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Liberal Arts and Humanities

The Will of God and Godless Willing: Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on How to Live Without Religion to Guide Us

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DECLARATION

I declare that I have created the thesis by myself. All sources and literature used have been duly cited. The work was not used to obtain another or the same title. This declaration and consent will be signed by a handwritten signature.

Signed at: Prague, Czech Republic
Date: June 27, 2025

Signature: Aria Izik-Dzurko

DEDICATION

To my dear brother, Jaeden:

It was in aspiring to follow in your footsteps that I first encountered the works of Schopenhauer. Our many exchanges over the years—countless citations, spirited discussions during brief reunions, and shared reflections on art—have shaped this thesis in both form and spirit. Though we do not always agree, your reflections and enduring encouragement have been an incomparable source of inspiration. You are the wise Schopenhauer to my willful Nietzschean self.

I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Jakub Marek, whose enlightening lectures led me down new intellectual pathways every week, and whose insight was indispensable in bringing this endeavour to fruition.

Abstract: In a world increasingly detached from traditional religious beliefs, the question of how to live meaningfully in the face of nihilism has become urgent. This thesis will explore Friedrich Nietzsche's will to power and Arthur Schopenhauer's will to live as two possible responses to a world perceived as devoid of divine purpose. Nietzsche advocates for self-overcoming and the active pursuit of resistance, seeing the will to power as a pathway to human flourishing. At the same time, Schopenhauer proposes a renunciation of desires to alleviate suffering, emphasizing the will to live as a source of existential dissatisfaction, and something to be mitigated. Both critique Christian morality's contribution to the formation of values, yet diverge in their assessments of its influence on human flourishing. Through a comparative analysis of these philosophies, this thesis seeks to evaluate which approach constitutes a more viable framework for addressing the existential concerns of the modern world, ultimately aiming to illuminate pathways to human flourishing and how to harness the will.

Key Words: *will to live, will to power, Christian morality, human flourishing, nihilism, asceticism, meaning*

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

For as long as there has been philosophy, there has been the question of how to live. From hedonism to stoicism, eudaimonism to deontology, pessimism to nihilism—countless viewpoints have been set forth to instruct, to inspire, and to interrogate the conduct of life. At the heart of these inquiries lies a perennial conflict, a tension between pursuing what one *wants* and what one feels is morally or pragmatically *right*. This contradiction is epitomized in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's respective concepts of the will, where willing is put forth as both a positive and a negative force. What drives us? What compels us to act, to suffer, to endeavour and to believe? Is the will—human nature itself—something to be embraced or overcome? While a definitive answer to these questions may remain elusive, examining and comparing these two philosophies side by side offers a deeper understanding of the ramifications of each and reveals how their insights might inform the ongoing discussion concerning human striving and fulfillment.

While Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have been compared countless times in philosophical literature, both for their striking affinities as for their profound disagreements, I aim to bring a new perspective to their respective concepts of the *will to live* and the *will to power*. By analyzing the role of spirituality on the strivings of the will, focusing, in particular, on the effect derived from Christianity and its religious symbolism, I will attempt to come to an evaluation of the significance of religious belief in the context of human striving. Christian symbolism, with its imagery of suffering, sacrifice, and redemption, occupies a unique role in the works of both philosophers.

Much literature already exists analyzing the views of Schopenhauer, who viewed Christian asceticism as an expression of renunciation, offering release from suffering, and Nietzsche, who saw Christian morality as symbolically entrenching a "slave morality" that undermines human potential. Few works examine these views side by side, focusing on how each philosopher interprets Christian ethics as a framework influencing human flourishing through their respective philosophies of will. By addressing how these symbols inform the respective will concepts, I hope to show how religious imagery can shape a philosophy of life, impact ones' sense of freedom and guide the moral direction of society. Moreover, this study will critically analyze whether the will is a source of pain and suffering or a source of motivation

and self-empowerment. In focusing on this practical, even teleological aspect of the will, broadly encompassing well-being, self-actualization, and fulfillment, I intend to distinguish my work from the existing literature and to illuminate how these philosophies might be applied to the philosophical dilemmas of the present age. While a comprehensive exploration of the concept of happiness lies beyond the scope of this thesis, the discussion will instead center on the primary ways in which human beings generate meaning. The rationale for this thematic focus on meaning will be elaborated in Chapter 5, as I link my analysis of the concepts herein to more practical applications.

I will, ultimately, seek to discern in my analysis which form of the will is more conducive to human authenticity and flourishing, and whether the traditional moral doctrines of Christianity further this end or impede it.

1.1 Research Question:

Which philosophical approach—Nietzsche's embracing of the will to power or Schopenhauer's suppression of the will to live—provides a more viable framework for human flourishing in a world without religious or divine purpose? Considering both philosophers' staunch rejection of Christianity, what role can Christian morality be said to play in either helping or hindering human flourishing, and is it a moral inheritance worth preserving in our modern age?

1.2 Objectives and Scope

I will conduct a comparative analysis of primary texts and secondary sources to examine how Nietzsche and Schopenhauer define and conceptualize the will. Particular attention will be given to how each philosopher's view of the will reflects his underlying beliefs and informs his proposed solutions to suffering and the search for meaning. Furthermore, these concepts will be analyzed within the context of the value problematic of the post-secular world.

The first section will focus on Schopenhauer's concept of the *will to live*, which he describes in *The World as Will and Representation,* particularly in *Volume II,* as a blind, ceaseless striving that leads to suffering. His solution, rooted in renunciation and asceticism,

will be analyzed alongside his emphasis on compassion as a moral virtue. This discussion will also explore the connection between Schopenhauer's ethics and Christian theology. While he was deeply interested in Eastern religions, many contemporary analyses suggest that his moral framework remained firmly entrenched in Christian values. For the purposes of this research, I will refer primarily to the Christian teaching of the New Testament, excluding more contemporary branches of theology and alternative religious frameworks such as Buddhism. This is by no means because other religions cannot provide meaningful contributions to life, but, rather, to maintain consistency with the philosophical context of both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Although Schopenhauer drew upon Buddhist teachings, he nonetheless lived and worked within a Western European context. Since both thinkers wrote extensively on Christian morality, there is a wealth of material to draw from. This study does not seek to make any value judgments regarding the potential of other religions to imbue life with meaning or direction and does not seek to place judgment on differing spiritual or religious pursuits in any way.

The second section will examine Nietzsche's concept of the *will to power*, drawing from *Untimely Meditations*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *The Gay Science*, and *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* among other works. Particular focus will be given to how Nietzsche's philosophy offers an alternative means of creating meaning through self-affirmation and self-overcoming. This analysis will be situated alongside his critique of traditional religious morality and his proposal for the construction of new moral values in the absence of religion, outlining his reasons for dismissing historically constructed beliefs and forging a new path. His departure from Schopenhauer will be touched upon, particularly with regard to his views on art and the underlying motivations that drive creativity and self-advancement.

The third section will present a comparative analysis of both approaches to determine which better promotes human flourishing. This evaluation will consider how each philosophy addresses suffering, self-identity, and purpose. It will draw upon empirical data from qualitative psychological studies through Harvard's *Human Flourishing Program* and other social science-based research platforms in order to provide a basis for generalizing attributes of well-being into these three principal categories, and by applying this framework to the aforementioned concepts of the will, attempt to integrate them into a judgement of how willing affects life and meaning.

Finally, the concluding section will discuss how these philosophical concepts relate to human well-being and explore whether a synthesis or reconciliation between these frameworks is possible. It will also touch upon potential challenges or difficulties that society will face going forward, provided it continues to progress in a secular and radically individualistic direction. Lastly, it will touch upon the role of art in society, and how the will motivates and shapes artistic creation. This analysis is warranted not only by the central role art occupies in the philosophies of both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but also by its broader cultural significance, serving as a reflection of society's collective aspirations, values, and beliefs and exposing what cannot be otherwise articulated.

1.3 Ethical Considerations

i. Representation of Philosophical Ideas: This thesis strives to represent the ideas of both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer with accuracy and fairness. Care has been taken to avoid personal bias or disproportionate emphasis on one philosopher over the other. Interpretations are grounded in close textual analysis and supported by relevant scholarly commentary.

ii. Engagement with Controversial Topics: Nietzsche's work, in particular, has historically been subject to misappropriation (e.g., in association with totalitarian ideologies). This thesis aims to engage with each philosophy in an ethically responsible manner, avoiding ideological distortions or politicization.

iii. Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity: Both philosophers offer critiques of religious and social norms that may challenge or unsettle readers. This thesis engages with these critiques while remaining respectful of the cultural and historical contexts in which these ideas were developed.

iv. Treatment of Religious Themes: While this thesis discusses Christian doctrines and themes, it does so solely within the philosophical frameworks of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. I do not claim theological expertise or intend to present religious interpretations as objective facts. Rather, religious content is treated analytically and contextually, acknowledging the diverse and deeply personal significance that faith may hold for individuals.

Chapter 2: Schopenhauer's Philosophy: The Will to Live

> *"[...] I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire [...] I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all of your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won, he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools."*
>
> –William Faulkner, *The Sound and The Fury*

What is the will? Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche conceived of it as an integral aspect of human life, the intangible force that drives a being onward, heedless of pain, suffering, and hardship. The will is that ineffable source of energy that spurs one on, yet, for Schopenhauer, this will, with its unquenchable hoping and desiring, leads only to misery. The will is a "mausoleum" of hope and desire, as Faulkner hauntingly phrases it, where striving is entombed. True victory against the will may be illusory. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer argues that the fight against human nature, though ultimately futile, is itself worthwhile. For, in the attempt to transcend the will, to rise above the base demands of the body and the crushing weight of desire, one touches upon a higher plane, one where nobler virtues, however fleeting, may be glimpsed. Thus, to resist against the will, though one might never fully overcome it, remains an endeavour worthy of the human spirit. The repression of the will is a striving that elevates even as it condemns.

2.1 Schopenhauer's Conception of the Will

Schopenhauer argues that philosophers have mistakenly placed the eternal and indestructible essence of humanity in the intellect, when, in reality, it lies "exclusively in the will," which he describes as "entirely different from the intellect," the only faculty that is "original."[1] Life follows the *principle of sufficient reason*,[2] or the idea that everything occurs for a reason. Some of these reasons are knowable, and some not, but the force that generates causal necessity— "what puts into activity the association of ideas itself"[3]—is the will.

[1] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 495.
[2] *Ibid.*, 136.
[3] *Ibid.*, 136.

Schopenhauer points out that our intellect has the capacity to link ideas together and to perceive continuity and consequence. However, the intellect does not do so without a purpose, for it, too, is subject to the very same principle it apprehends. While the principle of sufficient reason governs the world, this principle is subordinate to yet another, higher principle: that of the will. Since the will generates action, reasoning emerges as a secondary tool for navigating reality effectively. Our reasoning process, including the perception of cause and effect, is done for the purpose of being "in the best possible situation for all the cases that arise,"[4] and it is the will that determines what this optimized, ideal reality is. Schopenhauer calls this the law of motivation, asserting that it is the true controlling force behind the "form of the principle of sufficient reason," a volition that ultimately "governs the association of ideas and keeps it active."[5] The will stands "foreign to the principle of sufficient reason,"[6] precisely because it precedes and produces it. Hence, Schopenhauer's tautological statement "It is because it wills, and wills because it is."[7] This phrase illustrates the fact that the will, "that which is absolutely real in every being,"[8] inexplicably and simply *is*, eluding the demands of rational justification even as it establishes those demands for everything else. Thus, reason and intellect cannot be the highest authorities governing human existence, because they, like all else, are subject to the compulsions of the will. Indeed, for Schopenhauer, the advancement of the intellect always progresses in tandem with the will, for this enhancement "springs from the will's increased needs and more pressing demands; but in addition to this, the two mutually support each other."[9]

Given the will's primordial role, Schopenhauer argues that even human rationality arises as a consequence of its influence. Without the will, intelligence would not—could not—adapt and evolve. Unlike the intellect, the will is present in every living creature: it "constitutes the basis of our own inner being" and is "the same will that manifests itself in the lowest, inorganic phenomena."[10] Though present in every living being, this will remains ultimately unknowable. According to Schopenhauer, the will is not an object of pure intellect and therefore cannot be

[4] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 136.
[5] *Ibid.*, 136.
[6] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 94.
[7] *Ibid.,* 94.
[8] *Ibid.,* 95.
[9] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 280.
[10] *Ibid.,* 297.

understood *a priori*; rather, it is only revealed to us *a posteriori*, in and through the series of its "successive individual acts."[11] Put differently, phenomena that we can perceive are perceptible because they are the "*objective* essence of a thing."[12] Since the will is a "purely *subjective* essence," it cannot be "an object of knowledge," but is what constitutes knowing itself.[13]

In Schopenhauer's metaphysics, the true world is unknowable, and that which one perceives is merely a subjective representation of the thing. Though this representation constitutes one's lived experience, it does not encompass the true essence of the world. In this way, Schopenhauer builds upon Kant's metaphysical groundwork,[14] linking it to his own core concept of the will. He identifies the will as the fundamental essence of all things, which he, borrowing from Kant, refers to as the "thing-in-itself."[15] Since it operates beyond the intellect and underlies all action, he sees it as the ultimate force shaping reality. Schopenhauer extends this idea of Kant's unknowable *thing-in-itself* further, arguing that the will is not merely unknowable but constitutes the very foundation of existence—it is "first and unconditioned, the premiss of all premisses [sic]."[16] The will to live, then, is not a product of the world; rather, existence itself is merely an expression of this foundational drive.

