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# Pessimism, Hope, and the Tragic-Art of the Greeks (*Nietzsche and the Pandora Myth*)

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## I.

This essay is focused on Nietzsche's unique reading of the Pandora myth as it appears in *Human, All Too Human* and develops an interpretation of *Hope*, the most profound evil of the many evils released by Pandora infecting the human condition, as it might be understood in relation to Nietzsche's analysis of the ancient Greeks in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In reading this early work of Nietzsche, modes of comportment that fall under two specific categories are considered: *Passive Nihilism-Pessimism of Decline* and *Active Nihilism-Pessimism of Strength* as understood by Nietzsche in the late compilation of his notes published as *The Will to Power*. Ultimately, this essay explores the artistic responses to the bleak and *pessimistic* conditions of the Greeks' lives found in the *Apolline* art in the Homeric Greeks and the tragic-art of the Greeks, which Nietzsche argues is the ultimate expression of art as the merging of the "aesthetic" principles of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*. These aesthetic responses are elucidated in and through the comparison to modes of existence that impede the spirit's optimal, flourishing development, specifically, as expressed through Christianity and "Socratic optimism" in the superior power of human *reason*.

## II.

In *Works and Days* Hesiod introduces the now-familiar story of Pandora and the jar (*πιθος*) full of evils and in doing so establishes a view of the human condition - a non-systematic *metaphysics* and *ontology* - that is bleak, depressive, and consistent with a *pessimistic* view in which all things bend toward destruction and all humans are continually and relentlessly exposed to senseless, profuse, and unending instances of suffering. Pandora's story is set within the overarching narrative of Zeus's anger at the wily Prometheus who smuggled fire "in the tube of a fennel" and delivered it as a *gift* to the human race. Zeus, devising "grim care for mankind," as Hesiod tells us, vows to make human life miserable, for to "set against fire," Zeus intends to deliver them, and in an important sense, *infect them with*, an "affliction in which they will all delight as they embrace their own misfortune."<sup>1</sup> Thus, to carry out his nefarious scheme, Zeus tasks Hephaestus with crafting a beautiful maiden assuming the outward form of a goddess in stature and beauty, to which other denizens of Olympia contribute various and sundry "gifts" to the maiden made from "water and earth," named Pandora - "all gifts" (*παν-δωρον*). Athena teaches Pandora the skill to craft and dresses and adorns her in a flowing white gown; Aphrodite bestows the *gift* of charm and the insidious power to arouse "painful yearnings and consuming obsession" in men; the Graces and lady Temptation supply Pandora with her shining golden necklaces. This notion of "gift" assumes a duplicitous meaning, in one sense, Pandora is a *gift*

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod. *Theogony/Works and Days*, trans., M. L. West. Oxford University Press: New York, 1989, 38.

from all of the Olympians to humans, in another, and far more ominous sense, Pandora is a “gift” given with the explicit purpose of doing harm and inflicting pain on the recipients. Indeed, it is Hermes, the “dog-killer,” who gives Pandora “a bitch’s mind and knavish nature,”<sup>2</sup> so that she has the skill to fashion deceptive and malevolent lies.

When Pandora is sent to earth she carries with her a sealed jar - the “gift” that bears the *gift* - she presents herself to Epimetheus, who has been explicitly instructed by his brother Prometheus to flatly refuse and send back any gifts offered by Zeus and the Olympians. Epimetheus, of course, ignores his brother’s sound advice and accepts Zeus’s *gift* and so takes in Pandora, whereafter she unseals the lid of the earthenware jar to release all, or so it would seem, the malevolent forces, *afflictions* upon the human condition. However, unbeknownst to Pandora, one of the “evils” remained - *Hope* did not fly out, for it was clinging to the inside of the rim. This is because *Hope* was clinging to the inside of the lid and, as Hesiod recounts, Pandora quickly “put the lid back in time [trapping *Hope* inside] by the providence of Zeus.”<sup>3</sup> So, just as Zeus had cleverly planned, Pandora trapped *Hope* within the jar after releasing all the other “evils.” Thus, because of Pandora, “full of ills is the earth, and full the seas,”<sup>4</sup> and so for humanity there is seemingly no escape from the condition of suffering and death, nor can they transcend the vicious *cycle of desire*, which always ends in disappointment and in the extreme, destruction. Indeed, this is how, after the brief but crucial mention of *Hope* inside Pandora’s jar, Hesiod abruptly ends the myth prior to moving on to present another *human downfall myth*, that of the descending chronological stages or epochs of *metal*. Readers are left with an undeniably *pessimistic* vision of life, the darkest and gloomiest vision of the human condition, where all things eventually and ultimately bend toward disaster and destruction. Readers are well aware of the role that the issue of *illness* and its subsequent overcoming play in Nietzsche’s philosophy, so it is interesting to note that Hesiod describes the “evils” released by Pandora in terms of *afflictions, diseases, and illnesses*, and this we discuss later.

Hesiod does not elaborate the role of *Hope* within the Pandora myth, and hence does not consider the issue of *Hope*’s role as a potential value, and beyond, *salvific force*, as is often the case within retellings of the myth. For example, M. L. Lewis offers an interpretation of *Hope*’s role in the Pandora myth, stating, “although Hesiod has not given his jar a consistent symbolic meaning, he *means* that Hope remains among men as the one *antidote* to suffering.”<sup>5</sup> Here, based on Hesiod’s explicit description of the “evils” emerging from the jar, sicknesses infecting the human condition, Lewis suggests that *Hope* might be said to play the role of *pharmakon*, a drug or remedy to counteract the injurious effects of one or another *poison*. To continue and deepen this understanding of *Hope* as a potential salvific force, if we turn to H. A. Guerber’s

<sup>2</sup> *Works and Days*, 39. We must, when reading Hesiod, put out of our minds the innocent, naïve portrayal of Pandora we encounter in certain retellings of the myth, a young maiden who simply falls victim to her obsessive curiosity - i.e., she too is deceived by Zeus, and this makes her something of a sympathetic character (See our reference to H. A. Guerber’s text: *The Myths of Greece and Rome*). Rather, we should imagine Pandora, as the first woman, in terms consistent with the manner in which the scorned and cursed prophetess Cassandra describes the cunning and evil wife of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, who is labeled an “accursed bitch (*της κυνος*), who licks his hand, who fawns on him with lifted ear, who like a secret death shall strike the coward’s stroke.” In no uncertain terms, Aeschylus portrays Clytemnestra as the incarnate of a “female dog,” and in employing this stark and derisive characterization, indicates that she is less than human, namely, *inhuman*. See: Whitney Jennings Oates. *The Complete Greek Drama*. New York: Random House, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 40

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 75

retelling of the myth, we encounter a reading that in no uncertain terms, lauds the saving” power of *Hope* to deliver humanity from the thralls of a dark, bleak, and even fatalistic existence. Guerber, extending Hesiod’s original version of the myth, provides an epilogue missing from the original telling, and informs us that prior to sending off Pandora and the jar, the “gods, with a sudden impulse of compassion, concealed among the evil spirits one kindly creature, Hope, whose mission was to heal the wounds inflicted by her fellow prisoners.”<sup>6</sup> *Hope*, in this *optimistic* reinterpretation of Hesiod’s myth, relieves the pain and suffering of existence, and Guerber goes on to add that in the ancient Greek culture, it was believed that “evil entered into the world, bringing untold misery; but *Hope* followed closely in its footsteps, to aid struggling humanity, and point to a happier future,”<sup>7</sup> offering an understanding of the ancient Greeks at odds with Nietzsche’s “tragic” vision of the Hellenic culture.

