his pessimism, but solely on his being a courageous thinker and great writer.

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418 See for example the fragment entitled “Zu Schopenhauer”, NF 28 [6], early 1873–autumn 1873, KSA 7, pp. 618 ff.: “Er ist das strengste Ideal des Schriftstellers, das die Deutschen haben, keiner hat es so streng genommen. Wie würdevoll er ist, kann man an seinem Nachahmer Hartmann sehen. […] Schopenhauer steht zu allem in Widerspruch, was jetzt als ‘Kultur’ gilt: Plato zu allem, was damals Kultur war. Schopenhauer ist vorausgeschleudert: wir ahnen jetzt bereits seine Missio-.

419 NF 34 [7], early 1874–summer 1874, KSA 7, p. 794: “Description of the time: if it is hopeless is no matter to Schopenhauer. Since he is *true*, he restores the original nature and the meaning of life. There is no *hope* of happiness on earth: it is enough when people with the help of this veracity to realise that it has *never* been possible. The meaning of life is always the same for the individual, in all times. He *should* be without hope, when it comes to happiness: but he should hope that he will understand the meaning of life better. – The purification of culture is to him veracity towards true needs, but not beauty and lustre of life.”
Schopenhauer and Nietzsche agree that there are two different attitudes towards the knowledge of the essence of the world. On Schopenhauer’s view, one can either know intuitively or abstractly that the world is will. In the first case, one becomes an ascetic; the knowledge functions as a motive to inaction, potentially leading to the negation of the will. In the second case, one becomes a pessimist; the abstract knowledge lacks the motivational force; the knowledge of the pessimist can be communicated, and can be the basis of a philosophy, but it does not affect one’s actions. In Nietzsche’s case, there are two different types of knowledge of das Ur-Eine: firstly, there is the Dionysian knowledge, which comes to use in music and in tragedy; this knowledge helps us affirm existence. Secondly, there is the knowledge of the pessimist or Buddhist, that, much like the pessimist’s knowledge in Schopenhauer, lacks motivational force, but that fundamentally is correct.

But the most important conclusion of this examination of Nietzsche’s Nachlaß is that Nietzsche uses Schopenhauer and Hartmann, the two arch-pessimists, in completely different manners. He uses Schopenhauer as a positive example of a brave thinker who had the courage of accepting life’s meaninglessness. He finds fault with several aspects of Schopenhauer’s philosophy: he holds that the idea that knowledge can lead to the cessation of willing is (logically) untenable; he holds that Schopenhauer’s view of art as pacifying misunderstands the true function of art; and he regards the affirmation of life to be the goal, not its negation. But in spite of these criticisms – and they concern key elements of Schopenhauer’s system – Nietzsche maintains a revering tone towards Schopenhauer. His ideas were flawed, but he adopted a courageous and honest attitude towards the problems that he tried to solve. The situation is different when it comes to Hartmann. Nietzsche accepts Rohde’s description of Hartmann as a plunderer of Schopenhauer who philosophizes according to a stupid method. The criticism of Hartmann as a person becomes harsher with each reference to him. Still, he discusses Hartmann’s philosophy at great length in the Nachlaß.420

4.2 Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen (1873–1876)

As we have seen, pessimism is an important theme in Die Geburt der Tragödie. Although we have come to the conclusion that it is not a pessimistic work, it is a work in which Nietzsche is trying to find a non-pessimistic solution to the problem of pessimism, and it is a work written within a largely Schopenhauerian framework. This section will investigate to what extent this is true for the four short books that Nietzsche wrote during the years following Die Geburt der

420 There are a number of fragments where Nietzsche expresses admiration for Schopenhauer, often at the expense of Hartmann. See for example NF 28 [6], early 1873–autumn 1873, KSA 7, pp. 618 f.; NF 34 [4], early 1874–summer 1874, KSA 7, p. 793; or NF 35 [11], early 1874–summer 1874, KSA 7, p. 811.
Tragödie: namely the four *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (1873–76). I will argue that these books are variations on themes from Nietzsche’s first book. In particular, they contain a discussion on the optimistic scientific ideals inherent in modern culture.

**David Strauß der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller (1873)**

The first of the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, a harsh criticism of the theologian David Strauß, probably is Nietzsche’s least discussed book. Although a number of themes that are developed in later works are presented here for the first time, giving the book a certain importance to the reader interested in understanding Nietzsche’s thought as a whole, it is, in itself, a rather uninspired, at times pedantic book. Not least important is the fact that Nietzsche here uses a number of arguments against Strauß that he will later use against Wagner. Above all, his criticism of Strauß for being an actor disguised as a writer, and for being the advocate of a chaotic style lacking unity are important; these are two of the things that Nietzsche accuse Wagner of in several later works, most violently and explicitly in *Der Fall Wagner*.

*David Strauß der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller* was occasioned by Strauß’ book *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (1872), a book where Strauß reflects on the conditions for religious belief in the modern society. The book was a great success in its day: three editions were published in 1872 alone and by 1875 a further five editions had left the press. Nietzsche seems to have been prompted to write the book by Wagner’s disdain for Strauß.

In his autobiography, Nietzsche stresses the combative (*kriegerisch*) aspect of the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*. They are evidence, he writes, that he enjoyed drawing his blade. And continuing the duelling metaphor, Nietzsche comments on David Strauß that he was taking up on a piece of advice from Stendhal concerning duels: “Im Grunde hatte ich eine Maxime Stendhals prakticirt: er räth an, seinen Eintritt in die Gesellschaft mit einem Duell zu machen. Und wie ich

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421 A note on the spelling of Strauß’s name: in DS, Nietzsche spells the name ‘Strauss’, whereas he occasionally spells the name ‘Strauß’ in the Nachlaß (a minor example of Nietzsche’s often inconsistent spelling). Strauß himself used the letter ß (denoting a double s within a syllable) to spell his name. I will use the spelling ‘Strauß’ when referring to him, but will respect Nietzsche’s spelling when quoting him. This, as the reader will no doubt have noted, goes for the title of the book too.

422 Of the four *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, only the second has received any amount of attention from the scholars. *David Strauss* is the least discussed part of this, Nietzsche’s least discussed work. The recent *Weimarer Nietzsche-Bibliographie* lists only ten texts that deal primarily with *David Strauss*. Of these, none is a monograph; three are contemporary reviews and similar. *Weimarer Nietzsche-Bibliographie*, 5 vols., eds. Susanne Jung et al. (Stuttgart & Weimar, 2000–02), vol. iv, pp. 232 f., entries 13987–13996.

423 We cannot but agree with Giorgio Colli that *David Strauss* is the weakest of Nietzsche’s works ("la più debole di tutte le opera pubblicate da Nietzsche”) and that the timeliness of this purportedly untimely book, the fact that it consists in an attack on a figure whose importance has long since disappeared is the principal reason for this. Colli: *Scritti su Nietzsche*, p. 21.
This duel, Nietzsche adds, was a part of a relentless war on the shallow moralism of European and American *libres penseurs*, of whom Strauß was a prominent example. The book on Strauß itself opens with reflections on war. But unlike Nietzsche’s description of the situation in *Ecce homo*, it is not a metaphorical use of the word war that he reflects on, but on the effects of a particular war on the minds of the victors. That war is the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/71, and its effect, as Nietzsche was to repeat in several later works, was to make the German victors barbaric. Their winning against the French on the battlefield makes the Germans believe that they are superior also when it comes to culture, Nietzsche holds. But this is dangerous mistake. The Germans won the war on account of the superior discipline and courage of their soldiers, not because their culture is superior. It isn’t. The French have a true culture, the Germans don’t. The value of the French culture can be disputed, but that it is a genuine culture is beyond discussion. The definition of culture that Nietzsche gives in this context is very important:

Kultur ist vor allem Einheit des künstlerischen Stiles in allen Lebensäußerungen eines Volkes. Vieles Wissen und Gelernthaben ist aber weder ein notwendiges Mittel der Kultur, noch ein Zeichen derselben, und verträgt sich nöthigenfalls auf das beste mit dem Gegensatze der Kultur, der Barbarei, das heisst: der Stillosigkeit oder dem chaotischen Durcheinander aller Stile.

True culture is a unity of style. In his later attacks on Wagner, Nietzsche will focus on Wagner’s lack of unity, echoing Bourget’s definition of a decadent style as a style where the single elements become independent at the expense of the unity of the whole. In *David Strauss*, it is not Wagner but his enemy Strauß

424 EH, Die Unzeitgemässen 2, KSA 6, p. 319: “What I really did was to put into practice a maxim of Stendhal’s: he advised one to make one’s entry into society with a duel.” Cf. Prosper Mérimée’s introduction to Stendhal’s *Correspondance inédite*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1855), vol. I, p. IX: “Ne jamais pardonner un mensonge, – Saisir aux cheveux la première occasion de duel à son début dans le monde, – Ne jamais se repentir d’une sottise faite ou dite, voilà quelques-unes de ses maximes.” The second (but not the first) volume of this edition is listed in Nietzsche’s *persönliche Bibliothek*, p. 575.

425 Thomas Brobjer maintains that to Nietzsche, “*ad hominem* arguments are the strongest possible form of argument. Most other forms of arguments are merely abstractions”. Brobjer: Nietzsche’s *Ethics of Character. A Study of Nietzsche’s Ethics and its Place in the History of Moral Thinking* (diss. Uppsala, 1995), p. 105. The *ad hominem* arguments are particularly prominent in the *Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen*; indeed, one could argue that the four books in their entirety are *ad hominem* arguments.

426 DS 1, p. 163: “Culture is, above all, unity of style in all the expressions of the life of a people. Much knowledge and learning is neither an essential means to culture nor a sign of it, and if needs be can get along very well with the opposite of culture, barbarism, which is the lack of style or a chaotic jumble of all styles.”

who represents this barbaric lack of style. The Germans are content to live in the middle of this Durcheinander, this chaotic mix of styles; and this, obviously, is a sign of their lack of culture.

One of the main themes in David Strauss is that the cultural philistines are opponents of all searchers. This theme demonstrates how pessimism is an important aspect of Nietzsche’s thinking in this phase even when he is not discussing pessimism or the value of life explicitly. The only way to pay tribute to an artist, Nietzsche holds, is to continue the search that the artist in question expressed, to continue in the spirit and with the courage of him or her. This is not a solution appreciated by the cultural philistines. They want to stop all searching. Instead of letting themselves be inspired by certain artists, they attach the label “classic” to them. Instead of fulfilling the tradition by following the artists’ footsteps, the cultural philistines create a canon of (second-rate) works that they define as culturally important. These works are characterized by a celebration of comfort (Behaglichkeit) and homeliness (Heimlichkeit). The establishment of such an artistic tradition is not in itself philistine: Nietzsche regards it as a reaction to the experimental romantic art of the early nineteenth century. But in the hands of the philistines, the realistic descriptions of humble joy and serenity became a decree that all other art was useless. Art that disturbed the peace of mind of the philistines was deemed as epigonal, while the philistine canon was established, and was soon spilling into areas such as philology and history. The cultural philistine defines his or her own knowledge of this canon as Bildung and regards it as “der satte Ausdruck der rechten deutschen Kultur”.428

A characteristic of the works of the philistine canon, in Nietzsche’s eyes, is that they all distinguish sharply between what Nietzsche describes as the “Ernst des Lebens”, the serious things in life, and what is Spass, mere fun or entertainment. To the first category the Nietzschean philistine counts his career, his wife and family, and his business; art, on the other hand, belongs firmly in the second category. Therefore Nietzsche sees to genres or modes of writing that the philistines limit themselves to: “entweder Nachahmung der Wirklichkeit bis zum Aeffischen, in Idyllen oder sanftmüthigen humoristischen Satiren, oder freie Copien der anerkanntesten und berühmtesten Werke der Klassiker, doch mit verschämten Indulgenzen an den Zeitgeschmack.”429

We saw that culture to Nietzsche is a unity of style. The style of the philistines has a certain unity. Not because it is a form of culture, but because it ne-

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428 DS 2, p. 165: “the complete expression of true German culture”.
429 DS 2, p. 170 f.: “either imitation of actuality to the point of mimicry in idylls or gently humorous satires, or free copies of the most familiar and famous of the classics, though incorporating timid concessions to the taste of the time.”
gates everything that is artistic. This negation is very consequent, and this creates the illusion that the philistines have a form of culture. But it is in fact an anti-culture, phenomena that are the opposite of culture systematically arranged.

This is a parallel phenomenon to the tendency to consider the German victory over France as a sign of German cultural superiority. Both are forms of barbarism, both are a threat to German culture. The interpretation of Germany’s military power as a cultural superiority threatens to bring German cultural and artistic activity to an end. Likewise, the philistines’ focus on a canon and their will to stop the search that characterizes all true art would, if they were to obtain the support that they want and that the success of Strauß’ book implies, threaten the German culture.

David Strauss der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller does not address the problem of pessimism. The question of the value of existence is not discussed in the book, and although one of Nietzsche’s aims clearly is to defend Schopenhauer from Strauß’s attacks (that often are aimed at Schopenhauer’s pessimism), he neither takes Strauß’s criticism seriously, nor does he defend Schopenhauer by developing his ideas to demonstrate that Strauß misses his target; instead, Nietzsche largely relies on counterattacks. In Der alte und der neue Glaube, Strauß for example uses the memorable argument against pessimism that if the world is something that had better not be, then the thinking of the pessimistic philosopher, being a part of that world, consists of thoughts that had better not been thought. Nietzsche describes this argument as optimistic sophistry and quotes Schopenhauer’s analysis of optimism as “eine wahrhaft ruchlose Denkungsart”. Andreas Urs Sommer considers this a stand for pessimism: “Mit seinem furchtlosen Aufbegehren bricht Nietzsche eine Lanze für den Pessimismus und wirft Strauß sophistisches Verfahren vor”. But if we read David Strauss in the light of

430 It is important to remember that Nietzsche uses the word barbarian in two different senses. On the one hand, it is positively connoted, when it refers to barbarians as opposed to the civilized. In that context, ‘barbarian’ means strong, unprejudiced, healthy. But in this context, the antonym of the barbarian is the artist. It does not represent a threat to the prejudices of morality and the church, but to art and culture. Cf. Renate Reschke: “Barbaren”, in: Henning Ottmann (ed.): Nietzsche-Handbuch. Leben–Werk–Wirkung (Stuttgart & Weimar, 2000), pp. 202 f.

431 By comparing the victory of the more disciplined German troops over France to the Macedonian conquest of the incomparably more cultured Greek troops, Nietzsche is once again anticipating Bourget. “Le grand argument contre les décadences, c’est qu’elles n’ont pas de lendemain et que toujours une barbarie les écrase. Mais n’est-ce pas le lot fatal de l’exquis et du rare d’avoir tort devant la brutalité? On est en droit d’avouer un tort de cette sorte et de préférer la défaite d’Athènes en décadence au triomphe du Macédonien violent.” Bourget, p. 15.

432 David Strauß: Der alte und der neue Glaube. Ein Bekenntniss (Leipzig, 1872), p. 142. This argument and the various counter-arguments used against it has a story of its own, investigated in Andreas Urs Sommer: “Wenn die Welt ein Ding ist, das besser nicht wäre, ist es ja auch das Denken des Philosophen, das ein Stück dieser Welt bildet, ein Denken, das besser nicht dächte.” Zur Karriere eines polemischen Argumentes gegen Schopenhauer”, Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch 77 (1996), pp. 199–210, particularly pp. 204 f. for Nietzsche’s polemics with Strauß.

433 DS 6, KSA 1, p. 192: “a truly infamous mode of thinking”.

434 Sommer: “Wenn die Welt…”, p. 205: “With his furious anger Nietzsche takes up the cudgels for pessimism and accuses Strauß of sophistic methods”.

179
Die Geburt der Tragödie, it is clear that attacks on optimism need not imply endorsement of pessimism. Nietzsche’s attacks on Strauß echo the criticism of Socrates in Die Geburt der Tragödie, and the problem with Socratic optimism is that it threatens to bring about a practical pessimism. Just like Die Geburt der Tragödie, David Strauß is a work where Nietzsche is trying to avoid the pessimistic consequences of the optimism that is characteristic of his contemporaries.

We saw in the chapter on Die Geburt der Tragödie that the dichotomy Dionysian – Apollonian that Nietzsche introduces in the beginning of that book soon is partly overshadowed by the dichotomy Dionysian – Socratic. The Dionysian art form of tragedy (consisting of a pessimistic Dionysian element tempered by the beautiful Apollonian form) is destroyed by the rise of belief in rationalism. It is important to note that the Apollonian is not an optimistic counterpart to the pessimistic Dionysian; the Apollonian is an illusion that makes us forget the truth expressed by the Dionysian. Socratic rationalism, however, is optimistic. Its belief in the possibility of removing suffering has gained support. But that suffering is a crucial aspect of a number of important phenomena, notably tragedy. So in trying to make life more comfortable, Socratic optimism damages the most valuable features of life. Now, Strauß and the philistine attitude to culture that he represents are the modern counterpart to Socratic optimism.

The cultural philistines want peace and quiet. Therefore they try to define everything that disturbs their peace of mind as forbidden to the artists. But all true art takes its starting point in a dark, troubling realm of the mind that is nothing if not disturbing to the peace of mind. It takes it starting point in a realm of the mind that is also expressed in pessimism. However, the solution to the problem of pessimism does not lie in trying to negate it – this is the lesson of Die Geburt der Tragödie – but in using it artistically, using the force of the beautiful Apollonian illusion to consign the pessimistic truth expressed by the Dionysian to one individual. As we have seen, the Apollonian and the Dionysian combined have the power to justify existence. By attempting to exclude everything that disturbs the peace of the philistine, Strauß and his optimist equals are threatening to destroy art. And by destroying art, they destroy the possibility of saving the value of life, that is of finding a solution to the problem of pessimism.

Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Histoire für das Leben (1874)

The second of the Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen is no less of an attack on one person than is the first. But whereas the target of David Strauss is identified in the title of that book and is singled out as a philistine and a barbarian of the mind already in its second section, the main enemy of Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Histoire für das Leben is not mentioned until the penultimate section of the book. This means that previous studies of Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil have failed to assign to the main enemy of the book the importance he deserves. For this
book is just as kriegerisch as its predecessor; and the credit of being the main enemy belongs to Eduard von Hartmann.  

I do not mean to say that Hartmann’s presence in the book has gone unnoticed. Nietzsche after all dedicates the better part of sections 9 and 10 to an attempt to ridicule Hartmann’s ideas. But the previous studies that acknowledge Hartmann’s importance have focused on those last sections and failed to see how Nietzsche constantly alludes to Hartmann’s philosophy throughout the book.

Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil continues the discussion from David Strauss of the German lack of culture. Here, Nietzsche discusses one particular aspect of that problem, namely the status of history within German Bildung. Alluding to a poem by Giacomo Leopardi, Nietzsche asks us the reader to imagine a grazing herd of cattle, how peaceful they are, bothered neither by concerns for the future, nor by boredom when those concerns are absent. Memory, needless to say, is used by Nietzsche as a metaphor for history. It is through history that

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435 Cosima Wagner, whose attitude to HL is best described as ambivalent, is very content that Nietzsche attacked Hartmann in the book: “Mit Hartmann’s Abfertigung haben Sie mir einen besonderen Gefallen erwiesen, Sie wissen dass ich mich vor Jahren, als Sie mir die Unbewusstheit in das Haus brachten, nicht entschliessen konnte dieselbe ordentlich kennen zu lernen, da mir der Ton zu stark misfiel”. Letter to Nietzsche 20 March 1874, KGB II: 4, p. 414. In this letter she praises the book for its fire and for the compassion for the geniuses that Nietzsche shows. And the diary entries from the days when she read the book are predominantly positive. But she is concerned that the book can only be understood by those that already share its ideas. And in a later letter (20 April 1874, KGB II: 4, pp. 447–453) she writes that she thinks the book would have been better if he had spent a few more months working with it.

436 A number of important Nietzsche scholars have written extensively on Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil, but although for example Jörg Salaquarda’s extensive and knowledgeable discussion (“Studien zur zweiten unzeitgemässen Betrachtung”) does take Hartmann into consideration, he focuses too narrowly on the explicit polemics in the penultimate section. Even scholars who focus on Nietzsche’s relation to Hartmann have, I feel, underestimated Hartmann’s presence in HL. Maurice Weyembergh and Anthony Jensen both discuss Hartmann’s importance for HL, but Weyembergh’s interest is clearly Nietzsche’s later works and Jensen attributes too much importance to the polemics in the ninth section; Maurice Weyembergh: F. Nietzsche et E. von Hartmann, Vrijdenkerslexicon Studiereeks 3 (diss., Brussel, 1977), chapter two; Anthony K. Jensen: “The Rogue of All Rogues: Nietzsche’s Presentation of Eduard von Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewussten and Hartmann’s Response to Nietzsche”, Journal of Nietzsche Studies 32 (2006), pp. 41–50. Wolfert von Rahden primarily discusses Hartmann’s dislike of Nietzsche in his “Eduard von Hartmann ‘und’ Nietzsche”. Francesco Gerratana regards the pseudo-Hegelian philosophy of history and its consequences for the morals of the modern man: Gerratana, particularly pp. 422–429. As this section aims to demonstrate, Hartmann’s importance is greater than that.

437 The incongruity between the German and the English causes a problem here. The German words Bildung and Kultur (by Nietzsche often, but by no means always, spelled Cultur) are usually both rendered into English as culture. Since Nietzsche is, among other things, discussing the relation of the culture (Bildung) of the Germans to the German culture (Kultur), we cannot use ‘culture’ to designate both. Therefore, I will retain the German Bildung when Nietzsche uses that word. Bildung corresponds to the English ‘culture’ in the sense of ‘having culture’ or ‘being cultured’.

438 The poem in question is “Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell’Asia”.

439 This is of course an unoriginal metaphor. Of particular importance is that Schopenhauer also uses the animal as a symbol of mankind without a history: “Hingegen das Thier, dessen reflexionslose Erkenntniss auf die Anschauung und deshalb auf die Gegenwart beschränkt ist, wandelt,
man becomes man: “durch die Kraft, das Vergangene zum Leben zu gebrauchen und aus dem Geschehen wieder Geschichte zu machen, wird der Mensch zum Menschen”. But through an excess of history, man ceases to be human. For, as Nietzsche notes: “Zu allem Handeln gehört Vergessen: wie zum Leben alles Organischen nicht nur Licht, sondern auch Dunkel gehört.” Nietzsche dedicates his book to the question how history can be put to use in the service of life.

In so doing, Nietzsche distinguishes between three attitudes to life: the historical (das Historische), the unhistorical (das Unhistorische), and the supra-historical (das Ueberhistorische). The unhistorical is the most fundamental of the three. Nietzsche likens it to a protective atmosphere in which life can be bred. When discussing the other two categories, Nietzsche for the most part uses the types of humans that they correspond to as examples. He does this by asking us to imagine how we would react to an offer to re-live the last ten or twenty years of our lives. This question anticipates the idea of the eternal recurrence, an extremely important theme in Nietzsche’s later thinking, but we will return to that theme in section 5.4 below. In *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil*, Nietzsche predicts that we all would decline that offer, but the reasons behind our no would differ according to if one belongs to the first or the second of these categories. The historical man believes that the meaning of existence (Sinn des Daseins) comes to light in the course of a (historical) process. He turns to history to understand the present and to learn to desire the future even more. He would say no to the offer to re-live the past as that would take him further from his goal. The supra-historical man, in his turn, sees every moment as consummated, and therefore regards the past and the present as of equal importance. He would decline the offer since no moment differs from any other. If the past ten years have not brought happiness, then neither will the next ten.

After quoting another Leopardi poem (“A se stesso”) intended to illustrate the mind of the supra-historical man, Nietzsche bids farewell of this category. The rest of the book is dedicated to a lengthy discussion and at times severe criticism of the historical. For Nietzsche holds the historical in modern society, and particularly Germany, to have degenerated into a disease.

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440 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 253: “only through the power of employing the past for the purposes of life and again introducing into history that which has been done and is gone – did man become man”.

441 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 250: “Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic.”

442 This belief, the discussion of the Nachlaß demonstrated, is something that Nietzsche associates with Hartmann.

443 Mats Persson discusses Nietzsche’s use of illness and health as metaphors in relation to the changes in the concept of history that took place during the nineteenth century. Mats Persson: “Nietzsche and the Historical Revolution”, in: Zeit, Geschichte und Politik. Time History and Politics.
The problem with contemporary history, Nietzsche holds, is that it has become too scientific (or scholarly, wissenschaftlich). The strength of a people or a person can be measured according to the plastic power by means of which they can transform and incorporate the past. When history stands in the service of life, in the service of an unhistorical power, it does so by inspiring the raise of a new powerful expression of life, for example in the form of a culture. As usual when Nietzsche is talking of a powerful culture, he is thinking of the Greeks. Towards the end of the book, Nietzsche notes that the Greeks once were in the situation of the Germans, instead of a culture of their own they had a chaos of Egyptian and various Oriental influences; but they had the plastic power to transform those foreign elements to a culture of their own.

Scientific history, on the other hand, is a form of contradiction in terms. “Die Historie, sofern sie im Dienste des Lebens steht, steht im Dienste einer unhistorischen Macht und wird deshalb nie, in dieser Unterordnung, reine Wissenschaft, etwa wie die Mathematik es ist, werden können und sollen.” But although history cannot be a pure science, and ought not to aspire to become one, it does in fact harbour such ambitions.

Nietzsche distinguishes between three types of history: monumental, antiquarian, and critical history. They all have their advantages and disadvantages, and at times a people may have need for any one of them.

Wenn der Mensch, der Grosses schaffen will, überhaupt die Vergangenheit braucht, so bemächtigt er sich ihrer vermittelst der monumentalischen Historie; wer dagegen im Gewohnten und Altverehrten beharren mag, pflegt das Vergangene als antiquarischer Historiker; und nur der, dem eine gegenwärtige Noth die Brust beklemmt und der um jeden Preis die Last von sich abwerfen will, hat ein Bedürfniss zur kritischen, das heisst richtenden und verurtheilenden Historie.

The monumental history serves as a comfort, teacher, and example to a person or people involved in a struggle or in the course of an action. The love and

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444 Thomas H. Brobjer argues that Nietzsche’s criticism of history in HL is not representative for Nietzsche’s view of history at large; Nietzsche was in fact, Brobjer holds, on the whole greatly appreciative of the value of historical studies for philosophy. Thomas H. Brobjer: “Nietzsche’s View of the Value of Historical Studies and Methods”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65:2 (April 2004), pp. 301–322.
445 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 251.
446 HL 10, KSA 1, p. 333.
447 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 257: “Insofar as it stands in the service of life, history stands in the service of an unhistorical power, and, thus subordinate, it can and should never become a pure science such as, for instance, mathematics is.”
448 HL 2, KSA 1, p. 264: “If the man who wants to do something great has need of the past at all, he appropriates it by means of monumental history; he, on the other hand, who likes to persist in the familiar and the revered of old, tends the past as an antiquarian historian; and only he who is oppressed by a present need, and who wants to throw off this burden at any cost, has need of critical history, that is to say a history that judges and condemns.”
respect for a humble detail gives meaning to the life of the antiquarian historian. And critical history can be a means to making life more bearable. But they have to abide by the rules of each category. Each of them can become weeds (Unkraut) if they are planted on ground and in a climate where they do not belong. This is exactly what has happened with the study of history. Scientific history combines traits from the degenerate forms of the three types of histories.\[449\]

Depending on the goals, strengths and needs (Nöthen) of people, it needs a certain amount of knowledge of the past, at times in the form of monumental, at times in the form of antiquarian, and at times in the form of critical history. But in Nietzsche’s day and age, the balance between life and history has been lost. This has occurred when the study of history has become a science: “Jetzt regiert nicht mehr allein das Leben und bändigt das Wissen um die Vergangenheit: sondern alle Grenzpfähle sind umgerissen und alles was einmal war, stürzt auf den Menschen zu.”\[450\] This has led the modern age to be saturated in history, and this saturation is dangerous to life in five ways. Firstly, it causes a dichotomy between inner and outer (a theme first presented in David Strauss) that weakens the personality of modern man; secondly, it leads us to believe that our age is particularly rich when it comes to a virtue that is extremely rare, namely justice; thirdly, it weakens the instincts of the individual, the people, and the culture, hindering them from reaching maturity; fourthly, it leads us to a harmful belief in the age of mankind, and particularly in our own time as a late-comer (Spätling) and epigone; fifthly, it leads us to an ironic atmosphere which threatens to turn into an even more harmful cynicism.\[451\]

Modern scientific history nurtures a belief in its own objectivity. This is one of the consequences of our belief in our superiority in justice when compared to other ages. We believe that we have a special ability to judge past epochs. But it is not the task of an epoch to judge other epochs; that is a prerogative that belongs to the very few. This means that the representatives of our time use history to further their own interests. We have seen in the discussion of David Strauss that the true representatives of Nietzsche’s age are the philistines. They will use history to attack those that could use history creatively, the true artist: “Gegen ihre Erbfeinde, die starken Kunstgeister, also gegen die, welche allein aus jener Geschichte wahrhaft, das heisst zum Leben hin zu lernen und das Erlernte in eine erhöhte Praxis umzusetzen vermögen.”\[452\]

\[449\] It seems to me that Nietzsche regards the scientific history to be a degenerate form of critical history, which uses monumental history as a weapon against art, and which is practiced by historians who should practice antiquarian history. It would lead us too far from our discussion of Nietzsche’s relation to pessimism to develop this idea here, though.

\[450\] HL 4, KSA 1, pp. 271 f.: “Now the demands of life alone no longer reign and exercise constraint on knowledge of the past: now all the frontiers have been torn down and all that has ever been rushes upon mankind.”

\[451\] HL 5, KSA 1, p. 279. These five dangers are discussed in HL 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, respectively.

\[452\] HL 2, KSA 1, p. 263: “Against their arch-enemies, the strong artistic spirits, that is to say those who alone are capable of learning from that history in a true, that is to say life-enhancing sense, and of transforming what they have learned into a more elevated practice.”
History in itself is a worthwhile activity. But when it degenerates to a scholarly activity, a Wissenschaft, it becomes a threat to life. The belief in objectivity and justice that the scientific history has created within us affects us deeply in that it robs us of the illusions we need to live: “Der historische Sinn, wenn er ungebändigt walts und alle seine Consequenzen zieht, entwurzelt die Zukunft, weil er die Illusionen zerstört und den bestehenden Dingen ihre Atmosphäre nimmt, in der sie allein leben können.”

Like the Socratic science of Die Geburt der Tragödie, the objective scientific history punctures the illusion created by the love for the past that one instinctively feels. For this instinctive love is destroyed by modern education. And that makes modern man barren and dishonest. “In solchen Wirkungen ist der Historie die Kunst entgegengesetzt: und nur wenn die Historie es erträgt, zum Kunstwerk umgebildet, also reines Kunstgebilde zu werden, kann sie vielleicht Instincte erhalten oder sogar wecken.”

It is not until here, some fifty pages into his ninety-page essay, that Nietzsche reveals his purpose for the study of history: history must be turned into an art, it must be put to use to create illusions or images that make us believe that our lives are worth while. Nietzsche’s central illusion in Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil is that of a rebirth of a culture at the hands of a group of a hundred properly educated men. In Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche had discussed the use of Wagnerian tragedy as a means to create myths that might rejuvenate German culture. In Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil he repeats this theme, but uses another art form, history, instead of tragedy.

Nietzsche alludes to the idea a hundred men regenerating history on three occasions in the book. The first occasion is when discussing the three types of history in the second section. The hundred men are used as an example to how events of the past can be used to give strength in the present:

Nehme man an, dass Jemand glaube, es gehörten nicht mehr als hundert productive, in einem neuen Geiste erzogene und wirkende Menschen dazu, um der in Deutschland jetzt modisch gewordenen Gebildetheit den Garaus zu machen, wie müssten es ihn bestärken wahrzunehmen, dass die Cultur der Renaissance sich auf den Schultern einer solchen Hundert-Männer-Schaar heraus hob.
Immediately afterwards, however, Nietzsche introduces a caveat. A comparison of our age to the Renaissance would be very inexact. One would have to ignore a large number of differences; and to borrow support from the past one must really believe that history repeats itself down to the smallest detail.

When the hundred men see the light again in section six, the tone is altogether another. No longer does Nietzsche brush the idea aside. “Geschichte schreibt der Erfahrene und der Uebelegene”, Nietzsche notes. “Wer nicht Einiges grösser und höher erlebt hat als Alle, wird auch nichts Grosses und Hohes aus der Vergangenheit zu deuten wissen.”456 This means that we need to set ourselves a great goal, forget the prejudice that we are epigones of the great past ages, and that we must harness our analytical drives. We should look for biographies of men who are described as ‘fighters against their times’. “Sättigt eure Seelen an Plutarch und wart es an euch zu glauben, indem ihr an seine Helden glaubt. Mit einem Hundert solcher unmodern erzogener, das heisst reif gewordener und an das Heroische gewöhnter Menschen ist jetzt die ganze lärmende Afterbildung dieser Zeit zum ewigen Schweigen zu bringen.”457 Here, Nietzsche obviously believes in the inspirational power of the hundred, although he has already stated that he believes that the belief itself is mistaken. The hundred can function as a myth or an illusion and recreate the atmosphere that we need for our actions, an atmosphere that the scientific history has destroyed.

In the final section of the book, Nietzsche alludes once again to the idea of the hundred men. In a discussion of Hartmann’s idea that our age represents the old age of mankind Nietzsche attempts to show that this is just a prejudice, and that we need to educate the young in a different way to avoid that this prejudice be perpetuated. And Nietzsche sees a hope:

Immerhin: es giebt jetzt vielleicht hundert Menschen mehr als vor hundert Jahren, welche wissen, was Poesie ist; vielleicht giebt es hundert Jahre später wieder hundert Menschen mehr, die inzwischen auch gelernt haben, was Cultur ist, und dass die Deutschen bis jetzt keine Cultur haben, so sehr sie auch reden und stolziren mögen.458

456 HL 6, KSA 1, p. 294: “history is written by the experienced and superior man. He who has not experienced greater and more exalted things than others will not know how to interpret the great and exalted things of the past.”

457 HL 6, KSA 1, p. 295: “Satiate your souls with Plutarch and when you believe in his heroes dare at the same time to believe in yourself. With a hundred such men – raised in this unmodern way, that is to say become mature and accustomed to the heroic – the whole noisy sham-culture of our age could now be silenced forever.”

458 HL 10, KSA 1, p. 325: “Nonetheless, there are now perhaps a hundred more people than there were a hundred years ago who know what poetry is; perhaps a hundred years hence there will be a further hundred who by then will also have learned what culture is and that the Germans have up to now possessed no culture, however much they talk and puff themselves up about it.” That the Germans have no culture is a notion that we recognise from DS; Nietzsche is also recycling his definition of culture from that book: HL 4, p. 274: “Die Cultur eines Volkes als der Gegensatz jener Barbarei ist einmal, wie ich meine, mit einigem Rechte, als Einheit des künstlerischen Stiles in allen Lebensaussungen eines Volkes bezeichnet; diese Bezeichnung darf nicht dahin missverstanden werden, als ob es sich um den Gegensatz von Barbarei und schönem Stile handele; das
In this context, Nietzsche does not have to make the meaning of the number one hundred explicit. These hundred persons are the foundation upon which to build the culture that the Germans now lack. In analogy to Plato’s noble lie, that Nietzsche refers to as a Nothlüge (‘white lie’ or ‘necessary lie’, but literally an ‘emergency lie’) he introduces the concept Nothwahrheit, emergency truth (Hollingdale’s translation, ‘necessary truth’, does not give justice to Nietzsche’s word play). The fact that the Germans have no culture is such a Nothwahrheit, with the help of which the first generation of the representatives for the new German culture is to be educated.

The parallels to Die Geburt der Tragödie should by now be clear. Just like the art of tragedy was destroyed by the scientific rationalism epitomized by Socrates, the art of history has been destroyed at the hands of the Germans’ misguided preoccupation with the past. And just as Greek culture and the other Greek arts soon withered away without tragedy, the degenerate history study of the Germans threatens the foundations of art in Germany. We should also see clearly by now how Nietzsche advocates a form of monumental history.\(^{459}\) He introduces the mythical hundred men upon whom the Renaissance culture was founded, but he immediately retracts from it, hence showing that he is aware of the differences between the situation today compared to that of the Renaissance. But then he reintroduces the idea as if he believed in it. Thereby he demonstrates that it can be inspirational even if we know the limits of it. And when it reappears in the last section, the importance of the hundred men group is taken for granted. The hundred men upon whom the new culture are to be built are hence introduced as a myth that exemplifies the monumental history; and in the course of the book, Nietzsche demonstrates the workings of the monumental history by basing a monumental history of the origins of the new culture upon that very myth.

Eduard von Hartmann and *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil*

We have seen that *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil* continues a discussion of a number of themes from *David Strauss* (culture as a unity of style, the absence of a German culture, the animosity towards art by German intellectuals. I will now turn to an argument introduced at the beginning of this section which will clarify the importance of these themes to the question of Nietzsche’s relation to pessimism, namely the role of Eduard von Hartmann in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil*.

Hartmann’s name, as we noted above, is not mentioned until the ninth of the ten sections of *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil*. But several of the earlier sections con-

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459 HL is also a critical history: it is a critical history of modern German historiography. But I hold the positive monumental aspect of the book to be the more important.
tain allusions to key terms in Hartmann’s philosophy, and one of the central
categories of the book, namely the category of the historical, seems to be mod-
elled on Hartmann. The book contains several allusions to key concepts in
Hartmann’s system (particularly Weltprozess and Illusion), and given that they lead
up to the criticism of him as a philosophical parodist in the ninth and tenth
sections, it is not unreasonable to say that Hartmann is the main target of the
book. He is the main target in the sense that Strauß is the main target of David
Strauss; that is: in a qualified sense only. For Nietzsche is really attacking a ten-
dency in the intellectual life of Germany in both books, and Strauß and Hart-
mann function primarily as symbols. Nietzsche’s arguments against Hartmann
are primarily directed against two of his ideas: firstly Hartmann’s appeal for the
destruction of the illusions; and secondly Hartmann’s idea of a world process
(Weltprozess) and a practical philosophy based on the notion that the individual
must dedicate himself to the progress of that process. Both of these arguments
are present in Die Geburt der Tragödie: we saw that it was by destroying the illu-
sions that are the basis of art that Socratic science killed tragedy; and we also
saw that there is a tendency inherent in Alexandrine culture to an affirmation to
the established order that leads to a practical pessimism.

We noted above that one of the consequences of the scientific history is that
it weakens the personality. The reason for that, I take it, is that in digging into
the roots of modern society and culture, scientific history brings things to light
that ought to remain hidden as they are both unpleasant and necessary for life.
Scientific history discloses things about us that may be true, but that nonev-
less are inimical to us. We are better off not knowing them. This is an argument
that we recognize from Die Geburt der Tragödie: the pessimistic truth of the Dio-
nyian must be tempered by the beautiful forms and illusions of the Apollonian
to be bearable to us. Science, optimistic Socratic science, is a threat to life as it
destroys the Apollonian myths needed to transform the pessimistic Dionysian
truth to something bearable. The critique of the degenerate scientific history is
therefore in keeping with the basic argument of Die Geburt der Tragödie; and it is
an argument that Nietzsche repeats on several occasions in later works.

