Romanticism only *simulates* something revolutionary; its radicalism is feigned. It seeks "above all mildness, peacefulness, and goodness in thought and deed . . . also logic, the conceptual understandability of existence . . . in short, a certain warm narrowness that keeps away fear and encloses one in optimistic horizons." Just as Wagner began his career as a partisan of the 1848 revolutions but ended as an unctuous courtier to German princes, so Schopenhauer began with a seeming rejection of Socratic optimism, only, in the final analysis, to retreat to it. This "romantic pessimism" is thus "an altogether different kind" from Nietzsche's own, which he names here for the first time as "Dionysian pessimism." "That there still *could* be an altogether different kind of pessimism, . . . this premonition and vision belongs to me as inseparable from me, as my *proprium* and *ipsissimum*. . . . I call this pessimism of the future—for it comes! I see it coming!—*Dionysian* pessimism" (*GS* 370).

Romanticism, although it was Nietzsche's own starting point, turns out to be a kind of sham pessimism and Nietzsche here declares his independence from it. Unadulterated pessimism is only now coming into existence; only when it does can we fully appreciate its promise and dangers. Nietzsche (grateful for the education he provided) nonetheless rejects Schopenhauer, not because the latter is too pessimistic, *but because he is not pessimistic enough*.

## The Pessimism of Strength

Having, by a process of elimination, come some distance closer to understanding the pessimism of which Nietzsche could and does approve, it remains to give a more detailed account of it. Certainly his pessimism remains a kind of "no-saying," a rejection of traditional morality. But he emphasizes the *activity* involved in such a no-saying and considers it, by itself, to be something valuable. The alternative title Nietzsche gave one of his final books is perhaps a good starting point. *How to Philosophize with a Hammer* is the second name provided for *Twilight of the Idols*. Throughout the book, however, there is little reference to this "hammer" and readers are often left wondering just what it is.[34] In the foreword,

[34] The distance between the text and title is partly explained by the fact that Nietzsche only hit upon the latter after the book was written. The working title "Idleness of a Psychologist" Nietzsche discarded after his friend Peter Gast objected. Certainly the word "idleness" (*Müssiggang*) seems particularly inapposite for such vibrant and violent prose as the book contains—but perhaps it was Nietzsche's original intention that the title be understood ironically (i.e., "*our* idleness seems vigorous to you? Imagine what it would be like if we psychologists ever exerted ourselves!"). All the other book-titles of 1888 (*Ecce Homo, The Anti-Christ, The Case of Wagner*) are ironic to the point of sarcasm. Nietzsche concluded, we might suppose, that if his friend and admirer failed to get the joke in the original title neither would any of his other readers, and so he produced the more obvious pun, *Götzen-Dämmerung*.



Nietzsche likens the hammer to "a tuning-fork" with which he sounds out the hollowness of idols. But this does not square well with his characterization of the work as "a declaration of war" and does not, in any case, help us to understand the *nature* of the hammer. The final section of the book is entitled "The Hammer Speaks" but is simply a short quotation from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Perhaps the hammer is Zarathustra himself then? But this is only to further beg the question.[35]

In his notes, however, Nietzsche repeatedly refers to pessimism as a kind of "hammer," one used to break down and break apart traditional ways of thinking (e.g., *WP* 132, 1055). This destruction is healthy and recuperative on its own, even apart from some rebuilding that may come: "The hammer: a teaching which through setting loose the death-seeking pessimism brings about an extraction of the most vital" (*KGW* 8:1:108). What does it mean to wield pessimism as a tool? In the first place, of course, it means to attack existing moralities, "to teach destructive ways of thinking" (*KGW* 7:3:210). In this task, pessimism is an all-purpose instrument because it attacks the basis of all moralities, not just some of them. By denying the existence of any natural order to the universe and emphasizing the continuous flow of becoming and time, pessimism is as critical of utilitarian morality as it is of the Christian or Kantian variety. But its effect is not *simply* a critical one. Even if destruction is a necessary prelude, that is not the end in itself. Hammers can also be used to put something together—or, as a smith does, to reconfigure some existing object or material into a new shape. Likewise pessimism, "In the hand of the strongest becomes simply a hammer and instrument with which one can make oneself a new pair of wings" (*KGW* 8:1:109). This metaphor would seem to indicate, again, that the liberation of pessimism is not just a negative one (liberation *from* morality) but also a positive liberation, a new arena of possibility or technique of life is to be opened. To remove chains is one thing—to build wings another.

But again, one wants to ask: Wings of what sort? At this point, we can begin to perceive the difference between Nietzsche's pessimism and pre-

[35] This question is directly addressed by Thomas Brobjer in a short article that contains much useful information and suggests that the question has an easy solution, namely, that we read "hammer" simply as short-hand for "eternal recurrence." While there are some notes to suggest this reading, Brobjer ignores others that connect hammers with pessimism. And while there is merit in the idea of connecting the two terms, simply equating them creates as many problems as it solves—it hardly seems plausible, for example, that we are meant to grasp hold of eternal recurrence and use it as a tool in the way that the metaphor suggests. If anything, eternal recurrence is something that takes hold of us, not vice versa. See Brobjer 2000.

vious ones. Even the past pessimisms Nietzsche admired, like the Greeks', came to an end with the destruction of illusions. In his account, the pre-Socratics evoked an ethos of virtual paralysis. They taught one (as Buddhism does) to be at peace with the world's chaos but not to seek to alter it. In a long note entitled "Critique of previous pessimism," Nietzsche outlines his alternative:

> *Our* pessimism: the world does not have the value we thought it had. . . . Initial result: it seems worth less; . . . simply in this sense are we pessimists; namely with the will to admit this revaluation to ourselves unreservedly and not to tell ourselves the same old story, not to lie to ourselves.
>
> That is precisely how we find the pathos that impels us to seek *new values*. In sum: the world might be far more valuable than we used to believe; . . . while we thought we accorded it the highest interpretation, we may not even have given our human existence a moderately fair value. (*KGW* 8:1:248)