However, if we remain true to the myth as presented by Hesiod and consider Pandora’s jar and the evils unleashed: vice, jealousy, avarice, labor, old age, insanity, sickness, suffering, and death, it is clear that Hesiod holds a far more bleak and destitute view of the human condition, where chance and happenstance rule; humans can never predict what fate might befall them. The strong, he tells us can, at any moment, become impotent; the rich can easily lose their fortunes and become destitute in the flash of an eye; the healthy can at any moment be stricken with fatal, terminal illness. In short, one’s life can be turned upside down in an instant for no “good” reason; life unfolds, as it were, on shifting, dangerous, and unpredictably treacherous grounds.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Guerber, Nietzsche, remains true to the tone and timbre of Hesiod’s original telling of the myth, Nietzsche expresses what is intimated in *Works and Days*, namely, that the appearance of *Hope* in the myth is a slightly more complex and far less optimistic issue, for as we see, in relation to what was originally stated about the duplicitous nature of *δωρον* for the Greeks,<sup>9</sup> *Hope* must be rethought and re-conceptualized in light of its double meaning as introduced above. Nietzsche, in *Human, All Too Human* provides a unique reading that, in line with what Hesiod might be said to intimate, reveals the sinister as opposed to the salvific nature of *Hope*, the last of the *gifts* to humankind trapped forever in the Jar of Pandora. Nietzsche reading of the myth helps us to understand the terrible metaphysical and ontological *truism* that lies behind Zeus’s nefarious plan.

Nietzsche labels *Hope* “the most evil of evils because it prolongs man’s torment,”<sup>10</sup> it is the “actual *malignant* evil”<sup>11</sup> that gives us the false illusion that through it, we are able to fully transcend and hence outstrip the *ontological* condition of suffering and torment - e.g., as related to eschatological religions, where there is faith, belief, and *Hope* that a better world beyond *this one* exists, there is *Hope* for a morally just universe that is “value-laden” because it is “given” by God. *Hope*, in this instance, Nietzsche would say, facilitates a false consciousness, “a definite false psychology, a certain kind of fantasy,”<sup>12</sup> regarding our cold and “valueless” existence. Nietzsche extends the line of thought intimated within Hesiod’s original telling of the myth, in

6 H. A. Guerber. *The Myths of the Greeks and Romans*. Dover Press: New York, 1955, p. 21.

7 Ibid.

8 *Works and Days*, 37.

9 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans., S. Butler. Dover Books: New York, 1999. We are perhaps most familiar with this Greek sense of *gift* from Homer’s telling of how the Greeks gained entrance to Troy by hiding inside the Trojan Horse – a *gift* bringing destruction and death.

10 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans., M. Faber. Bison Books: Lincoln, 1996, 58.

11 Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans., R. J. Hollingdale. Penguin Books: London, 1990, 145.

12 *Human All Too Human*, 135.

that Nietzsche accepts that Zeus seeks to punish humanity, and the most effective manner of torture and punishment is to make the punishment unending, an idea we encounter in various myths, e.g., Prometheus on the rock secured in chains of adamantite, and Sisyphus ceaselessly rolling and re-rolling the boulder to the top of the *mineral flaked* mountain. The *gift* of *Hope* is inherently nefarious and malevolent, but is misinterpreted, per Zeus's plan, as a *salvific* force of redemption, i.e., humans mistake "the remaining evil for the greatest worldly good," and "man has the lucky jar in his house forever and thinks the world of this treasure," and it is always "at his service; he reaches for it when he fancies it."<sup>13</sup> This is a *gift*, as Nietzsche recognizes, that *keeps on giving*, for Zeus wanted the human race, blind to *Hope's* acutely malevolent nature, to employ in the mistaken assumption that it is a trusted and effective embrace *palliative* for the ills of existence, for *Hope* temporarily assuages the pain of wounds inflicted by the many other evils unleashed by Pandora. Rather, we are forever locked within the vicious cycle of recurring torment; for it is the case that Zeus "did not want man to throw his life away, no matter how much the other evils might torment him, but rather to go on letting himself be tormented anew," and as stated, "to that end, [Zeus] gives man hope."<sup>14</sup> We will see, that depending on the form *Hope* assumes, specific to the way in which it manifests, it holds the malevolent potential to blind us to the extremely *pessimistic* metaphysical condition of human existence (*nihilism*). *Hope*, we might say, distracts from Nietzsche's overall philosophical pursuit that obsessively consumed his life, namely, his ongoing and ever-renewed endeavor to find secular justification by providing a legitimate "philosophical" response to the following question: *How might life be made bearable, and beyond, transformed into ascending and flourishing heroic endeavor, once we reveal and grasp the oppressive, radically abysmal and terrible metaphysical constitution of the universe?*

### III.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, prior to *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche already referenced the mythological figures of King Midas and Silenus, Dionysus's companion when painting a vividly stark picture of the manner in which the ancient Greeks, especially those of the Tragic Age, viewed and experienced life. The story goes: Midas hunts down Silenus in order to learn the things that are most beneficial to and desirable for humankind, which Silenus sums up in the following terms: "Miserable, ephemeral race," spoke Silenus with mocking disdain, "children of hazard and hardship, why do you force me to say what it would be much more fruitful for you not to hear? The best of all things is something entirely outside your grasp: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second-best thing for you – is to die soon."<sup>15</sup> This is precisely the *metaphysical* and *ontological* condition established in Hesiod's Pandora myth, within which humans find themselves, continually in the midst of being tormented by "all the evils, those lively winged beings" that flew out of the jar and roam around doing "harm to men by day and night."<sup>16</sup> As stated, this is undeniably a *pessimistic* worldview - a gloomy, dismal picture of the world where it might be said that *evil* outweighs *good*. To adopt the view or philosophy of *pessimism* is linked in Nietzsche's later philosophy, with *nihilism*, where Nietzsche claims that

<sup>13</sup> *Human, All Too Human*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music.*, trans., S. Whiteside. Penguin Books: London, 1993, 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Human All Too Human*, 58.