In the critique of scientific history, Nietzsche alludes to Hartmann’s termin-
ology. In the seventh chapter, quoted above, Nietzsche writes: “Der histori-
sche Sinn, wenn er ungebändigt waltet und alle seine Consequenzen zieht, ent-
wurzelt die Zukunft, weil er die Illusionen zerstört und den bestehenden Din-
gen ihre Atmosphäre nimmt, in der sie allein leben können.” On Hartmann’s
account, the destruction of illusions is what drives an individual to maturity and
what drives the world process ahead. Hartmann borrows the phrase from
Goethe, who writes that nature punishes him who destroys illusions as the cru-
ellest of tyrants. Hartmann holds that this destruction is necessary nonetheless:

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460 HL 7, KSA 1, p. 295: “When the historical sense reigns without restraint, and all its consequences
are realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things of the atmos-
phere in which alone they can live.” Also quoted in section 4.2 above.
“Unbarmherzig und grausam ist dieses Handwerk der Zerstörung der Illusion, wie der rauhe Druck der Hand, der einen süss träumenden zur Qual der Wirklichkeit erweckt; aber die Welt muss vorwärts; nicht erträumt werden kann das Ziel, es muss erkämpft und errungen werden, und nur durch Schmerzen geht der Weg zur Erlösung!”461 To Nietzsche, the destruction of the illusions is far from necessary. On the contrary: we need illusions to live. And it is the purpose of monumental history to create such illusions: particularly the illusion that one hundred properly educated men is all that it takes to change the course of history.

The argument against the commitment to the world process is in a sense a more important argument than the first. It is present in most of the book, but particularly so in the first section. When introducing the concepts of the historical and the supra-historical, Nietzsche exemplifies the difference by asking the reader to imagine someone being offered to relive the last ten or twenty years. As we noted above, Nietzsche assumes that no one would accept the offer, but that the way the no is justified distinguishes the historical person from the supra-historical. The no of the supra-historical person is based on the opinion that each moment is complete in itself. “Was könnten zehn neue Jahren lehren, was die vergangenen zehn nicht zu lehren vermochten!”462 This notion seems modelled upon Schopenhauer’s notion of history, particularly when Nietzsche adds that the supra-historical persons agree upon one thing: “das Vergangene und das Gegenwärtige ist Eines und dasselbe, nämlich in aller Mannigfaltigkeit typisch gleich und als Allgegenwart unvergänglicher Typen ein stillstehendes Gebilde von unverändertem Werthe und ewig gleicher Bedeutung.”463 This comes very close to Schopenhauer’s polemical description of the study of history in the second volume of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung:

Die wahre Philosophie der Geschichte besteht nämlich in der Einsicht, daß man, bei allen diesen endlosen Veränderungen und ihrem Wirrwarr, doch stets nur das selbe, gleiche und unwandelbare Wesen vor sich hat, welches heute das Selbe treibt, wie gestern und immerdar: sie soll also das Identische in allen Vorgängen, der alten wie der neuen Zeit, des Orients wie des Occidents, erkennen, und, trotz aller Verschiedenheit der speziellen Umstände, des Kostümes und der Sitten, überall die selbe Menschheit erblicken.464

461 Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 620: “Merciless and cruel is this craft of the destruction of illusions, just like the rough touch of the hand that awakens someone dreaming sweetly to the torments of reality; but the world must forwards; the goal cannot be dreamt, it must be fought for and won, and the world to redemption goes only through pain.”
462 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 255: “What could ten more years teach that the past ten years were unable to teach?”
463 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 256: “the past and the present are one, that is to say, with all their diversity identical in all that is typical and, as the omnipresence of imperishable types, a motionless structure of a value that cannot alter and a significance that is always the same.”
464 W II, chapter 38, pp. 522 f./444: “The true philosophy of history thus consists in the insight that, in spite of all these endless changes and their chaos and confusion, we yet always have before us only the same, identical, unchangeable essence, acting in the same way today as it did yesterday and always. The true philosophy of history should therefore recognize the identical in
In the light of the illusory nature of individuality and subjective nature of time, it should not surprise us that history is held in low esteem by Schopenhauer. The past and the future are abstractions, as is the unity of a people. The essence of humanity is present in any moment of any individual’s life; hence whatever can be learnt from history can be learnt through a deep enough study of anyone’s life. This is the view of history of Schopenhauer; and it is the motive behind the supra-historical man’s no to the offer to relive the past.\textsuperscript{465}

The no of the historical person is totally different. He or she is motivated by a belief in future happiness:

\begin{quote}
Diese historischen Menschen glauben, dass der Sinn des Daseins im Verlaufe eines Prozesses immer mehr ans Licht kommen werde, sie schauen nur deshalb rückwärts, um an der Betrachtung des bisherigen Prozesses die Gegenwart zu verstehen und die Zukunft heftiger begehren zu lernen; sie wissen gar nicht, wie unhistorisch sie trotz aller ihrer Historie denken und handeln, und wie auch ihre Beschäftigung mit der Geschichte nicht im Dienste der reinen Erkenntnis, sondern des Lebens steht.\textsuperscript{466}
\end{quote}

The no of the historical person is motivated by a belief in the historical development. This development, this processual character of history, unveils the meaning of existence. The no of the historical person is therefore motivated by the belief that we were to be further removed from the meaning of existence if we were to relive the past ten or twenty years. I will argue that the portrait of the historical person is based on Hartmann.\textsuperscript{467}

A belief in history as a process that reveals the meaning of existence is definitely consistent with Hartmann’s view of history. By seeing how Nietzsche uses the key term \textit{Prozess} on other occasions in \textit{Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil} and the Nachlaß of the same period, we can affirm that this is no coincidence. In section 4.1 above, we saw that it is used a number of times in the Nachlaß, and almost always in connection to discussions or criticism of Hartmann.

Section eight contains another example of Nietzsche’s use of the term process. Here, he talks of the belief that we live in the world’s old age, and how it makes modern man believe himself to be the purpose (\textit{Sinn}) of and a consum-

\begin{enumerate}
\item Colli goes so far as to characterise Schopenhauer as “l’ispiratore nascosto”, the hidden source of inspiration, of \textit{Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil}, Colli: \textit{Scritti su Nietzsche}, p. 21.
\item HL 1, KSA 1, p. 255: “These historical men believe that the meaning of existence will come more and more to light in the course of its \textit{Prozess}, and they glance behind them only so that, from the process so far, they can learn to understand the present and to desire the future more vehemently; they have no idea that, despite their preoccupation with history, they in fact think and act unhistorically, or that their occupation of history stands in the service, not of pure knowledge, but of life.”
\item I am not the first to do so. Maurice Weyembergh argues the same thing in his dissertation: Weyembergh , pp. 35 ff.
\end{enumerate}
formation of world history. “Eine solche Betrachtungsart hat die Deutschen daran gewöhnt, vom ‘Weltprozess’ zu reden und die eigne Zeit als das nothwendige Resultat dieses Weltprozesses zu rechtfertigen”.468 Somewhat later, in his discussion of the irony and cynicism of modern man, Nietzsche quotes the phrase “der volle Hingabe der Persönlichkeit an den Weltprozess”.469 The phrase is placed inside quotation-marks, but Nietzsche does not mention his source. This, however, is a key phrase in the final part of Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewussten.470 After having stated that Schopenhauer’s asceticism contributes no more to the redemption from the unconscious than an individual suicide does, and after going through the things that man held for truths in earlier ages and finding that none of these is good enough, Hartmann comes to the conclusion that there is only one principle upon which a practical philosophy can be founded: “Alle diese Standpunkte sind bloss negative, die praktische Philosophie und das Leben aber brauchen einen positiven Standpunkt, und dies ist die volle Hingabe der Persönlichkeit an den Weltprozess um seiner Ziele, der allgemeinen Welterlösung willen”.471 Only through completely committing oneself to the world process does one contribute to the redemption from the suffering of the unconscious; and therefore this is the only principle upon which to build a practical philosophy. Nietzsche has nothing but disdain when commenting on this phrase: “Die Persönlichkeit und der Weltprozess! Der Weltprozess und die Persönlichkeit des Erdflöhs!”472

The reason for Nietzsche’s scorn against the idea of commitment to a world process is that it exaggerates the value of the present and diminishes that of the past. It does not really matter if one believes in a progress in history, or sees it as a development towards a global self-destruction, the belief in a development in history gives special prominence to the present on account, solely, of its being closer to the goal of history. One of the consequences of this is that one threatens the very foundations of true art. For by justifying the present by defining it as the necessary result of the world process, one affirms the materialism and shallow optimism of the present, one affirms, to use a Hartmannian phrase that Nietzsche quotes, the “gediegene Mittelmässigkeit” (solid mediocrity) of the present.473

468 HL 8, KSA 1, p. 308: “Such a point of view has accustomed the Germans to talk of a ‘world-process’ and to justify their own age as the necessary result of this world-process!”
469 HL 9, KSA 1, p. 312. Hollingdale translates this as “the total surrender of the personality to the world-process”, but this is inaccurate: “complete commitment” does better justice to Hartmann’s phrase than “total surrender”.
470 The quotation is identified in the commentary volume KSA 14.
471 Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 638: “All of these standpoints are only negative, but practical philosophy and life need a positive standpoint, and this is the complete commitment to the world process for the sake of its goal, the common redemption of the world.”
472 HL 9, KSA 1, p. 312: “The personality and the world-process! The world-process and the personality of the flea!”
Hartmann describes the world process as a development towards a state of affairs where science is no longer an intellectual adventure for a small number of giants of the mind, but rather a task subordinated to technology, which in its turn is needed to ensure modern man the comfort and luxury that he has gradually grown more and more accustomed to; and this is a development that we must affirm, on Hartmann’s account. And as art is subject to the same development, we must strive for a state of affairs where art has lost the all-important task of creating meaning in an existence that in itself lacks meaning, where art is reduced to mere entertainment: “Die Kunst wird der Menschheit im Mannesalter durchschnittlich etwa das sein, was dem Berliner Börsenmann des Abends die Berliner Posse ist.” Art reduced to mere entertainment: this is what the solid mediocrity means; and this is one of the faults that Nietzsche found with Strauß. And in the critique of Hartmann in Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil, Nietzsche makes the comparison of them explicit: “Jene erschreckende Verknöcherung der Zeit, jenes unruhige Klappern mit den Knochen – wie es uns David Strauss naiv als schönste Thatsächlichkeit geschildert hat – wird bei Hartmann nicht nur von hinten, ex causis efficientibus, sondern sogar von vorne, ex causa finali, gerechtfertigt”.

The problem with Hartmann, in short, is that he is a philistine. He is, as Nietzsche says repeatedly in the last section, ein Schelm, a rogue. Hartmann and Strauß are two prominent examples of a tendency in German intellectual life towards comfortableness and mediocrity, a tendency whose representatives believe themselves to be cultured but who in truth are enemies of culture (both in the sense of Bildung and in the sense of Kultur) and of art. This is very important for a correct assessment of the importance of pessimism to Die unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen. One of the leading pessimists and one of the leading optimists are grouped together as equals and as Nietzsche’s enemies.

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474 Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 619: “On average, in the years of manhood art will be to mankind something like what the evening burlesque is to the businessmen of Berlin.” Nietzsche quotes the greater part of this sentence in HL 9, KSA 1, p. 315.

475 DS 2, KSA 1, p. 170.

476 HL 9, KSA 1, p. 314: “This dreadful ossification of our age, this restless rattling of the bones – such as David Strauss has naively described to us as the fairest factuality – is justified by Hartmann, not only from behind, ex causis efficientibus, but even from in front, ex causa finali”. It is even more explicit in the Nachlaß, though; for example in NF 29 [52], summer–autumn 1873, KSA 7, p. 650: “Die David-Straussische Gegenwart wird in den Weltprozess eingordnet, findet ihre Stelle und wird also gerechtfertigt. Daher der Erfolg bei der Litteraten-Masse (das heisst nämlich jetzt ‘Erfolg’ überhaupt: die vermögen es schon, das Publikum zum Kaufen aufzureizen!)”

477 HL 9, KSA 1, pp. 317 f. Anthony Jensen lays great stress on this word in his recent discussion of Nietzsche and Hartmann. Jensen holds that this is a reference to the anonymous Das Unbewusste vom Standpunkt der Physiologie und Descendenztheorie. Jensen maintains that Nietzsche knew that Hartmann was the author of the book, and his roguishness thus consists in Hartmann’s debate with himself. Jensen, pp. 46 f
Several important themes connect *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* with the earlier meditations. A number of scornful allusions to the mediocrity and stupidity of Strauß\(^{478}\) and Hartmann\(^{479}\) are obvious enough, but more noteworthy examples are the warnings for dangers inherent in the belief that Germany’s victory over France is a sign of German cultural superiority, the notion that scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) ideals are a threat to art and philosophy, and the call to renew German culture by giving the most promising youths a new form of education.

We have already had reason to note that the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* make extensive use of *ad hominem* arguments. This is especially the case with the third of the meditations, *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*. We have seen that *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil* ends up in an apology for a monumental history which makes extensive use of examples: the fact that only one hundred properly trained men brought about the Renaissance can inspire us to seek to recreate German culture. *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* can be said to repeat this theme, but this time on the level of the individual.

It is – Nietzsche seems to think – difficult to imagine an age more inimical to philosophy than his own. The book is an attempt to show what is wrong with his time, as well as how Schopenhauer can be used as an example to help us avoid that. There is very little of analysis of Schopenhauer’s ideas in the book: Nietzsche uses Schopenhauer as an example, but it is rather Schopenhauer the man than Schopenhauer the thinker that interests him. As we will see, he attempts to explain away important features of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. For the purposes of the present study, it is especially important to note that his pessimism is amongst those features. But it is not an outright denial of the importance of pessimism that Nietzsche gives vent to. Just like in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, pessimism occupies an important role. It is just that it is a totally different role than that attributed to it by Schopenhauer. It is a premise in a totally different line of argument.

A true philosopher must set an example, Nietzsche holds. Among the ancient Greek philosophers the example set through gestures, dress, diet, and personal morals was more important than the example set through words, spoken or written. This goes for the modern philosophers, too. There are a few things in particular that Schopenhauer can teach us through his example. Firstly, it can teach us what philosophy is not and should not be: “Also: ich wollte sagen, dass die Philosophie in Deutschland es mehr und mehr zu verlernen hat, ‘reine Wissenschaft’ zu sein: und das gerade sei das Beispiel des Menschen.

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\(^{478}\) SE 2, KSA 1, p. 349, where the effect that Schopenhauer’s and Montaigne’s cheerfulness (*Heiterkeit*) has on the reader is compared to the misery produced by the cheerfulness of mediocrities such as Strauß.

\(^{479}\) SE 6, KSA 1, p. 384, where the belief that the goal of history consists in the chronologically last men is ridiculed.
Secondly, through Schopenhauer’s example we can reach knowledge of how our times are. In Germany there are naïve people who during the last couple of years (since the end of the Franco-Prussian war, that is) have come to believe that the world has now been rectified. “Denn so stehe es: die Gründung des neuen deutschen Reiches sei der entscheidende und vernichtende Schlag gegen alles ‘pessimistische’ Philosophiren, – davon lasse sich nichts abdingen.” The first step for anyone arguing for the meaningfulness of the philosopher as an educator must be to realise that the notion that a political event can solve philosophical problems is a form of worship of the state that is not only sheer stupidity but also a stain on our time.

With an important metaphor, Nietzsche explains the difference between Schopenhauer and the philosophy of his day: “Man muss den Maler errathen, um das Bild zu verstehen – das wusste Schopenhauer.” And this is what makes him the antithesis of scientific philosophy. Elaborating on the painting metaphor, Nietzsche likens the activity of the scientific philosophers to the study of the chemical makeup of the paint used to paint it. They ignore the painting qua painting, which is what Schopenhauer’s philosophy is all about. Attention to details rather than the sum of the details characterises scientific philosophy on Nietzsche’s account. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, addresses existence as such rather than minute details. But this brief comment on Schopenhauer’s method is also a description of Nietzsche’s own method. When Nietzsche intuited that he could use Schopenhauer’s books to educate himself he saw one flaw in them: that they are only books. “Um so mehr strengte ich mich an, durch das Buch hindurch zu sehen und mir den lebendigen Menschen vorzustellen, dessen grossen Testament ich zu lesen hatte, und der nur solche zu seinen Erben verhiess, welche mehr sein wollten und konnten als nur sein Leser: nämlich seine Söhne und Zöglinge.” It is not the content of the books that is important: it is the character of the man who wrote them that is.

Schopenhauer can help us see the wretchedness of our time. We will see that his pessimism is an important aspect of this. But Schopenhauer is not just a negative example. The purpose of mankind is to bring forth as strong and creative individuals as possible: “die Menschheit soll fortwährend daran arbeiten, einzelne grosse Menschen zu erzeugen – und dies und nichts Anderes sonst ist

480 SE 3, KSA 1, p. 351: “Thus what I was trying to say is that the philosopher in Germany has more and more to unlearn how to be ‘pure knowledge’: and it is to precisely that end that Schopenhauer as a human being can serve as an example.”
481 SE 4, KSA 1, p. 364: “The chief fact is that the founding of the new German Reich is a decisive and annihilating blow to all ‘pessimistic’ philosophizing – that is supposed to be firm and certain.”
482 SE 3, KSA 1, p. 356: “To understand the picture one must divine the painter – that Schopenhauer knew.”
483 SE 2, KSA 1, p. 350: “So I strove all the harder to see through the book and to imagine the living man whose great testament I had to read and who promised to make his heirs only those who would and would be more than merely his readers: namely his sons and pupils.”
ihre Aufgabe.”484 This means that whatever we do, our goal should be to help create favourable circumstances for the creation of philosophical genius. Once we have realised and admitted this we can make use of Schopenhauer to find out how to achieve this goal. For although he grew up subject to four great risks that threaten all extraordinary natures in Germany (loneliness, despair of the truth, feelings of worthlessness from not being able to live up to the standards set by genius and sainthood, and the worthlessness of the times)485, Schopenhauer was also protected by a number of important factors: “freie Männlichkeit des Charakters, frühzeitige Menschenkenntnis, keine gelehrte Erziehung, keine patriotische Einklemmung, kein Zwang zum Brod-Erwerben, keine Beziehung zum Staate – kurz Freiheit und immer wieder Freiheit: dasselbe wunderbare und gefährliche Element, in welchem die griechischen Philosophen aufwachsen durften.”486 These five factors allowed Schopenhauer to become the true philosopher that he was.

The five factors that allowed Schopenhauer to become a philosopher in spite of the negative influence of the times have one thing in common: they lead to freedom. Freedom, Nietzsche maintains, is absolutely necessary for the education to a philosopher. But freedom also brings with it a great responsibility: “Jene Freiheit ist wirklich eine schwere Schuld; und nur durch grosse Thaten lässt sie sich abbüessen.”487

The danger of bad philosophers is that they turn philosophy into a ridiculous activity. The philosophy of Nietzsche’s day causes distress to no-one (sie hat Niemandem betrübt). But this, Nietzsche adds, is the praise of an old woman rather than of a goddess of truth. This in its turn is explicable only in the light of the fact that those who occupy themselves with university philosophy are not men.

Schopenhauer als Erzieher can be seen as a counterpart to David Strauss. Both books describe a possible attitude to philosophy in our age. David Strauss shows what philosophy degenerates to in the hands of the philistines whose only wish is to turn it into a bourgeois profession, well-paid, respectable, and comfortable. Against this ideal, Schopenhauer als Erzieher presents an alternative attitude, epitomised, obviously, by Schopenhauer. His example proves that love for the truth is a terrible and a powerful thing. But Nietzsche goes to remarkable length to distance himself from the result of that love for the truth. The book contains very little in the way of analysis of Schopenhauer’s ideas, and the little that there is aims rather at explaining how Schopenhauer can be so important in spite of

484 SE 6, KSA 1, pp. 383 f.: “Mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men – that and nothing else is its task.”
485 SE 3, KSA 1, pp. 355 ff.
486 SE 8, KSA 1 p. 411: “free manliness of character, early knowledge of mankind, no scholarly education, no narrow patriotism, no necessity for bread-winning, no ties with the state – in short, freedom and again freedom: that wonderful and perilous element in which the Greek philosophers were able to grow up.”
487 SE 8, KSA 1, p. 412: “That freedom is in fact a heavy debt which can be discharged only by means of great deeds.”
his ideas than at appraising them. This is particularly true for Schopenhauer’s pessimism.

Pessimism in *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*

The problem of pessimism, the question of the value of existence, is present at the heart of *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*. One of the dangers that Schopenhauer had to face was the wretchedness of his time. Nietzsche writes that all true philosophers try to pass judgment on existence (*Dasein*). But to a philosopher living in such weakly times it is very difficult to be just to existence. Schopenhauer strived against his time from a very early age on. And his pessimism, Nietzsche holds, is an important part of this.

Throughout *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, three types of humans are used as examples of the higher men: artists, philosophers, and saints. Singling out these types is by no means an original move by Nietzsche: they are, for example, given a similar status by Schopenhauer. The artist’s task is to make the world and man appear beautiful: Nietzsche approvingly quotes an aphorism by Goethe that states that the world is good for one thing only, namely to be the material of dramatic poetry. The philosopher is there to seek knowledge and to teach, through words and through examples. The saint, finally, is there for our redemption (*Erlösung*). This redemption has very little in common with how this concept is used by other thinkers in the vicinity of the pessimistic tradition. It is not redemption from existence as such (as is the case with Schopenhauer’s or Mainländer’s or for that matter Wagner’s *Erlösung*) but rather from the wretchedness of the times.

Pessimism is a crucial aspect here. Our age turns into worse people than we really should be. The first two *Betrachtungen* have pointed out a number of things that are wrong with the times: the philistine optimism destroys everything valuable in art and culture. Our age is wretched, and it makes us wretched. In order to break free from the wretchedness of our times, we have to hate ourselves to the extent that we are representatives of the times; and in our normal constitution (*in unserer gewöhnlichn Verfassung*), we are precisely this. Hence we come to hate ourselves:

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488 SE 5, KSA 1, p. 380. These types are presented as “wahrhafte Menschen, jene Nicht-mehr-Thiere”.
489 SE 5, KSA 1, p. 382: “Ich habe es oft gesagt, ruft er einmal aus, und werde es noch oft wiederholen, die causa finalis der Welt- und Menschenhändel ist die dramatische Dichtkunst. Denn das Zeug ist sonst absolut zu nichts zu brauchen.” The commentary volume KSA 14 identifies this quotation as a letter to Charlotte von Stein.
But that hatred is only the root of pessimism; it is not its flower. It is the beginning of the quest for the redeeming man; but it is not its goal. And once we have become accepted in the circle of artists, philosophers and saints we will have learnt to hate and to love in a new fashion. We know what culture is: culture wants us to know and fight against the enemies of culture; it wants us to get that which has hindered us to become Schopenhauerian men out of the way.

Schopenhauer’s pessimism is thus a weapon to be used against that which is wrong with the times. To the optimistic contemporaries, the philistines, his attack on the established order will seem like cruelty or evil, for they cannot see that there is nothing in their way of life that has any worth. They see the violence of Schopenhauer’s attacks only and become blind to the merits of that which survives them. But those things are precisely what have merits:

This is a crucial passage for understanding *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, and it is a passage where both Schopenhauer’s example and the function of pessimism become clear. Nietzsche’s Schopenhauer is not a pessimist in the sense that the historical Schopenhauer was a pessimist. Schopenhauer the untimely educator wants to negate life in the form that contemporary culture and science makes us live it, but he does so in order to save that in life which is eternal and strong and healthy. He negates, he tears down; his pessimism is a *Nothwahrheit* much like *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil* presents the notion that the Germans have no culture as a prerequisite for a rebirth of such a culture. It is obvious that Schopenhauer’s work of destruction is also crucial for the rebirth of the German culture;

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491 SE 5, KSA 1, p. 383: “It is true that, as we usually are, we can contribute nothing to the production of the man of redemption: that is why we *hate* ourselves as we usually are, and it is this hatred which is the root of that pessimism which Schopenhauer had again to teach our age, though it has existed for as long as the longing for culture has existed.”

492 SE 4, KSA 1, p. 372: “But there is a kind of denying and destroying that is the of that mighty longing for sanctification and salvation and as the first philosophical teacher of which Schopenhauer came among us desanctified and truly secularized men. All that exists that can be denied deserves to be denied; and being truthful means: to believe in an existence that can in no way be denied and which is itself true and without falsehood.”
but it is no less obvious that Nietzsche wants to create a positive, healthy philosophy replacing the sickly culture that Schopenhauer has torn down.\footnote{Georges Goedert, who regards Nietzsche to have been an opponent to Schopenhauer already in \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie}, goes so far as to characterise \textit{Schopenhauer als Erzieher} as “nur ein ver-späteter Dank” to Schopenhauer. Goedert: “Nietzsche und Schopenhauer”, p. 2.}

In a sense, pessimism in \textit{Schopenhauer als Erzieher} fulfils one of the functions that it served in \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie}. In both books, an exaggerated belief in the power of reason has long stood in the way of a rebirth of culture. Pessimism is needed to protect us against that. But in neither book does Nietzsche adhere to pessimism. It is a necessary element, but it has to be overcome.

\textit{Richard Wagner in Bayreuth} (1876)

The fourth of the \textit{Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen} was written for the opening of Wagner’s \textit{Festspielhaus} in Bayreuth in 1876. Nietzsche’s relation to Wagner had deteriorated over the last years, partly due to simple reasons such as greater distance (the Wagners left Switzerland for Bayreuth in 1872), but partly at least due to Nietzsche’s philosophical development, his decreased interest in Schopenhauer in particular. Wagner and Nietzsche met once more after the opening (in Sorrento, Italy, in the autumn of the same year), and it was not until \textit{Die fröhliche Wissenschaft} (1882) that Nietzsche would openly criticise Wagner in his published works, but this event has nonetheless become a symbol of Nietzsche’s break with Wagner.

Still, in the book that Nietzsche wrote for the \textit{Festspielhaus} opening, very little of his critical points against Wagner can be discerned.\footnote{This is stressed by Dieter Borchmeyer who writes that Nietzsche is rather developing Wagner’s thoughts than criticising them in \textit{Richard Wagner in Bayreuth}. “In \textit{Richard Wagner in Bayreuth} (1876) fehlen diese kritischen Einsichten allerdings so gut wie ganz. Die vierte \textit{Unzeitgemäße} ist ihrem Charakter nach eine rein epideiktische Schrift, eine echte ‘Festrede’, wie Nietzsche selbst wiederholt sagt (1309). So oft wie möglich sucht er seine eigene Perspektive derjenigen Wagners anzunähen, dessen Gedanken gewissermaßen weiterzudenken.” Dieter Borchmeyer: \textit{Richard Wagner}, p. 454. The page reference in the quotation is to Borchmeyer & Salaquarda (eds.): \textit{Nietzsche und Wagner}. Borchmeyer points to the notions of Wagner as an anti-Alexander (\textit{Gegen-Alexander}) and as a reborn Aeschylus as the two most important examples of how Nietzsche develops Wagner’s thoughts.
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A number of themes from the earlier \textit{Betrachtungen} and from \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie} are developed in \textit{Richard Wagner in Bayreuth}. Here, of course, they are brought in connection with Wagner. The close relation between certain ancient Greek writers to modern German ones was an important theme in \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie} that is repeated here. The notion that culture is a unity of style, and that Germany lacks such a unity was an important theme in the first two \textit{Betrach-
in particular; we find a version of the same idea here. And the kinship between Wagner and Schopenhauer that is discernible in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is even more explicit in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*. These themes are all related to pessimism.

The notion of culture as a unity of style that formed an important part of the criticism of Strauß in the first and of scientific historiography in the second *Batrachtung* is an important theme here as well. But here it is addressed from a different perspective. Here it is joined together with one of the central themes from *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, namely the hopes in Wagner’s ability to let the German culture be born again. This means that here, Nietzsche does not address the problem with the lack of a German stylistic unity, but rather how Wagner solves that problem.

Nietzsche describes the history of the development of culture since the Greeks as very short, if one measures the distance covered only, and ignores the standing still, the steps back, etc. Very little that has occurred in the last 2,500 years of history has been a step forward. This explains the vicinity of certain modern phenomena to the ancient Greeks: Nietzsche describes Kant as closely related to the Eleatic philosophers, Schopenhauer as related to Empedocles, and Wagner, finally, as related to Aeschylus.⁴⁹⁶ One of the developments since Antiquity has been the Oriental influence on the Western world; that was one of the effects of Alexander the Great. But that influence has gone too far, and it needs to be countered. For this task, a number of anti-Alexanders are needed; and Wagner is one of them:

Nicht den gordischen Knoten der griechischen Cultur zu lösen, wie es Alexander that, so dass seine Enden nach allen Weltrichtungen hin flatterten, sondern ihn zu binden, nachdem er gelöst war – das ist jetzt die Aufgabe. In Wagner erkenne ich eine solche Gegen-Alexander: er bannt und schliesst zusammen, was vereinzelt, schwach und lässig war, er hat, wenn ein medicinischer Ausdruck erlaubt ist, eine *adstringirende* Kraft: in so fern gehört zu den ganz grossen Culturgewalten.⁴⁹⁷

There is no German culture. This was the bitter truth of *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil* that the Germans have to accept in order that a German culture can take form. *David Strauss* and *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil* illustrate how the scientific optimism of the philistines threatens art, which is the crucial factor for a rebirth of German culture. But *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil* and *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* show that historiography and philosophy can be used to counter the baneful influence of the philistines, and how they can be used artistically. The purpose

⁴⁹⁶ WB 4, KSA 1, p. 446.
⁴⁹⁷ WB 4, KSA 1, p. 447: “Not to cut the Gordian knot, as Alexander did, so that its ends fluttered to all the corners of the earth, but to tie it again – that is now the task. I recognize in Wagner such a counter-Alexander: he unites what was separate, feeble and inactive; if a medical expression is permitted, he possesses an *astringent* power: to this extent he is one of the truly great cultural masters.”
of Richard Wagner in Bayreuth is to illustrate how Wagner and Wagner’s art can make the German culture come alive.

Wagner’s life was a permanent struggle with himself, Nietzsche holds: the dithyrambic dramatist was in struggle with the elements of himself that he shared with his time. Wagner’s infamous anti-Semitic pamphlet Das Judenthum in der Musik, Nietzsche writes that Wagner came to understand that the influence of Meyerbeer had made the seeking for pompous effects in music necessary for popular success. But the demands that Meyerbeer’s influence led to enraged Wagner and filled him with shame. Once he had become a critic of effects in music, he gained access to music in a new way: “Es war, als ob von jetzt ab der Geist der Musik mit einem ganz neuen seelischen Zauber zu ihm redete.” It was, Nietzsche adds, as if he became an artist and a musician in that moment.

For an action or an event to achieve greatness, it is not enough that the person who carries it out is great, Nietzsche writes. States can rise and fall, stars can disappear without a trace; and at times the actions of a powerful man fail to make an impression. It is also necessary that there be an audience capable of appreciating the greatness of the event. The founding of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth is a unique event in the arts: “Es ist die erste Weltumsegelung im Reiche der Kunst: wobei, wie es scheint, nicht nur eine neue Kunst, sondern die Kunst selber entdeckt wurde.” The day when the first stone was laid at Bayreuth was the moment that Wagner’s life up until then had prepared him for; this was the moment “wie er wurde, was er ist, was er sein wird.” Whether the founding of Bayreuth takes place at the right time is too early to tell. But it is enough that we believe in it. It is not certain that the audience at Bayreuth is great enough to warrant that the Wagnerian enterprise fulfil its potential of greatness. It is not certain, but Nietzsche has high hopes. He holds it to be clear, at least that the audience at Bayreuth is anschauungswerth, worthy of observation.

This line of reasoning repeats a number of themes from the earlier Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen as well as from Die Geburt der Tragödie. Wagner’s struggle

498 WB 8, KSA 1, p. 472. “[D]er Kampf mit der widerstreben den Welt wurde für ihn nur deshalb so grimmig und unheimlich, weil er diese ‘Welt’, diese verlockende Feindin, aus sich selber reden hörte und weil er einen gewaltigen Dämon des Widerstrebens in sich beherbergte.”

499 WB 8, KSA 1, p. 474. In Das Judentum in der Musik, Wagner regrets the influence of a “weit und breit berühmter jüdischer Tonsetzer unserer Tage”, who has seduced the audiences of the operas with works that are mirages (Täuschungen). That composer attempts to fool the audience, and to chase away their boredom. The name of the composer is not mentioned, but it is Meyerbeer that he alludes to (which the editor Kneif makes clear in a footnote). Richard Wagner: Das Judentum in der Musik, in: Die Kunst und die Revolution/Das Judentum in der Musik/Was ist deutsch?, ed. Tibor Kneif (München, 1975), pp. 72 f.

500 WB 8, KSA 1, p. 474: “It was as though from then on the spirit of music spoke to him with a wholly novel psychical magic.”

501 WB 1, KSA 1, p. 433: “It is the first circumnavigation of the world in the domain of art: as a result of which, as it seems, there has been discovered not only a new art but art itself.”

502 WB 1, KSA 1, p. 434: “how he became what he is and what he will be”.

503 WB 1, KSA 1, p. 434.
against elements of his time in himself has an exact counterpart in Schopenhauer’s struggle as it is presented in the third Betrachtung. Wagner’s project is the opposite of Strauß’ philistine notion of art as mere entertainment. The belief in the greatness of Wagner’s audience corresponds to the belief that Nietzsche expresses in Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil, the belief that there are one hundred men who understand what culture is and upon whom a new culture therefore can be based. And taken together, all of these points add up to a counterpart to the belief in a rebirth of German culture through a rebirth of Greek tragedy in Wagner’s music drama.

Nietzsche thus presents the opening of the Festspielhaus as a positive counter-example to the philistine anti-culture epitomised by Socrates in Die Geburt der Tragödie and by Strauß and the scientific historians in the first and second Betrachtungen. He expresses his belief in the capacity of the audience at Bayreuth to appreciate Wagner’s greatness, and thereby to allow him to renew German culture. But Nietzsche harboured doubts about these things that he professed to believe in. These doubts seem, partly at least, to have had their origin in Nietzsche’s growing awkwardness with pessimism. Although they are not very visible in Richard Wagner in Bayreuth, they can be discerned in the passages where Nietzsche discusses Wagner’s relation to Schopenhauer.

Wagner and Schopenhauer

Richard Wagner in Bayreuth contains a number of passages that stress the close kinship of Wagner and Schopenhauer. We have seen that Schopenhauer als Erzieher paid homage to Schopenhauer as an example, but that his doctrines are held to have a negative value primarily. A similar notion in regard to Wagner is discernible in the fourth Betrachtung. Wagner is presented as a philosopher, and true philosophers teach through their deeds more than through their words. This goes for Wagner too: “Wagner ist dort am meisten Philosoph, wo er thatkräftigsten und heldenhaftigsten ist.”

This means that although Tristan und Isolde is presented as “das eigentliche opus metaphysicum aller Kunst”, it is not in that work that Wagner’s true importance lies. The artist himself is something even more wonderful than this work. To Nietzsche, this is demonstrated by the fact that Wagner was able to create Die Meistersinger (which conveys a completely different message) at the same time as he created Tristan, and that those two works functioned as a form of preparation for Der Ring des Nibelungen.

Der Ring des Nibelungen ist ein ungeheures Gedankensystem ohne die Begriffliche Form des Gedankens. Vielleicht könnte ein Philosoph etwas ganz Entsprechendes ihm zur Seite stellen, das ganz ohne Bild und Handlung wäre und blos in Begriffen zu uns spräche; dann hätte man das Gleiche in zwei disparaten

504 WB 3, KSA 1, p. 445: “Wagner is most a philosopher when he is most energetic and heroic.”
505 WB 8, KSA 1, p. 479: “the actual opus metaphysicum of all art”
And of course, there was a philosopher who did produce a conceptual counterpart to Der Ring; that philosopher was Schopenhauer. A number of allusions to Schopenhauer make this clear. Wagner as a musician has given a voice to everything in nature, Nietzsche says. To him, nothing is mute: “Wenn der Philosoph sagt, es ist Ein Wille, der in der belebten und unbelebten Natur nach Dasein dürstet, so fügt der Musiker hinzuz: und dieser Wille will, auf allen Stufen, ein tönendes Dasein.” Wagner lets the Schopenhauerian will take form as music. This of course means that Wagner depicts the world in its entirety in his music: “Wagner’s Musik als Ganzes ist ein Abbild der Welt, sowie diese von dem grossen ephesischen Philosophen verstanden wurde, als eine Harmonie, welche der Streit aus sich zeugt, als die Einheit von Gerechtigkeit und Feindschaft.” The philosopher from Ephesus who understood reality as a unity of justice and strife was, obviously, Heraclitus. But Nietzsche has already made clear that Schopenhauer is related to Heraclitus in the same way that Wagner is related to Aeschylus. Hence we have three very obvious allusions to Schopenhauer, where Schopenhauer’s name is not mentioned: a philosopher could create a conceptual counterpart to Der Ring – Schopenhauer’s philosophy corresponds to Der Ring (Wagner discovered Schopenhauer when working with the Ring, and his philosophy came to replace the Feuerbachian superstructure); the philosopher describes nature as one will – this is Schopenhauer’s central thought; and Wagner’s music is a depiction of Heraclitus’ world – Heraclitus who Nietzsche had characterised as an ancient Schopenhauer. All of these allusions are quite unambiguous, and yet Nietzsche does not mention Schopenhauer’s name.

Nietzsche thus stresses the similarity of Wagner and Schopenhauer in two ways. Firstly he describes Wagner’s importance in the same terms that he described Schopenhauer’s importance in Schopenhauer als Erzieher. Wagner is a philosopher, and philosophers teach through the example that they set with their lives rather than through their works. Secondly the thinly veiled allusions to Schopenhauer reveal that there is a Schopenhauerian element to Wagner’s works. The content of Schopenhauer’s works – this was the lesson of Schopenhauer.

506 WB 9, KSA 1, p. 485: “Der Ring des Nibelungen is a tremendous system of thought without the conceptual form of thought. Perhaps a philosopher could set beside it something exactly corresponding to it but lacking all image or action and speaking to us merely in concepts: one would then have presented the same thing in two disparate spheres, once for the folk and once for the antithesis of the folk, the theoretical man.”

507 WB 9, KSA 1, p. 491: “If the philosopher says it is one will which in animate and inanimate nature thirsts for existence, the musician adds: and this will wants at every stage an existence in sound.”

508 WB 9, KSA 1, p. 494: “Wagner’s music as a whole is an image of the world as it was understood by the great Ephesian philosopher: a harmony produced by conflict, the unity of justice and enmity.”
Schließlich tragen an dem endgültigen Bruch im Jahre 1876 nicht die Ereignisse der Festspielhauerseröffnung im Bayreuth die Hauptschuld. Vielmehr darf angenommen werden, daß Nietzsche die sowohl im *Ring des Nibelungen* als auch im *Parsifal*-Projekt, das Wagner ihm im Herbst, bei einer Begegnung in Sorrent, eröffnet haben soll, sich äußernde Gedankenwelt Schopenhauers nicht mehr vertragen konnte.509

This seems to me a reasonable interpretation. Furthermore, it seems to be an interpretation that is supported by the parallels between the apparently positive comments on Schopenhauer in the third and on Wagner in the fourth of the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*.

4.3 Pessimism in the *Nachlaß*, 1875–1878

As we have seen, pessimism gradually becomes less important in the years following upon the publication of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. But it does not cease to be a theme in the *Nachlaß*. This development can be discerned in the *Nachlaß* from 1875 and onwards, as well. The word “Pessimismus” occurs less frequently, though it does occur; and although the problem of pessimism – regardless of if it is formulated as the question whether non-existence is to prefer before existence or if it is formulated as the question of the value (or on some occasions the meaning) of life – is discussed less frequently and less earnestly, it is still an important theme.

