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Floraphilia: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Philosophical Significance of Plant-Life

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Abstract

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By Lauren E. Caryer

As philosophers of "the will," Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are often characterized as advancing a philosophical psychology in which the self is a strongly defined individual who is engaged in highly agonistic relationships with others and with the world around him. The will is portrayed as the mechanism by which the individual organizes his surroundings to correspond to his needs. In this dissertation I argue that a closer examination of the function of the will in each philosopher coupled with close attention to the ways in which each figure deals explicitly with plant life and employs botanical imagery and metaphors, yields a picture of the way each philosopher understands the pre-subjective life-as-such which undergirds human consciousness and experience.

The dissertation explores the two philosopher's understanding of the will as constitutive of desire. I argue that much of their work describes an appetitive model of life. I further argue that the works of both thinkers also contain elements of a very different way of understanding life and philosophical psychology. This second reading focuses on Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's descriptions of plant life and their uses of plant imagery and metaphors. Using this reading, I present an alternative model of life, what I refer to as the vegetal model. This vegetal model of life privileges relationality over subjectivity, vulnerability over individual survival, and becoming over being.

In the conclusion I will makes some initial comments on these themes of vegetal life and their usefulness to the discourse surrounding life in contemporary post-humanist, biopolitical, and environmental thought. I suggest that philosophical engagement with plant life would provide tools for these philosophical inquiries which complement and expand on recent thinking in the field of philosophy and animal life.

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Introduction

§1. The Silent Plant, Silence on Plants

In *The Open,* his pivotal work in the realm of post-humanism and biopolitics, Agamben makes the following observation:

> For anyone undertaking a genealogical study of the concept of "life" in our culture, one of the first and most instructive observations to be made is that the concept never gets defined as such. And yet, this thing that remains indeterminate gets articulated and divided time and again through a series of caesurae and oppositions that invest it with a decisive strategic function in domains as apparently distant as philosophy, theology, politics, and —only later—medicine and biology. That is to say, everything happens as if, in our culture, life were *what cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided.*[1]

In his brief (and final) philosophical text "Immanence: a Life…" Gilles Deleuze proffers similar commentary regarding life's resistance to conceptual determination. Life is "a *haecceity*, which now singularizes rather than individuating [*sic*]" and hence is preceded by the indefinite article: "a life."[2] The question of how the *haecceity*, the this-ness, of life is generalized and constituted into *life* through the structures of biopolitics drives much of Agamben's work. We see it both in his analysis of the ban as generative of *Homo Sacer* and bare life, and in his treatment of the anthropological machine in *The Open.* In both of these works, Agamben treats bare life as that which exists at the "threshold of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion, *nomos* and

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[1] Giorgio Agamben. *The Open.* Trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 13.
[2] Gilles Deleuze. "Immanence: a Life…" in *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze.* Edited and translated by Jean Khalfa (New York: Continuum Press, 2003), 171-172.

physis"[3] In discussing this threshold, Agamben turns to the language of vegetative life.

Agamben takes up the term vegetative life from Aristotle, who sees self-nutrition, or vegetation, as the fundamental criterion for *all* life. As Aristotle writes in *De Anima*, vegetation is the "originative power the possession of which leads us to speak of things as *living* at all.[4] While such delineation may appear helpful in the search for a definition of "life," Agamben charges Aristotle with the aforementioned strategy of ceaseless articulation in place of a definition; in lieu of defining "life," Aristotle proffers a series of distinctions, a trio of levels of vitality.

Agamben argues that this rhetorical strategy of "*divide et impera*" is ultimately what "allows the construction of the unity of life as the hierarchical articulation of a series of functional faculties and oppositions."[5] This set of divisions which lies at the heart of the Western concept of life comes with dramatic political implications. Most crucially, these caesuras between vegetative, sensitive, and rational life —all of which are simultaneously sustained within each person— are precisely the foundation of the "human"; hence a post-human inquiry into "humanity" begins with the acknowledgment that the "human" is the *product* of the division between animal and rational life.

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[3] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*. Translated by Daniel Heller Roazen. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 27.
[4] Aristotle. *De Anima*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume I.* Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Translated by J. A. Smith. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 656-658.
[5] Agamben, *The Open*, 14.

Bare life amounts to the element of life that is excluded in order to delineate the human and subsequently the zone of demarcation of biopolitics.

One of the most striking examples Agamben gives of the means by which contemporary biopolitics constitutes itself through the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of bare life lies in his treatment of *neomorts* (the overcomatose) and those in persistent vegetative states. Agamben discusses the *coma dépasse* or overcoma, the most severe grade of coma in which both relational life functions and vegetative functions have wholly ceased. The overcomatose person exhibits total brain death (including death of the brain stem) and is supported through artificial respiration until his or her organs can be harvested for transplant. *Coma dépasse* only became possible in 1959 with the advent of artificial respiration apparatus and became the political boundary between life and death with the 1981 Uniform Determination of Death Act (following the Karen Quinlan controversy). The advent of the overcoma is instructive from a philosophical perspective because it demonstrates that the boundaries between life and death and human and non-human are subject to politicization and sovereign power. [6]

This political parsing between human and non-human, alive and dead can best be seen when we compare the overcoma to the persistent vegetative state. While in a persistent vegetative state, relational life functions are minimal to nonexistent yet vegetative functions persist independent of life-sustaining equipment. Agamben describes the implications of this division between

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[6] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 160-165.

relational and vegetative functions (and vegetative functions and the lack thereof) in the following:

> It is hardly necessary to mention the strategic importance that the identification of this split between the functions of vegetative life and the functions of relational life has had in the history of modern medicine… And as Foucault has shown, when the modern State, starting in the seventeenth century, began to include the care of the population's life as one of its essential tasks, thus transforming its politics into biopolitics, it was primarily by means of a progressive generalization and redefinition of the concept of vegetative life… that the State would carry out its new vocation. And still today, in discussion about the definition *ex legere* of the criteria for clinical death, it is a further identification of this bare life – detached from any brain activity and, so to speak, from any subject – which decides whether a certain body can be considered alive or must be abandoned to the extreme vicissitude of transplantation.[7]

Classically, death was determined by a physician using "two ancient categories for the assessment of death" namely the absence of breathing and lack of a pulse. The modern medical capacity to "create" an overcomatose person (through artificial respiration, artificial circulation, etc.) marks a new relationship between science and death, wherein the boundaries of life itself become the new stakes for science.[8] Although the criteria have shifted, the point of reference for the persistent vegetative state, the classical coma, and the *coma dépasse* is the existence of vegetative function – albeit in the latter, the vegetative function may be maintained solely through life support technologies.

If in fact, the overcomatose "vegetable" is a figure of the operation of the political constitution of life, then it would appear that vegetative life itself is what is at issue. This is, in fact, supported by a whole constellation of terms which are

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[7] Agamben, *The Open,* 15

[8] Agamben, *Homo Sacer, 160-162.*

found within the shared terrain of medicine and biopolitics: persistent vegetative state, harvesting organs, transplanting organs, the use of stem cells, etc. The implicit conclusion, in statements such as these, is this: not only is the distillation and exclusion of the nutritive/vegetative function necessary for the demarcation of boundary of political life, *the exclusion of the plant is necessary for the demarcation of the human*. As such, it would appear that the plant is the figure *par excellence* of bare life. A robust understanding of the status of the human within the post-humanist and biopolitical framework thus requires a closer examination of the points of contact between the plant and the "nutritive" qualities of the human psyche.

Given the paradigmatic position of the figures of the overcomatose person and the person in a persistent vegetative state, and given Agamben's insight into the nutritive function as the most basic articulation of "life" in the history of western thought, one would think the plant would play a much larger role in Agamben's work. But aside from these brief encounters with *De Anima* and medical *faux vivants,* Agamben remains largely mute on the role of the vegetative soul in the processes of the anthropomorphizing machine. This omission is all the more obvious when Agamben describes the overall trajectory of *The Open* as a working through of the suggestion that "the aporias of the philosophy of our time coincide with the aporias of this body that is irreducibly drawn and divided between animality and humanity."[9]

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[9] Agamben, *The Open*, 12.

Yet, in my view, the nutritive aspect of life (or, in Aristotle's terminology, the vegetative soul) and its relation to —and exclusion from— the realms of man and animal is a crucial element to the investigation of the questions posed by the problems of biopolitics and post-humanism. This curious elision, whereby Agamben mentions plant-life only obliquely with reference to the metaphorical language surrounding brain death and organ donation, demonstrates the position of the plant in philosophical thought. The plant and the vegetative functions of nutrition, growth, and decay are formative and critical in any foray into the philosophy of life. Yet even philosophers who are very serious about the question of life, from Aristotle to Agamben, remain largely silent on the plant.[10]

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[10] One might look to Aristotle's treatment *On Plants* for evidence to counter this claim. However, most of this work is scientific (rather than philosophical) in nature. Aristotle does address the metaphysical status of plants in the first two sections, but by the fourth paragraph, Aristotle is already using the plant to describe the more saturated life of the sensing animal:

> *What, therefore, is the principle of life in animals? What is it that raises the noble animal…from the sphere of perplexity and doubt? For the heavenly bodies feel no outside influence, and sensation is an effect produced on a sentient being. Now a plant has no movement of itself, for it is fixed in the earth, which is itself immovable. Whence, then, shall we infer any similarity which may enable us to attribute life to the plant? For there is no one thing which includes all of them [i.e. plants, animals, and heavenly bodies]. We therefore assert that sensation is common to animal life, because sensations marks the distinction between life and death… And one ought not to shrink from the use of these terms on the ground that there is no mean between the animate and the inanimate, between life and the deprivation of life; indeed, there is a mean between life and the inanimate, because the inanimate is that which has no soul nor any portion of it. But a plant is not one of those things which entirely lack a soul, because there is some portion of a soul in it; and it is not an animal, because there is no sensation in it, and things pass one by one from life into non-life.*

This passage posits plants as residing in a gray zone between life (characterized by sensation) and death. A sort of buffer between the esteemed animal and lifelessness. This is even more evident as Aristotle further describes the plant as "imperfect," and posits that "plants are only created for the sake of animals" and "the function of the animal is better and nobler than all those of the plant." See: Aristotle. "On Plants," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. II*, edited and translated by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1251-1253. Here the philosophical discussion of the life of plants is coopted as a platform to discuss sensation (and later, desire) in animals. Matthew Hall, scientist at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh notes that Aristotle's botany is flawed in large part because the otherwise astute ancient empiricist evaluates plants not on their own merits but in contrast to animals. This pervasive zoocentrism

Agamben argues, in his discussion of the anthropomorphizing machine, that the animal is the foil which makes possible the biopolitical sphere of humanity. But the plant, construed by philosophers as unthinking, unfeeling, silent, immobile, and yet somehow *alive*, is the ground upon which the human's confrontation with her own animality unfolds. A more serious philosophical inquiry into plant life could reveal the ways in which our thinking about plants shades our understanding of our humanity, animality, and the *haecceity* of our own lives.

§2. The Sensitive Plant

While the Aristotelian hierarchy of being may have done a disservice to the botanical world, using plants as the groundcover for the margin between the living and the inert, other fields have not been so dismissive. Poet Francis Ponge describes his writing process in terms of giving expression to the mute objects and beings in our lives. He is particularly enchanted by various species of plants and writes the following in the introductory prose remarks within the poem "The Carnation:"

> …instead of feeling or human adventures, I choose as subjects the most emotionless objects available… that for me the guarantee of the need to express appears to reside in the object's habitual muteness.
>
> Guarantees of both a need to express and an opposition to language, to common expression.
>
> Mute opposable evidence.[11]

Ponge's poems are exploratory and sketch-like, delicate provisional drafts exploring the *haecceity* of things and creatures in the world around him.

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leads Aristotle to understand plants behavior and physiology "as a *series of lacks.*" See Matthew Hall. *Plants as Persons, A Philosophical Botany* (Albany: SUNY press, 2001), 26-27.

[11] Francis Ponge. *Vegetation*. Translated by Lee Fahnestock (New York: Red Dust Press, 1987), 2.

Sometimes these subjects are objects (a cigarette, an orange, a door, a pebble), less frequently they are portraits of people (a gymnast, a new mother), but quite often Ponge is fascinated by plants (asparagus, mimosa, moss) and the least expressive types of animals (oyster, snail, shrimp). Ponge repeatedly turns to plants as subjects for his poetry because they pose a challenge to thought. Plants compel Ponge to relate to them; they "need to express" and yet they can't be understood because they lie outside of the human sphere of language.

Ponge sees his project as "trying to bring out" some specific "traits" of these living things who can only express themselves by their very being —their habits, their postures, their physical reality. The plant's being-as-expression is evidence opposing the human tendency to view the plant as insensible and thus inchoate. Ponge's poetic explorations of moss, shrimp and stones are his attempts to marshal the being-as-expression of mute objects into the human territory of language.

Scientists, too, have seen evidence that despite plants' seeming insensibility, they are in fact awash in complex expression and sensation. These investigations trace their beginnings back to Darwin's studies of motion in insectivorous plants and sensation in the apical meristems of roots. Darwin himself was an avid advocate of plant intelligence. In his final work, *The Power of Movement of Plants,* Darwin and his son Francis discovered that phototropic sensitivity in plants is located in the shoot apical meristem. The Darwin experiments showed that the tip of the shoot was able to sense blue light,

prompting the main segment of the shoot to bend toward the light and suggesting a sophisticated level of differentiation and communication within the organism.[12] Darwin found similar sensitivity to gravity and moisture in the root apical stem (the radicle), which governs directional growth in the roots. Darwin goes so far as to conclude the treatise with the bold claim: "It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that the tip of the radicle thus endowed, and having the power of directing the movements of the adjoining parts, acts like the brain of one of the lower animals; the brain being seated within the anterior end of the body, receiving impressions from the sense-organs, and directing the several movements."[13]

Contemporary scientists are taking Darwin at his word and the advent of genetic mapping has generated an explosion of new studies showing relational and sensory behavior in plants. In his book *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses*, director of plant bioscience at the Manna Center in Tel Aviv, Daniel Chamovitz relates a dizzying number of studies that have shown everything from photoreceptor activity akin to sight in plants (including phototropism, photoperiodism and cryptochrome-induced circadian regulation) to chemical communication akin to olfaction to mechanoreceptor activity akin to touch. He

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[12] A good summary of this experiment can be found in David Chamovitz. *What a Plant Knows* (New York: Scientific American Press, 2012), 21-15

[13] Charles Darwin and Sir Francis Darwin. *On the Power of Movement in Plants* (Public Domain text available at http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5605/pg5605-images.html), 574. Chamovitz also describes this experiment in *What a Plant Knows*, pp 97-99.

also discusses positive evidence of plant proprioception (orientation in space) and cellular epigenetic and electrochemical memory.[14]

At the time of publication of Chamovitz's book in 2012, there was little in the way of evidence for any botanical capacity akin to sound. But in July of 2014, researchers Heidi Appel and Rex Cocroft of the University of Missouri found the first evidence that plants are able to launch chemical countermeasures in response to the sound of munching caterpillars.[15] A decade earlier renowned French botanist, Francis Hallé traveled to the canopies of tropical forests (in a raft suspended from a hot-air dirigible!) to study genetic variability within individual trees. His work has prompted him to argue that plants make up for their lack of behavioral plasticity (in comparison to ambulatory animals) with extreme genetic plasticity.[16]

Given that plants have genes, receptors, and hormonal markers that perform in much the same way as animal senses, some scientists (in line with Darwin's aforementioned observations with regard to radicle meristem activity) have even gone so far as to refer to these sorts of investigations as plant neurobiology. At the forefront of this school of thought is renowned behavioral ecologist, Stefan Mancuso, who coined the term when founding the International Laboratory of Plant Neurobiology at the University of Florence. Although, lacking a brain or centralized nervous system—plants do not have neurons *per*

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[14] Chamovitz, *What a Plant Knows,* 9-133.

[15] Heidi Appel and Rex Cocroft. "Plants respond to leaf vibrations caused by insect herbivore chewing," in *Oecologia* (Vol. 174, No. 4, August 2014), 1257-1266

[16]Francis Hallé. *In Praise of Plants*. Translated by David Lee. (Portland: Timber Press, 2002), 204-216.

se—Mancuso uses this (not entirely uncontroversial) term to call attention to the degree to which plant biochemistry resembles neurological activity. Mancuso further argues that if "intelligence" is defined by the ability to solve problems, then plants are indeed far more intelligent than we have previously given them credit for. They are capable of defending themselves against predation, enlisting the help of mobile creatures for pollination, and growing around obstacles in search of sustenance.[17]

This proliferation of new research on the sensitive capacities of plants stems in large part from a rejection of the long-held cultural assumption that plants are somehow inferior to animals. These scientists all reiterate the necessity of approaching plants with a view to their own merits. Francis Hallé posits that one key to understanding plant life is to recognize the vast import and the unique needs of sessile life. For example, sessile life forms trap energy differently than mobile animals, i.e. photosynthesis vs. digestion. For this reason, most animals are best described as "volumes" while plants are better described as "surfaces."[18] In a similar vein, the sessile nature of plants leave them constantly vulnerable to predation. Plants fight this through the use of physical and chemical defenses.[19] They also tolerate a certain amount of predation; this toleration requires that they have no irreplaceable organs or centralized control

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[17] Stefano Mancuso. *Brilliant Green.* Translated by Alessandra Viola. (Washington DC: Island Press, 2015), 129-131.

[18] Hallé, *In Praise of Plants,* 43-53. Hallé suggests that assimilating surfaces always benefit from the greatest surface area and that this is why animal digestive tracts are, like plants, vast surfaces. In his elegant words, "Animals are confused plants, turned inside out like a glove, with infolded leaves and roots in their digestive tracts. Plants are fantastic animals, their insides turned out, bearing their entrails like feathers" (50).

[19] Ibid., 156-158.

centers—as the separation of these would entail the death of the plant. Instead plant growth is necessarily open, indeterminate and cumulative.[20] In short, traits that appear as rudimentary when compared to animals, for example the plant's lack of organs, are quite elegant and efficacious when judged based on the needs and life habits of a root-bound, light assimilating organism.

§3. The Problem

Mancuso, Hallé and other plant scientists are quick to note the overwhelming disregard for plants in the discipline of biology taken as a whole, where there continues to be a marked zoocentric bias; as little as 8% of professional biology literature deals specifically with plant life.[21] Matthew Hall remarks that even in environmental studies the tendency is to concentrate on the homogenous and imprecise term "nature" rather than on the "plant-dominated biosphere" which largely characterizes nature.[22] This zoocentrism pervades our daily reality as well; plants are often just viewed as scenery, the backdrop to the lives of animals and people, and not as the vital entities they are. Both Hallé and Mancuso point out the most extreme example of our cultural zoocentrism, the figure of Noah's Ark. Hallé closes *In Praise of Plants* with a cartoon illustration and the following remark, "Not one, but two Noah's arks are needed. The first

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[20] Ibid., 94-99.
[21] Ibid., 27-31. Hallé also mentions that the bias against botany has a gendered element, as female researchers are better represented in plant sciences. He specifically cites Barbara McClintock's work on transposable elements in maize, a discovery which she made in the 1940's but which was largely overlooked until similar genetic mechanisms could be found in fruit flies. She ultimately did receive the Nobel Prize for this work (in 1983), but the recognition came almost 40 years after the fact (29).
[22] Hall, *Plants as Persons,* 2-3.

would be called *Phyton* and would be the flagship. The other, *Zoon*, would be of little interest and left behind."[23] Hallé finds this pervasive bias to be especially distressing as plants comprise 99% of the biomass on the planet, they are responsible for oxygenating the atmosphere, they are the foundation of the food chain, they anchor the soil, and they are fundamental to the biodiversity of biotic communities. Life without plants would be both harrowing and brief.

Botanical life thus lies at a crucial juncture in contemporary philosophy: both environmental philosophy and post-humanist philosophy would do well to recognize the unique place of plants. However, the recent trend has both of these disciplines engaging with the human-animal relationship at the expense of thinking about plants. A brief survey of philosophical literature published in the past seven years reveals a veritable explosion in texts on animals and animality which extend far beyond the narrow ethical arguments for animal rights advanced in the 1970's and 1980's by figures such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan. Thinkers as disparate as Stanley Cavell, Donna Haraway, John McDowell, and Jacques Derrida have recently propounded upon the value of reflection on the animal as a way of achieving a better understanding of our own place in the world.[24] This turn to animality is fueled, in large part, by several

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[23] Hallé, *In Praise of Plants,* 296; Mancuso, *Brilliant Green,* 2-4

[24] See for example: *Philosophy and Animal Life* by Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, and John McDowell (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); *The Animal that Therefore I Am* by Jacques Derrida (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* by Matthew Calarco (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); *The Open: Man and Animal* by Agamben (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* by Vanessa Lemm (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009); *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal* by Christa Davis Acampora *et al.* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

larger trends in recent philosophical history. First, much philosophy today is striving to create a climate of "post-humanist" inquiry through attempting to overcome traditional divisions between mind and body, self and other, and culture and nature. One major element of the post-humanist project is the rejection of conventional notions of subjectivity in favor of an account of personhood which stresses relationality and bodily presence as originary factors constitutive of identity. Viewed from this perspective the subject is something that arises out of environmental interactions and is thus, like other creatures, beholden to her physical existence. The realignment of the human with her animal counterparts, as found in these works on the philosophy of animality is thus crucial to the overall post-humanist project.

A second, related reason for such a staggering influx of such animal literature lies in the growing discontent felt within environmental philosophy toward the term "nature." Originally conceived of as a branch of applied ethics, which sought to extend moral consideration to the ecological realm, the majority of founding figures in environmental philosophy (i.e. Aldo Leopold, J. Baird Callicott, and Holmes Rolston III) generally embraced the term "nature" with all of its Romanticist trappings. Recent work in environmental philosophy is more wary. Denizens of third wave Critical Theory argue that nature is a social construction which through placing the ecological order outside of human control absolves humans from their responsibility toward it.[25] Heideggerian

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[25] See for example: *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* by Steven Vogel (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.)

critiques of nature often point to the apparent self-sufficiency of nature conceived of as a whole, which casts nature as an object, a mere resource for consumption, with which we are unable to enter in a truly reciprocal relationship.[26] Likewise the eco-feminist tradition rejects any dualistic notion of nature as something inert and irrational to be analyzed and made useful within a patriarchal "logic of domination."[27] Philosophy which emphasizes the animality of humanity is a means of resituating the person within the ecological order thereby abdicating such objectification and hierarchical dualism. While I certainly have no argument against this turn to the animal, I am cautious about doing so at the expense of other interesting and valuable encounters. A closer examination of the place of plant life in philosophy would likely bring fascinating ramifications that might not be otherwise unearthed.

§4. The Turn to Lebensphilosophie

Following the completion of his final book, *The View of Life,* and shortly before his death, Georg Simmel wrote a set of notes entitled "Philosophy of Life." Here he writes:

> Cognition, work, and culture represent mediations between subject and object. Even the mere designation as subject and object contains the presupposition that the strict coexistence of life and world has been set aside. The peculiar difficulties with the concept of experience [*Erleben*] symbolize this… Life [*Leben*] is an absence of differentiation between process and content. Both of these are abstractions out of its unity. Experience regards this unity in consequence of the fact that a particular synthesis of subject and object occurs; yet as soon as content

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[26] See for example: "Nature's Other Side: The Demise of Nature and the Phenomenology of Givenness" by Bruce V. Foltz in *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy.* Edited by Robert Frodeman and Bruce V. Foltz. (Indiana University Press: 2004.)

[27] See for example works by Carol J. Adams, Karen J. Warren, and Vandana Shiva.

> has become an object it transpires that the subject confronts it as something demanding recognition. Process and content are the primary pair of opposites, the first unfolding of the life-unity.[28]

Lived experience, for Simmel, is the key to understanding the origin of the subject. Experience marks the point at which life splits into process and content. This content takes the shape of fixed forms; it becomes objectified. The subject is the aspect of life which is able to distinguish itself, by means of cognition as "an individually closed form."[29]

In his discussion of the origin of the subject in lived experience, Simmel lays the groundwork for the observations made by Agamben in *Homo Sacer*. Simmel writes:

> Although the stream of life flows through—or more accurately, *as*—these individuals, it nevertheless dams up in each of them and becomes a sharply outlined form. Each individual then asserts itself as a complete entity, both against other individuals of its kind and against the total environment with all its contents, and it does not tolerate any blurring of its periphery.[30]

This "boundary-determined ego" as Simmel calls it only comes into its own in confrontation with its environmental milieu. Agamben describes this confrontation, or "assertion" as the original political moment, the ban. The stream of life, what Agamben refers to as *zo* , is then situated at the threshold of *bios* and as such delineates the contours of political and historical experience. To better understand the plant as the figure of bare life, this dissertation takes its cue from Simmel who contends that the two figures most necessary for

[28] Georg Simmel. *The View of Life*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 190.
[29] Ibid., 13.
[30] Ibid., 9.

understanding these two aspects of life—the original flux of life as such and the ego-bounded life of the individual—are Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.[31]

As philosophers of "the will," Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are often characterized as advancing a philosophical psychology in which the self is a strongly defined individual who is engaged in highly agonistic relationships with others and with the world around him. The will is often (and not wholly incorrectly) portrayed as the mechanism by which the individual organizes the world around him to correspond to his needs. Both figures seem, at first blush, to be strange choices for a work which purports to study to non-conscious and non-individuated lives of plants. However, a closer examination of the function of the will in each philosopher coupled with close attention to the ways in which each figure deals explicitly with plant life and employs botanical images and metaphors, yields a picture of the way each philosopher understands the pre-subjective life-as-such which undergirds human consciousness and experience.

The aforementioned simplistic view of these philosophers of the will, while not inaccurate, fails to account for the rich nuances of thought in both figures. Schopenhauer's account of the will as a ceaseless drive for increased growth through assimilation is certainly the backbone of his philosophy and is the root of Schopenhauer's generally pessimistic worldview. However, it is not the whole picture, as Schopenhauer's philosophy provides two ameliorative strategies for coping with and redirecting the forces of the will, namely aesthetics and ethics. Indeed, Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation* can be

[31] Ibid., 13

described as the first philosophy of the will; it can also be described as the first critique of the will. The nuances of Schopenhauer's response to the problem of the will are often overlooked by the casual reader, many of whom discover Schopenhauer through Nietzsche and approach the text through Nietzsche's thoroughgoing and strident critique of the concept of pity. This is unfortunate, as Nietzsche's perspective on Schopenhauer is both more complicated than some of the most oft-cited aphorisms might suggest and is shaded by his falling out, both personal and philosophical, with Wagner. While Nietzsche and readers of Nietzsche are responsible for much of the continued interest in Schopenhauer's philosophy, they are likewise the source of a fair amount of misunderstanding.

The problems associated with Nietzsche as a "philosopher of the will" are of a wholly different stripe. It is the case that Nietzsche, unlike Schopenhauer, does not view the will as a *problem* to be overcome, choosing instead to use the notion of the will as part of his challenge to traditional morality and as a source for a new way of thinking about (and living) life. However, in reading Nietzsche, many readers have stressed the confrontational and even predatory nature of the *Ubermensch*, while ignoring many of the other nuances of Nietzsche' rich and often ambiguous texts. As Simmel points out in *The View of Life*, Schopenhauer's work focuses on the "boundless continuity" of life itself while Nietzsche "places more stress on individuality as circumscribed by form." However both figures turn to the language of will to flesh out the relationship between subject and

life.[32] The plant is crucial to both philosophers as it allows them to conceive of and describe a concrete form of life which is neither a strict individual nor a subject.

I have situated my research in the 19th Century, specifically with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche because these thinkers espoused the idea that an understanding of plant life is crucial to *Lebensphilosophie*.[33] In my view a closer examination of their positions—both stated and implied—regarding plant life offers quite a bit of food for thought to post-humanist and environmental philosophy. Read together, these figures offer a picture of vegetal life which is a distinct alternative to an animal life oriented by desire. In the first two chapters I explore Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche understanding of the will and desire, showing how much of their work describes an appetitive model of life. In chapters three through five, I read these same figures, in conjunction with Goethe, *against the grain*, focusing on their descriptions of plant life and uses of plant imagery and metaphors. Using this reading, I present an alternative model of life, what I refer to as the vegetal model. Each chapter considers a different element of vegetal life. Chapter three focuses on plant life as life without desire; here the plant is described as having a dispersed self and a lack of an appetitive center. Chapter four discusses the ways in which vegetal life is embedded in, beholden to, and inseparable from its environment. Chapter five discusses the

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[32] Ibid., 13-15.

[33] As M. H. Abrams points out in the classic text *The Mirror and the Lamp,* Germany of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was the birthplace of the vegetable genius. See M. H. Abrams. *The Mirror and the Lamp.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 201-213.

vegetal "virtue" of mutual reciprocity and posits Goethe as the figure of vegetable genius. In the conclusion I will makes some initial comments on these themes of vegetal life and their usefulness to the discourse surrounding life in contemporary post-humanist and environmental thought.

Chapter One

The Appetitive Model and Schopenhauer's Metaphysics of Pain

Introduction: Movement and Appetite

Francis Ponge begins the poem "Fauna and Flora" with the following observation: "Fauna move from place to place, while flora unfold before your very eyes." In his further comparisons of the divergent being of plant and animal life, Ponge concludes the lengthy poem with a final thought on plant being and behavior: "Whence the essential property of this being, freed from the concerns of both lodging and food by the surrounding presence of an infinite source of nourishment: *Immobility*." These two remarks cap Ponge's reflection on the fundamental differences in the natures of plant and animal life. Animals express their being in action, in motion and sound. Unable to act, outside of growing, photosynthesizing, respiring, a plant's physical reality is itself the sole expression of its being. "For animals, expression is oral or mimed by gestures, each one effacing the one before. Expression in plant life is written, once and for all." The comparison between plants and animals is crucial for Ponge's poetic project in that it allows him to best understand what it means "to express" anything at all; they provide critical insight into the function of poetry and the act of poetic expression.[34] To understand animal life —and by extension, our own lives— Ponge introduces the plant as foil, both commonplace and alien. For Ponge, the

[34] Francis Ponge. "Fauna and Flora" in *The Nature of Things.* Trans. Lee Fahnestock (New York: Red Dust, 2000), 50-55.

first point of divergence, and the touchstone for rethinking life, is the plant's comparative fixity. The animal, in its actions, expressions, and desires is conceived against this backdrop.

When considering the differences between plant and animal life, biologists often point to a divergence in lifestyle as the primary source of these differences. Stefano Mancuso tracks these dissimilarities by examining the single-celled protists (an informal group of unicellular beings including algae and protozoa) from which both plants and animals evolved. All protists are capable of movement to reach food, either through flagella or through cilia; all have neuron-like electrical signals operating between the cell's organelles. But only some—like algae—contain chloroplasts capable of harnessing energy from the sun. This one difference became the point of divergence between plants and animals some 500 million years ago. Protists lacking chloroplasts, for example protozoa, developed more intricate forms of movement to befit alimentation while the plant-like organisms grew increasingly sessile, opting instead to put their evolutionary stock in the sun.[35]

Botanist and ecologist, Francis Hallé, also points to energy capture as the primary difference between plants and animals. The capture of energy from photons—a high-quality source of energy, but appearing at somewhat low intensities— requires that plants transform themselves into "vast, fixed surfaces." Plant assimilation, like touch, requires exposure to and contact with the external environment. Lacking the ability to unfurl a photoreceptive surface

[35] Mancuso, *Brilliant Green*, 21-26.

and touch an energy source, the animal requires mobility. A creature composed of vast surfaces is generally neither unobtrusive nor fleet of foot, so animals tend toward maximizing volume, wearing their surfaces of assimilation and exchange on the inside in the form of intestines. Hallé closes his discussion of comparative morphology and the "functional homology" between plants and animals with an elegant metaphor: "Animals are confused plants, turned inside out like a glove, with infolded leaves and roots in their digestive tracts. Plants are fantastic animals, their insides turned out, bearing their entrails like feathers."[36] As Mancuso and Hallé describe, the point of departure between plants and animals is ambulation (or lack thereof) for the capture of energy.