“pessimism” is already a “preliminary form of nihilism.”<sup>17</sup> Here, we pause to briefly examine Nietzsche’s understanding of “pessimism” in its relation to “nihilism”: According to Nietzsche, “Pessimism is not a problem but a symptom, the name should be replaced with ‘nihilism’.” (24) *Pessimism* is a *symptom* - a worldview that is facilitated and engendered by the condition of *nihilism* - when “*the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim [of existence] is lacking; ‘Why?’ finds no answer”<sup>18</sup>; *pessimism* is a way of responding to the world, philosophical or otherwise, when confronted with the condition of *nihilism*, and already harbors as immanent, the concern and question of whether “not-to-be is better than to be is itself a disease, a sign of decline, an idiosyncrasy.”<sup>19</sup>

To reiterate, for Nietzsche, when employing the term “nihilism,”<sup>20</sup> he indicates an existence which is at once grounded in the *metaphysical* conditions of the world as well as the human’s authentic relation and response to the world, in terms of being attuned (*Stimmung*) to the world and subsequently comporting to it, which includes the crucial “realization that we lack the right to posit a beyond or in-itself of things that might be ‘divine’ or morality incarnate.”<sup>21</sup> The world lives beyond any and all intrinsic values or teleological purposes, goals, or ends - *providence* becomes the will-o’-the-wisp of Christianity. Thus, the ultimate consequence of nihilism is the unyielding belief and manner of earthly comportment consistent with a “valueless” universe, only if, however, an awakening occurs, such as we find in the attuned philosopher strong enough to create *value-and-revalue* the world. The human arrives at the point where there is mistrust in all forms of “objective” and categorical explanations for life’s unfolding and, as related to the *pessimistic* worldly conditions expressed by the ancient Greeks in their myths and folk wisdom, there is no “meaning” in human suffering, we are, as well as nature, *beyond traditional religious and rationalistic notions of good, evil, and any objective notion of truth*.<sup>22</sup> It is possible, in a unique way that remains true to Nietzsche’s philosophy, to conceive pessimism as a mood (*Stimmung*) or mode of attunement similar to the manner we understand the emotional-psychic state of *Rausch* as an aesthetic psychological attunement - sexual ecstasy and orgiastic intoxication - inspired by participation in what Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* refers to as “Dionysian art”: The attunement of *Rausch* is inspired by “the psychology of the orgy as an over-flowing feeling of life and energy within which even pain acts as a stimulus...to the concept of the *tragic* feeling [*Stimmung*].”<sup>23</sup>

17 Nietzsche. *Will to Power*, trans., W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale. Vintage Books: New York, 1967, 11.

18 Ibid. 9.

19 Ibid., 24.

20 In *Will to Power*, Kaufman and Hollingdale translate “nihilism” in a manner that appears to convey the idea of the adjectival, “nihilistic.” Nihilism often appears to be used in a duplicitous manner: (1) To indicate the metaphysical condition of the universe and (2) To indicate a response or responses to this condition, i.e., indicating that one adopts a *nihilistic philosophy* in response to a “valueless” universe (the condition of *nihilism*). Our response to nihilism (the condition) determines the form(s) of *pessimism* (as philosophical response(s)) that we adopt and embrace.

21 Ibid. 9/

22 Ibid. 13. The condition of nihilism indicates that the “feeling of valuelessness [is] reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of “aim,” the concept of “unity,” or the concept of “truth.” Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking...Briefly: the categories “aim,” “being” which we used to project some value into the world – we *pull out* again; so the world looks *valueless*.”

23 *Twilight of the Idols*, 121.

Throughout Nietzsche's writing he provides a sustained and virulent critique of many and varied responses to *nihilism*, which includes a view toward several forms and grades of *pessimism* that underlie human comportment when confronted with life's meaninglessness and valueless nature. There are two main forms of *pessimism* as expressed through his philosophy, which relate directly to Nietzsche's understanding of modernity's response to *nihilism*: (1) *Pessimism of Strength*, which Nietzsche claims to have an "energy to its logic" and manifests in terms of "anarchism and nihilism," and (2) *Pessimism as Decline*, which manifests in terms of a weak and ineffective response to *nihilism*, "as growing effete-ness,"<sup>24</sup> both of which relate directly to: (1a) *Active Nihilism*, a "sign of increased power of the spirit," and (2a) *Passive Nihilism*, which is an expression of the "decline recession of the power of the spirit."<sup>25</sup> Related directly to our discussion of *pessimism* and *nihilism*, we must consider two forms of *suffering* and concomitant to this, two distinct types of *sufferers*. This issue of *suffering-suffers* is bound up inextricably with the human responses to nihilism as expressions of philosophy, art, and morality, for these endeavors and pursuits, according to Nietzsche, manifest lower and higher forms. The question for Nietzsche is always: *When one suffers, how, in what manner does that individual ultimately respond to that suffering - how does one bear it up, and beyond, how does one transform it into a cause for celebration?* Indeed, the value these pursuits acquire in *praxis* is linked intimately to the issue of whether the exercise of one's *will to power* contributes to or detracts from "the extraordinary expansion of its feeling of power, riches, necessary overflowing of all limits."<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche identifies (1) "those who suffer from an overfullness of life – they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight" into the general and insurmountable questionable nature of the universe (*Pessimism of Strength/Active Nihilism*);<sup>27</sup> and (2) "those who suffer from the impoverishment of life and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from their lives through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthesia, and madness [*Pessimism as Decline/Passive Nihilism*],"<sup>28</sup> namely, through forms of *escapism*, modes of *self-narcotization*,<sup>29</sup> to which we link *Hope* later in the analysis when exploring the responses to *nihilism* found in Christianity and the philosophy of Socrates.