Nietzsche is treading a delicate line since, as we have seen, he has also said that it is a mistake to try to give the world *any* overarching value. But, as is indicated here, this does not mean we should cease to value anything at all. Rather, the withdrawal of an overarching account of the world's value impels one to seek (importantly plural) "new values." No single one of these can replace the old value-system. But separately and collectively, they might give us more reasons to continue living than can any overarching Meaning of Life. Christian morality and its offshoots sought to overcome thoughts of suicide with one ultimate duty, or ultimate happiness. Nietzsche's pessimism advises each of us individually to cobble together a meaning for life out of lesser goals, to organize small portions of the world ourselves—but with the ultimate result that, when these are gathered together, "the world might be far more valuable than we used to believe." Finding the will to live is not a problem that admits of a universal solution—but the individual solutions we each can arrive at may, in any case, be more credible for us than a set of prefabricated values we are instructed to reenact.

Nietzsche's inspiration here, as in so many other matters, is the example of a certain kind of art.[36] Of course, his is not the romantic idea that art puts us in touch with greater truths or the Schopenhauerian belief in the artist's "objectivity." Rather art represents that organization of a small portion of an otherwise meaningless world that gives purpose to an individual existence (*WP* 585). Art is the attempt to impose a temporary form on the inevitable transformation of the world; since the world must acquire *some* particular forms in its metamorphoses, art is "repeating in miniature, as it were, the tendency of the whole" (*WP* 617)—only now by an effort of will. Thus art for Nietzsche, as it would be as well for Camus, is not really an attempt to fight the pattern of existence, but rather to shape that pattern into something recognizable, "*to realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*" (*TI*, "What I Owe" 5). The creativity of artists is thus an enactment of their "gratitude for their existence" (*WP* 852), even when that existence is constant turmoil. Pessimism impels us to this artistic "pathos," which then itself impels us to seek new values. And pessimism impels us to this pathos because it shows us that the sense of order and timeless meanings that we have taken for granted are themselves the product of an artistic pathos—doomed in time but also replicable as achievements of the human spirit. Pessimism shows us our continuity with the universal chaos—and equally with universal creativity, for they are one and the same. Pessimism is thus a "set of wings" that helps us to traverse and navigate the fluid medium we inhabit.

When art assumes this shape, it becomes "the great seduction to life, the great stimulant to life" (*WP* 853). This is *not* to say, however, that such art must be "uplifting" in the conventional sense. Since joy in destruction may be a stimulant to life, even depictions of the most miserable things may be included: "The things they display are ugly: but *that* they display them comes from their *pleasure in the ugly*. . . . How liberating is Dostoevsky!" (*WP* 821). Nietzsche does not mean, of course, that we should all be artists but that we should approach our lives as artists do their work. If we can understand *why* an artist like Dostoevsky, who knows that art is devoid of metaphysical value and that the universe is as apt to produce ugliness and depravity as beauty and virtue, would still want to write, then we can understand why Nietzsche thinks pessimism can result in a creative pathos. Similarly, if we can see how tragedy, the "repetition in miniature" of worldly chaos can represent the liberating "joy of becoming," then we can get a sense for the political productivity of a pessimistic ethic.

Now "liberating" is not the adjective most frequently applied to Dostoevsky, but it is instructive here to consider the art that Nietzsche praised after he came to view Wagnerian opera as romantic pseudo-tragedy. In *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche tells us that he returned to hear Bizet's *Carmen* no less than twenty times. And every time, he claims, "I seemed to myself more of a philosopher, a better philosopher," and even "a better human being" (*CW* 1). What creates this effect? "This music is evil," Nietzsche writes, by way of praise. "Have more painful tragic accents ever

[36] His praise of art is not indiscriminate. He goes to great lengths to distinguish the sort of art he has in mind from that produced by the "artists of decadence" and "romanticism in art" (Wagner is always his chief example), which proceeds from "an impoverishment of life" and ends in "hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged . . . one who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of his torture, on them, branding them with it" (*WP* 852, *GS* 370).

been heard on the stage? How are they achieved? . . . Without counterfeit." The language and metaphors that Nietzsche uses for pessimism are here transferred directly to Bizet's aesthetic vision. His music "liberates the spirit" and "gives wings to thought" (*CW* 1). On the one hand, a (very modern) tragedy is depicted, one in which the characters suffer and die without redemption. Nor is this an isolated case but, we are meant to understand, a repetition in miniature of the general path of love. And yet viewing it is depressing only to the most literal-minded. The liberation consists in the opera's acknowledgment of love as a fatality, equal parts passion and terror, which the protagonists do not control. The "tragic joke" of existence is revealed and the viewer, if not the characters, understands simultaneously his (or her) freedom and powerlessness (*CW* 2). Indeed, it is precisely the recognition of our powerlessness that is liberating. So long as we cleave to the illusion that we are perfect masters of our fate, we are burdened with a bad conscience, an unredeemable debt for our own flawed character. We can never be finished with justifying what we *are*. The witnesses of *Carmen* are better, freer philosophers and human beings for setting down that burden and replacing it with a future for which they can take their genuine share of responsibility, rather than a past that they can never alter. As in the Greek tragedies, it is the acknowledgment of fate (understood here not as a particular destiny for a particular individual but simply as a general term for the forces that exceed that of the individual will), rather than the resistance to it, that liberates the spirit. It is that much easier to begin projects that are genuinely our own when they do not have to bear the responsibility of justifying their creator.