The question of the value of life becomes especially important after Nietzsche read Eugen Dühring’s book *Der Werth des Lebens* (1865) in the summer of 1875. In a notebook entry where Nietzsche describes his plans, he makes the purpose of the reading of Dühring explicit: “Dühring, als den Versuch einer Beseitigung Schopenhauer’s durchzustudiren und zu sehen, was ich an Schopenhauer habe, was nicht. Hinterdrein noch einmal Schopenhauer zu lesen.”510 And he obviously carried out this plan. A number of fragments from the spring or summer of 1875 concern Schopenhauer and quote him at

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509 Georges Goedert: “Nietzsche und Schopenhauer”, p. 2: “In the end the events of the opening of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth do not deserve the main part of the blame for the final break in 1876. It can rather be assumed that Nietzsche could no longer stand the Schopenhauerian mental world that took form in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* as well as in the *Parsifal* project that Wagner supposedly presented to him during a meeting in the autumn in Sorrent.”

510 NF 8 [4], summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 129: “Study Dühring profoundly as an attempt to set Schopenhauer aside and see what I have from Schopenhauer and what not. In addition read Schopenhauer once more.” Entry number 3 on a list headed “Pläne aller Art.”
And the entire fragment 9 [1] from the summer of that year, a total of 50 pages, consists of a thorough summary (as the book itself in the that Nietzsche read – the first edition – amounts to no more than 234 pages, it is very thorough indeed) and critical discussion of Dühring’s book.512

The discussion of Dühring’s book is closed with a comment by Nietzsche. There he addresses the question what the belief in the value of life is. The belief in the value of life presupposes impure thinking (unreines Denken), Nietzsche professes. It presupposes that one’s compassion with the life and suffering of man in general is ill-developed. “Versteht man es, sein Augenmerk vornehmlich auf die seltensten Menschen, die hohen Begabungen, die reinen Seelen zu richten, nimmt man deren Werden zum Ziel und erfreut sich an deren Wirken, so mag man an den Werth des Lebens zu glauben.”513 Particularly the individual who feels that he or she is stronger and more important than the rest can believe in it. This is the result of a poor imagination, which prevents him from envisioning the situation of his fellow man. If someone were to feel compassion with humanity as such, the experience would be overwhelming: “Vermöchte jemand gar ein Gesammtbewußtsein der Menschheit in sich zu fassen, er bräche unter einem Fluche gegen das Dasein zusammen. Denn die Menschheit hat keine Ziele. Folglich kann in Betrachtung des Ganzen der Mensch, selbst wenn er dessen fähig wäre, nicht seinen Trost und Halt finden: sondern seine Verzweiflung.”514

Nietzsche continues his discussion of Dühring by noting that mankind has found ways to suck happiness out of the misery (Wehe) of the world. For there is a little bit of happiness in the way of life of the individual who seeks knowledge of the suffering, or of the individual who resigns in the face of the suffering, or the one who takes up a struggle against it. It is not that this happiness

511 Particularly NF 5 [72] to 5 [80], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, pp. 60 ff. contain quotations from and discussions of Schopenhauer. In these fragments, Nietzsche seems especially interested in Schopenhauer’s conception of genius and its relation to knowledge.

512 Campioni stresses the importance of Dühring to Nietzsche in spite of Nietzsche’s harsh criticism against him on account of his anti-Semitism: “La discussione con le teorie di Dühring, al di là delle aspre invettive che colpiscono l’antisemita e l’apostolo della vendetta, ha un’importanza centrale per il discorso filosofico di Nietzsche e meriterrebbe di essere approfondita. L’affermazione del ‘valore della vita’, su un’altra base rispetto a Dühring, appare un motivo essenziale per la liberazione dal pessimismo schopenhaueriano.” (“The discussions with the theories of Dühring, apart from the bitter invectives against the anti-Semite and apostle of vengeance, have a central importance to Nietzsche’s philosophical discourse and would deserve to be studied more profoundly. The affirmation of the ‘value of life’, on another basis than Dühring, seems to be an essential motive for the liberation from the Schopenhauerian pessimism.”) Campioni: Sulla strada di Nietzsche (1992; 2nd ed., Pisa, 1998), p. 57, footnote 48.

513 NF 9 [1], summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 178: “If one manages to direct one’s attention solely towards the most exceptional individuals, the greatest talents, and the purest souls, then one can believe in the value of life.”

514 NF 9 [1], summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 179: “If someone managed to grasp the collective conscience of mankind in himself, then he would break down and curse existence. For mankind has no goals. Therefore man could not find comfort and support in a consideration of the totality, even if her were capable of it: but only despair.”
compensates for the suffering, Nietzsche writes: “Or rather: what does compensate mean here? The suffering cannot be made undone by happiness that follows upon it. Pleasure and displeasure cannot cancel each other out.”

This is an important passage. With his denial that pleasure and displeasure cancel each other out, Nietzsche is using a new, much more concrete argument against the Hartmannian form of pessimism.

The tone of the fragments change during this period, especially with the fragment groups 16 and 17 from 1876, where Nietzsche anticipates important themes of his later writings such as dietetics, breeding techniques, the notion of the core of the world as a form of chaos that purportedly is not a metaphysical conception, and the opinion that one’s strength is reflected in how one judges life. One can also notice a change in Nietzsche’s writing in the fragments from this period, a change towards the aphoristic style of his middle period.

Although Nietzsche indisputably is more critical to pessimism than he was earlier, and although he is gradually becoming more critical, the question of the value of life, the central problem of pessimism, remains an immensely important theme. Nietzsche was not a pessimist in 1869–72, and he is even less of a pessimist in 1875/76. But he is still addressing problems raised by Schopenhauer’s and Hartmann’s pessimism. And he is still addressing them in the very terms of those thinkers.


515 NF 9 [1], summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 180: “Or rather: what does compensate mean here? The suffering cannot be made undone by happiness that follows upon it. Pleasure and displeasure cannot cancel each other out.”

516 See, for example, NF 16 [15], 1876, KSA 8, p. 290: “1 Tag nichts essen jede Woche./Abends nur Milch und Thee./Täglich 4 Stunden unterwegs. (mit Notizbich)”

517 For example NF 17 [28], summer 1876, KSA 8, p. 301: “Der Zweck der Kindererzugs ist, freiere Menschen als wir sind, in die Welt zu setzen. Kein Nachdenken ist so wichtig, wie das über die Erblichkeit der Eigenschaften.”

518 For example NF 17 [2], summer 1876, KSA 8, p. 296: “Zu den unbesiegbaren Nothwendigkeit des menschlichen Daseins gehört das Unlogische: daher kommt vieles sehr Gut! Es steckt so fest in der Sprache, in der Kunst, in den Affekten, Religion, in allem, was dem Leben Werth verleiht! Naive Leute, welche die Natur des Menschen in eine logische verwandeln wollen! Es giebt wohl Grade der Annäherung, aber was geht da alles verloren! Von Zeit zu Zeit bedarf der Mensch wieder der Natur d.h. seiner unlogischen Urstellung zu den Dingen. Daher rühren seine besten Triebe.”

519 For example NF 5 [183], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 92: “Die Matten, geistig Armen dürfen über das Leben nicht urtheilen.”

520 NF 3 [63], March 1875, KSA 8, p. 32: “Here too can we see how innumerable people really live in preparation for a true human being: e.g. the philologists as preparation for the philosopher who can draw advantage of their antlike labours, in order to make a statement about the value of
Nietzsche had been wary of the dangers and limitations of philology as a discipline from a young age. This fragment, from the period when Nietzsche worked on a later aborted *unzeitgemäße Betrachtung* on the philologists, “Wir Philologen”, is one of very many where Nietzsche is playing down the importance of philology. The importance of philology lies in its preparing mankind for a new philosophy. But what is important for our purpose is the description of the philosopher who justifies the efforts of the philologists: he who can take advantage of philology to pass a judgement on the value of life.521 The central problem of philosophy thus is the question of the value of life. As we have noted on a number of occasions, that question is the central problem of pessimism. There is an immense difference to the pessimists, though. We have seen that Nietzsche holds Hartmann to be a philistine who uses pessimism to justify the mediocrity of the present; we have also seen that Nietzsche regards Schopenhauer’s pessimism as one of the aspects of his philosophy that served him to fight his time. Philologists are needed to keep the philosophical heritage alive when a generation of philosophers arises that can solve the problem of pessimism. The pessimists themselves are not capable of that.

Nietzsche adopts another position than Schopenhauer in regard to the question of the value of life, but he still addresses the same problem. This is the case also with a number of related themes, such as the relation of knowledge to the negation of life:

*Die Verneinung des Lebens ist nicht mehr so leicht zu erreichen: man mag Einsiedler oder Mönch sein – was ist da verneint! Dieser Begriff wird jetzt tiefer: er ist vor allem erkennende Verneinung, gerecht sein wollende Verneinung, nicht mehr im Bausch und Bogen.*

Wer heute gut und heilig sein wollte, hätte es schwerer: er dürfte um gut zu sein, nicht so ungerecht gegen das Wissen sei, wie es die früheren Heiligen waren. Es müsste ein Wissender-Heiliger sein: Liebe und Weisheit verbindend; und mit einem Glauben an Götter oder Halbgötter oder Vorschungen dürfte er nichts mehr zu schaffen haben; wie damit auch die indischen Heiligen nichts zu thun hatten. Auch müsste er gesund sein und sich gesund erhalten; sonst würde er gegen sich misstrauisch werden müssen. Und vielleicht würde er gar nicht einem asketischen Heiligen ähnlich sehen, vielleicht gar einem Lebemanne.522

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521 Cf. NF 5 [59], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 57. This fragment consists of two columns where the Greeks are compared to the philologists. The heading is “Griechen und Philologen”, with the Greeks designated as pessimists and the philologists as philistines: “Die Griechen huldigen der Schönheit/[…]/ Pessimisten des Gedankens”; “Philologen sind Schwätzer und Tändler/[…]/Philister”

522 NF 5 [26], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 47: “The negation of life is not so easily reached anymore: one may be an eremite or a monk – what is then negated! This concept is now becoming deeper: above all it is knowing negation, negation that wants to be just, it is no longer summary. Who wants to be good and holy today would find it more difficult: in order to be good, he would not have to be so unjust towards knowledge as the earlier saints were. He would have to be a knowing
As we have seen in the chapter on his philosophy, Schopenhauer stresses the difference between the ascetic and the philosopher. There is no need for a philosopher to follow his own moral philosophy. The philosopher’s task is to seek abstract knowledge (Wissen) about, for example, motives for human action. But it is the moral person’s task to follow the rules. Nietzsche questions this division. His Heiliger, his ascetic, has more in common with, say, Baudelaire than with Schopenhauer. But the problem addressed in this fragment and its very language is distinctly Schopenhauerian.

The majority of Nietzsche’s comments on pessimism during this period are critical, but there are a few positive remarks on Schopenhauer’s thinking as well. Most of them have – as was the case earlier, too – to do with Schopenhauer as a person, his courage, his acuity, his skill as a writer. But some comments concern Schopenhauer’s ideas and are decidedly positive, such as when contrasting Schopenhauer with Hartmann:

Die Dummheit des Willens ist der grösste Gedanke Schopenhauer’s, wenn man Gedanken nach der Macht beurtheilt. Man kann an Hartmann sehen, wie er sofort diesen Gedanken wieder eskomotirt. Etwas Dummes wird niemand Gott nennen.523

Hartmann gets rid of Schopenhauer’s greatest idea by reinterpreting it. The stupidity of the will is an idea similar to Nietzsche in his later phases as well. The stupidity of the will, this word taken in its Schopenhauerian sense, is what causes the meaninglessness of the world. There is no purpose in life and we, as humans, are no different from any other natural phenomenon. The difference between Hartmann and Schopenhauer is, however, not that Schopenhauer was right and Hartmann was wrong (although it seems to me that Nietzsche actually held this to be the case with regard to the stupidity of the metaphysical principle upon which the world rests, as is evidenced by the numerous references to the world’s illogical character), but rather that Schopenhauer had the courage to see the world as it is whereas Hartmann lacked that courage. We have seen that optimism vs. pessimism no longer has the importance it had earlier for Nietzsche’s characterization of thinkers. In 1875, he acknowledges that there are lazy pessimists, too:

saint: binding together love and wisdom; and he could not have anything to do with a belief in gods or half-gods or Providence; just as the Indian holy men had nothing to do with them. And he would have to be healthy and keep himself healthy; otherwise he would have to be suspicious against himself. And perhaps he would not look like an ascetic saint at all, perhaps he would be like a man of the world.”

523 NF 5 [23], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 46: “The stupidity of the will is Schopenhauer’s greatest thought, if one judges thoughts by their power. One can see how Hartmann immediately tries to conjure away this thought. No one will call something stupid God.”
Ich träume eine Genossenschaft von Menschen, welche unbedingt sind, keine Schonung kennen und “Vernichter” heissen wollen: sie halten an alles den Maassstab ihrer Kritik und opfern sich der Wahrheit. Das Schlimme und Falsche soll an’s Licht! Wir wollen nicht vorgezügig bauen, wir wissen nicht, ob wir je bauen können und ob es nicht das Beste ist, nicht zu bauen. Es gibt faule Pessimisten, Resignisten – zu denen wollen wir nicht gehören.524

Later, Nietzsche will be using terms such as Dionysian pessimism (dionysischer Pessimismus) and pessimism of strength (Pessimismus der Stärke) to distinguish his own position from the weak, romantic pessimists.525 But here too the very phrase implies that the lazy pessimists (faule Pessimisten) are an exception. The comradeship that Nietzsche dreams of clearly consists of industrious pessimists who do not seek resignation. The fact that he sees the need to mark a distance to the lazy pessimists implies that pessimism still carries connotations of courage and clarity of vision that Nietzsche wants to use.

As we have seen, art is an immensely important theme in Die Geburt der Tragödie and the Nachlaß of that period. It is an immensely important theme in most of Nietzsche’s works. The dichotomy knowledge – art remains relevant to very the end. Increased knowledge leads to an insight into the inherent meaningless of life, and art is needed to temper that insight. This mechanism is present in different works from different epochs: in Die Geburt der Tragödie it is given a metaphysical, Schopenhauerian interpretation (Schopenhauerian metaphysics used to evade Schopenhauerian pessimism). In Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, the same idea is re-interpreted psychologically: the aesthetical justification of existence is transformed into existence’s being bearable through art.526 In the late writings, what is fundamentally the same idea is interpreted in terms of the (non-metaphysical) will to power. Art is given precedence over knowledge in all three works, as it is in almost all of Nietzsche’s works. But in Menschliches, Allzumenschliches, Nietzsche can be said to take the side of knowledge against art. And in the 1875/76 Nachlaß, this reorientation can be discerned. In the spring or summer of 1875, for example, Nietzsche regards art as a form of anaesthesia, belonging to the lower ranks of medicine:


524 NF 5 [30], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 48: “I dream of a comradeship of people who are absolute, who know no mercy and want to be called ‘annihilators’: they compare everything to the yardstick of their criticism and sacrifice themselves for the truth. Out with the evil and false into the light! We do not want to build too early, we know not if we will ever be able to build and if the best thing is not to build. There are false pessimists, resignists – we do not want to belong to them.”

525 The notion of pessimism of strength is addressed in section 5.1 below.

526 FW 107, KSA 3, p. 464: “Als ästhetisches Phänomen ist uns das Dasein immer noch erträglich, und durch die Kunst ist uns Auge und Hand und vor allem das gute Gewissen dazu gegeben, aus uns selber ein solches Phänomen machen zu können.”
wenn ein Kind gestorben, anzunehmen, es lebe noch, schöner, und es gebe ein-
mal eine Vereinigung. So soll die Religion für den Armen da sein, mit ihrer Ver-
tröstung.

Ist die Tragödie für den noch möglich, der keine metaphysische Welt glaubt?
Man muss zeigen, wie auch das Höchste der bisherigen Menschheit auf dem
Grund jener niederen Heilkunst gewachsen ist.527

We have come a long way from the notion of tragedy as that which justifies life.
Art anaesthetizes through representations (Vorstellungen); rather than making us
see suffering, death, and life’s meaningless more clearly, but limited to cer-
tain individuals, as was the case in Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche now seems
to be saying that art blurs the suffering and the lack of meaning. The year after,
Nietzsche criticizes art from a more matter-of-fact point of view:

Wer die Dinge sich für seine Vorstellungen verschönen will, muß es machen wie
der Dichter, der einen Gedanken verschönen will: er spannt ihn in das Metron,
und legt das Gespinst des Rhythmus über ihn: dazu muß er den Gedanken ein
wenig verschlechtern, damit er in den Vers paßt. Das Verschlechtern der Erkenntnis,
um dann die Dinge der Kunst zu beugen: ein Geheimniß der Lebenslustigen.528

Art makes the world more beautiful. But while Nietzsche earlier had described
this process (and later would describe it) as necessary, here the process is de-
scribed in a negatively connotated language: beauty is bought at the cost of the
quality of the thoughts. These two fragments are something of an exception in
this period, though.

The Nachlaß from 1875/76 anticipates many ideas of Nietzsche’s later
works. But pessimism is still a genuine philosophical problem; only later will it
become a problem of pathology.529 Sometimes Nietzsche is using old ideas, as
when he declares Antiquity to be a collection of examples needed to understand

527 NF 5 [163], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, pp. 85 f.: “The means against pain that people use are
often anaesthetics. Religion and art belong to the anaesthetics that work through representations.
They even out and calm; it is a level of lower medicine against pains of the soul. Setting the cause of the
suffering aside through a supposition, as when supposing after the death of a child that it is still
alive, living more beautifully, and that there will eventually be a reunion. That is how the religion
should be there for the poor, providing them comfort./Is tragedy still possible for those who do
not believe in a metaphysical world? One has to show how even the highest that mankind has
hitherto produced grows from that lower form of medicine.”

528 NF 17 [18], summer 1876, KSA 8, p. 299: “Whoever wants to make the things more beautiful
to himself through the representations has to go ahead like the poet that wants to make his own
thought more beautiful: he fastens it to the metron and puts the ghost of rhythm over it: in order
to do that he has to make the thought a bit worse, for it to fit into the verse. Making knowledge worse
in order to bend the things into art: a secret of those with a zest for life.”

529 See section 5.1 below for examples.
Das griechische Alterthum als classische Beispielsammlung für die Erklärung unserer ganzen Cultur und ihrer Entwicklung. Es ist ein Mittel uns zu verstehen, unsre Zeit zu richten und dadurch zu überwinden.

Das pessimistische Fundament unserer Cultur.530

Both Antiquity’s role as a canon for the comprehension of our culture and its role as the pessimistic foundation are ideas that can be discerned in Die Geburt der Tragödie and in Nietzsche’s contemporary pamphlets on the university system and Bildung. A central idea of Die Geburt der Tragödie, the idea that the wisdom of the Ancients was destroyed by Socrates is also discussed in the Nachlaß. And Schopenhauer is used as a positive counter-example to the rationalism of Socrates and his followers:


But Nietzsche also formulates new ideas in a pessimistic context. This can be clearly seen in a long fragment entitled “Goals” (Ziele). A number of ideas that will become important in Nietzsche’s later thinking are anticipated here, and they are all expressed in the context of the question of the value of life.

530 NF 6 [2], summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 97: “Greek antiquity as a collection of classical examples for the explanation of our entire culture and its development. It is a means to understand ourselves, to judge our time and thereby to overcome it. The pessimistic fundament of our culture.” This theme is varied in several fragments from this period, for example NF 5 [200], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 96: “Die Rede des Perikles ein großes optimistisches Trugbild, die Abendröthe, bei der man den schlimmen Tag vergisst – die Nacht kommt hinterdrein.” Cf. also NF 5 [76], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 61: “Die dem Genie beigegebene Melancholie beruht darauf, daß der Wille zum Leben, von je bellerem Intellekte er sich sich beleuchtet findet, desto deutlicher das Elend seines Zustandes wahrnimmt.” Schopenhauer. Cf. die Griechen!” The quotation is from Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (W II, chapter 31, p. 454).

531 NF 6 [25], summer 1875, KSA 8, pp. 107 f.: “With Empedocles and Democritus the Greeks were on the way to make a correct assessment of human existence, its lack of reason, and its suffering; but they never got there, thanks to Socrates. None of the Socratics has the unbiased look at the humans, as they all have those greyish abstractions ‘the Good, the Just’ in their heads. Read Schopenhauer and ask yourself why none of the ancients had such deep and free gaze – why they could not have had it? I cannot see why. On the contrary. They cease to be unbiased with Socrates. Their myths and tragedies are much wiser than the ethics of Plato and Aristotle; and their ‘stoical and epicurean’ men are poor compared to their older poets and statesmen.”
Ziele.

Der Werth des Lebens kann nur durch den höchstes Intellekt und das wärmste Herz gemessen werden.

Wie sind die höchsten Intelligenzen zu erzeugen?\textsuperscript{532}

Nietzsche notes that the goals of human welfare at large are completely different than the creation of intelligence. In this context, Nietzsche introduces a criticism of Christianity (that can also be discerned in the contemporaneous discussion of Dühring referred to above) and of socialism similar to his late writings: the ideals of Christianity (and of socialism) are opposed to those needed to create intelligence. Goodness and intelligence stand in opposition to each other.

Wir müssen wünschen, daß das Leben seinen gewaltsam en Charakter behalte, daß \emph{wilde} Kräfte und Energien hervorgerufen werden. Das Urteil über den Werth des Daseins ist das höchste Resultat der kräftigsten \emph{Spannung} im Chaos.

Nun will das wärmste Herz Beseitigung jenes gewaltsam en, wilden Charakters; während es doch selbst aus ihm hervorging! Es will Beseitigung seines Fundaments! Das heißt, es ist nicht intelligent!

Die höchste Intelligenz und das wärmste Herz können nicht in Einer Person zusammen sein. Die höchste Intelligenz ist \textit{höher} als alle Güte, auch \textit{diese} ist nur etwas bei der Gesammtrechnung des Lebens \textit{Abzuschätzendes}, der Weise steht darüber.\textsuperscript{533}

This fragment anticipates several important themes of Nietzsche’s later books. The question of how to breed a higher form of man, morality leading to the destruction of the basis of morality, life interpreted as a conglomerate of forces: all these themes are addressed in similar terms (only more exhaustively, obviously) in \textit{Zur Genealogie der Moral}, \textit{Jenseits von Gut und Böse} and other works. But here they are discussed in relation to the question of the value of life; in relation, that is, to the central problem of pessimism.

A number of fragments from 1875 are preliminary studies for the fourth of the \textit{Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen}, \textit{Richard Wagner in Bayreuth}. Several of these contain comment on pessimistic themes. When commenting on the notion of love in \textit{Tristan und Isolde}, for example: “Die \textit{Liebe} im Tristan ist nicht schopenhauerisch, sondern empedokleisch zu verstehen, es fehlt ganz das \textit{Sündliche}, sie ist Anzei-

\textsuperscript{532} NF 5 [188], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 93: “Goals./The value of life can only be measured by the \textit{highest intellect} and the warmest heart./How can the highest intelligences be created?”

\textsuperscript{533} NF 5 [188], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 93: “We have to wish that life retains its \textit{violent} character, that \textit{wild} forces and energies are conjured forth. The judgment on the value of existence is the highest result of the strongest \textit{tension} in chaos./Now the warmest heart wants to get rid of that violent, wild character; even though it was formed out of it itself! It wants to get rid of its own foundation! That means, it is not intelligent!/ The highest intelligence and the warmest heart cannot co-exist in one person. The highest intelligence is \textit{higher} than all goodness, \textit{for goodness} is not to be taken into \textit{consideration} until summing up life, the wise man stands above it.”

\textsuperscript{533} NF 5 [188], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 93: “We have to wish that life retains its \textit{violent} character, that \textit{wild} forces and energies are conjured forth. The judgment on the value of existence is the highest result of the strongest \textit{tension} in chaos./Now the warmest heart wants to get rid of that violent, wild character; even though it was formed out of it itself! It wants to get rid of its own foundation! That means, it is not intelligent!/ The highest intelligence and the warmest heart cannot co-exist in one person. The highest intelligence is \textit{higher} than all goodness, \textit{for goodness} is not to be taken into \textit{consideration} until summing up life, the wise man stands above it.”
Wagner durch Mißlingen ausgehöhlt und zerfressen wäre eine fürchterliche Na-
tur; es würde ihn die finstere Melancholie eines Umsturz-Dämons einhüllen.[- - -]

Die vielen tragischen Möglichkeiten, die in der Treue liegen, hat Wagner für die
Kunst erst entdeckt. Sein eigenes Leben ging durch diese Möglichkeiten hindurch
und war dadurch eines der schwersten Leben, das gelebt werden kann. Auf der
größten Hälfte [sic!] seines Lebens liegt das Nicht-Hoffen; darum auch das Nicht-
verzweifeln; aber wie ein Wanderer mit schwerer Bürde durch die Nacht zieht,
allein, so mag ihm oft zu Muthe gewesen sein: ein plötzlicher Tod erschien ihm
dann nicht als ein schreckendes, sondern ein verlockendes liebreizendes Ge-
spenst. Last, Weg und Nacht – alles mit einem Male fort! Die Treue hielt ihn und
stritt mit dem Gespenst.535

This portrait of Wagner draws on Nietzsche’s interpretations of Dürer’s Ritter,
Tod und Teufel (1513) in Die Geburt der Tragödie. There, Schopenhauer is presented
as a “Dürerscher Ritter”, who although without hope valiantly goes to war
against the mediocrities of the modern, Alexandrine culture.536 But it also draws
on Hamlet. Like Hamlet, Wagner had reason to observe that it would be better
not to be alive. Like Hamlet, something held him back, though. Wagner was
saved by his faithfulness. This faithfulness is the stuff of Wagner’s music dra-
mas.

In Die Geburt der Tragödie, Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde is presented as the quin-
tessentially Dionysian work of art, and therefore an artistic expression of pessi-
mism. Its Dionysian power, were it not mitigated by the beautiful Apollinian
illusion, would destroy the listener.537 In the Nachlaß of 1875, Nietzsche is no
longer using the dichotomy Dionysian – Apollinian. But Tristan is still regarded
as deeply pessimistic. It is the result of a form of introspection on Wagner’s
part, and results in his purging himself from optimism: “Sein Weltblick wendet
sich in die Tiefe, er sieht das Leiden im Fundament und reinigt sich von allem

534 NF 11 [5], summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 191: “Love in Tristan should not be understood as
Schopenhauerian but as Empedoclean, the sinful is absolutely absent, it is a sign and guarantee of
an eternal unity.”

535 NF 11 [27], summer 1875, KSA 8, pp. 214 and 216: “Wagner would be a terrifying nature if he
were hollowed out and corroded; the gloomy melancholy of a revolutionary demon would have
enshrouded him. [- - -] Wagner was the first to discover the many tragic possibilities for art inherent
in faithfulness. His own life went through these possibilities and was therefore one of the most
difficult lives that can be lived. A lack of hope lies upon the larger half [sic!] of his life; and therefore
also a lack of despair; but he must often have been in the mood of a wanderer carrying a heavy
burden through the night, alone: sudden death would not have seemed to be a frightening ghost
but a seducing lovely one. The burden, the road, the night – everything would disappear in an
instant! But faithfulness held him fast and made him fight the ghost.”

536 GT 20, KSA 1, p. 131.

537 GT 21, KSA 1, p. 135.
Optimismus. Sehnsucht aus dem Tag in die Nacht, Tristan.”  

Although Nietzsche’s interest in pessimism has diminished since the early 1870’s, it is still very much a theme that attracts his interest in 1876. In a series of fragments from the autumn of that year, he is obviously still trying to come to terms with pessimism:

Es gibt viel mehr Behagen, als Unbehagen in der Welt. Practisch ist der Optimismus in der Herrschaft; – der theoretische Pessimismus entsteht aus der Betrachtung: wie schlecht und absurd der Grund unseres Behagens ist; er wundert sich über die geringe Besonnenheit und Vernunft in diesem Behagen; er würde das fortwährende Unbehagen begreiflich finden.

Knowledge of the world leads to theoretical pessimism, which in its turn leads to practical pessimism. This was one of the main themes in Die Geburt der Tragödie and even more so in the Nachlaß fragments leading up to that work; it was an important theme in the Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen. This fragment contains a remnant of that idea, but with an important difference. It is not the privileged Dionysian knowledge of the essence of the Ur-Eine that leads to pessimism, but theoretical reflection on happiness and satisfaction. The knowledge in question is no longer the highest metaphysical truth, but reflections on matters that reflection should leave alone. In Die Geburt der Tragödie Nietzsche considered art as a means of protection against the excess of knowledge that science could produce. He still holds this to be a correct description; but by now the valuation has changed. Rather than saving the Greeks from science, art is now said to have hindered science: “Kunst die Wissenschaft verhindernd bei den Griechen.”

Two fragments question the honesty of the pessimists on account of their inconsequent attitude to death:

Wer das Nichtsein wirklich höher stellt, als das Sein, hat im Verhalten zu dem Nächsten dessen Nichtsein mehr zu fördern, als dessen Sein; weil die Moralisten dieser Forderung ausbiegen wollen, erfinden sie solche Sätze, dass Jeder nur sich selber in’s Nichtsein erlösen könne.

538 NF 12 [15], summer–end of September 1875, KSA 8, p. 253: “His worldly gaze turns into the depths, he sees suffering in the foundation and purges himself from all optimism. Longing out of the day into the night, Tristan.” The pronoun “sein” (“his”) refers to Wagner.

539 NF 18 [15], September 1876, KSA 8, p. 318: “There is much more satisfaction than dissatisfaction in the world. In practice optimism reigns, – theoretical pessimism originates from reflection: how bad and absurd is the reason for our satisfaction; it marvels at the insignificant amount of moderation and reason in this satisfaction; it would find permanent dissatisfaction to be understandable.”

540 NF 23 [8], end of 1876–summer 1877, KSA 8, p. 405: “Art hindering science in the Greeks.”

541 NF 18 [57], September 1876, KSA 8, p. 330: “He who really taxes non-being higher than being will have to further the non-being of the fellow man in his relation to him; since the moralists want to avoid this demand they invent phrases such as that one can only redeem oneself into
Those who prefer non-being over being obviously are the pessimists. Nietzsche implies that pessimism would sanction murder if it were not for the intellectual dishonesty of the pessimists. If anyone would take pessimism seriously, they would end their own life, and to the extent that they are altruistic at least, they would take as many as they could with them. Some months later we find a psychological explanation for Schopenhauer’s philosophy: “Die Philosophen finden den Willen zum Leben namentlich dadurch bewiesen, daß sie das Schreckliche oder Nutzlose des Lebens einsehen und doch nicht zum Selbstmord greifen – aber ihre Schilderung des Lebens könnte falsch sein!”

In the fragments of this period, we can see Nietzsche looking back on his philosophical development. One fragment in particular underlines how his attitude to pessimism has changed: “Damals glaubte ich daß die Welt vom aesthetischen Standpunkt aus ein Schauspiel und als solches von ihrem Dichter gemeint sei, daß sie aber als moralisches Phänomen ein Betrug sei: weshalb ich zu dem Schlusse kam, daß nur als aesthetisches Phänomen die Welt sich rechtfertigen lasse.” The central notion of Die Geburt der Tragödie, the attempt to solve the problem of pessimism through art, is now a thing of the past.

But Nietzsche is also using a new form of argument against pessimism that he will later excel in. It is in the Nachlaß of 1878 that we have the first examples of how Nietzsche associates pessimism with indigestion:


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542 NF 23 [89], end of 1876–summer 1877, KSA 8, p. 435: “The philosophers find the will to life to be proven by the fact that they realise the horror or meaninglessness of life and still do not commit suicide – but their description of life could be false.” A similar inversion of Schopenhauer is discerned in fragment NF 30 [92], summer 1878, KSA 8, p. 538: “Das Schönste am Hunger ist, dass er einem Appetit macht.”

543 NF 30 [51], summer 1878, KSA 8, p. 530: “At that time I believed the world from an aesthetic point of view to be a spectacle and intended as such by its creator, but that it is a deceit when considered as a moral phenomenon: hence I came to the conclusion that the world could only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon.” Even more distance to his old ideas is expressed in fragment NF 23 [159], end of 1876–summer 1877, KSA 8, p. 463: “Lesern meiner früheren Schriften will ich ausdrücklich erklären, daß ich die metaphysisch-künstlerischen Ansichten, welche jene im Wesentlichen beherrschen, aufgegeben habe: sie sind angenehm, aber unhaltbar. Wer sich frühzeitig erlaubt öffentlich zu sprechen, ist gewöhnlich gezwungen, sich bald darauf öffentlich zu widersprechen.”

544 NF 38 [1], November–December 1878, KSA 8, p. 575: “Unexpected learning. – Only a life full of pain and renunciation teaches us that existence is saturated with honey: this is why one often chooses asceticism out of a cunning Epicureanism. – The ‘pessimists’ are clever people with ruined stomachs: they take revenge with the head for their indigestion.” Cf. GD, Streifzüge 1, KSA 6, p. 111: “Carlyle oder Pessimismus als zurückgetretenes Mittagessen.”
Later, particularly in *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche will explain the gloominess and clumsiness of the Germans with a faulty diet of fat food and excesses of beer that ruins their stomachs.

One fragment is particularly important as it illustrates how Nietzsche’s relation to Schopenhauer has changed. We have seen that Nietzsche was critical of various aspects of Schopenhauer’s philosophy more or less from the very start. At first, his criticism seemed to be part of an attempt to solve problems that Schopenhauer himself did not see. Later he interpreted the problems as something that belonged to the time that Schopenhauer lived in and that he tried to rid himself of. Now he is criticising a key concept in Schopenhauer’s philosophy without trying to reduce the severity of his criticism:

Schopenhauer hat leider in dem Begriff “intuitive Erkenntnis” die schlimmste Mystik eingeschmuggelt, als ob man vermöge derselben einen unmittelbaren Blick auf das Wesen der Welt, gleichsam durch ein Loch im Mantel der Erscheinung hätte und als ob es bevorzugte Menschen gäbe, welche, ohne die Mühsal und Streng der Wissenschaft, vermöge eines wunderbaren Seherauges etwas Endgültiges und Entschiedenes über die Welt mitzuteilen vermöchten. Solche Menschen gibt es nicht: und das Wunder wird auch für den Bereich der Erkenntnis fürderhin keinen Gläubigen mehr finden.\(^{545}\)

Criticism against Schopenhauer’s conception of knowledge has been a recurring theme in Nietzsche’s *Nachlaß* a long time. Since 1866, Nietzsche has repeatedly claimed that redemption from the will through knowledge is impossible since the faculty of knowledge is a tool of the will. That is a criticism that can be levelled from within Schopenhauerian metaphysics: it is (or can be at least) an attempt to come to terms with an inconsistency in the system. But in this fragment, the privileged status of the intuitive knowledge, upon which Schopenhauer’s notion of asceticism and compassion hinges, is declared to be mysticism.\(^{546}\)

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\(^{545}\) NF 23 [173], end of 1876–summer 1877, KSA 8, p. 467: “Unfortunately Schopenhauer smuggled the worst form of mysticism into the concept ‘intuitive knowledge’, as if one could take an unmediated look at the essence of the world, as through a hole in the coat of the representations, and as if there existed privileged people who are able to communicate something definitive and determined about the world with the help of a wonderful clairvoyant eye and without the effort and strictness of science. Such people do not exist: and in the realm of knowledge too the believers in that wonder will be ever more difficult to find.”

There is a clear tendency in the Nachlaß of the period 1875–78 with regard to Nietzsche’s treatment of pessimistic themes. Although Nietzsche never seems to have seen pessimism as a credible theoretical doctrine, his arguments against it have changed character. No longer does Nietzsche attack pessimism from a position that respects the pessimistic system: now his criticism is directed against the very premises of the pessimistic argument. Schopenhauer’s conception of intuitive knowledge is brushed aside as mysticism, and Hartmann’s notion that pleasure can be weighed against displeasure is dismissed.

But we have also seen that Nietzsche remains preoccupied with the question of the value of life, the central problem of pessimism, during the period. This, to be sure, to some degree depends on his reading Dühring’s Der Werth des Lebens in 1875. But the decision to study the book was in its turn prompted by the fact that Dühring’s book is directed against Schopenhauer.

4.4 Conclusions: The Early Nietzsche and Pessimism

In this chapter and the last we set out to investigate Nietzsche’s position in the tradition of pessimist philosophy during the early phase of his career. In order to do that we undertook to examine the writings of Nietzsche’s early period, trying specifically to find out whether Nietzsche defines pessimism, whether he characterises or describes himself as a pessimist or not, and whether it is possible to differentiate between the relative importance of the various pessimists to Nietzsche. We have seen that Nietzsche’s use of pessimism has its roots in Schopenhauer’s, as he alludes to the very passage where Schopenhauer defines the concept, making the same point as Schopenhauer does. We have also seen that the expression “justification of existence”, Schopenhauer’s key phrasing of the problem of pessimism, is of central importance to Nietzsche. But Nietzsche does not describe himself as a pessimist. On the contrary: pessimism is true, but we need something that saves us from this truth. We need art, we need tragedy. But pessimism is not only that which art shall deliver us from, pessimism is also a crucial element of art.

This leads us to the question of which pessimists Nietzsche reacted to. In his introduction to a volume of papers on Nietzsche’s relation to Schopenhauer, the editor Christopher Janaway complains that “many discussions of Nietzsche these days make only glancing reference to Schopenhauer – which is, at best, Hamlet without the Ghost.” This complaint is exaggerated, and valid more or less only for the Anglo-Saxon Nietzsche scholarship. Still, Janaway’s observation has some truth to it. But if anything, the present chapter has demonstrated that it is a more pressing problem that Nietzsche is discussed without reference to Hartmann. If Schopenhauer is the Ghost in relation to Nietzsche’s Hamlet,

then Hartmann perhaps can be said to be Polonius. Polonius is a prominent target for Hamlet’s ridicule; but it is also through his death that the action of the play is propelled towards its blood-soaked conclusion. Similarly, Nietzsche heaps scorn on Hartmann; but his Nachlaß makes clear just how great an effort Nietzsche made to overcome Hartmann. He purports not to take Hartmann seriously, but nonetheless much of Nietzsche’s discussion of pessimism is an attempt to contest Hartmann’s form of pessimism.

To be sure, Schopenhauer’s philosophy is the origin of Nietzsche’s discussion of pessimism. The philosophy developed in Die Geburt der Tragödie is developed within a Schopenhauerian framework. He tries to find a solution to the pessimistic problem of existence that he found in Schopenhauer’s works. But when Nietzsche is trying to come to terms with pessimism, he is doing that in a struggle with Hartmann’s, not Schopenhauer’s pessimism.548

Nietzsche is not a pessimist, but he takes pessimism seriously. He does not satisfy himself with the notion that it would be better not to exist, but neither does he declare that notion to be a pathological phenomenon. In the introduction to this study, we had reason to quote Lichtenberg’s foresighted aphorism “Der eine mit seinem Optimismus, der andere mit seinem Pessimismus”, observing that the pessimists and their adversaries tend to lack all conditions of a mutual understanding. To the pessimists, pessimism is the highest truth on mankind’s situation. To their adversaries, pessimism is a disease. Nietzsche avoids both positions. He can see the positive value of pessimism, its creative potential and its audacious attitude to suffering. Far from being a pessimist, Nietzsche is an understanding adversary to pessimism.