In "Attempt at Self Criticism" Nietzsche details the importance of the understanding of authentic responses to *pessimism*, and here his reading of the issue is specifically related to the "Greeks and the pessimistic art form."<sup>30</sup> The Greeks might be said to have slowly convalesced from an *illness* and then found the strength to give birth to their tragic art. Indeed, it is in finding an antidote for *nihilism* in order to facilitate a *pessimism of strength* that necessitates that we remain "sick for a long time, and then, slowly, slowly, to become healthy," i.e., "healthier."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Nietzsche writes of overcoming a prolonged sickness to write *The Birth of Tragedy*, and for him the condition of *nihilism* engenders "a pathological transitional stage," requiring a recognition and acceptance that "there is no meaning at all," and then the issue arises whether the human's "productive forces" are strong enough, or if "decadence still hesitates and has not

<sup>24</sup> *Will to Power*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 422.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche. *Gay Science*, trans., W. Kaufmann. Vintage Books: New York, 1974, 328.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Will to Power*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Human All Too Human*, 9.

yet invented its remedies.”<sup>32</sup> In the process of overcoming the sickness of *nihilism* - a process we label the *continuum of illness-recovery* in Nietzsche - as a “sign of strength,” the spirit slowly recovers and grows strong enough to recognize and render a definitive judgment against the previous ways of living, e.g., finding the strength to turn away from and refuse to adhere to “convictions,” to fearfully cling to “articles of faith” that “express the constraints of conditions of existence,” which includes the categorical “submission to authority,” and when the spirit says “No” to traditional and inauthentic responses to *nihilism* and “Yes” to the legitimate task of pursuing “its maximum of relative strength,” life instantiates and unfolds in terms of a “violent form of destruction - as active nihilism.”<sup>33</sup> All attempts to overcome *nihilism*, also and necessarily entail the *revaluation of old values*, i.e., the replacement of the old value system with new values that are representative of the movement of the spirit in ways that facilitate an ascending life, a heroic life of continued *self-overcoming*, which does not shy away from and confronts the debilitating forces that hold the potential to engender a retreat from “life” in *passive nihilism*. Nietzsche is adamant that any attempts to confront and transcending *nihilism*,” “to escape nihilism without reevaluating our values so far,” produces the opposite effect of making “the problem more acute.”<sup>34</sup> According to Nietzsche, *active nihilism* ultimately inspires the “affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems,” and this is “the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility,” and this form of *self-overcoming* and *remaking* of the world is what he referred to in his later writings as the “Dionysian.”<sup>35</sup>

#### IV.

We now explore two ways in which *Hope* manifests in its nefarious and malevolent form, both of which Nietzsche is exceedingly critical: Christianity and “Socratic optimism” in the superior power of human *reason*, and we relate these to our forthcoming discussion of art in *The Birth of Tragedy*. So, let us consider the notion of *Hope* as invoked in our reading of the Pandora myth and recall that *Hope* is the most heinous of the evils sent to torment humans because “it prolongs man’s torment,”<sup>36</sup> in that it is not only an inauthentic palliative to suffering, it also blinds humans to the impossibility of ever fully grasping and mastering the world in knowledge, and hence establishing human superiority and dominance over nature. This for Nietzsche would require the impossible, namely, that existence has a *goal* and that underneath all *becoming* there is a grand *unity* and that there is intrinsic and supreme *value* within the world, namely, the world would be *explainable*.<sup>37</sup> We are certainly not indicating that adopting the philosophy of *active nihilism* precludes holding out “hope” for a better and more improved existence - indeed, the Greeks’ active pursuit of a better life by means of embodying a *pessimism of strength* harbors the “hope,” contributing to the *inspiration for the activity* of self-overcoming, and that through

<sup>32</sup> *Will to Power*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, 110. See also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* for Nietzsche’s poetizing of this movement of human self-overcoming in terms of the *trans-valuation of values*, in the “Three Metamorphoses of the Spirit”: The ascending spirit in its confrontation with nihilism and the values of the tradition is illustrated within the fable, or better, parable, of the camel that morphs into the lion and the loin that ultimately becomes a child, symbolizing a “new beginning,” the rebirth of the human spirit.

<sup>36</sup> *Human, All too Human*, 58.

<sup>37</sup> *Will to Power*, 13.



the creation and participation in art the dark and horrendous forces, the manifold “ills and evils,” oppressing their finite and ephemeral existence could be transformed and sublimated. Consider the Greek understanding of *eudaimonia*, the idealized drive to pursue an ascending and ethical “life of human flourishing,”<sup>38</sup> which is always in the process of developing, changing, and evolving - *praxis* can always be otherwise - instantiates the “hope” and legitimate belief that through personal and communal struggle - *esketic* discourse and education (*paideia*) - the human character (*hexis*) and soul (*psyche*) hold the potential to improve.<sup>39</sup> What Nietzsche is critical of, however, is the type and form of *Hope* bound up with delusion, blindness, and weakness - signs of *decadence* - leading to the pursuit of various philosophical endeavors that serve as exercises in *escapism*, which amount to ignoring and *fleeing in the face* of, and in many ways, compounding the problems and concerns plaguing the human’s terrestrial existence - i.e., when the supposed “cure” for *nihilism* is in reality the most deadly of illnesses.

To be specific, Nietzsche is critical of the type of *Hope* common to philosophies and world-views seeking permanent transcendence of either a *vertical* or *horizontal* nature, born of *sickness* and *illness*, as encountered in Schopenhauer’s pessimism, Wagner’s Romanticism, Socratic Rationalism, Christianity, and Platonism. Nietzsche launched countless vitriolic attacks against religion - Christianity - as a theological *Weltanschauung* and life-style grounded in the faith and belief in and *Hope* for another and superior “spiritual” (*supersensual*) world that transcends and is superior to the so-called material world (*vertical transcendence*): “The real world, unattainable for the moment, but promised to the wise, the pious, the virtuous,” to the Christian believer.<sup>40</sup> Much like the “winged evils,” which were characterized as illnesses - sicknesses - Nietzsche claims that it was Christianity that initially gave us a truly *diseased* world, for it “first brought sin into the world,” and although Christianity as a systematic religion has been “shaken to its deepest roots,” the “*belief in the sickness* which it taught and propagated continues to exist.”<sup>41</sup> Christianity has its origins in the festering resentment (*ressentiment*) that passes “sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and [seeks] to invent a world beyond it, a *true* world.”<sup>42</sup> The exigency to posit God as the “apex” of a given and universal truth, demonstrates a weakness of will that requires values given “from the *outside* - by some *superhuman* authority.”<sup>43</sup> The *Hope* that Christianity harbors for a new and better world, a *transcendent* realm of Heaven - belief in another life, the *afterlife* - is for Nietzsche one of the greatest dangers, in the form of a *hopeful* promise, Christianity sells to its converts. It perpetuates the harmful belief that our terrestrial existence is of little or no value, and worse, it serves as the terrestrial “training ground” or mere *dress rehearsal* in preparation for the next life, which will be better. This view “devalues” the only world we have, and does so by measuring it against “categories that refer to a purely fictitious world.”<sup>44</sup> Instead of cherishing

38 Martha C. Nussbaum. *Love’s Knowledge*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1990.

39 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., D. P. Chase. Dover Books: New York, 1998.