Likewise, the characters of Dostoevsky's fiction, horrible though they may be, and populating a landscape utterly devoid of morality, reveal to us the dizzying freedom that a pessimistic horizon creates, along with terrible possibilities that go along with that freedom. Though we may find the story of Raskolnikov repulsive, we grow by the exercise of measuring our distance from it, and finding that distance to be small. Equally, though, we grow from understanding that the subject of art can be the terrible and the ugly as well as the perfect and the beautiful—it helps us again to unburden ourselves of the self-despising that a retrospective morality enforces.[37] Not that we should liberate our worst impulses; rather, we should own up to them and understand those parts of ourselves as a fact rather than a sin. Modern tragedy, no less than ancient, for Nietzsche, is thus a source of solace and liberation. While I will not exaggerate

[37] Nietzsche never mentions the work of his near-contemporary Auguste Rodin and there is no evidence that he knew of it—but I think Rodin's sculptures give some sense of what is meant here.



its directly political effects, it should at least be clear why Nietzsche saw pessimism as, at root, a productive and creative ethic, rather than a soporific one. It invites us to explore along every dimension, and not just the one that the "path of history" marks out. It expands, for better or worse, the horizon of human possibility. From his perspective, it is optimistic rationality that is stifling, for it insists that there is only one path and one means with which to walk that path. Pessimism, by contrast, demonstrates the remarkable openness of the future and the remarkable diversity of trajectories open to the human species, even if they all end in death. That is the "liberation" (a word Nietzsche uses repeatedly) that is available here.

A helpful image for this situation, one that demonstrates its potential for effects beyond the individual, can be found in the practice of architecture: any sane architect must know that no building lasts forever. Built in opposition to nature (as to some extent every human structure must be), it will be attacked by nature (by wind, by water, et cetera) the moment it is completed. Whatever the purpose for which it is initially designed, that purpose will someday be superceded. However beautiful it may seem when erected, it will someday, to another set of eyes, appear ugly. Yet knowing all this, architects pursue their craft. Knowing that the universe will ultimately not tolerate their work, they continue to organize a small portion of that same universe for local purposes. The lack of an objective or metaphysical meaning for the work is no obstacle; indeed, architects often think of the generation of locally meaningful environments out of meaningless nature to be a particular goal. Equally, the lack of a preordained path to such production is the origin of an incredible variety of styles rather than of despair at the absence of a natural best form.

Of course, knowing all this does not make one into an architect, anymore than listening to Bizet makes one into a musician. But Nietzsche's claim that Bizet's music had made him a better human being is both less and more than that. One can enjoy music and admire architecture all one's life without being liberated by either. This is what Nietzsche has in mind when he complains that, although moderns claim to revere Greek tragedy, we do not experience it as a Greek audience did—and not just because of the gap in time that separates us. Pessimism is not just an ethos of artistic productivity but also, as I discuss further below, of human receptivity. It is the latter that makes the former possible. It is not just that Greek artists and viewers happened to share a perspective. Nietzsche's point is rather that the substance of pessimism, its teaching of the fundamental impermanence of the boundaries of self, rendered Greek audiences open to the suffering they witnessed on stage. This same openness is what Nietzsche claims to have rediscovered when he says that he, alone among modern philosophers (alone, perhaps, among all modern humans), "first

really experienced" pessimism. While Nietzsche is no democrat, the openness that pessimism fosters is a far cry from the elitism that he is often accused of promoting and it should be no surprise that Nietzsche once remarked, in a lecture on Sophocles, "Tragedy has always contained a pure democratic character, as it springs from the people" (*KGW* 2:3:17).[38]

. . . . . .

The lack of order in the universe can also fuel nihilism, as Nietzsche (like Dostoevsky) is well aware. Unlike the nihilist, the pessimist does not just reveal the tragic character of existence but achieves a degree of equanimity about it. This aspect of pessimism often comes across as indifference to the suffering of others, something Nietzsche is regularly, but mistakenly, accused of. What he does insist on, however, is that we not sanctify our concern for others by giving it an otherworldly origin. He advises that we not look to nature or God to express a horror of suffering on our behalf (and therefore to think of ourselves merely as concurring in their judgments). Nor should we imagine that such suffering is any less natural than happiness:

> The benefit consists in the contemplation of nature's magnificent *indifference* to good and evil. No justice in history, no goodness in nature: that is why the pessimist, if he is an artist, goes *in historicis* to those places where the absence of justice is revealed with splendid naïveté . . . and also in nature, to those places where her evil and indifferent character is not disguised. (*WP* 850)

If we choose to rebel against the suffering to be found everywhere in existence, we must take responsibility for that rebellion as our own and recognize the degree to which it is, so to speak, unnatural. Of course, the fact that nature is indifferent to good and evil is no reason for us to be so—indeed, if we succeed in creating values for ourselves to live by, such a stance would be impossible. What the pessimist is particularly opposed to is the optimistic view that suffering is to be eliminated by "history," "nature," or "reason." (Pessimism is also opposed to the idea that suffering is always unproductive—I discuss this in the next section).

Note here too Nietzsche's desire to dispel the view that pessimism leads to a disinterest in the workings of the world. Instead, he sees it as an invitation to a new critical investigation of nature and history—and even to those elements of life that we consider ugly and evil. One effect of this situation is that when we look at the world once again—without the grey-

[38] Cited in an unpublished paper by Tracy Strong, "The Tragic Ethos and the Spirit of Music," p. 15. I thank Tracy Strong for sharing this paper with me.



colored glasses of morality—we may see things differently. We may now find ourselves curious about that which, for millennia, we have been taught to shun. Curiosity about what has been considered evil is, to Nietzsche, one of pessimism's greatest benefits. This does not mean that we will simply celebrate what we once abhorred, but rather that we will seek it out on its own terms and come to our own fresh evaluation of it—and this goes for what was once called "good" as well:

> Let us dwell a moment on this symptom of highest culture—I call it the pessimism of strength. Man no longer needs a "justification of ills"; "justification" is precisely what he abhors: he enjoys ills *pur, cru*; he finds senseless ills the most interesting. If he formerly had need of a god, he now takes delight in a world disorder without God, a world of chance, to whose essence belong the terrible, the ambiguous, the seductive. In such a state it is precisely the *good* that needs "justifying." (*WP* 1019)

Nietzsche is quite clear that what we previously called "good" may well *find* a justification, only it will not be "justification" in its previous sense: "If he *in praxi* advocates preservation of virtue, he does it for reasons that recognize in virtue a subtlety, a cunning, a form of lust for gain and power" (*WP* 1019). In other words, pessimism promotes an unblinkered reexamination of the world, and of the self, without built-in moral assumptions. From this perspective, it is actually optimism, relying on such assumptions, that inhibits truly free inquiry.