2.2 Repression of the Will–What is Left?

> *A man who has no will at all is no self.*
>
> *—Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 295-296*

Schopenhauer identifies the will as the definitive force underlying existence, yet ultimately something that must be suppressed. Given that the will constitutes the basis of reality, its denial presents a philosophical dilemma. If the intellect is the servant of the will, can it endure once left without its master? Moreover, if existence is inseparable from the will, then what, if

[11] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 197.
[12] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena,* 93.
[13] *Ibid.,* 93.
[14] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason.* Trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 185 [B59], "General Remark on the Transcendental Aesthetic": "…all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; […] as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us."
[15] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 197.
[16] *Ibid.,* 360.

anything, abides in its absence? Schopenhauer presents a paradox: the will is the essence of life, yet he insists that something beyond it still exists. Life, he contends, is its own justification, and the will to live emerges wherever life itself is found. Schopenhauer repudiates the notion that the will is an individualized faculty that can be moulded or shaped by personal agency. Rather, it exists in everyone, equally, and is wrought by nature. Despite this, he seems to imply that in the absence of will, there is still *something.* To be stripped of the will, although it is one's essence, one's identity, one's sense of an *I,* does not mean that one ceases to exist. Schopenhauer asserts that the will encompasses not just the sphere of conscious volition, but also our most fundamental emotions—our desires, fears, and aversions. "For not only willing and deciding in the narrowest sense, but also all striving, wishing, shunning, hoping, fearing, loving, hating… is a modification of willing and not-willing."[17] Yet, he intimates that once the will is suppressed, something remains—a presence that has "never shown itself in this world, or only by hints and indirections."[18] This lingering presence—what remains when the incessant clamouring of the will is silenced—shapes Schopenhauer's understanding of the causes of human suffering, and how, through silencing the will, this pain can be overcome.

Schopenhauer argues that to live is to suffer, and that life "by no means presents itself as a gift to be enjoyed, but as a task, a drudgery, to be worked through."[19] For Schopenhauer, this suffering arises because the will—endlessly striving, never satisfied—ensnares us in a cycle of unfulfilled desire. This bleak view of existence makes his philosophy a precursor to nihilism, a worldview in which life has no immanent value. Nonetheless, despite his pessimism, Schopenhauer resists the conclusion that life is not worth living. He argues that the common pursuit of happiness is misguided, describing it as "the one inborn error"[20] of human existence—the mistaken belief that we exist in order to be happy. This illusion, he explains, is deeply embedded in our nature because it "coincides with our existence itself,"[21] being nothing more than a reflection of the will. Our entire being, he suggests, is simply an expression of this relentless force, a 'paraphrase' of which the body is its 'monogram.' Since "we are nothing more

[17] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 202.
[18] William Mackintire Salter, "Schopenhauer's Contact with Theology," *The Harvard Theological Review* 4, no. 3 (July 1911), 305.
[19] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 357.
[20] *Ibid.,* 634.
[21] *Ibid.,* 634.

than the will-to-live,"[22] that which is typically termed happiness is merely the cessation of suffering: the temporary satisfaction of desire, a short-lived relief, a glimpse of fulfilment before the will asserts itself once again. Thus, rather than being an ultimate goal, happiness is merely another manifestation of the will's ceaseless striving. This version of happiness that most pursue is, unmistakeably, a temporary solution. Through a bite of food quelling hunger, or a sip of water assuaging thirst, the urges of the will can be briefly mollified, yielding a glimpse at satisfaction. Inevitably, new urges emerge, rising up with the unremitting regularity of ocean waves. Humanity is thus caught in a cycle of willing, endlessly pursuing a self-rejuvenating object of desire. To repress the will is evanescent, as well, but it is different precisely because during the fleeting absence of willing there is no desire. Because the will is infinite, its desires can never be fulfilled—only extinguished. For Schopenhauer, the only *true* escape from suffering lies in its complete negation, an ultimate renunciation of life itself. Schopenhauer concludes that this denial is the sole way forward when faced with "the dawning of the knowledge that the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction and are therefore not worth our attachment to them."[23] From this, the only foreseeable path to liberation for Schopenhauer is that of resignation.

Schopenhauer identifies two ways in which one can briefly escape the unremittent striving of the will: through moments of heightened intellect and through the experience of art. The will strives towards this and that, but regardless of the object of the will, it is "an impulse wholly without ground and motive."[24] Ordinarily, the intellect serves as a mere instrument of the will, shaping perception to align with desire.[25] "The intellect often obeys the will," Schopenhauer writes, while the will "never obeys the intellect."[26] However, there are rare moments when the mind frees itself, achieving what he calls an "abnormal excess of intellect."[27] It is in these moments of detachment that "the creations of genius result."[28] At best, the intellect offers a "brief hour of rest, of an exceptional, and in fact only momentary, release from the

[22] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 634.
[23] *Ibid.,* 433-434.
[24] *Ibid.,* 357.
[25] *Ibid.,* 398. "A tool for the service of the will."
[26] *Ibid.,* 223.
[27] *Ibid.,* 387.
[28] *Ibid.,* 388.

service of the will."[29] The intellect, when liberated from the shackles of the will, gains a unique clarity. The will, Schopenhauer argues, "manipulates" and "distorts" the raw data of sense into the familiar contours of desire and aversion. Only through complete detachment from its influence can the intellect become "a 'clear mirror' of reality, completely 'objective'."[30] The metaphor of a mirror is no idle flourish, for it implies not only an unclouded vision, but the restoration of the mind to its most receptive state, that of the objective, universal will. In this state of pure receptivity, the mind perceives reality without distortion, allowing it to appear "just as, in itself, it is."[31] Thus, what we typically experience as the world—what Schopenhauer calls the "world as representation"—is shaped by the subjectivity of the will, which filters and alters perception. The question of what, precisely, this reality resembles or is constituted of remains tantalizingly unanswered; his concern, rather, is to delineate the fleeting conditions in which the will's influence is suspended, and the pure intellect stands unveiled before the world.

The world as representation is the world as perceived through the subjectivity of the will. The world of *things-in-themselves*, although unknowable in its entirety, can nonetheless become clearer once the will is detached from perception. For Schopenhauer, it is only then that genius can arise. He writes that the intellect can attain new heights only when it is "relieved for a while from its service under the will," at last able to function "entirely alone and of its own accord."[32] When this occurs, he calls the intellect pure and a "clear mirror of the world," for the intellect becomes "the world as representation itself concentrated in one consciousness."[33] In this state, the intellect is able to apprehend the world in its entirety, not as a collection of objects to be manipulated for the satisfaction of the will, but as a unified, coherent representation. The mind sees the world as a representation of what it is, and the fragmentary, subjective experience of the will is transcended. Schopenhauer sees these moments of respite from the will as the true source of well-being in life, as, freed from desire and endless striving, one can live without the will clouding one's judgement.

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[29] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation.,* 363.

[30] Julian Young, "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Death and Salvation," *European Journal of Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (2008), 319, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2008.00313.x.

[31] *Ibid.,* 319.

[32] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 388.

[33] *Ibid.*, 380.

As the intellect, when freed from the will, perceives reality in a purer, undistorted form, art—particularly tragedy—offers another avenue for transcending the will and perceiving reality in a purer form. In the presence of the aesthetically beautiful, one experiences beauty isolated from desire. The importance of art, in particular art that is tragic, is found in the fact that "in witnessing tragedy we feel urged to turn away our will from life, to will it and love it no more, we become aware that something else in us still remains, something of which we have no positive conception save that it is that which does not will life; and for this different kind of willing there must be a different corresponding kind of being—for if not, how could tragedy exercise its beneficent and elevating influence on us?"[34]

Ultimately, Schopenhauer suggests that while the will defines existence, its negation does not lead to absolute nothingness but to a different mode of being, one that is rarely glimpsed yet profoundly significant. Through both the intellect and through art, one momentarily prevails over the relentless striving of the will and encounters something beyond it, however faintly. This glimpse of sublimity and quietude reinforces Schopenhauer's insistence that true liberation is found not in fulfilling desires but in renouncing them. In the ephemeral absence of will, Schopenhauer hints at the possibility of a deeper, more profound existence; this state, though elusive, offers a rare preview into what lies beyond the suffering inherent in life.

2.3 Critiques and Appraisals

Schopenhauer's version of the will is persuasive, particularly to those who have felt overwhelming emotions or states such as fear, anxiety, or panic engulf their better judgement and cloud their reality. To repress such liabilities as these sentiments offers an escape from suffering, promising enlightenment and greater self-knowledge. Yet joy, glee, and merriment are also irrational in the same way as these painful emotions, for they do not arise solely from the intellect. The will produces both negative and positive emotions, and the question of whether to deny or embrace it when considering the question of happiness quickly becomes convoluted. It may be true that to deny the will is to reduce suffering. But it is also, and equally, to reduce happiness. Schopenhauer seems to be striving not for any positive emotion, but for a lack of emotion altogether. He views even those emotions that feel favourable as being inherently tied

[34] Salter, "Schopenhauer's Contact with Theology," 306.

to a state of suffering, and therefore better off being avoided altogether. To deny the will is to strive for a state of neutrality, where the will is no longer imposed on the mind, and the intellect is left to reign freely. For many readers of Schopenhauer, however, this conception of existence is difficult to accept. As Young puts it,

> "Acceptance of Schopenhauer's philosophy then becomes a descent into a terrible kind of madness. Life is suffering and, so, not worth living. But suicide is not worth contemplating either, since death merely transforms personal into cosmic suffering—which one thoroughly deserves on account of being fundamentally evil. So one's choice is between hell and hell. In a word, if the will is the thing in itself, then there can be no doctrine of 'salvation' in Schopenhauer's philosophy."[35]

In essence, Young points out that Schopenhauer's philosophy forces one into an impossible choice: to deny one's existence entirely and thus cease to 'exist' in the same sense, or to exist at the whim of the will, and thus suffer. He points out the irresolvable duality of Schopenhauer's ideology: to live is to suffer, and to die is to suffer. Salvation typically suggests liberation from suffering or a transcendence of the self, but if suffering is an inescapable consequence of the will, then no doctrine of salvation can resolve this fundamental paradox, underscoring the bleakness of a philosophy where the will is both the source of all life and the origin of all suffering. Nonetheless, others found a way to interpret the denial of the will positively. Among them was Richard Wagner, who, like Nietzsche, was both heavily inspired by and critical of Schopenhauer. Appropriating Schopenhauer's concept of the will, Wagner embraced the notion that art—and music in particular—offers a means of escaping or even negating the constant striving of the will. He saw this denial as being central to a faith in earthly miracles, since a "reversal of the will to live," and a "defiance of all Nature" gave rise to a state which he called "divine."[36] Life's travails, in Wagner's view, can be seen as a necessary path to achieving greatness, and the "stern school of Suffering which the Will imposed on its blind self" is not there without reason, but serves as a necessary conduit to truly "gaining sight."[37] Spiritual enlightenment and true knowledge are thus the goal of asceticism and self-denial, and they are worth obtaining because they bring us closer to our divine purpose. Pain and emotion are

[35] Young, "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Death and Salvation," 317.

[36] Richard Wagner, "Religion and Art," in *Prose Works*, trans. W.M. Ashton Ellis, vol. 6 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1897), 215.

[37] *Ibid.*, 245.

rendered irrelevant before the immensity of the celestial, yielding to a higher end: the apprehension of the sublime.

2.4 Schopenhauer on Christianity

If art as yet can stir the soul toward the sublime, then what is the office of religion? Religion is a symbolic sanctuary for a world that reason alone cannot recognize. Schopenhauer's view of Christianity is twofold. On the one hand, its moral teachings align with his own philosophy of suffering, compassion, and the negation of the will. On the other hand, he rejects Christianity's dogmatic view of creation and claims of supernatural providence. As Janaway points out, although Schopenhauer "rejects any conception of a personal God and any notion of the world's being created out of nothing," he finds the alternative, "an exclusively naturalistic, scientific account of the world,"[38] unsatisfactory. Janaway here refers to the metaphysical, spiritual core of Schopenhauer's writing, for he believed that a recognition that the world is not wholly fathomable, and that something lies outside our awareness, is an "in-built human need."[39] Religion is allegorical, yet it stands as a placeholder for something true: the *thing-in-itself* must remain a transcendental postulate rather than an object of empirical science. Schopenhauer admits to the "true and the most important of all truths"[40] that can be found in some religions, writing, "The value of a religion will depend on the greater or lesser content of truth which it has in itself under the veil of allegory."[41] It is no surprise that Schopenhauer, though atheistic, drew inspiration from religion and spirituality. Belief in a God is an intangible and deeply rooted faith in something imperceptible. In this sense, it is akin to Schopenhauer's concept of the *thing-in-itself*, which we cannot directly perceive. Just as one cannot prove the truth of Schopenhauer's metaphysical claims, belief in God requires a leap of faith beyond tangible perception. For Schopenhauer, absolute truth resides in the noumenal will; religious

[38] Christopher Janaway, "The Moral Meaning of the World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 273, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cuni/detail.action?docID=6380694.

[39] *Ibid.,* 273.

[40] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: Religion, a Dialogue, Etc.*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders, vol. 3 (Pennsylvania: Penn State Electronic Classics, 2005), 24.

[41] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 169.

allegories gain value only insofar as they hint at that universal reality rather than spinning purely subjective narratives.