40 *Twilight of the Idols*, 50 – In “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth: History of an Error,” it is Platonic metaphysics that inspires the Christian faith in other-worldly transcendence and salvation, when the idea of the “Real World” (as *supersensuous* reality) “grows more refined, more enticing, more incomprehensible” and ultimately becomes more and more *woman-like*, it becomes Christian.

41 *Human All Too Human*, 78.

42 *Will to Power*, 13.

43 *Ibid.* 16.

44 *Ibid.* 13. Nietzsche recognizes that in the type of authoritarian moral “judgment” against the nihilistic conditions of existence that Christianity embraces eventually leads to the following conundrum: Inevitably, when the

and living life to the fullest in the pursuit of *making* and *remaking* a world for ourselves, we squander and so defile *this* world in hopes that another world will be better, and beyond this, when denigrating the *material* world Christianity, with its preference for the *immaterial*, also devalues the body.<sup>45</sup> Christianity provides an ineffective palliative against the real and true *dangers* of existence - the frightful uncertainty that confronts us when inhabiting a “valueless” world, which requires the heroic activity of *creating values* - a supremely *dangerous* task. But, as Nietzsche reminds us, and here we are reminded of the Greeks, “the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is - to *live dangerously!* Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas.”<sup>46</sup>

Christianity is the paradigmatic instantiation of *vertical transcendence*, but Nietzsche also makes reference and is critical of *horizontal* forms of transcendence, for Nietzsche observes that when we choose remedies against *nihilism*, more often than not, we choose that “which hastens exhaustion; Christianity is an example (to name the greatest example of such an aberration of the instincts); [and the unfettered believe in] ‘progress’ is another.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, we consider the second form of transcendence we have labeled *horizontal transcendence*, an idea is found in philosophers such as Hegel and Marx, where we encounter prophesizing on the perfected, utopian “end” to the process of “history,” the former through philosophical *idealism*, the latter through *dialectic materialism*.<sup>48</sup> This form of transcendence is also prevalent within strands of contemporary *secular humanism* - which Nietzsche would deem successors of Socrates - where, it is possible to state without much exaggeration, human reason is elevated and becomes *deified*, and the *Hope* exists that due to the inevitable *progress* of science and technology, as expressed through the superior faculty of human *reason*, the world *in-itself* will eventually be known and mastered to serve humanity’s purposes, as the fulfillment of a *futural secular prophecy*.<sup>49</sup> This we relate to “Socratic Optimism,” as discussed in *The Birth of Tragedy*

“repudiated world” is set against and devalued in favor of “an artificially built ‘true, valuable’ one. – Finally: one discovers of what material one has built the ‘true world’: and now all one is left is the repudiated world.” This leads to the kind of *social values* that are “erected over man to strengthen their voice, as if they were commands of God, as ‘reality,’ as the ‘true’ world as hope and *future* world.” This is the tendency we encounter in Kantian Moral Law ethics and other forms of “secular” *deontological* moral systems.

<sup>45</sup> *Anti-Christ*, 143.

<sup>46</sup> *Gay Science*, 228.

<sup>47</sup> *Will to Power*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Albert Camus. *The Rebel*, trans., A. Bower. Vintage Books: New York, 1991. Interested readers are encouraged to seek out Camus’s reading and critique what he terms failed instances of “metaphysical rebellion” - failed philosophies of “hope” - to which Nietzsche’s philosophy is included. On Hegel, Camus states the following: “Hegel’s undeniable originality lies in his definitive destruction of all vertical transcendence,” identifying the rational with the Real (142). “Values are thus only to be found at the end of history,” and just as Christianity denigrates the “here and now” in favor of a perceived and hoped for *future world*, Hegel claims that we “must act and live in terms of the future,” in terms of the divination of history with a promised salvation in its prophesized culmination (142). On Marx, Camus observes that Marx’s philosophy of the dialectic development and culmination of history “materializes” religion and Hegel’s *idealism*, however, “Marx’s atheism is absolute. But nevertheless it does reinstate the supreme being at the level of humanity,” and so Marx’s thought is an “enterprise for the deification of man” in a way that holds on the “hope” of a utopian end to human history that is akin to “traditional religions” (192).

<sup>49</sup> John Gray. *Straw Dogs*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: New York, 2003. “Humanism can mean many things,” observes philosopher John Gray, but proximally and for the most part is indicates a *hopeful* “belief in progress,” which means that “by using the new powers given us by growing scientific knowledge, humans can free themselves from the limits that frame the lives of other animals. This is the *hope* of nearly everybody nowadays, but it is groundless.” For an analysis of John Gray’s philosophy and critique of *secular humanism* in relation to our current

and *Twilight of the Idols*, which characterizes Socrates as the “archetype of theoretical optimist who, in his faith in the explicability of the nature of things, attributes the power of a panacea to knowledge, and sees error as the embodiment of evil.”<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche is highly critical of the Socratic drive to link theoretical knowledge with virtue and morality, which is expressed in the Socratic dictum that Nietzsche never tires of lampooning: Knowledge = Virtue. This *illusion*, idealized in Socrates, not only demonstrates the “unshakable belief that rational thought, guided by causality, can penetrate to the depths of being,” it also holds the erroneous belief that *reason* is “capable not only of knowing but even *correcting* being”<sup>51</sup>; thus human reason not only “knows” the world, it renders a binding moral adjudication against it. Nietzsche claims that the *theoretical optimism* of Socrates gives rise to modernity’s unbounded faith and *Hope* in the healing and indeed, *saving*, power of *democracy*, *systematic ethics*, and *science*. What we take from Nietzsche’s reading of “Socratic Optimism,” despite Nietzsche’s theory regarding Socrates ushering in the death of tragedy<sup>52</sup> - in Socrates, we encounter *philosophical thought* that “outgrows art and forces it to cling tightly to the bough of the dialectic”<sup>53</sup>- is that we must remain suspect and highly skeptical of claims to “know” the world in its entirety, avoiding the irrational *Hope* that the superiority of the human intellect will one day exhibit the power to solve and eradicate life’s problems and explain away its inherent and unsolvable mysteries. For we know that for Nietzsche, the world can never be brought under the control of *knowledge*, for it is a violent and powerful “monster of energy,” a tumultuous chaotic maelstrom, i.e., the *will to power and nothing besides*, which defies and is recalcitrant to all human efforts to fully understand it and permanently bring it to stand in our fragile and ephemeral works of art.