Pessimism as a hammer—as a philosophical technology—both destroys and builds. Pessimism is both a critique of existing moralities and an instrument in the construction of an alternative apart from morality. Far from ending in despair and resignation, Nietzsche considers the moment when "my type of pessimism" appears "the *great noon*, . . . [the] great point of departure" (*WP* 134). Pessimism may not be the end of the journey, but all roads to the future lead through it—and it may be necessary to remain pessimistic for "a few millennia" (*KGW* 7:3:210). Can we say more about this alternative? Again, what is *Dionysian* pessimism?

## Pessimism as a Quest

Nietzsche was less interested in assigning content to the hypothetical new values he encouraged than in demonstrating that they should exist. One note on "the pessimism of the energetic" emphasizes that "the 'to what end?' after a terrible struggle [is] . . . itself a victory" (*KGW* 8:2:62). Just the desire to formulate new goals after overcoming earlier moralities (the end of the repression of desire those moralities enacted) is something to be celebrated. Although Nietzsche speaks often of a "revaluation of val-

ues," he never provides a new set of values to replace the old. Indeed, given his well-known sentiment that "a will to a system is a lack of integrity" (*TI*, "Maxims" 26) and his radically individualistic belief that the formulation of new values is something each of us should undertake on our own (*Z* 1:22), it would be unfair to expect this from him.[39] Still, we are not left simply with the imperiously vague injunction to "create new values." Dionysian pessimism is not itself a value-system, but it is an ethos that sheds some light on what it might be like to live a good life in the era following the death of God—it is, in short, an art of living. It is a life-practice that Nietzsche recommends, although not for everyone.

Some sense of what is meant by "Dionysian" is given in *The Birth*, but Nietzsche's use of this word continued to evolve (though he would often write as if all the later meanings were implicit in the earlier ones). If Dionysian pessimism is the one "no" that evolves out of "yes," then it is important to know what one is approving with a Dionysian "yes." From the various texts and notes that bear on this question, the answer seems to be something on the order of "life as a whole" or "the world as it is and will always be." But since, as Nietzsche was fond of pointing out with regard to Hartmann, there is really no perspective from which to view life as a whole (either to praise or condemn it), such an assent can only be a kind of gamble or risk-taking. It is an affirmation in the dark, an approval given in ignorance. Above all, it is a decision to welcome the unknown future, to wager on futurity, and accept the unseen past rather than clinging to a familiar present (*Z* 2:20). While all pessimisms conclude that the universe has no order and human history no progress, Dionysian pessimism is the one that can find something to like about this situation: "My new way to 'yes.' My new version of pessimism as a voluntary quest for fearful and questionable aspects of beings. . . . A pessimist such as that could in that way lead to a Dionysian yes-saying to the world as it is: as a wish for its absolute return and eternity: with which a new ideal of philosophy and sensibility would be given" (*KGW* 8:2:121).

The phrase "fearful and questionable" (*furchtbaren und fragwürdigen*), which recurs frequently in Nietzsche's texts, is carefully chosen to indicate what is at issue here.[40] The aspects of existence that we will have the greatest difficulty grasping and affirming are not the cruel and disgusting; they are those whose existence is so threatening to our sense of order that we have heretofore denied their very being, so that initially we

[39] Gooding-Williams, in an important discussion, also concludes that, having taken on the task of proving that the creation of new values is possible, Nietzsche leaves the act of creation itself to others (2001, chap. 5).

[40] These words could also be translated as, say, "terrible and doubtful." For other uses of this term, see, e.g., *WP* 852, *GS* 370. The phrase always refers to those things that the pessimist can bear the sight of which others cannot.



find their very existence "questionable" or "dubious." Which are these? In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche ridicules "the almost laughable poverty of instinct displayed by German philologists whenever they approach the Dionysian." Why laughable? Because these philologists cannot recognize what is, so to speak, right under their noses. The "Dionysian mysteries" are simply "the mysteries of sexuality . . . the *sexual* symbol was to the Greeks the symbol venerable as such, the intrinsic profound meaning of all antique piety" (*TI*, "What I Owe" 4; see Higgins 1998, 170ff.). The absurdity of post-Socratic philosophy is ultimately demonstrated in its attitudes toward sex and the body. What ought to be the most obvious and immediate source of knowledge and pleasure is not merely obscured but almost entirely obliterated. Cruelty may be *condemned* by morality but at least it is acknowledged; sexuality is *eliminated* from view through a process of "moral castrationism" (*WP* 204, 383).

Sexuality, not cruelty, represents that part of life with which it is most difficult to come to terms. It is the most difficult *not* because it is inherently shameful ("It was only Christianity . . . which made of sexuality something impure" [*TI*, "What I Owe" 4]). The difficulty lies in affirming the necessity for pain and suffering that accompanies any pleasure and growth. That is, it involves admitting that we ourselves *and not just the world* are essentially time-bound, that we too are flux and change. With its constant dissolution of boundaries, sexuality is more threatening to the optimist than is the human tendency to cruelty. The violation of self at the core of human sexual exchange (of whatever variety)—simultaneously painful and pleasurable—is the simplest and best evidence that our own nature is as unstable and tumultuous as that of the rest of the universe and, therefore, that no calculation of our best interest can ever be permanent.[41] The openness that pessimism recommends has, as its cost, the invasion of self that has always been symbolized and exemplified by sexuality. To truly make contact with another human being means to be open to their touch and alteration of us, to unfreeze our self-understanding and ego-boundaries long enough to acknowledge and model the distinctive qualities of the other, a transformative experience the outcome of which cannot be known in advance. Sex (like any true encounter with the world but more obviously) changes us in ways we cannot predict or master. It should thus be obvious why Nietzsche found Socratic rationalism and asceticism to be tightly linked. Maintenance of an optimistic perspective relies, in some sense, on denying the fluidity of self that the experience of

[41] Obviously I do not refer here to the brute fact of intercourse, which is no different in humans and animals, but to a sexual relationship between thinking beings. The boundaries of this category may be vague, but we are rarely uncertain about whether we are or are not within or without it.

sexuality manifests and repeatedly reminds us of. Shunning sex (and, to the degree that it is unavoidable, demonizing and mechanizing it) is therefore the practice of the self most necessary to the denial of pessimism.