He is an understanding adversary to pessimism in the early phase, that is. As we will have reason to note in the next chapter, Nietzsche’s attitude to pessimism changes. He goes from occupying a fairly unique position between the pessimists and their opponents to employing rhetorical stratagems shared with some of the shallowest of pessimism’s adversaries. We will also have reason to note that although pessimism loses in interest to Nietzsche, it remains a central problem.

548 I therefore agree with the conclusion of Anthony K. Jensen, who in a recent article on Nietzsche and Hartmann stresses the importance of Hartmann to the early Nietzsche: “To be sure, the Bejahung of his later philosophy was in large part a response to the pessimism of Schopenhauer. But I think it was also a response to Hartmann, against whose brand of pessimism he reacted first.” Jensen, p. 54.
PART III:
PESSIMISM IN NIETZSCHE’S LATE PHASE
5. Pessimistic Themes in Nietzsche’s Late Writings

Nietzsche is generally taken to have lost interest in pessimism after the mid-1870’s. His life changed on many levels. In 1876, he met with Wagner for the last time, and although there certainly were personal reasons behind their break, one important reason is that Wagner’s artistic development took a more pessimistic direction (his last finished work, Parsifal, is among other things a celebration of chastity and redemption), whereas Nietzsche as we have seen gradually distanced himself from pessimism. After several years of ill health, Nietzsche left his professorship permanently in 1879. Around this time, he harboured some admittedly vague plans to study the natural sciences; and although these plans resulted in nothing a scientific ideal permeated his writing for some years. These and several other changes in Nietzsche’s writings and life can give the impression that pessimism ceased to be of concern to him. I hold this impression to be incorrect. As I will seek to demonstrate in this third and last part of my study, a number of themes highly important for the late Nietzsche have their roots in his earlier attempts to resolve the problem of pessimism.

This chapter is divided into four parts, each of which is dedicated to a theme in Nietzsche’s late writings and to its roots in his early phase. The purpose of this structure, which obviously breaks up the structure of the last two chapters, is to demonstrate how Nietzsche’s view of pessimism changes, but also how important elements of it are absorbed into other discussions and contexts. The first section is dedicated to the question of how Nietzsche’s notion of nihilism is related to his notion of pessimism. The second section discusses how Nietzsche’s view of Hamlet, and the third section how his view of Leopardi, change as his attitude to pessimism changes. The fourth section finally seeks to demonstrate that Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal recurrence has an important pessimistic context that has gone largely unnoticed in previous research.
5.1 Pessimism and Nihilism

Pessimism is a phenomenon fairly often addressed in discussions of Nietzsche’s early works. It is discussed much more seldom in relation to the later phase of his production. One reason for this is that pessimism in Nietzsche’s eyes seems to gradually become absorbed by another problem. In his later works, pessimism becomes a limited case of nihilism. There is a large literature on Nietzsche’s relation to nihilism; and particularly Elisabeth Kuhn has done a large and important work in showing how Nietzsche gradually come to regard pessimism as a preliminary form (Vorform) of nihilism. This section aims at elucidating the relation of pessimism and nihilism, and the related theme of Nietzsche’s dichotomy of pessimism of strength and pessimism of weakness. Since a large and reliable body of research of Nietzsche’s relation to nihilism already exists, I have limited this section to a minimum. My aim in this section is thus rather to complement the results of Kuhn and others than to try to refute them.

Our investigation of Nietzsche’s relation to pessimism in the early 1870’s has shown that Nietzsche is atypical for the period. Pessimism became a problem for him with the reading of Hartmann in 1869, and his discussions of pessimism in the Nachlaß are often based on Hartmann’s rather than Schopenhauer’s version of pessimism. But he never considered Hartmann’s version of pessimism to be tenable: Nietzsche does not consider the idea that a measurement of the amount of pleasure and displeasure in the world can determine whether pessimism or optimism is true; he does not even argue against it. Furthermore, it is not until the mid 1870’s that Hartmann’s notion of progress – and thereby his solution to the problem of pessimism – becomes an issue for Nietzsche; when it does he has nothing but scorn for it. Nietzsche, that is, is not interested in the scientific (wissenschaftliche) form of pessimism that the pessimistic philosophers of the 1870’s tried to create. Hartmann, we have argued, functions as a catalyst; by reading him, Nietzsche came to understand Schopenhauer better.

To Schopenhauer, pessimism is a theoretical problem that has no consequences for the practical life of the pessimist. His pessimistic system can describe how resignation and thus redemption is brought about, but it cannot function as a motive. To the other pessimists, the theoretical knowledge of pessimism is the knowledge that motivates the striving for redemption from life. Nietzsche too distinguishes between pessimism as a theoretical doctrine and its practical counterpart. But, and in this Nietzsche differs from the pessimists, he regards the practical aspect of pessimism as the true problem. The many instances in the Nachlaß where Nietzsche describes pessimism as logically untenable and the use of the phrase praktischer Pessimismus in Die Geburt der Tragödie show this. Furthermore, he sees a danger that theoretical pessimism might lead to practical pessimism: that the insight into the worthlessness of life

549 Kuhn: Nietzsche Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus, e.g. p. 41 and passim.
that forms the basis of theoretical pessimism leads to a loss of hope on the practical level. This is one of the things that Nietzsche’s discussion of Buddhism in Die Geburt der Tragödie demonstrated.

Nihilism became an important theme in Nietzsche’s thinking from the early 1880’s. After resigning definitively from the University of Basel in 1879 he was spending more and more time in Italy and France; this change was, more or less unavoidably, accompanied by a change towards a French orientation in his reading habits. It was not least the literary debates over themes such as degeneration and decadence that attracted his attention.\[550\] And from the very beginning he found himself reading thinkers who associate nihilism with pessimism. In 1880, for example, Nietzsche read a French edition of Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons with an introduction by Prosper Mérimée; Mérimée there speculates (wrongly as it were) that Turgenev’s nihilists were influenced by Schopenhauer.\[551\]

The interest for nihilism was increased in 1883, when Nietzsche read the first volume of Paul Bourget’s Essais de psychologie contemporaine (1883–86).\[552\] In Bourget, we find an outright expression of the idea that German pessimism, Russian nihilism, and French naturalism have a common root in a nausea plaguing modern man:

Une nausée universelle devant les insuffisances de ce monde soulève le cœur des Slaves, des Germains et des Latins. Elle se manifeste chez les premiers par le nihilisme, chez les seconds par le pessimisme, chez nous-mêmes par de solitaires et bizarres névroses. La rage meurtrière des conspirateurs de Saint-Pétersbourg, les livres de Schopenhauer, les furieux incendies de la Commune et la misanthropie acharnée des romanciers naturalistes – je choisis avec intention les exemples les plus disparates – ne révèlent-ils pas un même esprit de négation de la vie qui, chaque jour, obscurcit davantage la civilisation occidentale? Nous sommes loin, sans doute, du suicide de la planète, suprême désir des théoriciens du malheur.\[553\]

\[550\] An excellent overview of the debate is offered in part I of Pick’s Faces of Degeneration.
\[551\] Kuhn: Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus, p. 22. For a discussion of Turgenev’s and Mérimée’s notions of nihilism vis-à-vis that of Nietzsche, see also Kuhn: “Nietzsches Quelle des Nihilismus-Begriffs”, pp. 262–269.
\[552\] Bourget’s importance for Nietzsche is stressed by more or less all scholars who comment on Nietzsche and nihilism. See for example Kuhn: Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus, pp. 42 f., Chiara Piazzesi: Nietzsche. Fisiologia dell’arte e décadence, Il viandante e l’ombra 1 (diss., Lecce, 2003), pp. 1–19 and passim., or Campioni: Sulla strada di Nietzsche, particularly pp. 237–250; Campioni: Les lectures françaises de Nietzsche, pp. 250–260.
\[553\] Bourget: Essais de psychologie contemporaine, pp. 9 f: “A universal nausea affects the Slavic, the Germanic and the Latin races when they face the insufficiencies of this world. It manifests itself among the first as nihilism, among the second as pessimism, and among us as solitary and bizarre neuroses. The murderous rage of the conspirators of St Petersburg, the books of Schopenhauer, the raging fires of the Commune of Paris and the relentless misanthropy of the naturalistic novelists – I have deliberately chosen the most disparate examples – do they not reveal one and the same spirit of negation of life that with each passing day darkens the Western civilisation? We are far, no doubt, from the suicide of the planet, the supreme desire of the theoreticians of unhappiness.”
But Nietzsche might have been familiar with the association of pessimism with nihilism at a much earlier date. We saw in section 2.2 that the pessimist Julius Bahnsen associates pessimism and nihilism in his *Zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, a book that Nietzsche borrowed from the university library in Basel in 1872.\(^{554}\) In section 2.3 we saw furthermore that Jürgen Bona Meyer, professor at Bonn and author of a couple of pamphlets on the philosophy of pessimism with which Nietzsche possibly was familiar, described pessimism as the German form of a phenomenon that also manifested itself as Russian nihilism.\(^{555}\)

With the reading of Bourget’s book in 1883, Nietzsche comes to regard nihilism a serious problem facing Europe. As a result, his interest in pessimism decreases. Or so most scholars have described the situation. But even after Nietzsche had come to consider pessimism a form of nihilism rather than a problem in its own right, there remain pessimistic themes in his notebooks and writings. And he apparently continued buying and reading books dealing with pessimistic issues: for example he owned Bahnsen’s *Widerspruch im Wissen und Wesen der Welt* (1880–82), as well as the French translation of Sully’s *Pessimism* (1882), and Olga Plümacher’s *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (1884).\(^{556}\) Most scholars who have studied Nietzsche’s relation to the pessimistic thinkers maintain that his interest in them was much greater than has hitherto been acknowledged.\(^{557}\) This is the opinion of Lütkehaus, for example: “Insbesamt ist seine Verbindung zu Hartmann, Mainländer, Bahnsen weit intensiver,

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\(^{554}\) Bahnsen: *Zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 2 and p. 72 (quoted in section 2.2 above). According to Luca Crescenzi’s list of the books that Nietzsche borrowed from the university library, he borrowed *Zur Philosophie der Geschichte* on 26 April 1872, Crescenzi, p. 414.

\(^{555}\) Meyer: *Welteidend und Weltschmerz*, p. 26: “Wenn hiermit die Zeichen der Zeit richtig gedeutet sind, dann mag der Pessimismus noch eine Weile im Russischen Nihilismus hausen, in der traurigen Zerfahrenheit unseres einst edleren Nachbarvolkes seinen Anhang suchen; Seele unseres deutschen Volkes aber kann dieser Pessimismus kaum noch sein und gewiß nicht bleiben.” In another book from the same year, Meyer also labels Schopenhauer a nihilist: “Noch einmal versuchte er von Italien heimkehrend die Docentenlaufbahn in Berlin, wieder mit demselben Mißerfolg. Wir mögen es gerne als ein Zeichen erfreulicher Gesundheit betrachten, daß die akademische Jugend keinen Geschmack an dem querköpfigen Nihilismus und dem grämlichen Pessimismus des Docenten fand.” Meyer: *Arthur Schopenhauer als Mensch und Denker*, p. 48. It is uncertain whether Nietzsche actually read any of the pamphlets of Jürgen Bona Meyer: it is not listed in *Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek* and the four passages where Meyer is mentioned (once in SE, twice in KSA 7, once in KSB 4, see footnote 417 in section 3.1 above) are too brief to offer conclusive evidence. It is of course possible that Nietzsche came across Meyer’s name in a journal or newspaper article of some sort and that he merely uses him as a symbol without reading him. But Meyer’s books prove that Nietzsche might well have been familiar with this idea much earlier. Earlier, in fact, than the first instance of someone using the term in a text known to Nietzsche that Kuhn points to (*Friedrich Nietzsches Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus*, p. 21), a letter from Carl Fuchs to Nietzsche, dated January 19, 1873, KGB II: 4, pp. 116 f.

\(^{556}\) *Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek*, pp. 130, 581 f., and 467. Only the second volume of Bahnsen’s book is preserved and listed in the catalogue.

\(^{557}\) Although his position is in fact very moderate, Giuseppe Invernizzi is actually an exception: “È interessante rilevare che Nietzsche non prende mai in seria considerazione i sistemi metafisici degli altri pessimisti, che pure gli erano noti.” (“It is interesting to note that Nietzsche never takes the systems of the other pessimists into serious consideration, although they were known to him.”) Invernizzi, p. 488, footnote 12.
als man heute noch weiß.” The fact that his comments on the pessimists are very dismissive – In the fifth book of Die fröhliche Wissenschaft Hartmann is described a “rogue” (Schalk), Bahnsen is a “humming-top” (Brummkreisel), and Mainländer a “mawkish apostle of virginity” (süsslicher Virginitäts-Apostel) – is beside the point: it is always dangerous to take Nietzsche’s polemics at face value. It is important to remember that Nietzsche is very often basing his argumentations on metonymies. Very often he addresses an issue that represents a larger problem, but that at the same time is of interest to Nietzsche in its own right. Pessimism, it seems to me, is an example of such a metonymy.

The continued interest in pessimism is not only reflected in Nietzsche’s reading of the pessimists: there are also a fair amount of comments on pessimism and the pessimists in the Nachlaß throughout the 1880’s. However, when pessimistic themes occur in Nietzsche’s writings from c. 1880 onwards, pessimism is removed from the metaphysical frame of reference with which he earlier, just as the pessimists, associated it. In Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (1882), for example, Nietzsche repeats a number of important themes from Die Geburt der Tragödie, but here they are removed from the pessimistic context of the earlier work. Nietzsche’s view of the relation of science to art, for example is similar in the two works. The pursuit of truth that motivates the scientist leads to insights into the nature of the world that are paralysing. In both works, art is needed to counter this paralysis. But there is an important difference: In Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche claimed that existence could be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon; in Die fröhliche Wissenschaft he no longer sees any need for a justification: “Als ästhetisches Phänomen ist uns das Dasein immer noch erträglich, und durch die Kunst ist uns Auge und Hand und vor allem das gute Gewissen dazu gegeben, aus uns selber ein solches Phänomen machen zu können.” This illustrates how Nietzsche’s concern is changing from pessimism to nihilism. For the allusion to this key phrase of his own book is so unambiguous that any reader familiar with the earlier work will see it. By retaining the idea but removing the reference to a justification, Nietzsche is in effect saying that he still regards art to be of fundamental importance, but that its role no longer is to provide a justification but to make life bearable. By doing this, he indicates that pessimism – as we have seen on a number of occasions, the question whether existence can be justified was the most general form of the problem of pessimism – is no longer Nietzsche’s concern.

558 Lütkehaus, p. 296: “On the whole, Nietzsche’s connection to Hartmann, Mainländer, Bahnsen is much more intense than is still known.” Another example is Friedhelm Decher, who regards Mainländer’s notion of a plurality of wills as a possible source for Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power: Friedhelm Decher: “Der eine Wille und die vielen Willen. Schopenhauer – Mainländer – Nietzsche”, Nietzsche-Studien 25 (1996), p. 238.
559 FW 357, KSA 3, p. 601.
560 FW 107, KSA 3, p. 464: “As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon.”
There are also examples of Nietzsche using pessimistic key phrases in a way that implies that he is no longer thinking of pessimism in the terms of the pessimistic thinkers. In a Nachlaß fragment from 1882/83, justification of existence is explicitly associated with the meaning rather than the value of life:

Ist es nicht gleichgültig, daß möglichst viele Menschen möglichst lange leben?
Ist das Glück dieser Vielen nicht eine verächtliche Sache und keine Rechtfertigung des Daseins?
Der Sinn deines Lebens sei, das Dasein zu rechtfertigen – und dazu mußt du nicht nur des Teufels Anwalt, sondern sogar der Fürsprecher Gottes vor dem Teufel sein.\textsuperscript{561}

Here, Nietzsche seems to associate the pessimistic calculus of pleasure vs. displeasure that Hartmann and his likes are propagating with utilitarianism.\textsuperscript{562} Nietzsche interprets the measurement of pleasure as a concession that all forms of pleasure are alike, regardless of the nature of the pleasure and the person who experiences it.\textsuperscript{563} To him, on the other hand, the notion of a justification of existence does not consist in evidence that life has a positive value. Instead it consists in providing life with a meaning.

To Volker Gerhardt, the question of the justification of existence is, even in \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie}, a matter of giving meaning to life:

\textit{Die Sinngebung des Lebens} ist die alles andere tragende Leistung der Kunst, von der nicht nur die Tröstung und Rettung der individuellen Existenz, sondern auch die Entwicklung von Gesellschaften, ja von ganzen Kulturen abhängig ist. \[\ldots\] Wenn es also darum geht, den \textquote{Schrecken der Individualexistenz} (GT 17) abzuwenden, dann ist ein Wesen vorausgesetzt, das nach dem \textit{Sinn des Daseins} fragt. Erst vor dem Hintergrund der Sinnfrage kann die Rede von \textquote{Verzweiflung} und \textquote{Erlösung}, von Pessimismus und Optimismus, von Weltschmerz, Tragik und metaphysischem Trost adäquat verstanden werden.\textsuperscript{564}

\textsuperscript{561} NF 4 [199], November 1882–February 1883, KSA 10, p. 167: “Is it not indifferent that the greatest possible amount of people live as long as possible?/Is the happiness of this multitude not a despicable thing and no justification of existence?/May the meaning of your life be to justify existence – and to achieve that you will have to not only the devil’s advocate, but also the mouthpiece of God against the devil.” And in the same notebook: “Die große Probe: bist du bereit, das Leben zu rechtfertigen? Oder das Sterben für dich?” NF 4 [271], November 1882–February 1883, KSA 10, p. 184.

\textsuperscript{562} By examining Nietzsche’s marginal notes in his copies of John Stuart Mill’s books, Thomas Brobjer has shown that Nietzsche’s knowledge of and interest in Mill is much greater than one would assume: see Brobjer: \textit{Nietzsche’s Ethics of Character}, pp. 137 ff. I believe that Nietzsche’s somewhat surprising interest in Mill can be best understood in the light of the similarities between the hedonistic calculus of the pessimists, particularly Hartmann, and that of the utilitarians.

\textsuperscript{563} This is not an interpretation that Hartmann for example would be satisfied with. His discussion of the pleasure of art and science (\textit{Philosophie des Unbewussten}, pp. 584–589) makes it clear that he considers these pleasures to be higher and purer than any other pleasures.

\textsuperscript{564} Gerhardt: \textit{Pathos und Distanz}, p. 52: “Giving meaning to life is the most important task of art, upon which not only the consolation and salvation of the individual existence depends, but also the development of societies, indeed of entire cultures. \[\ldots\] So when it’s a matter of warding off the ‘ter-
I believe that Gerhardt’s interpretation is partly correct. Art has the function of providing a justification of existence in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, and this is not to Nietzsche a matter of simply proving that existence has a positive value; nor is it a matter of refuting the pessimists’ alleged proofs of life’s negative value. Nietzsche is thus not interpreting the concept of justification as the contributors to the debate over pessimism do. He is not accepting the pessimists’ description of the problem. It is true that he, long before he is using the term nihilism, considers pessimism to be dangerous because it leads to feelings of despair and hopelessness: feelings that he will later diagnose as symptoms of nihilism. Andreas Urs Sommer describes Nietzsche’s notion of nihilism as “a symptom of décadence, denoting a pathological loss of trust in the world.” The practical pessimism of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is a similar state of mind. But this is not the same as saying that justification is a matter of providing existence with a meaning. The question of how to provide life with a meaning is not addressed by Nietzsche in his early phase.

The question of the meaning of life has of course become a cliché after Nietzsche. It has, not least, become a cliché because of Nietzsche. For although Nietzsche was not the first thinker to address the question of the meaning of life, it is, as Volker Gerhardt himself has demonstrated, a question that was established as a topos after Kant, but particularly with Nietzsche. It is, I believe, correct that the question of the meaning of life on the whole came to replace the question of the value of life. But we should not take for granted that the two questions can be regarded as synonyms. Or rather: they became synonyms after Nietzsche. In order to understand how they came to fuse into one, we have to go to Nietzsche’s late writings.

The so-called “Lenzerheide fragment”, a number of reflections of European nihilism written in June 1887 during a sojourn in Lenzerheide in the Swiss Alps, makes clear that Nietzsche understands nihilism as the absence of a meaning of

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566 Colli observes that Nietzsche has raised the level of reflection upon life, forcing us living after him to take his level as a starting-point: “Nietzsche è l’individuo che da solo ha sollevato il livello complessivo dei nostri pensieri sulla vita, ed è riuscito a questo con un distacco prepotente dagli uomini e le cose che lo circondavano, cosicché noi siamo costretti a partire dal piano che lui ha impostato.” (”Nietzsche is the individual who on his own has raised the common level of our thoughts on life, and he managed to do this with a powerful distance from the persons and things that surrounded him, forcing us to start from the plane that he has decided.”) Giorgio Colli: *Dopo Nietzsche* (1974; Milano, 1996), p. 199.


568 Gerhardt: “Sinn des Lebens”, column 815.
life. This fragment, consisting of sixteen brief paragraphs, is an attempt to think through the effects of the meaninglessness of existence, and how the various religions and systems of morality have handled it.\textsuperscript{569} In the sixth of the paragraphs, Nietzsche describes existence as without meaning and goal (“ohne Sinn und Ziel”). The eternal recurrence – an idea whose relation to pessimism will be discussed in section 5.4 below – of a meaningless existence is characterised as “die extremste Form des Nihilismus: das Nichts (das ‘Sinnlose’) ewig!”\textsuperscript{570}

Referring to another fragment where Nietzsche also describes nihilism as rooted in the meaninglessness of life, Franco Volpi concludes:

> Il nichilismo è dunque la “mancanza del senso” che subentra quando viene meno la forza vincolante delle risposte tradizionali al “perché?” della vita e dell’essere, e ciò accade lungo il processo storico nel corso del quale i supremi valori tradizionali che davano risposta a quel “perché?” – Dio, la Verità, il Bene – perdono il loro valore e periscono, generando la condizione di “insensatezza” in cui versa l’umanità contemporanea.\textsuperscript{571}

It is in particular the death of God, Volpi notes, that robs mankind of the answer to the question of why.\textsuperscript{572} The death of God is a problem that Nietzsche associates with pessimism – or with some of the pessimists at least.\textsuperscript{573} In the fifth book of \textit{Die fröhliche Wissenschaft}, which in its entirety was added to the second edition of 1887, Nietzsche asks whether Schopenhauer’s pessimism was

\textsuperscript{569} For a discussion of the background and general contents of the fragment, see Manfred Riedel: “Das Lenzerheide-Fragment über den europäischen Nihilismus”, \textit{Nietzsche-Studien} 29 (2000), pp. 70–81.

\textsuperscript{570} NF 5 [71], summer 1886–autumn 1887, KSA 12, p. 213: “the most extreme form of nihilism: nothingness (the ‘meaningless’) for ever!” The fragment is dated 10 June 1887.

\textsuperscript{571} Volpi: \textit{Il nichilismo}, pp. 53 f.: “Nihilism hence is the ‘lack of meaning’ that replaces the traditional answers to the ‘why?’ of life and of being when they lose their winning power, and this happens with the historical process, during the course of which the supreme values that gave an answer to that ‘why?’ – God, Truth, Goodness – lose their value and disappear, generating a condition of ‘insensibility’ into which contemporary man is hurled.”

\textsuperscript{572} Most scholars addressing nihilism maintain that its origins are to be found in the process of secularisation. An alternative interpretation of nihilism is presented by Michael Allen Gillespie, who seeks the roots of nihilism in late medieval nominalism (particularly Ockham) and Descartes’ radical doubt. Gillespie holds that Nietzsche misunderstood nihilism, and that virtually all later critics have followed him: “When it comes to our understanding of nihilism, we are almost all Nietzscheans.” Michael Allen Gillespie: \textit{Nihilism before Nietzsche} (Chicago & London, 1995), p. xii.

Nietzsche’s notion that nihilism is the result of the death of God is mistaken, Gillespie claims. On the contrary: nihilism is the result of an attempt to come to terms with the omnipotent God of Ockham by philosophers such as Descartes and Fichte, who stressed the importance of the I. Nihilism is hence not caused by the death of God, but by God’s attaining a much greater importance; nihilism itself is not a belittling of man, but an aggrandization. On Gillespie’s account, Fichte, not Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, is the most important figure in nineteenth century nihilism: “Nietzsche was deeply indebted to the thought of German idealism in general and Fichte in particular. Nietzsche, however, never acknowledges this debt and may very well be unaware of it.” Gillespie, p. 246.

\textsuperscript{573} And of course, Nietzsche was far from unique in this. Mainländer after all describes the world as the result of God’s suicide; and as Invernizzi has demonstrated, a number of Schopenhauer’s contemporaries held atheism to be the core of his pessimism: Invernizzi, pp. 98 f.
necessarily a German phenomenon: “Eine vierte Frage wäre, ob auch Schopenhauer mit seinem Pessimismus, das heisst dem Problem vom Werth des Daseins, gerade ein Deutscher gewesen sein müsste. Ich glaube nicht.”574 Soon thereafter, Nietzsche reformulates Schopenhauer’s question: “hat denn das Dasein überhaupt einen Sinn?”575 This, Nietzsche maintains, is what Schopenhauer’s question amounts to once it has been cleansed of all Christian prejudice. It is a question so terrible that a couple of centuries are needed for it to be grasped. Schopenhauer’s pessimism is a form of atheism, and atheism brings meaninglessness in its wake. Schopenhauer is the first and most consequent atheist among the German philosophers: hence it is not qua German that he was an atheist. Atheism is a European phenomenon, and Schopenhauer is a European (a good European at that) to the extent that he is a pessimist.576 In Nietzsche’s eyes, the European quality to Schopenhauer’s pessimism sets it apart from the pessimism of Bahnwes and Mainländer, which is a German phenomenon.

The fact that Nietzsche in this paragraph first understands Schopenhauer’s pessimism in terms of the value of life (Hartmann’s definition of pessimism) only to reinterpret it in terms of the meaning of life; and secondly that he distinguishes between Schopenhauer’s European pessimism and the German pessimism of the other pessimists tells us that the conceptual content of pessimism is not what interests Nietzsche here. Schopenhauer’s pessimism is an expression of the meaninglessness that the death of God, the loss of belief in the traditional values, has caused. The pessimism of the German pessimists is a mere reflection of Schopenhauer’s insights.

The later the date the more direct and explicit are Nietzsche’s statements that pessimism is a limited case of nihilism. At times, for example in a Nachlaß entry from 1888, he refers to pessimism as a symptom of nihilism:

Man hat neuerdings mit einem zufälligen und in jedem Betracht unzutreffenden Wort Mißbrauch getrieben: man redet überall von Pessimismus, man kämpft sonderlich, unter vernünftigen Leuten zuweilen, über eine Frage, auf die es Antworten geben müße, wer Recht habe, der Pessimismus oder der Optimismus. Man hat nicht begriffen, was doch mit Händen zu greifen: daß Pessimismus kein Problem, sondern ein Symptom ist, – daß der Name ersetzt werden müsse.

574 FW 357, KSA 3, p. 599: “It would be a fourth question whether Schopenhauer, too, with his pessimism – that is the problem of the value of existence – had to be precisely a German. I believe not.”
575 FW 357, KSA 3, p. 600: “has existence any meaning at all?”
576 In the thorough background chapter of his study of nihilistic themes in modern Swedish poetry, Anders Olsson stresses the difference in attitude to atheism between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: “Für Schopenhauer är Guds död ingen dramatisk händelse; för Nietzsche är det själva brytpunkten. Schopenhauer väljer konsekvent det negativa alternativet i Hamlets fråga, Nietzsche lika bestämt och heroiskt varat. Själva livet är heligt, vi har ingen rätt att vara pessimister!” (“To Schopenhauer the death of God is no dramatic event; to Nietzsche it is the very turning point. Schopenhauer consistently chooses the negative alternative in Hamlet’s question, and Nietzsche chooses just as consistently and heroically being. Life itself is holy, we have no right to be pessimists!”) Anders Olsson: Läsningar av intet (Stockholm, 2000), p. 167.
Taking pessimism seriously as a problem is thus not the right way to go. Asking the pessimistic question amounts to being ill. In *Der Fall Wagner* the opinion that the question whether non-being is better than being is a pathological symptom is made even clearer: “Man widerlegt das Christenthum nicht, man widerlegt eine Krankheit des Auges nicht. Dass man den Pessimismus wie eine Philosophie bekämpft hat, war der Gipfelpunkt des gelehrten Idiotenhums.” As we saw in section 2.3, the notion that pessimism is a pathological phenomenon was widespread among the adversaries of the pessimists. Some regarded it as a form of melancholy (Meyer, Sully); whereas others see as a manifestation of degeneration (notably Nordau). Nietzsche belongs to the second category.

That pessimism to Nietzsche is a symptom of degeneration is evident from how he comments on some of the pessimists. A list of pessimists with the heading “die modernen Pessimisten als décadents” is followed by a comment on the attempts to define pessimism as a mental illness: “man hat den geschmacklosen Versuch gemacht, Wagner und Schopenhauer unter den Geisteskranken zu subsumiren: was der Wahrheit ganz entsprach, war die scharfe Betonung der physiologischen décadence in ihrem Typus hervorzuheben…” Pessimism is rooted in the physiological decadence, the degeneration, of the pessimists. It does not need to be countered with argument; it has to be treated. Wagner is Nietzsche’s prime example in this respect. His art no longer expresses a fundamental metaphysical truth as it did in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*; it is no longer the foundation upon which to rebuild German culture which it was in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*. Wagner’s art is corrupt, sick, and the corruption is the result of his sexual perversions: “Wagner, im Banne jener unglaubwürdig krankhaften Sexualität, die der Fluch seines Lebens war, wußte nur zu gut, was ein Künstler

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577 NF 17 [8], May–June 1888, KSA 13, p. 529: “Recently an accidental and in all respects inaccurate word has been abused: everywhere people talk about pessimism, people fight, strangely enough even reasonable people do that at times, over the question who is right, pessimism or optimism, as if there were an answer. They have not understood what can be grasped by anyone: that pessimism is not a problem, but a symptom, – that the name should be replaced by nihilism, – that the question, whether non-being is better than being in itself is an illness, is degeneration, is an idiosyncrasy…” In the same fragment he refers to the pessimistic movement as a sign of physiological decadence: “Die pessimistische Bewegung ist nur der Ausdruck einer physiologischen décadence”

578 WA, Epilog, KSA 6, p. 51: “One cannot refute Christianity; one cannot refute a disease of the eye. That pessimism was fought like a philosophy, was the height of scholarly idiocy.”


580 NF 14 [222], early 1888, KSA 13, p. 395: “the distasteful attempt has been made to subsume Wagner and Schopenhauer under the mentally ill: what corresponded fully to the truth was the great stress laid on the physiological décadence of their type.” The list itself consists of Schopenhauer, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Mainländer, Goncourt, and Dostoevsky.

228
damit einbüßt, daß er vor sich die Freiheit, die Achtung verliert.”

Nietzsche’s polemics against Wagner at this stage are above all directed against Parsifal, with its theme of redemption and its praise of chastity. It has been convincingly demonstrated by Chiara Piazzesi how Wagner’s praise of chastity and asceticism has a strongly sexual content:

La negazione della sessualità, tipicamente, ha una portata sensuale ancora più forte di una sessualità liberata e aperta. L’esaltazione wagneriana della castità, dell’astinenza sessuale spinta fino alla patologia è, secondo Nietzsche, un’ipocrisia di natura morale per mascherare il vero intento dell’arte wagneriana, cioè la seduzione, l’eccitazione, la stimolazione delle bramhe più basse dei suoi spettatori.

Wagner’s music, Piazzesi holds, is to Nietzsche a response to a typically modern need for redemption, that this need is a manifestation of a longing for nothingness. This longing is in its turn a sign of weakness. In Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche warns that a culture without art is permeated by such a weakness. But in that work, Wagner was presented as a means to counter the tendency towards such a state, not as the summit of that tendency.

Let us return to the question of the value of life. The question of the value of life is in a sense more radical than the question of the meaning of life. The negative answer to the question of the value of life, pessimism, amounts to the notion that it would be better to be dead than to be alive. Its proponents either advocated suicide (Mainländer, Bahnsen), or held that suicide would be the right course of action if it did lead to complete extinction of life (Schopenhauer, Hartmann). The question of the value of life is a question whether we ought to exist at all; the question of the meaning of life is a question how we ought to live our lives. It is easy to see that to Nietzsche the negative answer to both questions have the same practical consequences. The notion that life is not worth living (but that suicide is an impermissible manifestation of the will to life) leads, this Nietzsche’s discussion of Buddhism in Die Geburt der Tragödie

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581 NF 23 [2], October 1888, KSA 13, p. 600: “Wagner, spellbound by that unbelievably sick sexuality, which was the curse of his life, knew all too well what an artist loses when he loses his freedom, his self-respect.” Nietzsche’s use of certain topoi from the degeneration debate in his attack on Wagner in Der Fall Wagner is deftly discussed in Gregory Moore: “Hysteria and Histri onics. Nietzsche, Wagner and the Pathology of Genius”, Nietzsche-Studien 30 (2001), pp. 246–266. Particularly Moore’s demonstration of how Nietzsche uses the associations of hysteria to female sexuality to accuse Wagner of homosexuality is convincing. Unfortunately Moore resorts to psychological speculation into Nietzsche’s motives towards the end of the article, interpreting Der Fall Wagner as an attempt to seek vengeance for an incident in 1877 when Wagner suggested to Nietzsche’s physician that his ill health might be caused by excessive masturbation.

582 Piazzesi, pp. 264 f.: “The negation of sexuality, typically, has an even stronger sensual force than that of a liberated and open sexuality. The Wagnerian praise of chastity, of sexual abstinence taken to the limits of pathology, is, according to Nietzsche, a form of moral hypocrisy designed to mask the true intention of the Wagnerian art, which is the seduction, the inebriation, the stimulation of the lowest instincts of the spectators.”

583 Ibid., pp. 142 f.
illustrated, to a form of life characterised by its inconsolableness. The notion that life lacks a meaning leads to a similar state of mind. In Die Geburt der Tragödie, this state was characterised as practical pessimism.

One of the differences between Nietzsche and the pessimistic philosophers among his contemporaries was, as we have seen, that pessimism to Nietzsche never was a predominantly theoretical problem. Die Geburt der Tragödie should be read as a warning for the practical pessimism that plagues all art-less cultures, and for scientific optimism that threatens art. To the later Nietzsche pessimism is a practical, cultural problem which has been addressed confusedly by the philosophers: the problem is that they have asked for the value of life when they should have sought to provide it with a meaning.

Nietzsche does not distinguish sharply between the questions of the value of and of the meaning of life. In Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil, for example, the historical man, who we have argued is a portrait of Hartmann, defends his no to the question if he wants to relive the last ten or twenty years with his belief that the meaning of existence (Sinn des Daseins) is disclosed with the course of history. But on the whole, with some exceptions aside, the question of the meaning of life or existence belongs to Nietzsche’s later phase, whereas the question of the value of life or whether non-existence is preferable to existence belongs to the 1870’s. And the further ahead one follows Nietzsche’s comments on these themes, the more evident it becomes that this difference is due to the fact that Nietzsche associates the notion of an absence of meaning of life with nihilism and the notion that life is without value with pessimism, and that he considers the first to be a genuine problem in its own right whereas the other is but a symptom of the first.

If nihilism is defined with the Collingwoodian approach that we used in the discussion of pessimism in section 2.5, then the difference between pessimism and nihilism becomes visible. Pessimism, we saw, is the negative answer to the question whether existence can be justified; in the aftermath of Dühring and Hartmann this question was narrowed down to whether life has a positive value. Nihilism, when approached in this schematic way, becomes the negative answer to the question whether life has a meaning.

Not all forms of nihilism are the same, though. Nietzsche differentiates the concept; for our purposes the most important distinction is that between passive and active nihilism. Passive nihilism is a passive reaction to the meaninglessness of existence. It is characterised by the longing for nothingness and the pathological loss of trust in the world of which Piazzesi and Sommer spoke.

\[584\] HL 1, KSA 1, p. 255, quoted and discussed in section 4.2 above and section 5.4 below. It should be noted that the translation of Sinn des Daseins as meaning of existence is a bit problematic. Sinn also means direction, and in this context, Nietzsche is using the ambiguity of the term.

The active form of nihilism consists in acknowledging, indeed embracing, the meaninglessness. The death of God, the loss of belief in values passed down over the generations is a painful experience. But once the old values are lost, the possibility to create new values arises. To the person strong enough to embrace the state of the world after the death of God, there is a chance to create a new meaning to life. Nihilism is hence not necessarily a negative thing. It all depends on the strength of the nihilist. Interestingly enough neither are all forms of pessimism pathological to Nietzsche. This highlights the metonymical relation of pessimism and nihilism. In the new preface to the 1886 edition of Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche proposes that there might be a pessimism rooted in strength:


And of course, Nietzsche not only believes that such a pessimism might exist; it is something that he embraces. Nietzsche is drawn to what is problematic with being, not because he longs for redemption and nothingness, but because he has the strength necessary to overcome it. He does not approach it with a moralistic outlook: the fact that life is characterised by pain is to Nietzsche not an argument against it. The ordinary pessimists, Nietzsche often refers to them as romantic pessimists, take the existence of suffering to be an argument against life. In Also sprach Zarathustra Nietzsche refers to them as the preachers of death. They use suffering and death to refute life: “Ihnen begegnet ein Kranker

586 GT, Versuch einer Selbstkritik 1, KSA 1, p. 12: “Is pessimism necessarily a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts – as it once was in India and now is, to all appearances, among us, ‘modern’ men and Europeans? Is there a pessimism of strength? An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing health, by the fullness of existence.”

587 Nietzsche distinguishes between classical pessimism, or pessimism of strength, and romantic pessimism, or pessimism of weakness, in a number of Nachlaß fragments, for example NF 14 [25] and 14 [26], early 1888, KSA 13, pp. 229 f. This terminology is probably an allusion to Goethe, who in what Nietzsche describes as the best German book that exists, gives a somewhat idiosyn-cratic definition of the concepts ‘classic’ and ‘romantic’: “Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde, und das Romantische das Kranke. Und da sind die Nibelungen klassisch wie der Homer, denn beide sind gesund und tüchtig. Das meiste Neuere ist nicht romantisch, weil es neu, sondern weil es schwach, kränklich und krank ist, und das Alte ist nicht klassisch, weil es alt, sondern weil es stark, frisch, froh und gesund ist. Wenn wir nach solchen Qualitäten Klassisches und Romantisches unterscheiden, so werden wir bald im reinen sein.” Johann Peter Eckermann: Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens (1836–48), ed. Fritz Bergmann (Frankfurt/M., 1987), 2 April 1829, p. 310.
oder ein Greis oder ein Leichnam; und gleich sagen sie ‘das Leben ist wider-legt’.”

Under what circumstances, we have to ask ourselves, is pessimism not a sign of weakness and ill health? The answer to that question can be found in Nietzsche’s physiological aesthetics that he develops in a number of his late works.

Beauty and ugliness are not objective values to Nietzsche. Interpreting something as beautiful is a matter of strength. The stronger one is, the greater is the range of phenomena that one can see as beautiful. Nietzsche approvingly quotes Stendhal’s dictum that beauty is a promise of happiness. Pessimism of strength consists in acknowledging that life is characterised by suffering, that pain is inevitable, that life is meaningless, but at the same time not being crushed by that insight. The stronger one is, the greater is the amount of suffering that one can overcome. One could perhaps say that the pessimism of strength consists in acknowledging that the description of the world of the romantic pessimists is correct, but rather than drawing the conclusion that because of the nature of the world the only of existence that is most bearable is the striving for redemption, it draws the conclusion that the affirmation of existence in all its painfufulness renders life happy. Pessimism of strength consists in acknowledging that life is painful and cruel, and wanting life to be just as it is.

