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Liam Luke Wilkie April 10, 2024

The Role of Suffering in Nietzsche's Philosophy

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Abstract

The Role of Suffering in Nietzsche's Philosophy
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The goal of this thesis is to elucidate the concept of suffering in Nietzsche's philosophy by examining, in order, three works from his overall anthology: The Birth of Tragedy, Thus spoke Zarathustra, and Ecce Homo. Starting with The Birth of Tragedy, I explore suffering's role primarily through the concepts of the Apollonian and Dionysian and establish that suffering is a destructive force in Nietzsche's philosophy that he sees as essential for creation; from there, we move into Thus Spoke Zarathustra, where I discuss changes in the role of suffering, most notably the break from any metaphysical framing of the concept, and how suffering is now depicted as a challenge that Nietzsche advocates for and approaches through the concepts of "courage," "pity," and "triumphs." In the third and final chapter, I bring the lessons of The Birth of Tragedy and Thus Spoke Zarathustra into their culmination with an examination of Ecce Homo. In Ecce Homo, I show how our previous examinations on the role of suffering are brought into discourse, and that Nietzsche's final conception of suffering is a destructive force that is utilized both internally and externally for the purpose of self-creation and discovery. Throughout the entirety of the thesis, I use secondary sources and other works from Nietzsche, including his unpublished notebooks, to examine suffering and justify my claims.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

This thesis originally began as a proposal to study the concept of human flourishing in Friedrich Nietzsche's work; however, I had proposed this idea when, despite my interest, I was still woefully under-read in Nietzsche's anthology and had a limited understanding of his philosophy. My initial aim was to understand what elements of life were crucial to how Nietzsche thought a person lives a fulfilling life. Thankfully, under the guidance of Professor Mitchell, I was able to approach the mountain of Nietzsche's work in as sensible and as absorbable a manner as one can hope for when dealing with one of history's most artistic and unorthodox thinkers. As I read my way through Nietzsche's insurmountable philosophy, one theme, one concept, continued to be highlighted for me: suffering.

Suffering is an integral part to Nietzsche's philosophy at all levels, and in my opinion, it is crucial to some of his most notable ideas. However, as Nietzsche and his thought matured, so, too, did his concept of suffering. Suffering initially takes root in his first published work *The Birth of Tragedy*, where a young Nietzsche, still under the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer, saw the irrational and chaotic forces of nature as a metaphysic that entailed suffering. To thrive in these pessimistic conditions, Nietzsche explains that the Ancient Greeks invented tragedy using the Dionysian and Apollonian aesthetics. The Dionysian aesthetic was representative of the destructive forces of nature that caused suffering, and to cope with it, the Greeks affirmed their suffering through the Apollonian aesthetic that used such suffering to make art. The concepts of destruction and creation, and even Dionysus — albeit with significant change to the concept — would be foundational to Nietzsche's overall philosophy even after his break from Arthur

Schopenhauer. Thus, for its foundational qualities, The *Birth of Tragedy* is a necessary starting point for our examination and constitutes the focus of Chapter I.[1]

Chapter II, however, focuses on Nietzsche's self-proclaimed masterpiece, and what is, in my opinion, his most representative work: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (hereafter *Zarathustra*). In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche, through the mouth of the prophet Zarathustra, covers, at least in some auspice, every concept in his overall anthology, and suffering plays a crucial role yet again. In contrast to *The Birth of Tragedy*, the concept of suffering in *Zarathustra* is strictly an earthly phenomenon that Nietzsche advocates an appreciation for and approach to, an approach that entails the concepts of "courage" and "triumphs." [2] Furthermore, this focus on triumphs and courage will lead to also seeing suffering's role in the Nietzschean concept of eternal recurrence and creation, which we will cover in more detail in Chapter II; for now, it is useful to state that eternal recurrence is the metric Nietzsche uses for gauging whether one lives a fulfilling life.[3] To exemplify the concepts addressed in in Chapter II, I will be using Nietzsche's own personal experience with suffering as well as my own.

Chapter II will end by introducing the concept of Nietzschean self-creation in relation to suffering, as we will see the character of Zarathustra undergo a self-creation through suffering near the end of the work. We will pick up this concept in Chapter III through examining some of Nietzsche's final writings: predominantly his posthumously published memoir, *Ecce Homo*, but also relevant sections of its precursor, *Twilight of the Idols*. In examining these two works, I ultimately aim to show suffering's role in the task given to readers by a late Nietzsche, that task

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[1] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Andrew Mitchell, vol. 1, of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, n.d.).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Strand, LDN: Penguin Books, 1969).

being "*How One Becomes What One Is*."[4] To *Become What One Is*, I will posit that the lessons of Chapters I & II have been brought into discourse with each other: Nietzsche reinvents the Dionysian as an aesthetic self-justification that eternally affirms and approaches suffering in the manner we saw in *Zarathustra*, using destruction and suffering this time in an internal and external context for the purpose of giving shape to oneself.

In the end, my goal is to elucidate suffering's role in Nietzsche's philosophy at these three stages; however, I am not going to pretend that the three works I am choosing can cover the entire spread. Many have tried to climb and conquer the mountain that is Nietzsche's philosophy with questionable results, and I am not claiming to have attempted such a feat, nor am I claiming to have analytically proven what exactly suffering means in Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche, while stylistically brilliant, approached philosophy with a much more creative style than most traditional philosophers both before and after him — his writing is rife with emotion, poems, characters, and songs. Due to his artistic prose, Nietzsche is notoriously inconsistent with terms, 'suffering' among them; moreover, as we will see in Chapter I, Nietzsche appears to be against over-rationalization, and to put an analytic criterion on him seems not only to be something he would have objected to but also a disservice that undermines the brilliance in his style. Therefore, in each chapter, while I aim to be technical and develop consistent themes to understand suffering, I am not trying to 'prove' what Nietzsche meant; instead, I would say my aim is to elucidate an insight on suffering that I developed when approaching the whole of Nietzsche's anthology.

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[4] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner, Twilight of the Idols, The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Dionysus Dithyrambs, Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, trans. Adrian Del Caro et al., 9th ed., of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), 198.

Speaking to Nietzsche's whole anthology gives way to another point I need to address concerning my supporting material, specifically Nietzsche's unpublished notebooks, commonly called *Fragments*. Jacques Derrida famously argued that it was impossible to use the "fragments" to form a "whole" concept of Nietzsche's philosophy or to assume that his ideas therein were in anyway interrelated to each other due to his inconsistency and indeterminacy. As the late Professor Bruce Detwiler points out, this raises the stakes considerably: is Nietzsche even capable of being textually analyzed in any fashion, let alone with a focus on the concept of suffering? While Nietzsche's indeterminacy and inconsistency do cause difficulty when approaching certain concepts, it does not mean that there is no interrelation whatsoever, or that all interpretations of his work are equally plausible.[5] As I hope to show throughout this thesis, but specifically in Chapter III, Nietzsche's thought does evolve and change over time, but as one continues to read, there is a relation between concepts even if he is retroactively modifying what has already been written — this is especially the case in *Ecce Homo*. Therefore, while Nietzsche certainly is not doing his due diligence in making sure his philosophy is communicated in a wholly coherent, easily digestible manner, I do not think that is reason to assume we cannot, to a degree, understand overarching concepts in philosophy; as Nietzsche himself put it in *The Joyful Science*, there is a measure of incomprehensibility that he is aiming for in communicating a message that he still hopes is understood by some:

> One does not merely want to be understood when one writes, but likewise certainly also *not* understood. It is by no means an objection to a book if just anyone finds it incomprehensible: perhaps this was exactly part of the writer's intention — he did not *want* to be understood by "just anyone."[6]

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[5]Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1 - 15.

[6]Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science; Idylls from Messina ; Unpublished Fragments from the Period of The Joyful Science (Spring 1881-Summer 1882)*, trans. Del Adrian Caro, vol.

Therefore, as we approach the concept of suffering, even if the term's exact use is not wholly consistent, I aim to trace its maturation as it coincides with Nietzsche's overall philosophy, culminating in the task of "*How One Become What One Is*."

Before we dive straight into *The Birth of Tragedy*, if there could be one underlying idea to establish as a guiding point for my reader, it is this: Nietzsche has a positive value for suffering at every stage in his philosophy — he never sees it as something that is a complete negative. While the concept of suffering will change, Nietzsche seeing suffering in a positive light will not, and this is what drew me to this question initially. Nietzsche is drawn to an appreciation of adversity and hardship like a moth to a flame — his love of creation and affirmation appear to focus on what would traditionally be the hardest problem to find value in. Despite all the negative conceptions that come to mind when the term "suffering" is mentioned, he advocates for it relentlessly. To encapsulate this point, I want to depart into Chapter I with the quote that endeared me to the question of Nietzschean suffering:

> The most intelligent humans, as the *strongest*, find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in their severity towards themselves and others, in experimentation: their pleasure is self-mastery: in them, asceticism becomes nature, need, instinct. A difficult task is considered by them a privilege; playing with burdens that would crush others, a *recreation*.[7]

6, of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023), 258.

[7] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, *198*.

Chapter I

Introduction

In 1872, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche would publish his first book — a work that would end his highly anticipated philology career and set him down the path as one of the 19th century's most cavalier, unorthodox, and impressive thinkers: *The Birth of Tragedy*. While little in the work relates to Nietzsche's then-profession as a philologist, the philosophical impact of the work was jarring for the time. Nietzsche would write an appraisal and critique of Greek Tragedy by focusing specifically on the works of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and all other prominent tragedians before Euripides — whom Nietzsche has some choice words and thoughts about. Aside from tracing Greek Tragedy from its birth to death, Nietzsche reimagined how one could view the philosophical elements of Greek Tragedy. Philosophically, Nietzsche attributed two critical components to the creation of Greek Tragedy, two *aesthetic ideals*; those two aesthetic ideals being: the *Dionysian* and the *Apollonian*. I will show that both these ideals deal with intense suffering and promote an appreciation of it, specifically, by encouraging us to accept it as a necessary risk when living a passionate life; however, before we can understand the Dionysian and Apollonian as responses to suffering, we must have a general, working definition of each. From there, we will look at how they both relate to suffering in our lives, the influences on Nietzsche when developing these concepts, and how Nietzsche describes the death of both aesthetic ideals and the birth of modern art, but before we get ahead of ourselves, let's first examine the Apollonian and Dionysian.

The Apollonian

Named after the Greek god Apollo, the Apollonian drive and aesthetic is our ability to create. Both creation and perception are formed by this drive that Nietzsche describes as

"imagistic."[8] By imagistic, Nietzsche means the Apollonian is form-giving: we use the Apollonian drive to shape the world around us into a something that is both rational and bearable. At this time, and heavily under the influence of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche saw that the 'true' reality of the world was horrific, incomprehensible, and irrational; however, through the Apollonian drive, we can give it form and a veil of comprehension. For example, Nietzsche shows this through the Greeks creating their divine pantheon. Their pantheon of gods was an artistic creation done to make sense of the chaotic world around them; as Nietzsche puts it:

> "In order to live, the Greeks had to create these gods, out of deepest necessity: a sequence of events that we might well imagine for ourselves thus, an original Titanic pantheon of terror gradually develops by means of the Apollonian drive toward beauty into the Olympian pantheon of joy: like roses breaking forth from a thorny bush." [9]

The same could be said for all religion by this argument, but what makes the Greek gods Apollonian is their affirmation and celebration of humanity — for the Apollonian is a veil, but it is a veil that *affirms*. All the Greek gods have human behaviors and exemplify humanity; thus, they act as a mirror for the Greeks to see themselves. By seeing themselves in their creation, the Greeks gave way to "*principii individuationis*,"[10] or in other words, individuality. Individuality is our knowable sense of self, our pathway to the Latin maxim *nosce te ipsum*, and ability to "know thyself." By believing in and seeing ourselves as separate, knowable, definable entities in this world, the whole of reality becomes less chaotic and irrational. A fine example used by both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is that of a person on a lone boat in a chaotic ocean: the Apollonian ideal making its way through the cruel, chaotic, irrational world. An amazing visual example is found in the painting "The Gulf Stream" by renowned American artist Winslow Homer.[11] In the

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[8] Nietzsche, *Tragedy*, 106.
[9] Ibid*,* 29
[10] Ibid*,* 21
[11] Lydia Figes, "The Legacy of Winslow Homer's 'the Gulf Stream,'" Art UK, 2022, https://artuk.org/discover/stories/the-legacy-of-winslow-homers-the-gulf-stream.

painting, we see a man on a sinking ship in stormy, shark-infested waters; the man's doom is all but certain, but his posture is calm, relaxed, almost graceful. This is the posture of the Apollonian in the clutch of the Dionysian. This Apollonian creation, however, is just an illusion, and illusions fall, thus casting us back into the frenzy of existence — think of the boat as now having sunk — the helmsman of said boat is now drowning in the Dionysian.

The Dionysian

Named after the Greek god of wine, partying, and theatre, the Dionysian encompasses all the irrational chaos in life and our drive toward it. When life overwhelms our senses, petrifies us, intoxicates us in inarticulable ways, that is Dionysian. The Dionysian is both an aesthetic and drive, it is a drive in us that Nietzsche describes as "non-imagistic,"[12] meaning it is not capable of being formed into images, codes, or rational concepts. To exemplify the Dionysian as a drive, who better to use then the Greeks themselves. In pursuit of Dionysus himself, the Greeks would consume wine at "The Great Dionysia," an Athenian festival where Tragedy would be performed. At this festival and similar tragic performances, people drank wine to bring Dionysus into themselves,[13] which could, in the Nietzschean view, be seen as them acting on their drive toward losing their sense of self and embracing their Dionysian drive. Bearing in mind that Nietzsche did abhor the use of alcohol in his own time, seeing it as a narcotic for the masses, he does not critique it in the Ancient Greek custom; so, the example stands as acting on the Dionysian drive even from the Nietzschean perspective.