This can be reconciled with Schopenhauer's take on the metaphysical, wherein the truth of an object —the *thing-in-itself*—is unknowable in its fullest form yet exists nonetheless alongside each subjective, epistemological representation of the world. As Salter writes, in Schopenhauer's philosophy, the physical or phenomenological world "does not fill out the whole possibility of being."[42] In declaring this, he opens up the possibility of an alternate aspect of reality. One world, the knowable world, is merely a representation, but there exists an ontological world that is fundamentally incomprehensible. This latter world is veiled under experience, just as the "truths" of Christianity, in Schopenhauer's view, are veiled beneath doctrines and gospel; metaphysics and theology thus both convey the message that a layer of reality lies concealed and ineffable. This notion finds a striking parallel in the Brahmanic doctrine of *Maya*, which Schopenhauer explicitly incorporated into his thought. For him, the world of appearances is not ultimate reality, but a "magic effect," an "unstable and inconstant illusion without substance, comparable to the optical illusion and the dream"[43]— a veil that both reveals and conceals. In this way, *Maya's veil* becomes a powerful metaphor for the epistemological limits of human perception, echoing religion's role as a symbolic medium for truths that lie beyond empirical reach.

Schopenhauer sees Christianity's usefulness as being tied to the allegorical nature of religion, which serves to bridge the gap between mysticism and practical Christian behaviour. While he denied the existence of the Christian God, he also acknowledged its symbolic power, writing that the figure of Christ plays "both a functional and revelatory role for the religious believer through symbol or allegory," rendering the concept of the negation of the will "comprehensible to those who are unable to more directly comprehend fundamental truths."[44] In short, religion makes the truths of Schopenhauer's pessimism understandable to the average person. His "suspension of the will" can be seen as a development of "Christian asceticism and

[42] Salter, "Schopenhauer's Contact with Theology," 306.
[43] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 490.
[44] Jonathan Head and Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Schopenhauer on Christ, Suffering and the Negation of the Will," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 28, no. 2 (2020), 192.

mysticism in a secularized and allegorically interpreted form."[45] Just as intellectual detachment offers a temporary escape from the will, Schopenhauer sees religious asceticism as another path to transcendence, despite his atheism. The ascetic life, he argues, reflects key principles found in Christianity, as well as in Brahmanism and Buddhism. According to Schopenhauer, these traditions share a "great fundamental truth"—the recognition that existence is defined by suffering and death, and the necessity of salvation possible only through "the denial of the will"[46] and a deliberate rejection of human nature. This idea of salvation is central to his philosophy, as it suggests that true liberation comes not from fulfilling desires but from escaping the will itself.

Schopenhauer entwines his concept of salvation further with that of Christian religion. He writes that original sin arose from an affirmation of the will, while the concept of redemption is the negation of the will. While all of the rest of the Christian doctrines are mere "wrapping, coverings, and appendages,"[47] this constitutes the core and real truth found in the religion. Life, no matter how full of luxuries and riches, remains at its core an ordeal of suffering. This suffering springs from desire that can never be fulfilled, knowledge that can never be known, and power that can never be gained. The very infinitude of the will makes life unbearable, and the only potential solution is found through its denial. This aligns with Christian puritanism, wherein, as the ascetic monk Thomas A Kempis wrote, "Denial of self is the true advance of a man."[48] If "the inner man is deeply depressed by bodily necessities in this world,"[49] then life on earth becomes one of unhappiness. Schopenhauer views resignation as the first step to achieving relief, and "Christ can serve as an exemplar"[50] of this sentiment, for martyrdom epitomizes selfless denial and supplies a "model of emulation for other human beings."[51] The non-defiance

[45] Eric S. Nelson, review of *Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and European Buddhism: Reflections on Nietzsche and Other Buddhas*, by Jason M. Wirth, *University of Hawaii Press*, Philosophy East & West, 71, no. 4 (October 2021).

[46] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 629.

[47] *Ibid.,* 480.

[48] Thomas A. Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Edgar Daplyn, Classics of Spiritual Writing (London: Sheed and Ward, 1952), 108.

[49] *Ibid.*, 27.

[50] Head and Auweele, "Schopenhauer on Christ," 195.

[51] *Ibid.,* 199.

Christ represents as he suffers willingly for the sake of others typifies Schopenhauer's ideal of passive resignation.

In particular, Schopenhauer's ideas resonate with the New Testament, or what he called "true Christianity."[52] Here, his view of life as suffering is echoed in *Romans* 8:22: "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (NRSV). He points out that there exists an "authentic" Christianity, which is characterized by pessimism and the Fall of Man.[53] Schopenhauer propounds willful self-denial, echoing the idea "of being priest and victim at the same time."[54] This links his views to the Christological theme of martyrdom, "where Christ's self-chosen sacrifice can redeem humanity of its (original) sinfulness."[55] While Schopenhauer rejected the metaphysical truth claims religion stood for, he approved of the means, suggesting that one "should look at religion more from the practical than from the theoretical side."[56] Although Schopenhauer was not eagerly awaiting an afterlife in heaven, his view of the present age is strikingly Christian in nature. He approves of the perspective of the *New Testament*, wherein "the world is presented as a vale of tears, life as a process of purification."[57] If the highest Christian wisdom is "to aim for the heavenly kingdom through indifference to the world,"[58] then the real difference for Schopenhauer lies in his view that this redemptive condition is to be attained through an altered state of existence, rather than in a future, heavenly kingdom. Unlike Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, a successful human being for Schopenhauer "is, then, not someone who has overcome suffering through zeal and now stands victorious, but someone who has intellectually transcended suffering,"[59] just like a Christian martyr or saint. If, as is written in *Peter* 2:19, "people are slaves to whatever masters them," (NRSV) then rather than let the will enslave, Schopenhauer urges us to become free by unencumbering ourselves from the chains of desire and striving. One is as much the slave of desire as the master of reason.

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[52] Head and Auweele, "Schopenhauer on Christ," 190.
[53] *Ibid.,* 190.
[54] *Ibid.,* 199
[55] *Ibid.,* 199.
[56] Schopenhauer, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer,* 23.
[57] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 584.
[58] Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ,* 3.
[59] Head and Auweele, "Schopenhauer on Christ," 199.

Although Schopenhauer rejects the consoling religious faith in an afterlife, his view that life is defined by suffering does not necessarily deny that an absence of suffering is possible. The experience of what is bad presupposes, by way of contrast, some awareness of the good, and he believes that "when death closes our eyes, we stand in a light of which our sunlight is only the shadow."[60] This statement intimates a negative view of human nature, which finds a parallel in *John* 5:19, where it is written: "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." (NRSV) In the same way as the biblical text posits that the world lies in the grasp of an external evil, Schopenhauer suggests that our existence is governed by the internal compulsion of the will that operates independently of, and often in contradiction to, rational deliberation. Replace "the evil one" with "the will" in the verse from John, and the parallel becomes still clearer. In both views, human agency is compromised: in the Christian account, by the pervasive influence of sin or the devil; in Schopenhauer's system, by the inescapable dominance of the will.

While Schopenhauer saw life as endless pain, his emphasis on renunciation and sacrifice insinuates that he nonetheless saw some means of long-lasting mitigation of misery. "In this world you will have trouble," Christ proclaims, yet the verse does not end there: it urges one to take heart, for there is the possibility to "overcome the world" (*John* 16:33, NRSV). As in Schopenhauer, the Bible offers an alternative to life and death, a path which might free us from this world of illusion and representation and reveal a deeper truth, just as is found in *Ecclesiastes*: "And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive; but better than both is the one who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun" (*Eccl*. 4:2-3, NRSV). This verse mirrors Schopenhauer for its cynicism as for its ultimate conclusion: here it is non-existence that is the highest form of peace, just is in Schopenhauer's philosophy it is a detachment from the world. Similarly, this verse from *Ecclesiastes* implies that true blessedness belongs not to those who have lived and endured, but to those who have never been entangled in the world at all. In both cases, liberation is found not through engagement with life but through a kind of metaphysical withdrawal from it.

[60] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* 463.

2.5 Moral Implications

Schopenhauer's acceptance of certain religious doctrines is critical to understanding his distinction between metaphysics and morality, for while he saw the metaphysical world as being fundamentally beyond comprehension, moral actions had to be comprehensible. The world was not merely, from a moral perspective, a *thing-in-itself*, because "you cannot assume a moral significance without presenting the world as means to a higher end. The notion that the world has a physical but not a moral meaning is the most mischievous error sprung from the greatest mental perversity."[61] While he may not believe in Jesus Christ himself, Schopenhauer seems to believe in his teachings, in particular in Christ's "free-willed suffering,"[62] and many scholars have noted that his ethical theories coincide in many ways with traditional Christian ethics. "Like the ethics taught by Jesus," Jon Stewart comments, "Schopenhauer also enjoins people to love others, even their enemies, and passively to accept and endure injustice and violence against themselves."[63] As James Lindsay points out, many philosophers reject the metaphysical basis of the Christian religion but cling to the ethical basis of it, Schopenhauer included. While Christ cannot provide answers to the mysteries of existence, Christian teachings can nevertheless "still guide […] life, and alone satisfy certain deep and universal needs of the human soul or mind, apart from any creedal forms or institutional embodiments."[64]

Schopenhauer may have based his reasoning for empathy and compassion in Eastern religious thought—for instance, the belief that each individual possesses the same will and therefore the same suffering—but, practically speaking, this belief manifests itself quite adeptly as Christian behaviour. He concludes that "we should therefore treat others with love and kindness since we are a part of them, just as they are a part of us."[65] By dissolving the boundary delineating individual consciousness, Schopenhauer implies that to witness another's pain is, in essence, to encounter one's own. Just as one seeks to reduce one's own suffering, one ought to replicate this in every other. Thus, to love one's neighbour, to live in poverty, to endure

[61] Schopenhauer, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer,* 44.
[62] Richard Wagner, "Religion and Art," 214-215.
[63] Jon Stewart, *A History of Nihilism in the Nineteenth Century: Confrontations with Nothingness*, Slovak Academy of Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 140-141, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009266734..
[64] James Lindsay, "Ethical Christianity in Europe," *International Journal of Ethics* 28, no. 2 (1918), 254.
[65] Stewart, *A History of Nihilism in the Nineteenth Century,* 148.

injustice[66]—these are all ways of living that Schopenhauer espouses. However negative his pessimism may appear, Schopenhauer retains a humanistic view of how to act in the world, engendered by the core belief that everyone is driven by the same fundamental, cruel will. Perhaps this pessimism is even necessary, for often, as Salter points out, "It is those who feel the world evil who help to make it good."[67]

Even if Nietzsche prophesied the future with uncanny prescience when he wrote of the death of God in modern society, this shift merely constituted "the disappearance of the metaphysical foundation for the lives of Westerners as humans."[68] It need not cause the legitimacy of morality itself to disappear as well. Atheism and immorality (or simply a dissolution of all traditional moral beliefs) need not go hand in hand, as Nietzsche insists. When Wagner writes that Schopenhauerian philosophy is the "recognition of a moral meaning of the world,"[69] he is pointing to the interdependence of conscience, intuitive ethical instincts, and the universality of the will. The will drives us on egoistically, selfishly, but we are all subject to this same entity. A genuine understanding of this, and the repression of the will that follows, *must*, for Schopenhauer, end in moral behaviour, for if each individual is just a different expression of the same underlying will, then harming another is, in a sense, harming oneself. Though Schopenhauer doubts the authority of any external, omniscient source of moral law, he finds in the shared condition of the universal will a deeper ground for ethical life. By offering an insight into the suffering of others, this universal consciousness thereby imbues one's actions, especially those that inflict harm, with objective and discernible moral significance.

To briefly summarize this chapter, Schopenhauer's metaphysics and his view of the nature of the human will led him to adopt a highly pessimistic view of existence in which suffering was an inescapable reality. He proposed that a life of resignation and negation of the will was the best possible way to alleviate the pain inherent in life, and disciplined asceticism was the only path to liberate oneself from grievous desires. This pessimism instructed his ethical

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[66] *Ibid.*, 140-141.

[67] Salter, "Schopenhauer's Contact with Theology," 285.

[68] Simone Raudino and Patricia Sohn, eds., "Christianity in Europe: Introduction," in *Beyond the Death of God: Religion in 21st Century International Politics*, (University of Michigan Press, 2022), 69, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.11866503.6.

[69] Wagner, "Religion and Art," 259.

views, for he believed that the recognition that all sentient beings are united in suffering engenders compassion. While Schopenhauer's concept of a universal consciousness was deeply influenced by Eastern traditions such as Buddhism, he did not depart entirely from the Christian intellectual tradition in which he was initially inculcated. Far from rejecting Biblical teaching, he found significant consonance between his own ethical conclusions and the teachings of the New Testament, particularly those concerning compassion, self-denial, and the overcoming of individual will.

Chapter 3: Nietzsche's Philosophy: The Will to Power

Nothing in the human situation is as unstable or fleeting as power not borne of its own strength.[70]

—Goethe, Maxims and Reflections

Nietzsche's conception of the will—the *will to power,* as he calls it—stands in sharp contrast to Schopenhauer's description of willing. While Schopenhauer paints a bleak portrayal of existence founded on the enslavement of human intellect to the will, Nietzsche offers a promising exhortation to self-realization and autonomy. The ensuing paragraphs will explore Nietzsche's conception of power as not simply an instrument of domination or control but as a force integral to the flourishing of the individual. Power, for Nietzsche, is not merely a means to an end, but the end itself: power is the very expression of life in its most vital and dynamic form. Nietzsche, through his *will to power*, a re-evaluation of morals, and an undying love of life, urges one to embrace a vision of human existence that is not defined by suffering or resignation but by the creative, life-affirming potential of the human will. Understanding Nietzsche's radical departure from Schopenhauer reveals an alternate proposition for creating a life of fulfillment.

3.1 Nietzsche's Conception of The Will

While Nietzsche agreed with Schopenhauer's conception of the will as the source of life and of striving, he assimilated this insight using a more existential and psychological framework. Instead of dwelling on the will's powerful, and often deleterious, metaphysical force, Nietzsche looked to its positive role in living life meaningfully. He discerned, as Schopenhauer did before him, the paradoxical quality inherent in the will's yearning, describing his own internal conflict as follows:

[70] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, ed. Peter Hutchinson, trans. Elisabeth Stopp (London: Penguin Books, 1998), Maxim 325, 38.

