

reaching" in *Dickerson v. United States*, 520 U.S. 428. More recently even, in *Berhuis v. Thompkins*, 560 U.S., note the decision of the court under Chief Justice John Roberts in the consideration of what constitutes a sufficiently clear gesture to invoke the right against self-incrimination, that they must speak and request a lawyer. Apparently, three hours of remaining silent under extreme interrogation was not a sufficient cause to believe that the suspect had chosen to remain silent. The man under questioning *obviously* didn't realize that in order to remain silent, he had to *speak*. This "counter-intuitive" locution, as Justice Sotomayor soberly recognizes, "turns *Miranda* upside-down." Justice Kennedy delivered the opinion: "Thompkins did not say that he wanted to remain silent or that he did not want to talk with the police. Had he made either of these simple, unambiguous statements, he would have invoked his 'right to cut off questioning.' Here he did neither, so he did not invoke his right to remain silent." The contradiction is apparent; the position is troubling.

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Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's Quest in a Godless World and the Will to Think that Drove Them

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ABSTRACT: How does one create meaning in a godless world? The pursuit to answer this question would consume the philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Each would develop opposing solutions to the question. Schopenhauer argued for a radical rejection of desire, or will, while Nietzsche promoted a radical exercise of the self, which he called the *will to power*. Both were right in identifying human *will* as the solution on how to live in a godless world. Yet, each philosopher, in his own way, went too far in his argument. As both worked to create meaning in the godless world, they had answered their own question, not with their particular solutions, but with the act of philosophizing. It is the will to think that defines our humanness.

Nietzsche famously said, "God is dead" in §108 in his *Will to Power*. In *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer's atheist sentiment is clear as we read that "A religion [... is] intended for the innumerable multitude who [... are] incapable of examination and thought" (875). It was the problem posed by a seemingly godless world that both men's philosophies addressed. For Schopenhauer, the solution was in a radical rejection of desire, which he called the *will to life*. Nietzsche, on the other hand, promoted a radical exercise of the self, which he called the *will to power*. Both were right in identifying the will as the solution on how to live in a godless world. Yet each philosopher, in his own way, went too far with his argument. The solution to the problem lies more in their example of *practicing philosophy* than in the ideas their particular philosophies offered.

The Endless Cycle

"No roses without thorns. But many thorns without a rose."

Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*

Schopenhauer held a deep pessimism towards life, and he saw only misery in the exercise of human will, desire, and striving. Schopenhauer's observations of the upheavals around him in the 18th and 19th centuries led him to believe happiness could not be obtained. Life, in essence, was a swirl of desires that could not be

satisfied: desires for more material, more pleasure, and more power. If people did not separate themselves from will (desire), they would be trapped, tormented forever by the relentless cycle of will. As Schopenhauer described it, life consists of desires, followed by the briefest, momentary satisfaction, which leads to boredom, and then back to an ever-consuming desire for more (Berman, xxxi).

Schopenhauer's "will to life" prevented any lasting happiness and satisfaction. Life was just a vicious cycle of desiring, striving, longing, craving, and hence suffering. In a god-centered universe, struggling, even suffering, can lead to salvation. Without God, life was meaningless and existence little more than a struggling hell (Berman, xxix). Therefore, said Schopenhauer, "suffering is essential to life" (339).

In Schopenhauer's pessimistic worldview, the only solution was to escape from this cycle. This meant the absolute and ultimate rejection of human desire. According to Schopenhauer's absolute pessimism, this rejection of desire would not result in an enlightened status or some nobility of spirit, as some Asian religions maintain; rather, it would merely minimize the extent of the suffering. For Schopenhauer, a total rejection of the life force in humans answered the godless universe.

Schopenhauer's ideas became very influential, and twenty years later they still resounded loudly when a young phi-

ology student named Friedrich Nietzsche first encountered them. "It was in this condition of need, distress and desire," wrote Nietzsche "that I came to know Schopenhauer" (*Schopenhauer*, 2). Nietzsche mainly appreciated Schopenhauer's attempt to solve the problem of meaning in a godless world and celebrated him as the "first honest German atheist" (*Gay Science*, 357). But whereas Schopenhauer saw nothing worth striving for and life as an endless cycle creating only suffering, Nietzsche hoped to capture the human life force (the Will to Power) and direct it to a new goal to replace God: the "Over-man."

The Over-man

This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!