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[12] Ibid*,* 18

[13] Gina Salapata, "A Divine Gift: Wine Drinking in Ancient Greece," Massey University, January 18, 2023, https://www.massey.ac.nz/about/news/a-divine-gift-wine-drinking-in-ancient-greece/#:~:text=During%20a%20spring%20festival%2C%20when,admission%20into%20the%20religious%20community.

The Dionysian drive and aesthetic is the loss of the sense of self and being reclaimed by the chaos of nature; as Nietzsche puts it, "Under the spell of the Dionysian it is not only the bond between human and human that is reestablished: nature, too, estranged, hostile or subjugated, celebrates once again her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, the human being."[14] While often depicted as horrific — and, indeed, often being so in the pessimistic Schopenhauerian perspective — the Dionysian aesthetic is also capable of granting inarticulable joy under the right circumstances. These circumstances are when we use the Dionysian and the Apollonian in tandem and make art. For example, say a musician is practicing notes on a guitar. As they are strumming, they feel the chaotic urge to break into a freestyle; in that freestyle, they are using the Dionysian drive. Now, when they go back and put some of the sounds created by their frenzy into a composed song, they have utilized the Apollonian drive, and the result is beautiful music. Returning to the focus of this thesis, I would like to look closer at the Dionysian as an ideal that encompasses suffering, and how Nietzsche's Apollonian acts as an affirmation.

Dionysian Suffering

If we can conceptualize the Dionysian as irrational chaos that destroys our sense of self, we can use it as a gauge to measure suffering. Truly intense suffering, insofar as it is Dionysian, must be so harsh as to break our Apollonian sense of self and put us into, by the Nietzschean view, a more primordial, chaotic state of being. To conceptualize this, I want to introduce a more contemporary source: *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* by Elaine Scarry of Harvard University.

In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry takes a close look at the psychological and philosophical components of pain and suffering. One such analysis she conducts is that of torture. According to

[14] Ibid, 22.

Scarry, intense pain and suffering can destroy our world. As Scarry writes of torture and its effects on the self:

> Intense pain is world-destroying. In compelling confession, the torturers compel the prisoner to record and objectify the fact that intense pain is world-destroying. It is for this reason that while the content of the prisoner's answer is only sometimes important to the regime, the form of the answer, the fact of his answering, is always crucial… in confession, one betrays oneself and all those aspects of the world—friend, family, country, cause—that the self is made up of. [15]

In this excerpt, we can see how physical pain can bring about the effects of the destruction of individuality that was described by Nietzsche's view of the Dionysian. In this state, everything that makes up the self as we know it ceases to exist. Scarry enhances this argument by the explaining how, when in intense pain, one may say they are "seeing stars,"[16] and that is because their consciousness has been obliterated: they only 'betray' their sense of self because it now no longer exists to them, and you cannot betray something that does not exist.

The way Scarry describes one's confession in torture as a renunciation of will power is very similar to the Dionysian destruction of the self that we see in what Aristotle called the pinnacle of Greek Tragedy: *Oedipus Rex* [17]. In Sophocles' famed play, Oedipus is a king renowned for his intelligence, and his sense of self is constituted in his ability to solve riddles and lead his people. However, in a quest to save his kingdom, Thebes, he must expel the murderer of the former king who, he will learn — piece by agonizing piece — was him all along. This realization coupled with the fact that he was also betrothed to his birth mother, Jocasta, the entire time is overwhelming. Jocasta commits suicide upon this realization, and in an act of

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[15] Elaine Scarry, "The Structure of Torture: The Conversion of Real Pain into the Fiction of Power," Chapter, in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 27–60.
[16] *Body in Pain*, 30
[17] Marjorie Barstow, "Oedipus Rex as the Ideal Tragic Hero of Aristotle." *The Classical Weekly* 6, no. 1 (1912): 2–4. https://doi.org/10.2307/4386601.

renouncing his kingship and greatness, Oedipus gouges out his eyes: banishing himself to an agonizing life as a crippled hermit. [18]

One may raise concern as to whether this type of Dionysian suffering, the "unmaking" of a world and destroying a sense of self, is present in the real world without physicality: can a person suffer as Oedipus did from emotional distress in the same way Scarry argued that one could when in physical pain? According to Professor Tor D. Wagner, a distinguished neuroscientist at Dartmouth College, emotional distress can create similar suffering. In a phenomenon referred to as "Psychogenic Pain," an individual can experience real pain and suffering stemming from mental, psychological, and emotional causes. From Professor Wagner's perspective: "pain and emotional distress are truly different things. Both psychogenic and organic pain, however, are real and both can be considered pain and lead to similar amounts of suffering."[19] Therefore, Dionysian suffering, which is in Scarry's view, world-destroying suffering, exists in many forms. However, no matter the form, Dionysian suffering is, as Nietzsche observed, a suffering so intense that it destroys a person's individualistic fortifications and puts them into an irrational, uncontrollable state — it is suffering that brings our world down in shambles.

This Dionysian state was what Nietzsche believed Greek tragedy would invoke. In Tragedy, a hero would represent everything Apollonian: the tragic hero's resolve, an almost complete sense of self, an understanding of their goals, and having all their decisions play into

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[18] Sophocles, "Oedipus the King," essay, in *The Greek Plays: Sixteen Plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides* (Trans. Frank J. Nisetich) (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2017), 219–74.

[19] Robert Dinerstein, "Panel 3: Chronic Pain, Psychogenic Pain, and Emotion," *Journal of Health Care Law and Policy* 18, no. 2 (2015), https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/facsch_lawrev/1311.

their dreams and aspirations made them knowable and comforting for the audience because they were the embodiment of the Apollonian — the audience could see themselves in the hero's sense of self. This Apollonian figure, a model of individuality, would then invoke the Dionysian in Tragedy through their demise. They would take individuality on their back and be crushed by chaos and frenzy of Dionysus; as Nietzsche describes the demise of the tragic hero: "The human is no longer artist, he has become artwork: here, to the great and blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity, the artistic force of the whole of nature reveals itself amid shudders of intoxication."[20] To relate this is concept to a modern example, I would like to introduce F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby.*

In Fitzgerald's prized novel, the book's namesake, Jay Gatsby, embodies the tragic hero: his style, grace, and, most importantly, his love of Daisy, are all Apollonian manifestations. The reader relates to and admires Gatsby; for the sake of love, he became the living embodiment of the "American Dream." Then, due to his relentless dream, he is killed by chaos that is entirely Dionysian: his death springs, ironically, from a misunderstanding caused by the woman he longed for, and then he goes entirely un-mourned by the elites he strove to impress — including his love, Daisy. However — and this will dovetail well with my next point — in *Gatsby* and Greek Tragedy, the Dionysian suffering is affirmed through the Apollonian creation of art: not only does the prose of Fitzgerald leave his audience awe-stricken, but the novel ends by encouraging its reader to dream on in the face of irrationality and defeat.[21] Therefore, the Apollonian perfection that is *The Great Gatsby* needs its Dionysian elements to be as great as it is, and this is what is crucial about the Dionysian and Apollonian: they need each other; intense

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[20] *Tragedy,* 22.
[21] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London, UK: V & A, 2021).

suffering needs its affirmation. As Nietzsche puts it, describing the Apollonian amid the Dionysian:

> "He shows us, in sublime gestures, how the whole world of agony is necessary, in order to compel the individual to produce that redeeming vision and then, sunk in contemplation thereof, sit calmly in his wavering bark, in the middle of the ocean."[22]

Clarifying Points on Dionysian Suffering

Before moving on to the relationship of necessity between the Dionysian and Apollonian, I want to clarify some points about the type of suffering we are examining in *The Birth of* Tragedy. As aforementioned, the Dionysian is seen as the forces of a nature that is a "primordial unity," and this is due largely to it also existing as a metaphysic. As aforementioned, at this early stage in his career, Nietzsche was heavily under the influence of fellow German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who was a pessimist and nihilist: he saw the metaphysical world as a "will" that was essentially constant discord with no meaning — this metaphysical will, in Nietzsche's framework, is represented by the chaotic, irrational forces of the Dionysian. Due to the lack of meaning in anything, Schopenhauer argued that all life was suffering under this will, and he advocated that to live a good life one should cease to will anything at all and waste away.[23] This pessimistic world view would eventually become something Nietzsche would vehemently rebuke and attack; however, to understand suffering at this stage in his philosophy, we must also understand that it was heavily influenced by the Schopenhauerian metaphysic, although he considers Apollonian art to be an alternative to the denial of the will that Schopenhauer advocated for:

> The Hellene, deeply sensitive and singularly capable of the most tender and the most severe suffering, consoles himself with this chorus, he who has looked boldly right into

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[22] *Tragedy*, 33.
[23] Jon Stewart. "Schopenhauer's Theory of Human Suffering and Lack of Meaning." Chapter. In *A History of Nihilism in the Nineteenth Century: Confrontations with Nothingness*, 126–48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

> the frightful destructive activity of so-called world history, as well as into the cruelty of nature, and is thus in danger of longing after a Buddhist denial of the will. Art saves him, and through art, life saves him — and itself.

Therefore, the Greeks, in Nietzsche's view, are suffering at the hands of a Schopenhauerian metaphysic. In fact, the focus on Buddhism in quote above is further evidence of that, as Schopenhauer himself was a public supporter of Buddhist ideals and considered them aligned with his philosophy.[24] However, as an alternative to the Schopenhauerian call to action, Nietzsche argues that the Greeks use the Dionysian and Apollonian aesthetic to implant the illusion of meaning into a cruel, meaningless reality.

The Need for Both

We have established through Gatsby that great art comes from the Apollonian affirmation and appreciation of the Dionysian. However, one may ask, "why must there be the Dionysian in all its chaos and horror? Why not just the Apollonian? Why do we need intense suffering for sublime beauty?" To answer these concerns, I would like to reimagine the Apollonian as a sort of container: both in our personal lives and in art, our Apollonian creations are meant to contain the raw power of the Dionysian. If the Dionysian encompasses primordial frenzy and nature's chaos, then human beings, as spawns of nature, keep this contained through creating our sense of self and employing logic. Similarly, Tragedy kept the Dionysian contained by invoking it through an artistic medium. The effects of art that invokes such power are described by Nietzsche: he believes Dionysian art is both affirming of suffering and leaves the audience awe struck:

> He grasps the action of the scene at its innermost and happily takes refuge in the incomprehensible. He feels the actions of the heroes as justified and is nevertheless still more elevated, if these actions annihilate their author. He shudders before the suffering,

[24] Peter Albelsen, "Schopenhauer and Buddhism." *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 2 (1993): 255–78. https://doi.org/10.2307/1399616.

> which the heroes will encounter and yet anticipates a higher, much more overpowering pleasure for them.[25]

In our own lives, we can live as artistic masterpieces of our own design by invoking the tragic model. We can embrace the intensity of suffering if we affirm it through our own artistic style: think of it as losing ourselves to build something better atop it. However, we see this type of artistic affirmation less and less in the modern era. Indeed, *The Great Gatsby*, celebrated as it is, is a rarity. There are similar tragic art forms in various artistic medians, to be sure, but they are the minority of modern art. For Nietzsche, modern art is a symptom of tragedy being killed, which means the Apollonian and Dionysian have died as well. But what caused this? Hearken back to my introduction and you will find that I noted Nietzsche has a unfavorable view of Euripides; in fact, he actually marks him, in tandem with Socrates, as the end of tragedy — let's examine that closer.

The End of Tragedy

Tragedy's death, for Nietzsche, was a two-pronged rupture in the philosophic and artistic fabric of the time, with Socrates handling the former and Euripides handling the latter; as Nietzsche puts the encounter between the two and Tragedy:

> "But since understanding counted as the genuine root of all enjoyment and creativity for him [Euripides], he had to ask and look around to see whether anyone else might think as he did and might likewise acknowledge that incommensurability. The many, however, and among them the best individuals had only a suspicious smile for him; but no one could explain to him why despite his concerns and objections the great masters should be in the right. And in this agonizing situation he found *the other spectator* [Socrates] who could not comprehend tragedy and therefore did not respect it. In league with this individual, coming out of his isolation, he could risk initiating the tremendous struggle against the artworks of Aeschylus and Sophocles — not with polemics, but as a dramatic poet, who placed over against the inherited tradition *his own* conception of tragedy."[26]

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[25] *Tragedy*, 138.
[26] Ibid, 75.

In this excerpt, Nietzsche describes Euripides and Socrates watching the tragedies of the "great masters" Aeschylus and Sophocles. When the two masters of tragedy invoke the Dionysian, in all its chaos and irrationality, people like Euripides and Socrates are lost. For they wish to live only in the knowable Apollonian, but therein lies the issue: the Apollonian affirms the Dionysian, and such affirmation is what makes it as great as it is, but it loses itself if it does not affirm the Dionysian — it does not exist without it. Therefore, to live only in rationality, and to seek only logic as a guide to life — to deny Dionysus — is to deny Apollo; we kill the beauty in Apollonian art if we remove the Dionysian chaos is contains. Notice how none of the fellow spectators cannot describe *why* it is that Socrates and Euripides can not comprehend Tragedy. The other spectators just simply relish in the incomprehensible and inarticulable joy that is the affirmation of the Dionysian through the Apollonian — they do not try to explain or understand it, for trying to rationalize the art would ruin it. What does Nietzsche think sacrificing this beauty for logic and rationalization look like? Let us examine rational art, art that does not appreciate the Dionysian, which, we will find, is a symptom of an era that does not appreciate suffering either.