> "That I must be struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends—alas, whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what crooked paths it must proceed. Whatever I create and however much I love it soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it."[71]

Here, the will is both a force that creates and sustains life and one that, in equal measure, destroys it. It is not merely willing existence as such, it is willing power *within* existence. Nietzsche's will is not content with life as it is; it constantly strives for more—more power, more growth, more creative expression. This will, too, is insatiable, but for him, this is not a negative feature. Rather than seeing the motivation of all action as being an escape from suffering, he sees the drive for power as, contradictorily, a drive for resistance. We *need* our suffering and our struggle because these are what constitute the fundamentals of power; it is resistance that discloses the true gauge of strength. That which is gained easily and without effort does not require power to obtain. Human beings "do not avoid" displeasure; rather, they are "in continual need of it."[72] He endorses the pursuit of that which is challenging to obtain, lauding as praiseworthy "whatever seems difficult to a people."[73] He continues, "whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy."[74] As Bernard Reginster points out, the very value of power is found in "overcoming resistance."[75] This overcoming constitutes more than simply a will to live: it is a true affirmation of life, a will to transcend mere survival and aim for something greater. That which is deemed necessary or sacred but exceedingly difficult to achieve represents a challenge that demands the surpassing of one's effort, creativity, and strength.

Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, attributes considerable influence to art. Unlike his predecessor, Nietzsche does not see art as a means of suppressing or escaping the will, but instead as a necessary rest, akin to sleeping. He points to the "greatness and indispensability of art" as being rooted in its ability to "produce the appearance of a simpler world, a shorter

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[71] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1954; Penguin Books, 1978), 115.

[72] Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 133.

[73] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 58.

[74] *Ibid,* 58.

[75] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 177.

solution of the riddle of life."[76] Art, in his view, is both a challenge and a reprieve, existing "so that the bow shall not break."[77] Though existence may be puzzling, for Nietzsche, a true creator is a *Rätsel-Räter*, a "guesser of riddles," and a "redeemer of accidents."[78] In the act of creating, one does not follow fixed truths, but thrives on enigmas and opacity, working to construct one's own version of the future while redeeming the past through creative reinterpretation. As Goethe, the esteemed writer whom both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer held in high regard, proclaimed, "there is no way of more surely avoiding the world than by art, and it is by art that you form the surest link with it."[79] The creation or appreciation of art is a way to replenish the will's energy, for it enables one to step back and survey the vicissitudes of living, to consider life's upheavals as a painter might a palette, an array of shades from which to draw, to shape, and to create. In so doing, art allows one to reassert one's strength and continue striving. The will naturally strives for a maximization of its own capacities, and as "intellectual" beings, humans harbour "a profound desire for the genius [within]."[80] Yet that genius is not fully arrived at through rational means alone. More precisely, Nietzsche credits art, by virtue of its pre-rational and affective power, as elucidating truths more surely than science. This view also reflects the unmistakable influence of Schopenhauer on Nietzsche's thinking. In his favourable characterization of the "Schopenhauerian man," Nietzsche concludes that "as nature needs the philosopher, so does it need the artist, for the achievement of a metaphysical goal, that of its own self-enlightenment, so that it may at last behold as a clear and finished picture that which it could see only obscurely in the agitation of its evolution—for the end, that is to say, of self-knowledge."[81]

Yet one may well ask: what good is self-knowledge when faced with the conundrum of meaningfulness? How does one answer when forced to question, "What is life worth as such?"[82]

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[76] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 213.

[77] *Ibid.,* 213.

[78] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 198; *Also sprach Zarathustra*, in Kritische Studienausgabe, vol. 4, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 137.

[79] Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, maxim 52, 7.

[80] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations,* 142.

[81] *Ibid.*, 160.

[82] *Ibid.*, 146.

For Nietzsche, self-knowledge is a path to genius, and genius the "highest fruit of life."[83] To be possessed of a "longing for a stronger nature, for a healthier and simpler humanity," is not merely a maximization of one's intrinsic capabilities, but a "longing for [oneself]."[84] In Nietzschean terms, realizing one's full potential is an end in itself, "something higher and purer to be found and attained on this earth than the life of [one's] own time," something that can even, perhaps, "justify life as such."[85] He marks genius as being primarily characterized by creativity, thus positioning the artist as the truest exemplar of this full self-realization. By embracing this call to greatness, this unspoken challenge, one shall at last "go free,"[86] liberated from the historical and the societal restraints that hold one back from attaining their full potential.

Here, Nietzsche turns Schopenhauer's theory on its head. Rather than viewing the will as a hindrance and a source of pain, he recasts it as a driving force for self-realization. When employed correctly, desire and longing can result in becoming what one is,[87] by urging one endlessly onward toward higher ends. Allowing oneself to follow one's ambitions and greater desires is the antithesis of self-denial, for embracing the totality of the self entails embracing the will wholeheartedly. What accounts for Nietzsche's impulse to integrate the will, rather than repress it through self-denial? Partly, it lies in his perception of the will as playing a unique role in heightened sentience. The will is precisely that faculty which, raised to a higher articulation in human beings, distinguishes us from the rest of the animal world, not merely through its intensity, but through its capacity to be shaped by reflection and steered through reason. In this, Nietzsche diverges from Schopenhauer, who saw the intellect as operating separately from the will, often in inverse correlation. Conversely, Nietzsche argues that willing arises out of pleasure or displeasure, and that the intellect is necessary to discern between the two. He writes, "It is only in intellectual beings that pleasure, displeasure, and will are to be found; the vast majority of organisms have nothing of the sort."[88] Indeed, for Nietzsche, the *will to existence* is a

[83] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations,* 146.
[84] *Ibid.,* 146
[85] *Ibid.*, 146.
[86] *Ibid.,* 146.
[87] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin Classics, 1979), 90, "Why I am so clever."
[88] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 179*,* Aphorism 127, "Aftereffects of the most ancient religiosity."

redundancy, and does not exist, for "For, what does not exist cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence?"[89] The will to power is not a precondition for existence but arises through an expression of the desire to overcome, to surpass, to create; it is a yearning for something greater than solely existence itself. The greater the intellect, Nietzsche suggests, the more refined and ambitious the desires it engenders, such that the will to power finds its fullest realization not in animal instincts, but in the uniquely self-aware striving of the human mind.

3.2 A Counterpoint to Christianity

> *Greatness is the secular name for Divinity: both mean simply what lies beyond us.*
>
> —George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman,* 220.

For Nietzsche, religion and belief in God are inadequate sources of meaning, for they subordinate the present to the promise of a distant future. Religious faith exhorts individuals to act virtuously not for life's own sake, but to secure a place in a heavenly afterlife, rendering morality an obligation to God rather than an expression of personal strength. For Nietzsche, this is tantamount to denying one's very existence. To exist is to be alive and to be vital in the pulse and pressure of the present moment. The notion that human life attains its ultimate purpose posthumously is an illogicality; for Nietzsche, "the goal of humanity cannot lie in its end."[90] Instead, he advocates for a life rooted in the present, and his answer to nihilism is to generate a personal sense of meaning rather than following historical creations such as Christianity to dictate how one ought to live. He declares, "the 'kingdom of heaven' is a state of the heart—not something to come 'beyond the world' or 'after death.'"[91] Though this statement strips away the comforting ideal of an afterlife, it also emboldens one to cease waiting for death, for heaven is "everywhere" and "nowhere."[92] Dismissing the notion of a metaphysical "will" or underlying necessity behind the universe and the existence of "causal connections," "necessity," and

[89] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 115.
[90] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 111.
[91] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H.L. Mencken, Pocket Book Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924) section 34.
[92] *Ibid.,* section 34.

"psychological non-freedom," he states that in the *in-itself*, "effect does not follow the cause, there is no rule of law."[93]

In denying God, Nietzsche denies more than a deity; he denies any comforting vision of order or metaphysical necessity underpinning the universe. He discards the notions which provide the very basis for morality, order, and intention, claiming that we are merely projecting a "symbol world" onto things; the *thing-in-itself* does not exist. Since "it is we alone who have devised cause, sequence, for-each-other, relativity, constraint, number, law, freedom, motive, and purpose,"[94] it follows that causality and necessity are human concepts that we project onto the indifferent world, rather than intrinsic features thereof. In that case, there is no underlying "will" or necessary force governing the world, as Schopenhauer claims. If the distinction between *noumena* (*things-in-themselves)* and *phenomena* (appearance or perception of a thing) is blurred, then objectivating experience serves no real existential purpose and is merely misleading. In other words, if an understanding of reality is a matter of perspective and subjectivity is a necessary precondition for existential experience of any kind, then seeking to glimpse unmediated actuality is a futile pursuit. Instead, the will is created by each individual in turn and discloses a singular mode of reality to each consciousness. In such a world as Nietzsche's, the will is not a primal force to be bridled but a necessary imperative for creation, an impetus to forge idiosyncratic meaning from the very fabric of one's being.

To return momentarily to Schopenhauer, recall that his will is blind. As Reginster points out, the *will to live* is, essentially, no more than a "will to will."[95] If the will "strives because striving is its sole nature,"[96] then there is no goal to the striving, no purposive direction. This blind struggle is anathema to the *will to power* that Nietzsche proposed, for his will has a clear purpose: greatness. This act of willing towards a greater state of being represents a continuous overcoming, an upward growth: a "pressing towards man as towards something that stands high above us."[97] Disagreeing both with Schopenhauer and with conventional understandings of Christian morality, Nietzsche rejected Christian faith on the basis that it had "degenerated into

[93] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers," 21.
[94] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers," 21.
[95] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism,* 122.
[96] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 308.
[97] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations,* 158.

a contradiction of [the] original goal."[98] Religious commitment, such as it was during Nietzsche's era, now stood in the way of individual greatness. Since religions seek to offer reassurance by rendering comprehensible through faith that which eludes explanation, what emerges is not necessarily a wholly truthful account of the existential condition but a "movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding."[99] Thus, the unfettered edifice of religious belief, once expanded by its poetic symbolism, has, over the centuries, ossified into dogma and begun to crumble.

Nietzsche criticizes the Christian virtue of compassion for the weak, viewing sympathy as engendering further weakness rather than strength. Compassionate acts only lead one to supplant personal ambition to the service of another. Moreover, he is equally denigrating of the doctrine that the unavoidable hardships of human life ought to be patiently and stoically endured; for him, this can only lead to resignation, passivity, and *ressentiment*. As Young points out, "Growth must always have a specific direction, must be growth towards a specific goal;"[100] as Nietzsche says, there must be "continual ascent."[101] Aimlessness will not result in a "flourishing life" to Nietzsche, for this requires "ongoing projects."[102] Stagnation equates to misery. Christian morality, then, is not a virtue but an impediment to self-actualization, and pity is antipodal to a flourishing life. As Nietzsche writes in "Wagner in Bayreuth," "passion is better than stoicism and hypocrisy; that to be honest, even in evil, it is better than to lose oneself in the morality of tradition; that the free man can be good or evil but the unfree man is a disgrace to nature and is excluded from both heavenly and earthly solace; finally, that he who wants to become free has to become so through his own actions and that freedom falls into no one's lap like a miraculous gift."[103] Individual freedom must be valued above religious piety, for morality is nothing other than "the herd instinct in the individual," training one to "ascribe value to

[98] Nietzsche*, Untimely Meditations,* 166.

[99] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s," in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979), 84.

[100] Julian Young, "Nihilism and the Meaning of Life," in *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 476.

[101] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 226, Aphorism 288, "Embark!"

[102] Young, "Nihilism and the Meaning of Life," 476.

[103] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations,* 252.

[oneself] only as a function."[104] By pity the Christian ethic strives to level the distance between people, to make all equal in the eyes of God. It is for this reason that Nietzsche calls Christianity a "slave morality," a faith fashioned for those "weak in will and mind."[105] Even under the stewardship of the most virtuous and wise shepherd, to live as a sheep is to abdicate the dignity of selfhood. The lone wolf, though estranged and burdened by solitude, at least affirms the sovereignty of its individual will. In Nietzsche's view, it is far better to confront the abyss alone than to find comfort in the flock at the cost of one's inner freedom. With this conviction driving him onward, Nietzsche urges one to create one's own individual value systems and to "stop brooding about the moral value of our actions!"[106]

3.3 Re-evaluation of Morals and Rejection of Faith

> *Thus the gods enter; thus the season of the gods falls*
>
> *From the shadows down to men, shaking the depths.*
>
> — Friedrich Hölderlin, in *Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin,* no. 4

The Christian notion of sin was a point of contention for Nietzsche, who viewed the concept as a manipulative force that produces and sustains gutlessness and a herd mentality. He argues that the doctrine of Original Sin is a counterproductive and impractical belief, one that fails to inspire the necessary motivation for reforming an imperfect world. Rather, Nietzsche contends that "the Christian resolve to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad."[107] This runs directly counter to Schopenhauer's pessimism, insinuating that the opposite approach serves humankind better. Instead of accepting *a priori* man's miserable circumstance after the *Fall*, one ought to begin by recognizing Man's potential; instead of looking back at mistakes, to look forward to possibilities. Repentance, contrition, and shame are of no use in the pursuit of human greatness and, thus, are to be cast aside. Nietzsche places the body at the center of existence,[108] and, for this, he views the ascetic rejection of physiological pleasures as

[104] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 173, Aphorism 116 "Herd Instinct."
[105] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 546.
[106] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 255, Aphorism 335, "Long Live Physics!"
[107] *Ibid.,* 182, Aphorism 130, "A Dangerous Resolve."
[108] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 34. "body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body."

incongruous with life, an expression of "ressentiment" and "self-contradiction."[109] Ascetic self-denial does not lead to a greater sense of fulfillment in the spiritual realm, but is merely depriving oneself of physical, sensual well-being—the one real form in which such well-being can be experienced. From this belief arises the scathing title of his aphorism 134 in the *Gay Science,* "Pessimists as Victims,"[110] a phrase that encapsulates his disdain for self-abnegation and his call for a more life-affirming perspective. This philosophy represents a refusal to become the hapless servant of one's fate.