The Will to Power, §1064

Although holding Schopenhauer in the greatest esteem, Nietzsche entirely rejected Schopenhauer's "will to life" and eventually developed his own solution. Whereas Schopenhauer saw the world itself as the problem to be overcome, Nietzsche believed that it was society that needed to be overcome. Whereas Schopenhauer was only pessimistic because he saw no possibility of reformation, as the problem was in the nature of things, Nietzsche saw the problem in the nature of society and the state of human consciousness at that time. There might be suffering in the world, but Nietzsche refuted its pertinence in his work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he concluded that happiness could grow from misery and tragedy (De Bono, 162). This happiness, he thought, could only be obtained by the "Over-man," "a stronger species, a higher type that arises and preserves itself under different conditions from those of the average man" (*Nietzsche Will*, 866). The Over-man would pave a path to greatness and rise above society to do so. Nietzsche saw Christianity and Christian ethics as forces that prevented the Over-man's rise and, in turn, despised and dismissed both as signs of weakness of will.

With further development, Nietzsche would believe that a perfect society would be that of one ruled by will and power, under the leadership of the Over-man. Refuting Schopenhauer, the Over-man created meaning and purpose in a meaningless world and proved that desire could be fulfilled.

In essence, Nietzsche's Over-man replaced God as the goal toward which people should strive, "to become as God," as Nietzsche wrote (*Will*, 17). His Over-man showed that even without a god to pave the golden path, one could rise toward goals that would embody greatness and give meaning. With this, his solution was given to the problem of a godless world.

Napoleon Bonaparte

"There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous."

Napoleon, writing about the retreat from Moscow (1812)

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, each in his own way, went too far in their arguments. Schopenhauer's pessimism and prescription for ending suffering by denying human will did not take into account that human will and desire lead to happiness, no matter how momentary. Nietzsche's philosophical push for unbounded human will did not take enough into consideration the point that too much will can, in fact, lead to suffering. Their absolutism on the subject of will made each of their philosophies only applicable in an ideal world of their own making, not in the real world in which their philosophies would have to be lived out. These limitations are most clearly illustrated by a more famous contemporary of Schopenhauer and near contemporary of Nietzsche: the French general and aspiring emperor, Napoleon.

Napoleon Bonaparte was born into a low-income, noble family. With a class system in France, he was destined to move no further up in rank in French society (McKay *et al.*, 712). Nevertheless, by 1799, Napoleon was ruler of France, and

by 1804, he was the head of a growing empire. His genius on the battlefield made him an unstoppable force, and the European states saw him as one, yielding to his power, as he plowed through Europe. Surely, Napoleon was the epitome of the Over-man. The Over-man was to overcome the painful embarrassment that is humankind. In accordance, Napoleon had risen above humankind's most prominent construction, namely, society and the monarchy that had ruled France for hundreds of years. In this way, Napoleon had, as Nietzsche would have wished, overcome humanity by dismantling its construction. He had conquered all around him, utilizing the will to power as his greatest asset. Napoleon shows that Nietzsche had correctly discovered the "will to power" in people and its ability to prevail in this world.

Yet, at the height of his power, with nearly all of Europe at his mercy, Napoleon fell. Schopenhauer's endless cycle is now in full view. Napoleon's growing desire for more power led to what Napoleon might have felt as satisfaction. However, Schopenhauer would know it to be only momentary. Napoleon's desire for more power, territory, and glory, through Schopenhauer's endless cycle of life, led Napoleon ultimately to overextend himself by his relentless ambitions and led him to his final misery. Schopenhauer stressed the pessimism of will, and this, too, is echoed in Napoleon's fall and the final meaninglessness of his life.

Napoleon and countless other dominant figures who rose and fell display both Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's philosophies and shed light on the truth that both hold. In Napoleon's rise to emperor, paving his own path to greatness, Nietzsche's concept of the Over-man is displayed. Simultaneously, this rise marks a failure of Schopenhauer's philosophy to recognize such advancements in life. Napoleon's consequent fall while pursuing his desires supports Schopenhauer's endless cycle of desire that leaves life in a state of misery and meaninglessness, exposing the unrealistic

optimism Nietzsche held for the Over-man. In other words, Nietzsche was unable to recognize how will could lead to anyone's fall, while Schopenhauer was unable to see the rise.

Certainly, Schopenhauer would argue that despite Napoleon's rise to power, his ultimate fall validates the will to life. Yet, Schopenhauer's solution to the godless world cannot account for any such rise to any extent. Furthermore, what Schopenhauer did not consider, which Nietzsche saw "as more dangerous than any vice," is that desires continue even in a godless world (*Nietzsche Will*, 54). People's natural desires of hunger, thirst, and more desires for greater wealth, knowledge, and control over daily activities are the forces that keep people living. It is not the separation from desires that prevents suffering but rather the fulfillment of them that creates happiness. In a religious worldview, God, too, is a desire. A world more destructive than one with no God is a world with no desires.