Not unlike contemporary scientists, Aristotle discusses locomotion in search of nutrition as a benchmark of animality. His argument for this is couched in a disagreement between himself and his predecessors, namely Plato, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Empedocles, about whether plants have sensation and desire (and, in the case of the latter three thinkers, intelligence as well). Aristotle argues that were plants to have desire, they must first have sensation, and were they to have sensation they would possess at least some of the attributes or capacities that coincide with sensation. But, as Aristotle points out:

> In plants we do not find sensation nor any organ of sensation, nor any semblance of it, nor any definite form or capacity to pursue objects, nor movement or means of approach to any object perceived, nor any sign whereby we may judge that the possess sense-perception corresponding to the signs by which we know that they receive nutriment and grow.[37]

[36] Hallé, *In Praise of Plants*, 41-50.
[37] Aristotle, *On Plants*, 1252.

Aristotle allows for two basic signs of sense perception: sense organs and movement with regard to objects of nutriment. While not all animals have both sense organs and locomotion, those that have only the former, e.g. "sea-shells" are "at once both plants and animals."[38] Movement toward (or away from) a thing, what Aristotle also refers to as "action,"[39] is a customary characteristic of sensation, and as such it is a decisive trait of the animal.[40] In Aristotle's view, both locomotion and sensation exist solely to serve the goal of nutriment as it occurs in the complex living things dwelling on the higher rungs of being.

The exclusively animal trait of sensation is also closely linked, for Aristotle, with appetite:

> For all living things both move and are moved for the sake of something, so that this is the limit of all their movement—that for the sake of which. Now we see that the living creature is moved by intellect, imagination, purpose, wish, and appetite. And all these are reducible to thought and desire. For both imagination and sensation are on common ground with thought, since all three are faculties of discrimination though differing according to distinction stated elsewhere. Wish, however, impulse, and appetite are all three forms of desire, while purpose belongs both to intellect and desire. Therefore the object of desire or of intellect first initiates movement…[41]

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 1255.

[40]Given Aristotle's argument that locomotion the main locus of difference between plants and animals, it's not surprising that there would be some agreement between the naturalist and his modern day counterparts. Hallé is particularly fascinated by coral due to their multitude of similarities with trees. Coral colonies have a symbiotic relationship with the photosynthetic algae covering them. This algae provides the coral with most of its nutrients, so like trees, coral growth and morphology is characterized by competition for light. Underneath the polyp the coral develops a "trunk" of crystallized calcium which accretes rhythmically and even in annual cycles in much the same way layers of lignin form rings within the tree. Coral colonies have a symbiotic relationship with photosynthetic algae which provide the coral with nutrients. Because they are dependent on light for energy and because they are fixed in place by their calcified structures, coral colonies exhibit plant-architecture and many plant-like behaviors. (Ibid., 252-258). Where contemporary botanists differ with Aristotle is in the assignment of lesser value on these alternative forms of being.

[41] Aristotle. *Movement in Animals* in *Collected Works, Vol. 1*. Translated by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1091.

Desire and intellect allow the sensitive organism (i.e. humans and animals) to distinguish between qualitative states of being. However as only humans have the capacity for judgment—a necessary condition for intelligence—animal movement is based solely on appetite.

Aristotle famously summarizes the whole state of affairs in *De Anima* wherein living things possess, to varying degrees, the "psychic powers" involved in organic being, namely "the nutritive, the appetitive, the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of thinking." Plants lack all but the first power; whereas animals possess appetite, sensation, and locomotion, in keeping with their complexity. For Aristotle these three intermediate powers all imply one another: "if any order of living things as the sensory, it must also have the appetitive; for appetite is the genus of which desire, passion and wish are the species." All animals possess the sense of touch at the very least and with touch comes the capacity for pleasure and pain, "and therefore [the animal] has pleasant and painful object present to it." Sense endows external objects with meaning for the animal, and with this meaning comes desire, "for desire is appetition of what is pleasant."[42] Desire is, for Aristotle, inextricably linked with sensation.

Desire also undergirds all action. While one might be tempted to attribute movement to thought, Aristotle is quick to point out that "thought is never found producing movement without appetite… but appetite can originate movement

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[42] Aristotle. *De Anima*. In *Collected Works, Vol 1.* Translated by Jonathan Barnes. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 659-660.

contrary to calculation, for desire is a form of appetite." Locomotion, and all forms of movement, are driven by appetite, which requires "either calculative or sensitive" imagination. Humans are capable of calculative imagination, whereas animals make use of sensitive imagination, which hearkens back to the sensitive properties present in animals. In fact, Aristotle cannot even fathom that any animal capable of movement be wholly devoid of sensation: "every body capable of forward movement would, if unendowed with sensation, perish and fail to reach its end." Sensation provides a context for desire while desire directs the animal to move toward its good.[43]

So animals have three distinct qualities which they participate in to varying degrees: sensation (or perception), appetite, and self-movement. Perception allows the animal to discriminate between painful and pleasant stimuli; appetite forms the motivation to avoid pain and seek out pleasure; movement allows the animal to act on its appetite. Thus in Aristotle we see the beginning of a philosophical triad for understanding animal life: sensation-appetite-action. Human action is, for Aristotle, no exception. The philosopher describes reason itself as a secondary triad consisting of the interaction between sensation, imagination, and judgment.[44] In the human practical thought co-exists with appetite and helps to determine movement. However, Aristotle is clear that thought alone is not sufficient to produce movement. Movement is always motivated by an appetitive for the good and thought is used to determine

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[43] Ibid., 688-690.
[44] Ibid., 680.

whether the perceived good is real or merely apparent.[45] In terms of how Aristotle conceives of human life the appetitive triad is only slightly altered: sensation-appetite (as guided by reason)-movement. The relationship between these three psychic attributes, sensation-appetite-action, forms the core of what I will be referring to as the appetitive model of life. For Aristotle—and arguably for most of his philosophical successors— this becomes the dominant way to view life.

We see this thoroughgoing zoocentrism in the alacrity with which Aristotle repeatedly shifts from the language of "animal life" to the language of "life itself" effectively eliding vegetal being. In De Anima, Aristotle writes "there are two distinctive peculiarities by reference to which we characterize the soul—(1) local movement and (2) thinking understanding, and perceiving."[46] The nutritive soul is the foundation of Aristotle's philosophy of life but like an actual foundation, the nutritive soul is often hidden, subterranean, unacknowledged. *Sense and Sensibilia* is purported to be about "all living things" but instead focuses entirely on animal sense faculties, with no discussion of plant analogs to sensation, such as the phototropism suggested by plants' heliotropic movements. [47] Should one get the sense that Aristotle is somewhat ambivalent about attributing life to plants, one might not be altogether wrong. Aristotle at times seems to locate plants in a boundary zone between living, moving animals and

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[45] Ibid., 688-689.
[46] Ibid., 679.
[47] Aristotle. *Sense and Sensibilia*. In *Collected Works, Vol 1.* Translated by Jonathan Barnes. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 693.

inert matter. In the opening moments of his treatise *On Plants*, Aristotle describes plants as occupying a phase of being which passes "gradually from life into non-life."[48]

The legacy of this zoocentric understanding of life can be seen in the ways in which both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche take up the appetitive model of the self. As we shall discuss in subsequent chapters, the appetitive model comes with several corollary ideas. For both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche the appetitive model leads to a view of the self as an ego, or as a distinct individual. It is also at the core of both philosophers' concept of the will. The notion of self as appetitive individual is integral to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, wherein the individual is circumscribed by her desires, chiefly by her desire to avoid pain. The appetitive model also underlies Nietzsche's agonistic conception of self, seen most starkly in his references to the will to power. In the following pages we will examine the place of the appetitive model of life in Schopenhauer work so as to throw the vegetal model, which forms an undercurrent in his thought, in sharper contrast in later chapters. In this chapter I argue that the appetitive model is an essential element of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, stemming from his reworking of the Platonic *Idea*. As such, the appetitive model is also writ large across Schopenhauer's understanding of human and animal behavior and is the backdrop against which he approaches human psychology, egoism, and the ethics of affirmation of the will for life. To make this case, this chapter will explore the will and its appearance in the organism as the will for life. In it I will

[48] Aristotle, *On Plants*, 1253.

show that Schopenhauer understands the will for life in terms of the drives which form the inner essence of individuals. Lived experience is mediated entirely through the accomplishment or frustration of these drives. The individual is ultimately constituted by her failure to assimilate more of the world into the sphere of her influence, or to put it more concretely, the boundary of the individual is the point at which the individual experiences pain. The individual's experience of pain is concordant with Schopenhauer's metaphysical pessimism, which follows from his account of the will as a turbulent and internally divided unity. Thus understood, Schopenhauer presents an agonistic and appetitive model of life, leading him to reject ethical positions based on the affirmation of life.

§1. Willing without Thinking

Widely known yet comparatively understudied, Schopenhauer's thought has reverberated through the history of ideas; his metaphysics echoes through *Tristan und Isolde*, rumbles in the Unconscious of Freud and psychoanalysis, resounds in Schweitzer's ethics of reverence, and moved a young philologist to *"voluntarily [take] upon himself the suffering inherent in truthfulness"*[49] and to become "a terrible explosive, endangering everything."[50] Schopenhauer's most controversial achievement was identifying the thing in itself, Kant's notorious

[49] Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Unfashionable Observations:* "Schopenhauer as Educator," Translated by Richard T. Gray. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1995), 175.
[50] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo:* "The Untimely Ones," Translated by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage, 1967), 281.

unknown, providing it with a handle with which a metaphysician could grasp it: "the Will." Schopenhauer's will is the "answer to the riddle" posed by the living creature, the individual body at work in the world.

But perhaps his most momentous contribution to philosophy, paving the way for both Nietzsche's "will to power" and Freud's "unconscious," is his separation of the process of willing from the conscious mind. While philosophers have often associated the will with individual conscious striving, Schopenhauer breaks with this tradition by positing that all consciousness is only consciousness of some *thing*, some phenomenal object. Consciousness, and hence subjectivity, whenever it appears, merely exists in a reciprocal relationship with phenomenal material; the material world exists for consciousness and consciousness only exists in reference to the material world. Both sides of this system of mutual dependence are wholly phenomenal. The will, however, exists as a metaphysical reality. Will is the driving force which underlies both mind and matter and which cannot be reduced to either or to some combination of both.[51] In positing the noumenal reality of the will, Schopenhauer unfetters the will from consciousness. He denies the reality of the soul, stating that philosophers, particularly Christian philosophers, in their concern to distinguish humans from animals, "make the intellect the essential matter and principle concern" going so far as "to depict willing as a mere function of the intellect."

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[51] Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1*. Translated by Richard E. Aquila and David Carus (New York: Peason Longman, 2008), 225.

In making this move, Schopenhauer understands himself to be continuing Kant's legacy by correcting Kant's line of thought regarding the thing in itself. Schopenhauer lauds Kant for his "main achievement" in "distinguishing the phenomenon from the thing in itself." But he critiques Kant (particularly the Kant of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, i.e. B70/B71) for failing to take seriously Berkeley's adage "No object without subject." Schopenhauer argues that Kant, and later Fichte, fail to introduce the thing in itself in a fully idealist manner:

> The issue can be made explicit in very few words. Kant grounds the presupposition of the thing in itself, although under the cover of all sorts of circumlocution, on an inference in accordance with the law of causality, namely, that empirical perception – more accurately, the **sensation** in our sense organs from which the latter proceeds – must have an external cause. But according to his own and an accurate discovery, the law of causality is known to us **a priori,** is consequently a function of our intellect, thus of **subjective** origin… Hence empirical perception as whole remains mere presentation to us: it is the world as presentation.

The noumena cannot be approached through the intellect and certainly not through the empirical world, but, Schopenhauer argues, we can ground a metaphysical account of the noumena in the correct understanding of the relationship between the subject and the world. [52]

Schopenhauer's grounds for establishing a theoretical caesura between thinking and the noumenal world of willing support his pessimistic view of the

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[52] Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 502-505. Schopenhauer explains further in §63 of the *Parerga and Paralipomena:*

> *Since every being in nature is simultaneously **phenomena** and **thing-in-itself**, or even **natura naturata** and **natura naturans,** it is accordingly capable of a twofold explanation, a **physical** and a **metaphysical**. The physical explanation is always from the **cause**, the metaphysical is always from the **will**; for it is this which manifest itself as a **natural force** in nature-without-knowledge and higher up as a **vital force**, but which in animal and man receives the name of **will.** (Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol. 2.* Translated by E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 91.

world. To conjoin will and reason within a hypostasized soul (either individual soul, or a pantheistic world-soul) is to delude oneself about the a-moral, irrational nature of life. Schopenhauer's charge against pantheism is that the latter worldview rests on an optimistic inability to empirically evaluate the world. He summarizes the profound disconnect between pantheism and the existential vicissitudes of the will in stark terms:

> According to that view [i.e. pantheism] the world would be a theophany. But just once take a look at it: this world of constantly needy beings, who only survive for a while by devouring one another, pull through with their existence in anxiety and hardship and often horrific torments, until they finally collapse in the arms of death.[53]

Elsewhere, Schopenhauer levels a more pithy evaluation of pantheism as "necessarily optimism and therefore false."[54] In both of these instances Schopenhauer is not critiquing pantheism on metaphysical grounds, i.e. he's not denying that the Will could be another way of describing the divine. Rather he is making an argument from experience with reference to theodicy, namely that no God would condemn his beings to such circumstances as exist in the world. However, as we shall see in Schopenhauer's treatment of the Platonic *Idea*, his pessimistic atheism is also inextricably rooted in his metaphysics.

The will is no longer a component of the intellect but is the *progenitor* of both the mind and its object. Should the mind cease to exist, and along with it all

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[53]Arthur Schopenhauer. *The world as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* Translated by Richard E. Aquila and David Carus (New York: Pearson Longman, 2010), 398.
He continues his remarks against pantheism on pg. 406, declaring that in such a world "there is no need for redemption; consequently there is none. But to what end the whole tragicomedy exists is not remotely evident; for it has no spectators, and the actors themselves are exposed to infinite afflictions, with little and merely negative enjoyment."
[54] Arthur Schopenhauer. *Parerga and Paralipomena Vol. 1.* Translated by E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 101.

of the objects to which it is related through the interdependence of knower and known, the will would not and could not be eradicated as the will is not grounded on this—or any other—basis. There is no spiritually transcendent unity of will and intellect. There is merely the earth-bound subject, *"the I"* which in perishing, relinquishes mind and body while the will, now unrestrained by form, plunges back into its originary and inchoate state of flux.

Thus liberated from any account of soul-hood, the will can be seen as manifest in the entirety of the phenomenal realm, and not merely in the rational intentional decisions made by humans. For Schopenhauer the will cannot be reduced to conscious acts of "willing." Instead the will is the driving force[55] behind all organic and inorganic processes. The will is that which "endows all things, whatever they be, with the power by virtue whereof they are able to exist and act." The metaphysical reality of the will underlies every sort of existence from "the voluntary actions of animals," to the "vegetation of plants," down to even "the inorganic kingdom crystallization, and generally every original force [*ursprüngliche Kraft*] manifesting itself in physical and chemical appearances."[56] The will is the undifferentiated protean flux *responsible* for life and for objective existence as such.[57] How then does the will, as an extra-efficient force make itself

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[55] Here Schopenhauer typically uses the term *Trieb* and its variants to describe organic drives (i.e. instincts) and *Naturkraft* for inorganic natural forces.

[56] Arthur Schopenhauer. *On The Will in Nature.* Translated by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Berg, 1992), 20. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 4.* (Leipzig: F. A. Brodhaus, 1891), 2-3.

[57] Although, of course, calling the will "responsible" or giving it some sort of "authority" is misleading and technically incorrect as the will cannot be ascribed an intellectual, intentional plan as if it were an entity with agency.

manifest in the processes and entities of the phenomenal realm? How does the will become objectified?

To answer these questions, Schopenhauer avails himself of some metaphysical maneuvering. The will, albeit undifferentiated, must not be reduced to the sort of unity which stands in opposition to plurality. The will considered in itself "lies beyond time and space and accordingly knows no plurality, is consequently *one*: yet as already stated, not as an individual or even as a concept is one, but as something to which the condition of the possibility of plurality, the *principium individuationis,* is foreign."[58] The will is considered by Schopenhauer to be a unity only in the sense that in its extra spatial-temporal

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[58] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 168. The unity of the will is one of the several major points of theoretical tension between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's doctrine of the metaphysical unity of will smacks of mysticism, a mysticism with which Nietzsche has close acquaintance through the life and work of Wagner. Nietzsche's rejection of mystical pessimism stems not only from his abhorrence for Schopenhauer's ethics of denial of the will for life, but also from his unflinching advocacy of the individual as the sole bearer of reality. The denial of the will to life not only abnegates the individual but lends itself to the sort of religious or quasi-religious practices which hinder the individual's capacity to generate her own meanings and values. Nietzsche most trenchant criticism of Schopenhauer on this front can be found in *The Gay Science*, §99:

> *"Schopenhauer's mystical embarrassments and subterfuges in those places where the factual thinker allowed himself to be seduced and corrupted by the vain urge to be the unriddler of the world; the unprovable doctrine of the One Will…the denial of the individual…his ecstatic reveries about genius… the nonsense about pity, about how it makes possible a break through the principium individuationis, and how this is the source of all morality... these and other such excesses and vices of the philosopher are always accepted first of all and turned into articles of faith; for vices and excesses are always aped most easily and require no long training."*

As I shall discuss in subsequent chapters, Nietzsche's philosophy emphasizes the protean quality of the will; yet – as Nietzsche seemed loath to admit – a description of the will as fundamentally manifold is not outside of Schopenhauer's own formulation of the will. To say that the will is a unity only insofar as it exists outside of the *principium individuationis* (which generates difference) is not fundamentally different than saying that the will is manifold only insofar as it exists outside of the *principium individuationis* (which generates individual unities). Nietzsche's reading on this point, while not inaccurate, may be a touch uncharitable as it fails to acknowledge the figurative nature of Schopenhauer's use of "unity" in describing the will. Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science,* Translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 152-156.

existence it is wholly indivisible [*untheilbar*].[59] Here Schopenhauer struggles to express what could constitute a unity independent of the *principium individuationis*, a definite sticking point for Nietzsche. At bottom, Schopenhauer is trying to show that the same ur-force underlies and is fully present in every phenomenal being:

§2. Turbulent Unity and the Origin of the Idea

Although Schopenhauer considers the will as a unity insofar as it precedes the possibility of individuation, he simultaneously describes the will as exhibiting a sort of internal process of differentiation. Here Schopenhauer repeatedly describes the will not as a stable entity, but as a sort of dynamism, a "blind pressing [*blinder Drang*]."[60] This pressing, while blind, is not entirely without direction; the will is always the will *for* life [*Wille zum Leben*]. The current which constitutes the motion of the will is the movement toward ever increasing actualization. "Everything presses and drives toward *existence,* if possible toward *organic* existence, i.e., life/*Alles drängt und treibt zum* ***Daseyn****, wo möglich zum* ***organischen****, d. i. zum Leben.*"[61] It is this impulse toward an increase in being which lies at the heart of the essential divisiveness [*wesentliche Entzweiung*][62] or

[59] Schopenhauer, *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 152.
[60] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 224. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 213.
[61] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 399. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 3,* 399.
[62] Schopenhauer, *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 174.

turbulence within the will. These internal divisions caused by the struggle for ever-increasing being are channeled, crystallized, and ultimately objectified as *Ideas* through a constant process of "overpowering assimilation/*überwältigende Assimilation*" of one force within the will by another.[63] Thus, as evidenced by Schopenhauer's language and tone, the will, while generative of life itself, is also deeply destructive and even self-destructive.

> "So the will for life is pervasively feeding on itself and, in various forms, its own nourishment, until finally the human species, because it overpowers all the others, views nature as something fabricated for its own use, even though that same species… reveals that battle within itself, that internal division of will, to the most fearsome degree of *distinctness*, and *homo homini lupus*. [*so dass der Wille zum Leben durchgängig an sich selber zehrt und in verschiedenen Gestalten seine eigene Nahrung ist, bis zuletzt dass Menschengeschlecht, weil es alle anderen überwältigt, die Natur für ein Fabrikat zu seinem Gebrauch ansieht, dasselbe Geschlecht jedoch auch… in sich selbst jenen Kampf, jene Selbstentzweiung des Willens zur furchtbarsten Deutlichkeit offenbart, und* homo homini lupus *wird*.]"[64]

The process of coming into being, in Schopenhauer's view, is not a beautiful *sui generis* act of creation. The entirety of the phenomenal realm makes manifest this metaphysical strife between forces. In fact this internal conflict of the will is the wellspring of nature, for "it exists only precisely through it."[65]

Schopenhauer's portrayal of the will occupies a difficult space as there is a sense in which the will is simultaneously *both* a unity and an array of tempestuous forces and a sense in which it is *neither* (as both categories, one and many, depend on the inadmissible descriptors of the world of space and time). However, the will still exhibits one identifiable quality: a fundamentally

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[63] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 188, / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 173.
[64] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 190. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 175.
[65] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 190.

purposeless self-propulsion toward life. "In fact the absence of all goals, of all boundaries, belongs to the essence of will in itself, which is an endless striving. [*In der That gehört Abwesenheit alles Zieles, aller Gränzen, zum Wesen des Willens an sich, der in endloses Streben ist.*"][66] Life itself, while providing the impetus and direction for the will does not constitute the goal or purpose of the will as the will achieves an increase in the being of one stratum only through the suppression or annihilation of another. The objectified *Idea* is born of this agony of assimilation.[67]

It is this internal conflict which allows the will to be rendered by cognizance (*Erkenntnis*) into a phenomenally comprehensible reality. The will, in its struggle against itself, yields not total chaos and cacophony, but becomes organized through its repeated internal contests into patterns or pathways of power. Even before consciousness arranges the will by means of the *principium individuationis,* the will has begun to funnel, channel, and fold in upon itself through its assimilating motion. Schopenhauer describes the assimilating motion

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[66] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 208. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 195. In moments such as this, Schopenhauer rejects any sort of teleological function of the will. At the same time the processes of overpowering assimilation seem to suggest something at least quasi-teleological, a sort of bleak reappropriation of the purposiveness of nature found in the third critique.

[67] In line with Plato, Schopenhauer believes the *Ideas* to exist independently both of the individuals which they exemplify and the minds which may think them. They are the undying and wholly non-contingent expressions of the power structures of the will. Thus Schopenhauer writes:

> *Now what, considered as a mere objective image, mere form, and thereby as lifted out of time as well as all relations, is a Platonic* ***Idea*** *is, when taken empirically and within time, the* ***species*** *or* ***kind****; hence the latter is the empirical correlate of the Idea. The Idea is truly eternal, but the species of infinite duration, although its phenomenon can be extinguished on a planet. (World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 414)

While the species exists in time, phenomenally, for a mind, the *Idea* as the metaphysical entity which underlies the species. The intellect apprehends the *Idea* only through the species, but the existence of the *Idea* does not depend on the earthly reality of the species.

of the will in terms of "battles" wherein weaker forces become lower levels of objectification once they are defeated by the more powerful forces which "overpower" them.[68] Schopenhauer also employs metaphors of bestial devouring and even autophagy to express this internal conflict, describing the will for life as "pervasively feeding on itself"[69] and citing both Bacon's adage that "the serpent becomes a dragon only by devouring serpents" and Aristotle's "*homo homini lupus.*" In this violent and contentious way the will churns itself into distinct vital forces; it is these forces which become the archetypes or forms of life for each phenomenal individual. Schopenhauer thus opts to refer to these pre-phenomenal forces using the Platonic notion of Ideas:

> The following point, accordingly, which has here of itself already pressed itself upon any student of Plato, will be the object of detailed consideration… namely, that the various levels of the objectification of will that, expressed in countless individuals, stand before us as their unachieved paradigms or as the eternal forms of things [*unerreichten Musterbilder dieser, oder als die ewigen Formen der Dinge*] – not themselves entering into time and space, the medium of individuals, but standing fixed, subject to no change, always being, never having become, while individuals arise and pass away, are always becoming and never are – these *levels of objectification of will* are, I say, nothing other than *Plato's Ideas*. [70]

To say that the will is objectified is *not* to say that it has achieved a phenomenal instantiation. Instead, in employing the term *objectification*, Schopenhauer is attempting to describe the process by which the will becomes organized and delineated into that which can provide *form* to phenomenal beings, into that which can be realized as organic life.

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[68] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 188.
[69] Ibid., 188-190.
[70] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 170. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 154.

When describing this process of objectification, Schopenhauer searches for means of expressing the synchronicity which occurs as these forces develop into a network of mutually determined *Ideas*. Given the non-rational and extra-phenomenal status of the will, Schopenhauer can only describe this process in figurative language of music. In fact, music functions as more than a mere metaphor for Schopenhauer, as it actually gives the listener a kind of extra-intellectual insight into the workings of the noumenal will. Music, unlike the poetic and plastic arts is not concerned with the "replicating of any Ideas;" instead, music *embodies* and gives voice to Ideas thereby "referring to the innermost essence of the world and of ourselves."[71] Music, specifically symphonic music, is unique among the arts because it serves almost as a microcosm of the will itself.[72] Because music is not concerned with recreating the forms, it instead attempts to capture the "essence" of things. It expresses "*an*

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[71] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1*, 306.

[72] Other arts are concerned with embodying *Ideal* forms. The aesthetic power of the of a great work of art is that it is capable of wholly arresting the view, tearing her away from her normal instrumental relationship to objects, and allowing her to temporarily escape the pull of the will. The viewer becomes so entranced in quiet contemplation of the art object that, for a moment, the viewing subject exists only for the artwork and the artwork for her. The aesthetic enjoyment found in the viewing of a work of plastic art is the losing of oneself in the presentation of an *Idea.* Schopenhauer describes the process of aesthetic contemplation thus:

> *Suppose that, lifted by the power of spirit, one abandons the usual way of regarding things stops merely pursuing relations among them, …but instead devotes the entire power of spirit to perception, becomes entirely absorbed in the latter and lest the entirety of consciousness be filled with restful contemplation of a natural object just at that moment present to oneself…entirely* ***losing*** *oneself, to employ a pregnant German expression, in this object, i.e., precisely forgetting the individual one is, one's will, and remaining only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as if the object alone existed without anyone perceiving it, and only can thus no longer separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, the entirety of consciousness entirely filled and occupied by a single perceptual image…And just by that fact, anyone caught up in this perception is at the same time no longer an individual – for the individual has lost itself precisely in this perception – but is* ***pure****, will-less, painless, timeless****, subject of cognition*** (*World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1*, 221-222).

image of the very will" unmediated by representational *Ideas*.[73] The will objectifies itself in the natural world in terms of "different levels" of phenomena.[74] These "levels" of objectification operate and interact in a way analogous to the different sonic ranges within an orchestral work. Thus the "deepest tones of the harmony," the rumble of timpani and the lowest vibrations of the contrabassoon and the double bass, reveal "the lowest levels of objectification of the will, of inorganic nature, of the mass of the planet." The middle registers correspond to the world of plants and animals, while the melody embodies the "thoughtfully aware life and striving of the human being."[75] The world, like the symphony, expresses through the order of various levels of power, what would otherwise be sheer chaos and cacophony.

The Platonic *Idea* is, for Schopenhauer, the definition and description of this pre-epistemological organization: "I thus understand by *Idea* any particular and fixed *level of objectification of will,* [*jede bestimmte und feste **Stufe der Objektivation des Willens***] so far as the latter is thing in itself and thus foreign to plurality, which levels of course relate to individual things as their eternal forms, or their paradigms."[76] The ideal "unachieved paradigms" through which phenomenal beings arise and conduct themselves are none other than the solidified pathways of the forces operant within the will's process of self-assimilation. The autophagic nature of the will, wherein parts of the will contend

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[73] Ibid., 308.
[74] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 224.
[75] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 308-310
[76] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 170. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 154.

with, destroy, and ultimately assimilate other parts, has the effect of splitting the will into diverse forces, each of which is delineated and made objective by the power relations it bears to the other forces of the will. These channels of power become so pronounced as to become the archetypes for phenomenal power relationships. While these relationships are internal to the noumenal will, phenomenal beings, in a sense, *participate* in these ideal (noumenal) power-constructions. The Platonic *Ideas* emerge as the crystallized power dynamics of the struggle toward existence, and ultimately living, organic existence within the will. The *Ideas* are always attempting to assimilate one another in this drive toward life. But only individuals in the phenomenal realm (partaking in these archetypical forms) can actually be said to be alive.

Schopenhauer's discussion of the individual's participation in the form is modulated through an interest in species life typical to thinkers of the 19th Century.[77] He writes:

> …the (Platonic) *Ideas* of the various levels of beings, which are the adequate objectification of the will for life, display themselves in the individual's cognizance, bound to the form of *time,* as *species,* i.e., as successive and homogeneous individuals connected by the bond of procreation, and that the species is therefore the *Idea*… elaborated in time.

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[77] While profoundly influenced by evolutionary theory, Schopenhauer is very candid about its limitations for assessing the root and fundamental nature of life. Etiology is only capable of tracing physical causes and is blind to the workings of the will. For this reason Schopenhauer criticizes Lamarck's reductionist view of the organism as "an aggregate of phenomena of physical, chemical, and mechanical forces that, coming together by chance in this case, produced the organism as a quirk of nature with no further significance." On this view only these chemical and electrical processes would embody metaphysical *Ideas* and the organism to which they give rise would have no more import than "human and animal shapes found in clouds or stalactites" (*World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 183-184). A complete understanding of species life involves, for Schopenhauer, an account not only of the physical forces operant in all life, but the Ideal structures which underlie and make possible the organization of forces in the physical world.

> Consequently, the essence in itself of every living thing lies in the first instance in its species…[78]

The *Idea*, considered from the perspective of the spatio-temporal world of presentation is nothing other than the species. Schopenhauer argues that it is ultimately the species rather than the individual which is the ultimate expression of the will for life, as the drive for the preservation of the species often annihilates the individual's drive for self-preservation. Although it is the individual through which the will becomes cognizant, each individual is nothing more than an imperfect physical instantiation of the species' will for life. In large part, Schopenhauer views the sex-drive (*Geschlechtstrieb*) and, to a lesser extent, the other drives which propagate and support species life as constituting the essence or inner drive (*innere Zug*) of every being insofar as it participates in the species. [79] The *Idea* is made manifest as the species which operates on the individual through the various productive drives, the visible instantiation of the subterranean pull of the forces from which the *Idea* is crystallized. The *Idea* emerges out of the relations between different courses of power within the will and thereby becomes the mechanism by which these power relations are able to appear, in a relatively fixed and stable manner, within the individuals of a species. Thus, the *Idea*, "as the result of the sum of all the relations, it is the real *character* of the thing, and therefore the complete expression of the essence" of the individual. The species is the physical appearance of a set of rigidified power

[78] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. II,* 569.
[79] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 569-560. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 3,* 584-585.

relations within the will, as imperfectly mediated through the *principium individuationis*; meanwhile the *Idea* is the "root point of all of these relations" and is hence "complete and consummate…objectivization of the will at this level of its phenomenon."[80]

Through his reconfiguration of the Platonic problem of participation, Schopenhauer describes the individual's essence and character as the very embodiment of the internal divisions of the will itself. Individuals of a species reveal the unity of the will *and* they also reveal the inherently unstable and agonistic nature of the will. For Schopenhauer, the will "reveals itself just as entirely and just as much in *one* oak tree as in millions."[81] However, the will which emanates from each being is not calm or peaceful or static. As thinking creatures, we are immediately able to perceive the antagonism inherent in the will. Each of us recognizes ourselves as

> only one of innumerable similar beings who press, drive, and torment themselves, restlessly and rapidly arising and passing away in time without beginning and end. Amidst this, nothing persists but matter and the continual recurrence of the same varied organic forms, by means of certain paths and canals that just happen to be there.[82]

The will is a unity, but the fundamental principle behind this unity is turbulent self-effacement. This principle is channeled through "paths and canals" into organic matter bringing about the struggle for survival which characterizes life on earth. As such, each entity functions as an embodiment-in-miniature of Schopenhauer's cosmic pessimism. Just as the branching network of a great

[80] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 413.
[81] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 169.
[82] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 2.

canopy bears close resemblance to the deviations of the subterranean root structure, phenomena take the form of tangible projections which mirror the metaphysical power relations described previously.