## V.

We now explore the manner in which the Homeric Greeks and Tragic Greeks responded to the *pessimistic* conditions of existence as expressed through both the Pandora myth and so-called “wisdom of Silenus,” and Nietzsche, in a sustained analysis in *The Birth of Tragedy*, reveals how the ancient Greeks demonstrated heroism in mounting an “aesthetic” response to what were *nihilistic-pessimistic* conditions of their lives through their “intellectual predilection for what is

environmental crisis, see: James M. Magrini. *The Ethical Call of Nature: Reticent Imperatives*. Routledge: UK, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 74. If we consider the Greek *θεωρία* (*theoria*) as it is related to *θεωρος* (*theoros*), from which our word “theory” is derived, it indicates a type of knowing that comes by way of “seeing,” and it is indicative of being a “spectator,” hence we get the sense of what the Greek understood as a “detached, spectator-like contemplation or knowing.” Socrates in the *Phaedo* speaks directly of this type of thought through which the soul (mind) can rid itself, as much as this might be possible, from its attachment to the body (67b-e). This notion was anathema to Nietzsche, for it was not the “mind” that thinks, according to Nietzsche, rather it was always the *body that thinks*, and in addition, are never mere spectators of existence, rather we are immersed and active participants within the world.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 73.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 62-63. Socrates, as Nietzsche claims, caused the degeneration of the Greeks’ instinct and emotion through his “rationalism,” and this infected tragedy, specifically Euripides, who “became the poet of aesthetic Socratism...the phenomenon of *aesthetic Socratism*, the chief law of which is, more or less: ‘to be beautiful everything must first be intelligible’ – a parallel to the Socratic dictum: only one who knows is virtuous.” Nietzsche’s radical argument attempts to establish that that after Sophocles, the “Euripidean *prologue* may serve as an example of the productivity of this [Socratic] rationalist method,” an offshoot of the Socratic need to work things out purely through the use of reason and the dialectic - through “explanation.”

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

hard, terrible, evil, problematic in existence” and because of their superior psychological “well-being, overflowing health, and *abundance* of existence.”<sup>54</sup> In the penultimate instance of art as a transfigurative life-enhancing force, Nietzsche references the expression of what he terms *Apolline* art, as expressed through the Homeric Greeks’s aesthetic, poetic, and mythological creation of the Olympian pantheon and the many heroes that populated the myths. As related directly to what we have sketched in §III regarding the continuum of *illness-recovery* in relation to the manifestation of our recognition and acceptance of the *pessimistic* condition of the universe and *nihilism*, Nietzsche traces the origins underlying the aesthetic creation of the great Olympian gods and goddesses, and observes that the Homeric Greeks overcame the horrors of existence that had previously “brought about the downfall of the gloomy Etruscans,” and so Nietzsche claims that we might imagine their drive to create and populate the poetic-mythological realm of the Olympians as follows: “the *Apolline* impulse to beauty led, in gradual stages, from the original Titanic order of the gods of fear to the Olympian order of the gods of joy, just as roses sprout on thorn bushes.”<sup>55</sup> *Apolline* art, instantiates a drive for clarity in presentation with a penchant for “appearances” in the form of fictional illusions, *sans* a dissembling effect that would broach the realm of complete *delusion*, which would instantiate a form of *escapism* and produce the condition of the soul’s *narcotization*.

The portrayal of the Olympians served an *aesthetic idealization* of the Greeks’ battle-torn lives, an oppressive, and at times, unbearable existence, but it was an *aesthetic idealization* that did not blind the Greeks to the *oppressive* and *terrible truths* of existence - from which they in turn drew aesthetic inspiration - and hence did not allow for a complete detachment from the *pessimistic* conditions they idealized and glorified in art. Thus, they created an aesthetic illusion wherein the participant is fully aware that the experience is *illusory*. The Homeric Greeks fully “knew and felt the fears and horrors of existence,” but in order to live a flourishing life, to draw inspiration for their continued growth and development, “they had to interpose the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians between themselves and these horrors,”<sup>56</sup> which allowed them to portray - and *live* - a “rich and triumphant existence, in which everything is deified, whether it be good or evil.”<sup>57</sup> It was this *Apolline* drive for illusory appearances, fictitious visions of the gods and heroes, that allowed the Greeks to “emerge triumphant over the terrible abyss in its contemplation of the world and its most intense capacity for suffering, by resorting to the most powerful and pleasurable illusions.”<sup>58</sup> Their art transformed and transfigured the suffering they endured, and through employing art as a clarifying and perfecting mirror to their existence, they were able to “contemplate” themselves, arriving at a sense of *self* that required aesthetic self-glorification, and to assure them that the re-creation of their lives in *Apolline* art was “worthy of glorification,” they had to “see themselves in a higher sphere, without contemplation seeming either a command or reproach.”<sup>59</sup> We see that the Homeric Greeks heroically avoided the two forms of *escapism* discussed associated with attempts to confront and transcend the *pessimistic* world, namely, the drive for a complete *escape* from the *terrible truths* of existence, e.g., in

<sup>54</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

terms of the *Hope for vertical transcendence* common to eschatological religious traditions<sup>60</sup> and the error of the “authoritative will” to render an objectivist moral judgment against the *nihilistic* conditions of existence, and hence seek an escape in theoretical philosophy or haughty moralizing.<sup>61</sup>

However, despite the transformative, “productive” prophylactic effect of *Apolline* art, erecting an aesthetic patrician between spectator and the “terrible abyss in [their] contemplation of the world and its intense capacity for suffering,”<sup>62</sup> as expressed within the Archaic-Homeric culture, Nietzsche is clear that the apotheosis of art for the Greeks is *not* found in Homer’s divine, poetized pantheon, but rather in Attic tragedy, specifically in Aeschylus and to a lesser degree Sophocles - at the critical exclusion of Euripides. Nietzsche’s reasoning is that *Apolline* art, though holding the potential to liberate the Greeks in the important sense of *transfiguring* their world through aesthetic creation, is expressive of and lies in servitude to the “principle of individuation” (*principium individuationis*) - a notion drawn directly from Schopenhauer - which exerts an influence on, giving structure to, the manner in which the human being experiences the world and others. *Apolline* art precludes human beings from authentically experiencing what we might understand as the “universal nature” of human life and suffering, which lies beyond individual, subjective experience. Nietzsche’s claim is that we are *not* as it first appears, namely, closed-off and interiorized “subjects” or “monads,” as in Descartes and Leibniz, cut off from the world and others. Rather, we are predisposed to, when properly motivated, inspired, and *attuned* through our participation in *tragic-art*, experience a *trans-subjective* reality, through communion with the *Primal Oneness* of things.<sup>63</sup> We have covered the penultimate Hellenic expression of the aesthetic drive by examining the Homeric Greeks, we now move to explore Nietzsche’s claim that the Greeks of the Tragic Age most successfully harnessed and discharged the *artistic-tragic* power to transform their world through the tragic-experience of the Greek theatre, which was given “birth” and facilitated by the merging and commingling of the *counter-striving* “psychological” forces of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*. We must note that although referencing these artistic forces as “psychological,” when further

60 Homer. *The Odyssey*, trans., W. H. D. Rouse. Mentor: New York, 1937, 134. When speaking about a transcendent after-life, we must keep in mind that unlike a Christian worldview the Greeks viewed Hades (underworld-afterlife) as an eternal subterranean place of dwelling populated by ghosts or anemic shadows of once vibrant, living humans, where Odysseus encounters “dead without sense or feeling, phantoms of mortals whose weary days are done.” When Odysseus glorifies the death of Achilles, he is corrected, for despite Achilles’s *time* (honor) and *kleos* (emblematic immortality through communal “stories”), residing in Hades is bleak and miserable: “I would rather be plowman to a yeoman farmer on a small holding,” laments Achilles, “than lord Paramount in the kingdom of the dead.”