Yet, Nietzsche's desire-pursuing Over-man was too optimistic, and Nietzsche focused too much on the rise of the Over-man and his glory. Nietzsche would object to this criticism by explaining that he was not overly optimistic but rather Napoleon is an insufficient example of an Over-man. Yet, other examples of Over-men's ending in disaster raise doubt about this counter argument. Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party would take Nietzsche as one of their prime influences and would live the life of the Over-man. Hitler was quoted saying, "Man is becoming God – that is the simple fact. Man is God in the making" (Keith, 151), thus demonstrating the concept of Nietzsche's Over-man. However, Nietzsche did not consider that when many people are all pursuing their will to power in pursuit of the Over-man, conflict is the inevitable result. By raising will to an almost divine level, the Over-man's internal desires eventually end in disaster. Nietzsche did not see how so-called Over-men, such as Napoleon and later Adolph Hitler, were bound to fall.

These apparent limitations in both Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's philosophies represent a flawed solution to how one should live and create meaning in a godless world. Nevertheless, the example of *how* they lived, philosophizing and daring to think and to create a path to meaning in a godless world, is perhaps the answer to the question to which they dedicated their lives. It was their hunger for knowledge, their intellectual lifestyles, which paved their own paths in a godless world. It was their will to think.

The Will to Think

"Every art and every philosophy is a remedy for sufferers."
Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

"I think therefore I am" (Descartes). Thinking for a human is the primary force in life (Frankl, 97). As Pascal once said, humans are like "a thinking reed" (in Palmer, 279). This thinking is the genesis of our evolution, the basis of our humanness, and the vehicle for our perceived domination of the earth. Thinking: the solution to the godless world. It is this focused string of thought that is the *will to think*, the human impulse to search for knowledge. The will to think and its quest for knowledge creates meaning. The old belief in God was faltering. People like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche presented solutions. But the real solution was in the pursuit of new ideas.

As people began to utilize their *will to think*, no longer was God needed to provide meaning; rather, their pursuit of knowledge developed a path separate from God. We see the will to think replace God in the lives of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and hence their consequent atheism. Even on a larger scale, at every period in human existence when the will to think was at its height, people began to "waver in many old beliefs [...] because of an increasing knowledge and study of humanity itself" (Palmer, 279). However, the will to think does not exclude religion; rather, to a larger extent, religion exercises it. Prayer, a central practice of

worship in all religions, in essence, is the will to think, as the person engaged in prayer is a person engaged in deep thought. Yet, as the Scientific Revolution and the period of Enlightenment would show, when separated from religion, the will to think has the consequence of widening a gap between humans and God.

The Scientific Revolution and the period of Enlightenment that followed were important periods in philosophy and heightened the sense of reason. All the major philosophic figures of the Enlightenment and of the Scientific Revolution – Thomas Paine, Galileo Galilei, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume – were, in essence, addressing the new godless world through their pursuits of knowledge. In these men, the meaning that the belief in God provoked was quickly replaced by the quest of knowledge. "The old heavens were exploded," historian R. R. Palmer wrote, "Humans were no longer the center of creation" (278). As the will to think would have it, these philosophers existed solely for the development of knowledge and the search for meaning.

The will to think is deeply rooted in a person's desire for meaning. In the majority of humans, the will to think is utilized to create meaning. Viktor E. Frankl, the author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, wrote, "This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him (man) alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning" (97). All philosophers and scientists have based their lives on the will to think in their pursuit of understanding and knowledge. As Frankl would argue, this will to think is the search for meaning. The study of the physical to the metaphysical to the spiritual is the will to think in action. The will to think is the creation of meaning in a godless world.

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche demonstrated the will to think at work. In both Schopenhauer's interpretation of will and Nietzsche's will to power, the driving force was not the pursuit for an answer to the godless world; rather, they were

impelled by the will to think. Perhaps both philosophers believed that they were introducing new ways of thinking and new philosophies to ponder, and to some extent they were. However, the driving force behind these philosophies is nothing new. The will to think is part of what defines our humanness. It has pushed the minds of the greatest atheistic thinkers and also religious philosophers as well.

It would seem that if we are constantly thinking, and thinking is indeed meaningful, then we would be left with no desire to find meaning. Yet, like the blind spot in our visual field, this meaning sought by inquisitive thought is hidden from consciousness. Consequently, many find themselves thinking of meaning and never seem to reach its reality. Nevertheless, what the will to think brings to light is that meaning is found in the process of thought, not in its products. Likewise, as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche used their will to think to find meaning in the new godless world, they did not see that in their quest they had answered their own question.

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