As the will is the unseen, unknowable force which channels itself into objectified *Ideas,* the drives, particularly the *Geschlechtstrieb,* operate by channeling vital power into the *Idea's* physical counterpart, the species. Thus Schopenhauer's notion of the appetitive individual is already circumscribed by species-specific drives which condition the behavior of the organism.

§3. Unriddling the World

Schopenhauer's main point of departure both from Kant and from his teacher, Fichte, lies in his insistence that we do, in fact, have some form of access to the thing-in-itself of the world.[83] The key to unlocking the thing-in-itself lies not in thought, as all thought is funneled through space and time into the

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[83] While Schopenhauer does indeed back Kant's transcendental idealism, he does not endorse Kant's subsequent critical restriction of metaphysics. Bryan Magee argues against the misunderstanding of Kant's and Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism as boiling down to the notion that "everything exists in a mind." This is, as Magee points out indeed a "radical error." Magee goes on to defend Kant and Schopenhauer against this misinterpretation:

> *On the contrary, both of them believed that the abiding reality from which we are screened off by the ever-changing surface of our contingent and ephemeral experiences exists in itself, independent of minds and their perceptions or experiences…. The chief clout of transcendental idealism is contained in the insight that while it is possible for us to perceive or experience or think or envisage only in categories (in the ordinary, not Kant's technical, sense) determined by our own apparatus, whatever exists cannot in itself exist in terms of those categories, because existence as such cannot be in categories at all.* See Bryan Magee. *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 73.

Although Magee is correct on this point, his account fails to do justice to the ways in which Schopenhauer attempts to circumvent transcendental idealism thought his investigation of the body. It is through such analysis of the body that Schopenhauer is able to give a name to the thing-in-itself beyond the world of Maya and to establish a new ground for speculative metaphysics.

epistemologically accessible space of *Vorstellung*. So, Schopenhauer looks instead to the body for the traces of the noumenal. The body is, as Schopenhauer argues:

> …an immediate object for us, i.e., that presentation which constitutes the point of departure for the subject's cognition in that, with cognizance immediately take in of its alterations, it itself precedes application of the law of causality, and so provides the latter with its initial data. The whole essence of matter consists, as shown, in its effectuality. Effect and cause exists, however, only for the understanding, which is nothing more than their subjective correlate. But the understanding could never find applications if there were not something else from which it proceeds. Such is merely sensory sensation, the immediate consciousness of alterations in the body by virtue of which the latter is an immediate object.[84]

The body presents itself to the subject as a current of continuously changing sensation. This flow of alterations constitutes the "raw data" of the understanding and all consciousness begins with a cataloging of these changes. Yet to view the mind as a sort of emergent property, a reflective apparatus which grows out of some pre-existing material existence would be a mistake. Rather, matter is nothing other than "effectuality" which can only exist "for the understanding" itself. A crudely developmental account of the mind, an account in which matter breeds a subject which then turns to confront this very matter as object, misses the point entirely. Subject and object exist, for Schopenhauer, in a sort of mutually dependent and mutually generative relationship.[85] The confrontation lies not between subject and object, which together constitute the

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[84] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 49.

[85] To illustrate the mutual dependence of mind and matter, Schopenhauer pens a dialogue between the two which ends with both matter and the subject concluding in unison:

> *So we are inseparable connected as necessary parts of a whole, which encapsulates both of us and exists through both of us. Only a misunderstanding can make us enemies on opposite sides, and lead to the suggestion that the one contests the existence of the other, with which its own existence stands and falls.*

For the full dialogue between matter and the subject (a not-so-subtle critique and satire of the modern mind/body problem) see Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 19-20.

world as *Vorstellung*, but between the subject-object complex on the one hand and the wholly indeterminate dynamism, the "vital stream,"[86] of the will on the other. The mind is cognizant only of (and through) the raw data provided by the body, but the body itself, the objectification of this data, is already an abstraction from this original dynamism.

In his work *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason,* which serves as a propaedeutic to the *World as Will and Representation,* Schopenhauer asserts that all knowledge is given to us through the principle of sufficient reason, or as he describes it, "the expression of the fundamental form at the very core of our cognitive faculty, namely the basic form of a necessary connexion between all our objects, i.e., our representations."[87] Objects are necessarily related to one another through causality, or alteration within a conjunction of space and time.[88] Matter as causality within the union of space, effectuality, forms the fabric of the world as *Vorstellung*, or Schopenhauer sometimes refers to it, actual (i.e.

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[86] To borrow Simmel's terminology.

[87] Arthur Schopenhauer. *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.* Translated by E. F. J. Payne. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1997), 130.

[88] Schopenhauer argues that causality does not merely imply the alteration of matter either in space or in time.

> *Time and space are not merely each on their own presupposed by matter. Rather, a union of the two constitutes its essence, just because, as indicated, the latter consists in effectuality, in causality. All of the countless conceivable phenomena and state might lie juxtaposed in infinite space without mutual limitation, or in succession in infinite time without mutual disturbance; in that case, there would be no need at all for their being necessarily referred to one another, nor for a rule determining them in accordance with that reference, indeed the very idea would not even apply… The law of causality obtains its meaning and necessity only by the fact that the essence of alteration does not consist in mere change in states as such, but rather in there being* ***in the same place*** *in space now* ***one*** *state and then* ***another****, and there being at one and the same particular time* ***here*** *this and* ***there*** *that state…"* (*World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 38-39).

effectual) reality, *Wirklichkeit*.[89] This distillation of the objective world **into** causality has a dramatic impact on Schopenhauer's understanding of the subject. He writes:

> The subjective correlate of matter or causality (for they are one and the same) is the *understanding [Verstand]*, and it is nothing more than that. Cognizance of causality is its single function, its sole power, and it is a grandly encompassing, multiply versatile, yet unmistakable identity throughout all its expressions. Conversely, all causality, thus all matter, hence the whole of actual reality [*Wirklichkeit*], exists only for the understanding, through the understanding, in the understanding.[90]

Understanding amounts to the "immediate cognizance" of causal alterations through the senses, and is a faculty that belongs both to human and animal minds. Subjective understanding's peculiar identity with causality leads Schopenhauer to an insight which leads beyond Kantian epistemology. He summarizes this insight thus: "Everyone knows of himself immediately, of everything else only in a very mediate way. This is the fact and the problem."[91] Because it works solely with the raw data provided by the senses, the understanding ends up with two very different types of cognizance: cognizance of the world as effectuality and cognizance of the world's particular effect on the senses. Walking to campus on an especially blustery day, I have knowledge through my senses of the effectuality of the wind at it scatters the leaves, kicks

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[89] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 37-38. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 11

[90] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1, 40*-41. / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 13.

[91] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 217, emphasis in original. The quotation continues:

> *For all such* ***concepts*** *borrow their content solely from perceptual presentation, which is therefore* ***primary*** *cognizance and thus alone taken into consideration when we investigate the relation between the ideal and the real. Accordingly, it is evidence of a complete ignorance of the problem, or is at least entirely inappropriate, to want to describe this relation as that between* ***being*** *and* ***thought****.* ***Thought*** *has in the first instance merely a relation to* ***perceiving****, but* ***perceiving*** *has a relation to the* ***being in itself*** *of what is perceived, and this latter point is the big problem that occupies us here.*

up dust from the road, and ushers the clouds across the sky. I know these things through the interaction of the senses and the understanding. But I am also aware of the impact of the wind *on* my senses: chilly fingers, the sound of rustling leaves, the smell of impending winter. It is precisely this discrepancy between the oblique knowledge of the world and the immediate knowledge of the sensations themselves which leads Schopenhauer to a closer investigation of the interplay of understanding and sensation which constitutes the body.

While Schopenhauer agrees with Kant that all cognizance of objects amounts to nothing more than phenomena, he points out one feature of knowledge which Kant fails to investigate fully, that cognizance of our own willing is decidedly unlike cognizance of other objects:

> "But now…I have brought that other truth to the fore, that we are not merely the *cognizant subject,* but rather on the other hand are *ourselves* also among the beings to be cognized, *are ourselves the thing in itself.* Consequently, a path is open to us *from inside* to that proper self and inner essence of things to which we cannot penetrate *from outside*. It is, as it were, a subterranean passage, a secret alliance that, as through treachery, transports us at once into the fortress that could not be taken from outside."[92]

This **"**subterranean passage**"** provides us with a sort of knowledge which reaches us immediately, not through the understanding's apprehension of sense data, by which we can begin to glimpse the inner workings of the noumenal world itself.

Without the faculty of the understanding there would be sensation without perception and our existence in the world would be, in Schopenhauer's words, "a dull, plant-like consciousness of alterations in the immediate object,

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[92] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 2,* 221.

which would pursue an utterly meaningless course had they not some meaning as pain or pleasure for the will./ *ein dumpfes, pflanzenartiges Bewusstseyn der Veränderungen des unmittelbaren Objects übrig bliebe, die völlig bedeutungslos auf einander folgten, wenn sie nicht etwa als Schmerz oder Wollust eine Bedeutung für den Willen hätten.*"[93] While Schopenhauer initially states that the understanding is nothing more than the faculty for the subject's cognizance of causality, this remark, appearing later in the same passage, seems to say a little more about the relationship between the subject and the effectual reality within which she finds herself.

Schopenhauer here makes a distinction between sensation as the "plant-like consciousness of alterations" and perception which seems to provide these alterations with more meaningful content. This meaning is indexed to the will through the experience of pleasure or pain. Presumably then, perception is a sensation of alteration with the addition of the meaning-generating experience of pleasure or pain. Subjectivity, or the understanding as correlate of material reality, is thus the sensory apprehension of the world *coupled with* an apprehension of the world's effect on the senses themselves. The conscious subject comes to know these effects through an awareness of pleasure and pain. These affects are what separate the human and animal from "plant-like" existence and allow for meaningful, subjective experience. They are the form and the foundation of the awareness of having a body.

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[93] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1, 41.*

§4. Subjects in Pain

Schopenhauer argues that "the entire body must be nothing other than the will become visible."[94] As Schopenhauer writes, it would be impossible to enter into an inquiry regarding the world as representation if the inquirer were "himself nothing more than a purely cognizant subject (winged head of a bodiless cherub)." We come to know the world around us because we are "rooted" in it; it is our source of all of our cares, concerns, and motivations.[95] Our rootedness in our own bodies, our ability to understand our own bodies not just as phenomena but as stemming forth from and manifesting the thing-in-itself is the basis for Schopenhauer's entire metaphysics (and ultimately his ethics and aesthetics). Were we to understand the world as mere phenomena we would have no real understanding of our own drives and actions, our own bodies would be just as "foreign and unintelligible" as any other phenomenal beings or events. But, this is not the case

> …rather, the answer to the riddle is given to the subject of cognition in its appearance as an individual; and the answer is *will*… To the subject of cognition, which appears as an individual through its identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely distinct manners: on the one hand as presentation in perception by way of understanding…but then at the same time also in an entirely different manner, namely, as that, immediately familiar to everyone, which the word *will* designates.[96]

[94] Ibid., 145.
[95] Ibid., 136.
[96] Ibid., 139.

For Schopenhauer, all actions of the body are phenomenally instantiated movements of the will itself. The individual embodied subject with her cares and concerns acts in and through the will itself, and experiences these actions as totally charged with emotion. The will is experienced immediately in the form of *the affects.*

The individual experiences the will through the actions of the body, but as Schopenhauer points out, in line with thinkers such as Spinoza, these actions are precipitated by and are aimed at particular affective states.

> Every true, genuine immediate act of will is also at once and immediately an act of the body as phenomenon, and correspondingly, on the other hand, every effect of the body is also at once and immediately an effect on the will; as such it is called pain when it is contrary to the will, a good feeling, pleasure, when it is in accord with it. / *Jeder wahre, ächte, unmittelbare Akt des Willens ist sofort und unmittelbar auch erscheinender Akt des Leibes: und diesem entsprechend ist andererseits jede Einwirkung auf den Leib sofort und unmittelbar auch Einwirkung auf den Willen: sie heißt also solche Schmerz, wenn sie dem Willen zuwider; Wohlbehagen, Wollust, wenn sie ihm gemäß ist.*[97]

These states of pleasure and pain, or accord and discord with the will, in their various nuances, are the basic elements of all emotions. These emotions or affects are *not* thoughts. We do not feel with the same capacity by which we normally cognize. Rather, to experience an affect, say, in this instance frustration, is to have "immediate consciousness" (*unmittelbaren Bewußtseyn*) of the frustration of some part of the will itself.[98] To feel is to feel the currents of power which ripple through the will as impacting, hindering, and goading forward one's own body.

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[97] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1*, 138 / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 120.
[98] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1,* 139-140 / *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 2,* 122. Schopenhauer goes on to further describe this immediate consciousness:

Although both contribute to our emotional experience of the will within, pleasure and pain do not have equal standing in their capacity to reveal the will. In his essay "Additional Remarks on the Doctrine of the Suffering of the World," Schopenhauer remarks that we are very unlikely to take notice of the moments when our lives move in accordance with the will. "Just as a brook forms no eddy so long as it meets with no obstructions" we rarely experience pleasure just from flowing along some channel of the will. Yet we are very quick to notice all of the ways the will within us is obstructed or frustrated, when the will within collides with some other influx of power. While on an uneventful walk around the neighborhood with his poodle, Atma,[99] Arthur might experience little acknowledgeable pleasure, yet he would be distressed immediately should his boot begin to chafe his toe. This insight leads Schopenhauer to claim: "On this rests the negative nature of well-being and happiness, as opposed to the positive nature of pain."[100] Schopenhauer describes pain, or the feeling of infringement of

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> *By its very nature, by contrast, it can never be proven, i.e., derived as mediated cognizance on the basis of some other more immediate, precisely because it is itself the most immediate, and if we do not apprehend and retain it as such, we will seek in vain ever to regain it in a mediated way, as derivative cognizance. This is an entirely unique sort of cognizance, whose truth can just for that reason not ever really be brought under any of the four rubrics into which I divided all truth in the treatise on the Principle of Sufficient Ground…I would therefore like to signal this truth above all others and call it* ***philosophical truth****.*

[99] Schopenhauer, who had little love for his mother or sister, was quite fond of his pet poodles, both of which he named Atma (a reference to the Sanskrit word for "self"). In the biographical chronology provided in the new translation of Schopenhauer's *Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics,* Christopher Janaway remarks that while Schopenhauer refused to attend the funerals of his mother and sister he was known to have deeply lamented the death of the first iteration of Atma. See: *Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics.* Translated by David E. Cartwright and Edward E. Erdmann. (New York: Oxford, 2010), xxxviii-xxxix.

[100] Arthur Schopenhauer. *Parerga and Paralipomena: Vol. 2.* Translated by E. F. J. Payne. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 291-292. Here Schopenhauer argues that theodicy (here he specifically mentions Leibniz' *Théodicée*) is entirely backwards. Evil is real and present, while "all happiness and satisfaction, is negative, that is, the mere elimination of a desire and the ending of a pain."

the force of our will by other forces of will, as primary. Pleasure is merely the escape from or temporary cessation of pain, thus is wholly negative, i.e. a *lack of pain*. The positive, primary nature of pain, while present in the animal world, is even stronger in the human world as humans have better developed thought processes and memories "whereby anxiety, fear, and hope really come into existence for the first time."[101]

Schopenhauer describes "our existence and that of all animals" as a "*mere existential fluxa* which continues only through constant fluctuation and change and is comparable to a whirlpool." The form of the body consists of constant "assimilation" of new material and "evacuation" of old material.[102] We are only able to become aware of our lives as whirlpools of assimilation and evacuation when we experience the obstacles which the flow of live runs up against. These obstacles, which constitute the experience of pain, simultaneously generate individuals capable of feeling such pain.

For Schopenhauer, consciousness exists in animal organisms by degree, yet because all organisms are shot through equally with will, the animal experiences affective states to much the same degree that the human does:

> By contrast [to the different degrees of consciousness based on levels of intellectual development], longing, desiring, willing, or abhorrence, fleeing, nonwilling are proper to every consciousness; the human being has this in common with the polyp. Accordingly, this is what is essential and the basis of every consciousness. The difference in its expressions, in the various species of animal beings, rests on the varying extent of their

[101] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Vol. 2,* 293-294.
[102] Ibid., 289.

> cognitive spheres, which is that in which lie the motives for those expressions.[103]

Emotional states, or affectations of the will, are shared by all creatures for whom some degree of intellect mediates between the organism and its environment via the process of representation. What differs is the degree to which an organism is able to understand these states of its will and the bearing they have on its motives.

While humans may differ by intellectual degrees from neurologically simple animals such as polyps, both humans and animals share some capacity to feel and recognize the changes which occur in their wills and respond accordingly. For this reason, Schopenhauer advocates compassion for animals: "We understand immediately from our own essence all the actions and gestures of animals that express movements of will; this is why we sympathize with them to such an extent, in manifold ways. By contrast, the chasm separating us arises simply and solely from a difference in intellect." [104]

If we are to take seriously the positive nature of pain, then pain is that which allows the individual to feel out the boundaries of her own will, and thus her own body. The individual subject feels and is aware of her body, and ultimately her whole embodied self through a boundary which is regularly subject to the impingements of exterior forces. The conscious individual is thereby *constituted as such* by the experience of pain. Further, Schopenhauer suggests that time itself is the expression in consciousness -- or, as he puts it, "in

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[103] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation Vol. 2*, 231.
[104] Ibid., 231.

our brain" – of the fluctuating divisions of the will; it arises from the ebb and flow of pain, from our in inability to assimilate that which is outside of ourselves. Pain is thus, for Schopenhauer, the sign and the inception of actual reality (*Wirklichkeit*). Time is the means by which we render such flux into "things and ourselves."[105]

Pleasure exists for Schopenhauer in much the same way that art exists for Plato as an image of an image. The metaphysical world is a world of will in flux. The world of presentation, of cause and effect, of *Wirklichkeit*, exists for the embodied mind which is able to understand the will only through the experience of pain. The experience of sensual pleasure[106] is a vain obfuscation of our true nature as creatures rooted and united in a metaphysics of pain. Pleasure is a "chimera" which has a "pernicious influence" on our ability to apprehend the world;[107] whereas pain gives us insight into the true nature of reality and spurs us to find ethical and aesthetic means of coping with this reality.

Schopenhauer's pessimistic preoccupation with pain, providing it with more metaphysical clout than pleasure, bears little resemblance to Aristotle's naturalistic affect theory. Yet Schopenhauer's version of the appetitive model of life is an unmistakable descendant of *De Anima.* Like Aristotle, Schopenhauer takes sensation as the point of departure for the analysis of the individual. Sensation forms the individual in two mutually reinforcing ways. First it

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[105] *Parerga and Paralipomena: Vol. 2,* 289.
[106] It is worth noting here that for Schopenhauer, aesthetic satisfaction (*Wohlgefallen)* differs from sensual pleasure.
[107] Ibid., 12-13.

separates her from the amorphous world of will by establishing her in time and space via the *principium individuationis.* Second it informs her that she is surrounded by forces that have the power to thwart her growth and assimilate her being. Perception shows us that we are individuals and that to be an individual is to feel constant impingent in the form of pain. Our desire to escape this pain fuels much of our behavior, but this puts the subject in an inextricable bind. For desire motivates us to overcome and assimilate others which only leads us to discover new parameters of discomfort. We create antibiotics to protect ourselves from diseases; we overuse them to guarantee our health and safety; we inadvertently create drug-resistant bacteria. For Schopenhauer, as long as there is perception there are individuals who experience pain. While Aristotle views the appetitive model as an improvement on the mere subsistence of plants, Schopenhauer views this model as a desolate trap. The appetitive model culminates, for Schopenhauer in a single ethical choice: to affirm or to deny the will which traps us in a cycle of restless desire.

§5. Character and Affirmation

In discussing the will as it functions in animals, what he refers to as the mechanical drives, Schopenhauer describes two means by which the will operates. He calls these two modes motivation and instinct. Motivation functions by means of "an external occasion," while instinct operates through "an inner drive." However, Schopenhauer notes that motivation can only be explained with reference to instinct, as a motive is an instinctual act with a greater degree

of direction. The instincts are arranged in terms of the "determinate quality" of the will, or "character." Character is the particular arrangement (one could even say pitch) of the will within an individual creature. Schopenhauer describes the relationship between instinct and character thus:

> In accordance with all this, the difference between instinct and mere character can be said to be that the former is a character that gets set in motion only by a *quite specifically determined* motive, which is why the action resulting from it always turns out exactly the same in kind; by contrast, character, insofar as it is possessed by every animal species and every human individual, is to be sure likewise a permanent and inalterable quality of will, but one which can be set in motion by very different motives and adapts itself to them. For this reason, the action resulting from the latter can, in its material constitution, turn out very differently but yet will always bear the stamp of the same character, thus express and reveal it; for cognizance of it, the material constitution of the action in which it comes to the fore is therefore essentially indifferent. Accordingly, one could explain *instinct* as an inordinately *one-sided* and *highly determined character*.[108]

As we can see from the preceding quotation, there are three components in the description of animal behavior, namely motivation, instinct, and character. Any ethic of affirmation of the will is one which embraces the ways in which the will determines behavior through the interplay of these elements.

As we have already said, motivation is the animal's response to an external state of affairs. I.e. the dog might crouch down and begin to creep toward the chipmunk that he espies in the grass. Yet these motivations only make sense when an appeal is made to instinct. A sparrow would not, on the whole, behave in the same way in the presence of a chipmunk, because unlike the dog, the sparrow has no instinct to stalk the chipmunk. Instinct is an "inner

[108] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation Vol. II,* 390-391.

drive" [*innern Trieb*] which is very specific, i.e. the action of instinct is very specifically determined, whereas character is more circumstantially adaptable. Like instinct, character is an "inner drive" of the will which helps to provide the structure for animal motivations. Yet it is not so highly determined as an instinct and can have an influence on many types of behaviors. According to Schopenhauer, character is tied to the intellectual capacity of the animal. Insects run (exclusively) on instinct, while intellect allows other species to adapt responses to varying circumstances. I.e. a dog can be trained not to stalk one's pet kitten as he would the chipmunks in the yard.[109]

Schopenhauer understands intellectual capacity as something that operates in the living world on a sliding scale. In "On the Physiology of Plants," Schopenhauer writes that "knowledge is the true characteristic that indicates the essential limits of animal existence, because of the movement in response to motives which is conditioned by it. [*Dieserhalb eben ist, wie ich oft gesagt habe, das Erkennen, wegen der dadurch bedingten Bewegung auf Motive, der wahre und die wesentliche Gränze bezeichnende Charakter der Thierheit.]"*[110] Here Schopenhauer is drawing an essential connection between knowledge and motivation. This is first, to contrast the plant's response to stimuli with animal motivation, and second, to show that plants have will without knowledge.

As Schopenhauer sees it, the will for life (as it appears in the sex drive and in the one's drive to care for one's offspring) is a means by which creatures seek to

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[109] Ibid., 392.
[110] Schopenhauer, *On the Will In Nature,* 76. *Uber den Willen in der Natur,* 69.

partially overcome the *principium individuationis* and restore themselves to what he calls "eternal justice." The affirmation of the will for life amounts to wholehearted participation in the appetitive functions of the will, i.e. seeking pleasure, especially through sexual gratification.

> The life of a human being, with its endless effort, hardship, and suffering, is to be viewed as the explanation and paraphrase of the act of procreation, i.e., of decided affirmation of the will for life: it is also part of the latter that he owes nature a death, and he thinks apprehensively of this obligation. – Does this not testify to the fact that our existence is a debt? – In any case, there we remain, in exchange for the periodic toll to be charged, birth and death, and successively enjoy all the sufferings and pleasures of life, so that none might escape us: this is precisely the fruit of affirmation of the will for life. At the same time, the fear of death, which despite all the troubles of life holds us firmly in it, is really illusory, but just as illusory is the drive that enticed us into it. This enticement itself can be objectively perceived in the longing encounter of two lover glances: they are the purest expression of the will for life in its affirmation.[111]

Schopenhauer argues that it is the promise of sexual fulfillment which entices the human into affirmation of the will for life. But, when we buy into the system of affirmation, we find that in exchange for this pleasure, we ultimately owe our own lives to the endless crushing drive of the will.

Ultimately, for Schopenhauer, one's view of death –as obligatory– is a function of the decision to affirm life. When one does not accept the will for life, then one also does not accept the standard notion of death. On this account, the denial of the will for life provides us with an alternative to the cycle of life, procreation, and ultimate death. Schopenhauer views his ethic of compassion as not only opposed to the affirmation of the will for life, but to its corollary –

[111] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation Vol. II,* 633.

sexual love. Compassion and sexual desire exist on opposite poles, as the primary ethical comportments of two diametrically divergent worldviews.

> The act of procreation relates to the world, further, as the answer to a riddle. Namely, the world is wide in space and old in time and with an inexhaustible multiplicity of forms. Yet all of this is only the phenomenon of the will for life; and the concentration, the focus of this will, is the act of generation. In this act, therefore, the inner essence of the world most distinctly expresses itself.[112]

The act of procreation is the fulcrum which brings the phenomenal world, *Vorstellung,* into being. This is why according to Schopenhauer, the notion of the "cosmic egg" has near universal mythological appeal.[113] All acts of procreation are the generation and reiteration of the world of illusion. Yet this will to illusion lies at the heart of reality itself.

The entirety of phenomenal life is tied up in the will for life, its essence is the *Geschlechtstrieb.* It is built into the species character of all living creature and thus all non-human life is utterly beholden to the affirmation of the will for life.

> The *affirmation of the will for life*, which accordingly has its center in the act of generation, is inevitable in animals. For it is only in human beings that will, which is *natura naturans*, first arrives at *reflective awareness*… In actual reality, the life of every animal species, throughout the thousands of years of its existence, is to a certain extent like a single moment; for it is mere consciousness of the *present*, without that of the past and future and hence of death. In this sense, it is to be viewed as an enduring moment, a *Nunc stans.* -- Here incidentally we see most distinctly that the form pertaining to any life at all, or to the phenomenon of will with consciousness, is in the first instance and immediately merely the *present*: past and future are added only with human beings, and merely in

[112] Ibid., 634.
[113] Ibid., 635.

> concepts, are cognized *in abstracto* and at most illustrated by images of the imagination.[114]

As affirmation of the will for life is not wholly inevitable for the human, as it is for the animal, it can take at least two different forms: egoism and a positive ethics of the will, i.e. ethical affirmation.

Egoism in the individual is the microcosmic instantiation of the processes of overpowering assimilation which permeate the entirety of the Will. The egoistic affirmation of the Will for life is the physical enacting of the "blind pressing" of the Will with "cognizance, consciousness, and thoughtful awareness."[115] When operant within the wider social sphere it is —to borrow a term from the Frankfurt School—nothing more than instrumental rationality. If we were to dig down to the source of egoism we would find that it springs from the experience of pain. Pain, as we have seen, is what carves out the individual ego with her unique cares, needs, and desires. The egoist not only struggles to avoid being trammeled and assimilated by other forces, but goes on the offensive, reinforcing her will (and with it, her identity) by imposing it upon others; the egoist becomes the aggressor because her very being, as an individual ego, is bound up in the constant battle for individual and species survival.

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[114] Ibid., 635-636. Incidentally, it seems as though Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer that animal life lives for the present and that this worldview of *nunc stans* (which appears in his work as the eternal recurrence) is the worldview of the affirmation of life. Nietzsche, of course, embraces his inner animal, the *nunc stans*, and the affirmation of the will for life, while Schopenhauer rejects it. The important thing is to note that while they embrace different strategies, they frame the question of the will in more or less the same way.

[115] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. 1*, 336-337.

At first blush this seems a grim state of affairs: we are doomed to play out the self-destructive conflicts of the irrational and inscrutable Will on the phenomenal and historical stage, forever locked in a Hobbesian war of all against all. However, in leading up to his decisive ideas of the affirmation and denial of the will for life, Schopenhauer describes an individual who is capable of recognizing the illusory nature of the phenomenal realm, yet who embraces his life as it is to the fullest.

> A person who had firmly assimilated into his way of thinking the truths so far expounded, but who has not at the same time arrived, through his own experience or through more extensive insight, at a recognition of lasting suffering as essential to all life; rather, a person who found satisfaction in life, to whom all in it was perfectly fine, and who in the repose of reflective consideration desired the course of his life as he had experienced it so far to be of endless duration, or ever anew recurring, and whose vital spirit was so great that, for the sake of life's enjoyments, he would willingly and gladly accept in the bargain all the hardship and pain to which it is subject – such a person would stand 'with firm, solid bones on the well-rounded lasting earth' [here Schopenhauer is quoting from Goethe's *Die Grenzen der Menschheit*], and would have nothing to fear.[116]

Here Schopenhauer prefigures the context and content of Nietzsche eternal return as it appears in *The Gay Science*. It's clear, when looking at this passage, the ways in which Nietzsche's philosophy lines up with Schopenhauer's description of the ethical system of affirmation.

Schopenhauer, like Nietzsche, cites Bruno and Spinoza as two of the foremost examples of the philosophical affirmation of the will for life. Although he expresses disagreement with their ethics of affirmation, Schopenhauer lauds both philosophers in their overthrowing of scholastic thought:

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[116] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol I,* 335.

> Bruno and Spinoza… stand each for themselves and alone, and belong neither to their century nor to their part of the world, which rewarded the one of them with death, the other with persecution and ridicule. Their meager existence and death in this West is like that of a tropical plant in Europe. Their true spiritual home was the banks of the sacred Ganges: there they would have led a life of repose and honor among those of a like understanding.[117]

As we can see from his description of the sort of philosopher who embraces the will, what is at stake for Schopenhauer is the question of whether there can be such a thing as a viable form of the affirmation of life. Bruno and Spinoza are noble because they exemplify the conscious acceptance of the will. This acceptance eschews the unthinking "blind pressing" of the egoist, turning instead to a "thoughtful awareness" characteristic of Schopenhauer's notion of *repose*.[118] Repose, as we shall see, is the central tenet of Schopenhauer's vegetal model of life. It is no wonder that Schopenhauer describes them as tragic plants.

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[117] *WWR.I*, appendix, 488ff.
[118] *WWR.I*, 336-337.