The Death of Tragedy & Birth of The Theoretic Human

As aforementioned, Nietzsche thinks Euripides' own concept of Tragedy is rational, optimistic, and reflects the Socratic love of virtue and reason. Starting with Socratic views, Nietzsche argues we can trace out the genealogy of what he labels the "the theoretical human,"[27] which is a person who belongs to a society that does not appreciate tragedy. The "Theoretical human," according to Nietzsche, is a person who thinks the world can be understood. By understood, I mean known, governed by laws, truths, and in brief, an entity we can be certain

[27] Ibid, 115.

about. Indeed, to feel certain about the world is a comforting dopamine rush. As Nietzsche describes, we chase the constant "unveiling"[28] of reality by believing ourselves capable of being able to discover the objective meaning of life and the world itself. This drive toward discovery is termed by Nietzsche as the "scientific instinct," and Nietzsche argues that Socrates was the first person to live and die by this instinct; moreover, by dying for it, Socrates solidified the scientific myth: striving for certainty is noble pursuit, and if we keep striving, the whole world will eventually be understood.[29] Doubtless the long history of science has made 'advancements' by widely agreed-upon metrics, but we are certainly no closer, in my opinion, to absolute certainty or eternal truth. Nonetheless, evidence of the desire for certainty existing today, and it having myth-like qualities, is best exemplified by a quote from Harvard physicist Sheldon Glashow:

> We believe that the world is knowable, that there are simple rules governing the behavior of matter and the evolution of the universe . . . and that any intelligent alien anywhere would have come upon the same logical system as we have to explain the structure of protons and the nature of supernovae. This statement I cannot prove, this statement I cannot justify. This is my faith.[30]

Nietzsche argues that this scientific drive to understand sought only the Apollonian and banished the Dionysian, but we have established the Apollonian needs the Dionysian; without the Dionysian, the sublime quality of the Apollonian is gone; art becomes a false Apollonian work, placating our sense of self and demanding nothing extreme of us. After Socrates, Nietzsche posits that art is something easy to understand and digest — e.g., a sitcom, another superhero movie, a soap opera, or a generic drama series — all another way to capitalize on the average consumer. The strength of the Apollonian was its relationship and affirmation of the Dionysian;

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[28] Ibid, 93.
[29] Ibid, 93-95.
[30]Sheldon Glashow, "Does Ideology Stop at the Laboratory Door? A Debate on Science and the Real World," The New York Times, October 22, 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/22/weekinreview/ideas-trends-does-ideology-stop-laboratory-door-debate-science-real-world.html.

Apollo contained the Dionysus' power and channeled it into a perceivable form, but now, without the Dionysian, we have a hollow shell, and that shell is in no way 'Apollonian.' Nietzsche argues this by condemning Euripides as an irredeemable rationalist and puppet for the "daemon"[31] of Socrates.

To be completely honest, I see Nietzsche's mauling of Euripides' plays as one of the philosopher's many idiosyncrasies that serves more as a channel for ire to be directed at Socrates than a well-founded critique of Euripides overall. However, without derailing our course beyond repair, it is important to note that Nietzsche's critique of Euripides argues he brought mediocrity on stage though glorifying the average person:

> Through him the human of everyday life shoved his way from out of the audience onto the stage, the mirror in which previously only the grandest and bravest traits were expressed, now exhibited that embarrassing fidelity that conscientiously reproduces even the miscarried lines of nature.[32]

The reason I think this important is that it lays the groundwork for later Nietzschean thoughts on the herd, mediocrity, and how average people abstain from the extremities of life. Art that promotes extreme emotion in the audience can be seen as Dionysian, while art that offers a more digestible, non-demanding experience is un-Dionysian. Nietzsche advocates for Dionysian art because it can inspire us to reach for the heights of life, which necessitates suffering.

Implications for Suffering

To begin on how the end of Tragedy effects the value of suffering, I want to look at the "scientific instinct."[33] While we have established that Nietzsche views the scientific instinct as a drive to discovery and unveiling, I would like to add that for the bulk of society, this is a drive to comfort as well. If we are to think about technological advancements — doubtless technology is

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[31] *Tragedy*, 77.
[32] Ibid, 71.
[33] Ibid, 94.

spurred on by the scientific instinct — we can agree that, by and large, human technology moves toward making life easier and less challenging; save weapons of war — which, it should be noted, advancements in warfare are all geared towards more efficient, and often less painful, modes of waging war — technology is developed to mitigate suffering. Now, this is not to say I think we need to revert to the technology available to us before Socrates' time; however, there is something to be said for when our drive toward technology causes us to seek extremely risk-adverse lifestyles, and to be risk-adverse is, I will show, to being suffering adverse.

Suffering and Risk

Hearken back to our original concept of the tragic hero: an Apollonian manifestation of individuality that ventures off into the incredibly Dionysian world in the pursuit of an ideal higher than what they can achieve. For example, I would like to reference the characters of Achilles and Hector from Homer's *Iliad*. However, before you object that Nietzsche's focus is tragedy, and that Homer was not a tragedian, I would like to point out that while tragedy is the most common example of the Dionysian and Apollonian, it is not the only theatre for it. Nietzsche himself argues as much saying that Homer was one of the first Apollonian artists:

> How inexpressibly sublime is *Homer*, therefore, who as an individual relates to that Apollonian folk-culture as the individual dream-artist relates to the dream-capacity of his people and to nature in general.[34]

Homer's Achilles is a glinting example of Apollonian risk — in fact, he's almost too perfect. Achilles knows there is no way for him to fight and live through the Trojan war; his only means of escape are to retreat and let his rival, Hector, live; however, Achilles decides killing Hector to avenge his dear friend Patroclus is worth the risk of suffering, as he tells a dying Hector that he know he will die and will accept his fate whenever the gods will determine it.[35] In fact, Hector,

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[34] Ibid, 30-31.
[35] Homer, *Illiad*, ed. C. W. Macleod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

too, could be seen as a good example of a Apollonian hero. Before his fatal duel with Achilles, there are conversations between him and his wife where he talks of the choice ahead of him and risking his life for glory and honor instead of taking the peaceful route and staying inside Troy.[36] Indeed, Homer masterfully creates two Apollonian heroes and has his audience sympathize with both even though they are fated to inflict suffering upon each other in taking up their risks. The only reason I consider Achilles a "too perfect" example is that he *knew* he was going to be killed. Granted, he did not know the manner, or how much suffering he would have to endure, but his fate was revealed to him by his divine mother Thetis.[37] In our actual lives, we have no idea whether we will suffer if we take up a risk, we just acknowledge it as a possibility; we accept that we will likely face the Dionysian, but if we can affirm our suffering and achieve our goal, Nietzsche argues that we will be met with the most sublime sense of accomplishment. And this is the potential downfall with the scientific instinct and the theoretical human: the trend since Socrates and Euripides has been certainty and mitigating risk. According to Nietzsche, the theoretical human wants to continuously "unveil."[38] By unveiling, we are attempting to come to a more certain worldview; we want to get as close as we can to certainty when making a choice and planning our careers. If we cannot know, we often won't embark on the challenge. We will abstain from the Dionysian out of fear of the unknown and thus forfeit any Apollonian experience — our life becomes safe and rational, and, by Nietzsche's view, un-Dionysian art reflects a society adhering to rationality above all else. This denial of risk for rationality is a denial of suffering, and thus, a denial of the Dionysian and Apollonian.

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] *Tragedy,* 93

To use an example, let's say a person is at a fork in the road in their career: they can either choose a more definite, comfortable but unfulfilling path, or they can choose a fulfilling adventure that risks them suffering in the pursuit thereof. A person guided by Nietzsche's depiction of Socrates would be inclined to take the knowable path, and, indeed, that is the logical solution. However, earlier tragedy that celebrates charging into the Dionysian would encourage a less risk adverse approach: chasing your artistic vision of life, whatever that may be. Now, this is not to say that I am promoting the Dionysian because I think it causes people to live entirely irrationally and charge into doom like Achilles. Art, when it inspires us, does not grant a prescription: while in The Great Dionysia the audience may seemingly fling themselves into the chaos, they are doing so in a manner that is still controlled and, thus, Apollonian. Unlike the heroes on stage, the audience keeps their Apollonian reflection throughout their lives and will likely use the Dionysian drive as a spur for decision rather than a guiding light; in fact, being guided by the Dionysian is impossible. Since it is chaos and irrationality, humans cannot survive it long without an Apollonian sense of self to redeem and pull them back onto their metaphoric boat. Therefore, the person who appreciates Nietzsche's concept of Dionysian tragedy, will try to embody the relationship of Dionysus and Apollo: spurs of chaos mediated by logical self-reflection and planning. It is only reasonable to assume that it was Nietzsche's appreciation of tragedy that matured and gave birth to an explicit appreciation of risk later in on his philosophy. In fact, one could even posit that the Dionysian was one factor driving him to leave his tenured but unfulfilling professorship in philology shortly after publishing *The Birth of Tragedy*. The best evidence I have for this is an older, more mature Nietzsche's reflection on risk taking found in *The Gay Science*:

> For believe me! —the secret to harvesting the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment from existence is: *live dangerously.* Build your cities on the slopes of

> Vesuvius! Send your ships into unexplored seas! Live at war with your peers and with yourselves! Be robbers and conquers as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you knowers! The time will soon be past when it could suffice for you to live in the woods like shy deer! [39]

This dose of the Dionysian in our lives may inspire us towards more dangerous paths, but how does one cope when that boat finally sinks, when we are in the clutch of Dionysian suffering, when our world as we know it falls apart? To answer these concerns, I would like to turn to a central argument made by Nietzsche in *Birth of Tragedy*; the argument in question is that "only as an esthetic phenomenon" [40] is life justified.

Creation Through Suffering

We have already established that for Apollonian art to exist — which is to say, for truly sublime art to exist — there needs to be the Dionysian aesthetic as well. The reason for this is that since the Dionysian destroys our world, we can, by affirming it, rebuild a new world that harnesses the strength of Dionysus. What does this rebuilding of a world as aesthetic phenomenon look like? According to Nietzsche, it is akin to a child-like creation:

> This striving into the infinite, the wing beat of longing, even at the greatest pleasure in a clearly perceived actuality, recalls thereby that we have to recognize in both conditions a Dionysian phenomenon, which always again reveals to us anew the playful construction and destruction of the world of the individual as the emanation of a primordial pleasure, similar to when Heraclitus the Obscure compares the world-building force to a child, playfully setting stones here and there, and constructing sandcastles only to smash them again.[41]

This is the affirmative power of the Apollonian and Dionysian in tandem: destruction and creation working in unison. Of course, we will get to creation and destruction more explicitly in

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[39]Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science, Idylls from Messina, Unpublished Fragments from the Period of The Joyful Science (Spring 1881—Summer 1882*, vol. 6, trans, Adrian Del Caro, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1–261, 167.
[40] *Tragedy*, 41.
[41] Ibid, 151.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra and *Ecce Homo*, but the groundwork is already here: Dionysian suffering destroys worlds, and Apollonian creation builds them anew by affirming this concept. The affirmation here is crucial: one must acknowledge the Dionysian's power to experience their world falling apart and partake in Apollonian creation. If we suffer but fail to appreciate or face our suffering by clinging to world views that deny suffering, i.e., the Socratic worldview, we fail to have the opportunity for creation. The problem with the former worldview is it tries to escape suffering and denies us the Apollonian by not allowing us to find value in suffering. We must find this value in suffering for ourselves to live artistically. Art that tries to subscribe to an established doctrine, as Nietzsche argues Euripides did with the Socratic worldview, doesn't allow us to feel our unique suffering or face it on our own: instead, we diminish its value it by assigning it generic meaning from an outside source, thus never facing our suffering in its entirety. For example, we look to Nietzsche's most famed and frequent adversary: Christianity (specifically Catholicism). Growing up as a Catholic and attending Catholic school, I was often taught that God has a plan for everything, and that all bad things in our life have value through him. Catholicism and other worldviews that prescribe perspective and universal values are all blockades on the path to Apollonian creation: they stand in the way of us facing our suffering and being able to attach our own meaning to it. Now, this is not to say that all people will inevitably be brought to Apollonian creation if they abandon such worldviews and narcotic-like approaches to suffering. In my opinion and Nietzsche's, there is an approach to suffering that one must employ to properly affirm and create from it; however, that is a topic for Chapter II.

In Summary

The *Birth of Tragedy* is a brilliant but often frustrating book to read for anyone who has studied Nietzsche. Some of the points in it are brilliant insights into art, culture, and the work

revolutionized reading tragedy philosophically, while other points only serve as a means for a young Nietzsche to pander unapologetically to Richard Wagner and Arthur Schopenhauer – both men he will later cut ties with and make retroactive excuses for supporting. However, speaking to the brilliant insights, the concept of the Apollonian and Dionysian are crucial for our study. The Dionysian, I have argued, is where we can first see Nietzsche develop an appreciation for profound suffering, and its value for creation. In our own lives, I have put forth that we can use the two drives in tandem: using the Dionysian to spur us on in the face of risk while also adhering to our own logic and creation through the Apollonian, thus making our life itself an aesthetic phenomenon: an artwork we live out. Moreover, we can use the Apollonian and Dionysian as aesthetics when we are looking at art outside of Greek tragedy, as I did by citing the examples of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Winslow Homer's "The Gulf Stream." Nonetheless, we are still just getting started with the Nietzsche's appreciation of suffering. We will see in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that, after cutting ties with metaphysics, Nietzsche develops a non-metaphysical appreciation of suffering where suffering and creation's relationship is reconceptualized into a climb through the highs and lows of life, with Nietzsche now attacking mediocrity with vitriol and no restraint. Furthermore, we will look at the concept of eternal recurrence: a concept that jolts our view of suffering even though, as an idea, it is Nietzsche's own creation birthed from suffering.