From the need to affirm the self, there arises Nietzsche's concept of the re-evaluation of morals. He questions the definition of good and evil, insisting that "he who wants to be a creator in good and evil has first to be a destroyer and break values."[111] This re-evaluation must be applied to *all* values, for Nietzsche sees it as the "formula for an act of supreme coming-to-oneself" wherein mankind can become both "flesh and genius."[112] In rejecting passive resignation and urging individuals to embrace the struggle, self-overcoming, and the creative destruction of old values, he lays the foundation for the *Übermensch*: an 'overman' who "has turned out supremely well, in antithesis to 'modern' men, to 'good' men, to Christians and other nihilists."[113] Nietzsche casts away metaphysics, critiquing Schopenhauer on the basis that "the whole idea that there must be a meaning that answers to a 'metaphysical need' exists only as an outdated inheritance from Christianity."[114] Schopenhauer fulfills that metaphysical need through a stalwart belief in some objective, unseen purposiveness in the universe, but for Nietzsche, such objectivity is not necessary. Morality is not contingent upon something "chaotic and groundless outside of itself"[115] but finds its origin in subjective willing. One decides for oneself what is moral. The metaphorical death of God represents "the death of the highest sanction and the absolute guarantee of our values," and from this point on, values and patterns

[109] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1989), part 3 verse 3.

[110] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 183, Aphorism 134, "Pessimists as Victims."

[111] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* "Why I am Destiny," 110.

[112] *Ibid.,* 110.

[113] *Ibid.,*"Why I am so Clever," 63.

[114] Christopher Janaway, "The Moral Meaning of the World," 281.

[115] Robert Guay, "Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 299.

of behaviour are created "from one's own mental resources."[116] In this self-controlled sphere, purpose is not relegated to the mystical or the esoteric; rather, purpose can be found in the very human act of striving for power.

"Now humanity does not know where to go, because no one is waiting for it: not even God.[117]

So writes the poet Antonio Porchia, offering a summation of the chief problem of nihilism that Nietzsche grappled with in his writings. In a world bereft of faith in a higher being, it is the *Übermensch* that steps in to fill a God-like role. Nietzsche's paragon is as of yet still mythical, for in all of human history, "never yet has there been an overman."[118] Every individual, from the humblest to the most exceptional, is bound by traits that preclude the attainment of this ideal, for they are, by nature, "all-too-human."[119] By setting up his idealized being as unattainably superior to mankind, Nietzsche attempts to reorient the striving for an afterlife—an equally lofty ambition—into the earthly realm. Keeping one's gaze fixed on an afterlife distracts from the immediate greatness that can be achieved on earth. His goal is not to strip away value entirely but to replace notions of "good" and "bad" with a more cohesive, attainable view of power. By postulating an ideal that remains, thus far, out of reach, Nietzsche replaces the omniscient God of traditional Christian morality with a humanized idol. The existing dogmatic system is not only wrong for its moral prescriptions, per se, but for its failure to unify human ambition under a single, life-affirming goal: the pursuit of power. Through the dichotomy of sin and virtue, diverging ambitions and motives guide people through life. In this way, Christian morality creates "a thousand goals"[120] for a thousand people. For Nietzsche, as long as humanity is "lacking the one goal," power, it is aimless; the will is diffused through too many versions of human striving. As will be explored in chapter four, this single-mindedness is significant in how it pertains to the creation of a meaningful existence. As Hanson and VanderWeele's *Comprehensive Measure of Meaning* indicates, meaningfulness is increased the more one feels their life is "fully integrated around one single sense of personal mission or

[116] Jacob J Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*, Problems of Modern European Thought (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1995), 13.

[117] Antonio Porchia, *Voices*, trans. William S. Merwin (Chicago: Big Table Publishing Company, 1969), 52.

[118] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 93.

[119] *Ibid.,* 93.

[120] *Ibid.,* 60.

calling," something that can "unify and synthesize" the goals or objectives of everyday life.[121] For Nietzsche, one of religion's fundamental failings lies in its repression of the will's natural energy. By stifling the instinct to will power, religion curtails what is most vital in human nature. This provokes Nietzsche's question: "If the goal of humanity is still lacking, is there not also still lacking— humanity itself?"[122] This statement touches upon yet another drastic departure from Schopenhauer, for while the former might argue that humanity is not the end goal, but something to be transcended, Nietzsche implies that humanity is still something worth possessing.

This question of humanity's intrinsic value reaches its philosophical apex in Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence**.** The concept of an infinitely repeating cycle directs one's focus inwards, demanding a confrontation with a daunting proposition: that one will that one's life "with all that led up to it and all that follows from it, be just as it is eternally and without regret."[123] He challenges us to imagine that every moment of our lives—every pain, every joy, every triumph and failure—*must* be lived again and again, for all eternity, without alteration. As Philip J. Kain points out, if all is pre-ordained, "then we cannot be held responsible" for our actions, and feelings of guilt and responsibility are rendered superfluous; suffering "just happens."[124] The challenge is thus to find a way to enjoy every part of life. This is not merely a thought experiment, but a test of existential affirmation. Could one truly will life so fully, love it so deeply, that one would desire its infinite repetition? It is in this context that Nietzsche presents one credo, in particular, to answer to nihilism and his aforementioned 'death of god': *amor fati,* or the love of fate. What he calls the "formula for greatness in a human being" is, simply put, that "one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity […] but to love it..."[125] This one declaration changes Nietzsche's philosophy from one of existential meaninglessness to an

[121] Jeffrey A Hanson and Tyler J. VanderWeele, "The Comprehensive Measure of Meaning: Psychological and Philosophical Foundations," in *Measuring Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities*, ed. Matthew T. Lee, Laura D. Kubzansky, and Tyler J. VanderWeele (Oxford University Press, 2021) https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197512531.003.0013.

[122] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 60.

[123] Kenneth Baynes, "Freedom as Autonomy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 286–310.

[124] Philip J. Kain, "Eternal Recurrence and the Categorical Imperative," in The Southern Journal of Philosophy, 45 (2007), 109-110.

[125] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* "Why I am so Clever," 61.

affirmative statement of vitality and life force. For him, Christianity creates false hope for better things to come. Instead, he proposes that one ought to accept what is already given in life, for one who "possesses it," one who "holds it bravely in his own hand,"[126] is truly strong. Although Nietzsche, too, says we must accept the suffering and pain in life, this is a very different approach from Schopenhauer's retreat from life. Resignation is not a passive stepping back, for Nietzsche, but an opportunity to assert the will to power. Instead of trying to numb oneself to the desires and aversions of the will, one must learn to love these very pleasures and pains unequivocally.

In final analysis, Nietzsche directly repudiates Schopenhauer's claim that the will ought to be suppressed. While the will may come up against resistance and pain, these are necessary steps in the process of becoming what one is: one must overcome and transcend suffering in order to achieve greatness, not simply endure through it. The will does not strive merely to live but searches unendingly for one thing: power. Nietzsche discarded traditional morality, viewing compassion, pity, and kindness as sources of weakness and as hindrances to the ascent of the strong. To love one's own fate wholeheartedly is, for Nietzsche, an affirmation of life and the will to power. It entails a radical acceptance of *all* experiences, including suffering, as essential to the forging of strength and individuality. The will is transubstantiated from a source of despair into a catalyst for growth and power, a necessary insatiability that gives life direction. The following chapter will look more closely into how this will affects lived experience and, furthermore, how it informs the ethical and existential choices that constitute a life.

[126] Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality,* 546.

Chapter 4: Comparative Analysis: Will, Morality, and Human Flourishing

> *"You see, gentlemen, reason is an excellent thing, there's no disputing that, but reason is nothing but reason, and it only satisfies man's rational faculty, while volition is a manifestation of the whole of life. And although it is indisputable that life is the manifestation of volition, it is also as indisputable that volition is to a certain extent the expression of reason […] I don't want to be bound by the chains of reason alone."*
>
> —Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground,* 25

Schopenhauer's pessimistic denial of the will and Nietzsche's affirmative will to power represent two opposing responses to suffering, morality, and meaning. However, as Dostoevsky's unnamed *Underground Man* observes, human beings are not cleanly divided into rational and volitional halves; rather, reason and will are inextricably intertwined. This passage illustrates that while thoughts are guided by reason, even reason expresses the will to some extent. In this light, although Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's views diverge, a synthesis of their views may offer a more ample understanding of human nature and the possible attainment of a flourishing life.

4.1 Nietzsche's Divergence from Schopenhauer: On Embracing the Will

How do Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's views of the will affect lived experience? When applied to one's actions, thoughts, and motivations, these two conceptions of how to live one's life differ radically. To deny the will to live, as Schopenhauer does, involves asceticism. It entails, through the act of resignation, that one denies oneself life's pleasures, in order to subdue the will to the fullest extent possible. By reducing one's desires, one also reduces one's suffering. Inversely, Nietzsche recommends that we embrace the will as the source of energy and power in life. Nietzsche, too, advocates for a kind of self-discipline, but the goal of this differs from Schopenhauer's. Rather than seeing pain as something to be mitigated, Nietzsche sees undergoing suffering as a critical process in producing well-being: as Reginster writes, "the ascetic does not take pleasure at painful emotions because they are emotions, nor, obviously, because they are painful, but because in subjecting himself to them, the ascetic overcomes a

certain resistance in himself and increases his feeling of power."[127] Reginster calls this "instrumental self-denial,"[128] because it is done as a means to an end; denying oneself is not the end in itself. To live a Nietzschean form of self-denial is to voluntarily endure suffering of one's own volition, using it to increase one's power: "To have and to want to have more—growth, in one word—that is life itself."[129] To suffer is to force oneself to grow stronger, and there simply "cannot be greatness without suffering."[130] Greatness, not a lack of suffering, is the ultimate goal of human existence, and discomfort is an unavoidable weight that must be borne.

Nietzsche, though admiring of Schopenhauer's work, denigrates his view that we must face life with resignation. This is synonymous with giving up, for to condemn suffering is to condemn life. Furthermore, morality itself is absurd to Nietzsche; instead of uniting human beings under a common law, morality restrains those who might otherwise achieve greatness. The same ethical ideals which Schopenhauer upholds, Nietzsche rejects. Compassion is seen as a lowering of the self, a hindrance to progress and greatness. To deny the will does not help, for the will is a tool to grow and ascend; the hunger for power is a natural aspect of life which should be encouraged rather than disparaged. Inversely, the sympathy found in Western ethics is an "anti-natural morality," for, in his view, "virtually every morality that has hitherto been taught, reverenced and preached, turns […] precisely against the instincts of life."[131] For this reason, Nietzsche recommends not a repressive stance towards the will, but an acceptance of its domination over life. Compassion is not the commendable emotion that Schopenhauer proclaims, but a symptom of the herd mentality. This emotion arises "not from a feeling of love for the race, but simply because within them nothing is older, stronger, more inexorable and invincible than this instinct–because this instinct constitutes the essence of our species and herd;" in short, because acting in this way is "what benefits the preservation of the human race.[132] Morality does not have value in itself, because *nothing* does. Value is man-made, and as such, can be bestowed in error and on the basis of falsity. It is for this reason that one ought

[127] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism,* 145.
[128] *Ibid.,* 145.
[129] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, A Vintage Giant (New York: Vintage Books: A Division of Random House, 1968), 125.
[130] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 186.
[131] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, vol. 17, 24 vols., The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche (Delphi Classics, 2015), 47, "Morality as Anti Nature."
[132] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 76, Aphorism 1, "The Teachers of the Purpose of Existence."

to depend only on one's own value system and cast off any externally imposed beliefs. When Nietzsche writes, "Whatever has value in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less, but has been given value at some time, as a present—and it was we who gave and bestowed it,"[133] he gives us the freedom to generate the life we choose. This freedom, admittedly, is both a blessing and a curse—something that both liberates us from the burden of living in accordance with a strict set of laws yet simultaneously imposes the responsibility of creating *something* with one's life, some set of values that can direct and drive one forward.

There is a contradiction at the heart of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power, for he pairs nihilism with affirmation. Though he rejects humanity's inherited values as illusions, he urges one to make new values. Yet, he does not answer the question of how self-made values can supply a sense of purpose if they are manufactured from nothing—if, as he maintains, all values are mere human fabrications. Can such values truly compel us? In spite of this, Nietzsche does propose an alternative to Schopenhauer's ethos, wherein value is found not in living, but in quashing the urge to live. Schopenhauer's 'values' are metaphysical, speculative; Nietzsche's are individualistic, fabricated. The urgent question of how to proceed in life remains unanswered.

4.2 A Meaningful Existence and the Meaning of Happiness

Before one can answer the question of which approach to living best serves human existence, it is first necessary to elucidate which factors truly contribute to a meaningful life. When considering both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's existential investigations, the term *happiness* proves woefully insufficient, capturing but a sliver of the deeper, more elusive conditions they regarded as essential to human existence. While many people might consider meaning to be a conduit to obtaining happiness, this is contentious, as still others see the pathways to meaning and happiness as incompatible with each other.[134] One can find meaning as readily in the midst of misery as in the presence of joy. A life can be filled with purposiveness

[133] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 236, Aphorism 301, "The Fancy of the Contemplatives."