Chapter Two

Vegetal Life as Still Life

§1. Introduction

Unlike many of his contemporaries, who thought of consciousness as the pinnacle of natural development, Schopenhauer offers a much more dim view of consciousness in relation to life in general. This is largely due to the ways in which Schopenhauer views consciousness as directly contributing to our unhealthy desires and hence our perpetual dissatisfaction. Schopenhauer deals with the relationship between will and appetite most directly in the commentary essay "On the Primacy of Will in Self-Consciousness." Here he describes the root of the appetitive model, consciousness, as a "mere fruit, a product, indeed a *parasite* with respect to the rest of the organism." Consciousness is not necessary for the life-functions of the organism or its "inner workings." Rather the impact of consciousness is found in its capacity to invest the organism with an "inner life" and thereby mediate the organism's relationship with that which is not inner, i.e. the surrounding environment, or in Schopenhauer's words "serving the purpose of self-preservation by regulating its relations to the external world."[119]

Consciousness (*Bewusstsein)*, for Schopenhauer, is co-emergent with and the intellect (*Intellekt)* and thus is only a secondary property of the organism and not a necessary component for an organism's will for life. While an organism may

[119] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol II,* 22, (emphasis mine).

have a greater or lesser degree of intelligence and a greater or lesser degree of consciousness, its remains wholly and perpetually shot through with will. It's worth noting that Schopenhauer not only views the intellect as superfluous from the point of view of the organism's will for life (as the image of the fruit might suggest) but even *detrimental* to the organism (as the term parasite might suggest). Yet, despite its unnecessary and even injurious nature, consciousness is the mechanism by which the will for life in humans is *modulated* and expressed as appetites.

Schopenhauer revisits the trope of the parasitic nature of the intellect in the following analogy:

> "In actual reality the intellect is like the mirror surface of water, but the water is like the will, whose agitation thus at once destroys [*aufhebt*] the purity of that mirror and the distinctness of its images. The *organism* is the will itself, is *will* embodied, i.e., objectively perceived in the brain; for this reason, many of its functions, such as respiration, circulation of the blood, secretion of bile, muscular strength, are enhanced and accelerated by pleasant and in general vigorous emotions. The *intellect* to the contrary is the mere function of the *brain*, which is only parasitically nourished and sustained by the organism; for this reason, every perturbation of the *will*, and with it of the *organism*, must disturb or paralyze the function of the brain, self-subsistent, and knowing no other needs than those of rest and nourishment."[120]

From this passage we get the sense that Schopenhauer views the intellect and the will as related but in a contest with one another. The intellect wants nothing more than to mirror and apprehend the world of appearances. But the intellect arises from the brain, which depends upon the organism's will. So whenever there is any unrest in the will of the individual (i.e. desires, emotions, appetites,

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[120] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation Vol. II,* 244-245

etc.) the intellect is disturbed. It can never achieve independence from the will because it is always tethered to the body by self-consciousness.

This chapter explores the ways in which Schopenhauer envisions both aesthetics and ethics to serve as *correctives* for self-consciousness and the appetites which it produces. I argue that Schopenhauer's ethics of renunciation is not a renunciation of the will for life itself, but merely a renunciation of *the appetitive form* of the will for life. The emphasis on both Schopenhauer's ethics and aesthetics is on the undermining of the phenomenal self that is found in consciousness. Both the aesthetic experience and the ability to feel compassion require that conscious being retreat from the world of *Vorstellung* and into the world of will.

While Schopenhauer describes a world in which humans are egoistic creatures caught in an endless cycle of desire, consumption, and boredom, his ethical and aesthetic work suggest that humans can use the mirror of consciousness to escape the agitations of the appetites, and to live a life of repose, a life for which the plant, not the animal, serves as a model, what Schopenhauer refers to as the still life. The still life as Schopenhauer's account of the vegetal model of life, entails the simultaneous rejection of the intellect's cordoning off of the organism from its surroundings via representation (i.e. individuation), and its regulation of the individual's subsequent interaction with its environment (i.e. appetites).

§2. Stimulated but Unmoved

Despite the initial failure of his magnum opus to achieve the level of renown that Schopenhauer felt it was entitled to, he continued to hope that his philosophical system would gain the respect of the academic community at large. He was particularly eager to attract the notice of the scientific world and thus sought to demonstrate the ways in which his metaphysics was amenable to and helpful for framing the scientific discoveries of the time. As he put it in the introduction to his work *On the Will in Nature*,

> Thus my metaphysics proves to be the only one that actually has an extreme point in common with the physical sciences, a point up to which those sciences use their own means in coming to meet it, so that they really connect and agree with it. Moreover this is not effected by twisting and turning the empirical sciences to make them fit metaphysics, or by secretly abstracting metaphysics from them in advance, and then, after the manner of Schelling, finding *a priori* what it had learned *a posteriori*. On the contrary, my metaphysics and the sciences meet of their own accord and without collusion at the same point. Thus, unlike all those previous systems, mine des not float in the air far above all reality and experience [*aller Realität und Erfahrung*], but comes right down to this firm ground of actuality [*Boden der Wirklichkeit*] where the physical sciences again take up the learner.[121]

Wirklichkeit, for Schopenhauer, includes not just the world of empirical observation but the substratum hovering beneath it. Thus, the primary goal of Schopenhauer's philosophy of science is to expose the implicit corroborations between scientific descriptions of life and his own philosophy of the will. *On the Will in Nature* presents "particular propitious instances" in which "unusually sharp and observant investigators" interpret the workings of plants and animals

[121] Schopenhauer, *On the Will in Nature,* 19

in such a way that they cast "a furtive glance behind the curtain that defines the boundary of the domain of natural science…and thus peep into the realm of metaphysics that lies beyond it."[122]

In seeking to find scientific corroboration of his philosophy of the will, Schopenhauer found time and again that misconceptions surrounding the soul impeded scientific understanding of the human mind and the workings of the will. He describes the problem thus:

> "Such an obstacle to the subject of our present investigation was the so-called rational idea of the soul, of that metaphysical entity in whose absolute simplicity knowing and willing were united and fused into an eternally inseparable unity. As long as this idea existed, no philosophical physiology was possible, the less so, as its correlative, real and purely passive matter, and necessarily to be assumed simultaneously therewith as the substance of the body, as an entity existing in itself, as a thing-in-itself. The rational idea of the soul was therefore responsible for the fact that the celebrated chemist and physiologist, Georg Ernst Stahl, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had to miss the truth to which he had come so near, and which he would have reached, had he been able to put in place of the *anima rationalis* the bare will that is still without knowledge, which alone is metaphysical… The *anima rationalis*, however, remained untouched in its honor and dignity as a strange guest in the house of the body, where it dwelled in the attic."[123]

Schopenhauer saw his philosophy, which completely severs the will from knowledge, as an alternative worldview which would help scientists better understand the ground of life and the basis of human and animal action.

The issue, for Schopenhauer, is the "physico-theological" impulse to ground the organization of nature by appealing to an external rational will. Schopenhauer agrees that the organization seen in the natural world does derive

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[122] Ibid., 21-22.
[123] Ibid., 34-35.

from will, but that this will is neither rational nor external. Rather, it is genetic, located in the living beings themselves. He makes this case in an extended critique of the Lamarckian theory that evolution comes about by repeated action on the part of the evolving species (i.e. giraffes have long necks because their ancestors repeatedly stretched their necks to reach more leaves). Schopenhauer immediately dismisses Lamarck's adaptive force theory, arguing that it cannot account for species that have clearly evolved together. Schopenhauer, not surprisingly, couches this critique in his usual pessimism: "For wherever a living thing breathes, another has at once appeared for the purpose of devouring it, and every animal is in a way designed and calculated throughout, down to the smallest detail, for the destruction of another." The design, however, is not to be taken as some external intelligence forming an animal to particular specifications. Rather, the design arises solely from the interaction of willing forces. The fox gets smarter in reciprocal relation to the rabbit getting faster. Schopenhauer argues that notion of the will can best capture the mutuality involved in evolution, because it doesn't require an element of intelligence — from within the organism, or without— to explain how these developments arise.[124]

Botany is of particular interest to Schopenhauer because the plant is an ideal example of a living being which appears to exhibit signs of *willing* which are not accompanied by intellect or consciousness. He writes,

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[124] Ibid., 54-62.

> The reluctance and reserve with which we see the above-quoted authors proceed to attribute to plants the will, which is after all empirically made known, spring from the fact that they too are steeped in the old opinion that consciousness is a requisite and condition of the will, but it is obvious that plants have no consciousness. It never occurred to them that the will is primary and therefore independent of knowledge, with which, being secondary, consciousness first appears.[125]

Initially, Schopenhauer's examples of unconscious willing seem to resemble his discussions of animal willing in that they depend on movement in response to external circumstances. In the chapter "Physiology of Plants," Schopenhauer cites extensively from naturalist Georges Cuvier. These initial citations, as well as Schopenhauer's own examples seem to suggest that Schopenhauer views the will in plant life in much the same way as he views it in animal life: as motion in response to a motivation. He cites the following passage from Cuvier's *Historie des progress des sciences naturelles*: "the movements of plants are *spontaneous*, viz., depend on an inner principle which receives directly the influence of external agencies."[126] Schopenhauer argues that what looks like spontaneity from the vantage point of empirical observation "always amounts to a manifestation of the will, of which, accordingly, spontaneity would be only a synonym."[127]

When describing examples of spontaneous activity (i.e. willed activity) action in plants, Schopenhauer turns to examples of plants which when planted in upside-down containers would grow so that their roots pointed up into the dirt. These examples struck the investigating scientists (M. Dutrochet, C. H.

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[125] Ibid., 74.
[126] Georges Cuvier, *Historie des progress des sciences naturelles*, quoted in Schopenhauer, *On the Will in Nature,* 69.
[127] Ibid., 69.

Schultz, and F. I. F. Meyen) and Schopenhauer as remarkable because they showed that the plant was responding to its environment rather than unfolding based on some pre-established "inner principle." Such movements prompted Meyen to ascribe a will to the plants, although they clearly lacked the mental and sensory apparatus usually thought to go with will. It would appear from such initial citations that Schopenhauer conceives of plant life as analogous to animal life. These opening paragraphs of Schopenhauer's most extensive treatment of plants might lead one to conclude that plants are similar to animals in that they move by means of some internal predilection in response to a set of external factors. If this is the case, what would lead Schopenhauer to think that the vicissitudes of plant life are any different from those of the obviously appetitive animal world?

The secret may lie, perhaps in the particular *way* in which plants go about responding to these "external agencies." Schopenhauer provides examples in which seeds were coaxed into germinating upside down by boring holes in the bottom of the plant's container and using mirrors to reflect sunlight into these holes, as well as situations in which potato plants in the darkest recesses of a cellar were able to seek out (through their growth) the sole source of light within reach. He references certain plants tendency to grow away from poor soil and toward more healthy ground. He also cites scenarios in which creeping vines grow forth in search of vertical supports on which to affix themselves. Such commonplace stories lead Schopenhauer, along with the naturalists whom he

cites, to attribute the force of will to these plants. All of these examples allow Schopenhauer to conclude that plants do operate by means of will and that will, in the case of plant life, can be described as Cuvier states, a spontaneous movement, which stems from some internal principle (i.e. the seeking out of light, support, etc.) and which responds to the influence of external agencies.

What is remarkable about plants, from Schopenhauer's perspective is their ability to adapt themselves to their environments in order to seek nutriment without action or conscious intention. This uncanny state of non-conscious movement is an important key to understanding the will's behavior within the living being. "Plants have a mere analogue of knowledge or representation, a surrogate; whereas they have the will itself actually and quite directly. For, as the thing-in-itself, the will is the substratum of their appearance, of every appearance."[128]

Here too, Schopenhauer is concerned with distinguishing will from consciousness and knowledge. Plants are useful figures for this distinction because they exist in a space of pure will. Animals, and ultimately humans, occupy a less straightforward position in reference to the will because of the relationship between will and consciousness. Consciousness is, for Schopenhauer, will turned around against itself, facing itself in the mirror of inner sense:

> Proceeding realistically, and accordingly starting from the objective, one can also say that that which lives and sprouts forth in vegetable nature

[128] Ibid., 74.

> and the animal organism, when it has gradually made its way up the scale of beings so far that the light of knowledge falls on it directly, presents itself as will in the now originated consciousness,[*nunmehr entstandenen Bewusstseyn*] and is here known more immediately, and consequently better than anywhere else. Therefore, this knowledge must supply the key to the understanding of all that is lower in the scale. For in it the thing-in-itself is no longer veiled by any other form than that of the most immediate apprehension [*unmittelbarsten Wahrnehmung]*. It is the apprehension of one's own willing with has been called the inner sense [*innern Sinn*].[129]

Consciousness can be viewed as our knowledge of the will within. But, in another very real sense, consciousness is the self-knowledge of the will. Botanical life is significant because in plants we can see the will in its most naïve form.

The naiveté of the plant points to the complicated relationship between knowledge and the will. On the one hand, all beauty and meaning only emerge in the light of knowledge.

> In itself the will is without apprehension and remains so in the inorganic and the plant kingdoms. The world would remain dark in spite of the sun if no bodies existed to reflect its light, and the vibration of a string required air and some kind of sounding-board in order to become a sound. In the same way, the will first becomes conscious of itself by the entrance of knowledge. Knowledge is, so to speak, the sounding-board of the will, and consciousness is the tone produced thereby.[130]

Without knowledge we are condemned to the blind pressing of botanical and inorganic life. However, the consciousness produced by knowledge gives birth to the experience of pain. In their lack of self-awareness, plants give us the first clue regarding how to escape from the pain of conscious existence.

§3. Characterizing Plant Life

[129] Schopenhauer, *On the Will in Nature,* 74-75. / *Sämmtliche Werke, Band 4,* 67-68

[130] Ibid., 75.

So the plant moves, but its movements are that of a somnambulist, how, then, does plant activity, if we might call this spontaneous movement activity, differ from the appetitive actions of animals? In the World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer begins to parse out the difference between plant and animal life by attributing animal movement to instinct while describing plant movement as a more basic response to stimuli. Animal instinct and plant stimulus response both have one critical component in common: they are both governed by *character*.

Schopenhauer describes three types of character, intelligible, empirical, and acquired. While acquired character requires a degree of intelligence that only a human can attain, both intelligible and empirical character are important concepts for the entirety of the living world, including plant life. Schopenhauer first discusses the difference between intelligible and empirical will in Book II, §20 in his discussion of the means by which the will enters into individual bodies and spreads itself across individual wills. Schopenhauer, following Kant, grounds his discussion on the intelligible and empirical wills in his analysis of motives. Motives do not determine character *as such*, but only the specific circumstances that govern acts of will. One's intelligible character is the individual will which is the *organizing principle* behind the body's response to motives. Thus empirical character is the "temporal phenomenon" of an

individual's will as it appears in the realm of *Vorstellung*. It is the aggregate of physical manifestations of the intelligible will.[131]

To describe the relationship between intelligible and empirical will, Schopenhauer provides us with a particularly evocative example:

> the intelligible character of any person is to be regarded as an extra-temporal, thus indivisible and unalterable, act of will, of which the empirical character is the phenomenon, developed and elaborated within time and space and all of the forms belonging to the Principle of Sufficient Ground, as that character is experientially displayed in the person's entire manner of action and course of life. Just as the whole tree is only the constantly replicated phenomenon of one and the same drive, which is most simply displayed in its fibers and replicated in the process of composition into leaf, stem, branch, trunk, and most easily recognizable therein, so all of a person's deeds are only the constantly replicated, somewhat changing expression of his intelligible character, and the induction proceeding from their sum yields his empirical character.[132]

What is crucial about this passage is that Schopenhauer is *not drawing a metaphorical comparison* between human character and plant life. Rather he is locating character in the life-drive itself. Character is the organizing principle behind a living being and as such is the channel for Will within the being. In this sense character is just as much a concept within philosophy of nature as it is a concept within ethics.

Character, when understood in this context, is the structure of the will as it occurs in an individual living creature. It is what relates the organism to its surroundings and channels the organism's energy toward self-preservation and

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[131] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation Vol. I*, 144-145; 339.

[132] Ibid., 342. Schopenhauer borrows the concept of "intelligible character" from Kant. But it is a strange adaptation because, for Schopenhauer, we can never really know the intelligible character of a person, only infer it from our sum experiences of the person's empirical character.

the replication of the species. Character is, in this sense, comparable to Nietzsche's notion of will to power. The will to power organizes the drives and forces within an individual creature in much the same way that character does for Schopenhauer. The main difference is that Schopenhauerian character is geared to survival of the species, while the will to power is geared to the growth of the individual. Thus, the will to power is a much more plastic concept than Schopenhauerian notion of intelligible character. As we can see in the preceding quote, the tree is destined to remain what it is as long lives. Its intelligible character is inherited and sealed, revealing the immutable *Idea* underlying its being. Will to power is far more adaptive and creative; it can be stylized.

So what does it mean for a plant to have character and the capacity for stimulus-response while lacking more complex instincts, behaviors, and consciousness? Schopenhauer discusses the non-conscious lives of plants in the following passage:

> Now that which, like the plant, has no representation is called by us unconscious, and we conceive it as differing only a little from the non-existent, in that it really has its existence only in the consciousness of another, as the latter's representation. Yet it does not lack the primary element of existence, the will, but merely the secondary one. But without this secondary, the primary, which is indeed the being or existence of the thing-in-itself, seems to pass into nothing. We do not know how to distinguish immediately with clarity an existence without consciousness from non-existence, although deep sleep gives us our own experience concerning them.[133]

Likening plant life to deep sleep, Schopenhauer gives us a first glimpse of what it would be like to live a life in total repose. Plants reside at the limit of animal

[133] Schopenhauer, *On the Will in Nature*, 75.

existence, exhibiting stimulus response without motives or the intelligence requires for the formation of motives. The status of the plant as living but lacking motives and appetites makes it an appealing figure when Schopenhauer begins to think through the aesthetic and ethical possibilities of escaping from the constant tumult of desire brought on by consciousness of one's will. In the following sections we will turn to the vegetal aspects of Schopenhauer's theory of art and moral theory.

§4. Silence and Stillness

As was discussed earlier, the character of a given object reveals the *Idea* at work beneath its presentation as phenomenon. Art, according to Schopenhauer, is in a unique position for revealing the *Ideas* that are otherwise obscured by the use-based relationships of the world of *Vorstellung*. The *Idea* of a living being, an inorganic object, or a physical force lies in the space between pure will, i.e. the raw thing-in-itself and the phenomenal world. Unlike will the *Idea* is objectified, by which Schopenhauer means that it is "being-object-for-a-subject." (*Objekt-für-ein-Subjekt-seyn.*) Yet unlike the phenomenal object, the *Idea* is metaphysically antecedent to the Principle of Sufficient Ground, which is to say, exists outside of space and time. The world of *Ideas* is thus "the step-ladder of objectification of the one will" as it exists in eternity. Here Schopenhauer occasionally alludes to

the Christian mystical tradition, calling the Platonic *Ideas* the "*Nunc stans*" of the world.[134]

The world as *Idea,* as "being-object-for-a-subject," lies at the threshold of that which we can know. Schopenhauer brings Kantian vocabulary in line with his own formulation of the Platonic *Ideas,* in describing the situation thus:

> …time, space, and causality are that structure [*Einrichtung*] of our intellect whereby that which is really the one and *only* actual being of a given kind is displayed to us as a plurality of beings of the same kind, ever anew arising and passing away in endless succession. Apprehension [*Auffassung*] of things by means of and according to said structure is *immanent* apprehension; that which by contrast consists in consciousness of what the former involves is *transcendental.* We get the latter *in abstracto* from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but in exceptional cases it can also occur in an intuitive manner. This latter is what I have to add, that which I am endeavoring to elucidate precisely by way of the present third Book [*The Platonic Idea: The Object of Art*].[135]

Aesthetic engagement, according to Schopenhauer, involves the intuitive apprehension of objects, not in their phenomenal being, but in their non-spatio-temporal, metaphysical being. It is the knowledge of an object as pure object-for-subject stripped of its individualization and plurality.

It is in this sense that we can better understand Schopenhauer's pronouncement, that the *Idea* of an object, the valence and degree of visibility of the will "reveals itself just as entirely and just as much in *one* oak tree as in millions."[136] We can relate to an object, in this case an oak tree, in an immanent manner. I can think of the oak tree in the front yard of my childhood home; it was planted to commemorate my birth, it is home to a multitude of fox squirrels,

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[134] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation Vol. I,* 217-218
[135] Ibid., 215-216.
[136] Ibid., 169.

it has slowly choked out the rose bushes by casting increasingly more shade on them, etc. In thinking of this tree, I am apprehending the oak immanently as a specific historical individual. In immanent apprehension, I am thinking, at least indirectly, of a particular individual object's use to me as a particular individual subject; *that* oak tree is *my* oak tree. Yet, as Schopenhauer's statement suggests, we need not relate to any object on this level alone. For the oak tree in the front yard can also be considered as the revelation of *Will-as-Oak*.

Aesthetics demands that the individual subject-object relationship be transcended and a relationship of pure-object-for-subject be established in its place. This happens when one cast aside ego-driven reason in favor of intuitive apprehension. Schopenhauer describes this rare and fleeting form of knowing:

> Suppose that by the power of spirit one abandons the usual way of regarding things, stops merely pursuing relations among them, the ultimate goal of which is always relation to one's will under the direction of modes of the Principle of Sufficient Ground, thus no longer considers the Where, the When, the Why, and the Whither of things, but simply and solely the What, nor lets abstract thinking, concepts of reason, consciousness occupy one's thinking; but instead of all this, one devotes the entire power of spirit to perception, becomes entirely absorbed in the latter and lets the entirety of consciousness be filled with restful contemplation of a natural object just at that moment present to oneself—be it a landscape, a tree, a cliff, a building, or whatever—entirely losing oneself, to employ a pregnant German expression, in this object [*sich gänzlich in diesen Gegenstand verliert*], i.e. precisely forgetting the individual one is, one's will, and remaining only as pure subject as clear mirror of object…[137]

Aesthetic contemplation demands that the viewer set aside her own use-value considerations regarding an object, focusing on the object itself so intently that subject and object are temporarily fused, the subject becoming the image of

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[137] Ibid., 221-222.

the object itself. In this moment the aesthete is transformed into the "*pure*, will-less, painless, timeless, *subject of cognition*" while the object of contemplation is similarly transformed into "the *Idea* of its species."[138] In contemplation the subject is able to detach herself, however briefly, from her own will, through becoming a reflection of the *Idea* of will of the aesthetic object.[139] To better comprehend the seemingly mystical way in which the subject is able to lose herself in aesthetic contemplation, I will take a moment to discuss Schopenhauer's theory of art in relation to Susan Sontag's "Aesthetics of Silence" an essay appearing in her collection *Radical Styles of Will.*

§4 ½. Discursion on Sontag

Susan Sontag views modern art as a spiritual activity, defining spirituality as "plans, terminologies, ideas of deportment aimed at resolving the painful structural contradictions inherent in the human situation, at the completion of human consciousness, at transcendence." In this sense art is the heir of certain religious and philosophical traditions: art supplants philosophy as a way of life. The rise of "art" (as opposed to "the arts") was responsible for, what Sontag calls the myth of "art as an *expression* of human consciousness."[140] Modern art emerged as a development and critique of this myth.

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[138] *Ibid.,* 222.
[139] Music, is a special case for Schopenhauer, as tones do not express the *Ideas* of will, but the very will itself. Thus aesthetic contemplation of music gives us a brief and mystical intuitive apprehension of the will of the world, i.e. a glimpse of the very thing-in-itself.
[140] Susan Sontag. *Styles of Radical Will. (*New York: Picador, 1969), 3-4.

> The later version of the myth posits a more complex, tragic relation of art to consciousness. Denying that art is mere expression, the later myth rather relates art to the mind's need or capacity for self-estrangement. Art is no longer understood as consciousness expressing and therefore, implicitly, affirming itself. Art is not consciousness per se, but rather its antidote – evolved from within consciousness itself.[141]

Sontag compares modern art's task, i.e. the self-estrangement of consciousness, to the religious mystic's project of *via negativa,* "a craving for the cloud of unknowing beyond knowledge and for the silence beyond speech" which in art becomes "anti-art, the elimination of the 'subject' (the 'object,' the 'image'), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence."[142] It is in Sontag's description of the myth of modern art, the foundation for the "aesthetics of silence" that we able to see strong parallels to Schopenhauer's understanding of aesthetics as a form of fleeting renunciation of the willing self.

Although Sontag does not reference Schopenhauer directly, she does provide several examples of the sort of artistic renunciation practiced by the modern artist: Rimbaud's disavowing poetry and subsequent voyage to Africa, Duchamp's abandonment of art in order to take up chess, Wittgenstein's non-philosophical job as a hospital orderly. "Accompanying these exemplary renunciations of a vocation, each man has declared that he regards his previous achievements in poetry, philosophy, or art as trifling, of no importance."[143] However, paradoxically, the corpus of each of these thinkers takes on an additional patina of meaning, a more profound sense of worth precisely because

[141] Ibid., 4.
[142] Ibid., 5.
[143] Ibid., 5.

of the artist's turn to silence; the artist's abdication becomes a further proof of his genius.

Sontag argues that "silence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter, and distorter of his work."[144] The silence of the anti-artistic tendency within modern art operates as the path to the transcendence of consciousness, it embodies the modern spiritual project.

> Though no longer a confession, art is more than ever a deliverance, an exercise in asceticism. Through it, the artist becomes purified – of himself and, eventually, of his art. The artist (if not the art itself) is still engaged in a progress toward "the good." But whereas formerly the artist's good was mastery of and fulfillment in his art, now the highest good for the artist is to reach the point where those goals of excellence become insignificant to him, emotionally and ethically, and he is more satisfied by being silent than by finding a voice in art.[145]

This silence need not be as extreme (or reprehensible) as Rimbaud's taking up the slave trade in Abyssinia; it can be found in every moment in which modern art perpetuates its "chronic habit of displeasing, provoking, or frustrating its audience."[146]

Just as Schopenhauer, contra Hegel, rejects the historicization of metaphysics in search of lasting strategies for overcoming the eternal meaninglessness of the world of will, the modern artist, according to Sontag, also struggles against the "alienation produced by historical consciousness." Though the employment of an aesthetics of silence, the artist seeks "to compensate for

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[144] Ibid., 6.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid., 7.

this ignominious enslavement to history" and "exalts himself with the dream of a wholly ahistorical, and therefore unalienated, art."[147] What might an artwork that renounces expression, self, and history look to achieve positively? Sontag argues:

> In the light of the current myth, in which art aims to become a "total experience," soliciting total attention, the strategies of impoverishment and reduction indicate the most exalted ambition art could adopt. Underneath what looks like a strenuous modesty, if not actual debility, is to be discerned an energetic secular blasphemy: the wish to attain the unfettered, unselective, total consciousness of "God."[148]

The aims of modern art, on Sontag's analysis, look strikingly like the spiritual aims that Schopenhauer describes in Book Three of *The World as Will and Representation.* The continuities between the two aesthetic theories become more apparent when we compare the previous statement from Sontag with the aesthetic program that Schopenhauer lays out in Book Three of *The World as Will and Representation.* In his description of the genius as the paradigm for aesthetic experience, Schopenhauer too turns to the renunciation characteristic of the genius. For Sontag, as in the case of Rimbaud, the genius rejects his own art as trivial, thereby nullifying the notion of art as intentional. This artistic silence is a spiritual practice as insofar as it frees the artist from his relationship to his audience, his consumers, while freeing him to pursue total attention to the experience of an object itself. The artist, in a sort of Faustian moment, abdicates modes of expression of his subject to achiever a deeper knowledge and experience of his subject, i.e. "unfettered, unselective, total consciousness."

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[147] Ibid., 15.
[148] Ibid., 14.

For Schopenhauer too, the genius seeks total experience of his object at the cost of intention, of maintain his will. He writes:

> Only through the pure contemplation described above, entirely absorbed in its object, are Ideas apprehended, and the essence of *genius* consists precisely in a predominating capacity for such contemplation. Since this demands forgetting one's own person and relationships entirely, *genius* is nothing other than the most complete *objectivity*, i.e., an objective orientation [*Richtung*] of the sprit as opposed to one that is subjective, directed at one's own person, i.e., the will. Accordingly, genius is the capacity for maintaining a pure intuitive [*anschauend*] state, for losing oneself in the intuition [*Anschauung*], and for withdrawing cognizance from service of the will that it existed originally but to serve, i.e., entirely losing sight of one's interest, one's willing, one's purposes, and thus getting utterly outside one's own personality for a time, so as to remain as *purely cognizant subject*, clear eye of the world.[149]

Both Schopenhauer's and Sontag's artists step outside of his own intentions to have a more complete, even mystical relationship with the art object.

However, there are moments where Schopenhauer appears to be caught up in the original myth of art, that of art as the artist's expression of meaning. For example, Schopenhauer writes that the genius has cultivated his capacity to contemplate without willing to such a degree it becomes a

> manner of cognizance which allows him to maintain with it the thoughtful awareness required for replicating the object of cognizance in a work of his choice; this replication is the work of art. Through this he communicates the apprehended Idea to others…The work of art is merely a means for facilitating the cognizance in which that satisfaction consists.[150]

[149] Schopenhaeur, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. 1,* 229. I modified the translation slightly. Both Payne and Aquila/Carus translated *Anschauung* as perception. I think this is misleading, as Schopenhauer is using *Anschauung* in the same manner as Kant. So I chose to replace the term "perception" with Guyer's translation, "intuition." The term intution also gets to the immediate nature of aesthetic apprehension, which happens outside of the normal cognizance/*Erkenntnis* of the Principle of Sufficient Ground. That connotation is lost in translating *Anschauung* as perception.
[150] Ibid., 239.

The modern aesthetic, on Sontag's reading, requires the renunciation of this myth.

Although there are moments when Schopenhauer seems to be advocating an aesthetic theory in which the artist "expresses" his experience of a particular object, i.e. the *Idea* of an object, overwhelmingly his philosophy is the 19th Century manifestation of the yearning for an aesthetics of silence. Sontag describes a certain mode of the aesthetics of silence in which the artist's evocation of silence operates as "part of a program of perceptual and cultural therapy."[151] Understood in this way, silence is a tool that the artist uses to allow us to move beyond thought *about* an object to experience *of* an object. Examples of this strategy, provided by Sontag, can be found in the work of Rilke and Ponge, and in the stark literalness of Kafka, Beckett and the Surrealists who attempt to strip language down to a "brutal nominalism" so as to overcome the "alienation of consciousness."[152]

This strategy of constraining language so as to create "silences around things"[153] is congruous with the relationship Schopenhauer envisions between the object of art and the Platonic Idea of an object. Compare the following statements:

> **Sontag**: Silence is a metaphor for a cleansed, non-interfering vision, appropriate to artworks that are unresponsive before being seen, unviolable in their essential integrity by human scrutiny. The spectator would approach art as he does a landscape. A landscape doesn't demand from the spectator his 'understanding,' his imputations of significance,

[151] Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, 23.
[152] Ibid., 24-25
[153] Ibid., 23.

> his anxieties and sympathies; it demands, rather, his absence, it asks that he not add anything to *it.* Contemplation, strictly speaking, entails self-forgetfulness on the part of the spectator: an object worthy of contemplation is one which, in effect, annihilates the perceiving subject.[154]

> **Schopenhauer**: But when an external occasion, or inner state of mind [*Stimmung*], suddenly lifts us out of the endless stream of willing, tears cognizance away from enslavement to will, our attention is then no longer directed toward motives of willing, but rather apprehends things free from their relation to will, thus without interest, without subjectivity, regarded purely for themselves, entirely given over to them so far as they are merely presentations, not so far as they are motives…. This state, however, is just what I described above as required for the cognizance of Ideas, as pure contemplation, absorption in intuition [*Anschauung*], losing oneself in the object, forgetting all individuality, nullification [*Aufhebung*] of that manner of cognizance which follows the Principle of Sufficient Ground and comprehends only relations; thereby simultaneously and inseparably, the individual who is cognizant of it rises to the pure subject of will-less cognition, and the two as such now stand no longer within the stream of time and all other relations. It is then all the same whether one sees the sun setting from the prison or from the palace.[155]

The self-forgetfulness described by Sontag is another way at getting at the will-less state of pure contemplation which Schopenhauer views as the hallmark of the aesthetic experience. Just as for Sontag, all modern art appears as a landscape, as aloof from human demands and meanings, for Schopenhauer, the Dutch *still life* is the definitive example of this will-less, non-consumptive, non-rational (i.e. unmitigated by the principle of sufficient ground) mode of perception:

> An inner state of mind [*Stimmung*], a preponderance of cognition over willing, can call forth this state in any surroundings. This is shown us by those excellent Dutchmen who directed so purely objective a perception upon the most insignificant objects and produced a lasting monument to their objectivity and spiritual repose in *still life,* which the aesthetic beholder cannot regard unmoved. For it makes present to the latter's

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[154] Ibid., 16.
[155] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. 1,* 241.