Chapter II

Introduction

In his self-proclaimed masterpiece, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche takes us through an almost biblical narrative that touches on nearly every topic in his overall philosophy. One topic that, aside from the "Superman,"[42] garners special attention in the work is eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence is the idea that everything that has or will happen in life has already happened and will happen again — a constant, unchanging, unending ring of time. Eternal recurrence is a contested topic in Nietzsche's work: some believe it to be a metaphysical claim on the nature of the world — and there are notebooks from Nietzsche that support this claim — while others believe it is more of an existential question: if you had to live your whole life over again in the exact same fashion, would your reaction be positive or negative?[43] Based on my own reading of Nietzsche, I have aligned more with the existentialists. Going with the existentialist view of eternal recurrence, the goal is to have had such a fulfilling life that you would want to live it again the exact same way. When examining what Nietzsche thinks could make a life worth living again the exact same way, I noticed *Zarathustra* focusing on an affirmative attitude towards all life, especially suffering. Suffering provides the deep "abysses" required for proper "triumphs,"[44] which Nietzsche believes are the greatest joys in life. The abysses and triumphs of *Zarathustra* are a marked change in the concept of suffering from the *Birth of Tragedy*, and this will become apparent throughout our examination; however, despite

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[42] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 63.
[43] Robert Harrison, "Friedrich Nietzsche - Andrew Mitchell," *Entitled. Opinions (about Life and Literature)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Radio, KZSU., May 25, 2009), https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/friedrich-nietzsche-andrew-mitchell/id384235267?i=1000411429440.
[44] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra,* 177.

the change, suffering remains crucial to Zarathustra's message about eternal recurrence. When looking closely at these triumphs, both in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and in Nietzsche's personal life, it seems that they are required to embrace eternal recurrence; moreover, closely examining each, along with Nietzsche's notebooks, shows that Zarathustra advocates for a specific kind of approach to suffering that involves both courage, pity, and eventually leads one to self-creation. Therefore, for this chapter, I will examine the aforementioned materials to show that one can only come to embrace eternal recurrence through first embracing suffering, and there is a way in which one embraces suffering that we will see the character of Zarathustra advocating for through examples depicting both successes and failures; the lessons learned in these examples will also be demonstrated in an example from my personal experience.

Zarathustra's Approach to Suffering

To begin, let's look at Zarathustra's own approach to suffering. When it comes to suffering, the sage is fond of the mountains where he resides and uses metaphors inspired by them to describe his view of suffering:

> "I stand before my highest mountain and my longest wandering: therefore, I must first descend deeper than I have ever descended, – deeper into pain than I have ever descended, down to its blackest stream! … Whence arise the highest mountains? I once asked. Then I learned that they arise from the sea... The highest must arise to its height from the deepest."[45]

In this metaphor, Zarathustra displays an appreciation for suffering because he wishes to climb the heights of life, and one only comes to appreciate such heights by going through deep lows; therefore, these opposites require each other: sublime joy requires intense suffering. This appreciation of intense suffering, while it displays some similarities, is a different than the concept of the Dionysian and Apollonian we saw in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In Chapter I,

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[45] Ibid,175.

descending into the Dionysian was symbolized as being reclaimed of a metaphysical state of nature, and one was only redeemed from perishing in this metaphysic by the Apollonian creation that contained it and implanted it with meaning. Now, suffering is something an individual faces and must overcome — it's no longer a metaphysical phenomenon. This break is a result of Nietzsche's break from Schopenhauer and metaphysics at large; in fact, evidence of this can be found when Zarathustra says he an advocate for things that are "of the earth,"[46] and does not concern himself with metaphysical phenomenon. For example, when Zarathustra preaches of virtues, he says that when a person finds something they cherish, they should let it exist in this world only and not try to tie it to metaphysical ones. As Zarathustra puts it in his ideal example:

> 'I do not want it [his virtue] as a law of God, I do not want it as a human statue: let it be no sign-post to superearths and paradises. It is an earthly virtue that I love: there is little prudence in it, and least of all common wisdom.[47]

Therefore, the abysses and heights Zarathustra is speaking of are part of the earth as well and not new renditions of the metaphysic we saw in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In his appreciation of the abysses and heights of life, Zarathustra cherishes them as earthly phenomenon that have no transcendental bearing, and the same can be said for the approach to such abysses and heights, which is now depicted as climbing a mountain.

In the next chapter, "On the Vision and The Riddle," Zarathustra describes himself climbing a mountain. On his climb, it would be fair to say he is suffering; Zarathustra is being tormented by a dwarf known as the "Spirit of Gravity"[48] who is attempting to bring him to the symbol of suffering, the abyss. As Zarathustra recounts the tortuous climb:

> I climbed , I climbed, I dreamed, I thought, but everything oppressed me. I was like a sick man wearied by his sore torment and reawakened from sleep by a worse dream. But there

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[46] *Ibid.* 61.
[47] *Ibid,* 63-64.
[48] Ibid, 177.

> is something in me that I call courage: it has it has always destroyed every discouragement in me. This courage at last bade me stop and say: 'Dwarf! You! Or I!"[49]

As we can see, Zarathustra overcomes this torment with "courage," which is later described as the "best destroyer."[50] Courage for Zarathustra is something "*that attacks*,"[51] and he posits that it is through courage that man overcomes every pain and even his own pity. Pity is what Zarathustra calls the deepest abyss: "courage also destroys pity. Pity, however, is the deepest abyss: as deeply as a man looks into life, so deeply does he look into suffering."[52]

While courage destroys pity and forces of the abyss, it would not be fair to say that courage destroys suffering or negates it. By destroying pity, courage destroys the sorrowful, self-loathing, and escapist emotions that suffering causes and replaces them with an affirmative embrace of the challenge and chance to triumph over suffering. For example, pity may cause one to loathe their suffering and desperately look for an escape, and that is why Nietzsche considers it "the deepest abyss." When one is pitiful in suffering, they desire anything that will alleviate their suffering; it is essentially self-loathing and escapism. However, if one has courage, they destroy self-loathing and all non-affirming approaches towards suffering by facing the challenge head-on. Through courage, they have the capability to attack their challenge and triumph; as Zarathustra puts it, "for every *attack* there is a triumphant shout."[53] Moreover, giving more credence to courage as an affirmative act is the Nietzschean concept of creation: every creation necessitates some destruction to precede it — you must prune off a bad branch for new flowers to grow; thus, to create, one must first destroy. As Zarathustra claims when speaking of creators:

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

"You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame: how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes?"[54] This is also a new take on suffering than we saw in Chapter I. Formerly, the Dionysian aesthetic and drive was destructive, but the destruction was a part of nature and had to be continuously harnessed for creation through the Apollonian aesthetic in order for the Greeks to make sense of the world around them — as Nietzsche put it then, the transfiguration of the Dionysian was "necessary, so as to keep the animated world of individuation alive."[55] Now, however, courageous destruction is a reply to one's own experience with suffering — it is employed for the purpose of overcoming. Courage destroys the pity and despair inside us that is prompted by suffering to triumph and overcome. To triumph over death and embrace eternal recurrence, Zarathustra says one also needs courage then as well: "courage that attacks: it destroys even death, for it says: Was *that* life? Well then! Once More! But there is a great triumphant shout in such a saying."[56] By saying once more, Zarathustra is once again using courage in destroying the pitiful emotions the very idea of eternal recurrence can create — these pitiful emotions are described by Nietzsche when he first penned the idea of eternal recurrence, depicting it as having been presented by a demon in *The Joyful Science*:

> "The eternal sand-glass of existence will ever be turned once more, and you with it, you speck of dust!" - Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth, and curse the demon that so spoke? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment in which you would answer him: "You are a God, and never did I hear anything so divine!"[57]

The courageous approach Zarathustra is advocating for would be the latter answer in the quote above, while the pitiful response would be the former, and the "tremendous moment" is the

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[54]Ibid., 90.
[55] *Tragedy,* 153.
[56] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 178.
[57] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*, 204.

triumph one experiences by overcoming suffering. In Zarathustra's case, such a triumph is found after he courageously faces the dwarf.

After countering the dwarf with his courage, Zarathustra describes eternal recurrence to him:

> 'Behold this gateway, dwarf!' I went on: 'it has two aspects. Two paths come together here: no one has ever reached their end. This long lane behind us: it goes on for eternity. And that long lane ahead of us — that is another eternity… it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it: "Moment." … And if all things have been here before: What do you think of this moment, dwarf? Must not this gateway, too, have been here — before?... — and must we not return and run down that other lane before us, down that long, terrible lane — must we not return eternally?"[58]

The end of that quote is the hard truth of suffering and eternal recurrence: Zarathustra must look back at the abyss and the long, tortuous path he just climbed and understand that eternal recurrence would have him climb it again and again, the exact same way, ad infinitum. However, while the climb was hard and brutal, it would also prove to be rewarding. The reward for Zarathustra's courage, his triumph, was a sight he saw that gave him an appreciation of eternal recurrence. The sight in question is graphic and was by no means pleasant to start with: Zarathustra saw a young shepherd choking on a "heavy, black snake."[59] The snake was hanging out of the shepherd's mouth as he laid on the ground being suffocated by it; Zarathustra could not pull the snake out of the young man's mouth no matter how bad his "*pity*"[60] urged him to, all he could do was tell the man to bite the snake's head off.

In my opinion, telling this man to bite the snake's head off is telling him to *attack*, and thanks to our previous analysis, it is fair to say that Zarathustra is telling the shepherd

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[58] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 178 – 179.
[59] Ibid, 180.
[60] Ibid.

to have courage with such a command. Thankfully, the shepherd adhered to Zarathustra's call for courage, bit the snake's head off, and spat it far away. In doing so, the young shepherd was transformed: "He spat far away the snake's head — and sprang up. No longer a shepherd, no longer a man — a transformed being, surrounded with light, *laughing*!"[61] Now, the obvious metaphor here is that the man has overcome himself and is thus transformed into Nietzsche's famed "Superman;"[62] however, given our recent examination of courage and suffering in this chapter, I think there is an interesting show of symbolism on that account as well: it was only through courage to attack his suffering that the man affirmed and overcame his abyss — pity would have gotten him nowhere. By overcoming his pity and suffering, the shepherd was able to triumph and reach the ever-famous status of the "Superman." This is, of course, an affirmation of suffering because without the snake, there is no opportunity to triumph. Witnessing this triumph also allowed Zarathustra to affirm eternal recurrence for himself. As aforementioned, he was pondering eternally climbing the long, hard path that brought him to the gateway and the vision of the shepherd; however, upon hearing the shepherd's laugh, Zarathustra is so overcome with joy that he affirms life eternally and never wishes for it to end: "My longing for this laughter consumes me: oh how do I endure still to live! And how could I endure to die now!"[63] Therefore, so long as Zarathustra's path up the mountain leads to his highest joy (the laughing of the Superman) then he would take it again, eternally.

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid, 63.
[63] Ibid, 180.

Zarathustra as an Advocate for Suffering

"Oh, Zarathustra, advocate of life! You must also be the advocate of suffering!" [64] This quote is from one of Nietzsche's private notebooks he used during the period of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. These notebooks are marvelous for people really interested in Nietzschean thought because they give us a glimpse into Nietzsche's philosophical workshop: you can read through thought experiments, him testing new ideas, and witness the process of Nietzsche creating masterpieces — like a vineyard tour for a sommelier. In this notebook excerpt, Nietzsche is posting that Zarathustra needs to advocate for suffering because he is an advocate for life. Thanks to our previous examination, we already know why this is: to affirm life eternally, one must also affirm suffering because it takes us to our triumphs. Zarathustra showed us how he successfully exemplified affirming suffering through courage, but how else does he teach the value of suffering to others? Aside from "Of the Vision and the Riddle," what examples and metaphors does Nietzsche use to have Zarathustra advocate for suffering and eternal recurrence? In my reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, there are a few that jump out immediately: the notion of "Ultimate Men," and the chapters: "Of Afterworldsmen" and "Of the Preachers of Death."

The Ultimate Man

The character I am about to describe I have also seen referred to as the "Last Man;"[65] however, I am using the R. J. Hollingdale translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* and he calls this

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[64] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Paul S. Loeb and David Fletcher Tinsley (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 486.

[65] Cynthia Haven, "Who Is the Last Man? Peter Sloterdijk on Nietzsche," The Book Haven, July 16, 2019, https://bookhaven.stanford.edu/2019/07/moral-philosophy-public-relations-peter-sloterdijk-on-nietzsche/.

character the "*Ultimate Man*"[66] because Nietzsche sees this man as the goal of modern society. What is this "Ultimate Man?" A man who no longer wills anything but constant comfort and complacency:

> "'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star? Thus asks the Ultimate Man and blinks… 'We have discovered happiness,' say the Ultimate Men and blink. They have left the places where living was hard: for one needs warmth… A little poison now and then: that produces pleasant dreams. And a lot of poison at last, for a pleasant death... No herdsman and one herd… They have their little pleasure for the day and their little pleasure for the night: but they respect health. 'We have discovered happiness,' say the Ultimate Men and blink." [67]

These "Ultimate Men" are the byproduct of no suffering: they experience no abysses or high heights, no pain and thus, no profound joy. Instead, they live a peaceful, calm life where they have a "little pleasure" but nothing to overwhelm them, for they could not bear anything extreme. Doubtless deep abysses are out of the cards for the Ultimate Men — this fact is evidenced by Zarathustra putting the question "What is Creation?" into their mouths. As aforementioned, all creation necessitates suffering and destruction, but these Ultimate Men: they cannot suffer, they cannot destroy; therefore, they cannot create. The main reason these Ultimate Men cannot experience any of the previously listed items is that they lack courage. We established that, in Nietzsche's framework, courage shows itself through suffering, and if one cannot approach suffering, it is due to a lack of courage.

The existence of the Ultimate Men shows, in an artistic medium, what life can be like without the courage to take on any risk or challenge. If Zarathustra depicts a courageous life that can be eternally affirmed as being one of abysses and heights, then the existence of the Ultimate Man is akin to a life lived on a flat plain — which Nietzsche despises; as he puts it earlier when

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[66] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 47.
[67] Ibid, 46-47.