61 *Will to Power*, 10-24.

62 *Birth of Tragedy*, 24.

63 Heidegger Martin. *Holderlin’s Hymns Germania and der Rhine*, trans., W. McNeill. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015, 79. Arguably, Nietzsche’s claim regarding the “principle of individuation” and art borders on the fantastic, however, if we consider the following claim by Heidegger in his writings of the 1930s (post-*Being and Time*) regarding the “communal nature” of *Dasein*, what Nietzsche proposes seems slightly less nebulous: Heidegger, in a 1934-36 lecture course, describes German comrades hunkered down in fox-holes fighting a common enemy, and in the harrowing context of war the soldiers experience a sense of “community,” they are united, no longer mere individuals fighting for their own survival, but rather united as a group, and beyond, as human beings in that they all have the “universal” potential to die, *stretched out toward death* as an ontological condition they all have in common which cannot be outstripped; they are united as *brethren of death*. Here, it is important to note that it is not merely a “common cause” that binds them, rather it is the *originary* ontological condition of death (human *mortality* as ontological category) within which each and every human finds themselves.

making the claim that these “artistic powers...spring from nature itself, *without the mediation of the artist*, and in which nature’s artistic urges are immediately and directly satisfied,”<sup>64</sup> it is obvious that Nietzsche views these forces in terms that are also *metaphysical* and, since these forces play a pivotal role in influencing and giving shape to the ancient Greek culture - their *way of life* and *being-in-the world* - we are also dealing with *ontology*, which subtends *metaphysics*.

We have already defined and discussed the *Apolline* principle in art, so here we introduce the *Dionysiac*,<sup>65</sup> as first unveiled in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which Nietzsche associated with unbounded sexuality, orgiastic overflow, intoxication, and violent cruelty. In Attic tragedy, the *Apolline* facilitates, by producing a mediating “narrative” structure, the emergence of the *Dionysiac*, the world in all of its rawness, as a maelstrom of competing and destructive forces in a state of perpetual change and *Heraclitean* flux (the world as *will to power*). Whereas *Apolline* art transfigures surface phenomena and transforms the way things *appear*, *Dionysiac* tragic-art seeks “delight not in phenomena themselves,” but rather that which is “behind the phenomena,” and what lies behind the phenomena *attunes* and transforms us, for we are brought, momentarily, through our participation in the tragic performance, into the *presence* of the overwhelming and sublime presence of *nature*, which “addresses us with its true, undisguised voice.”<sup>66</sup> According to Nietzsche, since the *Apolline* consciousness, “like a veil, hid the *Dionysiac* world from...view,”<sup>67</sup> it was the presentation of and participation in tragedy that serves as what we might understand as the *phenomenological* means by which to wrest the *Dionysiac* from concealment, to bring it to *presence*, bring to the light of revelation what had previously remained cloaked and hidden. In communion with the *Apolline*-mediated rising *Dionysian* force, the tragic spectators, as participants in the tragic hero’s downfall and destruction, transcended their status as isolated individuals, they were momentarily transported beyond the *principle of individuation*, no longer focused on the “terrors of individual existence,” they became *one* with others as part of a larger all-inclusive whole, and as a “metaphysical consolation,” attuned by and transfigured within the *attunement* of *Rausch*, they were momentarily torn away from “the bustle of changing forms,”<sup>68</sup> and became part of, as they merged with others in “the primal essence itself,” i.e., the deep and original *Dionysiac* essence of nature. In the destructive downfall of the tragic hero, the participants found “delight” and sensed the “eternity of that delight in Dionysiac ecstasy,”<sup>69</sup> Thus, as participants in the tragic spectacle, in spite of finding themselves in the thralls of terror and suffering through experiencing the *tragic reversal* (*peripeteia*), Nietzsche argues that the participants were “happy to be alive, not as individuals but as the single living thing, merged with its creative delight,”<sup>70</sup> which their participation in the tragic spectacle inspired.

<sup>64</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 18.

<sup>65</sup> James M. Magrini. “The Overman as Supreme Metaphysical Artist: Heidegger’s Reading of Nietzsche,” *Existentialia*, Vol. 26 (1). We note that in Nietzsche’s later writings, e.g., *Twilight of the Idols*, the characterization of the *Dionysiac*, or *Dionysian*, no longer references a metaphysical principle of art in “nature.” Rather it is employed to describe the life of self-overcoming associated with the “Over-man” (*Ubermensch*). For an analysis of the form of aesthetic, metaphysical existence the “Over-man” enacts and instantiates as the *supreme artist* - as related to the *Dionysian*.

<sup>66</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 80.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 80.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

To reiterate, the mediating contribution of the *Apolline* provides the necessary *form* and creates the *illusion* that ultimately entices and draws participants into the drama and at once protects them from being overwhelmed and ultimately destroyed by the rising and surging of the pure, unadulterated power of the original *Dionysiac* forces, through which, in times of the ancient festivals of Bacchus, the *rights of spring*, unleashed the “most savage beasts of nature,” creating an experience that was a “repellent mixture of lust and cruelty”; a proverbial “witches brew.”<sup>71</sup> Such an effect of being overwhelmed by the *Dionysiac*, would in fact produce the opposite effect of that which the tragedy inspired for the Greeks, it would, as opposed to inspiring a *return to the world* within a transfigured and invigorated conscious spirit and lust for life despite the horrors that give context to the human condition, induce a retreat into a negation of the will, “a weary nihilism that no longer attacks; its most famous form, Buddhism, a passive nihilism, a sign of weakness,”<sup>72</sup> a rejection of a life of action and, overtaken by a profound sense of “resignation,” slips silently and lifelessly into a *pessimism of decline-passive nihilism* that paralyzes all comportment, which Nietzsche found repulsive in his critical reassessment of Schopenhauer as expressed many years after *The Birth of Tragedy* in his “Attempt at Self-Criticism.”<sup>73</sup> This, of course, runs contra to the description from §IV above, regarding the abandonment of *Hope* for *another* more *perfect* world, because, as we saw, for the Greeks, the world was temporarily transfigured and is affirmed as “valuable” despite the bleak and dismal conditions structuring the world, and this phenomenon is expressed by Nietzsche in what might serve as the grounding tenet of *The Birth of Tragedy*: “[O]ur highest dignity lies in the meaning of works of art - for it is only as *an aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*.”<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Hope* for a transfigured and flourishing existence takes the form of aesthetics, tragic-art as a form of “attunement” through creative illusion, which avoids devolving into *escapism*, does not hold out *Hope* for *vertical transcendence*, faith in an afterlife of an otherworldly nature. In addition, the tragic-Greeks did not hold the view that embraces the *omniscient* and *omnipotent* nature or the human’s powers of reasoning, manifesting the *Hope* for *horizontal transcendence*, for they knew their limitations as mere mortals and then celebrated those limits - their *finitude* – in works of *life-transforming art*.<sup>75</sup>