> mind the restful, still, will-less state of mind of the artist that was needed for so objectively perceiving, for so attentively regarding such insignificant things, and for such thoughtful awareness in replicating this perception. And insofar as the picture prompts him to share in such a state, he is even often moved in a way that is magnified by its contrast with the frame of mind [*Gemütsverfassung*] in which he finds himself at the moment, restless and obscured by willing. Landscape painters, particularly Ruisdael, have often painted highly insignificant rural objects in the same spirit, and thereby produced the same effect even more delightfully.[156]

Still life paintings and landscapes are, for Schopenhauer, a true test of the artist's capacity for aesthetic contemplation because they are such truly insignificant things. To lose oneself in a bouquet of flowers or a stand of poplars and further to *replicate* this loss of self in the image of such simple subject matter requires an expert degree of intuition.

The plant, as simultaneously living but unknowing is perhaps the perfect object of aesthetic contemplation for Schopenhauer. In aesthetic experience, the viewer becomes the "pure will-less, painless, timeless, subject of cognition" [*willenlos, schmerzlos, zeitlos, Subjekt der Erkenntnis].* This painless will-less state is consciousness in total repose. The best sort of object for achieving this state would be one that clearly exhibited the will, so the subject could mirror it in her understanding. But it would be the sort of object that wouldn't inspire strong feelings of desire, which would stir up the will of the subject, barring her from contemplation. Plant life is just this sort of object. It exhibits the will, but doesn't evoke strong emotional reactions. Further, in existing solely as the mindless blind pressing of the will it allows the view to contemplate a sort of life that is

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[156] Ibid., 241-242.

unaffected by appetites and desires. Landscapes and still life paintings depict life in repose and in this way are ideal for a subject seeking repose in dissolution in an object.

The plant, lacking the complexity of objectification to experience or express desire allows the viewer to become one with the object of cognition and renounce desire as well. Thus, while the living plant is by no means a "still life," in its non-motivated quietude it portrays such a state for the viewer. This still life, this quieting of the will, when unchallenged by the will of the viewer, is experienced as beauty. Plants are thus particularly well-suited to be considered beautiful:

> It was already noted above that the transportation into the state of pure perception *[Anschauung]* occurs most easily when objects accommodate it, i.e., when by their manifold and at the same time particular and distinct form they easily become representatives of Ideas; therein in the objective sense, consists precisely beauty. Above all, natural beauty possesses this property and thereby wins from even the most insensitive at least some fleeting aesthetic satisfaction. Indeed, it is so striking in particular how the plant world prompts us to the aesthetic mode of regard and as it were importunes us to adopt it, that one might say that this accommodation is connected with the fact that these organic beings are not themselves, like animal bodies, immediate objects of cognizance.[157]

Plants are especially accommodating of the aesthetic experience because they cannot know themselves as will. They do not feel or know, thus the subject which mirrors the plant through aesthetic contemplation is able to still her own feeling and will.

While plants are often perceived as beautiful, they can, for Schopenhauer, also play an important part in the feeling of the sublime. The feeling of the

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[157] Ibid., 246.

sublime occurs when the will is challenged has to struggle with a sense of danger before achieving a quieted state. As an example of the sublime, Schopenhauer describes a landscape: "Let us transport ourselves into a most lonely region, with unlimited horizon, under utterly cloudless skies, trees and plants in entirely motionless air, no animals, no people, no moving waters, the deepest stillness." This scene is experienced as sublime because it is utterly alien and unlike human life. The landscape is alive and thriving but, without animals or people, it is not a world of appetites, motives, feelings, or desires. On the one hand contemplation of this scene instills in the aesthete the feeling of repose coincident with beauty. On the other hand it threatens our sense of humanity by causing us to consider the "dependency and pitifulness of a will that is in need of constant driving."[158] In both the experience of beauty and the experience of the sublime, botanical life is instructive because it provides the aesthete with a view of the will which is not consumed by appetites and desires. As such the plant is instrumental in the Schopenhauerian project of renouncing the will.

§5. A Shared Passion

While Schopenhauer often appears to think of himself as a theoretical empiricist when it comes establishing the metaphysics of the will, he argues that no well-developed *ethical* system can stem from a solely empirical approach to understanding the world as this would result in merely animal behavior, determined by said perceptions. Although pessimistic about the realities of the

[158] Ibid., 249.

world, Schopenhauer fiercely defends the is/ought distinction, allowing his philosophy the faintest glimmer of hope. On Schopenhauer's account, reason allows the human to overcome his animal desire, and what we call rational is exactly that which seeks to overcome the determined nature of animal behavior. Reason functions by "annihilating [the] deceptive show" of perception.[159]

Our nature as sensitive creatures draws us into this deception and the pull of the world of representation is felt most strongly –at least in the moral sphere—through the experience of emotion (*animi perturbatio).*

> I would then recall Seneca's pronouncement: *Si vis tibi omnia subjicere, te subjice ratione* [If you wish to make everything subject to yourself, then subject yourself to reason]. But now since, as is shown in the fourth book, suffering is of a positive nature, pleasure negative, anyone who takes abstract cognizance, or cognizance on the part of reason, as the principle of his action and therefore always considers its consequences and the future, will very frequently need to practice *Sustine et abstine* [endure and renounce], since to achieve the greatest possible painlessness in life he generally sacrifices lively joys and pleasures…[160]

Although he purports to be inspired by Kant's notion of practical reason, as we can see in the above passage, Schopenhauer moves away from the Kantian categorical imperative and toward something that looks far more like Stoic ethics.

While Schopenhauer recognizes that the content of Book IV of the *World as Will and Representation* and the subsequent addenda in *WWR, Volume II* are of a more practical nature, he also is loath to call his work practical philosophy because "all philosophy is always theoretical, in that it is of its essence always to

[159] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. II,* 168.
[160] Ibid., 170.

proceed purely contemplatively whatever the immediate object of its investigation, and to inquire, not to prescribe." He continues, "Virtue cannot be taught, no more than genius; indeed, concepts are as unfruitful for it as for art and of use only as tools. We would thus be just as foolish to expect that our moral systems and ethics might awaken the virtuous, noble, and saintly as that our aesthetics might awaken poets, sculptors, and musicians."[161]

The foundational difference between Schopenhauer and Kant when it comes to ethics, is the latter's reliance on the notion of the "good will." For Schopenhauer, the will is precisely what draws us into selfish spiral of desire and temporary satisfaction. To live ethically is not to discover and live by the good will, but to find practices which negate or otherwise still the will. Schopenhauer's rejection of the notion of the "good will" stems from his account of pain as primary and pleasure as secondary. Pain is metaphysical reality, whereas pleasure is merely the temporary (and therefore ultimately illusory) avoidance of pain. To *will* something, even something noble and right, is a wrongheaded attempt to escape the reality of pain, thereby further entrenching the willing person into the agonism of existence.

To escape the agony of desire, the subject must succumb to the reality of suffering, by renouncing pleasure as the co-conspirator of pain. Kant, who in this sense is the heir of rationalism, posits that reason and the good will can trump passion. In positing the primordial status of suffering, Schopenhauer makes the passions more fundamental than reason. Reason's job is not to function

[161] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation Vol. I,* 321-322.

independently of the passions but to most efficiently serve the quest for painlessness. For Schopenhauer, the path to freedom from passion is, paradoxically, the turn to compassion.

Schopenhauer's ethics is inspired by the *Cynics'* notion that one suffers more through loss than by never possessing something at all. For the cynic, the life of sacrifice is the most happy because one is never caught in the snare of having – and then losing – one's happiness. In describing the Cynics, Schopenhauer writes "Independence, in the widest sense, was their aim;" he compares them to contemporary mendicant religious orders.[162]

The Stoics, as Schopenhauer's story goes, develop the theoretical side of the Cynic ethical practice. For the Stoic it is not necessary to sacrifice everything, as long as everything one does have is recognized as contingent and "*dispensable*." The Stoic is actually more indifferent to pleasure than the Cynic for he does not even value the *sacrifice* of the object. To him, neither the object nor its sacrifice factor into his happiness. Schopenhauer, however, sees a flaw in the Stoic movement away from Cynic practice and toward theoretical indifference:

> Thus the Stoics perfected the theory of equanimity and independence at the expense of practice, reducing everything to a mental process and, with arguments such as those offered in the first chapter of Epictetus, sophistically availing themselves of all the comforts of life. But in doing so, they did not take into account that everything to which we have become accustomed becomes a need and therefore can be dispensed with only painfully; that the will cannot be toyed with, cannot take enjoyment without loving enjoyment; that a dog does not remain indifferent when

[162] Ibid., 175-177.

> we tantalize it with a piece of roast meat, and, when he is hungry, not a sage either; and that there is no mean between desire and renunciation.[163]

In this passage, we can see Schopenhauer's preference for Cynic practice over late-period Stoic moral posturing (here he specifically points to Arrian). Schopenhauer's primary point of contention with the Stoics is that the mental disavowal of the objects of desire is not enough because when we indulge in our passions, our desires, our emotional needs we ultimately become beholden to them. Schopenhauer summarizes the core of Stoic eudaimonism thus: "Our suffering always springs from a lack of congruence between our desires and the world's course…Since then the course of things is not in our power, we must adjust our willing and desiring according to the course of things." As neatly rational as this may be, on Schopenhauer's account it fails to meet the criteria of a eudaimonistic philosophy. *Ataraxia* may bring about tranquility but it can never truly make one happy, although, as Schopenhauer is quick to point out, "greatness of spirit and dignity lie in silent and tranquil bearing of what is unavoidable."[164] While many are quick to dismiss Schopenhauer's ethics as a sort of neo-Stoicism, this interpretation misses the unique subtleties of his position. In the end, Schopenhauer respects Cynicism and true Stoicism, but does not see these as the final answer to the problem of our enslavement to the will. Both philosophies take an overly cerebral approach to the problem of pain; with a deeper understanding of reality, pain can be renounced. For Schopenhauer,

[163] Ibid., 177-178.
[164] Ibid., 179.

however, pain emerges *in* or understanding of reality, thus his account of renunciation requires a slightly different tack.

Schopenhauer sets up a fundamental moral choice, what he frames as the affirmation or denial of the will for life. This description of our moral alternatives is especially stark in the final book of the *World as Will and Representation*. However, on closer inspection, and with greater attention to Schopenhauer's aruguments in *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics,* the choice is better described as a choice between egoism and compassion.

In order to expose the heart of the ethical alternative of affirmation, Schopenhauer first analyzes the will for life as it appears in humans. He argues, against Spinoza, that the will for life does not merely "display itself as a drive for *Selbsterhaltung*" [self-preservation]; because the will is not ultimately individual, but universal; it is present in the sex drive "which has an endless series of generations in view." For Schopenhauer, the sex drive is the absolute manifestation of the futile and self-destructive nature of the will.

> This drive removes the unconcern, cheerfulness, and innocence that would accompany a merely individual existence, brings disquiet and melancholy into consciousness, misfortunes, concern, and hardship into the course of one's life… Satisfaction of that strongest of all drives and desires is connected with the origin of a new existence, hence with life carried out anew, with all its burdens, concerns, hardships, and pains: to be sure in *another* individual. [165]

Because one's life is always devoted to the wellbeing of one's offspring, one lives the present for a future she will never experience. Thanks to the power of the procreative drive, true pleasure is always postponed and individual happiness is

[165] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. II,* 632.

sacrificed for the good of the species. Schopenhauer paints a bleak picture "life displays itself as a task, a job to be works at, and therefore as a rule, as a constant battle against hardship. Accordingly, everyone seeks to get through it and come off as well as he can: he works off life like indentured servitude for a debt." [166]

For Schopenhauer it is the knowledge of death which prompts some humans to feel dissatisfaction with the affirmation of the will for life. Schopenhauer argues (in a proto-Existentialist moment) that humans, unlike animals, possess imagination, are burdened by knowledge of the past and the future, and are thus bound to consider their own deaths. The affirmation of the will for life becomes more complicated for the human because should she affirm life, she does so *with knowledge* of the reality of death. The pleasure of the sex-drive is pleasure postponed. Individuals who are aware of their mortality understand that this pleasure, punted into future generations, will never truly arrive.

Considered from a cosmic rather than individual perspective, this "knowledge" of death, is actually a mistake on Schopenhauer's view because it is a privileging of phenomenal circumstances of the *principium individuationis* over the true metaphysical reality. When the individual "dies" her phenomenon merely disappears into the species life as the spray on the crest of a wave disappears back into the undulation of the vast ocean.

Schopenhauer suggests that the true relationship between life and death can be most clearly grasped through a consideration of plant life. The plant lacks sensory apparatus; thus, while the plant is capable of responding to general

[166] Ibid., 633.

stimuli, these stimuli are not "motives" and do not coalesce into desires. A lack of sensory apparatus means that the plant has little or no means of distinguishing "itself" from its surroundings. It has no mind, no self-concept, no awareness of individuality, hence plants have a very different sort of relationship with death.

> That procreation and death are to be regarded as belonging to life, and essential to this phenomenon of will, also emerges from the fact that they are both displayed to us only as more highly potentiated expressions of that of which all the rest of life consists. The latter, namely, is through and through nothing other than a constant exchange of matter underlying constant persistence of form; and precisely this is the transitory condition of individuals in relation to the permanence of the species. Constant nourishment and reproduction differs from procreation only in degree, and constant excretion only in degree from death. The former shows itself most simply and distinctly in the plant. The latter is through and through only a constant replication of the same drive, of its simplest fibers grouped together into leaves and branches, is a systematic aggregate of homogeneous, mutually supporting plants, the constant regeneration of which is their single drive. It rises to a more complete satisfaction of that drive by means of the ladder of metamorphosis, finally arriving at blossoms and fruit – at that compendium of its existence and striving – in which it now attains by a short path to that which is its single goal, and now with a single stroke accomplishes a thousand-fold what until then it had only effectuated within the individual: self-replication.[167]

What is initially important about this quotation is that the plant provides us with a more metaphysically accurate view of the relationship between life and death. Both the increase and decrease in life happen incrementally and the cessation of an individual life has no bearing on life itself. This passage also highlights the underlying identity between what we consider to be personal experiences (nourishment and excretion) and the universal "laws" of reproduction and decay.

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[167] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. I,* 328.

The entirety of the plant is organized by a single drive, what Schopenhauer describes as "self-replication." The organs within the plant are all geared toward endless growth, which, as is seen with "blossom and fruit," lies on a continuum with reproduction. While the quantitative, rather than qualitative, difference between growth and procreation exists in all life, it is particularly plain to see with the plant because of the minor and obvious changes in the organs from root to stem to leaf to flower to fruit (up the "ladder of metamorphosis"). Further, the plant, which dwells in a species-colony, or what Schopenhauer calls a "systematic aggregate of homogeneous, mutually supporting plants, is not always easily distinguishable from its progeny and siblings, often sharing organs across "individuals." For example: a mature spider plant shares stems with its young, a copse of aspens shares a common root system. In this sense, the being of the plant is a critique of the individual human ego.

For Schopenhauer, the affirmation of the will for life is only successful when it considers life from the perspective of the whole. Schopenhauer concedes the virtue of the affirmative path, but insofar as one affirms life *sub specie aeternitatis*. Prefiguring Nietzsche's notion of *Amor Fati*, Schopenhauer describes this ideal affirmer of the will for life as one "whose vital spirit [is] so great that, for the sake of life's enjoyments, he would willingly and gladly accept in the bargain all the hardship and pain to which it is subject."[168]

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[168] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. I,* 335.

However, this innate magnanimity is exceedingly rare, and most affirmation of life occurs in the guise of egoism. Egoism is problematic for Schopenhauer because it is both intellectually misguided and the source of much of the world's unhappiness. In *On the Basis of Morals*, Schopenhauer clearly ties egoism to the appetitive model of life as the "fundamental incentive" of both animals and humans. Egoism's core lies in reaffirming the individual over and against everything outside of her purview. It does so through a perpetual process of desire and assimilation. The egoist "wills to enjoy everything possible, have everything; since this is impossible, at least to be master of everything."[169] While Schopenhauer sometimes describes himself as rejecting the affirmation of the will, he is in fact, only rejecting affirmation insofar as it affirms the individual through the constant assertion of individual appetites.

Schopenhauer contrasts egoism with an alternative comportment toward the will using terms which recall the aesthetic experience:

> The opposite of this, *the denial of the will for life*, shows itself when willing comes to an end and in response to that cognizance, in that the individual phenomena of which one is cognizant are then no longer effectual as *motives* for willing, but rather one's entire cognizance of the essence of the world that mirrors the will, having grown out of the apprehension of *Ideas*, becomes a *quieter* of the will, and so the will freely nullifies itself.[170]

As in aesthetic experience peace is found through the quieting of sensory motives. The difference lies in the source of this quietude: aesthetic contemplation is the mental fusion of subject and object while the ethics of denial

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[169] Schopenhauer, *Two Fundamental Problems,* 202.
[170] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. I,* 337

is the fusion of feeling between two people; cognitive quietude is experienced as repose, while emotional quietude is experienced as *Mitleid*.

For Schopenhauer, even as pain delineates desires and constitutes the bounds of the individual, it simultaneously opens the individual's consciousness up to an "immediate and intuitive cognizance" of the Will as it exists beyond space, time and the *principium individuationis.*[171] The experience of pain situates one's own vital force and desires within a broader field of forces. When a person's struggle for self-realization is hampered and he subsequently feels pain, he can take this pain as a sign that there are other forces out there that are also striving for self-realization, and that his very being depends on the existence of these other sources.

On this view, to be constituted through the experience of pain is also to be constituted and sustained by the forces of the life-world beyond. The denial of the will for life, is thus not really a denial of the Will itself, but rather a denial of the ultimacy of the *personal* will. The intuition in such experience is that one does not suffer and struggle against the rest of the world; one *suffers with* the rest of the world. Where the egoist feels only pain, the ethical person feels compassion (*Mitleid),* literally "suffering-with". In the state of compassion, the good person has "cognizance of the fact that our true self exists not merely in our own person, in this individual phenomenon, but in everything that lives." Thus, while the egoist "feels himself surrounded by foreign and hostile phenomena," the "good

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[171] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. I,* 429.

person lives in a world of phenomena that he has befriended: the welfare of each one of them is his own."[172]

The compassion of the good person, according to Schopenhauer, is the expression of a philosophically accurate view of the world; compassion is the practical instantiation of the theoretical insight that "plurality and separateness belong only to *appearance*" therefore the "apprehension which suspends the distinction between I and Not-I is not in error."[173] This dissolution of division between the I and the Not-I extends not only to humans but to the entirety of the phenomenal world. "Indeed," Schopenhauer argues, "this extends even to animals and the whole of nature." Thus Schopenhauer advocates against animal cruelty and vivisection.[174]

Compassion, as co-suffering with the life-world, has the added benefit of being equally applicable to individuals and to systems. Gary Varner argues that Schopenhauer is a very useful resource for environmental philosophy because his metaethics can take both environmental holism and environmental individualism into account in a way which synthesizes these seemingly incongruent positions. Varner demonstrates that compassion operates in two different ways. First compassion allows the moral agent to recognize the presence of the Will and the potential for suffering within other living creatures. This "identification with the sufferings of another first leads one to stop destroying that other locus of will, to allow that intelligible character to continue

[172] Ibid., 432-434.
[173] Schopenhauer, *Two Fundamental Problems,* 267.
[174] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. I,* 432.

to manifest itself." This safeguarding of the will of another is at the root of the first of Schopenhauer's two primary virtues, *justice.* Further, when experienced on an even deeper level, compassion may cause the moral agent to not only protect but foster and support the will of another. This impulse to nurture the will of another, even when such action requires sacrifice on the part of the agent is characteristic of the second virtue which Schopenhauer refers to as "loving kindness" (*caritas*). [175] Both of these virtues can be applied to individual living creatures, to species, and finally to the "ecological whole."[176]

Compassion is the fundamental virtue underlying all ethics, grounding the secondary virtues of care and justice. Just as Schopenhauer ties repose to vegetal being in his aesthetic work, he discusses compassion and justice in botanical terms in his ethics. Compassion is the "root" of justice, which "is strong enough for this plant, which on earth is always rare and exotic."[177] It may appear that this metaphor is an incidental flourish, but taken in the context of Schopenhauer's entire philosophy, we can see that the only appropriate metaphor for an ethical system which denies the ultimate reality of the individual and seeks to offset individual desire through awareness of our commonality, is the metaphor of the plant.

Schopenhauer repeatedly turns to a vegetal model of understanding life because this model best exemplifies the ways in which ethics and aesthetics both

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[175] Varner, "The Schopenhauerian Challenge in Environmental Ethics," in *Environmental Ethics 7,* Fall 1985, 216.
[176] Ibid., 227.
[177] Schopenhauer, *Two Fundamental Problems*, 220.

relate to the metaphysics of the will. The plant is the figure of the will because it exemplifies the drive to life in its simplest form. In its lack of consciousness the plant defies the individuation inherent in the world of representation. As individuation is the source of human misery, the plant stands as a challenge to rational sensitive beings to overcome the vicissitudes of *Vorstellung.*

Chapter Three

The Appetitive Model and Nietzsche's Affective Force

§1. The Iconoclast and his Followers

Reflecting in *Ecce Homo* on the import of Schopenhauer in his early self-understanding, Nietzsche writes: "in *Schopenhauer as Educator* my innermost history, my *becoming*, is inscribed. Above all, my promise!"[178] The legacy of Schopenhauer is writ large on Nietzsche's philosophical development; Nietzsche's growth as a thinker can be mapped against his views regarding Schopenhauer and "the Schopenhauerians." Nietzsche first stumbled upon *The World as Will and Representation* in 1865 in a used book store. The 21-year old, found the text to be a galvanizing force, providing him with a new intellectual and spiritual orientation.[179]

Nietzsche's view of his predecessor changed dramatically throughout the course of his intellectually productive life. Karl Jaspers describes Nietzsche's thought as passing through three distinct phases: his youthful writings (1871-1876), his positivist period (1876-1882), and his mature "final" philosophy, (lasting from 1882 through 1888). The first phase, encompassing *The Untimely Meditations* and *The Birth of Tragedy,* is characterized by Nietzsche's veneration of

[178] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 281.
[179] Christopher Janaway. *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 342-343.

figures of genius (notably Wagner and Schopenhauer); the middle phase, following from his friendship with Paul Rée and exemplified by such works as *Human, all too Human, Daybreak,* and *The Gay Science I-IV*, mark a period of Nietzsche's increased intellectual independence, his discovery of positivism, his break from Wagner and Schopenhauer, and the honing of his critical voice; the final period beginning with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* finds its focus in Nietzsche's vision of a new philosophy centered on the affirmation of life and the primacy of aesthetic creation.[180] In her biography, Lou Salomé makes similar claims regarding Nietzsche's intellectual development, advancing that his early work is best characterized by the "cult of genius" inspired in Nietzsche by Schopenhauer and Wagner. She writes, "It is as if Nietzsche first understood and ferreted out his own self through the picture of his master, Wagner, and his philosopher-teacher, Schopenhauer."[181]

While both Jaspers and Salomé are accurate with regard to Nietzsche's changing positions regarding Schopenhauer, they perhaps overstate the extent of the "break" Nietzsche had with his intellectual predecessor. First, Nietzsche's early work does not exhibit such a wholly uncritical stance toward Schopenhauer; furthermore, his rejection of Schopenhauer is far more ambivalent than, for example, his thoroughgoing renunciation of Wagner. Nietzsche's criticism of Schopenhauer can be found in notebooks dating as far back as the fall

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[180] Karl Jaspers. *Nietzsche*. Translated by Charles F. Walldraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 42-57.
[181] Lou Salomé. *Nietzsche.* Translated by Siegfried Mandel. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 46-52.

of 1867, five years before the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* and seven years before "Schopenhauer as Educator."

As early as 1867 Nietzsche was already concerned that Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will lacked adequate grounding. In *Fragment for a Critique of the Schopenhauerian Philosophy* (henceforth *FCSP*) Nietzsche describes the project of the will as a failure stemming from Schopenhauer's inability to "sense the dark and contradictory elements in the region where the individ. ends. He distrusted his own judgment."[182]

Nietzsche confronts the doctrine of the one will on four fronts. First, Schopenhauer fails to appreciate the full power of this new notion of *the will* and as such unnecessarily saddles himself with the metaphysical baggage of the Kantian concept of the thing-in-itself. The will, as Nietzsche sees it, is ripe with philosophical potential, a "solidly coined, wide-ranging word, intended to express an idea which was so significant and which went so far beyond Kant."[183] Nietzsche wonders if the will is in fact, as Schopenhauer claims, as crucial and difficult to discover as the philosopher's stone, then why locate it in the non-phenomenal, inaccessible realm of the thing-in-itself?

This leads to Nietzsche's second critique, namely that this move from thing-in-itself to the will is ultimately a bait and switch wherein "the concept of the 'thing-in-itself' is secretly eliminated… and we are handed another concept

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[182] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Writings from the Early Notebooks.* Translated by Ladislaus Löb. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.
[183] Ibid., 2.

in exchange."[184] Since Schopenhauer does embrace the Kantian thing-in-itself, he is required to provide solid grounds for interpreting it as the will. Schopenhauer fails to meet the burden of proof, as his justification for calling the thing-in-itself 'the will' "is created only with the help of a poetic intuition." Compounding this dubious move, as Nietzsche discusses in the third portion of his critique, Schopenhauer begins to assign attributes to the thing-in-itself. These attributes "sound far too definite for something absolutely unthinkable." Further, Schopenhauer applies these attributes (unity, eternity, and freedom) to the will in order to contrast it with the world of representation; however the attributes themselves are clearly pulled from the phenomenal sphere. Ultimately, as Nietzsche lays out in the fourth branch of his critique, Schopenhauer's failure is not so much "a result of a certain tactical ineptitude" but a result of the world's tendency to resist the efforts of systematic philosophy. [185]

Despite these major reservations, the early notebooks express copious praise for Schopenhauer. Even as he first develops his criticism of Schopenhauer's systematic metaphysics, he write "The errors of great men are admirable because they are more fertile than the truths of lesser one."[186] What fruits did the young Nietzsche discover in the *World as Will and Representation?* In *Becoming Nietzsche,* Paul Swift discusses three aspects of Schopenhauer's life and work that the budding philologist found particularly compelling. First was Schopenhauer's commitment to a scientifically informed understanding of

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[184] Ibid., 3-5.
[185] Ibid., 3-6.
[186] Ibid., 3.

nature. At the time he was writing the *FCSP,* Nietzsche was considering a dissertation on Kant's notion of teleology and thinking through Darwin's theory of evolution. Schopenhauer's philosophy provided Nietzsche with insight into a philosophy in which "the living organism is the condition for the possibility of discursive reflection." Schopenhauer's notion of the will as a dark driving force and human intelligence as an emergent property fit nicely into Nietzsche's nascent perspectivism and his post-Darwinian, non-theistic understanding of life.[187]

The second compelling moment for Nietzsche in Schopenhauer's philosophy was an aesthetics which holds music in special regard. As Swift describes, "Schopenhauer's theory of music had dealt the composer a metaphysical role that had formerly been dominated by religion: a purported connection to the absolute." This esteemed position of music in Schopenhauer's philosophy resonated with Nietzsche, who at that time was already thinking in terms of the Dionysian function of music. Schopenhauer provided Nietzsche the philosophical language he sought for developing the ideas that would ultimately become *The Birth of Tragedy.* Further, this appreciation and assimilation of Schopenhauer's aesthetics formed a powerful common ground between Nietzsche and Wagner (whom Nietzsche met in the fall of 1868, a year after writing his fragmentary critique of Schopenhauer). Wagner and Nietzsche quickly became master and pupil in the school of Schopenhauerian thought.[188]

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[187] Paul A. Swift. *Becoming Nietzsche.* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 43-45.
[188] Ibid., 48-50.

Finally, Nietzsche was drawn to Schopenhauer for many of the same reasons he was drawn to Wagner. In *Schopenhauer as Educator,* Nietzsche characterizes his youth as a search for "visible embodiments of all creative morality in our age."[189] Schopenhauer and Wagner fit this bill perfectly. For the young thinker, these figures acted as spiritual role models, paradigms of iconoclastic genius. Walter Kaufmann describes the powerful appeal Wagner held for Nietzsche,

> for all his faults and foibles, Wagner was a great artist and incomparably more fascinating than anybody else Nietzsche knew. To be close personally to such a man, to be able to listen to him discoursing freely about his work and ideas, to belong to the master's inner circle—all that was not merely a privilege but seemed the best thing that had ever happened to the young professor.[190]

Just as Wagner was an artistic mentor for Nietzsche, through his writing Schopenhauer became an intellectual mentor of sorts.[191]

What Nietzsche found most inspiring in Schopenhauer was not the content of his philosophy, but the personality that brought about such thought. Nietzsche admired Schopenhauer for writing honestly and for himself as a "true thinker" rather than as a scholar in search of institutional praise and occupational security. In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche views Schopenhauer's lack of

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[189] Friedrich Nietzsche. "Schopenhauer as Educator," in *Unfashionable Observations*. Translated by Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 178.

[190] Walter Kaufmann. Translator's Introduction to *The Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage, 1967) 148.

[191] Kaufmann goes to so far as to suggest that Wagner (born the same year as Nietzsche's father) becomes a sort of father-figure to Nietzsche. I don't think this is too far a stretch, as Nietzsche himself says similar things about Schopenhauer, writing in *Schopenhauer as Educator,*

> To be sure, I discovered him only in the form of a book, and that was a great shortcoming. For that reason struggled all the more to peer through the book and imagine the living person whose great testament I was reading and who promised to make only those his heirs who were willing and able to be more than just his readers: namely, his sons and disciples (Ibid., 183).

recognition and readership during the bulk of his career as proof that his philosophy stood in contradiction to the fashion of the times. Schopenhauer was resolute in his atheistic and unpopular philosophy despite the toll this took on his spirit and his career. In this, Nietzsche found a moral and intellectual exemplar. The life of the freethinking genius is solitary at best. At worst it requires an environment of loneliness and melancholy that only the strongest souls "with constitutions made of iron" can survive. Nietzsche counts Hölderlin and Kleist as victims of the isolation of iconoclasm and Beethoven, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Wagner as scarred survivors.[192] These themes of the loneliness and alienation of genius are repeated throughout Nietzsche' corpus and echoes of these descriptions of his youthful heroes resonate across *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* While Nietzsche's intellectual development bore him ever further from the pessimism and systematic metaphysics of his predecessor, he remained committed to the project he set forth in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, to create a community in which true artists and thinkers could thrive, a culture hospitable to the iconoclast.

Nietzsche's lifelong allegiance to *Unzeitgemässe* philosophy is at the core of his split with Wagner and with Schopenhauerian philosophy. What Nietzsche continues to view as profound and compelling in Schopenhauer's life and work is that it taught him the real role of the philosopher. In reflecting on *Schopenhauer as Educator* in *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche writes, "How I understand the philosopher—as a terrible explosive, endangering everything…this essay gives inestimable

[192] Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations,* 185-187.

information about that."[193] Schopenhauer remains, in Nietzsche's estimation, the paradigm of incendiary philosophy because of his steadfast atheism. Nietzsche's continues to voice respect for Schopenhauer even in his late works, for example this passage from Book Five of *The Gay Science*:

> As a philosopher, Schopenhauer was the *first* admitted and inexorable atheist among us Germans...The ungodliness of existence was for him something given, palpable, indisputable; he always lost his philosopher's composure and became indignant when he saw anyone hesitate or mince matters at this point. This is the locus of his whole integrity; unconditional and honest atheism is simply the *presupposition* of the way he poses his problem…[194]

While Nietzsche advances a very different answer to the question of life after god, he acknowledges his debt to Schopenhauer in first framing the issue.