Zarathustra is getting ready to embark on a journey: "I am a wanderer and a mountain-climber (he said to his heart), I do not like the plains and it seems I cannot sit still for long."[68] Without the courage to take a path that can lead one to a triumph, it would be impossible to affirm eternal recurrence — for the triumphs are required to lead one to the "tremendous" moment necessary for an appreciation of life recurring again. In the perspective of the Ultimate Man, life is of very little value: to invent "happiness" they live in sheer avoidance of all things that Zarathustra thinks makes life worth eternal affirmation. Ultimate Men are shown to have their little highs and lows, but still seek a definitive death at the end of their lives, albeit a "pleasant" one. Therefore, despite being depicted as 'happy,' the Ultimate Men and their avoidance of suffering and creation are the antithesis of Zarathustra's approach to and appreciation of suffering.

The Preachers of Death and Afterworldsmen

The second set of characters that I think Zarathustra introduces to advocate for eternal recurrence and suffering are: "The Preachers of Death" and the "Afterworldsmen,"[69] whom I believe to be akin to one another. Their similarity lies in how they come to be: trying to escape from suffering. Speaking of Afterworldsmen, Nietzsche writes: "It is intoxicating joy for the sufferer to look away from his suffering and to forget himself… It was suffering and impotence – that created all afterworlds; and that brief madness of happiness that only the greatest sufferer experiences."[70] "Afterworldsmen," as the name would suggest, preach of afterworlds: worlds beyond this one that one can take solace in when suffering. For example, and likely the one Nietzsche is alluding to, the concept of heaven in Christianity is an afterworld: it is, quite literally, a supposed world after this one that helps comfort suffering people by assuring them

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[68] Ibid, 173.
[69] Ibid, 58, 72.
[70] Ibid, 59.

that their hardship on Earth will lead them to a place where suffering does not exist. Escaping suffering is also the source material that creates the "Preachers of Death."

The Preachers of Death are described by Zarathustra as people who wish to escape the suffering of life:

> "'Life is only suffering' – thus others of them speak, and they do not lie… But they want to escape from life… And you too, you to whom life is unrestrained labor and anxiety: are you not weary of life? Are you not very ripe for the sermon of death?... Everywhere resound the voices of death: and the earth is full of those to whom death must be preached. Or 'eternal life': it is all the same to me…"[71]

Since preaching of "'eternal life,'" — and to be sure, Zarathustra is referencing Christianity's heaven here, not eternal recurrence — is the same as preaching death, the preachers of death could very easily be considered afterworldsmen, and, of course, the two share a fundamental quality necessary to our study: they deny life by denying suffering. In suffering, it is where these characters are possible, but they are also born from a lack of courage. Instead of courageously facing suffering and affirming the challenge by overcoming it, they retreat into thoughts of afterworlds and, specifically regarding the preachers of death, abhor this life for its suffering and wish to leave it; both afterworldsmen and the preachers of death are examples of how suffering makes or breaks one's approach to eternal recurrence: under the crucible of suffering, both characters failed because suffering caused them to condemn life in favor of death and afterworlds — doubtless eternal recurrence would be their worst nightmare.

Suffering And Creation

> "*The will to suffer:* once in a while you must live in the world, you who create. You must *almost* perish — and afterwards *bless* your labyrinth and your stray paths. Otherwise, you could not *create*, but only *die off*. You must have your triumphs and your downfalls. You must have your evils and once in a while take them up again. You eternally returning ones, you yourselves must make of yourselves a return." [72]

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[71] Ibid, 73.
[72] Nietzsche, *Fragments*, 190.

The passage above is another gem from Nietzsche's private notebooks. Here, he is describing the "*will to suffer*." Like *The Birth of Tragedy,* the will to suffer has to do with suffering's role in creation, and Nietzsche seems to think that all creations worth anything come from profound suffering. This is why Nietzsche seemed to show sympathy towards the afterworldsmen — indeed, Zarathustra even considered himself a former afterworldsmen. The reason Zarathustra has some sympathy for afterworldsmen is that they are using suffering to create; however, their creations are not life-affirming in the eternal sense. An example of a flawed, but life-affirming, creation would be the Greek pantheon of gods. In *Birth of Tragedy*, we saw Nietzsche sing lengthy praise for Greek mythology because he saw it as the Ancient Greeks' solution to suffering; however, now Nietzsche realizes that the Greek gods are still an afterworld, and even if the gods encourage living full lives, they do not eternally affirm life as it is on Earth; in the fields of Elysium, Greek mythology still promised a heavenly end goal, making it opposed to eternal recurrence. Evidence for Nietzsche's new thoughts on the Greeks can be found in *The Joyful Science*, where he touts newfound admiration for Socrates and says of the Greeks in total that they must be overcome: "Oh my friends! We will have to overcome the Greeks too!"[73]Furthermore, though he does not specifically name the Greeks, when Zarathustra speaks of his past as an afterworldsmen, he does so by describing a similar phenomenon to the Greeks: having created a God to deal with suffering, and he calls on his followers to do away with such creations:

> "Ah, brothers, this God which I created was human work and human madness, like all gods! He was human, and only a poor piece of man and Ego: this phantom came to me from my own fire and ashes, that is the truth! It did not come from the 'beyond'! What happened, my brothers? I, the sufferer, overcame myself, I carried my own ashes to the mountains, I made for myself a brighter flame. And behold! The phantom *fled* from me… My Ego taught me a new pride, I teach it to men: No longer to bury the head in the sand of

[73] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*, 203.

> heavenly things, but to carry it freely, an earthly head which creates meaning for the earth!"[74]

Therefore, even in the case of the Greeks, where man-made Gods were used to make sense of existence, Nietzsche seems to now favor an approach that does not look away from earthly life but eternally affirms it. So, if not the Greeks anymore, what kind of creation comes from suffering and eternally affirms life? Well, how about eternal recurrence itself? Yes, as we will see, Nietzsche only came to this concept through intense suffering.

In the winter of 1881, Nietzsche was suffering immensely: especially ill health, signs of madness, and so depressed that he had even forgot his own birthday. He had also just turned 36, the age his father was when he had died and an age that Nietzsche feared he would die at, too. And finally, to top it all off, he had just broken off his longtime friendship with Richard Wagner, whose split from Nietzsche was also part of his break from Schopenhauer and metaphysics at large. In this melancholic point of his life, Nietzsche decided to take a long hike down by Lake Silvaplana in the Swiss Alps. While hiking by a boulder that "looks as though it had just been dropped from the skies by Sisyphus,"[75] Nietzsche was fighting another battle against manic psychosis when the affirming idea of eternal recurrence came to him. Following this thought, Nietzsche was met with a period of extreme elation and triumph — he had been courageously fighting his abyss but affirmed it and now started to climb — and climb he did. Indeed, the seven years following this sublime experience were Nietzsche's best and most creative, and he used these years to pen the works that made him a legend in the field of philosophy, and unarguably, one of the most influential philosophers of the 19th century.[76]

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[74] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 59 - 60.
[75] Eva Cybulska, "Nietzsche's Eternal Return: Unriddling the Vision, a Psychodynamic Approach," *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 13, no. 1 (2013): pp.1-13, https://doi.org/10.2989/ipjp.2013.13.1.2.1168, 2.
[76] Cybulska, "Nietzsche's Eternal Return," 13.

With Nietzsche, however, no victory is without tragedy. In Carl Jung's seminars on *Zarathustra*, he posited that this concept of eternal return was a redemptive one to Nietzsche — the thought redeemed him from his suffering and allowed him to triumph over it; therefore, Nietzsche would always crave a return to this intense, sublime overcoming of the abyss. He wanted to return, again and again, to that white-knuckling, triumphant burst of madness and creation. As an article from the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* argues, this drive to madness may have ultimately be Nietzsche's undoing: at age 44, Friedrich Nietzsche would be enveloped by an abyss of madness from which he would never recover. [77]

Bringing Zarathustra's Teachings to a Modern Example

Hitherto, I have shown what Nietzsche thinks on this issue and not much else. Due to the brilliant but unique style of *Zarathustra*, I considered my explanation of the imagery and metaphors in the text necessary and apropos to our understanding; however, the goal I set forth in the beginning was to not only show how the concept of suffering matures throughout Nietzsche's anthology, but also to elucidate the concept and corresponding teachings through real-life examples. So, having now learned about suffering and its relation to abysses, afterworlds, pity, courage, and triumphs, I wanted to allow the discussion of affirming eternal recurrence to culminate in one glinting example: my father, an opioid addict. In this example, I will also be arguing for the value of Nietzsche's teachings by reframing them through the modern psychological phenomenon called the "victim mentality."

When I was 7 years old, my dad's first hip-replacement surgery came. He was suffering before and after going under the knife, and it was not long until he would need his second hip replaced. Following the second surgery, there was an increase in pain, and the recovery was far longer and

[77]Ibid, 13.

arduous: numerous setbacks and no signs of initial progress; however, doctors agreed that with continuous and committed treatment, there was a high chance of full recovery; however, the onus was on my father to commit to the challenge treatment if he was to recover, and he would have several obstacles along the way — the most significant being opioid addiction

Opioids are an epidemic in modern America. From prescription painkillers to the illegal opioids that have been killing many Americans due to often being laced with fentanyl, a strong and very lethal opioid drug,[78] both addiction and misuse have claimed a tragic number of lives. Thankfully, fentanyl is controlled in prescribed drugs and therefore, does not reach the lethal doses that the illegal counterparts contain; however, prescription opioids pose their own complicated risk. According to the National Library of Medicine:

> Due to their inarguable abuse potential, these drugs are frequently misused, with high numbers of patients developing dependence. Opioid medications prescribed for mild to moderate acute pain were continued indefinitely, with no intention of tapering or ceasing use. Due to pharmacologic effects, opioids are highly addictive. Tolerance is achieved within days, and the withdrawal syndrome is severe.[79]

In my experience, the philosophy of this phenomenon can mirror Nietzsche's teachings on pity and courage. In pain, opioids function to provide temporary relief while one is on the road to recovery; however, if one is not vigilant, prescription opioids can prey on self-pity the same way alcohol and other addictive substances hijack the suffering of people: their ease of use, access, and fast-acting affects can become the go-to escape for those suffering, thus robbing them of any real triumph over their afflictions. In my own example, my father would bounce from treatment to treatment, giving each one only a few weeks or a month tops until he determined its results unsatisfactory and quit. He ran the therapeutic gauntlet from East to West: physical therapy,

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[78] "Fentanyl," DEA, accessed November 27, 2023, https://www.dea.gov/factsheets/fentanyl.
[79] Azadfard Mohammadreza, et al., "Opioid Addiction - Statpearls - NCBI Bookshelf," Opioid Addiction, July 21, 2023, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK448203/.

exercise, acupuncture, meditation, yoga, sweat lodges, saunas, and even mystical crystals, he tried it all — the only constant was opioids, and those would eventually be his undoing. Looking for the one pill that could fix anything ultimately became his philosophy for life, and it represented the most picturesque example of lacking Nietzschean courage in suffering and succumbing to pity: by favoring temporary bliss over taking up the challenge of committing to treatment, my father was denying himself the opportunity to triumph over his own abyss.

Now, to be perfectly clear: I do not want to make light of addiction or act as if the painful suffering of addiction that opioid users face is one that is simple. The opioid epidemic is an epidemic for a reason, and swathes of the American populace have fallen victim to it;[80] however, without simplifying a national crisis, I still think Nietzsche's thought of pity and courage can be of tremendous benefit as a cautionary tale against the psychological phenomenon referred to as the "victim mentality,"[81] which was a phenomenon I saw as detrimental to my father's hopes for recovery. While most popular for its effects in political and collective conflicts, the victim mentality is essentially the Nietzschean concept of pity on the individual level. According to an article from Stanford University, the victim mentality is the feeling of being wronged unfairly compared to those around you, and it is often self-aggrandized to a form of entitlement:

> We propose that this perception of being wronged increases individuals' sense of entitlement to avoid further suffering and to obtain positive outcomes for themselves.1 Wronged individuals feel that they have already done their fair share of suffering—as if there were a maximum amount of victimhood that a person can reasonably be expected to endure—and consequently, they feel entitled to spare themselves some of life's inconveniences, such as being attentive to the needs of others. We predict that this should lead individuals to behave

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[80] "Understanding the Opioid Overdose Epidemic," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 8, 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/epidemic.html#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20who,in%202021%20involved%20an%20opioid.

[81] George A. Goens, *It's Not My Fault: Victim Mentality and Becoming Response-Able* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

> selfishly by, for example, refusing to help, endorsing self-serving intentions, or claiming a bigger piece of the pie when sharing resources with others.[82]

The article goes on to further goes on to verify what I saw in my personal experience by noting the entitlement found in people with physical disabilities. In my example, this feeling of being wronged and corresponding entitlement was present: my dad certainly did not do anything he thought would cause surgery in his youth, and he did not enjoy seeing other people enjoy the physical capabilities he lacked as natural part of their daily lives — the embarrassment he felt and loudly complained of each time he parked in my school's handicap spot was evidence of this. He looked at his suffering, became pitiful, and adopted a victim mentality, blaming each short-lived treatment and even, much later, the surgeons who operated on him for his condition. It was this pity and resulting victim mentality that caused him to selfishly turn to pills, negating the attempts of family and loved ones who were desperately trying to get him out of his abyss, but as with Zarathustra and the shepherd, an external influence can only go so far: one must attack their own spirit of gravity, affirm their own suffering, to triumph and create. And, to keep with the theme of eternal recurrence, I think it goes without saying that, after losing to his opioid addiction and passing away due to ill health, my father would not have embraced the idea of eternal recurrence. The last ten years of his life were completely miserable, and an utter rebuke of eternal recurrence: he often wished he could go back long before his surgery in order to live differently.