[134] Maciej Gorski, Kuba Krys, and Joonha Park, "First Happiness, Then Meaning. A Cross-Cultural Investigation into Well-Being Dilemmas," *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, October 2024, 2.

even alongside adversity and hardship. Nevertheless, individual meaning remains integral to any serious account of human flourishing, for it is exceedingly difficult to find happiness in the absence of a guiding sense of purpose. Happiness is a broad term, one that can refer to fleeting moments of pleasure after a delicious meal or an engaging activity, but can also encompass a more general satisfaction with the arc of one's life. Subjectivity is a persistent issue with any analysis of happiness, for its constituents are influenced and determined by both preference and necessity. However, it is not, for the purposes of this thesis, necessary to explore the question of happiness in depth. Instead, this chapter will focus on the main ways in which human beings generate *meaning.* The justification for this thematicization of meaning will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

In a series of survey studies by Gorski, Krys and Park, they found that most human beings, when questioned, choose happiness over meaning in life.[135] The study raises questions as to whether humans know what is best for them, and also whether the pursuit of happiness stems from a reasoned conviction that it will improve their life, or from a more primal urge to avoid suffering and pain. Notably, this current research suggests that, for many people, what matters most is not the attainment of happiness but the avoidance of its opposite.[136] Despite this, most still perceive the pursuit of happiness as central to influencing their life's trajectory. Addressing this valuation of happiness, Gorski *et al.* write: "Without first ensuring their happiness, individuals are less inclined to actively seek out and engage in activities that hold deeper personal meaning."[137] Such a view seems to unwittingly support Schopenhauer's assertion that the will is a negative force; if our hedonistic drives overpower long-term, rational goals, this could result in momentary states of happiness that do not contribute any long-lasting positive effect. Put in precise terms, the prioritization of happiness over meaning "may be not only unrealistic but potentially detrimental to overall well-being,"[138] enslaving people to a kind of "hedonic treadmill."[139] This conviction aligns with Schopenhauer's belief that the primary

[135] Gorski *et al.*, "First Happiness, Then Meaning," 2.
[136] *Ibid.*, 5. "…it may be avoiding unhappiness rather than maximizing happiness, being the key factor driving prioritization of this specific aspect of well-being over others."
[137] *Ibid.*, 7.
[138] *Ibid.*, 7.
[139] *Ibid.*, 8.

drive of human life is to escape suffering and that following the instinctual urging of the will does not result in the best possible manifestation of one's life.

If meaning and happiness, though related, are not corollaries, then it is unnecessary to attempt a definitive account of *happiness* here. Rather, I will proceed from the philosophical assumption that long-lasting meaning bears greater existential weight than ephemeral happiness. Following this, the avoidance of suffering must also be seen as less worthwhile than a life of meaning; having a purpose overshadows both pleasure and pain in its significance for human well-being. With this focus on meaning and long-lasting value, the following section will outline a generalizable sample of the demonstrable attributes that most commonly contribute to human well-being and the cultivation of a purposeful life.

4.3 Knowing Thyself

In a recent study conducted in 2024 by Padgett *et al.*, the constituents of a meaningful life are divided into three categories: coherence, significance, and direction.[140] Of these, the last term, direction, is perhaps the most comprehensible. In order for life to be directed, there must be "a sense of mission or vocation that provides a unifying understanding of what one's life should be that generates and guides all of one's activities, goals, and purposes and adjudicates between them when they come into conflict."[141] This notion of life as governed by an inner telos echoes, in experiential terms, existentialism's central concern: the challenge presented to each individual to confer meaning upon existence from within. Similarly, another study by Schlegel shows that self-knowledge is a key part of having meaning in life. Intriguingly, he notes that "the subjective feeling of true self-knowledge, regardless of whether this self actually exists, serves an important meaning-making function."[142] Long before empirical data confirmed these insights, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche both, through their respective philosophies, strove to uncover the "true" self. Although their philosophical labours precede any statistical examination

[140] Noah Padgett et al., "Measuring Meaning in Life by Combining Philosophical and Psychological distinctions: Psychometric Properties of the Comprehensive Measure of Meaning," *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, September 2024, 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2024.2403367.

[141] *Ibid.*, 3.

[142] Rebecca J. Schlegel et al., "Feeling Like You Know Who You Are: Perceived True Self-Knowledge and Meaning in Life," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2011), 754, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211400424.

of these issues, they place emphasis on the very sources of meaning that are proven most important by extant data, namely self-awareness and a sense of purposeful identity.

"The consequences of committing to and pursuing a purpose should help people make sense of life," write Martela and Steger, because this commitment crystallizes one's identity through the act of 'trying on' this purpose; through assuming an identity, people can "learn something about themselves."[143] Though the suppression of the will to live and the pursuit of the will to power both challenge the natural instincts of human beings, these formidable challenges may be the very thing that gives these committed endeavours value. It could well be that either theory might serve equally well to give life purpose, for meaning, we may surmise, does not lie in the content of the chosen path alone, but in the disciplined commitment to walk the entire length of that path. This process of commitment helps shape one's identity, even if what is ultimately considered the 'true' self remains debatable. Golomb, writing about existentialism and the quest for the self, writes that authenticity arises when "the ideal of coherence, which reappears as a whole, congruent and harmonious personality in the existentialist quest for *individuum* […] rejects any symptom of *dividuum* within one's authentic self."[144] Coherence and stalwart faith in one's beliefs may be the closest one can get to achieving authenticity, and while this does not answer overarching questions of what is right or wrong, it can, at the very least, provide some confidence in one's actions. Indeed, it is in "acting in circumstances that are beyond the 'good and honest' ethic, the world of shallow appearances and pious ethical codes" that one can determine whether "genuine selfhood or a hollow core lies behind one's cultural shell."[145] By similar logic, religious faith can also serve as a means to deepen self-knowledge and impart direction to one's life through both internalized convictions and externalized practice, so long as piety and practice are not merely upheld at a superficial level. Wholehearted credence, regardless of eschatological or teleological object, becomes the enacted manifestation of meaning.

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[143] Frank Martela and Micheal F. Steger, "The Three Meanings of Meaning in Life: Distinguishing Coherence, Purpose, and Significance," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 11, no. 5 (2016), 539.

[144] Jacob J Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity : From Kierkegaard to Camus*, Problems of Modern European Thought (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1995), 12.

[145] *Ibid.,* 24.

4.4 The Problem of Desire

> *Then let us live, you with whom I suffer*
>
> *And inwardly strive towards better times*
>
> *[…] The Earth will take back those concerned*
>
> *With impermanent things: others climb higher*
>
> —Friedrich Hölderlin, "Once Gods Walked…" in *Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin*, 24

Philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are not meant to be read and just as quickly forgotten. They wrote with the intent to instruct and inform, and, hopefully, to help create a roadmap for living life. Yet it is not enough to follow blindly one path or the other; one must carefully consider, each to his own, what kind of life is worth living. It is vital to pose questions: *If everyone were to follow Schopenhauer, would society stagnate? If everyone were to follow Nietzsche, would morality collapse?* Moreover, what compelling force would lead a person to embrace one extreme mode of life with unwavering fervour over another, if not an indomitable internal compass, a purpose that arises from none other than the will itself? These tensions do not discredit either thinker but emphasize the necessity of coordinating between these extremes and critically analyzing both sides of the divide. Philosophy creates archetypes that we can then follow, such as the Schopenhauerian ascetic or the Nietzschean *Übermensch.* The works of philosophy can, in a sense, *show us what we want.* So, too, can religion provide this exemplar for life. Religion does not merely comfort us in the face of death but creates a paradigm of purpose and direction by instructing us what we ought to desire. In both philosophy and religion, then, one finds not clear-cut answers, but the conditions under which meaningful questions may be asked and personal outlooks created. Setting forth upon any path raises its own question. Ideologies may kindle the first sparks, might nudge one in a certain direction, but it is only through action that thoughts, motives, or desires can be stoked to a flame; just as sparks are largely harmless, a fire is something real, with the capacity to alter existence for better or for worse.

The wholehearted pursuit of a goal can set one on the path to meaning. The basis of a meaningful existence can also, as statistical evidence collected by Baumeister indicates, be

rooted in purposiveness, belonging, and a sense of intrinsic self-worth and value.[146] Schopenhauer's compassionate view, which emphasizes the shared nature of existence, encourages kindness and fosters a sense of belonging, thereby aligning with Baumeister's three criteria, proposing that Schopenhauerian empathy contributes to generating a sense of meaning within one's life. By recognizing our common fate, individuals can feel part of a larger scheme, finding solace in the experiences of suffering and tribulation in which all living beings partake. However, Schopenhauer's concepts of repressing the will and existing without desire seem to pose a barrier to finding purpose. After all, what is *purpose* if not the possession of the drive and motivation to pursue a goal, one initially generated by desire or aversion? Nevertheless, *purpose* in this sense can, perhaps, be found in silencing the basic survival instincts and pursuing intellectual and aesthetic pursuits.

It can be argued that purpose requires the backing of reason; purpose implies something done with intention, not something done by accident. Schopenhauer contradicts himself when he says the will is blind, for he also implies that "human willing (or desiring) is an essentially intentional state and therefore requires an intentional object,"[147] and we necessarily will "something."[148] Either the will is truly blind and its striving is thus purposeless and not aimed at any specific goal, or, as Nietzsche would argue, our will is somehow combined with the intellect to give it a specific directionality. Striving itself can be viewed pessimistically, following Schopenhauer, or, alternatively, through a more empowered, volitional lens. However, even if the will compels one toward striving and effort, this can itself generate meaning and purpose, provided the object of *nisus* is freely chosen. As studies conducted by Inzlicht and Campbell on the aftereffects of exerting effort conclude, "without free choice, effort cannot be justified and made meaningful."[149] Schopenhauer's state of will-lessness paradoxically requires striving and effort to achieve, because repressing one's natural instincts is not easy or natural; it is not an utter absence of will but an *anti*-will. There is motivation here, too: the motivation to reduce suffering. Schopenhauer's philosophy demands purposiveness

[146] Roy F. Baumeister and Tyler F. Stillman, "Uncertainty, Belongingness, and Four Needs for Meaning," *Psychological Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (2009), 249.

[147] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism,* 122.

[148] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 163. "When a man wills, he wills something; his will is always directed to an object and can be thought of only in relation to an object"

[149] Micheal Inzlicht and Aidan V. Campbell, "Effort Feels Meaningful," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 26, no. 12 (2022), 1035–37.

extirpated from desire, and action without emotiveness and reward-centred reactivity, yet even this renunciation still demands a form of striving and intention.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's will to power embraces the natural domination of the will to the fullest yet uses it to pursue rational aims. Perhaps the solution lies not in isolating the intellect from the will but in forging a conciliation between the two that is mutually beneficial. Nietzsche famously writes, "if we have our own why of life, we shall get along with almost any how."[150] This quote elucidates the link between purpose and well-being, showing that, beyond the avoidance of suffering, having a reason—a *why*—to continue living and striving is crucial. Interestingly, this notion finds an unexpected parallel in Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ,* which, though written in a profoundly religious context, similarly emphasizes self-mastery and disciplined striving. Kempis writes:

> "A good and devout man first sets out inwardly the things to be done. Nor do they draw him away to longings of a lawless inclination, but he himself bends them to the ruling of calm reason. Who has a harder fight than one who strives to master himself? And this should be our concern, that is: to conquer the self, and daily become stronger, and to make for something better."[151]

While Kempis frames self-mastery in terms of spiritual devotion and moral fortitude, the essence of his message—overcoming base instincts and striving for higher ideals—echoes Nietzsche's emphasis on self-overcoming. Both perspectives affirm that struggle and discipline are essential for growth, though they diverge in their ultimate aims: Kempis envisions submission to divine will, while Nietzsche champions the self-creation of values. Thus, rather than being strictly opposed, their insights can be viewed as different interpretations of the same fundamental human endeavour: the pursuit of meaning through mastery of the self. Yet this perspective reiterates the unanswerable question: *if Nietzsche urges individuals to create their own values, where do these values originate? Can one truly generate values in isolation, or are they inevitably influenced by cultural, hereditary and historical forces?* This question is further complicated by René Girard's theory of mimetic desire. If, as Girard claims, "we do not each

[150] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Viking Press, 19554), 468.

[151] Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ,* 6, "Ch. 3 Of the Teaching of Truth."

have our own desire, one really our own,"[152] then such a re-evaluation is impossible, for desire without mimetic models reduces us to an animal state in which there would be "neither freedom nor humanity."[153] Girard writes that desire is shaped through culture and experience; in short, "we tend to desire what our neighbour has or what our neighbour desires."[154] That is to say, desires find models within culture, which we can then project within ourselves. Girard posits that desire is not a natural sentiment and not something which animals possess; this echoes Nietzsche's claims that the will is unique to rational beings, and willing increases in proportion to the intellect. In order to create desire, Girard insists, "we must have recourse to people about us; we have to borrow their desires."[155] If this theory of mimetic desire is true, then Nietzsche's ideal of self-created values may be more dependent on external influences than he acknowledges, reinforcing Schopenhauer's claim that human beings are trapped by their will and their circumstances. A true *will to power* is shaped by unyielding inner resolve, yet Girard's argument points to the compelling sway of the societal gaze; in this light, the *will to power* risks becoming not a sovereign ascent, but a path encumbered by the very social forces it undertakes to transcend. Schopenhauer would find his views vindicated by this mimetically founded desire. The rejection of the will avers that it is precisely this outwardly oriented attention that generates misery and suffering, since that which is desired does not reflect that which is truly worth having. He thus reverses the will's orientation, proposing, instead, what could be called an anti-desire: the Schopenhauerian resignation is derived from a desire to be freed of desire—in essence, to overcome our very nature.