The romantic and classical forms of pessimism thus correspond to the passive and active nihilism, that Nietzsche distinguishes between. The insight that life is inherently meaningless might be tackled in two different ways: one can either passively accept the meaninglessness and the feelings of emptiness and hopelessness that follow with it; or one can regard it as a challenge to provide life with a meaning. One can either accept that life is ugly, or one can artistically reassemble the elements of life in a fashion that makes it appear attractive and worthwhile. One has to approach life as a work of art. And as already *Die Geburt der Tragödie* showed (and this is an aspect of Nietzsche’s thinking that never changes) there is a pessimistic element at the heart of any work of art capable of rendering life justifiable or indeed bearable.

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588 ZA I, Von den Predigern des Todes, KSA 4, p. 55: “They encounter an invalid or an old man or a corpse; and straightaway they say ‘Life is refuted!’” Schopenhauer refers to an encounter with sickness, old age and death as the motive that turned him into a philosopher, comparing himself to the Buddha: “In meinem 17eten Jahre[,] ohne alle gelehrte Schulbildung, wurde ich vom *Jammer des Lebens* so ergriffen, wie Buddha in seiner Jugend, als er Krankheit, Alter, Schmerz und Tod erblickte.” HN IV: 1, p. 96.


590 Cf. David Berman: “Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: Honest Atheism, Dishonest Pessimism”, in: Christopher Janaway (ed.): *Willing and Nothingness. Schopenhauer as Nietzsche’s Educator* (Oxford, 1998), p. 188: “Thus from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) Nietzsche always seems to have accepted something close to Schopenhauer’s general thesis that the world is will, although later Nietzsche does not usually want to regard it as a metaphysical claim, i.e. about the thing in itself, since he is unhappy about seeing the world as something more than mere appearances.”
The fact that Nietzsche was such a perceptive critic of nihilism depends to an important degree on his pessimistic *Lehrjahre*. Since he had a different angle on pessimism than his contemporaries did (regardless of whether they were pessimists or adversaries of pessimism) he seems to have been appreciative of other aspects that they. He saw the limitations of pessimism more clearly than the pessimists did; and he was able to take pessimism more seriously than its adversaries did. This means, as this section has sought to demonstrate, that understanding Nietzsche’s relation to pessimism better will make us understand his relation to nihilism better.
5.2 Nietzsche and Hamlet

Hamlet’s pondering of suicide in the great soliloquy in the third act of Shakespeare’s tragedy occupies a central place in the pessimistic canon. Pessimists from Schopenhauer to E. M. Cioran discuss the melancholy prince’s reasoning as a form of pessimism.\(^{591}\) Nietzsche’s comments on Hamlet illustrate how his view of pessimism changes. Indeed, I believe that Hamlet is something of a key to the understanding of Nietzsche’s changing attitude to pessimism.

We saw in the section on *Die Geburt der Tragödie* that Nietzsche quotes Hamlet as an example of the Dionysian myth at the heart of tragedy. In that section we argued that it is in virtue of the famous “to be or not to be” soliloquy that he is quoted: Hamlet’s pessimistic conclusion that it would be better to be dead if we only could be certain that death would in fact mean total non-existence is the point in the play where the Dionysian with its drive to dissolve individuality and the Apollonian with its drive to create a beautiful illusion form a higher synthesis.

In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche introduces Hamlet by claiming that the Dionysian state contains an element of lethargy. Having seen the world as it really is, Dionysian man realizes the futility of all action.

> In diesem Sinne hat der dionysische Mensch Ähnlichkeit mit Hamlet: beide haben einmal einen wahren Blick in das Wesen der Dinge gethan, sie haben erkannt, und es ekelt sie zu handeln; denn ihre Handlung kann nichts am ewigen Wesen der Dinge ändern, sie empfinden es als lächerlich oder schmachvoll, dass ihnen zugemuthet wird, die Welt, die aus den Fugen ist, wieder einzurichten. Die Erkenntniss töd tet das Handeln, zum Handeln gehört das Umschleiertsein durch die Illusion – das ist die Hamletlehre, nicht jene wohlfeile Weisheit von Hans dem Träumer, der aus zu viel Reflexion, gleichsam aus einem Überschuss von

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Möglichkeiten nicht zum Handeln kommt; nicht das Reflectiren, nein! – die wahre Erkenntniss, der Einblick in die grauenhafte Wahrheit überwiegt jedes zum Handeln antreibende Motiv, bei Hamlet sowohl als bei dem dionysischen Menschen.\textsuperscript{592}

Any reading of \textit{Hamlet} has to supply an explanation for Hamlet’s passivity. How come he does not take his life when he considers death to be preferable to life; and how come he hesitates when the Ghost implores him to kill Claudius? Nietzsche distinguishes between two forms of passivity in \textit{Hamlet}: that of the Dionysian man, and that of Hans der Träumer. The passivity of the Dionysian man corresponds to Hamlet’s true character; whereas the passivity of Hamlet \textit{qua} Hans der Träumer is only very superficially related to Hamlet’s person. In order to unravel this quotation we have to go to the German edition of Shakespeare that Nietzsche used. For the phrase “jene wohlfeile Weisheit von Hans dem Träumer” is an allusion the play. To be precise, it is an allusion to act II, scene II of \textit{Hamlet}: a monologue where Hamlet cannot decide whether to follow the Ghost’s command to avenge him.\textsuperscript{593} Hamlet’s indecision – which has just prompted him to have the troupe of visiting actors perform a play designed to snare the king – fills him with self-contempt. Quoting from the edition of Shakespeare’s works that Nietzsche possessed,\textsuperscript{594} Hamlet’s monologue reads:

\begin{quote}
Und ich,
Ein Blöder schwachgemuther Schurke, schleiche
Wie Hans der Träumer, meiner Sache fremd,
Und kann nichts sagen, nicht für einen König,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{592} GT, 7, KSA 1, pp. 56 f.: “In this sense the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both 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. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veil of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom of Jack the Dreamer who reflects too much and, as it were, from an excess of possibilities does not get around to action. Not reflection, no – true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs any motive for action, both in Hamlet and in the Dionysian man.”

\textsuperscript{593} Kaufmann’s translation of GT has “Jack the Dreamer” for “Hans der Träumer”. But Shakespeare’s original has “John-a-dreams” (line 503), which makes me suspect that Kaufmann does not see the allusion to this monologue.

The cheap wisdom of Hans der Träumer thus alludes to Hamlet’s indecision when he cannot decide whether he believes in the Ghost or not. He wants to believe, but fears to be tricked by the Ghost. He cannot act because he weighs his impulse to obey the Ghost against the dangers of doing so. He cannot act, that is, because he reasons. The monologue, too long to be quoted in extenso, continues:

Der Geist
Den ich gesehen, kann ein Teufel seyn;
Der Teufel hat Gewalt sich zu verkleiden
In lockende Gestalt; ja und vielleicht,
Bei meiner Schwachheit und Melancholie,
(Des er sehr mächtig ist bei solchen Geistern)
Täuscht er mich zum Verderben: ich will Grund,
Der sichrer ist.596

Here, Hamlet wants proof (“ich will Grund, / Der sichrer ist”) before he can act. In order to attain this proof, he has the troop of actors perform a play with a regicide similar to the one that has recently occurred in Elsinore. In a sense, it is his cowardice that hinders him from avenging his dead father. He has the choice of following the Ghost’s command, but reflecting on the situation makes him hesitate. In this monologue, Hamlet’s passivity comes from reflecting too much. But this is not die Hamletlehre. Hamlet’s true teaching, I argue, is found in the soliloquy in the third act, where Hamlet ponders suicide but decides against it.

To fully understand this position, we have to have the context of Nietzsche’s allusions to Hamlet in Die Geburt der Tragödie present. Hamlet is introduced as an example of a Dionysian myth which praises passivity. Alongside with Hamlet, Nietzsche offers Oedipus as another example of the same myth. Nietzsche claims that it is because Oedipus commits two crimes against nature that he is given the ability to answer the riddle of the Sphinx. He has killed his father and married his mother, and this gives him access to the Dionysian wisdom. We have also seen that the Dionysian wisdom is what Silenus disclosed to Midas under torture: that it would be best for any human never to have been born, and that the second best is to die immediately.

Nietzsche’s comments on Oedipus, and on Hamlet, serve the purpose of illustrating what effect Silenus’ insight has on a person. Hamlet’s true passivity

595 Hamlet, act II, scene III, lines 501–506. Page 394 in the Schlegel edition: “Yet I, / A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak / Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, / And can say nothing. No, not for a king / Upon whose property and most dear life / A damned defeat was made.”

596 Ibid., act II, scene II, lines 533–539. Page 395 in the Schlegel edition: “The spirit that I have seen / May be a de’il, and the de’il hath power / ’Assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps / Out of my weakness and my melancholy / As he is very potant with such spirits / ’Abuses me to damn me! I’ll have grounds / More relative than this.”
does not come from his reflecting on his possibilities. Like Oedipus, he possesses an insight into the essence of the world, and this knowledge hinders his actions.\textsuperscript{597} Oedipus has gained his knowledge through killing his father and marrying his mother. Hamlet does not carry out those acts himself, but the murder of his father and the illegitimate re-marriage of his mother to the murderer are still crucial elements of his tragedy. The death of his father and the marriage of his mother to his uncle are, on the level of the myth, that which gives Hamlet the Dionysian knowledge that Nietzsche claims that he possesses.\textsuperscript{598} And in the soliloquy in the third act, possibly the most frequently quoted lines in Western literature, Hamlet gives vent to a variation of Oedipus’s Dionysian wisdom:

\begin{verbatim}
Seyn oder Nichtseyn, das ist hier die Frage
Ob’s edler im Gemüth, die Pfeil’ und Schlendern
Des wüthenden Geschicks erdulden, oder
Sich waffnend gegen eine See von Plagen,
Durch Widerstand sie enden. Sterben – schlafen –
Nichts weiter! – und zu wissen, daß ein Schlaf
Das Herzweh und die tausend Stöße endet
Die unsres Fleisches Erbtheil – ’s ist ein Ziel
Auf’s Innigste zu wünschen.\textsuperscript{599}
\end{verbatim}

This, I argue, is the \textit{Hamlet-Lehre}. Here, Hamlet does not seek a “Grund, der sicher ist”, as does Hans der Träumer. Hamlet intuitively \textit{knows} that non-existence would be preferable to existence, were it not for our ignorance of what happens after death. Like Oedipus he has been given an insight into the \textit{Ur-Eine} and this insight corresponds to philosophical pessimism.

It deserves notice here that the phrasing of Schlegel’s German version of the soliloquy alters the passage: a slight but significant change. For whereas Hamlet’s question, in English, is based on the verb \textit{be}, Schlegel uses the noun \textit{Seyn}, rather than the corresponding verb (\textit{seyn}). In the German translation, that is, Hamlet does not weigh \textit{to be} against \textit{not to be}, but \textit{being} against \textit{non-being}. This is obviously a more abstract formulation, and furthermore one that is closer to the

\textsuperscript{597} The interpretation of Hamlet is one of the things that Wilamowitz-Möllendorff does not appreciate with \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie}: “aber gar erst das verständniss Hamlets, der nebenbei gesagt auch Dionysios ist: seite 35 tötet die erkenntniss sein handeln, weil es ihn ekelt, die weisheit der Seilen [sic] erkannt zu haben: 93 redet er unbedeutender als er handelt! hier scheint allerdings manches aus den fugen zu sein: gott sei dank, dass ich nicht in die welt es einzurichten kam.” Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff. \textit{Zukunftspolitologie!}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{598} Cf. the Ghost’s comment on the murder: “Murder most foul – as in the best it is –/But this most foul, strange and unnatural.” Act I, scene V, lines 27 f. And both Hamlet and the Ghost refer to the marriage of his uncle to his mother as incest. See, for example, act I, scene II, lines 156 f.: “She married. O most wicked speed! To post/With such dexterity to incestuous sheets”;

\textsuperscript{599} \textit{Hamlet}, act III, scene I, lines 55–64. Page 399 in the Schlegel edition: “To be, or not to be – that is the question/Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer/The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune/Or to take arms against see of troubles/And by opposing end them; to die: to sleep –/No more, and by a sleep to say we end/The heartache and the thousand natural shocks/That flesh is heir to; ’tis a consummation/Devoutly to be wished”
pessimistic tradition. In the version of the text with which Nietzsche was familiar, Hamlet’s soliloquy is in short closer to the Dionysian wisdom of Silenus and Sophocles, as well as to Schopenhauer and Hartmann, than the English original is.\textsuperscript{600}

There are thus two forms of passivity in \textit{Hamlet}. The Hamlet of the second act (Hans der Träumer) chooses not to act; whereas the Hamlet of the third act is forced to inaction by his insight into the essence of the world. Hans der Träumer has the choice of acting but lacks the strength or courage to act. He is no tragic hero. The Dionysian Hamlet of the third act cannot choose. Just like Oedipus, Hamlet has seen through the veil of Maya, and this Dionysian insight forces him to be passive.\textsuperscript{601} And when he eventually does act, killing Polonius in the belief that he is Claudius, he is no freer than Oedipus is in killing his father.

Nietzsche’s use of Hamlet is greatly indebted to Schopenhauer. Most importantly, the description of Hamlet is steeped in Schopenhauerian terms. Hamlet is unable to act, for “zum Handeln gehört das Umschleiertsein durch die Illusion”, and Hamlet has “einen wahren Blick in das Wesen der Dinge gethan”.\textsuperscript{602} Hamlet’s passivity is just like that of the Schopenhauerian ascetic.

Just like the heroes of the older Greek tragedies, Hamlet discloses (offenbart) a more profound wisdom through his actions than Shakespeare’s words can express. Nietzsche writes that Hamlet speaks more superficially than he acts.\textsuperscript{603} What this means is evident from Nietzsche’s lecture \textit{Socrates und die Tragedie} (1870), one of the texts where Nietzsche is struggling to get the ideas of \textit{Die Geburt der Tragödie} right:

\begin{quote}
Euripides ist der erste Dramatiker, der einer bewußten Aesthetik folgt. Absichtlich sucht er das Verständlichste: seine Helden sind wirklich, wie sie sprechen. Aber sie sprechen sich auch ganz aus, während die aeschyleisch-sophokleischen
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{600} Simon Williams praises Schlegel’s translations in his \textit{Shakespeare and the German Stage. Volume 1: 1586–1914} (Cambridge, 1990), p. 151: “The translations are faithful to the original without being prosaic, demonstrating a resourcefulness and imagination that often finds close German equivalents to Shakespeare’s English. […] The German verse was flexible, pleasant to hear and rhythmically light, which made it ideal for the stage, while Shakespeare’s ambiguous and multiple meanings were surprisingly well sustained in the German.” In this particular case, though, Schlegel managed to create an ambiguity that was not there in the original.


\textsuperscript{602} GT, 7, KSA 1, pp. 56 f.: “action requires the veil of illusion” and “looked truly into the essence of things”. Cf. Gerhardt: \textit{Pathos und Distanz}, p. 53: “Ohne zumindest die Illusion eines Sinns kann der Mensch nicht handeln und letztlich auch nicht leben, wie Nietzsche an Hamlet zu zeigen versucht.”

\textsuperscript{603} GT 17, KSA 1, p. 110.
If Hamlet were a Euripidean hero, then he could have explained his passivity. If he could do that, then he would be a pessimist. But unlike Euripides, Shakespeare is a true tragedian; Hamlet therefore cannot speak, but only stutters. A Nachlaß fragment makes clear that this means that he re-interprets his pessimism, his tragic knowledge, as a weakness that he carries in himself:

Der Gedanke des tragischen Helden muß vollständig mit einbegriffen sein in die tragische Illusion: er darf nicht etwa uns das Tragische erklären wollen. Der Hamlet ist Muster: er spricht immer das Falsche aus, sucht immer falsche Gründe – die tragische Erkenntnis tritt ihm nicht in die Reflexion. Er hat die tragische Welt belehrt, – aber er spricht nicht davon, sondern nur von seinen Schwächen, an denen er den Eindruck jenes Blicks entlädt.

Hamlet, that is, believes that he is pondering suicide in the famous soliloquy in the third act. In fact, he is not. It is only in a very superficial sense that Hamlet addresses suicide. On a mythical level, he is not asking whether he should kill himself; he is asking whether life as such is worth while, whether existence as such is justifiable. Hamlet has seen that the world is das Ur-Eine, but in order not to be crushed by this insight, he reinterprets it as an insight that he is too weak and worthless a man to deserve to live.

The soliloquy of the third act can therefore be defined as the Dionysian element in Hamlet. Although Hamlet is a tragedy, it is not a tragedy in the Greek sense; it is a non-musical drama. This raises the question how Hamlet, although not containing music, can communicate the fundamentally musical Dionysian truth.

In Wagner’s essay Beethoven, published in 1870, the centenary year of the composer’s birth, Wagner discusses Beethoven and Shakespeare as the greatest representatives of music and of the other arts respectively. Unlike Nietzsche, Wagner regards music as related to dreaming. “Wenn wir die Musik die Offenbarung des innersten Traumbildes vom Wesen der Welt nannten, so dürfte uns Shakespeare als der im Wachen fortträumende Beethoven gelten. Was ihre beiden Sphären auseinander hält, sind die formellen Bedingungen der in ihnen.
giltigen Gesetze der Apperzeptionen.” Shakespeare is unique among writers in that he dreams although awake, that is: he is unique in that his writings communicate something that otherwise can only be communicated through music. Beethoven is uniquely literary in an analogous way; and Wagner himself, he gives us to believe, is nothing short of a synthesis of the two.

Nietzsche not only read Wagner’s book upon publication, he also spent long hours at Wagner’s home in Tribschen during the period in which the book was conceived. Cosima Wagner’s diaries show that Nietzsche listened to Wagner reading Beethoven prior to publication. In section 3.4 we saw Cosima Wagner report that her husband read to Nietzsche from the manuscript, for instance on 29 August 1870. Shakespeare was apparently on Wagner’s mind in these days, as the entry from the 31st testifies to: “Schöne Tages- und Abendruhe, R. trinkt sein Bier im Garten vor dem Haus, und die leise Erwähnung eines Wortes aus ‘Hamlet’ bringt ihm zu einem Vergleich zwischen Sh. und Beethoven; wie die Gestalten bei Shakespeare, so treten bei Beethoven Melodien auf, unverkennbar, unergreiflich, eine ganze unbegreifliche Welt.” And a number of entries from Nietzsche’s notebooks demonstrate that he shared Wagner’s notion of Shakespeare as a musical writer. Shakespeare is described as a music-making Socrates (“der musiktreibende Sokrates”). He also writes that in Shakespeare the thought becomes the adequate expression of music.

What this means is exemplified by Socrates und die Tragödie. There is, Nietzsche argues in this lecture, a musical beauty to the reasoning of Shakespeare’s characters when compared to those of Euripides: “Man mag einmal vergleichen, Richard Wagner: Beethoven, p. 89 f.: “If we were to call music the revelation of the innermost dream image of the essence of the world, then we may regard Shakespeare as a Beethoven who continues to dream after awakening. What distinguishes their spheres is the set of formal conditions of the laws of apperception valid in each sphere.”


609 Ibid. p. 262: “Beautiful calm day and evening, R. drinks his beer in the garden in front of the house, and the still mention of a word from ‘Hamlet’ leads him to a comparison between Sh. and Beethoven; just as the characters appear in Shakespeare do the melodies appear in Beethoven, inimitable, incomparable, a whole incomprehensible world.”

610 NF 7 [131], End of 1870–April 1871, KSA 7, p. 193: “Shakespeare der Dichter der Erfüllung, er vollendet Sophocles, er ist der musiktreibende Sokrates.”

wie ganz anders die Helden Shakespe<re>re’s dialektisiren: über allem ihren Denken, Vermuthen und Schließen liegt eine gewisse musikalische Schönheit und Verinnerlichung ausgegossen, während in der späteren griechischen Tragödie ein sehr bedenklicher Dualismus des Stils herrscht, hier die Macht der Musik.”

The reason for the superficiality of the reasoning of Shakespeare’s heroes is also the reason for his superiority over Euripides: in Shakespeare’s works the ideas and opinions of the characters are subordinated to the musical totality; whereas Euripides attributes to the ideas a greater importance than the whole.

* * *

From the late 1870’s, Nietzsche seems to re-interpret Hamlet. In 1881, for instance, he writes: “Ich lache über die Aufzeichnungen des Schmerzes und Elends, wodurch sich der Pessimismus zurecht beweisen will – Hamlet und Schopenhauer und Voltaire und Leopardi und Byron.” And some two years later he writes that it is conceived to consider Hamlet the pinnacle of the human mind: if Nietzsche were to meet Shakespeare, he would tell him that the play is a failure. Shakespeare, Nietzsche assumes, would laughingly agree. And in Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, he compares Hamlet to Brutus, and finds the latter a much more important figure: “Was ist alle Hamlet-Melancholie gegen die Melancholie des Brutus! – und vielleicht kannte Shakespeare auch diese, wie er jene kannte, aus Erfahrung! Vielleicht hatte auch er seine finstere Stunde und seinen bösen Engel, gleich Brutus!” This is in line with Nietzsche’s re-interpretation of pessimism that takes place at this time. He ceases to see anything brave in the attitude of the pessimists, and he ceases to see any value in their metaphysical interpretations of reality.

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612 ST, KSA 1, p. 546: “Compare how totally differently Shakespeare’s heroes argue: a certain musical beauty and spirituality has been poured over all of their thinking, assuming and drawing of conclusions, whereas in the later Greek tragedies a highly dubious stylistic dualism reigns, rather than the power of music.”

613 López, whose discussion of Nietzsche’s view of Shakespeare in relation to Wagner’s comments on him is most helpful, maintains that it is because Shakespeare managed to incorporate dialogue within a musical totality that made him superior to the Greek tragedians in Nietzsche’s eyes: “Da Shakespeare nach dem Tod der antiken Tragödie durch das Eindringen des bewußten Dialogs wieder aus dem dionysisch-musikalischen Ursprung geschopt hat, aus dem auch die griechische Tragödie hervorgegangen war, habe er historisch einen Schritt über diese hinaus getan[…].” López, p. 258.

614 NF 13 [4], Autumn 1881, KSA 9, p. 618: “I laugh at the catalogues of pain and suffering through which pessimism wants to prove its right – Hamlet and Schopenhauer and Voltaire and Leopardi and Byron.”

615 NF 7 [68], early 1883–summer 1883, KSA 10, p. 265: “Hamlet für eine Spitze des menschlichen Geistes anzusehen – das heiße ich bescheiden über Geist und Spitzen urtheilen. Vor allem ist er ein mißrathenes Werk: sein Urheber würde es mir wohl lachend eingestehen, wenn ich’s ihm ins Gesicht sagte.”

616 FW 98, KSA 3, p. 452: “What is all of Hamlet’s melancholy compared to that of Brutus? And perhaps Shakespeare knew both from firsthand experience. Perhaps he, too, had his gloomy hour and his evil angel, like Brutus.”
There seems to be another reason behind Nietzsche’s choice to take Brutus’ side against Hamlet. By killing Caesar, Brutus demonstrates that no sacrifice is too great to maintain independence. Caesar is his closest friend and the greatest man alive, but still Brutus’ high ideals demand that he kill him. The greater Caesar is, the greater is Brutus’ deed. Nietzsche writes that Shakespeare’s sympathy for Brutus was more than just sympathy with the political freedom that Brutus fought for. He implies that Shakespeare himself had made a similar sacrifice and that this is how he can know Brutus’ melancholy from first-hand experience. By drawing that conclusion, Nietzsche is simultaneously implying that he too had made such a sacrifice. For his conclusion that Shakespeare’s portrait of Brutus reflects a privileged knowledge based on personal experience about the impact of such an act on the psyche in its turn presupposes a similar privileged knowledge. In the case of Nietzsche, his murder of Caesar is obviously the rupture with Wagner. Nietzsche is staging himself as Brutus with Wagner in the role of Caesar.

This is underlined by the fact that the book itself contains some passages where Nietzsche is criticising Wagner. At times he does so without mentioning his name: as for example, when Nietzsche talks of a musician (whose name is not disclosed) with a great talent for miniatures, but whose vanity drives him to create gigantic works of art.617 At others he is openly acknowledging his target as in the paragraph following the Shakespeare interpretation where Wagner is referred to as a follower of Schopenhauer’s whose fault was that he did not trust his own unprofessed philosophy.618

* * *

Hamlet is also discussed in Nietzsche’s last work, Ecce homo, written in the autumn of 1888. The similarities and the differences clearly illustrate how Nietzsche’s view of pessimism has changed, but they also testify to the fact that pessimism remains a problem central to Nietzsche throughout his philosophical production. Hamlet cannot act because he has seen the world as it is. This remains constant. But instead of sympathizing and identifying with him, Nietzsche now declares Hamlet insane:

Ich kenne keine herzzerreissendere Lektüre als Shakespeare: was muss ein Mensch gelitten haben, um dergestalt es nöthig zu haben, Hanswurst zu sein! – Versteht man den Hamlet? Nicht der Zweifel, die Gewissheit ist das, was wahnstinnig macht…619

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617 FW 87, KSA 3, pp. 444 f. Perhaps FW 91, KSA 3, p. 447, where Nietzsche says that the memoirs of Alfieri cannot be trusted and that he would trust the memoirs of Plato as little as he trusts those of Rousseau or Dante, should be interpreted as a warning (the paragraph is headed “Vorsicht”) that Wagner’s Mein Leben should not be taken at face value?
619 EH, Warum ich so klug bin, 4, KSA 6, p. 287: “I know of no more heartrending reading than Shakespeare: what must a man have suffered to need to be a buffoon to this extent! – Is Hamlet understood? It is not doubt, it is certainty which makes mad…” Nietzsche’s use of Shakespeare, and
The similarities between this Hamlet and the Hamlet of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* are highly significant, but so are the differences. This Hamlet inhabits the same world as the earlier Hamlet. The Hamlet of 1872 had torn the veil of Maya; in *Ecce homo* Nietzsche is no longer interested in metaphysical explanations of the world. But his world is no less characterised by pain and suffering than that of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*.

The Hamlet of *Ecce homo* knows that time is out of its joint; he knows that the world is a prison. Just as in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Hamlet's knowledge of the world’s nature sets him apart from the other characters. And just as in the earlier work, Hamlet becomes lethargic under the burden of his knowledge. Is Hamlet understood? It seems that by Nietzsche’s 1888 standards, the Nietzsche of 1872 did understand the play – although he had too romantic a notion of Hamlet’s character. Hamlet’s brooding is still the heart of the play: his actions are simply a consequence of the theatrical conventions. Having rejected Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, Nietzsche no longer accepts the difference between intuitive and abstract knowledge, and Hamlet consequently is a pessimist, not an ascetic. Pessimism has come to be regarded a reaction of those who are too weak to endure life’s cruelty, that is: a form of passive nihilism. Pessimism is thus a form of décadence, in certain cases it takes the form of madness.

But why does reading Shakespeare “rend” (*zerreißt*) Nietzsche’s heart? How are Hamlet’s fate, Shakespeare’s suffering, and Shakespeare’s buffoonery connected? In the paragraph quoted above, Nietzsche also writes:

> Wenn ich meine höchste Formel für Shakespeare suche, so finde ich immer nur die, dass er den Typus Cäsar concipirt hat. Dergleichen erräth man nicht, – man ist es oder man ist es nicht. Der grosse Dichter dichtet nur aus seiner Realität – bis zu dem Grade, dass er hinterdrein sein Werk nicht mehr aushält...620

Certainly, if Caesar was created out of Shakespeare’s reality, Shakespeare’s suffering, then so was Hamlet.621 The author of *Hamlet* suffers from having found the terrible truth of the nature of the world, but manages to save himself by not

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620 EH, *Warum ich so klug bin*, 4, KSA 6, p. 287: “When I seek my highest formula for Shakespeare I find it always in that he conceived the type of Caesar. One cannot guess at things like this – one is it or one is not. The great poet creates only out of his own reality –to the point at which he is afterwards unable to endure his work...”

621 Or, to be exact, out of Francis Bacon’s suffering: for in this paragraph, Nietzsche claims to know instinctively and with certainty that Bacon is the true author of the Shakespearean writings. On Duncan Large’s account, Nietzsche’s certainty that Bacon was the true Shakespeare becomes an important aspect of a complicated series of shifting identities: “for not only does he identify Shakespeare in his own characters, and Shakespeare as Bacon, but he himself also identifies more and more intensely with Shakespeare.” Large, p. 59.
surrendering to this truth, not becoming a pessimist that is, but instead playing
the buffoon (Hanswurst) and transforming his suffering into a dramatic work.
Hamlet is a pessimist, that is: insane. But his insanity saves Shakespeare from
becoming insane. Shakespeare can overcome his pessimism by letting Hamlet
become a pessimist.

In the preface to Der Fall Wagner, Nietzsche admits that he himself, just like
Wagner, is a décadent. The difference is that Nietzsche defended himself against
his decadence.622 Since he is fundamentally healthy, Nietzsche can conduct ex-
periments with illnesses. Health to Nietzsche is primarily a matter of possessing
the instinct to find the right cure to one’s illnesses. Wagner lacked this instinct;
and instead of disciplining his “unbelievably sick sexuality”, Wagner gave in to it
and created works that on Nietzsche’s account are perverse and unhealthy, not-
tably Parsifal.623

Nietzsche himself did the opposite thing when his health was at its worst
around 1880. Instead of giving in to the combined threat of pessimism and
illness, he overcame them. He wrote the seemingly light-hearted works of his
middle period. When commenting on those works in Ecce homo, Nietzsche
stresses that they are the result of his illness. Being ill gave him the clarity of a
dialectician, which enabled him to think things through, to in particular think
his way of life, his diet, and his choice of profession through. Dialectics, to
Nietzsche, is a means typical of the décadents.

Nietzsche’s writing the works of his middle period corresponds to what
Shakespeare did when writing Hamlet. They both got rid of the illness of pessi-
mism by means of dialectics. This means that there is a decadent trait to these
works. This, I suggest, is why Nietzsche prefers Julius Caesar to Hamlet. Hamlet is
a work necessary for Shakespeare to heal himself. Its worth does not lie in itself
as an artistic product, but rather in making its author ready for Julius Caesar,
where life is affirmed in spite of the suffering that it entails. And just like Shakes-
ppeare, Nietzsche advanced after having cleansed himself of pessimism by writ-
ing his Hamlet, (the works of the middle period, particularly Der Wanderer und sein
Schatten). Like Shakespeare, he too went on to write a life-affirming tragedy
where a melancholy greater than anything Hamlet or any other pessimist has
ever experienced is expressed. That work, Nietzsche’s Julius Caesar, is called Also
sprach Zarathustra.

* * *

The fact that Nietzsche can use Hamlet as a symbol of pessimism both when he
attributes a certain amount of courage to it and when he sees it as a pathological

622 WA, Vorwort, KSA 6, p. 11: “Ich bin so gut wie Wagner ein Kind dieser Zeit, will sagen ein
décadent; nur das ich das begriff, nur das ich mich dagegen wehrte. Der Philosoph in mir wehrte
sich dagegen.”

623 NF 23 [2], October 1888, KSA 13, p. 600: “Wagner, im Banne jener unglaubwürdig krankhaf-
ten Sexualität, die der Fluch seines Lebens war, wußte nur zu gut, was ein Künstler damit einbüßt,
daß er vor sich die Freiheit, die Achtung verliert.”
phenomenon can be explained by Hamlet’s melancholy. According to Lawrence Babb, Hamlet’s melancholy would explain his behaviour in the eyes of Shakespeare’s contemporaries: “To Elizabethan playgoers Hamlet’s melancholy would seem quite sufficient explanation for his procrastination. To them the play would be no mystery.”624 Several of Hamlet’s character traits – his exaggerated grief, his sexually tinged obsession with Ophelia, his fondness for graveyards, his mood swings – testify to this diagnosis.625

We have seen that pessimism has been defined as a tendency to see things in black, which is an allusion to melancholy. We have also seen that a number of anti-pessimistic thinkers imply that pessimism is a form of melancholy. And similarly, the pessimists draw advantage of the associations of pessimism to the creative and clairvoyant aspects of melancholy. Nietzsche’s interpretations of Hamlet move between those two poles.

To the Nietzsche of Die Geburt der Tragödie, Hamlet’s pondering of suicide in the third act is an expression of his pessimism. He is not contemplating whether he should take his life but whether life as such is worth living. He is discussing a philosophical topic; but in the eyes of the other characters of the play, this discussion is a manifestation of a pathological state of mind. In Ecce homo, Nietzsche has, as it were, taken the side of those other characters against Hamlet. Hamlet is still a pessimist, but pessimism has by now become a pathological phenomenon. In neither book does Nietzsche have to describe Hamlet as a melancholic, he is emblematic of melancholy to such a degree that this goes without saying. In Die Geburt der Tragödie his interpretation uses the associations of melancholy to creativity and intellectual brilliance; in Ecce homo the interpretation uses its pathological aspects.

625 Jean Starobinski even maintains that queen Gertrude’s observation that Hamlet is “fat and scant of breath” (act V, scene II, verse 290) might have been an allusion to Hamlet’s melancholy; Starobinski: Histoire du traitement de la mélancolie des origines à 1900 (diss. Lausanne; Bâle, 1960), p. 68, footnote 2.
5.3 Nietzsche and Leopardi

Giacomo Leopardi occupies a peculiar role in the pessimistic tradition. Not quite a thinker, his poetry and dialogues were still often considered as philosophy. Not a German, but often enough interpreted as one. As we saw in section 2.4 above, Leopardi was something of a household name in the pessimistic philosophical circles of the late nineteenth century. Nietzsche and his friends were no exception.

What is most interesting with Nietzsche’s reception of Leopardi is not so much the effect it has on his writing as his comments on him. He had a much more productive relation to Hartmann, for example, not to mention Schopenhauer. But he read Leopardi early, and his poetry remained a point of reference during his whole adult life. And he very clearly considered him a pessimist, regardless of what his attitude to pessimism happened to be. By studying the development in Nietzsche’s comments on Leopardi, one can therefore see how pessimism gradually changes from a sign of courage and intelligence to a symptom of perversion and pathology.

* * *

The first mention of Leopardi in Nietzsche’s writings is from a lecture series on the Greek rhetoric that Nietzsche held in the winter semester of 1872–73. Nietzsche points out that we, as moderns, find it difficult to understand the success of Isocrates the rhetorician. We tend to compare him to Demosthenes; and then we find him rather mediocre (ein wenig Mittelgut). His thoughts do not seem profound enough, not statesmanlike enough. And since we have been accustomed to stronger spices, we have lost the sensibility for a style such as his. One needs a certain subtlety to note the brilliance of Isocrates:


626 “Die Geschichte der griechischen Beredsamkeit” KGW II: 4, p. 382: “Therefore, **Leopardi**, the greatest prose writer of the century, has translated him and educated himself through him, he that could say that it is much more difficult to write good prose than good verse; poetry is similar to a richly ornate female body, poetry [sic] is similar to an unveiled body. But Pliny said of sculpture graeca simplicitas est nihil velare [Greek simplicity means hiding nothing]. Therein lies the difficulty. This is how the style of Isocrates seems to us, with this simplicitas, quae nihil velat [simplicity that hides nothing].” Nietzsche is actually quoting from the prefaces of two different editions of Leopardi’s poems here: Robert Hamerling’s preface to his edition *Gedichte. Verdeutscht in den Versmaßen des Originals*, p. 8, reads: “Er hielt eine treffliche Prosa für weit schwieriger als treffliche Verse; die Poesie, pflegte er zu sagen, gleiche eine prächtig geschmückten, die Prosa aber einer unverhüllten Frauengestalt.” And Gustav Brandes compares Leopardi to Pliny in the introduction to his edition: “Was Plinius von der griechischen Skulptur sagt: graeca simplicitas est nihil velare, das war es offenbar, was sich Leopardi zum Grundsatz gemacht hatte und was seine Poe-
Leopardi is the greatest prose-writer of the century, and he is that on account of the simplicity of his style. As to Nietzsche’s own style, this is a confession of the lips. He would eventually (particularly in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*) find a style that is naked in precisely this sense; in the writings from this period, though, that was still some years away.\(^{627}\)

In a notebook entry from the summer or autumn of 1873, Nietzsche uses Leopardi as a metaphor. Nietzsche is discussing Eduard von Hartmann’s analogy between the history of mankind and the life of an individual. As we have seen, Hartmann was of the opinion that the history of mankind, as well as the life of an individual, can be divided into three stages, each characterised by an illusion. Antiquity corresponds to the childhood, and is characterised by the illusion that happiness is attainable on earth, in this life. The Middle Ages correspond to youth: the illusion is that happiness is possible in a transcendent life that is attainable to the individual. We are still in the third stage, which commences with the Reformation and corresponds to manhood. In this stage the illusion is that happiness lies in the future, and is to be reached through the progress of mankind. When we have seen through the illusion in all its stages, mankind enters into a fourth stage, corresponding to old age. Here, it is realised that life is never worth living; with this discovery, life can eventually be negated and the suffering ended. Nietzsche questions this development: a man whose life is so characterised by greed would never develop to a wise, melancholy old man:

> Wenn aber die Menschheit als eine Art Leopardi ihr Greisenalter erleben soll, so müsste sie edler sein als sie ist und vor allem ein anderes Mannesalter haben, als Hartmann ihr ertheilt. Der Greis, der einem solchen Mannesalter entspräche, würde sehr ekelhaft sein und würde mit widriger Gier am Leben hängen, in die gemeinsten Illusionen mehr als je verstrickt.\(^{628}\)

Here, Leopardi obviously represents a man who has come to terms with life, who has accepted that life entails much suffering, yet manages to bear it with dignity. Accepting pain and suffering as a necessary aspect of life always remained an important part of Nietzsche’s moral ideal; in a sense, one can there-

\(^{627}\) In March 1875 Nietzsche returns to Leopardi’s style: “Ich empfehle an Stelle des Lateinischen den griechischen Stil auszubilden, besonders an Demosthenes: Einfachheit. Auf Leopardi zu verweisen, der vielleicht grösste Stilist des Jahrhunderts ist.” NF 3 [71], March 1875, KSA 8, p. 35.

\(^{628}\) NF 29 [51], summer–autumn 1873, KSA 7, p. 648: “But if mankind is to experience its old age as some kind of Leopardi, then it would have to be much nobler, and especially have a different adult age than that which Hartmann allots to it. The old man that corresponds to such a manhood would be very disgusting and would hang on to life with awful greed, more than ever caught up in the basest illusions.”
fore say that Leopardi here represents Nietzsche’s ideal, much in the same way that Goethe would do in the late writings.