Nietzsche calls the Dionysian "the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; *true* life as collective continuation of life through procreation." But this can only come at the cost of suffering, the rending of self that is the price to be paid for continuous rebirth: "In the teaching of the mysteries, *pain* is sanctified: the 'pains of childbirth' sanctify pain in general—all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, *postulates* pain. . . . All this is contained in the word Dionysus" (*TI*, "What I Owe" 4). Childbirth, that is, the emergence into the world of a new individual, stands in here for the enlargement and transfiguration of the self ("all becoming and growing") that pessimism enables in people over the course of their lives. In Christian morality, the pains of childbirth are the Curse of Eve, and sexuality the sin that enables and stands for sin in general; it is this symbolism (and this generalization) that Nietzsche urges us to reverse. The Dionysian is not *simply* sexuality (Nietzsche is not Freud); rather, the repression of sexuality represents the repression of the "fearful and questionable" as such. Accepting the necessity of these things, accepting the pain and loss that comes with any experience that transforms us, thus *setting aside the goal of happiness as the ultimate aim of a human life*, is what the Dionysian "yes" requires.

This does not mean that happiness must disappear from human life. Setting it aside as the final goal does not mean banishing it altogether. But if happiness is to be found, it can only be on these new terms. We can only take our pleasures in an acceptance of a chaotic and, we now know, painful condition. Pleasure and pain simply cannot be separated as the utilitarian or simplistic pessimists contend with their efforts simply to seek one and avoid the other. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche suggests that the Stoics were far closer to the truth when they contended that "pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever *wanted* to have as much as possible of one *must* also have as much as possible of the other" (*GS* 12). But where the Stoics, on this basis, drew the inference that both are to be avoided, Nietzsche rejects this as wholesale life-denial and concludes the opposite. Destruction must be known and acknowledged as part of anything creative or good. To truly embrace becoming at the expense of being means *to take pleasure in the suffering that accompanies the demise of whatever is:* "The joy of becoming is only possible in the destruction of the actuality of 'Beings,' the beautiful visions, in the pessimistic annihilation of illusions. [I]n the destruction also of beautiful illusions, Dionysian joy appears as its climax" (*KGW* 8:1:114; see also *EH*, "Destiny" 4).

This is something we have great difficulty doing. Nietzsche knew such an idea would sound dreadful to most. It is not enough simply to withdraw our condemnation of suffering. It is not enough to retreat to an agnostic shrug and agree to coexist with "necessary" suffering; that would be equivalent to being agnostic about life itself. Instead, we must approve of it.[42] That is why Nietzsche depicts the idea of eternal recurrence as something proposed by a "demon" and the "greatest weight" upon one's conscience (*GS* 341). To will the eternal recurrence is to will endless suffering. Why should we sanction suffering, even our own, much less that of others?[43]



If Nietzsche's reply is simply "because it is an unalterable part of life," then we are tempted to return to the position of Schopenhauer. Indeed, perhaps now we can see the attractions of that position most clearly. Why *not* reject this life we are offered, as Schopenhauer suggested, if to endorse it means to endorse endless and unalterable suffering? Nothing, after all, requires us to participate in the suffering of others. Our every moral instinct rebels at the thought. If we are truly powerless against suffering, as Schopenhauer argues (and here the parallels between Schopenhauer and Stoicism become more visible), why not just withdraw? To this question, Nietzsche cannot give the sort of answer that provides any comfort. He cannot offer any irrefutable reason for preferring affirmation to denial. In a world of flux, no such "reason" could permanently exist. This is why Nietzsche calls it a "question of strength"—*not* because the strong survive and the weak die, but because those who affirm have the "strength" to control their disgust long enough to give themselves a local reason to live.

The Dionysian "yes" is not a matter of taking a sadistic pleasure in the suffering of others. But it is a decision to be glad that ours is a world of becoming rather than being, to be glad that things are always changing and that the future is always being born and the present always passing away. It means detachment from whatever exists at present—something that will inevitably appear as callousness toward others: "*Dionysian wisdom*. Joy in the destruction of the most noble and at the sight of its progressive ruin: *in reality joy in what is coming and lies in the future, which triumphs over existing things, however good*" (*WP* 417, second emphasis added). This is what Nietzsche had in mind by such phrases as "*amor*

[42] Gillespie overstates the point when he writes that "doing Yes" amounts to "putting one's hand to the throats of all the innocent children and squeezing their lives away," but he is not wrong to demonstrate to us our own likely revulsion at the implications of Nietzsche's philosophy and his reference to Dostoevsky is also apt (2000, 146). His ultimate conclusions about Nietzsche's historical anthropology, however, strike me as condescending and dismissive. A more sympathetic discussion of this point can be found in Murray 1999, though it is marred by the author's insistence that Nietzsche's aim is to "overcome pessimism."

[43] Neiman (2002, 219ff.) shows a keen appreciation of this dilemma.

*fati*" or eternal recurrence. *Not* the idea that we must relive the past again and again, but rather that this pattern of destruction and creation is unalterable and must be borne (*WP* 1041). *And it cannot be withstood by means of faith in progress.* We must learn to hope in the absence of an expectation of progress. If this sounds almost nonsensical to the modern ear, perhaps it is because we have been told for so long that progress is the rational thing to hope for.