Ironically, by proposing these two alternatives to normal human desire, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer provide us with two new objects of desire: the former being autonomy over one's desires, the latter being an absence of desire. Ultimately, both point to the reality that managing this desire must be personal. One must remain aware that all desires are culturally and mimetically influenced, and thus, adopt a critical stance that neither blindly follows the negation of desire nor the unbridled creation of new values. One must strike a balance such that what one desires feels *personal*, yet at the same time coheres with rationality rather than base urges, that

[152] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 15.
[153] *Ibid.,* 15.
[154] *Ibid.,* 8.
[155] *Ibid., 15.*

desires feel *purposeful*, yet do not drive us in endless cycles of unfulfilled wants. As with Aristotle's mean, where virtues become vices when executed in extremes,[156] perhaps neither philosopher proposes a viable path forward. Perhaps they both exist in extremes of willing and denying the will, and the answer lies somewhere in the middle: harnessing desire's creative energy, as Nietzsche advocates, while being aware of its capacity to generate suffering, about which Schopenhauer warns.

4.5 The Resigned Overman

Continuing with the attempt to reconcile these two opposing views, one encounters a possibility: what if Nietzsche's uncompromising drive for autonomy were applied to the same moral values which Schopenhauer describes? If the individual were encouraged to continuously better themselves, overcome challenges and embrace the *will to power*, yet, at the same time, to do so with a consciousness of humanity's shared, universal will? If, as Schopenhauer says, all partake of the same will and are in that way equal, then a will which strives towards individual greatness could theoretically be expanded to encompass all of humanity. A Schopenhauerian *Übermensch* would strive to lessen the suffering of all beings, to free them from the enslavement of the will. In so doing, this *Übermensch* would assert and live by their own rationally constructed values, moving upward within themself by embracing the struggle inherent in the condition of human life. Pity and compassion would be employed here as fodder to feed the drive for power, so long as they do not engender stagnation. This is not the saccharine pity that Nietzsche despised, but a lucid and unsentimental lens that sees in another's suffering the mirror of one's own. Such a disposition, properly disciplined, is not weakness but magnanimity. To live ascetically is to exert mastery over one's natural inclinations, but this mastery can be a way of asserting dominance—in this case, over oneself. It is the *will to power* turned inward. If, as Bernard Shaw writes in *Man and Superman*, "Virtue consists, not in abstaining from vice, but in not desiring it,"[157] the will is not to be suppressed, but reconfigured. To reconcile these two versions of the will is not to confuse them but to inquire whether self-overcoming might also

[156] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, ed. Robert Crisp, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1104a, Ch. 3. "[virtues] then, are ruined by excess and deficiency, and preserved by the mean."

[157] George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, *John Bull's Other Island*, and *Major Barbara*, ed. Brad Kent (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 219.

become a form of self-transcendence. Bernard Shaw's character *Don Juan* serves as a spokesman for his concept of *Life Force*, articulating an evolutionary ideal that unites Nietzschean ambition with a quasi-Schopenhauerian commitment to the betterment of humanity. For him, true greatness lies in advancing the collective spirit through conscious effort and creative will: "to be in hell is to drift: to be in heaven is to steer."[158] In this context, the same emotions that Nietzsche critiques could be reimagined as catalysts for self-overcoming rather than signs of weakness. Resignation and affirmation, though seemingly antithetical, can here become the other's complement: one can be resigned to the endless Sisyphean struggle and pain of living, and view it but affirm that this life is worth living and worth embracing. One can strive to master the will, but to do so only insofar as it enables one to overcome mundane and temporary appetites. Mastering the will can also mean employing it, rather than discarding it entirely. Human nature, caught between the agony of desire and the ecstasy of self-creation, bestows a double inheritance. Nevertheless, there might yet be a third path forward: an affirmation of resignation that turns the bondage of the will into the very resistance needed for greatness. As Bernard Shaw proclaims, we must fight for freedom, honour, and the self, for these are all "one and indivisible."[159] In the end, it is not through renunciation or conquest alone that one betters oneself, but through the steady labour of harnessing the will to mould coherence, character and commitment.

With respect to the greater aspirations of existence, the will can be a tool to energize and motivate. As for religion, in particular Christianity, the decision to maintain or to reject its doctrine must be a personal one. If Christian faith is a useful means for comprehending the world, notably when it ennobles and clarifies, then it can also be a useful means for finding one's own place in society and affirming life. Such faith is not meant to pacify the soul, but instead to incite one into action, to encourage one to search for sanctification in this life. When this faith has the opposite effect, that is to say, when it holds one enslaved to an idealized alternate reality, or it buries the end goal under the weight of repentance, self-abasement and guilt, then a Nietzschean revaluation of one's beliefs might be in order. Schopenhauer saw religion as being "a force both for much good, truth, and enlightenment in the world," but he

[158] Shaw, *Man and Superman,* 144.
[159] *Ibid.,* 179.

readily admitted that it could just as quickly become something standing in the way of "greater human fulfillment and understanding."[160] The act of reflecting on one's life, discerning what is valuable, and then striving to live in accordance with that chosen set of standards is, in essence, an expression of the will to power. It is through this active, creative process that individuals can transform suffering and chaos into a coherent, meaningful life.

Returning, finally, to the three principal sources of meaning previously discussed—coherence, significance and direction[161]—I will now turn to the most elusive of these terms: significance. It is perhaps the least concrete criterion, for a sense of significance hinges on how one's life is reflected "in the context of our values, expectations, and standards, as well as how we conform to those criteria given our circumstances."[162] This ambiguity harkens back to Schopenhauer's argument that religion is analogical in nature, and its real value is not derived from any ability to produce metaphysical certainty. The "abstract, conceptual work required to find coherence, purpose, and significance in life"[163] is reflected in the role of symbolism and analogy in religion. Just as religion helps to comprehend the world and reality, "the amorphous yet impactful mental representations we wield make it possible to reflect on one's cognitive representations about the world, to reflect on one's pursuits, and to reflect on the standards used in evaluating one's life."[164] This insight suggest that meaning-making is deeply cognitive in nature; rather than being an inherent feature of life, significance can be understood as something actively constructed through reflection and self-evaluation. Nietzsche's philosophy can also be aligned with this view, as he sees the will to power as the force that drives individuals to impose order on their experiences and to wrest significance from their exertions, shaping their lives into something purposeful rather than leaving them adrift in chaos and inertia. Ultimately, one assigns significance to ideas and actions oneself. One can decide to value one path over another, and one can equally decide that life is meaningless. Whether through the denial of the will and the subsequent striving for intellectual heights, or the pursuit of power, both Schopenhauer and

[160] Gerard Mannion, "Schopenhauer and Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 402.

[161] Padgett et al., "Measuring Meaning in Life."

[162] Martela and Steger, "The Three Meanings of Meaning in Life: Distinguishing Coherence, Purpose, and Significance," 538.

[163] *Ibid.,* 538.

[164] Martela et al., "The Three Meanings of Meaning in Life," 538.

Nietzsche are proposing a set of values to give life *significance*. Without any such values, nihilistic futility threatens to strip away even the will to live.

To recapitulate, this section proceeds from the premise that the pursuit of meaning should be prioritized over temporary states of happiness. Meaning, in this context, is defined as comprising of three principal dimensions: coherence, significance, and direction. Both the *will to live* and the *will to power* can, in their own respective ways, contribute to these three constituents. Accordingly, the inquiry concludes that what is ultimately of value is not the experience of transient satisfaction, but a genuine commitment to one's chosen mode of life. Societal value, too, comes under scrutiny, with the ultimate understanding being that the actions we undertake must hold perceived value in order to contribute to the generation of meaning. Whether or not those values are tied to some *principle of sufficient reason* or can be created *ex nihilo* is uncertain; for Schopenhauer, value remains grounded in human nature and collective consciousness, while for Nietzsche it is to be created afresh in each individual.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Implications for a Secular Age

An analysis conducted through the abstract method of metaphysical inquiry is such that the conclusions mentioned herein elude empirical verification, as they vary according to each subject's unique perspective or identity. After all, how can one truly know how one's happiness compares to that of another or, further, "how can one judge the authenticity of someone else's life?"[165] Nevertheless, I will endeavour to outline some potential paths forward. In light of this acknowledgment of subjectivity, I do not claim that religious belief constitutes knowledge in the sense of justified true belief, nor do I attempt to defend its epistemic status. Instead, I aim to highlight some existential and psychological functions religion may serve. Firstly, religion is for many people an important aspect of life, providing solace and comfort in the face of death. "God is something more real than a mere moral order of the world,"[166] writes Feuerbach, and thus has a perceptible impact on how people act, think, and feel. Belief in a God can not only make one feel a part of some bigger, meaningful venture but can relieve some of the weight of responsibility one feels when determining one's actions. Baumeister even claims that one of the most important benefits of religion is "the capacity to make suffering tolerable," and likens religion to a painkiller in its ability to blunt difficult emotions.[167] If, as Schopenhauer writes, all is cause and effect, it is easy to quickly become wrapped up in heavy concerns over the consequences of one's actions. Faith in a supreme being can help shift the burden of that responsibility to another entity and allow one to live life less anxiously. At the same time, as Nietzsche points out, religion can hinder self-advancement. When carried to an extreme, repentance can lead to crippling guilt and self-abasement. In this state, an afterlife ceases to seem like a welcome reward at the end of a life well lived, instead becoming an escape from life and something desperately yearned for. At this juncture, the discourse positions asceticism against hedonism and piety against self-love.

[165] Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus,* 145.

[166] Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, Great Books in Philosophy (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 115.

[167] Roy F. Baumeister, *Meanings of Life.* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), 194.

5.1 Re-evaluation—or Disintegration—of Values

Ultimately, religious belief in its best form can promote well-being and inspire an individual to live an ethical life. While not the only basis for ethics, it has indisputably shaped the moral standards of the world. Abandoning ethics entirely might, as Nietzsche says, result in the emergence of certain *Übermensch* types, but it would also likely deteriorate the current social system into something resembling a contract agreement such as Thomas Hobbes portrayed in his *Leviathan.* Like Hobbes' view of human nature, where man is possessed of "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death,"[168] Nietzsche sees life as a struggle for supremacy, even if it is only supremacy over one's own weaknesses. All "laws of nature, as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and, in sum, doing to others as we would be done to" are directly "contrary to our natural passions."[169] Unlike the *Leviathan,* however, Nietzsche does not see all humans as being fundamentally equal.[170] Rather, only some are able to rise to the level of the *Übermensch*, while others are born to be part of the herd. His system is one of inequality, in which the strong alone achieve greatness, while the weak fare far worse. This hyper-individuality ostracizes and condemns, going contrary to a great many pre-existing moral standards in the world today. If the goal is not to benefit merely a few individuals, but to increase the well-being of the *whole* of society, then the abandonment of traditional morality leads to the abandonment of any pretense of levelling the playing field. If there is meant to be "a great ladder of hierarchy and value differentiation between people,"[171] then some are meant to rule and others to be subordinate. Nietzsche's world is each to himself, and while it gives the individual the freedom to pursue their own ambitions and motivations, it can also lead to the "disruption, erosion, and occasional destruction of several of the major value bases"[172] of society. Faced with this "chronic shortage"[173] of values which can be held up as motivators and legislators of choice, Nietzsche's path can lead to the fragmentation of meaning and a lack of direction. As Baumeister points out, "The very recognition that values can be personal is an

[168] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chapter 11, 70.
[169] *Ibid.,* ch. 17, 117.
[170] *Ibid.*, ch. 18, 86. "Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind..."
[171] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* 151, section 257.
[172] Baumeister, *Meanings of Life*, 92.
[173] *Ibid.,* 92

important indication that values have declined in power."[174] Without common evaluative standards, the institutions and relationships that depend on mutual understanding—for example, political community, education, even social trust—face increasing instability. The implication here is that total disregard of society and self-legislation, such as Nietzsche's *Übermensch* exemplifies, cannot be upheld; in order to fulfill their function, values require the backing of humanity as a whole and not one sole human validation.

Modern society is now at a crossroads, as the fight for subjectivity and acceptance of diverse values has resulted in a seeming lack of any unanimous standards whatsoever. In a world where each person becomes a law unto themselves, finding a stable moral consensus ceases to matter. This situation invites reflection not only on the phenomenon of moral relativism but also on what might be described as a condition of existential estrangement or fragmentation. Is life best characterized as a naturalistic competition of survival of the fittest, or can human beings find some common ground upon which to base a sentiment of universal compassion and sympathy? At what point does sympathy do more harm than good? The ultimate irony of contemporary society is that as it becomes increasingly globalized and interconnected, effectively making Schopenhauer's grasp of the shared essence of humanity a lived reality, there is also a marked tendency towards individualization and fluidity of beliefs and values. At the same time, public discourse is increasingly marked by strong moralizing claims, even as the foundations of those claims often remain contested or unclear. Everything risks becoming open to interpretation if all such interpretations are deemed valid, and such interpretation is infinitely mutable. The death of God may have freed society from historical enslavement, but, for many, no re-evaluation of morals has yet taken place. This brings to light the possibility that moral rules exist not merely to enslave and dictate life, but to unify disparate people under a common value system. Morality, then, is contingent upon some degree of objectivity, some universalizable 'essence' of human nature as can be found in Schopenhauerian philosophy or religion.

Returning to the topic of the will, it is clear in both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's writings that the will can be led astray; reason is a necessary process to keep it on course. If

[174] Baumeister, *Meanings of Life,* 87.

morality is to be more than an illusion, as Schopenhauer suggests, or a mere tool of the weak, as Nietzsche argues, it must serve both the pursuit of self-mastery and the cohesion of society. The ultimate task is not to abandon values entirely but to refine them—finding a path between blind submission and unbridled will, between resignation and dominance, where meaning can be reclaimed without falling into nihilism or oppression. The pursuit of self-mastery must be reconciled with a moral framework that can revive and direct not just the few but the many. From this point, it is up to the individual to determine whether they will achieve the greatness that is theirs to achieve.