One of the most famous passages in Nietzsche’s early writings is a scene in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* where Nietzsche compares man’s condition to that of a herd of animals:

Betrachte die Heerde, die an dir vorüberweidet: sie weiss nicht was Gestern, was Heute ist, springt umher, frisst, ruht, verdaut, springt wieder, und so vom Morgen bis zur Nacht und von Tage zu Tage, kurz angebunden mit ihrer Lust und Unlust, nämlich an den Pflock des Augenblickes und deshalb weder schwermüthig noch überdrüssig. Dies zu sehen geht dem Menschen hart ein, weil er seines Menschenthums sich vor dem Thiere brüstet und doch nach seinem Glücke eifersüchtig hinblickt – denn das will er allein, gleich dem Thiere weder überdrüssig noch unter Schmerzen leben, und will es doch vergebens, weil er es nicht will wie das Thier. Der Mensch fragt wohl einmal das Thier: warum redest du mir nicht von deinem Glücke und siehst mich nur an? Das Thier will auch antworten und sagen, das kommt daher dass ich immer gleich vergesse, was ich sagen wollte – da vergess es aber auch schon diese Antwort und schwieg: so dass der Mensch sich darob verwunderte.629

A number of scholars have noted that this passage is a paraphrase of a poem by Leopardi, “Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell’Asia”. In that poem, an Asian shepherd is melancholically wandering with his herd. He sings to the moon: sings of the suffering that is man’s lot from the moment of birth, when we come screaming and crying into the world and have to be comforted by our mother for being born. The shepherd envies the moon, which just wanders across the sky without fear, without suffering. He then observes how his herd is quietly and contently reclining on the grass. The reason, the shepherd muses, must be that the animals immediately forget all pain and fear that they are subjected to, but above all because they know not of boredom (*tedio*). He is never satisfied: he never succeeds in enjoying the moment; while his herd is perfectly content to spend the greater part of the year lying on the grass and in the shadow. He then goes on to address the herd directly:

Se tu parlar sapessi, io chiederei:
Dimmi: perché giacendo
A bell’agio, ozioso,

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629 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 248: “Consider the cattle, grazing as they pass by you: they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today, they leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again, and so from morn till night and from day to day, fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure, and thus neither melancholy nor bored. This is a hard sight for man to see; for, though he thinks himself better than the animals because he is human, he cannot help envying them their happiness – what they have, a life neither bored nor painful, is precisely what he wants, yet he cannot have it because he refuses to be like an animal. A human being may well ask an animal: ‘Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?’ The animal would like to answer and say: ‘The reason is I always forget what I was going to say’ – but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering.”

248
S'appaga ogni animale;  
Me, s’io giaccio in riposo, il tedio assale?630

Nietzsche takes this contrafactual asking one step further. If the herd could speak, then it still would not answer, because it would forget to say that it never speaks of its happiness because it always forgets. Instead of praising the happiness of the herd – as does Leopardi – Nietzsche uses the image as a symbol in a totally different context. Neither of them really makes the herd’s answer explicit.631 To Leopardi, a life without boredom is necessarily a life without human consciousness.632 Nietzsche seems to mock the shepherd who would rather be a happy animal than an unhappy man.

That Nietzsche is paraphrasing Leopardi is made evident by a notebook containing the preliminaries of the passage in question. There we find an outline of the argument: “1. Keine Betrachtung des Vergangenen. Thier – Leopardi.”633 And soon after Nietzsche makes an explicit reference to, and quotes from, Leopardi’s poem:

Die Heerde weidet an uns vorüber: sie fühlt keine Vergangenheit, springt frisst ruht verdaut, springt wieder und so vom Morgen bis zur Nacht und von Tag zu Tage, kurz angebunden mit ihrer Lust und Unlust, nähmlich an den Pflock des Augenblicks: so dass der Mensch sie sehend seufzen muss und sie anreden möchte, wie Giacomo Leopardi im Nachtgesang des Hirten in Asien:

Ach wie muss ich dich beneiden!
Nicht nur weil frey du scheinen
Beinah von allen Leiden,
Mühsal, Verlust, die schlimmste
Beängstigung im Augenblick vergessend –
Mehr noch, weil nie der Überdruss dich quälet!634

Nietzsche is here quoting the first lines of the stanza that he alludes to in the final version of the text quoted above.

630 Leopardi: “Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell’Asia”, verses 128–132: “And I would ask you, if you could but speak:/Why is it, lying down/At leisure, and at ease,/All creatures are at peace;/While I sit down to suffer from the spleen?”
631 Franco Ferrucci holds this asking of ontological questions without supplying an answer to be a stylistic trait characteristic of the “Canto notturno”, drawn from The Book of Job; see his Il formidabile deserto, p. 86.
632 This is particularly evident in “Dialogo di Malambruno e di Farfarello” discussed in section 2.4 above.
634 NF 29 [98], summer–autumn 1873, KSA 7, pp. 676 f.: “The herd grazes ahead of us: it knows no past, runs, eats, rests, digests, runs again and does this from morning to night and from day to day, tethered up, in short, to its pleasure and displeasure, that is to the pole of the moment: so that the human, on seeing them must sigh and speak to them, like Giacomo Leopardi in the Night Song of the [Wandering] Shepherd of Asia:/Oh how I must envy you!/Not only because you seem to be free/From almost all suffering/Forgetting in an instant/Fatigue, loss and the worst anxiety –/But even more, because you are never plagued by dreariness!”
Quanta invidia ti porto!
Non sol perché d’affanno
Quasi libera vai;
Ch’ogni stentò, ogni danno,
Ogni estremo timor subito scordi;
Ma più perché giammai tedio non provi.635

In a short, somewhat aged, but nonetheless thought-provoking article on Nietzsche and Leopardi, Otto Friedrich Bollnow asks himself why Nietzsche did not mention Leopardi’s name when alluding to him, a question that becomes even more relevant given that he did quote him in this notebook entry. Nietzsche does quote Leopardi later in the same chapter, so he obviously did not try to avoid giving the impression that he was influenced by him. “Es ist eher anzunehmen, daß er die Kenntnis Leopardis zu seiner Zeit als selbstverständlicher voraussetzte und daß er dies Stück ohne Namensnennung gewissermaßen als Blickfang vorausschickte, um durch die zugespitzt formulierte provozierende Behauptung die Aufmerksamkeit zu erregen und so auf das Problem der menschlichen Geschichtlichkeit hinzulenken.”636 This seems to me an unnecessarily far-fetched interpretation. It seems more probable that he removed Leopardi’s name to avoid mentioning him twice in the same paragraph. But Bollnow is definitely correct in assuming that Nietzsche’s presumed readers were familiar with Leopardi. This is not least evidenced by the fact that at least nine of the people with whom Nietzsche corresponded mention Leopardi in their letters to Nietzsche. And Nietzsche’s friend Carl von Gersdorff report that they would read Leopardi together on a daily basis when they spent the summer of 1873 together in Flims-Waldhaus.637

Some pages into Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben, Nietzsche quotes another poem by Leopardi, “A se stesso”. This time, Leopardi is used as an example of a supra-historical (übergeschichtlicher) thinker:

Wie die Hunderte verschiedener Sprachen denselben typisch festen Bedürfnissen der Menschen entsprechen, so dass Einer, der diese Bedürfnisse verstände, aus alle Sprachen nichts Neues zu lernen vermöchte: so erläutert sich der überhistorische Denker alle Geschichte der Völker und der Einzelnen von innen heraus, hellschierisch den Ursinn der verschiedenen Hieroglyphen errathend und allmählich sogar der immer neu hinzuströmenden Zeichenschrift ermüdet auswei-

635 “Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell’Asia”, verses 107–112: “How much I envy you/Not just because you go/Almost without distress,/And very soon forget/All pains, all harm, and even utmost terror; but more because you never suffer boredom.” It should be noted that the translator has chosen to render tedio as boredom: this is problematic, as that term is usually reserved for the more general noia.
636 Otto Friedrich Bollnow: “Nietzsche und Leopardi”, Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung 26 (1972), pp. 68 f.: “One should rather assume that he presupposed the knowledge of Leopardi as self-evident and that he in a sense used this piece as an eye-catcher without mentioning his name, in order to awaken attention through the incisively worded provocative assertion, and thereby comment on the problem of human historicity.”
chend: denn wie sollte er es im unendlichen Ueberflusse des Geschehenden nicht zur Sättigung, zur Uebersättigung, ja zum Ekel bringen! so dass der Ver-wegenste zuletzt bereit ist, mit Giacomo Leopardi zu seinem Herzen zu sagen:

Nichts lebt, das würdig
Wär deiner Regungen, und keinen Seufzer verdient
Die Erde.
Schmerz und Langeweile ist unser Sein und Koth
Die Welt – nichts Andres.
Beruhige dich.638

The original reads:

Non val cosa nessuna
I moti tuoi, nè di sospiri è degna
La terra. Amaro e noia
La vita, altro mai nulla; e fango è il mondo.
T’acqueta omai.639

Translating poetry is obviously a very difficult business; but the fact is that the translation that Nietzsche uses, that of Robert Hamerling, is quite inexact. But Nietzsche does not quote Hamerling’s translation accurately – or rather, his wording is in a sense closer to the original than that of Hamerling. Bollnow, to whom neither the critical edition of Nietzsche’s works nor the vast array of tools in the form of philological commentaries were available, assumes that Nietzsche must have been familiar enough with the original to be able to improve the translation. For Hamerling renders the words “amaro e noia” as “bittere Langeweile”, whereas Nietzsche has “Schmerz und Langeweile”.640 But “Schmerz und Langeweile” is not closer to the original than “bittere Langeweile”. Admittedly, ‘amaro’ is used as a noun here, which means that Nietzsche, from a grammatical point of view, is closer to the original. But then again: ‘amaro’ does not mean ‘pain’; ‘amaro’ means ‘bitterness’, and has as in most languages a literal as well as a metaphorical meaning.641 The fact that Leopardi’s phrase is rendered “Schmerz und Langeweile” means that he is brought closer

638 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 256: “Just as the hundreds of different languages correspond to the same typically unchanging needs of man, so that he who understood these needs would be unable to learn anything new from any of these languages, so the suprahistorical thinker beholds the history of nations and of individuals from within, clairvoyantly divining the original meaning of the various hieroglyphics and gradually even coming wearily to avoid the endless stream of new signs: for how should the unending superfluity of events not reduce him to satiety, over-satiety and finally to nausea! So that perhaps the boldest of them is at last ready to say to his heart, with Giacomo Leopardi:/Nothing lives that is worthy/Thy agitation, and the earth deserves not a sigh./Our being is pain and boredom and the world is dirt – nothing more./Be calm.”
639 “A se stesso”, verses 7–11: “Nothing is worth/One beat of yours; nor is it worthy sighs,/This Earth. Bitterness, boredom/Are all life is; and all the world is mud./Lie quietly.”
640 Bollnow, p. 68, footnote 5.
641 The metaphorical meaning is obviously rooted in ancient medicine: it refers to the bitter taste of bile, an excess of which meant a choleric disposition, or a melancholic disposition in case of an excess of black bile.
to Schopenhauer. Life is ultimately pain and boredom; this, we saw in section 1.4, is exactly Schopenhauer’s position: “Sein [=des Menschen] Leben schwingt also gleich einem Pendel hin und her zwischen dem Schmerz und der Langeweile, welche beide in der Tat dessen letzte Bestandteile sind.”

642 This correspondence seems to me more important than that of the grammatical structures of Leopardi’s original and the translation found in Nietzsche’s book. It was, we should perhaps add, not Nietzsche who modified Hamerling’s translation: his friend Erwin Rohde did that.

The fact that Nietzsche uses a translation that has been modified in a distinctly Schopenhauerian direction, and the fact that it was modified by a close friend of Nietzsche’s together give the impression that Nietzsche perceived Leopardi to be related to Schopenhauer.

643 This should not surprise us: we have seen that Leopardi’s translators as well as a number of participants in the debate over pessimism associate Leopardi and Schopenhauer. Occasionally, Nietzsche explicitly likens Leopardi to Schopenhauer. An example can be found in a Nachlass entry from the early months of 1874:

Schopenhauer unter den Deutschen. Was hat gerade hier sein Erscheinen zu bedeuten? Was bedeutet in einem Volke, in dem die Philosophie zu Grunde geht, die Jugend Schopenhauers? Was hat die Philosophie unter Deutschen für einen Sinn?

644 Brusotti maintains that the opinion that the fact that Hamerling’s translation reduces the complexity of the poem – Hamerling renders both ‘tedio’ (boredom) and ‘fastidio’ (discomfort/boredom) as ‘Überdruss’ (disgust/boredom); and he translates ‘posi’ (you lay/rest) and ‘seggo’ (I sit) with the verb ‘ruhen’ (rest) – he actually makes the poem more fitting as an illustration in this context; Brusotti, p. 326, footnote 28; and p. 328, footnote 33.

645 NF 35 [8], early 1874–summer 1874, KSA 7, p. 810: “Schopenhauer among the Germans. What does his appearance precisely here mean? What does the youth of Schopenhauer mean in a people in which philosophy meets its doom? What meaning does philosophy have among Germans? He could very well have been born among Italians: see Leopardi. Leopardi ‘Only it (the thought of the beautiful) can soothe/the debt of destiny, so hard/that gives us children of man/so much to repent fruitlessly,/and only on occasion through it/can it make life appear sweeter than death/to noble souls too, not only the simple ones.’”
Nietzsche is here quoting Leopardi’s poem “Il pensiero dominante”. The original reads:

[Pregio non ha, non ha ragion la vita
Se non per lui, per] lui ch’all’uomo è tutto;
Sola discolpa al fato,
Che noi mortali in terra
Pose a tanto patir senz’altro frutto;
Solo per cui talvolta,
Non alla gente stolta, al cor non vile
La vita della morte è più gentile.646

The pronoun it (lui) refers to the dominant thought (il pensiero dominante) of the poem’s title. Nietzsche correctly interprets it as der Gedanke der Schönheit, the thought of the beautiful, as a symbol of art. The one and a half verses within square brackets are excluded by Nietzsche: I have reproduced them for the sake of comprehension. Nietzsche sees Leopardi as related to Schopenhauer, otherwise the fact that Leopardi is Italian could not be used to prove that Schopenhauer could have been born in Italy. But the poem that he quotes does not testify to Schopenhauer’s view of the world. On Schopenhauer’s account, art is on of three strategies to palliate the suffering that the will causes, but it is the least effective of them. Compassion (Mitleid) and asceticism presuppose a deeper understanding of the nature of the world but are therefore more permanent and of greater effect.

Nietzsche, however, does not see asceticism and compassion as options. As we have seen he uses Schopenhauer as a means to an end that is very different from Schopenhauer’s: he introduces a Schopenhauerian element (the Dionysian) in a philosophy of art with the purpose of providing an alternative to Schopenhauer’s pessimism. When he quotes Leopardi to prove that Schopenhauer could have been Italian he takes this strategy one step further. Schopenhauer’s philosophy is becoming less and less interesting to Nietzsche. In Schopenhauer als Erzieher that he was working with at the time Schopenhauer the man is presented as an ideal: he can teach us how to counter the negative influence of our wretched times. His philosophy can serve a purpose in this context, but it serves primarily to tear down the weak and sickly culture-substitute that the philistines have produced. The facts that Nietzsche quotes some lines of poetry by Leopardi that actually have a rather un-Schopenhauerian tendency (as they lay much greater stress on the importance of the aesthetic for the happiness of man) to prove that Schopenhauer could have been Italian is in line with this. It shows that Schopenhauer’s ideas are losing their importance.

646 “Il pensiero dominante”, verses 81–87: “[Life has no value, life can make no sense/Without this,] which to us is everything/For putting mortals here/To no avail but so much suffering/–/Though not to fools, to hearts which are not base/–/Life seems at times more noble than death is.”
Another important aspect of Nietzsche’s view of Leopardi becomes apparent in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, the fourth of the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*:

Indem die Kunst Wagner’s uns auf Augenblicke aus ihr hinausträgt, vermögen wir ihren gleichartigen Charakter überhaupt erst zu überschauen: da erscheinen uns Goethe und Leopardi als die letzten grossen Nachzüger der italienischen Philologen-Poeten, der Faust als die Darstellung des unvolksthümlichsten Räthsels, welches sich die neueren Zeiten, in der Gestalt des nach Leben dürftenden theoretischen Menschen, aufgegeben haben; selbst das Gothische Lied ist dem Volksliede nachgesungen, nicht vorgesungen, und sein Dichter wusste, weshalb er mit so vielern Ernst einem Anhänger den Gedanken an’s Herz legte: “meine Sachen können nicht populär werden; wer daran denkt und dafür strebt, ist im Irrthum.”

Let us for now leave Wagner out of the picture. Leopardi is together with Goethe one of the last disciples of the philologist-poets of the Renaissance. His attitude to the literature of antiquity is another than that of the barren scientific philologists, he manages to combine a profound knowledge with the frame of mind of a poet. He manages to be learned without letting his erudition block his creativity. “Wir reden über die Poesie so abstract, weil wir alle schlechte Dichter zu sein pflegen” Nietzsche writes in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. It is precisely because he is a poet and writes about poetry in his capacity as poet, because he does not talk abstractly, that Leopardi manages to communicate a knowledge of the ancient literature that the scientific philologists have no access to. In his conversations with Eckermann, Goethe gives vent to the exact same idea:

Bisher glaubte die Welt an den Heldensinn einer Lucretia, eines Mucius Scävolas, und ließ sich dadurch erwärmen und begeistern. Jetzt aber kommt die historische Kritik und sagt, daß jene Personen nie gelebt haben, sondern als Fiktionen und Fabeln anzusehen sin, die der große Sinn der Römer erdichtete. Was sollen wir aber mit einer so ärmlichen Wahrheit! Und wenn die Römer groß genug waren, so etwas zu erdichten, so sollten wir jedenfalls groß genug sein, daran zu glauben.

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647 WB 10, KSA 1, p. 503: “By transporting us for moments out of this mantle of light and shade, Wagner’s art enables us for the first time to see how uniform that whole period was: Goethe and Leopardi then appear to us as the last great followers of the Italian philologist-poets, Faust as a representation of the riddle propounded by modern times of the theoretical man who thirsts for real life – an enigma the furthest removed from the world of the folk; even the Goethean song is an imitation of a folk-song, not an example of it, and the poet knew well why he admonished one of his followers with the words: ‘My things can never be popular; whoever thinks they can and tries to make them so is in error.’”

648 GT, 8, KSA 1, p. 60: “We talk so abstractly about poetry because all of us are usually bad poets.”

649 Eckermann: *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, 15 October 1825, p. 150: “Earlier the world believed in the heroism of a Lucretia, or a Mucius Scaevola, and let itself be warmed and inspired by it. But now the historical critique comes and says that these people never existed, that they should be regarded as fictions and fables, invented by the great spirit of the Romans. But what good is such a poor truth to us! If the Romans were great enough to invent such things, then we should at least be great enough to believe in them.”
In Nietzsche’s eyes, Leopardi has an ability to make the ancient world come alive. In March 1875 he comes back to Leopardi as a philologist: “Leopardi ist das moderne Ideal eines Philologen; die deutschen Philologen können nichts machen. (Voss ist zu studieren dazul)”650 Sebastiano Timpanaro comments on this passage when discussing the relationship of Leopardi and Nietzsche in his book La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi.651 Voss was apparently considered a talented philologist, but from a scholarly point of view he was inferior to many of his and Nietzsche’s contemporaries. The reason that Nietzsche thinks that he ought to be studied is, on Timpanaro’s interpretation, simply that he was a better writer than those more scholarly contemporaries. Timpanaro therefore comes to the conclusion that Nietzsche probably was familiar with enough of Leopardi’s philological writings to pass an informed judgement on Leopardi’s ability in that field: Voss should be studied, that is, because his philological writings might have a Leopardian quality to them.

Timpanaro states that as Nietzsche was familiar with the first two volumes of Leopardi’s Opere, he might well have been familiar with the third volume as well, which contained some philological works. In all probability, Timpanaro writes, he was familiar with an essay by Leopardi that was published in Rheinisches Museum in 1835, a scholarly journal with which Nietzsche actually was affiliated for a period.652 Giuliano Campioni agrees, on the whole, with this conclusion of Timpanaro’s: “Certamente, non possiamo non concordare col Timpanaro, l'affermazione laudativa di Nietzsche non può essere ridotta a sfogo antitedesco o a pretesto per una ulteriore valorizzazione del legame filologia-poesia nella direzione della Nascita della tragedia.”653

But Timpanaro also notes that Leopardi’s philological writings had a distinct scholarly character – he claims that it was relatively close to the works of Nietzsche’s teacher Ritschl in its general approach – rather than being an attempt at a synthesis between poetry and philology.654 This means that Nietzsche’s view of Leopardi qua philologist is tinged by his view of Leopardi qua poet, if it is not determined by it altogether. Given this, I see the opposite conclusion as more reasonable: I would say that Nietzsche had at best a very limited knowledge of Leopardi as a philologist; he was familiar with his poetry and assumed that the tendency of the philological writings had to be similar. It

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650 NF 3 [23], March 1875, KSA 8, p. 22: “Leopardi ist das moderne Ideal eines Philologen; die deutschen Philologen können nichts machen. (Voss ist zu studieren dazul)!”
652 He created an index for the journal in 1871.
653 Giuliano Campioni: “Il rinascimento in Wagner e nel giovane Nietzsche”, Rinascimento, seconda serie, vol. 38 (1998), p. 110, footnote 100. “Certainly, we cannot but agree with Timpanaro that Nietzsche’s laudative affirmation cannot be reduced to an anti-German outburst or a pretext for an ulterior revaluation of the connection philology-poetry in the direction of Die Geburt der Tragödie.”
654 Timpanaro, pp. 188 f.
might be the case that he read some of the articles that Leopardi wrote in Latin that were published in German journals, but it seems unlikely that he would have made the effort of reading the philological work that Leopardi wrote in Italian. And even if he would have, nothing speaks in favour of Timpanaro’s assumption that he was familiar with the third, philological, volume of the Opere.655

There are several similar statements on Leopardi as an ideal philologist in the Nachlaß of the mid-seventies, when Nietzsche was working on a never completed fifth unzeitgemässe Betrachtung called “Wir Philologen”. In the spring or summer of 1875, Leopardi and Goethe are once again cited as examples of the philologist-poets: “Hinter ihnen pflügen die reinen Philologen-Gelehrten nach.”656 And again, slightly later: “Würde die Philologie noch als Wissenschaft existiren, wenn ihre Diener nicht Erzieher, mit Besoldungen wären? In Italien gab es solche. Wer stellt einen Deutschen neben Leopardi z.B.?”657 And in a note from the spring or summer of that year, Nietzsche compares Leopardi as a thinker to Plato – to Leopardi’s benefit. If Plato were right, Nietzsche says, then man would be the greatest artwork.658 But would art come into existence in that case? Nietzsche thinks not: the existence of art proves that the world (alles Dasein) is an ugly, unaesthetic phenomenon. “Man erwäge doch einmal, was ein wirklicher Denker, Leopardi, sagt. – Es wäre doch wahrlich zu wünschen, dass die Menschen keine Kunst nöthig hätten.”659 Plato does not belong to Nietzsche’s favourite philosophers, and this judgement is of course incisive, aiming at rhetorical effect. But to be regarded a real thinker when put next to Plato still does testify to a great appreciation. And when reading that Mörike, not Goethe, is considered the greatest German poet by the German

655 To our aid we have a wide range of philological tools unavailable to Timpanaro. In this case the catalogue of Nietzsche’s library, Nietzsche’s persönliche Bibliothek, is particularly helpful (pp. 348 ff.). Nietzsche bought the second volume of an Italian edition of Leopardi’s works, Opere (Leipzig, 1861). This volume contains no philological works: it contains some of the Operette morali, the Pensieri and some translations of Latin and Greek authors: see G. Mazzatinti & M. Menghini (eds.): Bibliografia leopardiana. Parte I, p. 153. It was, however, never cut open so its contents need not occupy us. Apart from this edition Nietzsche also possessed the German translation of the Canti by Hamerling referred to above. At Christmas 1878 Nietzsche was given the two-volume edition Giacomo Leopardi with translations by Paul Heyse by Marie Baumgartner. After this, the number of references to Leopardi increases, but by then the tone of his comments has changed.

656 NF 5 [17], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 44: “The purely scholarly philologists come trailing after them.”

657 NF 5 [56], spring–summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 56: “Would philology still exist as a science if its practitioners were not educators with a salary? In Italy there existed such philologists. Who can put a German next to Leopardi, e.g.”

658 Of course, Nietzsche would later, in Die fröhliche Wissenschaft for example, hold that man indeed is the greatest artwork. But that was much later.

people, Nietzsche lashes out against the former, and against the unmusicality of the Germans. One of the faults he finds with Mörike is that he is not a thinker: “Gedanken nun hat er gar nicht: und ich halte nur noch Dichter aus, die unter andern auch Gedanken haben, wie Pindar und Leopardi.”

The picture is clear: in the first half of the 1870’s, Nietzsche esteems Leopardi highly. He sees him as a great prose-writer, as a philologist who manages to combine deep knowledge of the writers of antiquity and a creative, poetic approach to them; he sees him as a profound and important thinker. That Leopardi’s name occurs in combination with that of Goethe is not a coincidence: Nietzsche seems to regard them as related, two poets who are thinkers and who share a deep love for antiquity. Being compared to Goethe is very high praise indeed when it comes from Nietzsche. There is, however, very little in the way of analysis. Nietzsche uses quotations from Leopardi’s œuvre to illustrate his own thoughts, and he occasionally uses Leopardi as a symbol. And it seems that exactly those facets of Leopardi’s œuvre that caused his admiration were in fact unknown to Nietzsche. He calls Leopardi the greatest prose-writer of the century, yet he seems to have read very little of his prose. He describes him as the ideal philologist, yet seems not to have read his philological writings. He describes him as a great thinker, yet does not bother to analyse his thoughts.

If we go to the letters the situation is much the same. Nietzsche refers to Leopardi in several letters from this period; and several of his friends quote or allude to his poetry. In these circles, Leopardi is obviously a household name: most of the people with whom Nietzsche corresponded mention Leopardi. He is always mentioned in such a way that it is obviously taken for granted that the recipient is familiar with him. However, the poems are used as mere illustrations, they are never analysed. Carl von Gersdorff writes from Siena “Aber es ist Herbst und die Landschaft ist melancholisch; glutrothe Sonnenuntergänge, das plötzliche Ergrauen der Natur und die unvollkommene Scheibe des wachsenden Mondes, sie mahnen an die Gesänge Leopardis, z.B. an den Nachtgesang des Hirten in Asien.” In 1872 the composer Hans von Bülow, Cosima Wagner’s first husband, visited Nietzsche, and wanted to dedicate a translation of Leopardi’s poems to him. “Mit der Anfrage,” Janz writes, “ob er Nietzsche diese Übersetzung widmen dürfe, brachte er dem Geschenkten ein Werk und eine Gedankenwelt nahe, die einen nachhaltigen Einfluß ausüben sollten.”

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660 NF 8 [2], summer 1875, KSA 8, p. 128: “He does not have any thoughts at all: and I can only put up with poets that among other things have thoughts, such as Pindar and Leopardi.”
661 7 October 1873, KGB II: 4, p. 313: “But it is autumn and the landscape is melancholy; glowing red sunsets, nature is suddenly turning grey, and the imperfect disc of the growing moon, they all recall Leopardi’s poems, e. g. the Night Song of the Shepherd of Asia.”
662 Janz, vol. I, 453. “With the question if he could dedicate this translation to Nietzsche, he brought a body of writings and an intellectual world close to him that would exert an enduring influence.” This translation seems never to have been printed: it is not listed in the Leopardi bibliographies, and a German romanist who has examined the German translations of Leopardi’s poem “L’infinito” has not been able to locate it: “Friedrich Nietzsche, grande ammiratore non solo del poeta ma anche del filologo Leopardi, parla in una lettera del 1872 di una traduzione dei
Later, Bülow suggested that Nietzsche should translate the *Operette morali* and the *Pensieri*. “Schopenhauers großer romantischer Bruder Leopardi harrt noch immer vergeblich seiner Einführung bei unserer Nation.” Although his Italian was very poor, Nietzsche apparently took the idea of translating him seriously. It was not until Cosima Wagner advised against the enterprise that Nietzsche gave up the idea: “Sind Sie wirklich gewillt Leopardi zu übersetzen? Ich halte es für eine Uebertriebenheit ihn mit Schopenhauer, (zu welchem er sich verhält wie der Schlaf zum Tod, oder der Traum zur Vision und Revelation) zu vergleichen, doch würde es sehr der Mühe werth sein ihn zu übertragen.” Cosima Wagner’s influence on Nietzsche was considerable: the day after, after two full months of hesitation, Nietzsche sent a reply to Bülow:


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663 1 November 1874, KGB II: 4, pp. 600 f.: “The great romantic brother of Schopenhauer, Leopardi is still vainly waiting for an introduction in our country.”
664 1 January 1875, KGB II: 4, p. 643: “Are you really willing to translate Leopardi? I consider it an exaggeration to compare him to Schopenhauer (to whom he stands in the same relation as sleep to death, or dream to vision and revelation), but it would be worth the effort to translate him.” It seems though that Cosima Wagner was not familiar with the works of Leopardi at the time. In her diaries, Leopardi does not appear until 1878, and then the context makes it very probable that neither Cosima nor Richard Wagner knew his works: “nach dem Abendbrot lesen wir in Leopardi, den Malwida uns zugesendet. Zuerst ist eine kleine Vereingenommenheit zu überwinden, R. liebt Gedichte nicht, das erste an Italien fesselt ihn nicht […] der Dialog von Tristan und einem Freund aber überwindet alle Bedenken […].” Richard Wagner also declares “Dialogo di Plotino e di Porfirio” to be the best text on suicide. Cosima Wagner: *Die Tagebücher*, 18 October 1878, vol. II, p. 202.
665 2 January 1875, KSB 5, p. 3: “I felt all too pleased and honoured by your letter not to think through the suggestion you make concerning Leopardi ten times. I know only the least bit of his prose writings, one of my friends, with whom I live together in Basel, has often translated individual parts of them and read them aloud to me, always to my great surprise and admiration; we possess the newest edition from Livorno. […] I know the poems from a translation by Hamerling. I myself understand far too little Italian and am on the whole lack aptitude for languages (the German language is difficult enough for me).” The *Livornese Ausgabe* that Nietzsche mentions is probably an edition of *Le operette morali* published in Livorno 1870. This is the only edition of any work by Leopardi published in Livorno listed in the relevant bibliography – *Bibliografia leopardiana. Parte I (fino al 1898)* – that would make sense chronologically.
Just as in the works and the notebooks, the number of references to Leopardi in the letters culminate in 1875, and radically drop thereafter. In 1879 the number rises again, and for a few years there are quite a number of references, the reason being that Marie Baumgartner, the mother of one of Nietzsche’s students, in 1878 gave Nietzsche the recently published two-volume edition translated by Paul Heyse as a Christmas present. When thanking Baumgartner, Nietzsche marked a certain distance to the poet: “Leopardi steht da in ernster Pracht, aufgespart für gute Sommertage im Gebirge. – Sie wissen doch, daß ich kein ‘Pessimist’ bin, wie er und das ‘Düstere’ wo ich es finde, nur constatire, nicht bejam- mere.” Although this is not strictly true – Nietzsche’s letters are full of complaints about his health – it is an important change of attitude that has taken place. He is no longer used as a positive example. It is only when he is complaining that Nietzsche can still find use of Leopardi as a symbol: “Welche Jahre! Welche langwierigen Schmerzen! Welche innerlichen Störungen, Umwälzungen, Vereinsamungen! Wer hat denn so viel ausgestanden als ich? Leopardi gewiß nicht!”

In a notebook entry Nietzsche claims to laugh at the madness of Hölderlin and the early death of Leopardi: “Die Art Hölderlin und Leopardi: ich bin hart genug, um über deren Zugrundegehen zu lachen. Man hat eine falsche Vorstellung davon. Solche Ultra-Platoniker, deren immer die Naivetät abgeht, enden schlecht.” This lack of naïveté meant that Leopardi did not realise that a man from time to time needs a woman, just as he at times needs a heavy meal. Leopardi ruined his health through masturbation: “Und daß solche Shelles, Hölderlins, Leopardis zu Grunde ghn, ist billig, ich halte nicht gar viel von solchen Menschen. Es ergötzts mich, an die Revanchen zu denken, welche die derbe Natürlichkeit der Natur bei solcher Art Menschen nimmt z.B. wenn ich höre, daß L<eopardi> früher On<anie> trieb, später impotent war.”

However, Nietzsche still sees Leopardi as a great writer: in Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, he is mentioned as one of only four writers of the nineteenth century

666 29 December 1878, KSB 5, p. 375: “Leopardi is standing there in sombre elegance, saved for good summer days in the mountains. – You do know, though, that I am no pessimist, as he is, and that I only observe the ‘gloom’ where I find it, I don’t complain about it.”

667 Letter to Erwin Rohde, middle of July 1882, KSB 6, p. 226: “Such horrible years! Such enduring pains! Such inner disturbances, upheavals, loneliness! Who has put up with as much as I have? Certainly not Leopardi!”

668 NF 26 [405], summer–autumn 1884, KSA 11, p. 257: “Hölderlin’s and Leopardi’s type: I am hard enough to laugh at their ruin. People have a false picture of that. Such ultra-Platonists, who always lack naïveté end badly.” A certain obsession with Leopardi’s sexual life can be discerned. In a fragment from 1888 (quoted in its entirety in section 5.1 above), Leopardi, Baudelaire and Schopenhauer are used as examples of the physiological decadence of the philosophers of pessimism. After Leopardi’s name, Nietzsche adds a brief diagnosis: “Leopardi: geschlechtliche Irrungen am Anfang, Impotenz bei Zeiten als Folge”. NF 15 [34], early 1888, KSA 13, p. 429.

669 NF 34 [95], April–June 1885, KSA 11, p. 451: “And that these Shelles, Hölderlins, Leopardis are ruined is reasonable, I have little regard for such people. I am amused by thinking about the revenge that the hard naturality of nature takes on that kind of people, e.g. when I hear that L<eopardi> used to masturbate, and later became impotent.”
worthy of being called ‘master of prose’, the other being Ralph Waldo Emerson, Prosper Mérimée, and Walter Savage Landor (Goethe belongs to the eighteenth century); and in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* Leopardi is cited as one of the great poets, along with the likes of Byron, Gogol, and Poe.\(^{670}\) Leopardi’s weakness as a man, his decadence, could be put to a creative use. But although Leopardi is still considered a great poet, he is not great in the sense that he was in 1875. He is no longer a healthy poet. Consequently his use of the ancient literature is no longer considered exemplary; he is no longer presented as a thinker. Leopardi has, in short, lost his place next to Goethe. Goethe, Nietzsche states in *Götzen-Dämmerung* was a very strong person, hence his tolerance: he was strong enough to be tolerant. In his strength lies Goethe’s greatness.\(^{671}\) Leopardi belongs to a different order altogether: it is from his weakness that Leopardi manages to create his poetry. He is therefore a romantic pessimist, as opposed to Nietzsche and Goethe whose pessimism is classic, a pessimism of strength.

\(^{670}\) FW, 92, KSA 3, p. 448; JGB, 9. Hauptstück, 269, KSA 5, p. 224.  
\(^{671}\) GD, Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen 49, KSA 6, pp. 151 f.
5.4 The Pessimistic Context of the Eternal Recurrence

One of the most important ideas in Nietzsche’s later phase is the idea of the eternal recurrence. It achieves its full importance in Also sprach Zarathustra but it is first formulated at the end of the fourth book of Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. In Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, the idea is introduced in hypothetical form, and is connected to Nietzsche’s notion of amor fati.


Anyone who can either interpret everything that occurs to him or her as beautiful, or as sublime, or choose not to see them at all, will be able to avoid boredom (Langeweile), which Nietzsche at this stage regards as the great threat to man. Die fröhliche Wissenschaft is arguably Nietzsche’s most Epicurean book, and the eternal recurrence is one instance of many of Nietzsche’s trying to create a philosophy in the form of wisdom of life (Lebensweisheit).673 In Also sprach

672 FW 341, KSA 3, p. 570: “The greatest weight. – What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ – Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?’ would lie upon your action as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal.”

673 Epicurean wisdom and pessimism are mutually exclusive: “He who advises the young man to live well and the old man to die well is simple-minded, not just because of the pleasing aspects of life but because the same kind of practice produces a good life and a good death. Much worse is
Zarathustra, where in many ways a bleaker image of the world is given, the idea is closely associated with courage.\textsuperscript{674} Courage enables one to affirm recurrence, which makes one overcome death: “Muth aber ist der beste Todtschlager, Muth, der angreift: der schlägt noch den Tod tod, denn er spricht: ‘War das Leben? Wohlan! Noch Ein Mal!’”\textsuperscript{675} In \textit{Die fröhliche Wissenschaft} as well as in Zarathustra, the eternal recurrence is used as a criterion if one leads the right life. In Zarathustra, the term used to refer to this kind of person is \textit{Übermensch}.\textsuperscript{676} The eternal recurrence is therefore one of the key concepts of Nietzsche’s late philosophy. Its emerging in \textit{Die fröhliche Wissenschaft} can be said to be the point where the second and third phases of his writings connect; and its central role in Zarathustra and not the least its connection to the \textit{Übermensch} idea makes it a key concept in Nietzsche’s philosophy as a whole.

According to the legend that Nietzsche created around his thinking, the idea of the eternal recurrence came to him in August 1881, spent in the Engadin valley in Switzerland.\textsuperscript{677} In a certain sense, this is true. The first time that the idea appears in the Nachlaß is in a fragment from the beginning of August that year.\textsuperscript{678} But this is also one of many examples where Nietzsche re-interprets his own past to suit his purposes. Nietzsche creates a mythical aura around the idea, he who says that it is good not to be born, ‘but when born to pass through the gates of Hades as quickly as possible.’ For if he really believes what he says, why doesn’t he leave life? For it is easy for him to do, if he has firmly decided on it. But if he is joking, he is wasting his time among men who don’t welcome it.” Epicurus: “Letter to Menoeceus”, in: \textit{The Epicurus Reader. Selected Writings and Testimonia}, tr. & ed. Brad Inwood & L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis & Cambridge, 1994), p. 29. The similarities of Nietzsche’s philosophy to the spiritual techniques of the ancient philosophers are stressed by Pierre Hadot: \textit{Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault}, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, tr. Michael Chase (Oxford, 1995), for example pp. 212 and 272.

\textsuperscript{674} Knowledge as a matter of courage (“Erkennen als Sache des Muts”) is according to Salaquarda one of the defining characteristics of the understanding of reality that Nietzsche worked out during the 1880’s and that is summed up in the formula ‘will to power’. Jörg Salaquarda: “Der ungeheure Augenblick”, \textit{Nietzsche-Studien} 18 (1989), p. 319.

\textsuperscript{675} ZA III, Vom Gesicht und Räthsel 1, KSA 4, p. 199: “Courage, however, is the best destroyer, courage that attacks: it destroys even death, for it says; ‘Was that life? Well then! Once more!’”

\textsuperscript{676} The matter is succinctly put by Montinaro: “Nietzsche dunque non è il superuomo; ma il superuomo a sua volta altro non è che l'uomo il quale sia in grado di dire di si alla vita così come è, in eterna ripetizione. Questo è il nesso che lega la teoria dell'eterno ritorno con la predicazione del superuomo.” (“Nietzsche is thus not the superman; but the superman on his part is nothing else than the man who is capable of saying yes to life as it is, in eternal repetition. This is the nexus that connects the theory of the eternal recurrence to the preaching of the superman.”) Montinari: \textit{Che cosa ha detto Nietzsche}, p. 125. The fact that Nietzsche himself was no Übermensch is made clear by a desperate and all-too-human fragment from 1882/83: “Ich will das Leben nicht wieder. Wie habe ich's zu ertragen? Schaffend. Was macht mich den Anblick aushalten? der Blick auf den Übermenschen, der das Leben bejaht. Ich habe versucht, es \textit{sicher} zu bejahen – Ach!” NF 4 [81], November 1882–February 1883, KSA 10, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{677} EH, Also sprach Zarathustra 1, KSA 6, p. 335: “Ich ging an jenem Tage am See von Silvaplana durch die Wälder; bei einem mächtigen pyramidal aufgetürmten Block unweit Surlei machte ich halt. Da kam mir dieser Gedanke.”