The difference between the incomplete pessimism of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's version is explicitly outlined in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a difference in their respective attitudes toward our fate of temporality. In the twentieth section of the second book, titled "On Redemption," Nietzsche traces two approaches to our time-bound condition. First he describes the preaching of "madness." Madness speaks as Nietzsche once did himself, by citing the aphorism of Anaximander—in a slightly altered form so as to bring out what Nietzsche now considers its vengefulness "'Everything passes away; therefore everything deserves to pass away. And this too is justice, this law of time that it must devour its children.' Thus preached madness" (*Z* 2:20). Madness then continues to speak more directly in the voice of Schopenhauer, whose solution to the problem of time is to withdraw from the life of the will insofar as is humanly possible. "Can there be redemption if there is eternal justice? Alas, the stone *It was* cannot be moved: all punishments must be eternal too. . . . No deed can be annihilated: . . . This, this is what is eternal in the punishment called existence, that existence must eternally become deed and guilt again. Unless the will should at last redeem itself, and willing should become not willing" (*Z* 2:20). To Nietzsche, this attitude of resignation toward our place in time can only be called madness, the product of "the spirit of revenge" or "the will's ill will against time."[44] It moves too quickly from the inescapability of time to the idea that it enslaves us.

Next, Nietzsche contrasts this false redemption with a better one, one in which our temporality conditions us, but does not imprison us: "I led you away from all these fables when I taught you, 'The will is a creator.' All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident—until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I willed it.'" Rather than hate backwards, as it were, Nietzsche suggests that we aim forward, that is, be open to the future to result from this past. If the present is the result of an unalterable

[44] Hartmann also speaks with the voice of madness: "Pain, once endured, can never be compensated for. The past can never be made good" (Hartmann 1895, 89). Wendy Brown has written eloquently on the way in which *ressentiment* is generated by a kind of narcissistic dwelling on prior injury to the point that it can infiltrate and infect much supposedly affirmative identity politics. Release from this form of political subjectivity is a singular attraction of Nietzsche's pessimism, as Brown (without using that term) points out (1995, 66–76).



past, it is also the source of a very alterable future: "I walk among men as among the fragments of the future—that future which I envisage." Instead of a false redemption that is essentially an abandonment of society, the true pessimist (pessimistic still because he accepts our time-bound condition and all it entails) sees an opportunity where the false pessimist sees only a conclusion: "To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption." Schopenhauer's romantic pessimism acknowledges the power of the past but not the open horizon of the future. It is madness because it seems to be based on a hostility to existence that Nietzsche ultimately finds inexplicable except as self-hatred. Temporality is not just a limitation but also a source of potential.[45] The redemption of the past to which Nietzsche looks forward may be unlikely, but at least it is not an impossibility. His characterization of pessimism as a "voluntary quest" (*freiwilliges Aufsuchen*) thus captures many of its essential qualities. It must be voluntary in the strongest sense, because the option of resignation cannot be rationally foreclosed. Nor can the quest be fully motivated by its object since to choose a quest for the questionable is to choose a path to the future that is unknown, but known to be something different from where one sets out. It is an exploration that is bound to be frightening, but holds the potential to be liberating. It is, as I argued in the first chapter, to value human life primarily for its natality and its futurity, its ca-

[45] I cannot agree, therefore, with Gianni Vattimo's contention, in his interpretation of this section, that Nietzsche seeks "redemption from time" as such. Vattimo's interpretation recognizes the burdens of linear temporality as Nietzsche describes them but posits an imagined escape from this condition that Nietzsche would have considered quite impossible (Vattimo 2001, 116–20). Much more interesting are Joan Stambaugh's attempts (1972, 1987) to understand Nietzsche's remarks on time as a contravening of Schopenhauer's views that are revolutionary in their originality. I cannot give Stambaugh's analysis here the attention it deserves—I will only say that, however sympathetic I am to some of her formulations, I find the analysis in the end too separated from the "historical" element of Nietzsche. That is, in Stambaugh, the whole topic of time, under Heidegger's influence, becomes hypostatized in a way that, I believe, is alien to Nietzsche's thinking. Likewise Gooding-Williams, also acknowledging Heidegger's influence and despite extraordinary and enlightening attention to Nietzsche's imagery in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ends by suggesting that Nietzsche's solution to the problem of time is to "spatialize" it—that is, to subordinate linear time to a spatial eternity where all moments are simultaneous (2001, 214ff.). But this interpretation rescues Nietzsche from the "contradiction" of willing backward only at the price of making him into a metaphysician who posits a plane of reality outside of time where all our problems can be solved. But Nietzsche, I think, is perfectly clear in his text that we are not to imagine solutions that contravene our experience, but rather embrace our experience of time, with all its costs, so that we can see its possibilities. Gooding-Williams also includes an excellent discussion of Nietzsche's relationship to Schopenhauer but, like so many others, assumes that Nietzsche's opposition to Schopenhauer must entail opposition to pessimism as well.

pacity to produce something new and different, without knowing what that something will be.

Here at least Nietzsche is at some distance from the Greek tragic view, which, however liberating, remains finally within the ambit of a nonlinear temporality and thus is unable to generate this kind of openness to the future. Nietzsche's rhetoric tends to suppress this distance, but in his later self-criticism of his romantic identification with the Greeks in *The Birth* ("in sum, a first book, . . . in every bad sense of that label" [*BT*, "Self-Criticism" 2]) and in his injunctions that we must "go beyond the Greeks" we can see some acknowledgment of it. Ultimately, the Greek tragic view cannot generate an interest in an open future for, from that perspective, what is to come is already foretold. When Nietzsche speaks of "*amor fati*" he has in mind accepting the history that constituted us as we find ourselves not, as a Greek would, accepting a future that is already scripted. If Nietzsche continues to call his view "tragic," as he sometimes does, he at least does not mean to replicate that element of the outlook of the original tragedians. That would leave us unalterably in the position of Hamlet.