Zarathustra's Final Triumph

We now have three examples to conceptualize suffering: Nietzsche and Zarathustra's victorious bout with it, and a the most recent example of my father's loss to his own spirit of

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[82] Emily M. Zitek et al., "Victim Entitlement to Behave Selfishly.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98, no. 2 (2010): 245, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017168.

gravity and pity. However, there is a final account of triumph over suffering that we must touch on: Zarathustra's facing and triumphing over his "most abysmal thought." In the section that precedes Zarathustra's encounter with his most abysmal thought, he appears to be longing for one more great triumph that will shape his destiny, stating:

> O my Will! My essential, *my* necessity, dispeller of need! Preserve me from all my petty victories! O my soul's predestination, which I call destiny! In-me! Over-me! Preserve and spare me for a great destiny. .. O Will, my essential, *my* necessity, dispeller of need! Spare me for one great victory![83]

The will, as I understand it, is Zarathustra's term for having power over oneself. Earlier in the work, in a section titled "Of Self-Overcoming," Zarathustra preaches that a strong will is required to command oneself and not be dependent on the guidance of others[84] — hence it being called the "dispeller of need." Zarathustra is calling on his self-mastery to save himself for a great triumph that will shape his destiny. Such a triumph is found in the following chapter "The Convalescent," where Zarathustra calls upon his most abysmal thought. Zarathustra's most abysmal thought is a product of eternal recurrence; however, unlike the earlier encounter with the Spirit of Gravity, Zarathustra is no longer fearful of the idea that suffering must eternally recur — for he already has affirmed that due to his suffering bringing him to high heights. What causes Zarathustra to suffer near the end of the work is the idea of mediocrity recurring. For Zarathustra, mediocrity has neither upward nor downward direction; it is flat, unfulfilling, and plain-like. The thought of eternally recurring mediocrity alone disgusts Zarathustra and causes him to suffer worse than any previous example hitherto. The thought of man's mediocrity recurring invokes pity in him — the pity coming in the form of self-despair Zarathustra feels when he encounters this thought. However, Zarathustra nonetheless courageously calls on his

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[83] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 231 -232.
[84] Ibid, 136 -139.

most abysmal thought so that he may turn the thought of mediocrity into an abyss to be triumphed over:

> I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle — I call you, my most abysmal thought! Ah! You are coming — I hear you! My abyss *speaks*, I have turned my ultimate depth into the light! Ah! Come here! Give me your hand — ha! Don't! Ha, ha! — Disgust, disgust, disgust — woe is me![85]

After calling his deepest abyss into the light Zarathustra falls like a "dead man"[86] only to awake and remain dormant and lifeless for seven days. After seven days, however, Zarathustra converses with the animals around him, telling them he has conquered his abyss much like the shepherd we saw earlier: "and how that monster creeped into my throat and choked me! But I bit its head off and spat it away."[87] The bite in question was Zarathustra affirming that while man in all his mediocrity must recur, so, too, must Zarathustra recur as the teacher of eternal recurrence to man.

> 'How well you know what comfort I devised for myself in seven days! 'That I have to sing again — *that* comfort and *this* convalescence did I devise for myself: do you want me to make a hurdy-gurdy song of that, too?'… 'For your animals well know, O Zarathustra, who you are and must become: behold, *you are the teacher of eternal recurrence*, that is now *your* destiny![88]

Realizing his destiny is to be the teacher of eternal recurrence is how Zarathustra conquers his most abysmal thought, and it was only through suffering that he was able to do so, but what is missing here is how exactly suffering shapes one's destiny, and what happened internally with Zarathustra over those seven days? This will be our point of departure from this chapter. It is not until much later in Nietzsche's anthology that he elucidates the concept of a destiny and its relation to suffering in his posthumously published memoir *Ecce Homo*. However, this

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[85] Ibid, 233.
[86]Ibid, 233.
[87] Ibid, 235.
[88] Ibid, 237.

examination is not ending completely open-ended: through final triumph that Zarathustra has over suffering, he recreated himself; through suffering, he affirmed his own image as a prophet of eternal recurrence. This aspect of suffering caused by internal conflict is the topic of Chapter III, but before moving on, I will summarize the findings of Chapter II.

Summary

The focus of this chapter was Nietzsche's new concept of suffering and the approach he advocated for when confronting it. The new concept of suffering was not a break from the pain or destruction of the Dionysian that we saw in *The Birth of Tragedy* but a break from the metaphysical conception of nature as suffering and chaos. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, suffering still entails pain and destruction, but it is strictly an earthly phenomenon that is approached as an opportunity. The opportunity suffering provides is one for the abysses and heights that Nietzsche thinks are essential to embracing his idea of eternal recurrence. However, as we saw, there is a specific approach to suffering Nietzsche advocates for in reaching this affirmation. Nietzsche, through the mouth of Zarathustra, advocates for one to be courageous in their approach towards suffering; to *attack* the challenge and all feelings of pity that suffering may cause. In advocating for suffering and the courageous approach, we saw Zarathustra bring examples of the Ultimate Men, the Preachers of Death, and the afterworldsmen — with each depicting various elements of a pitiful life that lacks the courage to embrace suffering. To better exemplify the teachings of Zarathustra, we saw examples of the teachings applied to real-life bouts with suffering through the personal life of Friedrich Nietzsche himself and my father, with the former depicting the courageous, affirmative approach, and the latter exemplifying the pitiful, non-affirmative approach. Lastly, we saw Zarathustra turn his "ultimate depth to light" to recreate himself and shape his destiny. In doing this, Zarathustra did still exemplify the Nietzschean approach to

suffering that has been the object of this chapter, but he left us with questions concerning the Nietzsche concept of suffering for self-creation that I intend to answer in Chapter III.

Chapter III

Introduction

Hitherto, we have discussed how Nietzsche conceptualized suffering on two fronts: in *The Birth of Tragedy*, we saw his value of suffering in a metaphysical lens through the Dionysian and Apollonian; in *Zarathustra*, we saw his break with the metaphysical view of suffering and an account of how to properly approach suffering in a life guided by eternal recurrence. It is now time to bring both examples to their culmination by examining Nietzsche's posthumously published memoir *Ecce Homo*. "Ecce Homo" is Latin for "behold man" and, according to the Book of John, 19:5, it is also the phrase Pontius Pilate says to a frenzied mob as he presents Jesus Christ for judgement.[89] The analogy here is that Nietzsche is also presenting himself and his path thus far for appraisal, albeit self-appraisal — in fact, the subtitle of *Ecce Homo* is "*How One Becomes What One Is*." In his account of *Becoming What One Is*, Nietzsche accomplishes two tasks: first, going through his anthology, adding to, and commenting on all his published works; second, creating an explanative, artistic, and self-aggrandizing memoir: Nietzsche provides reasons and stories that attempt to show why and how he became the greatest philosopher of all time and doubles down on his signature elitism in the process. However, both tasks seem to pay special attention to one work in particular: *Zarathustra*. In the foreword to *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says of *Zarathustra*: "Among my works, *Zarathustra* stands alone. With it, I presented humanity with the greatest gift it ever received."[90] Furthermore, in *Ecce Homo*,

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[89]Kevin Butcher, "News & Events," Pontius Pilate - Ecce homo!, January 11, 2016, https://warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/features/pontius_pilate/.

[90] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner, Twilight of the Idols, The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Dionysus Dithyrambs, Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, trans. Adrian Del Caro et al., 9th ed., of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), 214.

Nietzsche also makes a notable return to his concept of Dionysus, stating also in the foreword, "I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus, I would prefer to be a satyr rather than a saint."[91] In his commentary on Dionysus and *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche reflects on and adds to his thoughts that were established in *Twilight of the Idols*, a book written just before the memoir and published shortly after Nietzsche's mental breakdown in 1889.[92] While Nietzsche himself would never be able to appreciate the publication of *Ecce Homo* and *Twilight of the Idols*, both bring the Dionysian aesthetic into discourse with his teachings in *Zarathustra*. In examining this merger, we will see how the common conception of the Dionysian has been modified, and how our past two examinations of Nietzsche's work are brought together to show the role suffering plays in the Nietzschean task of "*Becoming What One Is*."

To elucidate this concept, I will examine both *Ecce Homo*, relevant sections of *Twilight of the Idols*, and as with the previous chapter, sections from Nietzsche's notebooks, albeit this time sampling from *The Will to Power*, which was a book published by Nietzsche's sister and is a collection of Nietzsche's notebooks from 1883 to 1888. In this examination, I will first lay out a refined concept of suffering that covers new developments in the Dionysian and follow it by explaining how one can aesthetically justify themselves with suffering; in both pursuits I will bring the lessons of chapters one and two into a concept that we can work with when tackling our final goal: establishing that the role of suffering, in Nietzsche's philosophy, is to artistically create oneself as an ever-affirming Dionysian symbol — a person who has "*Become What One Is*."

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[91] Ibid, 212.
[92] Hemelsoet, D et al. "The neurological illness of Friedrich Nietzsche." *Acta neurologica Belgica* vol. 108,1 (2008): 9-16.

New Developments in Suffering

In Chapter I, we looked at *The Birth of Tragedy* and defined Dionysian suffering as an aesthetic born from a metaphysical collection of non-imagistic, irrational, and destructive forces that is affirmed through the Apollonian. To put this into perspective, I used Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* to show how Dionysian suffering is the type of pain, physical or emotional, that destroys our sense of self and the world around us. To link this concept with *Zarathustra*, we can see pity, "the deepest abyss,"[93] as a failure to react affirmatively to suffering: in pity, we perpetuate the destructive effects of suffering by negating the will to create. This concept of pity brought suffering into frame as an internal phenomenon as well as an external one, and Nietzsche recognized this, stating in *Ecce Homo* that when reflecting on *The Birth of Tragedy*, he found the concept of the Dionysian within himself:

> This beginning is incredibly unusual, I had *discovered* the only resemblance and parallel in history to my own innermost experience — and in doing that, I was the first to grasp the wonderful phenomenon of the Dionysian.[94]

I think this internal conceptualization of the Dionysian brings a new, crucial element to our concept of suffering: it can be found within oneself to be employed both internally and externally. The destructive forces of Dionysian suffering, for Nietzsche, can now be harnessed internally to destroy what we see as ugly in ourselves and the world around us when performing an aesthetic justification. To define an aesthetic justification, I will defer to how Nietzsche puts it in *The Will to Power*:

> I myself have attempted an *aesthetic* justification: how is the ugliness of the world possible? I took the will to beauty to pursue in like forms, for a temporary means of preservation and recuperation: fundamentally, however, the eternally-creative appeared to me to be, as the eternal compulsion to destroy, associated with pain. The ugly is the form things assume when we wish to implant a meaning, a new meaning into what has become

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[93] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra,* 177.
[94] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 257.

> meaningless: the accumulated force which compels the creator to consider all that has been created hitherto as unacceptable, ill-constituted, worthy of being denied, ugly![95]

In this excerpt, by rethinking the aesthetic justification, Nietzsche is also rethinking the concept of the Dionysian. Formerly the aesthetic represented a meaningless, pessimistic metaphysic that was justified through the tragic art form; now, the destructive forces once attributed to the Dionysian primordial unity exist within all creators for the purposes of justifying themselves, and their justifications are no longer subject to a metaphysical truth that they are simply trying to accommodate. As we will see, the new concept of the Dionysian allows one to use suffering itself to create their perspective and reinterpret their self-image, forming an aesthetic justification that is no longer a veil over a metaphysic but stands on its own as "*What One Is*."

Is All Suffering Dionysian?

Before I can further explain how Nietzschean suffering is something that is both internal and continual, I would like to first establish a reply to a possible question: is any pain that causes one to feel as if their world is shattering classified as Dionysian suffering? Put simply, yes and no. A constant force of negative destruction applied to one's life creates a nihilistic existence, and supporting nihilism is not the goal of Nietzsche's philosophy. Nihilism is essentially the extreme consequence of critiquing traditional western beliefs and holds that: there is no meaning in anything, human existence is pointless, and all knowledge claims are baseless. This worldview, in practice, creates a constant negation of life that is in direct opposition to the eternal affirmation Nietzsche is arguing for. Doubtless Nietzsche writes with nihilistic assumptions due to famously stating that "God is dead,"[96] and with him so is objective and

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[95] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann, trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).
[96] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*, 129.

intrinsic meaning, but in my opinion, Professor Lawrence J. Hatab, a Nietzsche specialist from Old Dominion University, put it well when he wrote of Nietzsche's nihilism: "the question of whether Nietzsche was a nihilist must be answered both yes and no: yes, if nihilism means the denial of traditional belief systems; no, if it means the denial of any value, meaning, or truth in the world."[97] This concept, in the perspective of suffering, amounts to the notion that while Nietzsche believes suffering may not have any objective or intrinsic meaning, one can aesthetically justify it in his philosophy. Therefore, to completely answer the question on if any world-destroying suffering fits the classification of Dionysian suffering, I would like to borrow from Professor Hatab, Yes: if we believe that Nietzsche's nihilistic assumptions hold there is no intrinsic value to suffering, and that no type of suffering can hold the same value for every person; No: if suffering without objective value promotes a constant negation of life and denies any aesthetic justification. To better exemplify this concept, I would like to introduce a relatively new phenomenon in the world of psychology: post-traumatic growth (PTG).