Although Nietzsche continues to value Schopenhauer as a philosophical role-model, he eventually comes to abhor German *followers* of Schopenhauer, especially Richard Wagner. In an extended criticism of "Schopenhauerianism" in German thought, Nietzsche bemoans the ways in which Schopenhauer's followers miss what is truly valuable about his philosophy. These followers are not interested in Schopenhauer's "sense for hard facts," or his "good will for clarity and reason," or his "intellectual conscious," or his "cleanliness in questions about the church and the Christian god." Instead they are seduced by the mystical possibilities of the "doctrine of the *One Will,*" particularly the way in which this doctrine denies the individual as a mere appearance and supports pity as the supreme virtue.[195] In short followers focus on the metaphysical *results*

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[193] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 281.
[194] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science.*, §357.
[195] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §99

of Schopenhauer's problem of the will; Nietzsche, on the other hand, puts more stock in Schopenhauer's *question;* and the figure for this question is the will.

The remainder of this chapter will explore the legacy of Schopenhauer's notion of will in Nietzsche's philosophy. Specifically, we will look at the ways in which Nietzsche reimagines the will as fundamentally *embodied*. This focus on the embodiment of the will allows Nietzsche to develop a more nuanced sense of the function of appetite in constituting the individual. A better understanding of the dominant appetitive model of life in Nietzsche will provide us with the proper context and foil for examining the secondary vegetal model also operant in his philosophy in subsequent chapters.

§2. Will and Perspective

In discussing the legacy of Schopenhauer for Nietzsche's thought, Georg Simmel stresses the vacuum of meaning for life created in the wake of post-Christian philosophical atheism. Schopenhauer's philosophy is the "absolute philosophical expression" of the post-Christian yearning for ultimate ends. What is fascinating for Simmel with regard to Schopenhauer is that his philosophy perfectly captures this continuously stymied desire for meaning. "The will is the substance of our subjective life because and insofar as the absolute of Being as such is precisely an urge that never rests, a constant movement beyond, Thus, as

the exhaustive reason of all things, it condemns [us] to eternal dissatisfaction." The simultaneous drive toward and refusal of final ends function, for Schopenhauer, as "a total interpretation of reality."[196]

While Nietzsche begins with the same problem as Schopenhauer, there lies between the two thinkers a major intellectual development: Darwin. For Nietzsche, the idea of evolution holds the promise of a new source of meaning for life.

> Schopenhauer sees in the abhorrence of life the tip of the iceberg of horror which fills some natures in the face of brute existence… He misses out completely on the feeling for life as celebration, which is all-pervasive in Nietzsche. Nietzsche takes a totally new concept of life, which is very much opposed to that of Schopenhauer, from the idea of evolution: life is in itself, in its intimate and innermost essence, an increase, maximization, and growing concentration of the surrounding power of the universe in the subject. Through this innate urge and the essential affirmation of increase, enrichment, and value perfection, life can become the goal of life.[197]

By developing a view of life which encompasses and takes seriously the notion of evolution, Nietzsche is able to reincorporate meaning into life itself and avoid the pitfalls of locating meaning in a religious beyond or abandoning meaning as an exercise in futility.

Nietzsche, however, is not convinced by Darwin's explanation of evolution. In the philosopher's estimation, Darwin puts far too much emphasis on the external pressures impinging upon the organism, and too little on the

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[196] Georg Simmel. *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.* Translated by Helmut Loiskandl, Deena Weinstein, and Michael Weinstein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 4-5.
[197] *Ibid*., 6.

conflicts of force inherent within the organism itself.[198] Darwin's overestimation of external forces at work upon the organism causes him to interpret evolution in terms of survival. Nietzsche believes that survival is not the proper rubric for evaluating the confluence of forces within living beings; rather one is better able to understand living beings in terms of their seeking the feeling of growth in power. He remarks,

> "Useful" in the sense of Darwinist biology means: proved advantageous in the struggle with others. But it seems to me that the feeling of increase, the feeling of becoming stronger, is itself, quite apart from any usefulness in the struggle, the real *progress*: only from this feeling does there arise the will to struggle—[199]

For Nietzsche there has to be some motivation for the organism to struggle to survive at all, some drive behind the "instinct for preservation" and that motivation is the experience of the increase in power.

Nietzsche's synthesis and critique of Darwin allows him to think of the force of will as existing solely within living, embodied beings, as opposed to existing in a metaphysical conceptual space. To be living, for Nietzsche, is to be an expression of force, acting and reacting in concert with other forces. In defining "life" in his late notebooks, Nietzsche stresses the role of the interplay of forces within a being: "A multiplicity of forces, connected by a common mode of nutrition, we call 'life.' To this mode of nutrition, as a means of making it possible, belong all so-called feelings, ideas, thoughts."[200] Nietzsche raises the stakes of Schopenhauer's will to life, by removing the means by which the mind

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[198] Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), §647

[199] *Ibid.*, §649; §650.

[200] *Ibid.*, §641.

can escape the will. For Nietzsche life, in its entirety, can be described as assimilation for the sake of growth. Even contemplation is a form of rumination.

Gilles Deleuze provides an astute clarification of the relationship between the will to power and the concept of force in *Nietzsche & Philosophy*. The will to power is the figure of relation between forces. It is "the genealogical element of force" in that it generates and differentiates forces from one another. Further it is the mechanism which synthesizes forces.[201] The will to power is the medium which allows forces to interact; in allowing forces to come together it is also the factor which distinguishes forces from one another. Considering the will to power as the figure of relation between forces, allows us more insight into the "feeling" of the will to power. As Deleuze writes, "The relationship between forces in each case is determined to the extent that each force is *affected* by other, inferior or superior, forces." This "affectivity" in forces is, for Nietzsche, at the root of all feeling and gets to the core of the will to power as the condition of relationality.[202]

Another way to describe the genetic and synthetic aspects of the will to power is through the notion of interpretation. Consider the following entry in *The Will to Power:*

> The will to power *interprets* (—it is a question of interpretation when an organ is constructed): it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power. Mere variations of power could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wants to grow and interprets the value of whatever else wants to grow. Equal *in that*— In fact,

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[201] Gilles Deleuze. *Nietzsche & Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 49-53.
[202] *Ibid.*, 61-64.

> interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something. (The organic process constantly presupposes interpretations.)[203]

Here we see the whole breadth of functions of the will to power. First it "defines limits," i.e. delineates the different forces from one another. Then, it organizes these forces based upon "degrees, variations in power." The will to power does so by a single criterion: whether and to what extent this particular force is useful for growth. This process of interpretation and evaluation of forces is what allows groups of forces to adhere together in an organic whole, i.e. an organism. The genetic and synthetic elements of the will to power are what allow Nietzsche to think of the will as the fundamentally creative element of life. The will is responsible for bringing forces into contact and organizing them based on their relative strength. The result are creatures that in constantly changing, growing, decaying, and becoming. As Nietzsche write in the late notebooks, "the whole organism is such a complex of systems of struggling for increase of the feeling of power."[204]

Whereas Schopenhauer locates the organization of the will at the level of the species (i.e. in the Platonic *Idea*), Nietzsche brings the work of the will into the individual organism. This results in a *static* view of character for Schopenhauer—as the character of the individual is deeply determined by the species/*Idea* in which it participates—and a far more *plastic* idea of character in Nietzsche's organism. Because the will to power is active in the creature at the level of the

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[203] Nietzsche,*The Will to Power, §643.*
[204] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* §703.

individual, growth and creativity become crucial facets of Nietzsche's philosophy.

§3. Will and Affect

This view of the will to power as a creative and interpretive power and "the primitive form of affect" has wide-ranging consequences for Nietzsche's understanding of pleasure, pain, and the array of bodily and intellectual affects which arise therefrom. First, Nietzsche distinguishes between two forms of pleasure which coincide with two forms of displeasure:

> One has confused displeasure with one *kind* of displeasure, with exhaustion; the latter does indeed represent a profound diminution and reduction of the will to power, a measurable loss of force. That is to say: there exists (a) displeasure as a means of stimulating the increase of power, and (b) displeasure following an overexpenditure of power; in the first case a stimulus, in the second the result of excessive stimulation—inability to resist is characteristic of the latter kind of displeasure: a challenge to that which resists belongs to the former—The only pleasure still felt in the condition of exhaustion is falling asleep; victory is the pleasure in the other case.[205]

Like Schopenhauer, we can see that for Nietzsche pleasure is determined in relation to displeasure. However, Schopenhauer's pleasure is the pleasure sleep following exhaustion. In this case pleasure is experienced as an escape from stimulus and from pain, pleasure in this sense is best described as peace, rest, repose. The pleasure of peace is a derivative sort of pleasure, and for Nietzsche, seeking the cessation of stimulation is a form of weakness, preservation rather than growth. Real pleasure is experienced as victory over the negative forces that

[205] Ibid., §705.

inhibit growth. "The rich and living want victory, opponents overcome, the overflow of the feeling of power across wider domains than hitherto. All healthy functions of the organism have this need."[206]

As such, pain is often an ally of growth because it spurs the competing forces within the organism not only to greater resilience but to find ways to master the sources of pain. Nietzsche describes pleasure as "the will's forward thrust," and requires sources of pain to function as "opponents" which can be overcome for the experience of victory.[207] Pain is a sort of disequilibrium of the organism as a whole prompting the organism to make adjustments and thereby bringing about growth. "There are even cases in which a kind of pleasure is conditioned by a certain *rhythmic sequence* of little unpleasurable stimuli: in this way a very rapid increase of the feeling of power, the feeling of pleasure, is achieved."[208]

Pleasure and displeasure[209] are not polar opposites, but they work in concert as phases of the will to power. Nietzsche provides us with a rudimentary example of this process when describing an amoeba's experience of hunger and nourishment:

> the protoplasm extends [its] pseudopodia in search of something that resists it—not from hunger but from will to power. Thereupon it attempts to overcome, appropriate, assimilate what it encounters: what one calls

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[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., §696.
[208] Ibid., *§699.*
[209] Thus far I have been referring to displeasure as synonymous pain. This is a simplification, as Nietzsche describes "pain" as the intellectual interpretation of displeasure. See Nietzsche, *Will to Power,* §699.

> 'nourishment' is merely a derivative phenomenon, an application of the original will to become *stronger*.[210]

Hunger is not the opposite of nourishment. Rather both operate together as part of the process of the will to power; hunger is the antagonist with regard to the amoeba's will and nourishment is triumph over this potentially life-weakening force. Nietzsche often describes this feeling of victory over opposing forces in terms of intoxication (*Rausch*).

Throughout his philosophical development, Nietzsche too describes the will in terms of bodily growth, often likening human will to power to that of other organisms: amphibians, trees, protozoa.[211] *Rausch* itself is characteristically a result of feelings of increased power and growth.[212] The feeling of power is the byproduct of and catalyst for enhanced feelings of life, feelings which stem directly from bodily growth and the swelling of strength. It is safe to conclude of Nietzsche that the will is made manifest through the body and it is the body that is both driven by and satisfies the demands of life. As a barometer for measuring life, the human body is thus in a unique position as the philosopher's interpretive tool in judging the utility of phenomena for life, as determined via the will's feeling of enhancement and growth. It is from the vantage point, that Nietzsche discusses the role of the senses in projecting a world of objects to be utilized and assimilated.

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[210] Ibid., *§702.*
[211] See for example, *Will to Power,* §702.
[212] Ibid., §800.

In humans this rapid "enhancement of the feeling of life" remains essentially bodily. In *The Will to Power as Art,* Nietzsche remarks that "Art reminds us of states of animal vigor; it is on the one hand an excess and overflow of blooming physicality…on the other an excitation of the animal functions…"[213] Further, this feeling of life is injected into the individual directly through the senses (as the term 'aesthetics' suggests). The senses, in fact, swell and proliferate in response to the intoxication derived from the overcoming of pain. In the enigmatic Aphorism 800, Nietzsche describes this in terms of "new organs, new accomplishments, colors, forms."[214] Later he avers that in this state of *rausch*:

> …the sensations of space and time are altered: tremendous distances are surveyed and, as it were, for the first time apprehended; the extension of vision over greater masses and expanses; the refinement of the organs for the apprehension of much that is extremely small and fleeting.[215]

For Nietzsche, intoxication has the seemingly paradoxical effect of helping us to better apprehend the world around us. This is not, in fact, a paradox, because for Nietzsche, the quintessence of the world is the will which undergirds the feeling of expansion at the heart of *Rausch.*

In his discussion of the sensual lives of the artists, in contrast to the formal intellectuality of the philosopher, Nietzsche attests to his fundamental agreement with the artists: "they have not lost the scent of life, they have loved the things of 'this world' – they have loved their senses."[216] In contrast, the philosopher desires "de-sensualization," which strikes Nietzsche as "a misunderstanding or

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[213] Ibid., §802.
[214] Ibid., §800
[215] Ibid., §800.
[216] Ibid., §820.

an illness."[217] Like the artists, Nietzsche desires a "multiplication of the senses" and the ability to love and abide by the "things of this world." Through his development of senses, his privileging of the body and the things of this world, the human being "learns to transfigure himself" and thus become the "transfigurer of existence."[218]

§4. Sense and Perspective

The transfiguration of existence marks the advent of something radically new: "a new *feeling*."[219] These new feelings, stemming from new and improved senses require new values. In transfiguration, the human being, through the sheer pressure of her superabundance of life, *becomes* something new. This self-transcending enhancement brings about an intoxicating bliss, a bliss which has never before been demarcated, which demands a new signification. "Value words are banners raised where a *new bliss* has been found – a new *feeling*."[220] These new value words thus flag and mark the place of these new feelings, so that they can be known and returned to. Values give *meaning* to our feelings of enhancement.

As feelings of value and subsequent value words take root, knowledge of objects is born. Nietzsche poses this question to his readers: "[w]hether the origin of our apparent 'knowledge' is not to be sought solely in older evaluations which

[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., §714.
[220] Ibid.

have become so much part of us that they belong to our basic constitution?"[221] Value judgments serve to arrange perception into a hierarchy of things we hold valuable for life. Perceptions become simplified into those aspects of the world which are of vital use. Were someone to suddenly erase all previous values from my consciousness and drop me off in a crowded train station, I would not only be confused as to what I should do to successfully set forth to my destination, I would not be able to decipher the difference between the tracks, the clocks, the crowds, the ticket booth, and the woman selling tickets. This world would certainly be a world of absolute change, becoming, and flux, but I would entirely lack knowledge of how to navigate this world. Values allow me to note that the throngs of people are different sorts of beings than their suitcases. I would be able to pick out my friend in the crowd, make my way to the ticket booth, purchase the correct ticket, etc. Beings themselves are thus carved out of becoming itself through the slow streamlining, sedimentation and reification of values. Nietzsche maintains:

> everything of which we become conscious is arranged, simplified, schematized, interpreted through and through… 'Thinking,' as epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction arrived at by selecting on element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for intelligibility.[222]

Not only is epistemology a fictitious arrangement for the sake of intelligibility, *all* cognition is this very same sort of fiction. Knowledge thus conceived is simply a

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[221] Ibid., §678.
[222] Ibid., §477.

"tool" in the service of power.[223] And our most congealed form of knowledge, i.e., that which we call truth, is nothing more than "the kind of error without which a certain species of live could not live. The value for *life* is ultimately decisive."[224] Each living creature, as an individual and as a member of a species, possesses certain senses and certain needs for life. These sources of phenomena and principles for their arrangement constitute the basis of Nietzsche's perspectivism.

Nietzsche's perspectivism marks the second major departure from Schopenhauer's appetitive model of the self. The first departure, as we have already seen, lies in Nietzsche's less negative view of pain. While for Schopenhauer pain was something an organism generally attempted to avoid in the name of survival, for Nietzsche pain is an element of growth and hence contributes to the organism's feeling of expansion of power. This feeling of power is unique to each organism and forms the basis of its own character and values. Schopenhauer's model of the appetitive self is universal and largely deterministic; all drives serve the life of the species. In contrast, Nietzsche's model of the appetitive self is based on individual growth. While it is just as agonistic as Schopenhauer's model, it focuses on the creative and evaluative potential of the successful achievement of goals.

§5. Polyp Man

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[223] Ibid., §480.
[224] Ibid., §492, (emphasis in original).

The mystery of self-regeneration has always been one of the central questions in philosophy of life. Aristotle puzzles over it in *De Anima*. In trying to locate the soul of the animal in its living material, the philosopher ponders the possibility of regeneration in insects

> which have been cut in two; each of the segments possesses both sensation and local movement; and if sensation, necessarily also imagination and appetite; for, where there is sensation, there is also pleasure and pain, and where these, necessarily also desire.[225]

In the twisting enigma of two worms which were once one, we see what Eugene Thacker, in his work *After Life* characterizes as the fundamental Aristotelean problematic. On the one hand, any definition of life must be plastic and "ephemeral" enough to account for dramatic changes such as the splitting of the worm, on the other hand, the notion of life must be immanent to the individual in which it adheres.[226] To put it in the Deleuzian terms introduced in the introduction of the dissertation, how do we simultaneously account for "life" as such and the *haecceity* of discrete living organisms?

Schopenhauer attempts to solve this problematic through the introduction of the Platonic *Idea*. For Nietzsche, both the will and the *Idea* fall too much on the side of "life" the concept; they fail to take seriously the dynamic and adaptive functions of life. A concept of life that is true to the specificity of being takes into the account the "continuous shedding" of the weak and dying parts of the organism[227] as well as the "expression of forms of the growth of power" of that

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[225] Aristotle, *De Anima*, 658.
[226] Eugene Thacker. *After Life,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 11.
[227] Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §26.

same organism.[228] While Schopenhauer's "will" holds a myriad of philosophical possibilities for Nietzsche, it is hampered by the rigidity of Schopenhauerian metaphysics.

The image which best embodies Nietzsche's appropriation of Schopenhauer's notion of the will and his simultaneous rejection of Schopenhauer's conclusions, is the figure of the Polyp Man. The polyp, or freshwater hydra, like Aristotle's insect, is fascinating to philosophers because it is an animal organism which can be divided into multiple beings. Polyp Man makes his brief and only appearance in *Daybreak* in a lengthy aphorism titled "Experience and Invention."

> Every moment of our lives sees some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and others of them wither, all according to nutriment which the moment does or does not bear with it. Our experiences are, as already said, all in this sense mean of nourishment, but the nourishment is scattered indiscriminately without distinguishing between the hungry and those already possessing a superfluity. And as a consequence of this chance nourishment of the parts, the whole, fully grown polyp will be something just as accidental as its growth had been.[229]

In his essay "Polyp Man," Brian Domino helpfully points out the way in which the polyp man functions as a metaphor for human psychology. The self is a collection of drives represented by the arms of the polyp.[230] A character is developed and reinforced based upon which of these drives are capable of finding gratification.

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[228] Nietzsche, *Will to Power,* §706.
[229] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Daybreak.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 119.
[230] Brian Domino. "Polyp Man" in *A Nietzschean Bestiary*, 47-48.

The metaphor of the polyp man is instructive here because it exemplifies the ways in which Nietzsche understands the animality of the human. Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche envisions the human—and the animal, for that matter— as constituted by drives. For Schopenhauer, these drives exist at the metaphysical level, as the competing strands of the will which get worked out into Platonic *Ideas* and ultimately into distinct characters. For Nietzsche, these drives are physical realities, a drive for hunger, a drive for laughter, a drive for indignant anger at careless motorists. These drives play out on a psychological level, rather than a metaphysical one. The result is that they likewise provide the person with a character, but this character is always provisional and dynamic.

As a way of elaborating on the relevance of polyp man as a metaphor for human psychology, Nietzsche writes:

> To express it more clearly: suppose a drive finds itself at the point at which it desires gratification – or exercise of its strength, or discharge of its strength, or the saturation of an emptiness – these are all metaphors –: it then regards every event of the day with a view to seeing how it can employ it for attainment of its goal; whether a man is moving, or resting or angry or reading or speaking or fighting or rejoicing, the drive will in its thirst as it were taste every condition into which the man may enter, and as a rule will discover notion for itself there and will have to wait and go on thirsting: in a little while it will grow faint, and after a couple of days or months of non-gratification it will wither away like a plant without rain.[231]

Not only does the polyp man embody a dynamic sense of character, motivated by a complex interplay of desires, the polyp man's personality is also radically contingent on its environment. Human psychology and personalities are

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[231] Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §119.

manifold enough to allow for radical change in response to changes in environment.

It is not an accident that Nietzsche employs the figure of the polyp here, a creature which straddles the boundary between plant and animal. The image of the polyp's arms suggest an appetitive intentionality in the drives behind the human personality. But the growth habits of the polyp are protean and context-sensitive in the way a plant's growth is. Dynamic invention is just as necessary to character as linear drives are. In Nietzschean philosophical psychology becoming-animal is always, already becoming-plant.

Chapter Four

The Garden and the Desert

§1. Fertile Soil

Nietzsche's early work is characterized by quite a bit of reflection on his social and philosophical roots. This is due in large part to Nietzsche's attempt to outrun the shadow of dependence on his intellectual predecessors, Wagner and Schopenhauer. One would expect that any discussion of origins would include at least some incidental plant metaphors (roots, ground, etc.), but in both *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer* and in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche privileges, even revels in a veritable hothouse of botanical imagery. These intricately constructed images function as more than metaphors; they serve as Nietzsche's earliest formulations of his vegetal model of understanding the human.

The first of the *Unfashionable Observations*[232] is a book review of David Strauss' *The Old and the New Faith*. Strauss, influenced in large part by Schleiermacher, was seeking a new breed of Christianity, based in what Nietzsche characterizes as naïve panentheism and an emphasis on the historical Jesus. Nietzsche's book review, unlike most reviews of Strauss' work, was not, however concerned with the theological content of the work but with Strauss' beliefs and rhetorical strategies vis-à-vis the more general trends in German

[232] While I'm generally fond Richard Gray's translation of the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen,* I *vastly* prefer Hollingdale's translation of the title: *Untimely Meditations*.

intellectual society. While somewhat unknown and painfully entrenched in its historical context, this text is rife with vegetal metaphors, which Nietzsche employs in the service of social criticism.

In this work, the watchword of Nietzsche's social criticism is *philistinism.* Nietzsche uses the persona of the philistine as a means of distinguishing between "culture" and false culture or "cultivatedness." (*Kultur* vs. *Gebildetheit*).[233] Written in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war, *Strauss* begins by confronting the notion that a powerful army is rooted in a great culture, and the military victory only enhances such vibrant national culture. Nietzsche warns: "This delusion is extremely pernicious; not simply because it is a delusion – for delusions can be of the most salutary and blessed nature – but rather because it is capable of transforming our victory into a total defeat: *into the defeat – indeed the extirpation – of the German spirit for the sake of the "German Reich."*[234] Nietzsche lauds the "calm and tenacious courage" responsible for German military prowess. Yet, at the same time he wishes that these virtues could be directed toward the generation of a true German culture rather than be used in the service of legitimating Germany's lack of culture, its "cultivatedness."[235] This cultivation allows the German people to believe that they have culture, when in fact it merely replaces culture with philistinism and even a sort of barbarism. The replacement of culture with "cultivatedness" could only mean one thing, and here Nietzsche

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[233] Gray's "Cultivatedness" is, for the purposes of my work, a good translation of *Gebildetheit*, as it plays well with the image of Strauss as a "garden artist," but generally I tend to think of *Gebildetheit* more in terms of civility, as in "we don't do that in *civilized* society!"
[234] Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations,* 5.
[235] Ibid., 5-6

offers us his diagnosis of the problem (of which Strauss is a glaring symptom) namely: “the pure concept of culture has been lost.”[236]

Nietzsche defines culture thus, “Above all else, culture is a unity of artistic style that manifests itself throughout all the vital self-expressions of a people.”[237] Style, a concept which Nietzsche will return to throughout his philosophical career, stands in opposition to cultivation, and by extension the artist stands in contrast to the philistine. Artistic style is not a dead replication—Nietzsche claims that most Germans,[238] and Strauss in particular, are masters of copying the styles of others—but is sort of “vital” comportment within which an entire society can conduct themselves. Style is a coherent self-representation and, as such, is the absolute opposite of the “hodgepodge of all styles” which characterizes the “modern carnival motley” of German writing and arts.

It is in the service making this distinction between true culture and “cultivated-ness” that Nietzsche employs the majority of botanical imagery of the work. He argues that it is the very cultivation of the philistine that leaves German culture barren, withered, treeless, “a parching desert to the German spirit seeking and thirsting for new life.”[239] In copying the styles of great cultures, the art form loses its life and the “artwork” of the philistine becomes a danger to any real and vital art in its vicinity. Nietzsche does not mince words in this regard, declaring “A corpse is a pleasant thought for a maggot, and a

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[236] Ibid., 8.
[237] Ibid., 9.
[238] In various places within the essay, Nietzsche exempts Beethoven, Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, and Hölderlin from this charge.
[239] Ibid., 12.

maggot a dreadful thought for everything living…The Straussian philistine dwells in the works of our great poets and composers like a maggot that lives by destroying, admires by consuming, and worships by digesting."[240]

However, what is most infuriating to Nietzsche is that the philistine —Strauss being the example *par excellence*—believes that German culture is positively flourishing, "that the finest seeds of culture have been sown, and that in some areas they are already pushing up their green shoots or even standing in full flower."[241] Nietzsche critique comes to a crescendo when, in an extended metaphor, compares Strauss to an incredibly self-satisfied gardener and garden-house architect. Nietzsche describes the garden house as bathed in "total comfort" and filled with the civility of the bourgeoisie, where the pseudo-intellectual gentlemen are "surrounded by their wives and children, engrossed in their newspapers and mundane political discussions" and rattling off "the rosary of public opinions." Close attention is paid to the semblance of "classical taste" in the garden house; "only the best books line the shelves, and only the most celebrated compositions are on the music stands." Meanwhile Strauss, the master of the house, strolls through the estate like the "epicurean garden god" he believes himself to be.[242] Of course the entire description is dripping with Nietzsche's characteristically vehement sarcasm.

While Nietzsche's critique of Strauss may have little bearing on his oeuvre as a whole, this essay is interesting from the standpoint of Nietzsche's

[240] Ibid., 32.
[241] Ibid., 7.
[242] Ibid., 58-59.

understanding of German society. In describing German culture as "barren" and "strewn with ashes"[243] Nietzsche is setting up a contrast, which he will explore in later works between an environment which is not sufficient for human flourishing and one which promotes it. His strident appraisal of Strauss, as "garden god," and his general disdain of cultivation suggests that this ideal culture would be a wild and diverse landscape, a far cry from a bland pastoral. Further, this ideal culture would be populated by artists who lived as befitting such a landscape.

§2. On Becoming Who You Are

Just as the youthful Nietzsche depicts his culture as a particular sort of environment (albeit, in less than flattering tones), and the true artists within a culture as beautiful, vibrant plants, he also, in *Schopenhauer as Educator,* presents himself in positively botanical terms. Although this essay is not teeming with botanical images, as Strauss was, there is one very particular passage in which Nietzsche introduces Schopenhauer as his "cultivator" which is relevant to our discussion:

> Your educators can be nothing other than your liberators. And that is the secret of all cultivation: it does not provide artificial limbs, wax noses, or corrective lenses—on the contrary, whatever might provide these things is merely a parody of education. Instead, education is liberation, removal of all weeds, rubble, and vermin that seek to harm the plant's delicate shoots, a radiance of light and warmth, the loving rush of rain falling at night; it is imitation and adoration of nature where nature displays its maternal and merciful disposition; it is perfection of nature when it prevents nature's cruel and merciless onslaughts and turns them to good,

[243] Ibid., 44.

> when it drapes a veil over the expressions of nature's stepmotherly disposition and sad lack of understanding.[244]

The thinker, as a young plant, requires the type of cultivation that allows the plant to live according to its own habit. The educator doesn't trim the plant/pupil to fit an idealized model, like a topiarist; nor does he only attend only to his pupils strengths, concentrating "all his efforts and energies, all his sunshine" there like a farmer might. Instead the cultivator merely protects his protégé from that which might hinder his development and encourages and supports the young thinker's unique growth.

Nietzsche returns to this theme of educator as a gardener who respects the natural landscape and the tendencies of his plants in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Here Zarathustra frequently describes his disciples as his seeds[245] or his seedlings who are "still greening in their first spring."[246] Likewise Zarathustra characterizes himself as "a cultivator and taskmaster who not for nothing once told himself: 'Become who you are!'"[247] In these passages, as well as in his praise of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche characterizes the thinker, like the plant, as one who grows idiosyncratically, dependent on his own style of being, his environment (social and natural) and the presence of cultivators who allow the thinker to grow into himself.

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[244] Ibid., 174-175.
[245] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Translated by Adrian Del Caro. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 63.
[246] Ibid., 128.
[247] Ibid., 192.

§3. Two Deserts

As we have seen from his work on Strauss and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche is keenly interested in the environmental factors (both social, historical, and natural) that contribute to a person's development, the "conditions of existence."[248] One particularly salient instance of this interest occurs in a journal entry, collected in *The Will to Power*. Here Nietzsche writes, "Great question: where has the plant 'man' hitherto grown up most magnificently?"[249] Given his interest in human development and his tendency to naturalize –both literally and through his use of metaphor—the human spirit, it is no surprise that Nietzsche frequently employs environmental themes. Oceans, swamps, mountains, forests, and gardens are all biomes which figure in his philosophy. But perhaps the most developed environmental theme is that of the desert.

On a superficial level, Nietzsche describes the desert in wholly negative terms. The desert is a "realm of death." One particularly bleak desert appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. As Zarathustra goes out to seek out fellow free spirits, he descends from his mountain home, through the forests, and ends up in a desolate valley called "Snake Death." This name is significant within the work, as Zarathustra is partial to snakes, keeping one as a pet and referring to it as the wisest of animals. The snake is a symbol of perpetual rebirth and a testament to transience, as it routinely sheds its skin and its wisdom comes from its proximity

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[248] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* 329.
[249] Nietzsche, *Will to Power,* §973.

to the earth.[250] Nietzsche describes this Valley of Snake Death: "Here black and red cliffs jutted upward: no grass, no tree, no birdsong. For it was a valley that animals avoided, even the predators; except for a species of hideous, thick, green snakes that would come here to die when they grew old."[251] The desert is a place where wisdom and even the cycle of rebirth are obliterated; the desert is the paradigm *par excellence* of nihilism.

Nietzsche sees the desert as a physical, a psychological and a social ailment. All three of these meanings are present in his discussion of the wanderer in *Human, all too Human:*

> He who has attained to only some degree of freedom of mind cannot feel other than a wanderer on earth…Such a man will, to be sure, experience bad nights, when he is tired and finds the gate of the town that should offer him rest closed against him; perhaps in addition the desert will, as in the Orient, reach right up to the gate, beasts of prey howl now farther off, now closer to, a strong wind arise, robbers depart with his beasts of burden. Then dreadful night may sink down upon the desert like a second desert, and his heart grow weary of wandering. When the morning sun then rises, burning like a god of wrath, and the gate of the town opens to him, perhaps he will behold in the faces of those who dwell there even more desert, dirt, deception, insecurity than lie outside the gate – then the day will be almost worse than the night.[252]

Here the desert is physical hardship which serves to make the wanderer so much more attuned to and appreciative of the meadows and forests and mild weather he experiences. In this respect the desert parallels other physical tribulations Nietzsche frequently mentions; only in overcoming illness does one experience the joy of convalescence appreciate only in surviving winter does one truly

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[250] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 16.
[251] Ibid., 213.
[252] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Human, All Too Human.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §638

appreciate the gift of spring. The "second desert" is the mental desert, the experience alienation and loneliness felt by those who seek freedom and artistic agency. Finally, and perhaps most powerfully, the desert represents languishing of humans brought about by moral, ignoble society, the perilousness of the herd.