5.2 The Value of Things

Religion, philosophy, and art are all focal points for value creation. All fill the void of nihilistic desolation; all offer the solace of believing that life is not in vain. The human will is not necessarily content with mere survival and thus needs one or all of these points, whether spiritual, intellectual or aesthetic, to fill the existential void. Ultimately, both philosophers circle around the conclusion that the will, whether as an irrational drive or an innate assertion of power, is fundamentally a quest for value. Perceived value is the bedrock of purposeful existence; it is the foundation upon which individuals and cultures construct their artistic, religious, and philosophical edifices to provide some reason for life. In attempting to inquire into which philosophy better serves humankind, the conclusion I came to is that ascribing to the lived philosophy of either Schopenhauer or Nietzsche can, in its own way, fulfill the same overarching need. Purpose, significance, meaning: these are not fixed objectives that can only be reached through one specific path. They are goalposts that can be met in a variety of ways and are different for each individual. This makes a qualitative judgement of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's respective philosophies impossible to accomplish, yet, ultimately, unnecessary.

As to the question of whether traditional morality is worth preserving in our modern world, this is contingent primarily on the motivating force it still possesses. The value ascribed to this ethical system determines its purpose: lose the belief in and the weight accorded to a value system, and that system rapidly loses its utility. Humanity's existing moral structure is only as beneficial as the value invested in it; when that commitment wanes, so too does the framework's capacity to guide us. As Nietzsche's critique of this moral tradition shows,

Christianity is not a perfect, universalizable solution that ensures the greatness of all. Nietzsche astutely recognized the need not for an abandonment of value, but a recreation. In attempting to create new values, one can recall the warning found in Schopenhauer's work: one ought not to allow the will's ceaseless striving to overcome the intellect. The interplay between these two perspectives emphasizes the idea that value itself, while it might contain universally common grounds across humankind, is not wholly static. Values are continuously being redefined through an ever-evolving quest for meaning. Hanson and VanderWeele even propose that the ultimate measure of meaning is found in some "hybrid" or "integrated" perspective of objective and subjective definitions; there must be some coherence between the all-encompassing "meaning of life" and the individualized "meaning of *a* life."[175]

Nietzsche's eternal recurrence leaves the self to judge the value of one's life, while Schopenhauer's concept of redemption leaves this judgement up to an objective definition of existence; in both cases, there is no way to truly know which is the 'right' set of values. Collective human striving might inform where the role of the will lies in this adjudication of good and bad, but only the individual can determine which ideal they will follow. Whether for better or for worse, behind each striving will is a mind capable of deciding on a given course, with the potential to enable the will or to repress it. Ultimately, it appears that the search for meaning need not implicate unearthing universal truths. Rather, it can embrace the transformative challenge of aligning one's own moral compass, for through its formation, the will is affirmed. Whether this aligns with or strays from the existing outline, an awareness of the all-too-human nature of this struggle can help give a broader assessment. In a world where traditional frameworks and beliefs may falter, may be challenged or questioned, this value-oriented pursuit breathes purpose into existence.

5.3 Art and Willing

I will return once more to the topic of art, not to survey the entire aesthetic systems of either philosopher—such an undertaking would require its own thesis—but to address one issue closely tied to the topic of this paper: What role does religion play in the genesis and ultimate

[175] Hanson and VanderWeele, "The Comprehensive Measure of Meaning: Psychological and Philosophical Foundations."

meaning of art? Historically, much of what we call "art" was not produced for beauty's sake, or autonomous gratification, but as a vehicle for worship and moral instruction. Consider, for example, Byzantine icons, Gothic cathedrals, or medieval devotional chants, all of which are Christian examples in which artistic expression served a spiritual or didactic function. Even at the time of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's writing, religion permeated artistic creation and propagation. Schopenhauer revered figures such as Bach, Beethoven, and Goethe, all of whose artistic production was deeply influenced by Christian faith. In their works, the artist's individual will is directed towards an extrinsic ideal—namely, the glorification of God or the communication of spiritual profundity. Here, art serves not as a catharsis of subjective drives but as an instrumental medium anchored to a higher communal or exegetical purpose. By contrast, art movements from the 19th century onwards, beginning with Romanticism and extending through Realism and into contemporary post-modernism, reflect a marked decline in religious influence in art. Even during the lifetimes of both philosophers, art had begun to transform, turning from the dreamlike visions of romanticism to the pictorial and socially conscious works of realism. While religious motifs did not disappear entirely, their dominance in the visual arts diminished as artists increasingly turned toward human experience, nature, and social critique as central subjects. Today, it is fair to say that much contemporary art is politicized, secularized, and commodified rather than devotional in nature. Now, the creative impulse seems less driven by spiritual ideals and more by individual expression or sociopolitical critique. This shift suggests that the very *will* that compels artistic creation has changed in both origin and nature. The following paragraphs will attempt to answer whether this will remains tethered to an external ideal or has become self-contained, manifesting either as an autonomous pursuit of aesthetic form or as a self-referential critique of society.

The observation of art's changing societal role gives rise to two interrelated questions. First, when art claims to exist 'for its own sake,' does it not, even in that claim, tacitly presuppose some external ideal, whether moral, spiritual, or communal, by which it achieves its fullest significance? Second, if one posits that art benefits human well-being, how does this relate to concepts of the will? Can one recognize in the artist's autonomous impulse a purely immanent 'will to create,' an engine of expression and transformation that needs no further legitimization? Or must artistic creation be linked to a self and a will, such that it is essentially

personal? There seems, in Schopenhauer's view of art, to be a contradiction: art is seen as an escape from suffering, yet its creation and appreciation are as inextricably tied to earthly values as anything else. Schopenhauer attempts to justify this by clarifying that art does not constitute an absence of will, but frees one from the *individual* sense of willing. It is pure, objective will, stripped of the phenomenal world, for art constitutes "the Ideas that are the immediate and adequate objectivity of the thing-in-itself,"[176] and, ultimately, the will. Schopenhauer posits that art repeats "the eternal Ideas apprehended through pure contemplation,"[177] even going so far as to say that music is the highest embodiment of objective will; music, for him, is not merely a representation, but the will itself. He writes of music that "the composer reveals the innermost nature of the world and expresses the profoundest wisdom in a language that his reasoning faculty does not understand,"[178] thereby admitting that art calls upon an element of human nature that is not found in the mind.

Though recognizing the inevitability of the will in artistic creation, Schopenhauer nonetheless insists that the artist extirpate their *individual* will from the creation process. One might question this, however, and suggest that while art can help one to grasp objective truths in an abstract, ideational manner, it is not through mere disconnected, impersonal contemplation. Even art that manages to transgress cultural and historical boundaries and remain relevant across time and place is, nevertheless, produced within the context of a highly specific set of ideas and beliefs. Art is borne of intense emotion, passion, and reflection, inspired not in the quietude of the detached, ego-less mind but in the turbulence of the spirit. Art cannot help but reflect society; society, in turn, shapes what we value, and, thus, what the will wills. If art is a manifestation of the will, it is counter-productive to repress this same striving upon which artistic creation is contingent or try to universalize and depersonalize the will. The individuated experience is important, as is the societal context. As Golomb aptly points out, "To make the personal and social manifestation possible, any creation, even the most individual and idiosyncratic, requires the linguistic and social fabric as a necessary condition […] Hence there is *no* power and no authenticity without society, and their essential manifestations are

[176] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 184.
[177] *Ibid.,* 184.
[178] *Ibid.,* 260.

impossible apart from any social context."[179] Music, for example, did not develop in a vacuum. It progressed slowly and methodically, building upon generations of composers. Its evolution took place through particularities of temperament, culture, and historical circumstance, each composer adding their voice to an archive of subjective works. To compose a piece does not extinguish the ego, for in every human creation, there must be thought, motivation, and intent. Art is fueled by a longing for something beyond the mundane or the prosaic and by a desire for a better understanding of the mysteries of existence, much the same as God, philosophy, or spiritual contemplation. Creation can be further nurtured by spiritual sources and the experience of intense emotions. Thus, art cannot be severed from subjective experience. Schopenhauer's repression of the will does not liberate art from the physical world, but, rather, denies it the very energy that sustains it.

This is where Nietzsche's notion of the *will to power* offers a useful counterpoint. The creative impulse, reducible neither to utility nor mere survival, can be conceived of within Nietzsche's framework of the will. Here, the will to create is a force that compels the artist to produce for the sake of expansion, transformation, and self-overcoming. Art, in its essence, is an act of transformation: turning one's thoughts, desires and emotions into tangible manifestations. If today, art no longer fulfills a spiritual or religious function, seemingly abandoning a higher end as its primary object, it does not necessarily follow that art has become an end in itself. Even in abstract or surreal art, its end must be oriented somewhere else: aesthetic, emotional or otherwise. Placed in a secular context, art is stripped of a higher ideological purpose, yet some other transcendent value must, nonetheless, arise to give it direction.

The will to create art, if one grants that it hinges upon a societal basis of ideals and desires, is thus a will that changes through context. If, in a secularized society, art no longer aspires to a shared spiritual order, does it still require a set of widely held ideals—political, moral, or aesthetic—to ground its significance? Either way, art is a manifestation of the will, and it *requires* the will for its creation. Yet it seems that this will cannot merely be directed towards creation itself, but is teleological, always inclined towards an ultimate end. If the artist's

[179] Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus,* 80.

will was entirely absent, there could be no intentionality, no selection of medium or form, and no aesthetic ordering of experience. Thus, Schopenhauer's repression of the will may be less conducive to artistic expression and contemplation than he believed. Far from requiring the repression of the will, art thrives on its sublimation, on its unique ability to channel desire, conflict, and striving into meaningful form. It is this very act of shaping chaos into order, of manifesting inner life into aesthetic form, that proves beneficial to well-being, inspiration, and artistic genius. Creativity, then, is not a denial of life but a profound engagement with it, suggesting that the most fruitful relationship to art is not one of withdrawal and objective contemplation, but of earnest participation.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The foregoing research has aimed to explore the contradictory philosophical perspectives of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on the nature of the will and its role in human striving. Schopenhauer's *will to live*, characterized by suffering and renunciation, stands in stark opposition to Nietzsche's *will to power*, which affirms life through self-overcoming and creative force. Their respective interpretations of Christian morality further deepen this divide: Schopenhauer sees asceticism as a means of escaping suffering, while Nietzsche condemns Christian ethics as a hindrance to human flourishing. By examining these perspectives side by side, I have highlighted how the Christian religious tradition, particularly its doctrines of suffering, sacrifice, and redemption, shapes each philosopher's conception of the will and influences broader discussions on moral direction and human actualization.

In attending to the central research question—whether the will to power or the will to live provides a more viable framework for human flourishing in a world in which many no longer possess sincere conviction in an over-arching divine purpose—I have argued that both perspectives provide insights capable of generating both meaning and intention in modern life. While Schopenhauer's renunciation of desire provides a path to alleviate and detach from suffering, Nietzsche's stance on struggle and self-overcoming offers a way to fully embrace and maximize one's abilities. The role of Christian morality in shaping human striving remains inherently ambivalent: while historically, Christianity provided structure and ethical cohesion to Western society, it also imposes limitations on the individual that may hinder an authentic, flourishing existence. By holding Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's respective philosophies up against a background of religious influence, I have sought to illuminate not only their historical significance but also their relevance to contemporary discussions concerning meaning, ethics, and human fulfillment.

In discussing meaning and will, I found it also necessary to consider the uniquely human creation of art. As I argue, art cannot be divorced from the will that animates its production. Whether borne of faith, conflict, or desire, artistic creation remains rooted in the human impulse to shape meaning from experience and to wrest beauty and consolation from the depths of human suffering. Isolating art from a spiritual or value-oriented foundation risks compromising

the personal, emotional, and societal conditions from which its creation arises. Though not bound to religion, spiritual or sacred motivations not necessarily synonymous with organized religion, can enhance artistic creation and enrich art's resonance within society. For this reason, I contend that a total repression of the will, such as Schopenhauer proposes, ought to be approached with caution, lest in silencing the will, one also extinguishes the creative spark it kindles.

To the perennially important question of how to live, neither Nietzsche nor Schopenhauer supply a definitive answer. However, their contrasting views offer possibilities for navigating life's fundamental struggles. Ultimately, this study reiterates the necessity of forging one's own path—whether through the ascetic detachment of Schopenhauer or the self-affirmation of Nietzsche—and critically evaluating the manifold facets of moral behaviour, desire, and the will that continuously shape existence. Nietzsche's prophet does not prescribe that one sequester oneself in a cave or eschew society outright; the path to authentic existence is not confined to any exact reenactment of Zarathustra's quest. When Zarathustra declares, "this is my way; where is yours?" he offers neither command nor conclusion, but "a challenge and a promise of what is possible."[180]

The crucial lesson that can be taken from this study is the need for effort, be it applied as resistance against obstacles or as enterprising creativity. Whether viewing life from the lens of Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, theism or atheism, philosophy or psychology, it is abundantly clear that a good life does not come from passivity. Even the act of repressing the will requires assertive action towards a goal. Enjoy the Sisyphean burden of living—imagine Sisyphus happy—and life will yield its own meaning. Choose a path and remain steadfast upon it, find or define oneself and stay faithful to that identity (or lack thereof): these are not abstract ideals, but living principles that anchor oneself within the flow of everyday existence. Even if life, as Schopenhauer teaches, is inherently filled with suffering, it is still valuable and worthwhile. When adrift in the breakwater of existential nothingness, turn again to swim against the current, no matter how turbulent it may be. Let challenges and desires become the streams that lead to something greater; let pain be the precursor not to pleasure, but to purpose.

[180] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 195.

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