As I argue in the next chapter, we can see in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* a better example of the quest-for-no-object Nietzsche has in mind. The lack of object throws into relief the idea of pessimism issuing not in a fixed judgment, but in a *quest*, that is, not in an idol of the future but in a *task* that can only be described in narrative. If Nietzsche is reluctant to specify the *content* of the new values he calls for, he is clear enough that these new values must have a new *form*. In the form of narrative, values cannot fall victim to the sort of metaphysical hypostatization that has been the result of the Socratic turn of philosophy outlined in *The Birth*. And the quest-narrative puts particular emphasis on the openness of the future as well as the encounter with the unexpected along the way.

Dionysian pessimism may be "fearful and questionable," but the alternative is worse. In a famous note, Nietzsche embodies the two choices as "Dionysus and the Crucified": "It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom," i.e., in whether the two personifications of different life-practices suffer and die, "it is a difference in the meaning of it" (*WP* 1052).[46] In other words, it is not a question of how death and suffering can be minimized—all human lives include suffering and end in death. "The problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning." We are only given the choice of accepting

[46] As Murray points out, this dichotomy is also what Nietzsche has in mind when terming his alternative source of redemption "eternal recurrence" (*ewige Wiederkunft*); it contrasts with the *Wiederkunft Christi* (the Second Coming of Christ) (1999, 234).



this life as a whole or rejecting it as a whole. There are more than two possible meanings for suffering and we can surely struggle to alter those elements of life within our purview, but we will still be faced with the larger question where we cannot pick and choose. One alternative is to reject life as a whole: "The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life." The other is to embrace life, with all the suffering entailed, both for ourselves and for others: "Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction" (*WP* 1052). Here is the "this-worldly redemption" that Nietzsche spoke of in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is nothing permanent. Every local solution to the burden of time-consciousness will, ultimately, itself be destroyed by time. But it can serve its local purpose of creating reasons to embrace life and leave a legacy that itself may be fodder for further incarnations.

If one accepts the pessimistic assessment of the time-bound world as a place of chaos and dissonance, one faces the choice of retreating from it or embracing it and trying to "let a harmony sound forth from every conflict" (*WP* 852). Dionysian pessimism, understood as a quest, is a life-practice designed to meet this challenge. It does not deny the structure of time or the difficulties this creates for human life, but it converts those difficulties into the stimulus for a project of worldly exploration and self-renovation. Pessimism fortifies us, not against the effects of time itself (death, change, suffering), but against the possible dispiriting that can come from facing time and its effects in pessimism's absence. It looks toward the future, not with the expectation that better things are foreordained, but with a hope founded only on taking joy in the constant processes of transformation and destruction that mark out the human condition.

## The Future of Dionysian Pessimism

Nietzsche wrote about pessimism throughout his career, but there is a remarkable degree of concentration on the subject in the series of prefaces prepared in 1886 for all his pre–*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* writings, which were then in the process of being republished. Looking back over the development of his thought, he identifies a principle that has guided it, unseen hitherto in its entirety, even by himself—and he desires now to reemphasize it, and by doing so, to draw together his various poses into a unified attitude. Read together, these introductions (to *The Birth*, *Untimely Meditations*, *Human, All-too-Human*, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, and *Daybreak*) describe a pessimism that "has no fear of the fearful and questionable that characterizes all existence":

> This has been *my* pessimistic perspective from the beginning—a novel perspective, is it not? a perspective that even today is still novel and strange? To this very moment I continue to adhere to it and, if you will believe me, just as much *for* myself as, occasionally at least, *against* myself. . . . Do you want me to prove this to you? But what else does this long preface—prove? (*AOM*, "Preface" 7)

Here Nietzsche is playing on the meaning of *beweisen* (prove). The root *weisen* means "show," so that *beweisen* can mean "show" in an intransitive sense, that is, to "show oneself." In other words, the last sentences can be read to ask, in effect, whether the reader desires that Nietzsche expose himself to his audience—and then to respond that he has already done so by displaying his pessimistic perspective.[47] And yet the preceding sentences suggest that Nietzsche's pessimism has struggled with other elements of his psyche and that this struggle is not over. Taken together with the quotation with which this chapter began, where Nietzsche declares pessimism to be his "quintessence," we can see that the self is not meant to be excluded from the small portion of the universe that the pessimist is to organize. Indeed, if anything, the self is the starting point (though certainly not the ending point) from which pessimistic quests must begin. Tracy Strong describes Nietzsche's as a "politics of transfiguration" and it is this theme of self-shaping and self-transformation against a fundamentally chaotic background that is the key link between Nietzsche and such later figures as Camus, Arendt, Foucault, and William Connolly. Critics of postmodernism have considered Nietzsche a dubious foundation for politics because of his clearly antidemocratic tendencies.[48] But what each of these later, more democratic writers has found in Nietzsche is a portrait of energetic individuality that can be supportive of political action while remaining distinct from the liberal assumptions that are often held to be a necessary complement to democratic participation.

Nietzsche's pessimism authorizes a process of identity-renovation based not on an assumption of the self's natural integrity but, to the contrary, on an acknowledgment of its fundamental instability and perishability. The lack of perfect boundaries to the self means that these projects need not (indeed, cannot) be solipsistic or limited to self-perfection (as some critics imply). The pessimistic spirit, I wrote above, is a restless one, unlikely to be enamored of the status quo either in the self or in the world.

[47] Note again here the association of pessimism with sexuality and the suggestion that in affirming pessimism, Nietzsche also affirms himself as a (vulnerable, exposed) sexual being.

[48] See Leiter 1994, Berkowitz 1995, and Appel 1999, among many others. Of course, these works, and those they attack are only the latest iteration in an old debate. See Brinton 1965 [1941] for an earlier example that itself surveys this debate in the first half of the twentieth century.