Nietzsche elaborates on the desertification of society in *David Strauss:*

> Thus our philistine —this is the remarkable thing— does not experience the solecism [of bad style in German writing] as offensive, but rather as a stimulating refreshment in the barren, treeless desert of workaday German. But anything *truly* productive remains offensive to him… When everything that is flat, hackneyed, powerless, and common is accepted as the norm, when everything that is bad and corrupt is accepted as the stimulating exception, then what is powerful, uncommon, and beautiful falls into disrepute.[253]

While Nietzsche is making a more limited claim in this passage about the lack of a German style and aesthetic conscience, a larger point is implicit in this comment. The desert is the place of the bland and the inoffensive, philistinism, what the Critical Theorists would later call mass culture. It does not support originality or artistry, and in that sense the desert of mass culture does not support life.

Generally even philosophers are incapable of understanding the desert, the alienation of the free spirit, because they themselves are representatives of the cult of mediocrity, "in some cases they themselves are this desert, these educated people." Nietzsche goes on to describe the desert of the mundane further in the *Genealogy of Morals*:

> A voluntary obscurity perhaps; an avoidance of oneself; a dislike of noise, honor, newspapers, influence; a modest job, an everyday job, something that conceals rather than exposes one; an occasional association with

[253] Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations,* 65.

> harmless, cheerful beasts and birds whose sight is refreshing; mountains for company…perhaps even a room in a full, utterly commonplace hotel, where one is certain to go unrecognized and can talk to anyone with impunity—this is what "desert" means here.[254]

Quietude, modesty, prudence, anonymity, a blasé sort of niceness, are some of the "virtues" Nietzsche attributes to contemporary society. These people who are the instantiations of the desert are precisely the same people Nietzsche characterizes as the herd, complacent, unoriginal, and above all *tame*.

The calm sought by the herd cannot be confused with the solitude sought by the immoralist and the free spirit. The herd instinct, which fears solitude, is what prevents many people from deviating from cultural mores.[255] Nietzsche elaborates: "To be alone, to experience things by oneself, neither to obey nor to rule, to be an individual —that was not a pleasure but a punishment; one was sentenced 'to individuality.'"[256] The moral valuations of good and evil exist for the benefit of the herd as a whole and not for individuals, thus moral training is initiation into the herd, a process taming; it is the "herd instinct in the individual."[257] To be an individual and to create oneself, one must be willing to stand apart from culture, and the renunciation of morality is an essential component of this. The herd instinct, filtered through Christian morality and the suppression of individual expression, is responsible for the death of freedom, wisdom, artistry, and self-invention. The herd is responsible for the desertification of the world.

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[254] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 109.
[255] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* §50.
[256] Ibid., §117.
[257] Ibid., §116.

§4. Desert Flora, or How to be Faithful to the Earth

While Nietzsche often characterizes the desert in disparaging terms, the symbol of both ascetic morality and the wasting death of humanity, when considered more comprehensively, the desert also has a positive function in Nietzsche's philosophy, especially in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Here the desert functions as a crucible for humanity, a necessity for the development of the overman. Over the course of the novel, Zarathustra gives an increasingly more nuanced account of the desert. Initially the growing desert connotes nothing but concern for the withering of humanity's potential. When Zarathustra enters the town upon coming down from his years of solitude in the mountains, he attempts to marshal the people: "It is time that mankind set themselves a goal. It is time that mankind plant the seed of their highest hope. Their soil is still rich enough for this. But one day this soil will be poor and tame, and no tall tree will be able to grow from it anymore."[258] Desertification, in this sense, is a negative feedback loop. The soil of society becomes "poor and tame" by the mass monoculture of late-Christian bourgeois virtue. Only the decentering of this culture and the establishment of the "yes-saying" life, symbolized by the noble trees, can enrich the social world, but as the monoculture progresses, the free spirit and his alternative mode of being cannot take root.

The free spirit, as symbolized by the tree, appears to be at risk, his future a question rather than a guarantee. Nietzsche repeats the theme of the danger

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[258] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 9.

posed to the free spirit-as-tree in the passage "*On the Tree on the Mountain*" following Zarathustra's decision to give up shepherding the masses, and his new plan to seek out a select group of disciples, the "fellow harvesters and fellow celebrators."[259] The first disciple he finds from the town of Motley Cow is a young man sitting beneath a tree. In this passage Nietzsche draws a partial parallel between the youth and the tree beneath which he sits. Zarathustra tells the young man: "But it is with human beings as it is with this tree. The more they aspire to the heights and the light, the more strongly their roots strive earthward, downward, into darkness, depths – into evil." The young man agrees with this metaphor, exclaiming "How is it possible that you discovered my soul?" He goes on to lament the loneliness and alienation that come from seeking such heights. In response, Zarathustra continues the metaphor: "This tree stands here lonely on the mountain; it grew high beyond humans and animals. And if it wanted to speak, it would have no one who understood it: so high it grew. Now it waits and waits – but what does it wait for? It lives too near the clouds' abode: it waits for the first lightning bolt" The youth agrees that he is waiting for his own lightning bolt, in the form of Zarathustra's prophecy of the overman.

In this metaphor, it is not the lightning that is the danger posed to the free spirit. Rather, as Nietzsche/Zarathustra argues, the risk is that those who aspire to this new life fall victim to their own yearning for freedom. This desire causes them to see the world as a prison, to lose their love and hope, and thereby lose the very nobility that the free spirits (and ultimately the overman) require; they

[259] Ibid., 14-15.

become libertines rather than heroes. "But it is not the danger of the noble one that he will become a good person, but a churl, a mocker, an annihilator."[260] In this passage, the tree symbolizes the ideal free spirit who accepts that the designation of evil comes along with his aspirations and who maintains his nobility despite the opinions of others and his own tendency toward cynicism.

As discussed in the previous chapter, much has been made of the significance of Zarathustra's connections to different types of animals for Nietzsche's philosophy but there is scant mention in the secondary literature of the prophet's relation to trees. The trees, however are a very potent symbol for Zarathustra's lifestyle as a free spirit and for the prophetic inspiration such a lifestyle provides. We can begin by considering the function of the forest taken as a whole. The forest, which separates Zarathustra's cave in the mountains from the world of regular human interaction, serves at least two purposes within Nietzsche's philosophy. First it provides the distance necessary for Zarathustra's critique and revaluation of society. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche makes reference to the role of distance in the revaluation of the world made by the artist:

> *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now there is a counterforce against our honest that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the *good* will to appearance… 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 be *able* to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon. At times we need a rest from ourselves by looking upon, by looking *down* upon, ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *over* ourselves or weeping *over* ourselves… we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish and blissful art lest we lose the *freedom above things* that our ideal demands us…We should be *able* also to stand *above* morality…[261]

[260] Ibid., 29-31.
[261] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* §106, italics in original.

Distance simultaneously allows for the critique of morality and the revaluation of the world from an aesthetic point of view. In this sense both the forest and the height of the mountain serve as markers for Zarathustra's alterity.[262]

The forest operates not only as a buffer between Zarathustra's vantage point and society but as a liminal space of critique. In the final chapter of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra begins to collect free spirits for a dinner at which he can celebrate the eventual birth of the overman. He descends from his cave into the forest where he comes upon two kings who are seeking to escape the nausea of rabble and "good manners."[263] Further into the woods, Zarathustra comes to a swamp where he finds "the conscientious of spirit" who has also come to the woods because he is "nauseated by all halfness of spirit."[264] Likewise he finds the magician who is "weary and nauseated" by his art of lies and trickery,[265] and the pope who has retired upon learning of the death of god.[266] All of these people have come to the forest as a form of critique against the nausea of their places in society and in search of Zarathustra whom they hope will provide them with an alternative way of living, a revaluation.

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[262] Another passage in praise of the necessity of distance for critique can be found in *The Gay Science*, §380: "'*The wanderer' speaks.* – If one would like to see our European morality for once as it looks from a distance, and if one would like to measure it against other moralities, past and future, then one has to proceed like a wanderer who wants to know how high the towers in the town are: he *leaves* the town. 'Thoughts about moral prejudices,' if there are not meant to be prejudices about prejudices, presuppose a position *outside* morality, some point beyond good and evil, a freedom from everything 'European,' by which I mean the sum of the imperious value judgments that have become part of our flesh and blood…"
[263] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 196-197.
[264] Ibid., 200-202.
[265] Ibid., 206-207.
[266] Ibid., 210.

While the forest, taken as a whole, symbolizes a metaphysical space of critique and revaluation, a refuge for the free spirit, Nietzsche uses individual trees to symbolize Zarathustra's prophetic insight. Zarathustra's ideas generally occur either when he is sitting on the boulder outside of his cave, or when he is sleeping under a tree. He falls asleep under a tree in the forest after burying the body of the tightrope walker. Upon awakening "he stood up quickly…and he rejoiced, for he saw a new truth." He renounces proselytizing to the herd and decides to seek out fellow free spirits to pave the way to the overman.[267] He is bit by an adder, the wisest of animals, while sleeping beneath a fig tree. Rather than succumb to the poison he obliges the adder to take it back. This encounter becomes a parable for the revaluation of evil as something positive for growth. He tells his disciples "If you should have an enemy, then do not requite him evil with good for that would shame him. Instead prove that he has done you some good."[268] Finally, as he makes his way back to the cave to have dinner with collection of free spirits, Zarathustra falls asleep at noon beneath an "old crooked and knotty tree, embraced by the luxurious love of a grapevine." As he dozes he contemplates this relationship between this tree and the grapevine, which as we have seen is the symbol of Dionysus and the eternal recurrence, and for a moment the world becomes perfect.[269] The perfection of the earth, as symbolized by the vine-wrapped tree is the integration of the freedom and nobility and the Dionysian spirit of dissolution into the world and rebirth. As we can see from

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[267] Ibid., 13-15.
[268] Ibid., 50.
[269] Ibid., 223-224.

these instances, these trees serve as muses and instantiations of Zarathustra's genius.[270]

Not only is Zarathustra associated with trees as such, one particular tree sums up Nietzsche's "ethic" of faithfulness to the earth after morality: the stone pine.[271] At the beginning of the "Last Supper," after Zarathustra has welcomed his guests, the free spirits, one of the Kings makes the following speech:

> To behold this alone we would have gladly climbed higher mountains that this one here. We came hungry for something to behold, we wanted to see what brightened our gloomy eyes. And behold, already we have ceased all our crying of distress. Already our minds and hearts stand open and are delighted. Little is missing and our spirits become spirited. Nothing more delightful grows on earth, oh Zarathustra, than a tall, strong will: that is the earth's most beautiful plant. An entire landscape is invigorated by one such tree. Whoever grows tall like you, oh Zarathustra, I compare to the stone-pine: long, silent, hard, solitary, of the most resilient wood, magnificent – but in the end reaching out with strong green branches for *its* dominion, asking strong questions before the winds and weather and whatever else is at home in the heights, -- answering even more strongly, a commander, a victor: oh who would not climb high mountains to look upon such plants? Even the gloomy, the failures are invigorated by your tree, oh Zarathustra, even the hearts of the unsteady are made sure and are healed at the sight of you. And truly, many eyes today are trained on your mountain and tree; a great longing has opened up, and many have learned to ask: who is Zarathustra?[272]

Through Zarathustra's symbolic representative, the stone pine, Nietzsche offers us a glimpse of what it may mean to be "faithful to the earth." Several virtues are immediately obvious from the quotation and are supported by the rest of

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[270] The relationship Nietzsche draws between the figure of Zarathustra and the trees can be compared to Goethe's scientific study of the lives of plants, and his subsequent claim that an understanding of plant life (i.e. life as metamorphosis) lies at the heart of poetic genius.

[271] The stone pine (*Pinus pinea*), also known as the umbrella pine grows throughout the Mediterranean, North Africa, and West Asia, thriving in rocky and arid conditions. This tree is the source of the pine nuts ubiquitous in Mediterranean cuisine. While I am focusing on the stone pine, there are also frequent specific references to another semiarid plant: the date palm, which like the grape is a symbol of superabundance (see Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 65; 248-252 for examples).

[272] Ibid., 227.

Nietzsche's corpus: beauty, nobility, uniqueness, strength of will, the ability to be happy while alone, leadership, and, most important in this context, resilience. The stone pine is an apt example of a resilient plant, flourishing in rocky terrain and semidesert climates, and it is a particularly apt example, given the polysemous nature of the desert within this text.

As we explored in the previous section, the desert often has negative connotations for Nietzsche, as a place devoid of life. But it has a second and perhaps more important meaning as a place that challenges life to adapt, to change or perish. As such the desert is a place of possibility, and the site of the parable *On the Three Metamorphoses.* The spirit enters the desert as a camel; the camel's chief virtue is strength, bearing all of the "heaviest things," the problems and ills of Nietzsche's Europe and its late Christian morality. The human as camel is what prompts Nietzsche's genealogical project, and the camel receives the diagnoses of *ressentiment,* nausea, decadence, and nihilism. The camel, if he does not perish of his burden, transforms into the lion, a metaphor for Nietzsche's critical project as the annihilator of "the values of millennia," the speaker of the "sacred No." In the final metamorphosis the lion becomes the child, Nietzsche's positive ethico-aesthetic project, encompassing the affirmation of life found in the themes of rebirth, eternal recurrence, *amor fati*, and aesthetic revaluation.[273] The desert of late Christian morality is the natural home of the camel/genealogical project, and for Nietzsche the genealogical project of

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[273] Ibid., 16-17.

deconstructing morality offers the challenge of creating a lifestyle which doesn't depend on the categories of good and evil and the belief of a god and an afterlife.

Conceived of in this way, the desert offers an escape from and a perspective on the nihilist morality of monotheism. Nietzsche writes of Jesus: "If only he had remained in the desert and far away from the good and the just! Perhaps he would have learned to live and to love the earth – and even to laugh!"[274] Nietzsche describes the desert as a godless and "truthful" place where one goes to break one's "revering will." In breaking the will to revere, one is capable of becoming an annihilator of past values, becoming the "hungry, violent, lonely, godless…lion will." The desert toughens one up and makes one capable of living "truthfully," i.e. outside of morality: "In the desert the truthful have always dwelled, the free spirits, as the rulers of the desert; but in the cities dwell the well-fed, famous wise men – the draft animals."[275] While the desert is a desolate place for most, it is a crucible which spares those who, like the lion and the stone pine, demonstrate nobility and resilience.

The notion of faithfulness to the earth, which is perhaps the closest Nietzsche comes to articulating an ethic "beyond" good and evil, is a vegetal model of life. Faithfulness to the earth in an ethos which affirms the positivity of life and health; it is respectful of the singularity of being, as each character lives in its own style; it insists on the bodily and refutes the transcendent and the otherworldly; it promotes cheerfulness, and barring cheerfulness, it awaits the

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[274] Ibid., 54-55.
[275] Ibid., 80.

cycle of rebirth, of spring, of dawn. To be faithful to the earth requires that one not take the human to be the meaning and *telos* of the world, but to see the human as one being among many, a transient moment which will evolve into something new. Finally, to be true to the earth, mean to recognize the nihilism (desertification) in the world but to remain resilient in the face of it, to live joyously and thrive even in amidst decay. As Nietzsche puts it in his description of *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*, "this type of man that [Zarathustra] conceives, conceives reality *as it is*, being strong enough to do so; this type is not estranged or removed from reality but is reality itself."[276]

In living this kind of life, the free spirits are practicing a vegetal way of being. Thus Nietzsche describes Zarathustra as a "sower who has cast his seeds."[277] Zarathustra refers to his disciples, who he is teaching to be noble, resilient celebrators of life, as seedlings or saplings:

> My children are still greening in their first spring, standing close to one another and shaken by a common wind, the trees of my garden and best plot of soil. And truly, where such trees stand next to one another, there *are* blessed isles! But at some point I want to dig them up and set each one apart, so that it learns solitude and defiance and caution. Gnarled and crooked and with pliant hardness it shall stand then beside the sea, a living lighthouse of invincible life.[278]

And when his disciples revert to religion, Zarathustra laments, "Alas, does everything lie wilted and grey that only recently stood green and colorful in this meadow?"[279] Such references suggest that the plant -- perhaps even more than

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[276] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 331.
[277] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 63.
[278] Ibid., 126.
[279] Ibid., 143.

Nietzsche's more famous trope, the lion -- serves as a reference for the lifestyle of the free spirit.

There is one passage in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which seems to contradict this reading of the vegetal nature of the free spirit. Near the beginning of the work there is a passage where Zarathustra introduces the idea of the overman to the citizens of the Motley Cow. He declares to the townsfolk, "whoever is wisest among you is also just a conflict and cross between plant and ghost. But do I implore you to become ghosts or plants? Behold, I teach you the overman! The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!" One might take this to mean that the overman is a rejection of both the "plant" (the earthly, material) and the "ghost" (the religious, the rejecter of physical world). But in the following paragraph, Nietzsche introduces the notion of faithfulness to the earth. He characterizes those who oppose this ethos, those who maintain "extraterrestrial hopes" as "despisers of life, dying off and self-poisoned, of whom the earth is weary: so let them fade away!" These "desecrators" of the earth "gazed contemptuously at the body" and they "wanted the body gaunt, ghastly, starved."[280] This description of those who desecrate the earth fits only with the "ghostly" side of humanity, leaving the plant-like side of humanity in ambiguity.

Further on in this section Zarathustra describes the overman as the "lightning that would lick you with its tongue."[281] This notion of the lightning is

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[280] Ibid., 6.
[281] Ibid., 7.

repeated later in the aforementioned passage *On the Tree on the Mountain.*[282] In this passage the free spirited youth is represented by the tree that grows tall and yearns for lightning and the overman by the lightning that eventually sets the tree ablaze. Given the relationship between the two passages, I suggest that the notion of faithfulness to the earth implies the "vegetal" way of life of the free spirit, Zarathustra's seedlings who grow strong and noble and await their obliteration as they create and are replaced by their offspring, the "new species," the overman.

§5. The Spring, or New Human Flora and Fauna[283]

Nietzsche's early notebooks are littered with enigmatic half-aphorisms regarding plant life. In Notebook 19, spanning the Summer of 1869 to early 1873, Nietzsche's thoughts repeatedly return to the figure of the plant. Three notes in particular stand out:

> **19[156]** If we trace the whole intellectual world back to *stimulus* and *sensation* this very feeble perception explains the least. The proposition that there is no knowledge without something that knows, or no subject without an object and no object without a subject, is quite true, but trivial in the extreme. We cannot predicate anything about the thing-in-itself because we have pulled the standpoint of the knower, i.e. the measurer, away from under our own feet. A quality exists *for us*, i.e. as measured against us. If we pull the measure away, what is left as quality? But what things *are* can be proved only by placing a measuring subject next to them. Their qualities as such do not concern us, except in so far as the affect us. Now it must be asked: how did such a measuring being come into existence? The plant is also *a measuring being*.[284]

[282] Ibid., 29.
[283] This phrase is from Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* §356.
[284] Nietzsche. *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, 137-138.

> **19[158]** To the plant the world is such and such — to us such and such. If we compare the two forces of perception, we regard our conception of the world as more correct, i.e. as more corresponding to the truth. Man has evolved slowly and knowledge is still evolving: therefore our image of the world is becoming increasingly true and complete…We see a striving to make the mirror more and more adequate: the natural process is continued by science. — Thus things are reflected more and more purely: a gradual emancipation from the all too anthropomorphic: *To the plant the whole world is a plant,* to us a man.[285]
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> **19[212]** Der Sinn der *Geschichte*: eine Metamorphose der Pflanzen.[286]

These three thoughts occur in the context of several of the young Nietzsche's philosophical projects. At this time Nietzsche is formulating his response to Kant's teleology, thinking through the role of tragedy in Hellenic thought, and –relatedly- pondering the snarl of intersections between philosophy, science, and art.

In his abandoned attempt at a dissertation regarding Kant's teleology, Nietzsche makes use of Goethe to argue against Kant. As Elaine Miller puts it, "For Nietzsche, Goethe embodied the capacity to see nature simultaneously with the eye of the philosopher and with the eye of the artist."[287] This is certainly true. Yet I would argue that Goethe's influence on Nietzsche is far more profound as the scope of the last of the above-mentioned passages might suggest. Goethe's work in *The Metamorphosis of Plants* paves the way for Nietzsche's thinking of truth as congealed metaphor, an idea that becomes central to Nietzsche's philosophy and which he first explores in *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral sense*, written shortly after he concluded the 19th Notebook.

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285 Ibid., 138.

286 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe: Band 7*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 485.

287 Elaine P. Miller. *The Vegetative Soul.* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 153.

At the start of *The Metamorphosis of Plants,* Goethe observes that the operant metaphor by which scientists of his time understand living beings is the metaphor of "Gestalt." However, the paradigm of organism-as-gestalt has its drawbacks, for, as Goethe continues, "in this expression the element of mutability is left out of consideration." To think of the form an organism takes in terms of gestalt is to think of the organism as complete, closed off, and otherwise impervious. In place of the organism-as-gestalt paradigm, Goethe suggests thinking of form in terms of **formation** or *Bildung*, as this term better connotes "what has been brought forth and likewise what is in the process of being brought forth."[288]

What ultimately is at stake here in Goethe's introduction of *Bildung* as the best approach to understanding the natural world is an entirely new way of thinking of biology couched in a neo-Heraclitean metaphysics. The shift from thinking of life in terms of *form* to *formation* has three distinct benefits. First, it counters an overly static view of living beings as isolated individuals who effect one another in ultimately mechanical patterns with a view of the living being as a nexus of infinitely complex interactions shot through with contingency. Second, the introduction of *Bildung* as a way of explaining the form and character of living beings allows for more continuity between the processes of nature and the processes of artistic invention. Finally, when mutability is taken as primary the

[288] Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe. "Formation and Transformation," in *Goethe's Botanical Writings*. Translated by Bertha Mueller (New York: Ox Bow Press, 1989), 23.

door opens for viewing living beings in themselves without anthropomorphizing or analyzing based solely on human interests.

Goethe's work on form and formation is a pivotal precursor to Nietzsche's understanding of the role of metaphor in any and all human attempts to make meaning. If meaning is made by way of metaphor, then meaning is centered entirely in the nexus of relationships in which humans find themselves. This is the Goethe-inspired grounds for Nietzsche's critique of Kant.[289] For Nietzsche, Kant's careful critique of teleology, limiting it to purposiveness, does not go far enough because it fails to acknowledge the affective machinery underlying judgements of purpose. In July 1879, Nietzsche writes, "The action wants to be *repeated* because it is pleasant. Everything pleasant is the end. Do plants exist *in order* to be eaten by animals? There is *no purpose*. We *deceive* ourselves. —I dip my pen *in order* to---"[290]

It is in the context of this insight that Nietzsche compares man to a plant. Each organism measures itself against the world around it. For the human, this measurement takes the shape of meaning. At the same time, each organism only becomes *an* organism, rather than a bundle of life impulses, by encountering itself in contest with the world around it. Here, as in Schopenhauer, the organism is constituted in its struggle to adapt to the world around it. Here we have the crux of the idea behind the fragment, "Der Sinn der *Geschichte*: eine

[289] For a nuanced account of Nietzsche's reaction to Kantian teleology, see Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, 149-159.

[290] Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, 41[5], 244. Nietzsche's reading of Kant here is at best deeply uncharitable. I think he is reading Kant this way in order to make a bigger point about the fiction, built on use-value, which undergirds all judgments regarding purposiveness.

Metamorphose der Pflanzen." Humanity's understanding of itself, its history, is best approached through the rubric of metamorphosis. Thus, Goethe's principle of metamorphosis sees itself transformed in Nietzsche's philosophy as a constitutive element of the will to power.

Nietzsche begins the Preface to the Second Edition of *The Gay Science* by remarking that the book conveys a spirit of springtime:

> It seems to be written in the language of the wind that thaw ice and snow: high spirits, unrest, contradiction, and April weather are present in it, and one is instantly reminded no less of the proximity of winter than of the triumph over the winter that must come, and perhaps has already come.[291]

Themes of spring thaw and convalescence after sickness lead Nietzsche to the famous statement that philosophy has perhaps been "an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*."[292] Much of the project of *The Gay Science* can be understood as Nietzsche's attempt to better philosophize the body.

To accomplish this task, Nietzsche takes aim at consciousness. The tyranny of consciousness is not a new topic for the philosopher. In Notebook 41, dating to July 1879, Nietzsche writes: "The brain is growing. Only the youngest parts have an accompanying consciousness. The older ones work without this *controlling light*. The goal: man as a great unconscious purposive activity [*grosse unbewusste Zweckthätigkiet*], like the nature of a plant."[293] Consciousness appears to control our actions, however, as Nietzsche will argue in various ways through his oeuvre, much of what motivates our thoughts and actions lies in the darkness

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[291] Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 32.
[292] Ibid., 34-35.
[293] Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, 41[15], 244.

of our more plant-like existence. Consciousness is dangerous because it often gets in the way of our better instincts; it "gives rise to countless errors that lead an animal or man to perish sooner than necessary." Consciousness feeds the myth that the organism is a unity, thereby shutting down opportunities for adaptive growth.[294]

An overemphasis on consciousness hampers philosophical inquiry into the nature of life. Nietzsche explores the possibilities inherent in deconstructing consciousness in *The Will to Power.* He writes:

> A multiplicity of forces, connected by a common mode of nutrition, we call "life." To this mode of nutrition, as a means of making it possible, belong all so-called feelings, ideas, thoughts; i.e., (1) a resistance to all other forces; (2) an adjustment of the same according to force and rhythm; (3) an estimate in regard to assimilation and secretion.[295]

Life, for Nietzsche, takes a decisively plant-like form. A plant is a single organism, as opposed to a bundle of life impulses, based solely on the coherence of its nutrition. We can consider one plant different from another only insofar as the photosynthetic nutrition which happens in one cannot be easily transferred to another.[296]

Viewing life in this way has both ethical and aesthetic implications for Nietzsche's philosophy. First, it allows for ethical valuations to be seen as adaptive, and ultimately mutable. As the myth of the three metamorphoses in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* shows, an understanding of morals as provisional and

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[294] Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §11.
[295] Nietzsche, *Will to Power,* §641.
[296] This is what makes clonal colonies of plants so interesting. The world's largest clonal organism is a gigantic aspen colony located in south-central Utah. Given the name Pando (Latin for I spread, or I lay open), the nutrients from one trunk (clone) are able to travel through the shared root system for miles to sustain a less-fortunate part of the organism.

adaptive allows for the possibility of revaluation when those morals no longer contribute to the happiness and flourishing of those they purport to benefit. Second, a view of life which places growth and nutrition (the hallmarks of vegetative being and the foundation of all living being) front and center, allows for an aesthetic sensibility that is intimately connected to the senses. Nietzsche's vegetative aesthetics has no room for Kantian disinterestedness or Schopenhauerian repose.

> In the main, I agree more with the artists than with any philosopher hitherto: they have not lost the scent of life, they have loved the things of "this world"—they have loved their senses. To strive for "desensualization": that seems to me a misunderstanding or an illness or a cure, where it is not merely hypocrisy or self-deception. I desire for myself and for all who live…an ever greater spirtualization and multiplication of the senses…it is a sign that one has turned out well when, like Goethe, one clings with ever-greater pleasure and warmth to the "things of this world"

Nietzsche's vegetal philosophy which emphasizes embodiment while destabilizing the concept of the individual is perhaps the earliest precursor to contemporary post-humanist philosophical projects. However, as we shall briefly discuss in the following section, Nietzsche's philosophy is not neatly amenable to the most common forms of post-humanist environmental philosophy.

§6. Nietzsche's "Environment" - A Caveat

In an attempt to think of Nietzsche as a proto-environmentalist one might initially look for footing in three important components of Nietzsche's philosophy: first in his critique of Christian dualism and concordant anthropocentrism, second in Zarathustra's relationships with various animals

and evocation of faithfulness to the earth, and third (and most problematically) in his writings on the Will to Power. Max Hallman argues that within these three facets of his work "Nietzsche's thinking is an attempt to overcome the kind of philosophizing that has traditionally provided a theoretical foundation for the technological control and exploitation of the world" and as such, his work "has certain affinities to the ecosystem approach of modern ecologists."[297] On Hallman's reading Christian thinking and the metaphysical systems which are its heirs, generate a "double schism" in which human beings are divested of their place in the nature world and the human soul is dissociated with the fleshy presence of the body. This double schism ground the "unabashed anthropocentrism" characteristic of western thought. Hallman argues that Nietzsche's criticism of Christian dualism is echoed by critical ecologists who view such anti-naturalism as the root of humanity's despotic relationship to the environment.

While his synopsis of Nietzsche's critique of Christian metaphysics is sound, Hallman oversteps in drawing a parallel between this critique and those of deep ecologists. Hallman's first mistake lies in assigning a decidedly anti-Christian position to all deep ecologist. In conceiving of the "deep ecology platform" (henceforth DEP), Arne Naess, founder of deep ecology, argues that a plurality of religious or philosophical commitments could conceivably lead one to adopt the premises of deep ecology. As such proponents of the deep ecology

[297] Max O. Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics" in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 13, Summer 1991, 100.

movement can represent a diversity of backgrounds while sharing a core group of values.

> In order to facilitate discussion about the deep ecology movement among philosophers, it may be helpful to distinguish a *common platform* of deep ecology from the fundamental features of philosophies and religions from which that platform is derived, provided it is tentatively formulated as a set of norms and hypotheses…The term *platform* is preferred to *principle*, because the latter may be misunderstood to refer to ultimate premises. Furthermore, the formulations of a platform should be short and concise (as a synopsis), whereas the fundamental premises are Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or of other religious kinds, or they are philosophical with affinities to the basic views of Spinoza, Whitehead, Heidegger, or others. Different sets of fundamentals are normally more or less incompatible, or at least difficult to compare in terms of cognitive contests, Supporters of deep ecology may have great difficulties in understanding each other's ultimate view, but not sets of penultimate views as formulated as a kind of platform they have largely in common.[298]

Naess regards pluralism and multiculturalism is critical components of deep ecology in part because the DEP views diversity as a good, in part because he embraces localism and self-determination as generally commensurate with green policy, and because the local community (*Gemeinschaft*) is a powerful antidote to the ills associated with the globalized economy.[299] Further, Naess rejects the view that Christianity is "homogenous" and instead recognizes that that many "radically different attitudes" pertaining to ecological responsibility are present within Christianity, some of which are far more conducive to the DEP than others.[300] Along the same lines, Warwick Fox argues that while the dominant strain of Christianity –- and Western thought more generally -- does indeed support anthropocentrism and mind-body dualism, there is a "rich, albeit

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[298] Arne Naess. *The Ecology of Wisdom*. (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 101.
[299] Arne Naess. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Translated by David Rothenberg. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 144-145.
[300] Ibid., 183-185.

minority philosophical and religious tradition that informs the modern environmental movement."[301] Based on such claims from major theorists of deep ecology, it becomes clear that Hallman mistakenly attributes Nietzsche's wholesale rejection of Christianity to deep ecology.