## VI.

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche describes the “*novelties*” that *The Birth of Tragedy* introduced to the scholarly world and the public, which we have covered in some depth: (1) The understanding of the *Dionysiac* phenomenon (which, we must state, underwent considerable

<sup>71</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> *Will to Power*, 18.

<sup>73</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 32. In such a cultural age and condition of the Attic Greeks, the human being “is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of the whole of nature reveals itself to the supreme gratification of the primal Oneness amidst the paroxysms of intoxication.” (18). In his “Attempt as Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche observes, in relation to this claim that the tragic artist always sees “*art under the lens of life*.” (5).

<sup>75</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant. *The Greeks*. trans., C. Lambert and T. L. Fagan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 16. Indeed, as Jean-Pierre Vernant recognizes, “the oracle, ‘Know Thyself’ meant: learn your limits; know you are a mortal man; do not attempt to be the gods’ equal.” To know: Vernant’s anthropology of the ancient Greek “psyche” - his interpretation and reading of the Greeks differs from Nietzsche’s more creative reading - indicates that it could never be understood in terms of the modern phenomenon, traceable to Cartesian philosophy, of the “principle of individuation” that Nietzsche philosophizes.

evolution as Nietzsche's philosophy developed); and (2) the "understanding of Socratism," which is nothing other than an elevated form of *rationalism* pitted against instinct and emotion.<sup>76</sup> As we have shown, to overcome *Hope* expressed through either *vertical* or *horizontal* transcendence requires "*courage* and, as a condition of this, a superfluity of *strength*," and it is necessary that we avoid the "inspiration of weakness" and cowardice of pessimism to "take *flight* in the face of reality."<sup>77</sup> In "Attempt at Self-Criticism," Nietzsche revisits and reemphasizes what is entailed in embracing and instantiating a philosophy emblematic of the *pessimism of strength* as opposed to its opposite, and it is possible to *learn* from Nietzsche's sustained and critical confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with the Greeks that this ancient culture might be thought of in a radically different manner than the idealized Hellenes that "Winckelmann and Goethe constructed for themselves."<sup>78</sup> Because Nietzsche's interpretation, while undoubtedly emphasizing the "beauty" of both the cultures of the Homeric and Tragic Greeks, also emphasized the "heroic" manner in which to confront *nihilism* and respond to the *pessimistic* conditions of the universe - and to find, in terms of forging and creating, *value*, indeed *supreme value*, in the aesthetic responses to such conditions.

Nietzsche uniquely explored the depths of the ancient Greeks' psychology, their joy, suffering, cruelty, and unbounded sexual drive expressed through intoxication, festive moods, and the celebration of the tragic spectacle - "all belonging to the oldest *festal joys* of mankind, all also preponderate in the early 'artist'."<sup>79</sup> What is perhaps most important from Nietzsche's analysis is his understanding and portrayal of the Greeks' overall "*tragic feeling*" about life in the face of all of its terrors and unpredictability, and this feeling, Nietzsche tells us, must not only be embraced and preserved, it must also be amplified. Thus, against Aristotle - or at least the "Aristotle" of traditional readings of *poetics*, which highlight *katharsis* and its function in tragedy - the Greeks, according to Nietzsche did not seek to "get rid of [purge] pity and terror, not...to purify [themselves] of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge," but rather to transform it, sublimate it into their works of art, to allow themselves to momentarily "look beyond pity and terror, to *realize in* [themselves] the eternal joy of becoming - that joy which also encompassed the *joy in destruction*,"<sup>80</sup> something we might recognize as representing the *tragic-double bind* in human life. So, we conclude that Nietzsche's Greeks might teach us about *philosophizing* on life in a way that always holds on to and draws inspiration from the understanding that life's most difficult and thorny issues are not always "problems" to be solved and eradicated, rather they are a crucial aspects of the eternal "mysteries" of life, the mystery of Nature's unfolding.

Despite our discussion regarding various forms of reactions and responses to *nihilism*, including what Nietzsche believed was the most heroic and successful response, found in ancient Greek tragic-art and *not* Greek philosophy - especially in the philosophies of Socrates and later Plato, "a coward in the face of reality - consequently he flees in the ideal"<sup>81</sup> - we must stress, as related to our earlier discussion of *active nihilism*, that this response, be it aesthetic or even philosophical in nature, *does not* because it *cannot* defeat or transcend *nihilism* - or the

<sup>76</sup> *Ecce Homo* 49

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 50

<sup>78</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, 120.

<sup>79</sup> *Will to Power*, 421.

<sup>80</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, 121.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 118.



*nihilistic* condition of existence - rather, to reiterate, it is a movement and response (art/philosophy) through which the Greeks found ways to lessen the depressive and crushing influence *nihilism* by embracing ways-of-life that avoid, much like Christianity and *secular humanism*, further contributing to the *nihilistic* condition. Nihilism cannot necessarily be overcome; there is no such thing as a complete *twisting free* of nihilism – but we can and must respond to it, *and we ourselves* should find in art, much like Nietzsche did, that it is one of the most potent and powerful responses that acts in the face of *nihilism* as the “*redemption of the man of action* - of those who not only see the terrifying and questionable nature of existence, but live it, want to live it, the tragic-warlike man, the hero.” And, beyond this, art is also the “redeemer” of the “*man of knowledge...the sufferer*,” inspiring us to want to “know” and *will suffering* as it is “transfigured, deified...a form of great delight.”<sup>82</sup> For related to our forgoing thoughts, art *is* for Nietzsche “the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, antinihilist *par excellence*.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *Will to Power*, 452.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*.