Traditionally, scientific literature regarding mental health has focused on the negative effects of traumatic experiences; however, the concept of PTG developed in the mid 1990s and was only clearly defined in 2022 as "positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with trauma or highly challenging situations."[98] According to psychologists, effects of PTG include: self-acceptance, positive changes in self-perception and interpersonal relationships, self-resilience, and more.[99] As relatively new phenomenon, psychiatrists are still

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[97] Lawrence J. Hatab, "Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning." *The Personalist Forum* 3, no. 2 (1987): 92. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20708503.
[98] Lorenzi Dell'Osso et al., "Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) in the Frame of Traumatic Experiences." Clin Neuropsychiatry. 2022 Dec;19(6):390-393. doi: 10.36131/cnfioritieditore20220606. PMID: 36627947; PMCID: PMC9807114.
[99] Ibid.

examining what causes PTG, and as a result, there are numerous studies ranging from observations on cancer patients[100] to firefighters[101] that have documented the psychological reality of the concept. Perhaps most notably for this project was the study on firefighters, which observed that individual coping methods opposed to organizational ones were indicators of PTG. The reason this stands out as more relevant to our project is that it shows there is no standard way to cope with or respond to suffering[102] — there is no intrinsic meaning in trauma for all humans to grasp. Even without any objective meaning to be had, studies show that suffering can be interpreted as something that leads to a positive change. Therefore, as shown through the phenomenon of PTG, people can approach suffering with the nihilistic assumptions of Nietzsche's philosophy and still find their own meaning in it — they can *aesthetically justify* their suffering.

The Dionysian as Continual and Developmental

Now that suffering has been established as a destructive force that can be given meaning through aesthetic justification, I would like to discuss in more detail how suffering is also a continuous developmental phenomenon for Nietzsche. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche added a developmental aspect to the anticipation suffering by equating Dionysian suffering to birth pangs. While the thought of birth pangs and suffering may be no great difference from the concepts developed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, this later account is more ameliorative on the individual level:

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[100] A. Marziliano et al. The relationship between post-traumatic stress and post-traumatic growth in cancer patients and survivors: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psycho-Oncology*. 2020; 29: 29: 604–616. https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.5314.

[101] Deanne Armstrong et al., "Predicting post-traumatic growth and post-traumatic stress in firefighters," *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 2014. 66:1, 38-46, DOI: 10.1111/ajpy.12032

[102] Ibid.

> In the lore regarding mysteries, *pain* is sanctified: "birth pangs" sanctify pain in general — all development and growth, everything that pledges the future, *presupposes* pain…For there to be eternal joy in creation, for the will to life to affirm itself eternally, there *must* be eternal "birth torment" as well… The word Dionysus signifies this: I know of no higher symbolism than this *Greek* symbolism, that of the Dionysian.[103]

This excerpt from Nietzsche exemplifies suffering as something that is ameliorative for the following reason: the idea that the "future," and all experiences that bring development and growth, presuppose pain suggests that as life continues, we must continuously encounter suffering if we wish to grow, and though this is not a thesis on Nietzschean power, one could read sections of *The Will to Power* and argue one of the main goals of Nietzsche's philosophy is the expansion of power. Furthermore, in a notebook dated from 1885-1886, Nietzsche defined Dionysus as, "*Dionysus*: sensuality and cruelty. Transitoriness could be interpreted as enjoyment of productive and destructive force, as continual creation."[104] Therefore, the new concept of the Dionysian now has a productive force to its destruction; to grow, the Dionysian aesthetic continuously approaches suffering as Zarathustra did in Chapter II; however, if continual growing is to be strived for, does that mean that one must seek out suffering in the world around them to eternally affirm life? Not necessarily. As aforementioned, Nietzsche also conceptualizes suffering as something that is internal, which I am taking to mean self-inflicted, and this form of self-inflicted suffering is an evolution of the concepts we established in Chapters I & II.

Destruction within Oneself

As aforementioned, Dionysian suffering has evolved through this project from a phenomenon that the ancient Greeks encountered metaphysically, to a something that must be overcome when Zarathustra encountered it as an earthly challenge, and now an overcoming of oneself that Nietzsche describes facing within his own experience. However, there has been one

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[103] Nietzsche, *Twilight*, 130
[104] Ibid, 539.

constant throughout this entire evolution: destruction. The destructive power of the Dionysian has taken multiple forms, but it has not been negated yet; moreover, the framework for destructive force being applied to oneself has been underlying suffering throughout the course of our examination. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, it was the sacrificial destruction of the hero that represented the perishing of oneself in the Dionysian; in *Zarathustra*, one no longer destroys themselves but harnesses the destructive forces of courage to overcome and affirm their suffering; in *Ecce Homo*, the two are united, and the former metaphysical destructive forces of suffering are now incorporated into how one uses sacrificial suffering to create and discover oneself. This destructive forced turned inward is still an affirmation, and it is blurring the lines to call it a creation. While Nietzsche uses the previous birth analogy to conceptualize it, it is more akin to *Becoming Oneself* through affirmative destruction, i.e., giving birth to an underlying form by sacrificing ugly aesthetics. As Nietzsche puts it in *Twilight of the Idols*:

> "Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems; the will to life, rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types — *that* is what I called Dionysian…. *Not* in order to break free from horror and compassion, not in order to be purged of dangerous emotion by vehemently discharging it — as Aristotle misunderstood it: but, beyond horror and compassion, *to be oneself* that eternal joy in becoming, this joy that also even incorporates the *joy in destruction*. And with that I touch again on my point of departure — *The Birth of Tragedy*… with that I put myself back into the soil from which grow my will, my *ability* — I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus — I, the teacher of eternal recurrence."[105]

As stated, Nietzsche's "*ability*" grows from the soil of the same destructive suffering we saw in *The Birth of Tragedy*, albeit now without any metaphysical bearing, and Nietzsche ends the statement on the use of this destruction with understanding himself as "the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus" and, more importantly, the "teacher of eternal recurrence." The reason it is important to emphasize that Nietzsche understands himself as the "the teacher of eternal

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[105] Nietzsche, *Twilight*, 131.

recurrence" at the end of this statement is that it is no coincidence this is the same conclusion we saw Zarathustra come to in affirming his suffering. However, while it does shed light on the fact that Nietzsche thinks suffering is necessary to *Become Oneself*, this excerpt does present two questions we must answer to fully understand how suffering can make it so that *One Becomes What One Is*. First, what is the underlying material that makes up "*oneself*"? And second, how does suffering, both external and internal, lead us there? To answer this, I want to begin with Nietzsche's philosophy on what constitutes life and the makeup of people, starting with perhaps the most prolific section of *The Will to Power*.

The World as a Will to Power

> And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expand itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size… enclosed by "nothingness" as a boundary… a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back with tremendous years of recurrence… out of the simplest forms striving towards the most complex… this my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying… A solution to all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, my strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? *This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides![106]

The world's essence, to Nietzsche, is an extremely complex, recurring, multitude of forces that constitute life as we know it. This "sea of forces" is a sea of powers, and that can range, from powers being cultural, historical, physical, hormonal, genetic, etc. — and as Nietzsche states, this will to power also constitutes the expression of the forces that make up an individual person. Doubtless this concept is rife with internal debate in Nietzsche scholarship, and the the essence of humanity in Nietzsche's framework is hotly contested, with some such as French Philosopher

[106] Nietzsche, *Power*, 549 -550.

Gilles Deleuze[107] supporting the take I previously laid out, while, most notably, fellow German philosopher Martin Heidegger interprets the will to power as a metaphysical claim.[108] Furthermore, this excerpt, among others, has divided scholars on whether Nietzsche thought individual free will existed, raising the question to whether the powers of the Dionysian could be acted on with any agency?[109] For the purposes of this project, and based off my own reading of Nietzsche, I will be siding with Deleuze's interpretation on the individual in Nietzsche's framework, and a modified notion of freedom: as a cluster of forces, a person can accept that they are inseparable and determined by how the powers that constitute them interact with and change with the external powers of world around them. [110] From this point, I will show how and why I think the internal powers constituting us, through an aesthetic justification, take shape and "*Become What One Is*." To exemplify and explain this concept and how it relates to suffering, I would first like to go into deeper detail on how humans, as a bundle of reactive forces, can use the destructive force of suffering.

How Suffering Works for Discovery

I could easily focus an entire thesis project the length of this one on the concept of Nietzschean freedom and still leave many ideas untouched; however, for brevity's sake, I will abstain from diving into the depths of the aforementioned metaphysical debate on free will in

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[107] Sean Bowden, "Deleuze's Nietzsche on Becoming What One Is." Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie: *Leuven Journal of Philosophy* 81, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 53–80. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pif&AN=PHL2392103&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[108] Michael Allen Gillespie. Review of *Heidegger's Nietzsche*, by Martin Heidegger, David Farrell Krell, Frank A. Capuzzi, and Joan Stambaugh. *Political Theory* 15, no. 3 (1987): 424–35. http://www.jstor.org/stable/191212.

[109] Claire Kirwin, "Pulling oneself up by the hair: understanding Nietzsche on freedom," *Inquiry*, 2018, 61:1, 82-99, DOI: 10.1080/0020174X.2017.1371829

Nietzsche's work and start the discussion of how suffering plays a role in discovery with an excerpt from *Twilight of the Idols* where Nietzsche lays out his concept of freedom and creation:

> For what is freedom! That we have the will to self-accountability… That we are prepared to sacrifice human beings to our cause, including ourselves. Freedom means that the manly instincts, joyous in war and victory, hold mastery over other instincts like, for example, "happiness." … The free human being is a *warrior*. — How does that freedom gauge itself in the individual or in a people? By the resistance that must be overcome and the effort it takes to remain *on top*. The highest type of free human being should be sought where the highest resistance is continually overcome.[111]

I am not bringing this excerpt to distract from our discussion on suffering and take a detour into the debate on Nietzschean free will; on the contrary, I am using this quote to return to the concept of human beings as a cluster of forces, albeit with the illumination that certain forces overcome others. According to the quote above, freedom is expressed by overcoming obstacles and resistance, and if we apply this to the theory of the will to power, we can understand how a forces' freedom of expression is determined by its strength. If a force is stronger, it can, without altering the nature of a human being, express itself freely and *will* a new creation, even though it was already there to being with. According to Nietzsche, the way forces do this is by overcoming the expression of other forces and developing a mastery over them — they overpower and *destroy* the expression of the other. And since, in this framework, humans are made up of the expressions of their wills, one can "sacrifice" what they were formerly to a stronger will and "*Become What One Is*."

This battle of wills, both internally and externally, is the essence of this new concept of the Dionysian. When suffering, that destructive force is inflicted upon a human, and the Dionysian affirmation is expressed in affirming one force by letting it destroy the expression of another — this works both internally and externally. An example given by Nietzsche in *Ecce*

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[111] Nietzsche, *Twilight*, 112.

Homo shows how the aesthetic justification of forces can be conceptualized when depicting the human being as marble needing to be sculpted:

> The human being, for him [Zarathustra], is something unformed, some matter, an ugly stone needing a sculptor.
> [Now quoting *Zarathustra*]: "…Oh, you humans, a shape is sleeping in the stone, the shape of all shapes! Alas, that it has to be sleeping in the hardest, ugliest stone of all! *Now my hammer rages cruelly against its prison*. Pieces fly off the stone like dust: what do I care!" … [Returning to *Ecce Homo*] I will stress one final point: the italicized verse occasioned this. For a Dionysian task, the hardness of the hammer, the *pleasure even in destroying* are a decisive part of its preconditions, The imperative "become hard!," the most deep-seated certainty *that all creators are hard*, is the real seal of a Dionysian nature.[112]

The destructive hardness of the hammer is suffering, both inward and external. Being Dionysian in one's suffering is to allow destruction to strike away at all things deemed ugly by an individual, thus forming the hard sculpture beneath and discovering what creation a person is. Furthermore, the external suffering does not always have to be the force that prevails. As shown in *Zarathustra*, the prophet of eternal recurrence did not lose any part of him that was deemed ugly in his bout with suffering on the mountain; he overcame the external challenge and triumphed, thus strengthening preexisting forces. However, as we saw through examples in Nietzsche's personal life, his own bout with suffering was caused by loss that he affirmed and reinterpreted — the common theme with both examples was that they were aesthetic justifications. Zarathustra's was depicted as triumph and Nietzsche's as reinterpretation, but nothing was exactly negated in either — each was an affirmation. In Zarathustra's case, the Spirit of Gravity and his most abysmal thought were not negated; he affirmed the problems presented through the concept of eternal recurrence. In the case of Nietzsche's personal life, his affirmation of his pain and suffering did not cure his sickness or lead to the acceptance of Lou

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[112] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 290.

Salome. On the contrary, it was through the embrace of eternal recurrence that he reinterpreted his own image, destroyed the ugly perception, and affirmed the life he had. Therefore, as shown through Zarathustra and Nietzsche himself, the role of Dionysian suffering in shaping a person is as a force for sculpting "*What One Is*." The obvious question we are now left with after establishing how suffering acts a sculptor is: What are examples of the ugly aesthetics Nietzsche used suffering to sculpt against? Thankfully, Nietzsche has a term for that: *decadence*.

Suffering and Decadence

One of the most ambiguous topics in Nietzsche's anthology is *decadence*. From societal critiques, to art, people, and religions, specifically Christianity, the term "*decadence*" appears to describe a wide array of items that draw Nietzsche's ire; however, I think the key to understanding decadence is understanding how suffering works with "Be*coming What One Is*." As we previously established, to discover oneself through suffering, a person must find the shape within the stone and sculpt accordingly, to indulge in habits and vices that further hide this object would be to decay as an individual, and this is where I find *decadence*. *Decadence*: a state of decay caused by malnourishment. Not malnourishment as a lack of nourishment, but malnourishment as *unhealthy* nourishment. *Decadence,* for me, can be conceptualized as vices that Nietzsche sees as corrupting a human being and leading them to deny life. For example, Nietzsche argued that one such vice was the music of his former friend and idol Richard Wagner, stating that his music preys on those who are weak:

> How related to the whole of European *decadence* Wagner must be if he is not already perceived by it as a *decadent*! He belongs to it: he is its protagonist, its biggest name… For it is already a sign of *decadence* that they do not defend themselves against him. Instinct is weakened. People are attracted to what they ought to shun. They put to their lips what will drive them faster to the abyss…Wagner increases exhaustion: *for that reason* he attracts the weak and exhausted.[113]

[113] Nietzsche, *Wagner,* 13.