\textsuperscript{678} NF 11 [141], early 1881–autumn 1881, KSA 9, p. 494. The fragment is an outline to a book, and is dated “Anfang August 1881 in Sils Maria, 6000 Fuss über dem Meere und viel höher über allen menschlichen Dingen!”

262
as if it were a moment of mystical, almost divine inspiration. In this section, I intend to show that, even if Nietzsche himself thought that the idea came to him that summer, it was present in his thinking, in an admittedly rudimentary form, much earlier. I will show important similarities between the eternal recurrence as expressed in Die fröhliche Wissenschaft and earlier books by Nietzsche. Furthermore, I intend to show that there is an important, yet neglected, pessimistic context to Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal recurrence. I will demonstrate this by showing that important aspects of the eternal recurrence were discussed by pessimistic contemporaries and near-contemporaries of Nietzsche. The first step is to show that the version of the eternal recurrence of Die fröhliche Wissenschaft and Zarathustra is anticipated in Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil; the second step is to establish a link between the Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil version of the idea and a number of writers who Nietzsche read in the early 1870’s and that he associates with pessimism. In the light of this, as a third step, I will argue that the eternal recurrence as formulated in 1881 was not least intended as a cure against pessimism.

Nietzsche often argues by means of metonymies. Pessimism, we maintained in section 5.1, functions as a metonym for nihilism to Nietzsche in the 1880’s. Pessimism is a limited case of nihilism. This, it seems to me, is something that Nietzsche presupposes in his discussion of the eternal recurrence. The eternal recurrence, Nietzsche wrote in the Lenzerheide fragment, intensifies nihilism to its most terrible form. The eternal recurrence of a meaningless existence perpetuates and increases the meaninglessness. The affirmation of the eternal recurrence is therefore the ultimate overcoming of nihilism. But the use of the reaction to the notion an eternal recurrence as a test of whether one lives the right type of life is something that Nietzsche develops with a pessimistic model. It is therefore reasonable to say that the eternal recurrence represents Nietzsche’s attempt to overcome pessimism.

The notion that the eternal recurrence represents Nietzsche’s attempt to overcome pessimism is not at all new: it goes back at least to Lou Andreas-Salomé, who maintains that it is an attempt to inverse Schopenhauer’s pessimism: “Nicht Befreiung von dem Wiederkunftszwange, sondern freudige Bekehrung zu ihm ist das Ziel des höchsten sittlichen Strebens, nicht Nirwâna, sondern Sansâra der Name für das höchste Ideal.” However, neither Andreas-Salomé nor anyone else to my knowledge has been able to identify what aspect of pessimism that Nietzsche rebels against.

679 This has been accepted somewhat uncritically by most scholars. Salaquarda, for example, comments: “Manches deutet darauf hin, daß es sich um eine mystische Erfahrung handelt, und daß Nietzsche selbst in der Engadin Bergwelt eine solche mystische Erfahrung gemacht hat.” Salaquarda: “Der ungeheure Augenblick”, p. 335.

680 Lou Andreas-Salomé: Nietzsche in seinen Werken (1894), ed. Ernst Pfeiffer (Frankfurt/M., 2000), pp. 261 f.: “Not emancipation from the compulsion of recurrence, but joyful conversion to it is the goal of the highest moral striving, not nirvana but samsara is the name of the highest ideal.”, cf. p. 252. Walter Kaufmann also regards the eternal recurrence as an attempt to overcome pessimism: see Kaufmann: Nietzsche, pp. 401 f.
The idea of the eternal recurrence consists of two aspects. On the one hand it expresses a cosmological judgment (in Nietzsche's published writings expressed in conditional form), and on the other, it is an attempt to draw conclusions as to what is the correct attitude towards life. There is a fair amount of philological research into the possible sources, ancient and modern, that Nietzsche might have drawn upon for the cosmological aspect of the eternal recurrence.\(^{681}\) The scholars who stress the existential aspect are more often than not philosophers rather than philologists.\(^{682}\) But the existential aspect of the eternal recurrence deserves some philological attention too, for there is in fact an important pessimistic context that has gone unnoticed in the research.\(^{683}\) This

\(^{681}\) In a seminal article by Paolo D'Iorio, links between Nietzsche's notion of the eternal recurrence and a more or less contemporary scientific debate originating in the consequences of the second principle of thermodynamics are presented. On the basis primarily of an extensive study of manuscript remains from 1881, D'Iorio argues that Nietzsche formulated the idea of the eternal recurrence in implicit polemics with certain contemporary scientists, particularly the physicist Otto Caspari. D'Iorio also holds that certain philosophers, notably Hartmann and Dühring, were important to Nietzsche not least because of their relevance to this debate, primarily because of their views on time. D'Iorio's conclusion is that since Nietzsche never fulfilled his intention to spend an extended period of time studying the natural sciences to be able to work out the implications of the eternal recurrence, it cannot be regarded as a flawed concept: "L'éternel retour reste une 'pensée posthume'. Il ne nous semble pas qu'on doive en tirer la conclusion d'un échec conceptuel; nous ne savons pas ce qu'il aurait fait, s'il avait vécu jusqu'au temps de la polémique Boltzmann-Zermelo ou de la théorie de la relativité d'Einstein. Ce serait peut-être à ces savants, plutôt qu'à d'obscurs mythes orientaux, qu'aujourd'hui serait mis en relation l'éternel retour." Paolo D'Iorio: "Cosmologie de l'éternel retour", Nietzsche-Studien 24 (1995), p. 113. D'Iorio discusses the notion of time inherent in the idea of the eternal recurrence in relation to Dühring's and Hartmann's notion of time (both of them hold past time to be finite and future time infinite); a similar discussion, albeit not as thoroughly rooted in the cosmology of Nietzsche's day, can be found in Robin Small: “Nietzsche, Dühring, and Time”, Journal of the History of Philosophy 28:2 (1990), pp. 229–250. An ancient precursor is presented in Paolo D'Iorio: "L'image des philosophes préplatoniciens chez le jeune Nietzsche", p. 405: "Sous quel masque Nietzsche cache-t-il sa pensée? Nous avons déjà rencontré son autoportrait en habits empédocléens, mais quand on lit, à propos d'Héraclite: 'so stellt Heraklit seinem grossen Vorgänger, dem Lehrer der άοντας der Welt, gegenüber eine Kosmodicee' on ne peut s'empêcher de pensar à la 'cosmodicée esthétique' et au 'maître de l'éternel retour'.” See also Thomas H. Brobjer: “A Discussion of Hölderlin's Influence on Nietzsche. Nietzsche's Use of William Neumann's Hölderlin”, Nietzsche-Studien 30 (2001), pp. 397–412, especially p. 406, where similarities between Hölderlin's Hyperion and Nietzsche's idea of the eternal recurrence are pointed out; a similarity that Brobjer holds to be important not least because it is stressed in William Neumann's study Hölderlin (1853), a book that Nietzsche read while a student a Schulpforta and apparently returned to at a number of times. Margot Fleischer suggests Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion as a source; see her “Hume – auch eine Quelle für Nietzsches Lehre der ewigen Wiederkunft des Gleichen. Versuch einer Dokumentation”, Nietzsche-Studien 25 (1996), pp. 255–260.

\(^{682}\) Alexander Nehamas is an example worth mention. He claims that although Nietzsche might have believed in the eternal recurrence as a cosmological thesis, such a belief is not necessary for the existential aspect that he takes to be the true import of the idea: “Philosophically, however, the use Nietzsche makes of the eternal recurrence does not require that this highly doubtful cosmology be true or even coherent. […] The eternal recurrence is not a theory of the world but a view of the self.” Nehamas: Nietzsche, p. 150.

\(^{683}\) A recent example is Philip J. Kain who, although he discusses the eternal recurrence as a means to come to terms with the horror of existence fails to see the connection of the idea to pessimism. This leads him to exaggerate Nietzsche's state of health, considering the eternal recur-
section is an attempt to show that Nietzsche’s notion of an eternal recurrence has a strongly anti-pessimistic edge. Its aim is to supplement rather than to refute the research into the cosmological roots of Nietzsche’s idea. For regardless of which aspect is considered to be the more important, both of them were important to Nietzsche, and they were intertwined to a high degree.684

I intend to show that both the existential and the cosmological aspect of the eternal recurrence are in fact presented in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*. There is a difference in how they are used, though: Nietzsche uses them to prove a different point than in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* and *Zarathustra*. The cosmological aspect of the idea is expressed in the second chapter:

> Im Grunde ja könnte das, was einmal möglich war, sich nur dann zum zweiten Male als möglich einstellen, wenn die Pythagoreer Recht hätten zu glauben, dass bei gleicher Constellation der himmlischen Körper auch auf Erden das Gleiche, und zwar bis auf’s Einzelne und Kleine sich wiederholen müsste: so dass immer wieder, wenn die Sterne eine gewisse Stellung zu einander haben, ein Stoiker sich mit einem Epikureer verbinden und Cäsar ermorden und immer wieder bei einem anderen Stande Colombus Amerika entdecken wird. Nur wenn die Erde ihr Theaterstück jedesmal nach dem fünften Akt von Neuem anfinge, wenn es feststünde, dass dieselbe Verknotung von Motiven, derselbe deus ex machina, dieselbe Katastrophen in bestimmten Zwischenräumen wiederkehrten, dürfte der Mächtige die monumentale Historie in voller ikonischer Wahrhaftigkeit, das heisst jedes Factum in seiner genau gebildeten Eigenthümlichkeit und Einzigkeit begehren: wahrscheinlich also nicht eher, als bis die Astronomen wieder zu Astrologen geworden sind.685

Here, the idea of history repeating itself is used as an argument against monumental history, one of the three forms of history that Nietzsche distinguishes to be his way of overcoming his attacks of migraine. Philip J. Kain: “Nietzsche, Eternal Recurrence, and the Horror of Existence”, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 33 (2007), pp. 49 and 55 f. Once the connection to pessimism is established, it is evident that the eternal recurrence has a much wider scope than that.

684 This point is beautifully made by Scarlett Marton: “L’éternel retour: thèse cosmologique ou impératif éthique? La question perd tout son sens. Exhorter à vivre comme si cette vie revenait un nombre infini de fois ne se réduit pas à avertir au sujet de la conduite humaine; cela est plus qu’un impératif éthique. Soutenir que cette vie revient d’innombrables fois – qu’on le veuille ou pas – ne se limite pas à décrire le monde; cela est plus qu’une thèse cosmologique.” Scarlett Marton: “L’éternel retour du même: Thèse cosmologique ou impératif éthique?”, *Nietzsche-Studien* 25 (1996), pp. 62 f.

685 HL 2, KSA 1, p. 261: “At bottom, indeed, that which was once possible could present itself as a possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellation of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest event, must also be repeated on earth: so that whenever the stars stand in a certain relation to one another a Stoic again joins with an Epicurean to murder Caesar. And when they stand in another relation Columbus will again discover America. Only if, when the fifth act of the earth’s drama ended, the whole play every time begins again from the beginning, if it was certain that the same complex of motives, the same *deus ex machina*, the same catastrophe were repeated at definite intervals, could the man of power venture to desire monumental history in full icon-like *veracity*, that is to say with every individual peculiarity depicted in precise detail: but that will no doubt happen only when the astronomers have again become astrologers.”

265
between in the book. Monumental history, the use of historical examples to inspire greatness today, is tangible only if history repeats itself. It is easy to see parallels between our age and the past, but these parallels matter only if the historical process advances according to strict necessity, and if the present situation is not just comparable, but actually similar, to the situation in the past.

What is most relevant to Nietzsche, however, is not the circular notion of history per se, but the use of it as a criterion of whether one makes full use of one’s life or not. If one embraces the prospective of having to relive one’s life, down to the smallest detail, in all eternity, then one has adopted the correct attitude to life. There is an example of a similar use of the question whether one would want to relive one’s life in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*. Nietzsche implores us to ask whether our friends would want to relive the last ten or twenty years again as a test if they are historical or superhistorical people.

Wer seine Bekannten fragt, ob sie die letzten zehn oder zwanzig Jahre noch einmal zu durchleben wünschen, wird leicht wahrnehmen, wer von ihnen für jenen überhistorischen Standpunkt vorgebildet ist: zwar werden sie wohl Alle Nein! antworten, aber sie werden jenes Nein! verschieden begründen. Die Einen vielleicht damit, dass sie sich getrösten “aber die nächsten zwanzig werden besser sein”; es sind die, von denen David Hume spöttisch sagt:

And from the dregs of life to hope to receive, What the first sprightly running could not give.

Wir wollen sie die historischen Menschen nennen; der Blick in die Vergangenheit drängt sie zur Zukunft hin, feuert ihren Muth an, es noch länger mit dem Leben aufzunehmen, entzündet die Hoffnung, dass das Rechte noch kommt, dass das Glück hinter dem Berge sitze, auf den sie zuschreiten. Diese historischen Menschen glauben, dass der Sinn des Daseins im Verlaufe eines *Prozesses* immer mehr ans Licht kommen werde, sie schauen nur deshalb rückwärts, um an der Betrachtung des bisherigen Prozesses die Gegenwart zu verstehen und die Zukunft heftiger begehren zu lernen; sie wissen gar nicht, wie unhistorisch sie trotz aller ihrer Historie denken und handeln, und wie auch ihre Beschäftigung mit der Geschichte nicht im Dienste der reinen Erkenntnis, sondern des Lebens steht.

Aber jene Frage, deren erste Beantwortung wir gehört haben, kann auch einmal anders beantwortet werden. Zwar wiederum mit einem Nein! aber mit einem anders begründeten Nein. Mit dem Nein des überhistorischen Menschen, der nicht im Prozesse das Heil sieht, für den vielmehr die Welt in jedem einzelnen Augenblicke fertig ist und ihr Ende erreicht. Was können zehn neue Jahre lehren, was die vergangenen zehn nicht zu lernen vermochten?

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686 HL 1, KSA 1, p. 255: “If you ask your acquaintances if they would like to relive the past ten or twenty years, you will easily discover which of them is prepared for this suprahistorical standpoint: they will all answer No to be sure, but they will have different reasons for answering No. Some may perhaps be consoling themselves: ‘but the next twenty will be better’; they are those of whom David Hume says mockingly:/And from the dregs of life hope to receive/What the first sprightly running did not give./Let us call them historical men; looking to the past impels them towards the future and fires their courage to go on living and their hope that what they want will still happen, that happiness lies behind the hill that they are advancing towards. These historical
Whether one is a historical or a supra-historical (überhistorisch) person, one will not want to relive those ten or twenty years. This is obviously an important difference to the eternal recurrence in Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. But it is important to note that the question whether one would want to do so is used as a criterion for what type of person one is.

It has not escaped the notice of the Nietzsche scholars that an idea similar to the eternal recurrence is present in Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben. In his paper “Der ungeheure Augenblick”, one of the most important texts on the eternal recurrence, Jörg Salaquarda, for example, writes:

> Der ‘Wiederkunftsgedanke’ ist schon in diesem frühen Text präsent, wenn auch in einer weniger strengen Fassung: Alles kehrt in dem Sinne wieder, daß es nichts Neues unter der Sonne gibt, die Welt vielmehr in jedem Augenblick alles erreicht hat, was sie je erreichen kann. Kombination und Reihenfolge des immer Gleichem können aber variieren und dadurch dem oberflächlichen Blick den Anschein ständiger Neuheit bieten. Schon in dieser Form hält Nietzsche den Gedanken für unerträglich und ekelerregend. Seine ‘überhistoristischen Menschen’ sehnen sich im Geiste Schopenhauers nach einem Ausweg und verneinen die Welt insgesamt.687

Salaquarda specifies the Schopenhauer reference to “Schopenhauers bekannte Ausführungen über das (relative) Nichts gegen Ende des 1. Bandes der Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.”688 As we will soon see, there is a passage in Schopenhauers believe that the meaning of existence will come more and more to the light in the course of its process, and they glance behind them only so that, from the process so far, they can learn to understand the present and to desire the future more vehemently; they have no idea that, despite their preoccupation with history, they think and act unhistorically, or that their occupation with history stands in the service, not of pure knowledge, but of life./But our question can also be answered differently. Again with a No – but with a No for a different reason: with the No of the suprahistorical man, who sees no salvation in the process and for whom, rather, the world is complete and reaches its finality at each and every moment. What could ten more years teach that the past ten were unable to teach!” The two verses in fact do not stem from Hume, but from John Dryden. See the editor’s notes to David Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (1779) ed. Martin Bell (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 147, footnote 70. To Hume, it might be added, there exists only one motive of the negative answer, that which Nietzsche characterises as historical. The sentences leading up to the Dryden quotation read: “Ask your self, ask any of your acquaintance, whether they would live over again the last ten or twenty years of their lives. No! But the next twenty, they say, will be better.” Ibid., p. 108.

687 Salaquarda: “Der ungeheure Augenblick”, p. 334: “The ‘idea of recurrence’ is present already in this early text, albeit in a less strict version: everything returns in the sense that there is nothing new under the sun, that the world in every instant has achieved everything that it can ever achieve. But combinations and succession can vary and thereby give an impression of perpetual novelty to the superficial glance. Already in this form, Nietzsche holds the idea to be unbearable and disgusting. His ‘supra-historical men’ are longing for an exit in Schopenhauer’s spirit, and negate the world in its totality.”

688 Ibid., p. 334, footnote 70: “Schopenhauer’s comments on the (relative) nothingness towards the end of the first volume of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.” Cf. Francesca Cauchi who points to a passage in Parerga und Paralipomena where Schopenhauer stresses that everything happens according to “strenger Nothwendigkeit” (P I, Transcendente Spekulation, p. 222) as
Salaquarda is highlighting the existential aspect of the eternal recurrence, whereas most commentators tend to use the cosmological aspect as their starting point.

But Nietzsche had several predecessors in this existential use of the circular notion, too. And they are linked to the problem of pessimism in Nietzsche’s eyes. Schopenhauer is an important example. In the first volume of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* he describes the idea of a repetition of one’s life as a horrible punishment.

Schopenhauer is not toying with the idea of an eternal recurrence. He has no need for that. Life in itself is so horrible that once is one too many. No matter how one’s life has been, no one would want to live again. Any honest soul will realise the central truth of pessimism: non-existence is preferable to existence.

A similar idea is presented by Eduard von Hartmann. He compares the situation of the unconscious to that of a man offered the choice to relive his life or to cease to exist. Like Schopenhauer, he considers existence itself to be an evil, and therefore predicts that the man would choose non-existence.

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Nietzsche’s impetus. Francesca Cauchi: “Nietzsche and Pessimism: The Metaphysic Hypostatised”, *History of European Ideas* 13:3 (1991), p. 258. But this idea of Schopenhauer’s is not only far too general to allow us to infer that Nietzsche reacted to it; and it is also an idea that Nietzsche held in *FW*; see for example *FW* 290 and 335.

689 W 1, § 59, p. 405/324: “But as regards the life of the individual, every life-history is a history of suffering, for, as a rule, every life is a continual series of mishaps great and small, concealed as much as possible by everyone, because he knows that others are almost always bound to feel satisfaction at the spectacle of annoyance from which they are for the moment exempt; rarely will they feel sympathy or compassion. But perhaps at the end of his life, no man, if he is sincere and at the same time in possession of his faculties, will ever wish to go through it again. Rather than this, he will much prefer to choose complete non-existence.”

690 Referring to a passage in the second volume of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Scarlett Marton also points to a parallel between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Marton writes: “Dans *Le Gai Savoir*, il paraît assumer les prémisses de son vieux maître sans accepter sa conclusion. Si Nietzsche, lui aussi, lance en tant que défi l’idée selon laquelle l’existence se répéterait un nombre infini de fois, il essaie de lui donner une réponse tout à fait différente.” Marton, pp. 56 f. This, I would say, is a fundamentally correct description of Nietzsche’s relation to Schopenhauer, regardless of which aspect of their philosophies one has in mind. For the eternal recurrence, it is too general though. As we will see, the eternal recurrence might well have been aimed at other pessimists as well.
Nun denke man sich den Tod zu diesem Manne treten und sprechen: “Deine Lebenszeit ist abgelaufen und in dieser Stunde fällt Du der Vernichtung anheim; doch hängt es von Deiner jetzigen Willensentscheidung ab, nach vollständigem Vergessen alles Bisherigen Dein jetzt beschlossenes Leben noch einmal genau in derselben Weise durchzumachen. Nun wähle!”

Ich bezweifle, dass der Mann die Wiederholung des vorigen Spieles dem Nichtsein vorziehen wird, wenn er bei uneingeschüchterter ruhiger Ueberlegung und nicht überhaupt einfältig ist.691

Hartmann’s phrasing is much closer to Nietzsche’s than is Schopenhauer’s. The demon of Die fröhliche Wissenschaft has been replaced by a personification no less mythical, and like Nietzsche Hartmann stresses that life would turn out just like it did the first time. But Hartmann’s uses Death’s question in the exact opposite way. In 1881, Nietzsche wanted to suggest that a person who has found the right way of judging the events in one’s life would be content to relive those very events in all eternity. Hartmann, being a pessimist, holds that regardless of how life has turned out, everyone would prefer not to live rather than experience that life again.692

Giacomo Leopardi, as we have seen one of Nietzsche’s favourite poets in the 1870’s, also addresses the question of whether one can want to relive one’s life. In the “Dialogo di un venditore d’almanacchi e di un passeggero”, a vendor of almanacs tries to present the upcoming new year as happy, much happier than the present year, as an argument to buy an almanac. He is questioned by a passing gentleman whether he would want the new year to resemble any particular year. The vendor cannot remember any one year that was happy. Although life is beautiful – the vendor and the gentleman agree on that – no particular year was so happy that the vendor would want the next year to be like it. Therefore, the passing gentleman asks the vendor whether he would want to relive his life, the twenty years of selling almanacs, and the entire period from his birth. The vendor assumes that he is asked whether he would want a completely new life, an opportunity to avoid the mistakes and misfortunes of his own existence, and cries out “if only God would want that”. But the gentleman wants to know if he would want to relive his life precisely as it turned out. This, by contrast, is an idea that fills the vendor with disgust: In the words of the German translation with which Nietzsche was familiar from 1879, the passage that is most central to our theme reads:

691 Hartmann: Philosophie des Unbewussten, p. 534: “Now imagine Death coming up to this man and saying: ‘Your lifetime is up and in this hour you will be annihilated; but it is up to your will to decide if you, after having forgot everything completely, would like to live the life you have just finished once again, in exactly the same way. Now choose!’/I doubt that the man would prefer the repetition of the previous game over non-being, if he thinks it through fearlessly and is not naive.”

692 In his dissertation on Nietzsche and Hartmann, Maurice Weyembergh points to the similarity of the passage in Hartmann just quoted and Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal recurrence. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only first attempt to point to Hartmann’s importance for the existential aspect of the eternal recurrence. Weyembergh, pp. 36 and 61.
SPAZIERGÄNGER. Aber wenn Ihr Euer Leben genau so wieder erleben solltet mit allen Freuden und Leiden, die Ihr erfahren habt?
HÄNDLER. Das möcht’ ich freilich nicht.
SPAZIERGÄNGER. Nun, was für ein anderes Leben möchtet Ihr denn wieder erleben? Etwa mein Leben, oder des des Fürsten, oder welches anderen Menschen? Oder glaubt Ihr nicht, daß der Fürst und jeder Andere genau so antworten würde, wie Ihr, und daß, wenn er das nämliche Leben noch einmal leben müßte, kein Einziger wieder von vorn anfangen möchte?
HÄNDLER. Das glaube ich allerdings.
SPAZIERGÄNGER. Auch Ihr möchtet also nicht unter dieser Bedingung von vorn anfangen, wenn es auf eine andere Art nicht anginge?
HÄNDLER. Nein, gewiß nicht, Herr.693

Regardless of how one’s life has turned out, no one would want to relive the life that they have led. The vendor and the passing gentleman agree that they would only want to begin life all over if they would know nothing about what it would contain, just like we know nothing of the new year. This, the gentleman concludes, is because fate has treated all of us badly. Life is a good thing, but not the life that one has experienced, but the life that one not yet knows; not the past life, but the future life. The belief that happiness might be waiting around the corner makes life bearable; deprived of this hope, life loses all sense. Life in itself, Leopardi seems to say, is unhappy. But Leopardi’s point is less severe than Schopenhauer’s. As long as we do not know how life will turn out, we assume that it will become better. In Leopardi’s dialogue, we have no trace of the valour connected to the pessimist’s knowledge of the worthlessness of life. We have rather an absurd belief against reason in the possibility of happiness. Like Byron and like Nietzsche, Leopardi considers the tree of knowledge to be another than the tree of life.694

693 Giacomo Leopardi: “Ein Almanachhändler und ein Spaziergänger”, Giacomo Leopardi, vol. II, p. 205. In the original Italian (“Dialogo di un venditore d’almanacchi e di un passeggere”, Operette morali, p. 210) the passage reads: “PASSEGGERE Ma se aveste a rifare la vita che avete fatta nè più nè meno, con tutti i piaceri e i dispiaceri che avete passati?/VENDITORE Cotesto non vorrei./PASSEGGERE Oh che altra vita vorreste rifare? la vita ch’ho fatta io, o quella del principe, o di chi altro? O non credate che io, e che il principe, e che chiunque altro, risponderebbe come voi per l’appunto; e che avendo a rifare la stessa vita che avesse fatta, nessuno vorrebbe tornare indietro?/VENDITORE Lo credo cotesto./PASSEGGERE Nè anche voi tornereste indietro con questo patto, non potendo in altro modo?/VENDITORE Signor no davvero, non torneresti.” In Cecchetti’s translation (p. 481) it reads: “PASSER-BY But if you had to live exactly the same life all over again – with all its pleasures and all its pains? PEDDLER I wouldn’t like that. PASSER-BY But what kind of life would you like to live over again? The life I’ve had, or a prince’s, or who else’s? Don’t you think that I, the prince, or anyone else, would answer just like you, that having to live the same life over again, no one would want to go back to it? PEDDLER I think so. PASSER-BY You wouldn’t go back either, unless you could in some other way? PEDDLER No, Sir; I really wouldn’t.”

694 Joshua Foa Dienstag acknowledges that Leopardi’s dialogue “anticipates Zarathustra’s speeches about eternal recurrence”, but although he considers both Leopardi and Nietzsche as pessimists, he fails to see that Nietzsche’s response to the idea is completely different from Leop-
We saw in section 5.3 that Nietzsche held Leopardi in high esteem for quite a long period, definitely for the greater part of the 1870’s. He was primarily acquainted with Leopardi’s poetry, since that was what the first translators translated. From the Christmas of 1878, he could read the “Dialogo di un venditore” in German translation; for that year he was given the two-volume edition *Giacomo Leopardi*, translated by Paul Heyse, as a present by Marie and Adolphe Baumgartner. But although we argued in section 5.3 that Nietzsche’s judgments on Leopardi’s prose was based on hearsay more than anything else, the fact is that he had some knowledge of Leopardi’s prose works before that. We have seen that Nietzsche’s friend Romundt would translate single dialogues and read them to Nietzsche around 1875. As this is a short easily translated dialogue, it might well has been among them.

We saw furthermore that Leopardi’s presence is very visible in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*. Nietzsche went out of his way to show the cultured reader that he was familiar with Leopardi. The first section of the book opens with a paraphrase of Leopardi’s poem “Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell’Asia” and a few pages into the chapter Nietzsche quotes another poem, “A se stesso”. He might have been familiar with the “Dialogo di un venditore” too. Perhaps the ten or twenty years that neither the historical nor the supra-historical persons want to experience again are not just an echo of Hume; it is possible that it might also be an echo of the twenty years that Leopardi’s vendor has spent selling his almanacs.

Although one could argue that Leopardi is not a pessimist in the sense that Schopenhauer and Hartmann are pessimists, he was clearly considered a pessimist in the late nineteenth century. Section 2.4 above has given plenty of examples of that. More importantly, there are numerous examples that Nietzsche considered him a pessimist: in the 1870’s when pessimism still carried positive connotations in Nietzsche’s eyes, as well as later, when he regarded it a pathological phenomenon. Nietzsche was obviously more than familiar with the works of Schopenhauer. He knew Hartmann’s *Philosophie des Unbewussten* well enough: he attacks Hartmann in section 9 of *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil*, and his notebooks from this period show that he had renewed his acquaintance with Hartmann to be up to this task. In short, we have three examples of pessimist thinkers who deny that one can want to relive one’s life, with whom Nietzsche was occupied during the period when he wrote *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil*. In the light of this fact, it seems reasonable to assume that Nietzsche in the early

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695 See, for example: NF 13 [4], autumn 1881, KSA 9, p. 618: “Ich lache über die Aufzählungen des Schmerzes und Elends, wodurch sich der Pessimismus zurecht beweisen will – Hamlet und Schopenhauer und Voltaire und Leopardi und Byron.” Or see NF 14 [25], early 1888, KSA 13, p. 229, where Leopardi together with Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky, de Vigny, and the nihilistic religions is cited as an example of romantic pessimism.
1870’s associated the negative answer to whether it is possible to want to relive one’s life with pessimism.

There is also an example of a pessimist that Nietzsche read some years later who alludes to the experience of reliving one’s life as most appalling. Philipp Mainländer has his readers imagine the horrors of being reborn and living once again as an argument for his notion of virginity as the highest virtue and child-bearing as the greatest sin:

Der Gedanke: wiedergeboren zu werden, d. h. in unglücklichen Kindern rast- und ruhelos auf der dornigen und steinigen Straße des Daseins weiterziehen zu müssen, ist ihm einerseits der schrecklichste und verzweiflungsvollste, den er haben kann; andererseits ist der Gedanke: die lange, lange Entwicklungsreihe abbrechen zu können, in der er immer mit blutenden Füßen, gestoßen, gepeinigt und geramert, verschmachtend nach Ruhe, vorwärts mußte, der süßeste und er-quickendste.696

Nietzsche seems to have read Mainländer’s book shortly after its publication, as he alludes to its contents in the Nachlaß from the autumn of 1876.697 And since what seems to be an allusion to him as a preacher of death can be found in the Zarathustra, he is most definitely relevant to Nietzsche in this period: “‘Wollust ist Sünde – so sagen die Einen, welche den Tod predigen – lasst uns bei Seite gehn und keine Kinder zeugen!’”698

Furthermore, the question of whether it is possible to want to relive one’s life is also addressed by a number of anti-pessimists. Jürgen Bona Meyer, professor of philosophy at the University of Bonn, for example, associates this question with pessimism:

Unsere Pessimisten behaupten, wenn man dem Menschen die Alternative stelle, ob er nach diesem Leben eingehen wolle in’s Nichts oder ob er wiedergeboren sein wolle um ganz dasselbe Leben noch einmal zu leben, so werde der Mensch

696 Mainländer: Die Philosophie der Erlösung, vol. I, p. 217: “The thought: to be reborn, i.e. to have to continue walking restlessly and disquietedly along the thorny and rocky roads of existence in the form of unhappy children is on the one hand the most horrifying and desperate thought that he can have; on the other hand the thought: to be able to break that long, long chain of development in which he is constantly forced ahead with bleeding feet, pushed around, tormented and tortured, longing for peace, is to him the sweetest and most uplifting.” The notion that reliving one’s life is even more horrible than living it the first time is also present in Mainländer’s discussion of the behaviour of the inhabitants of his Social democratic ideal state: “Sollten sie wirklich genug Energie haben, um ein solches Leben bis zum natürlichen Tode zu ertragen, so haben sie gewiß nicht den Muth, es nochmals, als verjüngte Wesen, durchzumachen.” *Ibid.* vol. I, p. 207

697 NF 19 [99], October–December 1876, KSA 8, p. 354 (a brief comment on Mainländer’s view of art). Cf. NF 23 [12], end of 1876–summer 1877, KSA 8, p. 407 (Nietzsche notes that Mainländer’s plurality of wills is just as worthless from a scientific point of view as Schopenhauer’s will).

698 ZA I, Von den Predigern des Todes, KSA 4, p. 56: “‘Lust ist sin’ – thus say some who preach death – ‘let us go aside and beget no children!’” And as Friedhelm Decher points out, it is striking that Nietzsche’s comments on Mainländer are fairly evenly distributed up until his last active year: Decher: “Der eine Wille und die vielen Willen”, p. 227.

Um zum richtigen Schluß zu kommen, muß man die Alternative anders stellen. Man muß den Menschen fragen: wenn Du jetzt vor Deiner Geburt stündest und könntest Alles vorschauen, was Du in Deinem Leben erlebt hast, würdest Du dann doch zu leben wünschen, oder würdest Du dann auf den Eintritt in’s Leben verzichten, würdest Du dann den ewigen Schöpfer der Seele um Nichtsein bitten? – Vor diese Alternative gestellt, würden nach meiner Ueberzeugung die meisten Menschen um Dasein bitten.699

By attacking “unsere Pessimisten” rather than Schopenhauer or Hartmann, Meyer signals that his enemy is pessimism as such: Schopenhauer and Hartmann are attacked as representatives of the pessimistic current, as symbols of pessimism, rather than in their own right. More importantly for our theme, Meyer seems to consider this idea to be a central notion of pessimism; he seems to mean to attack pessimism when attacking the idea. So regardless if Nietzsche knew Meyer’s pamphlet or not – his name is mentioned in Schopenhauer als Erzieher and there are two allusions to him in the 1872/73 Nachlaß and one in a letter from 1873, but they are too brief to ascertain whether he knew the contents of the book700 – it indicates that the question whether one can want to relive one’s life was an aspect of the debate over pessimism vs. optimism in the late nineteenth century.

699 Meyer: Weltelend und Weltschmerz, pp. 22 f.: “Our pessimists claim that if a man after life is confronted with the choice of either entering into nothingness or being reborn in order to live the very same life over again, then he would indisputably wish to cease existing. When put in this way – I maintain – this choice can give no clear answer over the human wishes concerning existence. If the reborn life is connected to the outlived life by memory, then it might be true that one cannot wish to overcome the fear of death only to tread the treadmill of the same existence once again. But if we wake up to the same life without memories, then we are no longer ourselves, and then it is of course indifferent to us if this changed creature would live our existence once again or not. My soul at least would then have no interest in its continuation, this new existence without memories is worth no more than non-existence. Confronted with this choice, anyone could therefore wish non-existence as well as existence. /To come to the correct conclusion, the choice must be put differently. One has to ask the man: if you were facing your own birth, and you could anticipate everything that you have experienced in your life, would you then wish to live or would you abstain from entering into life, would you then beg the eternal creator of souls for nonexistence? – Confronted with this choice, I am convinced that most men would ask for existence.”

700 See footnote 417 in section 4.1 above.
Similarly, the English psychologist James Sully mentions the impossibility of wanting to relive one’s life as a pessimist doctrine:

The pessimist says men invariably, on looking back on their life, think it empty and worthless, and they point to the many testimonies to the fact that men would not willingly lead their lives over again. It is, perhaps, worth remarking that men’s shrinking from a repetition of life is no proof of its worthlessness. In imagining oneself as leading life over again one cannot but conceive it as robbed of its freshness and novelty.  

Sully apparently alludes to Schopenhauer’s version of the idea. But like Meyer he is not interested in attacking Schopenhauer as much as pessimism as such; Sully in fact only rarely distinguishes between Schopenhauer’s and Hartmann’s forms of pessimism. That pessimism rather than Schopenhauer is the target is more than evident in the French edition of the book, where the idea is attributed to “les pessimistes” rather than “le pessimist” in the first sentence quoted. Just like Meyer, Sully seems to regard the idea as a pessimist topos.

Two contemporaries of Nietzsche thus allude to the pessimists’ using the question whether one would want to relive one’s life as an argument against the value of life. Whether Nietzsche was familiar with these books when he formulated the eternal recurrence is largely irrelevant. The fact that they address the question, and particularly that they address it like a pessimist commonplace, demonstrate that it was considered as such in Nietzsche’s day.

The same issue was also addressed by a writer immensely important to Nietzsche: Michel de Montaigne. Nietzsche received a copy of the Essais as a

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701 Sully: *Pessimism*, p. 312. And in an earlier chapter of the book, dealing with the pre-history of modern pessimism, Sully discusses the eighteenth-century theologian Wollaston, and compares him to the pessimists on account of this idea: “Wollaston agrees with the modern pessimist in thinking that the most favoured of mortals would scarcely be willing to lead their lives over again, and affirms that ‘if the souls of men are mortal, the case of brutes is much preferable to that of men.’” (p. 55) Nietzsche possessed a French translation of this book, but since this was published in 1882, it cannot have been a source; its relevance to the eternal recurrence is limited to being a confirmation of the idea. His copy of the book is rather heavily annotated, though, testifying to the continued relevance of pessimism as a philosophical problem to Nietzsche; see *Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek*, pp. 581 f.

702 Sully: *Le pessimisme (histoire et critique)*, tr. Alexis Bertrand & Paul Gerard (Paris, 1882), p. 323. The quoted passage in its entirety reads: “Les pessimistes disent qu’invariableslement les hommes, en jetant un regard en arrière sur leur vie, pensant qu’elle est vide et sans valeur, et ils étalent de nombreux témoignages pour prouver que les hommes ne voudraient pas recommencer leur vie. Il est peut-être digne de remarque que la répugnance des hommes pour recommencer leur vie n’est pas une preuve de sa non-valeur. En s’imaginant qu’on recommence de nouveau sa vie, on ne peut que la concevoir comme dépouillée de sa fraîcheur et de sa nouveauté.”

703 As we have seen, there are some indications that he might have been familiar with Meyer’s pamphlet, whereas, given Nietzsche’s poor English, he almost certainly did not read Sully’s book until the French edition was published in 1882. And by then, of course, he had already formulated the idea of the eternal recurrence.

704 It was in fact addressed by at least two writers cherished by Nietzsche. In one of his autobiographies, Stendhal, who Nietzsche was to read and consider an example throughout most of the 1880’s, claims to love life to such a degree that he would want to relive his life if he were given.
Christmas present from the Wagners in 1870. He was soon to become a favourite writer of Nietzsche’s; and, of particular importance for our theme, Nietzsche considered Montaigne a remedy against pessimism, as is pointed out in Vivetta Vivarelli’s important study on the Freigeist theme in Nietzsche’s middle period: “Seit den Basler Jahren schätze Nietzsche das Denken Montaignes als den Weg zur ‘Erleichterung des Lebens’. In einem noch unveröffentlichten Manuskript der Basler Zeit stellt Nietzsche Montaigne neben Horaz, um zu zeigen, welcher Methoden sich Skeptiker, Pessimisten und religiöse Menschen bedienten, ‘um Sorgen los zu werden’. Von Anfang an waren es also – neben der außerordentliche Kraft des Stils – diese die Windstille der Seele fördernde Aspekte im Denken Montaignes, die Nietzsches Aufmerksamkeit erregten.”