Hallman then turns to Nietzsche's perspectivism and the role of animals in *Zarathustra* to justify his reading of Nietzsche as environmental ethicist. On Hallman's view, "Nietzsche clearly suggests that the values and perspectives of nonhuman life form must be taken into consideration." Further, Hallman describes Nietzsche's recurrent animal tropes as examples of his perspectivism as therefore a rejection of "epistemological anthropocentrism."[302] While there is much in Nietzsche that does indeed suggest a non-anthropocentric worldview, there is no reason to think that this non-anthropocentrism shares the motivations as deep ecology. Warwick Fox describes five species of arguments against anthropocentrism: (1) anthropocentrism can be show to be "empirically incorrect," (2) it can be show to have "disastrous" practical ramifications, (3) anthropocentrism can be show to be logically inconsistent, (4) anthropocentrism can be rejected on ethical grounds, as morally (rather than logically) objectionable, (5) finally some people claim that anthropocentrism "simply does not accord with a genuinely open approach to experience."[303] Throughout his work he draws on all of these arguments against anthropocentrism, but his most

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[301] Warwick Fox. *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*. (Albany, SUNY Press, 1995), 7.
[302] Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," 115-116.
[303] Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, 13-20.

dominant objections are of the second and fourth varieties, which one might expect given that he is working within the realm of environmental ethics with a goal of establishing the philosophical foundations for an ecologically-oriented transpersonal community. However, Nietzsche's major objections to anthropocentrism are almost entirely of the first and third varieties. While for Nietzsche, the rejection of anthropocentrism does mean that the human is viewed as part of the natural order, it does *not* mean that the human has any particular moral obligations vis-à-vis the natural order. This point becomes even more important when considered in light of Hallman's comments on the *Will to Power*.

Hallman gives a very soft reading of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, using it to show "that Nietzsche recognizes the interdependency of all living things."[304] While Nietzsche's comments do suggest that he views the world as a balance of forces in which of nature is connected as part of a "living growing, decaying process,"[305] this alone is not sufficient to draw an affinity between Nietzsche and deep ecology. One major point of dissonance between Nietzsche's concept of the will to power and deep ecology lies in Nietzsche's characterization of life in terms of agonistic rather than symbiotic relationships. Nietzsche describes the will to power as the organizing principle governing every being, and as Christa Acampora points out, "if such is the case, then there is a developmental story of struggle to be told about everything that exists:

[304] Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," 121.
[305] Ibid.

everything is constituted on the basis of conflict."[306] In keeping with this agonistic model of becoming, Nietzsche tends to describe the healthy human expression of the will to power in terms a warrior mentality. In his rebuttal of Hallman's article, Ralph Acampora describes the self-overcoming inherent in the will to power as inextricably linked to Nietzsche's "aristocratic individualism" and his trope of the *Übermensch*.[307] The struggle to overcome may form the basis of an interdependent natural order, but as Acampora points out "whatever eco-natural holism Nietzsche may embrace, it is a variety that does not preclude the possibility (nor exclude the actuality) of hierarchical visions or transcendental aspirations."[308] The *Übermensch* may learn faithfulness to the earth, but such a relationship to the natural order may have little in common with the identification with the natural world, and the subsequent harmonious solidarity with nature advocated by deep ecologists.[309]

Given all of this, I find it hermeneutically rash to view Nietzsche, as Hallman does, as a sort of proto-deep ecologist. Yes, Nietzschean will to power entails an understanding of the world as fundamentally interconnected. But this interdependence is a tooth and nail fight for dominance.

The thrust of the will to power can best be seen when compared to Schopenhauer's concept of the will to life, an idea which Nietzsche

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[306] Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 99.
[307] Ralph Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche for Environmental Ethics," in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 16, Summer 1994, 187.
[308] R. Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche for Environmental Ethics," 192.
[309] A lot remains to be said on the topic of the *Übermensch* with regard to environmental philosophy. I suspect there are ways to interpret Nietzsche which circumvent the "aristocratic individualism" problem posed by Acampora, but for now the jury is still out.

simultaneously sought to elaborate upon and distinguish his own work from. Schopenhauer's ethical stance depends on his configuration of the representational world as obscuring the metaphysical reality of the world as will. As discussed earlier, Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion entails (1) a holistic understanding of reality as the world-as-will, (2) a rejection of the individual will, insofar as it is channeled through the individual as ego-driven desire, resulting in an attitude of peace and concern for other living beings. Nietzsche's will to power can be seen as an elaboration on the first point and a fervid rejection of the second.

If not environmental philosophy, what positive values can be derived from Nietzsche's vegetal model of the self? As I hope I have demonstrated in this chapter, Nietzsche's botanical imagery is employed in the service of several major themes in his philosophy. As we can see in *The Untimely Meditations,* Nietzsche's plant metaphors signal the ways in which humans are inextricably embedded in their environs. For Nietzsche, "culture" has a deeply biological connotation, and the monoculture of philistinism makes it difficult for an iconoclastic and original thinker to flourish. The barren nature of contemporary nihilistic life is one meaning to which Nietzsche alludes when he writes of the desert.

However, as we see in his mature work, "the desert" is not merely a threat to the iconoclastic thinker, the free spirit; it is also a challenge. Nietzsche's view of life as contentious is seen even in his botanical metaphors. The tree which best

symbolizes his hero, Zarathustra, is one which thrives in poor soil. The best virtues, for Nietzsche, are ones that are forged in the harshest of conditions. True pleasure and real flourishing is not achieved, as it is for Schopenhauer by retiring from the will, but from the *Rausch* experienced in overcoming the greatest of obstacles. The *Übermensch* implies *Überleben.*

Finally, Nietzsche's vegetal model supports a view of life which is metamorphic, cyclical, and profoundly influenced by natural processes. Humans are always adapting in response to environmental cues. To cultivate an aesthetic approach to life is to allow oneself to experience the nuances of the interplay between environment and self. As we see in Nietzsche's discussions of consciousness, the human "being" as "individual" is an abstraction from the flux of becoming. The vegetal model uncovers the subtlety of exchange between a person and the world around her; it points to the provisional nature of subjectivity and valorizes our total exposure to the world.

Conclusion

Here is man metamorphosed into a plant. But do not think that this is but a story such as Ovid might have told. On the contrary, the singular analogy between the plant and animal kingdoms has led me to the discovery that the principal parts of men and plants are the same. And if, herein, my imagination plays sometimes, be assured that it is on the table of truth.
~Julien La Mettrie "Man a Plant"[310]

But if the brain is well constructed and instructed at the same time, it is like a perfectly seeded fertile ground that produces a hundredfold of what is sown. Or…imagination elevated by art to the lofty and rare dignity of genius, grasps exactly all the relations of the ideas it has conceived; easily embraces an astonishing host of objects; and finally draws from them a long chain of consequences, which are nothing but further relations begotten by comparison to the first, which the soul finds them to resemble perfectly.
~Julien La Mettrie "Man a Machine"[311]

§1. The Polyp and other Ambulatory Plants

The titles of these two essays may be "Man a Machine" and "Man a Plant," but the central enigma of these two texts, by physician and post-Cartesian

[310] Julien Offray de La Mettrie. *Man a Machine* and *Man a Plant*. Trans. Richard A. Watson and Maya Rybalka. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994) 77.
[311] Ibid., 45.

materialist, Julien La Mettrie, is without a doubt the freshwater polyp. Discovered in 1744 by the naturalist Abraham Trembley and initially classified as a plant, the polyp (or freshwater hydra) perplexed the scientific community. It reproduces through budding; but at the same time it conducts itself through the water and uses its tentacles to convey food into a mouth-like aperture and ultimately to a stomach. The tiny creature fascinated La Mettrie and his contemporaries for two reasons. First, its simultaneously plant-like and animal-like tendencies suggested a more intimate connection between the two sorts of life forms. Second, its ability to reproduce through division suggested that life was a property inherent in certain types of matter and not situated in the second substance of soul.

Just as the newly discovered polyp was seen to exist at the boundary of the plant and animal worlds, La Mettrie's essays, inspired by the polyp, mark the boundary between the mechanical motifs of the post-Cartesian moderns and the biological motifs that came to characterize the philosophy of the 19th Century. In "Man a Machine" (published anonymously in 1747), La Mettrie's chief aim is to de-spiritualize the human, contra the dualism of Descartes and Malebranche and the pre-established harmony of Leibniz. Early in the essay he appeals to the Cartesian understanding of animals as machines, arguing that man is merely an exceedingly complicated machine.[312] Later in the essay, he leaves behind the mechanical language of rationalism in favor of even more avant-garde botanical imagery. It was commonplace at the time to think of animals as machines, as, for

[312] La Mettrie, *Man a Machine,* 30.

example Vaucanson's digesting duck automaton. For La Mettrie to equate man and machine was to point out the continuity between man and animal. Equating man with a plant was a far more forceful way of situating the human in a wholly material worldview. Describing the effects of food, sleep, chemicals, age, illness, and pregnancy on a person's mood and state of mind, La Mettrie argues that mental states are subject to physical causality. Like the body, the mind can be described as healthy or unhealthy; it too "has its epidemics and scurvy." Weather too, has an impact on mental disposition of a person. La Mettrie notes, "Such is climate's dominion that a man who moves to another is affected by the change in spite of himself. He is an ambulatory plant who transplants himself. When the climate changes, naturally the plant sprouts or shrivels."[313]

The polyp functions as a pivot in La Mettrie's work, allowing him to argue for a contiguous notion of life, wherein the mechanisms of plant growth and metamorphosis can be found across all species, as an exuberant sort of proliferation. Describing the development of human embryos, La Mettrie writes:

> It is an astonishing vegetable growth. Here, hairs sprout from the top of our heads; there leaves and flowers. The same profusion flourishes everywhere in nature… Such is the uniformity of nature that these observations lead one to recognize the analogies of both the animal and the vegetable kingdom, and of man to the plants. Are there perhaps even some animal plants like polyps that both vegetate and move about and otherwise function like animals?[314]

The polyp allows for the possibility of a continuity between the human and the plant in way that goes beyond mere analogies. Whereas hair is only leaf-like by

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[313] La Mettrie, *Man a Machine,* 31-35.
[314] La Mettrie, *Man a Plant*, 73.

analogy, the polyp suggests, to La Mettrie, that there are elements of life that are *common* between plants and humans.

The polyp in its ability to regenerate through budding is also pivotal in that it shows that nature's causes are intrinsic to the organisms themselves and not to some external cause or unmoved mover.

> What response can one make to a man who says that we do not know nature at all, that everything come have been produced by hidden causes in her bosom? Look at Trembley's polyp! Does it not contain its own regenerative causes? Would it be absurd, therefore, to think that physical causes explain everything that has happened…?[315]

Here we see the true horizon of La Mettrie's thought: that the principles of life are immanent to living beings, and that we access these principles only in nature. From here it is only a short leap to the vegetable genius of the 19th Century.

§2. The Vegetable Genius

In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams traces the movement away from rationalist metaphysics and psychology and toward a new, biologically-informed notion of self, what he terms the "vegetable genius." The late 18th and early 19th Centuries were, in large part, characterized by the eruption of aesthetic theory onto the intellectual scene. This aesthetic turn required a robust psychology of art as well as a theory of nature which could house such a psychology. Empiricist sense-theory and a mechanistic account of object relations failed to provide a satisfactory account of the artistic invention because they could not adequately capture the human's place in nature.

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[315] La Mettrie, *Man a Machine,* 56-57.

The mechanical theory of artistic invention grew out of a system of philosophical psychology which "was guided by the attempt, more or less deliberate, to import into the psychical realm the explanatory scheme of physical science, and so to extend the victories of mechanics from matter to mind."[316] The result was a psychology in which the content of the mind could be distilled into atomistic image-ideas and the activity of the mind reduced to the combination and recombination of these images according to the laws of associative attraction. On this model, all artistic invention is reduced to reconstituting elements of sense data into new and novel aggregates, i.e. *chimeras.* Further, this mechanistic model of psychology failed to provide an adequate picture of artistic design, in which the artist purposefully generates a work with formal unity. Abrams sums up the shortfalls of the mechanistic philosophy of mind as viewed from the aesthetically-minded thinkers of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries thus:

> If the process of imagination is conceived as images moved by purely mechanical, or efficient cause of attraction – each present image pulling in the next automatically, according to the accident of its inherent similarity or of its contiguity in past experience – how are we to explain that the result is a cosmos instead of a chaos? And how are we to account for the difference between the incoherent associations of delirium and the orderly, productive associations of a Shakespeare?[317]

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[316] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 159. Charles Batteux's *Lex Beaux Arts* is a particularly salient example of this tendency. Batteux in good Cartesian fashion, sought to discover a clear and distinct principle governing all art, even comparing his method to that of the 'true physicists' (see Abrams, 10).

[317] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 164.

Goethe became a seminal figure in German Romanticism because he was one of the first[318] to set forth a theory of nature which was commensurate with the nascent cult of genius and spirit of artistic inventiveness of his time.

M. H. Abrams presents Goethe as the figure who best captures the spirit of the vegetable genius in German Romantic thought. Goethe's life is an attempt to fuse questions of science, politics, and aesthetics into his own lived experience. Further, this lived experience is Nature made concrete. The externally directed investigations of science and the introspection of poetry coincide in the unity of self and Nature. Although this confluence of science and poetry is philosophical at its core, Goethe does not approach either *as* a philosopher. Georg Simmel addresses the problematic of Goethe-as-philosopher with the following comments:

> Goethe combines these constituents in a quite different way, and arrives at an equally reassuring unity. But not only does he lack a systematic framework, he does not even follow the basic intention of a philosophy striving to achieve the status of science: to elevate our sense of the value and the interconnectedness of the world as a whole into the sphere of abstract concepts… But if I understand Goethe correctly, then with him it is always only a case of an unmediated expression of the way he experiences the world. He does not start by first dealing with it within the medium of abstract thought before objectivating it there and forming it into a completely new mode of existence. Instead, his incomparably strong sense of the world and its inner coherence based on Ideas brings forth his 'philosophical' utterances, just as a root gives rise to flowers.[319]

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[318] Kant, of course, is the other primary figure to mention in this regard. Goethe was quite moved upon reading Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in large part because he saw a deep affinity between his own project and Kant's endeavor to unite art and nature under the rubric of a relativized teleology. Elaine Miller observes, "Goethe's approbation of Kant is based on Kant's discussion of teleological judgment, and particularly on the way in which Kant makes room for strictly limited assumptions of the purposiveness of nature while insisting that such assumptions will always remain heuristic fictions that are impossible to prove" (Miller, *The Vegetative Soul,* 49).

[319] Georg Simmel. "Kant and Goethe: On the History of the Modern Weltanschauung," Translated by Josef Bleicher, in *Theory, Culture and Society* 24(6) 2010, 317-323.

Goethe's position as the figure of the vegetable genius makes him a difficult philosopher to study. He does not provide an abstract philosophy, per se; rather the comportment he bears toward life is itself a philosophy.

Goethe looms large behind both Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's understandings of vegetal life. Both figures see Goethe as embodying the most important aspects of their philosophies, yet Schopenhauer and Nietzsche each emphasize different aspects of the vegetal model of life and these differences in approach can be seen in their dissimilar treatments of and reactions to Goethe. In the following sections, I will bring Schopenhauer and Nietzsche into dialogue with one another by examining their appropriations of Goethe in the context of vegetal life. In attempting to give voice to this vegetal model, Schopenhauer stresses the importance of the repose found in the aesthetic contemplation of the Platonic Idea and dissolution of subject-object relationship which arises from this contemplation. For Schopenhauer, Goethe-as-poet embodies the still life by becoming pure reflection of the will. For Nietzsche the vegetal model is not about still life and repose at all. It is about metamorphosis through affirmation. For Nietzsche, Goethe is the epitome of these Dionysian ideals.

§3. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on Goethe

As discussed in Chapter Two, Schopenhauer advances an aesthetics which promises to temporarily free the mind from subjugation to the will. Aesthetic contemplation dissolves the subject into the object of contemplation, thereby

breaking the use-value relationship in which the will operates. Landscape paintings and lyrical poetry are particularly good objects for aesthetic contemplation because they promote a feeling of tranquility and quietude. In Book Two of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer spends a chapter discussing the state of mind of the artist who produces such works for aesthetic contemplation. It is here we see the way in which Schopenhauer envisions Goethe as the genius figure of still life.

Although Schopenhauer makes mention of Jean Paul, Byron, Raphael, and Mozart, he repeatedly turns to Goethe as his example of the ideal of the genius. Like Goethe, the genius displays an "abnormal surplus of intellect," yet, also like Goethe, remains perpetually childlike. Like Goethe's character, Tasso, the genius is given to intense emotion and is often quite lonely. Most importantly, the genius exhibits thoughtful awareness [*Besonnenheit*] in his interactions with the world. This reflective, even pensive, comportment is what allows the genius to suspend his practical concerns regarding the world around him and what allows him to see past the objects themselves and into the Ideas which inform their being.[320]

Schopenhauer turns to a poem from Goethe's *Sprichwörtlich* collection to further examine the nature of *Besonnenheit*:

> My poetic flame was very sparse,
> When visions of goodness set my course:
> By contrast, burned in its fullest light,
> When, met by evil, I took to flight. –
> Like rainbows poems of tender vision

[320] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation, Vol. II,* 430.

> Have darker grounds as precondition:
> And so poetic genius is stirred
> When melancholy surrounds its word.[321]

Melancholy is conducive to thoughtful awareness because it is in these times that the mind is most desperate for release from the tyranny of will. Pain and sadness drive the poet to turn away from "personal ends" and cause the poet to dwell instead in the macrocosm of the world. The greatness of the genius requires that he see as affected by and effectual toward the whole of the world, "just for this reason the whole concerns him."[322] In relinquishing personal interests, the genius allows his personhood to become more porous, more touched, and more responsive to the world around him. This abdication of practical concern and the tendency to dwell in the macrocosm are characteristics of the still life of contemplation. A lyrical poem of real genius doesn't just invite the view into the will-less space of dissolution of self, it is already shot through with the dissolute self of the artist.

Although Schopenhauer is nothing but positive regarding Goethe's literary endeavors, he is decidedly less warm on the topic of Goethe's scientific inquiries. Schopenhauer describes *The Metamorphosis of Plants* as "hyperbolic" and "pompously" written with "labored exposition."[323] He describes the primary issue surrounding *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, as he sees it, in terms of the failure

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[321] Goethe "*Meine Dichtergluth,*" quoted in Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation, Vol. II, 433. Meine Dichtergluth war sehr gering,// So lang ich dem Guten entgegenging:// Dagegen brannte sie lichterloh,// Wann ich vor drohendem Uebel floh.// -Zart Gedicht, wie Regenbogen, // Wird nur auf dunkeln Grund gezogen:// Darum behagt dem Dichtergenie// Das Element der Melancholie*
[322] Ibid., 436.
[323] Ibid., 379.

of Goethe's appeal to metamorphosis to say anything constructive or illuminating about plant life.

> Indeed to explain the blossom by demonstrating the form of the leaf in all its parts seems to me almost like explaining the structure of a house by showing that all its parts, stories, alcoves, and attics, are only composed of bricks and are a mere replication of the primary unity of the brick.[324]

Given such a description, it appears that Schopenhauer misses the dynamic aspects of plant life. The crucial point in *Metamorphosis* is not that the node is the basis of all plant structures, but that the nodes is fundamentally protean and able to transform into any element of the plant. Drawing an analogy to a brick makes it clear that Schopenhauer does not fully comprehend the novelty of Goethe's argument. Imagining the plant as a structure composed of inert, reiterated bricks completely ignores the distinction that Goethe is very careful to draw between "Gestalt" and "Bildung."

Goethe observes that the operant metaphor by which scientists of his time understand living beings is the metaphor of "Gestalt." However, the paradigm of organism-as-gestalt has its drawbacks, for, as Goethe continues, "in this expression the element of mutability is left out of consideration." To think of the form an organism takes in terms of gestalt is to think of the organism as complete, closed off, and otherwise impervious. In place of the organism-as-gestalt paradigm, Goethe suggests thinking of form in terms of **formation** or

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[324] Ibid., 377-379.

Bildung, as this term better connotes "what has been brought forth and likewise what is in the process of being brought forth."[325]

What ultimately is at stake here in Goethe's introduction of *Bildung* as the best approach to understanding the natural world is an entirely new way of thinking of biology couched in a neo-Heraclitean metaphysics. The shift from thinking of life in terms of *form* to *formation* has three distinct benefits. First, it counters an overly static view of living beings as isolated individuals who effect one another in ultimately mechanical patterns with a view of the living being as a nexus of infinitely complex interactions shot through with contingency. Second, the introduction of *Bildung* as a way of explaining the form and character of living beings allows for more continuity between the processes of nature and the processes of artistic invention. Finally, when mutability is taken as primary the door opens for viewing living beings in themselves without anthropomorphizing or analyzing based solely on human interests.

Gestalt is an understanding of form as static, while *Bildung* expresses the morphological component of form. *Bildung* connotes both the processes that brought the current form into being and the processes which are to come. In this sense, form, is merely an ephemeral point in the relentless becoming which is life.

Whereas Schopenhauer rejects this notion of becoming in favor of the static mutuality between subject and object found in the contemplation of still life, Nietzsche wholeheartedly embraces the emphasis on process found in

[325] Goethe, "Formation and Transformation," in *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, 23.

Goethe's life and work. For Nietzsche, Goethe exists as a wholly natural human being, cultured rather than cultivated. Goethe embodies the ideals of *The Gay Science* by living according to an aesthetic code and by affirming fatalism in life.

Nietzsche's most comprehensive treatment of Goethe can be found in three contiguous aphorisms in *Twilight of the Idols*. What is perhaps most impressive about Goethe, from Nietzsche's standpoint, is Goethe's ability to become whatever it was he wanted to become, poet, physicist, botanist, archeologist, armchair philosopher, political figure, while all the while remaining himself. Nietzsche describes this tendency: "he surrounded himself with limited horizons; he did not retire from life but put himself into the midst of it… What he wanted was *totality*…he disciplined himself to wholeness." Goethe never allowed himself to rest in the world of being. Rather he was perpetually creating himself, giving himself entirely to the process of self-becoming and even standing for the self-overcoming of Europe at the end of the 18th Century.[326]

Goethe's life as philosophy embodies the Nietzsche version of the vegetal model in several key respects. First, Goethe's being was inextricably bound up with his environment. He was the figure of all of Europe in the early 19th Century. Here Nietzsche portrays Goethe almost in a synecdochal relationship to his cultural milieu:

> One might say that in a certain sense the nineteenth century *also* strove for all that which Goethe as a person had striven for: universality in

[326] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols.* Translated by Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche.* (New York: Penguin, 1977), §49.

> understanding and in welcoming, letting everything come close to oneself, and audacious realism, a reverence for everything factual.[327]

Goethe captures the vegetal mode of life in his sensitivity to his cultural grounds. He also displays aspects of vegetal being in his openness to the world around him.

It is his focus on the deep dependence the plant has on its environment that endears Goethe to post-humanist thinker, Michael Marder. Marder presents the plant as the figure of anti-metaphysics. The plant's ability to contrapose metaphysics resides in the position it has held in philosophy since Hellenic times. Marder cites the *Timaeus* as Plato's "attempt to harness the plant for the purposes of justifying the privileged theo-ontological status of the human."[328] Just as the plant is rooted in the ground, where it finds its context and sustenance, the human is "rooted" by the head to the ethereal realm of Ideas. The demiurge "sows" the souls of humans, which are then "implanted in bodies."[329] In this analogy, the human is conceived of as an upside-down plant with its roots exposed and pointing skyward, and its visible mass oriented downward, grounded in its earthly body.[330] Thus, in the *Timaeus,* a critical text in the

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[327] Ibid., §50

[328] Michael Marder. *Plant-Thinking: a Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 56.

[329] Plato. *Timaeus.* Translated by John M. Cooper in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 41e-42a.

[330] One detail that stands out to the reader of the *Timaeus* is the complete lack of discussion of plants themselves as living beings. Timaeus' speech is purportedly as description of the origin of life in the world, and he makes mention of the creation of the gods, men, women, birds, quadrupeds, slithering animals, and sea creatures, yet plant-life only appears in the form of this analogy to the creation of the human and the joining of the physical and spiritual within the human. This omission furthers Marder's claim that the *Timaeus* commences the philosophical trend toward the establishment of a chain of being and the correlative "devaluation of the literal plant" (Marder, *Plant-Thinking,* 57).

transition from Greek to Christian metaphysics, the plant is portrayed as the foil and reverse image of the human psyche.

While far more biologically-minded than the *Timaeus,* Aristotle's *De Anima* and *De Plantis* likewise force philosophical discourse on botanical life into the service of establishing a chain of being. Aristotle portrays the plant, which possesses only the nutritive capacity of the soul, as less independent than animals and humans. Unlike beings which make use of the sensitive soul, plants are less self-determining. For Aristotle, the plant is wholly beholden to the vicissitudes of its environment. It requires proper humidity in the air, nutrients and moisture content in the soil, a specific range of temperatures, and exposure to the proper intensity and duration of sunlight. The plant's relationship to the elemental world is by and large out of the plant's control.[331]

Marder characterizes the plant's dependence on external circumstance as a deep-seated "heteronomy," which stands in stark contrast to the metaphysics of subjectivity at the heart of classical philosophy and all humanist philosophies henceforth. The metaphysics of the subject, against which Marder posits the plant as a foil, is "marked by an emphatic abhorrence of radical dependence."[332] Unlike the subject, the plant fails to exhibit self-sovereignty and it does not operate by overcoming and subduing its environment. In Marder's words:

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[331] Contemporary plant "neurobiology" offers an almost diametrically opposed interpretation of plant life, arguing that the lives of plants are filled with stimulus-responses that are closely analogous to sense-motivated behaviors in animal. Aristotle himself did presumably have knowledge of plant growth habits, heliotropism, and other less "passive" behaviors.

[332] Marder, *Plant-Thinking,* 67-68.

> The plant does not stand under the injunction, ostensibly relevant to all other types of subjectivity, to cordon itself off from its surrounding, to negate its connection to a place, so that it can fully become itself as a consequence of this oppositional stance. If vegetal being is to be at all it must remain an integral part of the milieu where it grows. **Its** relation to the elements is not domineering: the receptivity of the flower and of the leaf is obvious in how they turn their widest surfaces to the sun, while the root imbibes everything, whether nutrients or poisonous substances, it encounters in the dark recesses of the soil into which it burrows.[333]

Marder describes the receptive heteronomy of the plant as "vegetal anti-metaphysics" because he sees the subject as the essential component to any and all metaphysical systems. For Marder, metaphysics can only be written in the ink of humanism.[334] Thus, plant-thinking offers the key to post-humanist ethics. If we are to strike out on the path that was pointed out by Levinas and traversed by Derrida and Nancy, the plant provides us with a model of life that bypasses the mire of traditional subjectivity.[335] Vegetal "anti-metaphysics" requires a rethinking of the subject, which drains the subject of an essential interiority, what Marder describes as "the view of subjectivity as a hidden repository or a storehouse of experience" which only grows and develops through appropriation. The superficiality of vegetal-life allows the plant to be fully

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[333] Marder, *Plant-Thinking,* 69.

[334] While I agree with Marder's assessment of the plant as the figure of post-humanist thought, the label of metaphysics does not, in itself, rankle me. I am not wholly convinced that philosophy must eschew metaphysics itself when relinquishing its foundation in subjectivity.

[335] Marder, unlike me, wants to retain the notion of subjectivity. I think that the bare term "subjectivity" is wholly inextricable from the concept of subjugation; I'm inclined to think that a subject is always "subjecting someone" or "subject to someone." But, while I disagree with his terminology, I am in accord with his description of plant-heteronomy, "with its emphasis on the constitutive role of the relation to the other," as a viable alternative to traditional subjectivity (Marder, *Plant-Thinking,* 72).

integrated into its environment and to grow and thrive (largely) without consumption and appropriation of other lives.[336]

On Marder's reading, *The Metamorphosis of Plants* is the first work in which the superficiality of plant life is brought to the fore. Along with Marder's understanding of "heteronomy," "superficiality" also functions as a revaluation of a term which would appear negative from a humanist standpoint, which privileges the inner-world of the subject. From the perspective of the subject, to be superficial is to be both inane and trivial. Marder's championing of the term is simultaneously a rejection of the privileging of the inner life of the (humanist) subject over more blatant, external vitality and an evocation of the total connectivity and *in situ* nature of plant life. The superficiality of the plant as the figure of vegetal anti-metaphysics operates as a critique not only of the notion of the inner life, but is also a critique of the importance of origins. On Marder's reading of Goethe, there is no essential element of the plant, any particular element of the plant is detachable and ultimately superfluous. As such, Goethe's analysis of plant life "plays out the logic of the deconstructive supplement *avant la letter*."[337] According to Marder there are two implications to Goethe's analysis of plant life as radically dependent. First, the important quality of the plant is that its body "is all skin," meaning it is totally exposed and open to the environment. Like the post-humanist "subject," Goethe's plant is radically

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[336] Ibid., 73.
[337] Ibid., 81.

heteronomous. Second, in relocating the life-force to the leaf, Goethe is supplanting the "mystical aura of the seed taken to be an originary principle."[338]

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I discussed a problematic set forth by Agamben in *The Open*. Agamben argues that the question "what is life?" has thus far only been answered through a process of breaking life into various attributes and arranging these attributes in a hierarchy. With each "intimate caesura" a new level of life is established. The nutritional, the relational, and the rational are articulations of life which first generate plants, then animals from plants, and ultimately humans. Agamben refers to the distinction between the animal and the human as an "intimate caesura" because, while the human is ontologically separated from the animal life form, he continues to bear the relational and sensitive attributes of life which constitute the animal within him. For Agamben, an archaeology of humanism begins with this insight. "It is possible to oppose man to other living things…only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place."[339]

While Agamben does not explicitly cite his predecessors, he arrives at the same conclusion which had been intimated by both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: the human is created in and through opposition to the animal element within. Agamben refers to this ontological mechanism by which the human is

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[338] Ibid., 81-82.
[339] Agamben, *The Open*, 15-16.

defined against his own animality as the "anthropomorphizing machine" and describes its function as "excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human: *Homo alalus*, or the ape-man." The upshot of the anthropomorphizing machine is the humanism of the modern era. However, for Agamben the very process which generates and supports humanism, is that which generates the peril of modernity, the utter animalization of the human, i.e. the biopolitics of genocide.[340] The inextricable relationship between humanism and genocide is perhaps the main driver of contemporary post-humanist inquiry.

Like Agamben, Deleuze and Guattari express concern regarding the political implications of a hierarchal understanding of life. Against this mode of thought (which they describe as "arborescent," Deleuze and Guattari suggest a "rhizomatic" approach to philosophy which replaces linear trajectories and binary thinking with the conceptual apparatus of connective networks, heterogeneity, and multiplicity. They assert classical philosophical thought forces the world to conform to "subjective organic interiority" and as such "lags behind" and fails to adequately comprehend nature. Rhizomatic thought, on the other hand, allows us to think of connections, not in terms of unions or aggregations of subjects, but as interlinking hybrids formed by the meeting of heterogeneous entities. For Guattari and Deleuze the wasp and the orchid constitute a rhizome, as do a person and a virus, as does a flock of birds. Such a sea-change in thinking would better equip philosophers to address the supreme

[340] Ibid., 33-38.

interrelationality of the globalized world and environment, themes which Guattari pursues further in *The Three Ecologies*.[341]

It is not an accident that Deleuze and Guattari turn to botanical imagery to express this new mode of thought. It is equally unsurprising that the plant should capture the attention of thinkers in the *Lebensphilosophie* tradition. As a life form, the plant constitutes a challenge to the philosopher: how might we conceive of life and fundamentally relational, without a closely guarded interiority? How might we conceive of life as singular yet evolving? Given the imminent environmental catastrophe we face, and its roots in an appetitive mode of being, these questions could not be more urgent. It is my hope that this intervention into the thought of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche has contributed to the nascent body of work we might refer to with Michael Marder as "plant-thinking" and has provided some historical context for future research in the vegetative aspects of the post-humanist world.

[341] Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5-11.

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