I want to focus on *decadence* being portrayed as something people are attracted to but "ought to shun" and a phenomenon that will "drive them faster to the abyss," starting with the former. The reason Nietzsche thinks one "ought to shun" Wagner and his music is that *decadence* is nourishment that causes one to decay, but it can also be stimulating and comforting. With Wagner, Nietzsche argued his music was overstimulating, stating: "He guessed it in the means to excite tired nerves — and with that, he made music sick…He is the master of hypnotic holds."[114] Therefore, *decadence* appears to be an over-indulgence in any vice that causes the aesthetic justification a person aspires for to decay. For example, one could think of *decadence* as a diet that places too much emphasis on one food group: an obvious example would be a diet consisting of primarily processed sugars, but even diets overly focused on normally healthy foods would fit the concept of *decadence*. Humorously, Nietzsche himself used vegetables and vegetarians as an example:

> The exhausted are *lured* by that which is harmful: the vegetarian by vegetables. Sickness itself can be a stimulant to life: except one had to be healthy enough for this stimulant! Wagner increases exhaustion: *for that reason* he attracts the weak and exhausted.[115]

While I may have introduced this quote as a slightly humorous example, the second half of it sheds light on the concept that *decadence* causes one to "put to their lips what will drive them faster to the abyss," which is to say it weakens the ability of one to approach suffering for the use of creation — the manner which Zarathustra advocated for. As we recounted in Chapter II, Nietzsche's own experience with his illness, among other factors, constituted the suffering he needed to affirm life through the creation of eternal recurrence; however, as stated, one must be "healthy" enough for this stimulus. If one nourishes themselves on that which is unhealthy, they

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[114] Ibid, 14.
[115] Ibid, 13.

are unable to approach suffering and are more prone to pity. Pity, however, was provoked by suffering, *decadence* does not have to be. *Decadence* constitutes the vices in and outside the experience of suffering that causes one to decay — moving one further away from their aesthetic justification. What is the counter to decadence? According to Nietzsche, suffering.

To exemplify how one could conquer *decadence*, Nietzsche provides himself as an example. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche admits that he, too, is a *decadent*, but that he is always on guard and clashing with his decaden*ce*, stating:

> Granted, then, that I am a *decadent*, I am also the opposite. My proof for that is, among other things, I always instinctively choose the *right* means of countering bad circumstances: while the *decadent* as such always chooses means that are disadvantageous.[116]

Thus, *decadence* appears as another type of force that is inside all human beings, and it is a matter of regulating its expression that determines if one is succumbing to *decadence*. Evidence of this is in the fact that Nietzsche often refers to a "decadence-instinct"[117] existing, and he argues that one must combat against this instinct by choosing the "right means" of countering bad circumstances. The example of Nietzsche's personal experience I provided in Chapter II holds up under this framework: Nietzsche inflicted suffering on himself by cutting ties with Wagner in Schopenhauer to fit his own aesthetic justification. Doubtless it was hard for Nietzsche, but the "hardness" of the Dionysian is what shapes a person into what one *is*. To further elucidate this concept, I want to go into further detail on overcoming Decadence by touching on, as Nietzsche puts it in *Ecce Homo*, a person obeying their "*Dionysian nature*." [118]

The Dionysian Nature and Destiny: *Becoming What One Is*

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[116] Ibid, 220.
[117] Nietzsche, *Twilight*, 68.
[118] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 306.

The final chapter of *Ecce Homo* is titled "Why I am a Destiny," and by my reading, Nietzsche is essentially predicting that he is ahead of his time, and describing why it is that he has philosophized more dangerously than anyone hitherto — he famously writes in the opening section, "I am no human, I am dynamite."[119] Granted, in the following section, Nietzsche refers to himself as a human when he offers a formula for a "destiny such as this [his own] that *becomes human*."[120] Nietzsche says the answer to how he *became* what he *is* can be found in *Zarathustra*:

> *"— and those who want to be creators in the realm of good and evil, they must first be annihilators and smash values into little pieces. Therefore, the greatest evil is part of the greatest good: yet this good is the creative kind."* … [text of *Ecce Homo*] I know the pleasure of *destruction* at a pitch equal to my *strength* to destroy — in both cases I obey my Dionysian nature that does not know how to distinguish between doing No and saying Yes.[121]

The way Nietzsche obeys his "Dionysian nature" has led him to becoming "*what one is*." That Dionysian nature, the force that can destroy (say No) and affirm (say Yes), is the force whose expression is based by reacting to both internal and external forces. It is the force that produces the "hardness" needed to create oneself, and it is found in how we interpret and employ the destructive forces of suffering. This Dionysian nature is the aesthetic self-justification against *decadence*. One must know *what one is* to recognize and sacrifice the comforting vices of *decadence*. As Nietzsche put it himself in *Ecce Homo*:

> Whoever not only comprehends the word "Dionysian," but also comprehends himself in the word "Dionysian," has no need to refute Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer [all symptoms and promulgators of *decadence*] — he *smells the decay*.[122]

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[119] Ibid, 305.
[120] Ibid, 306.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid, 258.

While the following this new Dionysian aesthetic as a justification of oneself, may be the path to fighting against *decadence*, there are no indicators in Nietzsche's philosophy other than descriptions such as: destruction, hardness, affirmation, aesthetic justification, and the Dionysian, *decadence* that can diagnose if one is on the path to becoming *what one is*. Sure, he observes that he is, but that is not a call for his readers to abandon their current occupations and follow him by taking up lives as wandering philosophers. In fact, Nietzsche is vehemently against discipleship, stating so in both *Ecce Homo* and *Zarathustra*, where he openly calls for those who admire him to pluck at his laurels.[123] Moreover, Nietzsche, while famous for his colorful critiques of others, does actually have a diverse cohort of historical figures whom he admires: most notably Napoleon, but also Julius Caesar, Heraclitus, Shakespeare, Ralph Waldo Emerson (whom he considered a "*brother* soul"),[124] and even Jesus Christ, explaining in *The Antichrist* that his critique is actually against the religion of Christianity and not Jesus himself: "at bottom there was only one Christian, and he died on the cross."[125] My point with this list is that there is not a set of concrete determining factors for who has "*Become What One Is*" in Nietzsche's philosophy: the aesthetic justification is artistic due to it being a personal creation. Similar to what we saw with the study on post-traumatic growth, suffering must be harnessed and interpreted by the individual to lead to growth, it cannot be interpreted by an external arbiter. While Nietzsche may offer a guide to how one can recognize, harness, and react to suffering to become a "Destiny," the end-goal of the guide, the aesthetic justification of oneself, is subject to

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[123] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 103.
[124] Andrew Huddleston, "Individuality and beyond: Nietzsche Reads Emerson," Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, April 27, 2020, https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/individuality-and-beyond-nietzsche-reads-emerson/.
[125] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 171.

one's "Dionysian nature," and Nietzsche offers no prescription for this — he leaves the finding of it to the reader.

In Summary

Ecce Homo was the parting gift Nietzsche left us with before succumbing to madness. In my opinion, the memoir is brilliant in style and a real gift to all those who are familiar with Nietzsche's anthology; however, the memoir is best appreciated after familiarizing oneself with Nietzsche, as the lessons it teaches build off and combine previous works and concepts. In our own examination of suffering, we saw how both the destructive force of the Dionysian as described in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the affirmative approach to suffering put forth in *Zarathustra*, culminated in a new concept of the Dionysian aesthetic whose employment is crucial to "*How One Becomes What One is*." Of course, this phenomenon is not clear from the outset, nor is it explicitly stated by Nietzsche himself. Indeed, it seems that to read *Ecce Homo* requires that one partake in more philosophizing than typical from any of Nietzsche's other works, save the ever-metaphorical *Zarathustra*. In this examination, recall was not enough to understand suffering's role in becoming "*What One Is*," our examination depended on understanding the evolution of Nietzschean suffering from both Chapters I & II, a basic understanding of the contested concept of Nietzschean power, and even a purview into *decadence*. However, after all these concepts were established, it became not only clear that suffering for Nietzsche requires destruction, but that this destructive force is to be used by one, both external and internally, to follow their *Dionysian* nature, which is: the ability to create an artistic interpretation and use suffering to chisel away at *decadence* and *Become What One Is*.

Conclusion

For Nietzsche, suffering was a central player in his philosophy from beginning to end. In Chapter I, we saw a young Nietzsche view the essence of the world as a form of suffering, a destructive force that was made bearable by the Ancient Greeks through the tragic art form. It was through the Dionysian and Apollonian aesthetics that the Greeks were able to implant meaning into a meaningless existence and create from suffering; furthermore, by inventing the Dionysian aesthetic, Nietzsche conceptualized suffering as a meaningless destructive force. While this concept would go on to change, it provided the groundwork for our concept of suffering: a destructive force that one can use to create and affirm.

From Chapter I, we moved on into what Nietzsche considered his anthology's crown jewel: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. *Zarathustra* was used for this project to represent a turning point in Nietzsche's philosophy: his break from metaphysics and academics, and a reconceptualization of suffering as an earthly phenomenon that, while still being valued for its creative, destructive, and affirmative qualities, now requires a certain approach. We saw Nietzsche advocate for approaching suffering in *Zarathustra* with the concept of "courage." Courage was a creative, affirmative, and destructive act that Nietzsche said allowed a person to face their suffering head-on. By facing suffering with courage, Nietzsche argued that a person can destroy the deepest abyss, "pity." Nietzsche considered pity to be the deepest abyss since, no matter the experience one is suffering at the hands of, being in a state of pity perpetuates its destructive effects by negating the will to face suffering and triumph over it.

We saw Nietzsche advocate for suffering in Zarathustra through examples such as "The Ultimate Man," "Afterworldsmen," and "The Preachers of Death;" however, while I do admire Nietzsche's artistic feat with *Zarathustra*, its examples alone are not the clearest when trying to

elucidate the concept of suffering that he was advocating for. To help exemplify the concept of suffering in Zarathustra further, I used an example of one victorious, and one failed attempt at Zarathustra's approach to suffering, with Nietzsche's personal life being the victor and my father's bout with opioid addiction exemplifying a tragic failure — the former marked by the concept of courage, while the later was meant to personify pity.

To end our examination of suffering in *Zarathustra*, we parted with the idea of suffering being used to recreate oneself, which Zarathustra did towards the end of the book when he solidified his image as the prophet of eternal recurrence. To examine this aesthetic self-justification in Chapter III, we first had to cover the development of the new Dionysian aesthetic and understand Nietzsche's view of human beings as a complex cluster of forces, each being determined by the strength of such forces trying to overpower one another. After establishing the basis of humanity in Nietzsche's work, we moved into understanding how one person could shape themselves with suffering: using suffering's destructive power to destroy expressions deemed ugly in an aesthetic justification; from there, we saw Nietzsche have a term for forces that he deemed ugly in human beings: *decadence*. In Nietzsche's view, while *decadence* exists as an internal force inside all of us, it is a drive towards indulging in unhealthy vices and over-indulging in normally healthy ones, resulting in it being opposed to *what one is*. For Nietzsche, it was a matter of allowing the new Dionysian aesthetic to prevail over *decadence* that allows a person to *Become What One Is*, and to do this he posited that one must follow their "Dionysian nature:" a vision of one's aspired for aesthetic self-justification that uses the destructive energy of suffering both in how one reacts to external stimuli, and when inflicting such suffering against oneself, all to chisel away at *decadence* and *Become What One Is.*

This is a summary of our project, and while I do think our examination was able to elucidate the concept of suffering at three stages of Nietzsche philosophy and pose a plausible interpretation, I must elaborate on some issues raised in the Introduction that warrant further discussion: namely, Nietzsche's inconsistency and the ability to have equally plausible interpretations of his philosophy that do not necessarily cohere. For example, I introduced work from the Professor Bruce Detwiler in my introduction to explain a point of concern with approaching Nietzsche's philosophy as a 'whole;' however, the text I was pulling from was from Professor's Detwiler's book titled *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*. The reason I mention this is that the same Dionysian we examine in Chapter III is, in Professor Detwiler's work, interpreted as a political ideal for Nietzsche.[126] These two ideals are not opposed to each other, but they do not exactly cohere either — each is equally plausible but lacking a strong relation. That Nietzschean terms may be applied to a wide array of ideas does not undermine our examination of suffering, but it does show that the terms discussed throughout this project are not exclusive to the concept of suffering and therefore may be subject to various plausible interpretations.

The last point of concern I want to touch on before concluding is my choice in books, mainly *Ecce Homo*. In vetting this thesis through others who have studied Nietzsche's philosophy, there was one idea that I saw as a reasonable objection: is *Ecce Homo* just a summary of Nietzsche's work and could I have made the same point by focusing on other works in his anthology or on *Zarathustra* alone? Indeed, Nietzsche himself seemed to think *Zarathustra* was all encompassing, stating in the concluding section of *Ecce Homo*: "I have not said one word

[126] Detwiler, *Politics*

just now that I would have not said through the mouth of Zarathustra five years ago."[127] To me, this is a matter one's read of Nietzsche that has no concrete answer. The reason I chose *Ecce Homo* is that I found value in Nietzsche bringing all his works into discourse with each other.

The word "Dionysus" is not mentioned a single time in Zarathustra, and though the idea of an aesthetic self-justification through suffering is present, I never was able to fully grasp the idea without *Ecce Homo* putting in it the context of his new concept of Dionysian and the phenomenon of *decadence*. Furthermore, it appears to me that, to prove this relation otherwise would require examining a multitude of Nietzsche's texts, specifically: *The Joyful Science*, *The Case of Wagner*, and *The Antichrist*; in my opinion, such an endeavor is beyond the constraints of this thesis. Therefore, while I cannot prove whether the developments on the concept of suffering listed were 'new' developments, I have presented how I came to grasp the concept of Nietzschean suffering, and I cannot offer a better route to such an understanding that fits within the scope of this thesis.

[127] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 312.

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