The choice to do so, even if the remainder of his life would be plagued by excruciating pain: “Je passerais dans d’horribles douleurs les cinq, dix, vingt ou trente ans qui me restent à vivre qu’en mourant je ne dirais pas: ‘Je ne veux pas recommencer.’” Stendhal: *Vie de Henry Brulard* (1890), in: *Œuvres intimes* II, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, ed. Victor Del Litto (Paris, 1982), ch. XLVI, p. 958. But *Vie de Henry Brulard*, written in 1835/36, was published in 1890 (see the editor’s Notice in *Œuvres intimes* II, p. 1306) and therefore obviously too late for Nietzsche to be able to acquaint himself with the book. Somewhat surprisingly, the same question was also addressed by Benjamin Franklin, although the context is totally different. Franklin notes that his life has been so full of happiness that he would gladly repeat it if he had the possibility to do so: “I should have no objection to a repetition of the same life from its beginning, only asking the advantages authors have in a second edition to correct some faults of the first. So would I if I might, besides correcting the faults, change some sinister accidents and events of it for others more favourable, but though this were denied, I should still accept the offer. However, since such a repetition is not to be expected, the next thing most like living one’s life over again, seems to be a recollection of that life; and to make that recollection as durable as possible, the putting it down in writing.” Benjamin Franklin: *His Life As He Wrote It*, ed. Esmond Wright (Cambridge, Ma., 1990), pp. 15 ff. Thanks to Peter Josephson for drawing my attention to this passage. Nietzsche bought a German edition of Franklin’s memoirs in 1876 (*Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek*, p. 232).

705 Later, Nietzsche would acquire and in all likelihood read Montaigne in the original French (an edition from 1864 is present in his library: *Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek*, p. 393; and Nietzsche returned to the *Essais* several times, for example in 1887 and possibly in 1885; see Thomas H. Brobjer: “Nietzsche’s Reading and Private Library, 1885–1889”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (October 1997), pp. 686 and 681), but the edition that he received from the Wagners was a German edition, *Michaels Herrn von Montagne [sic] Versuche, nebst des Verfassers Leben, nach der neuesten Ausgabe des Herrn Peter Coste ins deutsche übersetzt*, tr. Johann Daniel Tietz, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1753–54). Many pages in Nietzsche’s copy are marked by dog-ears and/or underlinings; see: *Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek*, pp. 393 f.

706 Vivetta Vivarelli: *Nietzsche und die Masken des freien Geistes. Montaigne, Pascal und Sterne*, Nietzsche in der Diskussion (Würzburg, 1998), p. 60: “Ever since the Basel years Nietzsche appreciated Montaigne’s thinking as a way of ‘making life easier’. In a still unpublished manuscript from the Basel years, Nietzsche puts Montaigne next to Horace in order to show the methods used by sceptics, pessimists, and religious people to ‘get rid of worries’. Apart from the extraordinary power of his style, it was therefore these aspects that favoured the calm of the soul in Montaigne’s thinking that attracted Nietzsche’s attention.” She expresses this thesis even more strongly in a somewhat older article: “Die unbekümmerte Philosophie Montaignes wurde in den Jahren von *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* als eine Art von Antidoton gegen den Schopenhauerschen Pessimismus gebraucht. Die Auffassung von einer fröhlichen Weisheit, die auch die Gesundheit des Körpers beeinflussen sollte, wurde damals von Nietzsche als ein stärkendes Getränk und Stimulans des Lebens (fast wie die griechische Philosophie) betrachtet.” Vivarelli: “Montaigne und der ‘Freie Geist’. Nietzsche im Übergang” *Nietzsche-Studien* 23 (1994), p. 100. Cf. also Brendan Donnellan:
So Nietzsche was acquainted with Montaigne in a period in which he was struggling with the problem of pessimism, and he soon came to regard him as a tool to cure himself of pessimism. The essay “Du repentir” is an important part of why this was so. It contains a passage that in the German edition that Richard and Cosima Wagner gave Nietzsche in 1870 reads:


Nietzsche and the French Moralists, Modern German Studies 9 (Bonn, 1982), p. 35: “Montaigne is one of the few literary and philosophical figures for whom Nietzsche has practically no criticism.”

That Nietzsche read Montaigne on numerous occasions from c. 1875 onwards is a well-established fact. Vivarelli points to a somewhat earlier date: “Erste direkte Belege von Nietzsches Montaigne Lektüre sind das schon [sic] erwähnte Zitat einer Stelle in der ‘Zweiten [sic – should be Dritten] Unzeitgemässe n Betrachtung’, ferner eine schriftliche Notiz vom Frühjahr oder Sommer 1874, die ich als Abschrift zweier Passagen der deutschen Ausgabe der Essais identifizieren konnte.” Vivarelli: Nietzsche und die Masken, p. 61. The fragment in question is NF 35 [4], early 1874–summer 1874, KSA 7, p. 809. But there is at least one even earlier example. In Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben, in the fierce attack on Hartmann, where Nietzsche discusses the need for a new education for the next generations, he quotes an ancient Spanish saying: “Defienda me Dios de mi Gott behüte mich vor mir”. HL 10, KSA 1, p. 328. He also quotes this saying in NF 29 [28], KSA 7, summer–autumn 1873, p. 636. This is clearly quoted from Montaigne. In the German edition of Montaigne, this Spanish saying is quoted with approval: “Diejenigen Uebel, mit welchen uns die Einbildungskraft belastigt, sind die ärgsten und gewöhnlichsten. Der spanische Wunsch (*** Defienda me Dios de my, gefällt mir von vielen Seiten.” And in a footnote, the translator gives the German translation of the saying: “Gott behüte mich vor mir.” Michel de Montaigne: Essais (Versuche) nebst des Verfassers Leben nach der Ausgabe von Pierre Coste ins Deutsche übersetzt, tr. Johann Daniel Tietz (1753–54), 3 vols., hrsg. v. Winfried Stephan (Zürich, 1992), III. Buch, XIII. Hauptsstück (vol. III, p. 382). For a comparative discussion of Nietzsche’s and Montaigne’s use of history and reaction to change, see Dudley M. Marchi: Montaigne among the Moderns. Receptions of the Essais (Providence & Oxford, 1994), pp. 151 ff.

707 Montaigne: Versuche, vol. II, p. 796; in the English translation of Charles Cotton, the passage reads: “In my opinion, ‘tis the happy living, and not (as Antisthenes said) the happy dying, in which human felicity consists. I have not made it my business to make a monstrous addition of a philosopher’s tail to the head and body of a libertine; nor would I have this wretched remainder give the lie to the pleasant, sound, and long part of my life: I would present myself uniformly throughout. Were I to live my life over again, I should live it just like I have lived it; I neither complain of the past, nor do I fear the future; and if I am not much deceived, I am the same within that I am without.” The Essays, tr. Charles Cotton, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (Chicago, London, Toronto & Geneva, 1952), p. 394. In the original French, the passage reads: “A mon avis c’est le vivre heureusement, non, comme disoit Antisthenes, le mourir heureusement qui fait l’humaine felicité. Je ne me suis pas attendu d’attacher monstrueusement la queuez d’un philosophe à la teste et au corps d’un homme perdu; ny que ce chetif bout eust à desadvouër et desmentir la plus belle, entiere et longue partie de ma vie. Je me veux presenter et faire veoir par tout uniformément. Si j’avois à revivre, je revivrois comme j’ay vescu; ny je ne pleins le passé, ny je crains l’advenir. Et si je ne me deçoy, il est allé du dedans environ comme du dehors.” Michel de Montaigne: Essais, in:
Montaigne differs from Schopenhauer, from Hartmann, and from Leopardi’s characters in that he does not find the idea of living the life he did live once again frightening. On the contrary: in spite of all the illness and pain that his life contained, Montaigne was able to love life to the degree that he would relive it just as he actually had lived if he had the chance. And it is precisely in virtue of this affirming attitude to life that he became an ideal to Nietzsche. This passage is quoted by David Molner as one of many examples of Montaigne’s influence on Nietzsche. Apart from a number of rhetorical devices, Molner holds Montaigne’s notion of *amor fati* to be highly important to Nietzsche, and he implies that Nietzsche regarded Montaigne an *Übermensch*. But Molner fails to see the Schopenhauer-Hartmannian context and therefore exaggerates the importance of the passage. The passage does imply that Montaigne was one of the positive examples out of which Nietzsche created his ideal of the *Übermensch*. But the positive example set by Montaigne reveals its importance only if we take the negative counter-example set by the pessimists into account.

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This section has demonstrated four things. Firstly, we have seen that two passages in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* together express an idea similar to the eternal recurrence. In the first section of that book, the question whether one would want to relive one’s life is used existentially, as a criterion to determine what type of life one leads. In the second section, the question whether history will repeat itself, that is the cosmological aspect of the idea of eternal recurrence, is addressed. We have therefore had reason to verify our hypothesis that the idea of eternal recurrence is indeed anticipated in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil*.

Secondly, we have seen that a number of pessimist thinkers with whom Nietzsche was well acquainted and who he was actually reading during the period when *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil* was conceived (Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Leopardi) address the question whether it is possible to want to relive one’s life. And another thinker who Nietzsche read some years later, Mainländer, addresses the same question. They all answer the question in the negative, which leads us to argue that it is reasonable to assume that Nietzsche associated pessimism with the negative answer to that question.

Thirdly, we have seen that at least two anti-pessimistic philosophers and contemporaries to Nietzsche, Jürgen Bona Meyer and James Sully, address the same question, attacking the pessimist’s position as tendentious. Meyer’s and Sully’s criticism indicates that the question of whether one can want to relive one’s life

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was widely associated with pessimism in their (and Nietzsche’s) day. This further strengthens the case for our assumption that Nietzsche associated the negative answer to that question to pessimism.

Fourthly, we have seen that Montaigne, a writer that Nietzsche read continuously from the early 1870’s and whom he regarded as an important cure against pessimism, affirmed that he would relive his life just as he had lived it if he had the opportunity. In the light of the assumption that Nietzsche, and not only Nietzsche, saw the negative answer to precisely that question as a key notion of pessimism, Montaigne’s affirmative answer leads us to the conclusion that the idea of the eternal recurrence was developed at least partly in response to a pessimistic context, as an anti-pessimistic scheme, possibly inspired by Montaigne and directed against the pessimistic philosophies of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and perhaps Mainländer and Leopardi.

The central importance of the eternal recurrence to Nietzsche’s philosophy means that pessimism remains immensely important as well. The Übermensch is the person who has the strength to embrace the eternal recurrence. This means that the Übermensch is the person who has the strength to overcome pessimism.
The theme of this dissertation is the mainly German pessimistic tradition in the philosophy of the nineteenth century. More particularly it is an investigation into how the various pessimists argued for their particular system, and into how the critics argued against them. A special role is occupied by Friedrich Nietzsche, whose changing but always ambivalent attitude to pessimism is discussed at length.

The aim of the dissertation is twofold. Firstly, to investigate the process when the term pessimism was established as a philosophical concept in the second half of the nineteenth century. Secondly to investigate the early Nietzsche’s complex relation to pessimism, and how it changes with his philosophical development.

The dissertation is divided into three parts: the first is dedicated to the pessimistic tradition in nineteenth-century philosophy, while the second and third are dedicated to Nietzsche’s relation to that tradition in his early and late stage respectively. The first part is preceded by an introductory chapter, where I discuss the aim of the dissertation, the etymology of the terms pessimism and optimism, as well as questions of method, and delimitations of the study object. The first part consists of two chapters. The first chapter, “Schopenhauer and the Founding of Philosophical Pessimism”, is primarily dedicated to Schopenhauer. After a discussion of the previous research into the pessimistic philosophic tradition and a brief discussion of the pre-philosophic usage of the term, I turn to Schopenhauer’s pessimistic system. Schopenhauer introduces the term pessimism in the second edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1844, first edition 1818). He does so in a context where he discusses religion: the religions are divided into two groups according to whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, that is whether they present existence as something justified in and of itself, or as something that cannot be justified. That existence cannot be justified means to Schopenhauer that being cannot be preferable to non-being. This, I have argued, is what Schopenhauer means with pessimism. In the chapter, I also aims to prove that pessimism is an all-important premise upon which key aspects of Schopenhauer’s system rests: I have particularly tried to demonstrate that pessimism is a premise underlying his notions of the aesthetic experience as a state of painlessness and relative happiness; of compassion; and of redemption through renunciation of the will in the ascetic.

In chapter one I also seek to demonstrate that Schopenhauer describes the difference between pessimism and asceticism as a difference between two types
of knowledge. The pessimist and the ascetic both know that existence cannot be justified. But while the knowledge of the ascetic is intuitive, the pessimist’s is abstract. This means that the ascetic’s knowledge has a motivational force that that of the pessimist lacks; whereas the pessimist’s knowledge, but not that of the ascetic, can be communicated through words.

In the second chapter, entitled “A Matter of Logic or Beer? The Post-Schopenhauerian Debate over Pessimism”, the most important pessimists of the generation after Schopenhauer and a selection of their adversaries are presented. In this chapter I seek to demonstrate that Schopenhauer’s conception of pessimism as the notion that existence cannot be justified came to be given a more delimited meaning. Two thinkers were particularly important in this process: the anti-pessimist Eugen Dühring and the pessimist Eduard von Hartmann. Both of these thinkers regarded pessimism as the notion that life has no positive value. In later works and later editions of his Philosophie des Unbewussten (1869), Hartmann also distinguishes between two forms of optimism and pessimism: firstly eudaimonological optimism and pessimism, denoting the notion that life does/does not have a positive value; and secondly developmental (or historical) optimism and pessimism, denoting the notion that mankind is going through a progress/decline.

Chapter two also establishes that the other pessimistic philosophers – of whom Agnes Taubert, Philipp Mainländer and Julius Bahnsen are discussed – on the whole follow Hartmann’s usage although they criticise various aspects of his thinking. All of them maintain that death is preferable to life; and all of them seek to demonstrate that this is so because the wants that man experiences are never fully satisfied. The pessimists consider their doctrines to be incontestably true. Their opponents – and of these Jürgen Bona Meyer, James Sully, Elme Marie Caro and Max Nordau are discussed – consider pessimism to be an illness or at least a symptom of a pathological state of mind. But they too share the pessimists’ usage of the term pessimism. They too consider pessimism to be the notion that non-existence is preferable to existence; but they question the method of measuring pleasure against displeasure.

Chapter two thus describes the how pessimism came to be given a well-defined conceptual content in the 1860’s and how this content was firmly established in the 70’s and 80’s. In the chapter I also discuss a thinker of an earlier generation who came to be read and admired and considered a pessimist by the pessimistic philosophers: the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi. By means of a discussion of Schopenhauer’s reception of Leopardi and of the comments on him by three of his German translators – Robert Hamerling, Gustav Brandes and Paul Heyse – I show that he was, as one would expect, presented as a pessimist. I then discuss a selection of his works, which leads to the conclusion that there are indeed pessimistic traits in Leopardi’s poems, aphorisms and dialogues: life is presented as consisting ultimately of pain and boredom; the only argument against suicide is that continuing living in spite of the suffering is a more valorous solution. But there is no metaphysical motivation of the suf-
ferring. This is an important difference between him and the pessimistic philosophers of the nineteenth century. Furthermore I demonstrate that an entry in Leopardi’s *Zibaldone* that has hitherto been cited as evidence that Leopardi was a pessimist firstly is much more ambiguous towards pessimism, stating that although pessimism is more plausible than optimism, it is not Leopardi’s position; and secondly that Leopardi is using the term pessimism in a different way than the other pessimists. Pessimism to Leopardi is an anti-theodicy; and although there is such an element in Schopenhauer’s pessimism, it is in fact a minor element whereas it is central to Leopardi.

Part one of the dissertation thus demonstrates that the establishment of pessimism as a philosophical concept took place in three phases. To begin with, it was not used in a philosophical context, and its meaning was at best vague. The first phase of the philosophical usage of the concept is initiated by Schopenhauer. With him, pessimism becomes a philosophical concept. It is given a content, namely the notion that existence cannot be justified. But as the discussions among his contemporaries show, it was not at all clear how this notion should be understood. In the second phase, Eduard von Hartmann and Eugen Dühring are the protagonists. Through their works pessimism comes to be defined in terms of the value of life. Pessimism becomes the notion that the value of life is negative. In the third phase, the Hartmann-Dühring usage of pessimism becomes more or less generally accepted in the philosophical debate. The various pessimists that follow in the generation after Hartmann diverge from him in a number of ways, challenging his criteria for establishing the truth of pessimism, or rejecting the path to redemption that he sketches out; but they all accept his interpretation of pessimism as the notion of life’s worthlessness. Likewise, the various adversaries of pessimism go to some length to characterise pessimism as an absurd doctrine and a pathological phenomenon; but nevertheless they all accept the conceptual content that Dühring and Hartmann attributed to pessimism.

Part two of the study, comprising chapters three and four, is dedicated to the early Nietzsche. Chapter three, entitled “Nietzsche and Pessimism: 1864–72”, contains a discussion of the earliest references to pessimism in Nietzsche’s notes and letters, and of some of his minor works from the years 1864–1872. The focus of the chapter, however, is on the role of pessimism in Nietzsche’s first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872). The discussion of the fragments and minor works is an empirically grounded discussion of Nietzsche’s comments on pessimism and pessimistic thinkers, and demonstrates that it was not until 1869 that pessimism became an important theme for Nietzsche: before this year his comments are very few and very vague. And although he first read Schopenhauer in 1865, there is no discussion of Schopenhauer as pessimist until after 1869; before this year, the term pessimism is all but exclusively used when Nietzsche is making plans for a discussion of ancient themes. In 1869, Nietzsche read Hartmann’s *Philosophie des Unbewussten*, and although he was never convinced by its message and later would dismiss
Hartmann derisively, he seems to have attached a specific meaning to pessimism only after he read this book. After he read it, pessimism becomes a theme in the notebooks. Interestingly, Nietzsche is from the very beginning negative towards pessimism: it is described as a theoretical impossibility and as producing a state of mind against which we need art to protect ourselves. Like Hartmann and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche maintains that the knowledge of the world leads to pessimism, but unlike them, he regards this knowledge as dangerous and maintains that art is needed to create new illusions replacing those that the pessimistic insights tore down.

In the section dedicated to *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, I demonstrate that the notion that knowledge – in the book epitomized by scholarship or science (*Wissenschaft*) – leads to painful insights into the world’s essence that render life worthless. I furthermore demonstrate that art serves the purpose of creating illusions that let us live in spite of these insights, which means that *Die Geburt der Tragödie* continues Nietzsche’s discussion of pessimism from the posthumous fragments of the years preceding the book. But there is one important difference. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche no longer describes the result of knowledge as pessimism. The pessimistic insight is absorbed by the Dionysian, one of the two artistic drives that Nietzsche discerns. The Dionysian is a fundamental component of tragedy, which allowed the Greeks to constructively channel their pessimistic insights of the worthlessness of life. This, Nietzsche predicts, can also allow the recreation of a German culture based on Wagner’s music dramas. That this is a pessimistic element is demonstrated by a discussion of the literary examples of the Dionysian element that Nietzsche gives: they all have a protagonist who describes death as by necessity preferable to life. The practical aspect of pessimism, the hopelessness and despair that it according to Nietzsche causes, is associated with the optimistic scientific ideals epitomised by Socrates. Nietzsche maintains that ancient tragedy died when scientific optimism was introduced into it, particularly with Euripides. The optimistic attack upon the pessimistic element in art led to that it lost it capacity to provide us with an illusion that makes us believe in the value of life. Optimism, that is, makes pessimism come true.

Chapter four, “Nietzsche and Pessimism: 1872–78”, discusses posthumous material and the four parts of the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (1873–76). The section dedicated to the posthumous fragments from 1872–74 continues the exposition of Nietzsche’s usage of the term pessimism and his discussion of pessimistic thinkers from chapter four. There is no dramatic change in his usage; but there are some notable changes in how he treats the pessimistic philosophers. In some fragments Nietzsche describes Eduard von Hartmann as a philistine (*Philister*) which means that the dichotomy optimism–pessimism is becoming less important to him. For it shows that not all pessimists are the same: some are just as harmful as the philistine optimists.

However, the central section of chapter four is the discussion of the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*. These four essays are here interpreted as variations on
themes first brought forth in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. The first, *David Strauss der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller* (1873), is a somewhat more explicit discussion of the danger of optimism to the arts, that is of one of the central themes of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. The second essay, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (1874), varies the theme of the decay of an art form that can create illusions that make us believe in the value of life. And just as tragedy in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* was destroyed once a scientific ideal was introduced into it, it is the introduction of a scientific ideal that destroys the art of history. The third part, *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* (1874), is a positive counterpart to the first: it attempts at showing how Schopenhauer can be used as an example for how to resist the damaging influence of our times. Schopenhauer’s pessimism, Nietzsche makes clear, is an important aspect of this, but it is a means of defence and nothing more. The fourth essay, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876), expands on how Wagner can be used to rebuild German culture. By underlining the similarities between Schopenhauer and Wagner, Nietzsche demonstrates that he still embraces the notion of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* that the central element of an art-work (the Dionysian) is pessimistic.

The discussion of the *Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen* is followed by a discussion of the posthumous fragments from 1874 to 1878. During this period, which transcends the border to the middle phase of Nietzsche’s production, his comments on pessimism and the pessimists change nature. He had, we have seen, questioned the conclusions of the pessimists from very early on: from 1869, when pessimism becomes a problem to him. But he accepted the premises of the pessimists. This gradually changes in the period 1874–78. Now Nietzsche attacks fundamental pessimist doctrines, such as Schopenhauer’s conception of intuitive knowledge, and he attacks intellectual honesty of the pessimists who claim to prefer death over life and still keep on living.

Part two of the dissertation thus demonstrates that Nietzsche had a complex relation to pessimism. There are important pessimistic themes in Nietzsche’s early writings, but he was seeking to find an alternative conclusion from the premises of the pessimists.

Part three of the study discusses pessimism in Nietzsche’s late phase. It consists of a single fifth chapter, “Pessimistic Themes in Nietzsche’s Late Writings”, which is subdivided into four sections, each dealing with an aspect of how reminiscences of the problem of pessimism permeate Nietzsche’s later texts. The first section addresses pessimism and nihilism and the related question of Nietzsche’s dichotomy of pessimism of strength and pessimism of weakness. I agree on the whole with the many scholars who have claimed that Nietzsche gradually loses his interest in pessimism in the 1880’s as he comes to regard it as a limited case of nihilism. In this section I seek to demonstrate that Nietzsche gradually comes to consider the pessimists’ question of the value of life to be wrongly put. It was the practical aspect of pessimism that Nietzsche regarded as the true problem from the very beginning; not the theoretical question of whether life has a value or existence can be justified. This practical prob-
lem, Nietzsche described it as practical pessimism in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, is the fundamental part of the problem of nihilism. As I furthermore demonstrate, Nietzsche associates nihilism with the question of the meaning of life. And this question takes precedence over the question of the value of life. But not all forms of nihilism are harmful. To the person strong enough, the meaninglessness of life is an opportunity to create a new meaning rather than a problem. And analogously, Nietzsche posits the existence of a “pessimism of strength” (*Pessimismus der Stärke*) that consists in the ability to acknowledge that life is painful and yet affirm it.

The second section discusses Nietzsche’s comments on Hamlet. I demonstrate that Nietzsche’s changed relation to pessimism is mirrored in how the comments on Hamlet change. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Hamlet is one of Nietzsche’s examples of the Dionysian; and I argue that it is in virtue of the pessimistic soliloquy in the third act that he is used in this way. When explaining Hamlet’s passivity, Nietzsche distinguishes between a true Hamlet doctrine (*Hamlet-Lehre*), which consists in an insight into the essence of the world that robs Hamlet of the will to act, and a superficial interpretation of Hamlet’s inactivity as a result of his reflecting and brooding. The fact that Hamlet’s father has been unjustly murdered and that the murderer has married the widow amounts to a crime against nature that gives Hamlet a privileged knowledge of the world; and this lets him know that life is worthless. In later works, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* and *Ecce homo* notably, Nietzsche alludes to his own interpretation of Hamlet, but by now he is no longer in possession of a privileged form of knowledge of the world: he is not declared insane. Pessimism has changed from being the result of a special insight to being a pathological phenomenon; the interpretation of Hamlet remains unchanged, he remains a symbol of pessimism, but the same elements of Shakespeare’s tragedy that made its protagonist’s pondering of suicide a sublime protest against the evils of the world now makes him ridiculous.

The third section of chapter five discusses Nietzsche’s relation to Leopardi. This relation undergoes a change that in many ways is parallel to the one that we saw in the section on Hamlet. Up until the middle of the 1870’s, Nietzsche’s comments on Leopardi are remarkably positive. He is presented as the ideal for a philologist, as the greatest prose-writer of the nineteenth century, and as a true thinker. As I demonstrate, however, Nietzsche had little knowledge of those aspects of Leopardi that he lauds. He was familiar with his poetry through the translations of Hamerling and probably Brandes, but he did not read Leopardi’s prose works until 1878 when he was given Heyse’s translation of them. He might have had some knowledge of his philological writings, but his comments on him seems to indicate that he presupposed a poetic quality in those works, a quality that simply is not there. And although Nietzsche quotes Leopardi in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*, and although he and several of his friends quote Leopardi’s poems in their letters to one another, the quota-
tions are used merely as illustrations, they are never the object of any deeper reflection.

The tone of the comments on Leopardi changes dramatically towards the end of the 1870’s. Nietzsche now comes to regard Leopardi’s complaints about the sufferings inherent in life as weakness. He is no longer a great thinker: he is a physiologically degenerated person, whose sickly world-view has its origin in his perverted sexuality. This illustrates how Nietzsche’s attitude to pessimism has changed from considering it a problem to be taken very seriously into a pathological phenomenon. This in its turn shows how Nietzsche has moved from the fairly unique position that he occupied in the early 1870’s as someone who accepts the premises of pessimism but seeks to avoid its conclusion, into what is in effect the mainstream of the adversaries of pessimism.

The fourth and last of the sections discusses the pessimistic roots of the eternal recurrence, one of the later Nietzsche’s most important ideas. In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* and then again in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, one’s reaction to the prospect that one will relive one’s life, down to the smallest detail, an infinite number of times is used to determine whether one lives the right type of life. In this section, I demonstrate that there is an important pessimistic context to Nietzsche’s idea. Both Schopenhauer and Hartmann, whom Nietzsche was reading when he wrote *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* where a preliminary version of the eternal recurrence is first propounded, claim that life is by necessity so worthless that no one who is honest to himself can want to relive his or her life when they come to the end of it. This is a notion that Nietzsche then encountered in at least two more pessimists, Leopardi and Mainländer, that he read before he formulated the idea of the eternal recurrence in 1881. Hence I argue that Nietzsche was associating the negative answer to the question whether it is possible to want to relive one’s life with pessimism. The case for this argument is further strengthened by the fact that at least two adversaries of pessimism, Jürgen Bona Meyer and James Sully, mention this as a pessimist commonplace. Furthermore I demonstrate that Montaigne, a writer who to Nietzsche served as a model for how to rid oneself of pessimism, states that he would want to relive his life, even at the cost of excruciating pain. Therefore I conclude that Nietzsche created the eternal recurrence as an anti-pessimistic scheme, with the help of which he could hope to counter the pessimistic and nihilistic currents of thought that he held to be a threat to modern man.

In a sense, it is of course correct to say that Nietzsche distanced himself from pessimism. But one could just as well say that pessimism remained a hidden motif in his writings. At the very least there remained a gloomy, sombre streak in his thinking: a streak that Nietzsche constantly fought against. At the risk of exaggerating, I cannot help seeing this conflict as the source of his philosophy.
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Index

A

Aeschylus, 155, 156, 160, 167, 198, 199, 202
Agell, Fredrik, 119, 124, 144
Albrecht, Jörn, 258
Anaximander, 141
Andreas-Salomé, Lou, 263
Aristotle, 87, 147, 155, 210
Asher, David, 99, 101
Atwell, John E., 44, 53
Augustine, St., 126

B

Babb, Lawrence, 245
Bach, Johann Sebastian, 164
Bacon, Francis, 99, 243
Bahr, Carl G., 101
Barbera, Sandro, 99, 196, 215
Baudelaire, Charles, 107, 207, 228, 259
Bau芒rganter, Marie, 256, 259, 271
Beethoven, Ludwig van, 164, 165, 166, 239, 240
Belaval, Y., 13
Beneke, F. E., 37
Benne, Christian, 128, 148, 243
Bentham, Jeremy, 114
Berman, David, 232
Bini, Walter, 96
Bollnow, Otto Freidrich, 250, 251
Borchmeyer, Dieter, 18, 51, 128, 139, 164, 165, 198
Bourget, Paul, 177, 179, 221, 222
Brand, Peter, 101
Brandes, Gustav, 103, 246, 280, 284
Brojaber, Thomas H., 117, 165, 177, 183, 224, 264, 275
Brusotti, Marco, 96, 252
Bulow, Hans von, 257, 258
Burckhardt, Jacob, 130, 132, 147
Burton, Robert, 29, 141
Byron, George Gordon Noel, 94, 102, 105, 241, 260, 270, 271

C

Campioni, Giuliano, 96, 164, 204, 221, 255
Camus, Albert, 26
Carlsson, Anna-Lena, 149
Caro, Elme Marie, 76, 91, 92, 95, 105, 280
Cartwright, David E., 34, 54, 155
Caspari, Otto, 264
Cauchi, Francesca, 267, 268
Chateaubriand, Francois Rene de, 105
Cioran, E. M., 23, 26, 234
Clement of Alexandria, 40
Colli, Giorgio, 19, 157, 176, 190, 198, 225
Collingwood, R. G., 16, 17, 113, 119
Craig, Gordon A., 101
Crescenzi, Luca, 171, 222
Creuzer, G. F., 151

D

D’Iorio, Paolo, 141, 264
Dahlkvist, Tobias, 141
Damiani, Rolando, 96
Dante Alighieri, 102, 106, 242
De Sanctis, Francesco, 100, 101, 104
Decher, Friedhelm, 223, 272
Descartes, Rene, 105, 226
Deussen, Paul, 125, 130
Diels, Hermann, 17
Dienstag, Joshua Foa, 11, 23, 25, 26, 31, 47, 68, 89, 96, 115, 270
Diogenes Laertius, 148
Donnellan, Brendan, 275
Doringhaus, Andreas, 33
Doß, Adam von, 98, 101, 102
Dostoevsky, Fedor, 271
Dryden, John, 267
Dühring, Eugen, 62, 63, 64, 73, 74, 76, 89, 90, 94, 95, 111, 113, 114, 203, 204, 205, 211, 216, 230, 264, 280, 281
Dürer, Albrecht, 212
E
Eckermann, Johann Peter, 231, 254
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 260
Engels, Friedrich, 63
Epictetus, 99, 109
Epicurus, 262

F
Ferrucci, Franco, 108, 249
Feuerbach, Ludwig, 18, 102, 202
Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 46, 226
Ficino, Marsilio, 86
Figl, Johann, 126
Fischer, Kuno, 39
Flashar, Helmut, 29
Fleischer, Margot, 150, 151, 159, 264
Franklin, Benjamin, 275
Frauenstädt, Julius, 39, 41, 63
Freud, Sigmund, 26
Fritzsch, Ernst Wilhelm, 133
Fromm, Eberhard, 32
Fuchs, Carl, 222

G
Garaventa, Roberto, 108
Gerhardt, Volker, 12, 26, 27, 110, 146, 224, 225, 238
Gerratana, Francesco, 69, 143, 181
Gersdorff, Carl von, 125, 129, 130, 131, 132, 166, 173, 260, 257
Gerstering, Johann Joachim, 17, 23, 25, 26
Gillespie, M. A., 226
Goedert, Georges, 149, 159, 198, 203
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 13, 99, 122, 147, 188, 196, 231, 248, 254, 262, 256, 257, 260
Gogol, Nicolai, 260
Gossman, Lionel, 147
Gräfth, Bernd, 80, 81
Grassi, Ernesto, 108
Gregor-Dellin, Martin, 102
Grimm, Reinhold, 129
Gründer, Karlfried, 151
Günther, H., 13
Gustafsson, Torbjörn, 95

H
Hadot, Pierre, 262
Haeckel, Ernst, 66
Hamann, Johann Georg, 120, 121
Hamerling, Robert, 27, 28, 102, 103, 106, 246, 251, 252, 256, 258, 280, 284
Harris, George W., 114
Hartsen, Friedrich Anton von, 118
Haym, Rudolf, 121, 216
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 46, 58, 66, 68, 83, 106, 107
Heine, Heinrich, 94
Henry, Anne, 92
Heraclitus, 202
Herman, Arthur, 11, 28, 115
Herodotus, 154
Heyse, Paul, 27, 103, 104, 256, 259, 271, 280, 284
Hof, Walter, 27, 92
Hoffmann, Franz, 63
Hölderlin, Friedrich, 91, 259, 264
Hollingdale, R. J., 19
Hollinrake, Roger 149
Homer, 148, 231
Hornstein, Robert von, 101, 102
Horsmann, Ulrich, 23, 80
Hübscher, Arthur, 13, 19, 20, 32, 38, 51, 63, 99, 102
Hume, David, 264, 266, 271
Huysmans, Joris-Karl, 51

I
Ingenkamp, Heinz Gerd, 109
Invernizzi, Giuseppe, 23, 24, 25, 28, 36, 38, 62, 63, 70, 71, 82, 83, 85, 222, 226

J
Jacquette, Dale, 52
Jahn, Otto, 173
Janaway, Christopher, 33, 34, 35, 54, 216
Janz, Curt Paul, 126, 128, 250, 257
Jean Paul, 37, 80
Jensen, Anthony K, 181, 192, 217
Josephson, Peter, 275
K
Kain, Philip J., 264, 265
Kanngießer, Karl Ludwig, 97
Kant, Immanuel, 42, 52, 53, 63, 66, 85, 87, 90, 111, 120, 121, 124, 165, 199, 225
Kaufmann, Walter, 19, 149, 150, 152, 235, 263
Kiowsky, Hellmuth, 112
Klibansky, Raymond, 29, 86
Koppen, Erwin, 51
Krug, W. F., 38
Kuhn, Elisabeth, 130, 138, 140, 220, 221, 222, 230

L
La Salvia, Adrian, 97
Lambrecht, Roland, 141
Landon, Walter Savage, 260
Lange, F. A., 123, 124, 128, 144, 154
Large, Duncan, 243
Leibniz, Georg Wilhelm von, 13, 25, 32, 33, 38, 39, 82, 105, 111
Lenau, Nikolaus, 94
Lepenies, Wolf, 50
Libell, Monica, 57
Lichtenberg, Georg Christoph, 12, 13, 98, 114, 217
Liebmann, Otto, 124
Lindner, Ernst Otto, 99, 100
Löhnysen, Wolfgang von, 19, 41, 97
López, Héctor Julio Pérez, 240, 241
Luporini, Cesare, 112
Lütkehaus, Ludger, 23, 25, 28, 36, 50, 63, 69, 82, 222, 223

M
Magee, Bryan, 18, 32, 33, 45, 68
Mainländer, Philipp, 15, 24, 25, 76, 79, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86, 111, 115, 117, 196, 222, 223, 226, 227, 228, 229, 234, 272, 277, 278, 280, 285
Malter, Rudolf, 33, 44, 49
Malthus, Thomas Robert, 64
Mann, Thomas, 51
Marbach, Oswald, 165, 166
Marton, Scarlett, 265, 268
Mattioli, Emilio, 106
Mazzatinti, G., 99, 256
Menghini, M., 99, 256
Mérimée, Prosper, 177, 221, 260
Meyer, Jürgen Bona, 87, 88, 89, 95, 173, 174, 222, 228, 272, 273, 274, 277, 280, 285
Meyerbeer, Giacomo, 200
Migotti, Mark, 35, 54
Mill, John Stuart, 114, 224
Miller, Bernard, 102
Mohr J., 151
Molner, David, 277
Montaigne, Michel de, 18, 193, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 285
Montinari, Mazzino, 16, 19, 135, 262
Moore, Gregory, 229
Mörke, Eduard, 256
Müller, Max, 91, 138
Müller-Buck, Renate, 141
Müller-Seyfarth, Winfried H., 79
Mushacke, Eduard, 120
Mushacke, Hermann, 125, 130

N
Negri, Antonio, 96
Nehamas, Alexander, 160, 264
Neumeister, Sebastian, 107, 252
Nordau, Max, 93, 94, 95, 105, 228, 280
O
Offenbach, Jacques, 122
Olsson, Anders, 227
Oxenford, John, 38, 39, 62

P
Panofsky, Erwin, 29, 86
Pauen, Michael, 17, 23, 24, 25, 30, 35, 66, 68, 72, 78, 86, 110
Payne, E. F. J., 19, 20, 47
Persson, Mats, 182
Pertile, Lino, 101
Peters, A., 42
Piazzesi, Chiara, 221, 229, 230
Pick, Daniel, 95, 221
Pikulik, Lothar, 55
Piper, Reinhard, 37
Plato, 29, 52, 102, 174, 187, 210, 242, 256
Plümacher, Olga, 77, 118, 222
Plutarch, 154, 186
Poe, Edgar Allan, 260
Pope, Alexander, 13, 111
Porter, James I., 123, 128, 144, 154, 163
Preller, L., 151

R
Rahden, Wolfert von, 171, 181
Ranieri, Antonio, 98, 103
Rätze, J. G., 37
Reibnitz, Barbara von, 151, 155
Reschke, Renate, 179
Rethy, Robert, 164
Riedel, Manfred, 226
Riehl, Wilhelm Heinrich von, 173
Ritschl, Friedrich Wilhelm, 128, 148, 173, 255
Rohde, Erwin, 128, 130, 133, 135, 148, 175, 250, 259
Romundt, Heinrich, 125, 271
Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 25, 26, 31, 96, 242
Safranski, Rüdiger, 63
Sans, Édouard, 18, 51
Saxl, Fritz, 29, 86
Schärschmidt, Carl, 126
Schelling, Friedrich von, 66, 121
Schlegel, August Wilhelm von, 237
Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 42
Schömel, Wolfgang, 27
Schulz, Ortrun, 36
Schütz, Carl, 101
Seggern, Hans Gerd von, 141
Seidlitz, Carl von, 90
Seydel, Rudolf, 38, 63
Shakespeare, William, 18, 102, 155, 167, 234, 235, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 284
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 259
Small, Robin, 264
Socrates, 137, 145, 146, 160, 161, 162, 164, 180, 187, 201, 210, 238, 240, 282
Sommer, Andreas Urs, 16, 179, 225, 230
Sophocles, 117, 155, 156, 160, 167, 238, 240
Spengler, Oswald, 25, 76
Spierling, Volker, 37, 108
Spinoza, Baruch von, 42, 46, 105
Staël, Germaine de, 96
Stäglich, Hans, 13, 26, 27, 28, 30
Starobinski, Jean, 245
Stein, Charlotte von, 196
Steinkamp, Volker, 96, 97, 105, 110
Stendhal, 176, 177, 232, 274
Strauß, David, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177, 179, 180, 188, 192, 193, 199, 201
Sully, James, 66, 76, 89, 90, 91, 95, 104, 105, 118, 222, 228, 273, 274, 277, 280, 285
### T

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taubert, Agnes</td>
<td>15, 76, 77, 78, 79, 85, 86, 89, 96, 115, 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theognis</td>
<td>154, 155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thilo</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timpanaro, Sebastiano</td>
<td>96, 255, 256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turgenev, Ivan</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### U

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ueberweg, Friedrich</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unamuno, Miguel de</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### V

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vigny, Alfred de</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivetta, Vivarelli</td>
<td>275, 276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volpi, Franco</td>
<td>11, 47, 111, 226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Von Arx</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyverberg, Henry</td>
<td>25, 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### W

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wagner, Cosima</td>
<td>14, 18, 130, 131, 133, 165, 166, 181, 198, 238, 240, 257, 258, 275, 276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ueberweg, Friedrich</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unamuno, Miguel de</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Von Arx</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyverberg, Henry</td>
<td>25, 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Y

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young, Julian</td>
<td>34, 52, 54, 56, 60, 149, 152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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