As I argue in the next chapter, the story of Don Quixote gives us a good example of what such a project would look like. Quixote begins by changing his own identity from a man who sits at home to one who engages the world as a knight-errant. This project begins with Quixote liberating himself from a social role into which he has been cast without his consent and arming himself against the forces of the chaotic world, but the project is not completed when this is accomplished or when some aesthetic criteria of the self have been met, but only when he has succeeded (against all sound advice) in launching himself into the world and, indeed, altering it. Don Quixote is free and active in the world. He is never happy, but he accepts this condition as necessary to his quest. Doubtless he is not an ordinary democratic citizen; but he would not be a bad citizen in such an order even if it is not his goal to sustain it. And, importantly, his qualities are not dependent on the variety of regimes in which he finds himself. Like Camus' rebel, he acts in a way that exemplifies freedom regardless of circumstance, illuminating a human dignity that we all share. If Nietzsche's politics are not always democratic, then, they are quixotic—and that should be taken as no more of an insult than calling them pessimistic.

Nietzsche's connections to the pessimists who preceded him have heretofore been difficult to see, in large part because of the invisibility of the pessimistic tradition itself. If it can now be acknowledged that such a tradition has existed, then we can recognize Nietzsche as one of its principal exemplars. What is more, however, we can also see later Nietzscheans as extensions of the pessimistic tradition, even if they have not always used that name for themselves. Concerns about the burdens of temporal existence have continued to animate political theorists in the twentieth century and they have often attempted to use a Nietzschean language to address those concerns. While it is beyond the scope of my efforts here to rewrite the history of twentieth-century thought from a pessimistic perspective, it seems to me an eminently possible task.

. . . . .

To believe that pessimism must lead to resignation is to make one of two errors: It is either to mistake Schopenhauer's pessimism (or Wagner's or Buddha's) for the whole of pessimism, or it is to believe that no other response is possible to the realization that we live in a tragic, disordered, immoral world. Why is it commonly thought that human beings must be disappointed at the prospect of a world of constant flux and chaos, where no moral order can be sustained? Because, I believe, it is assumed that human beings are creatures of order, that we will somehow be discomposed if forced to exist in this chaotic world. But to Nietzsche we ourselves are no different from the world to which we are condemned; we are

not islands of being in a sea of becoming. We too are nothing else but a constant transformation and development. So he famously calls it a "*Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying . . . without goal. . . . [D]o you want a *name* for this world? . . . *This world is the will to power—and nothing besides*! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!" (*WP* 1067).[49] To restore "the innocence of becoming" to the world means likewise to restore it to *ourselves* and to face this chaotic world not as a creature alien to it or fallen from it, but as part and parcel of that which we find most threatening. Those who believe pessimism leads to resignation see humans as "weak," creatures that must have transcendental meanings in order to survive. It is *not* the pessimists, then, at least not all of them, who believe that the demise of traditional beliefs must lead to aimlessness and suicide. *It is rather those who fear pessimism*, or fear the repeal of traditional moralities, that maintain this.

What does it mean to go through life with no expectations, or more precisely, with an expectation of nothing? To be sure, one is deflected from a certain kind of global ambition. The desire *wholly* to remake the world in one's image, in whatever manner, must be set aside once it is realized that the world will hold no image at all for very long.[50] Yet nothing deters us from entering on local projects or organizing "a small portion" of the world (How small? One person? One city? One state? One culture?). As I have argued, this does not mean cultivating one's own garden so much as knowing the limits to one's actions, however ambitious.

Furthermore, there is a freedom to be gained when one's existence is detached from the narrative of progress. If human history is pregiven as a story of progress, then one's fate (however worthy) is already scripted, in a sense, by what has come before, and one becomes nothing more than

[49] To be sure, there is something paradoxical about this formulation. To imagine ourselves as will would normally imply that our will had some object. Yet if there are no permanent objects, but only an eternal flux, including ourselves, how is this possible? The paradox is not eliminated, I think, but it is mitigated in light of Nietzsche's critique of our subject-object grammar and his related critique of our ideas of causality as such. In *GS* 370, Nietzsche explicitly links these to the emergence of Dionysian pessimism. To him, the strangeness of what he proposes emerges as much from our ordinary grammar of "will" as it does from the propositions themselves. In this passage, in any case, it seems clear that Nietzsche gives us what he knows to be an inaccurate shorthand "name" for what he describes only because we, his readers, demand it. Nietzsche's critique of causality is especially vivid in his discussion of dreams (see *GS* 22, 112; *TI*, "Four Great Errors" 4; *WP* 479; and Dienstag 1997, 96–100).

[50] Or rather, the desire to wholly remake the world is permitted so long as one does not regret the fleeting character of such a remaking. The art of Christo, geographically grandiose but always temporary, is perhaps an example of this.



"an angry spectator of all that is past" (*Z* 2:20). Pessimism, by freeing us from this script, simultaneously frees us from enslavement to the past. This is not to say we are immune from the effects of history, merely that they do not bind us.

The destruction of all things by time is not a judgment of their worth, as Anaximander maintained, but simply a condition of life and an opportunity for each person to chart their own course free of "the stone *It was*." "Thus," Nietzsche concluded, "the belief in time is good for one's health (pessimists after all)" (*KGW* 7:1:390). The constant transformation reminds us that our fate is not set. We have at least a role in determining it. The burden of the past is thus lessened and the prospect of the future brightens. "The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a *problem*. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy. Even love of life is still possible, only one loves differently" (*GS*, "Preface" 3). Instead of being a creature of the past, one can be "a bridge to the future" (*Z* 2:20). Instead of valuing oneself for being part of a long chain of progress, one can value the fresh start that one makes of oneself. Instead of searching for transcendental meanings, one can "give the earth a meaning, a human meaning" (*Z* 1:22:2). Dionysian pessimism encourages us to act while seeking to avoid the hubris so common to more systemic philosophies.

The reference to pessimism as "good for one's health" is not, I think, a casual phrase. Nietzsche often refers to pessimism as a life-technique with medicinal qualities "a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life" (*GS* 370). This language reflects his continuous struggle to set the proper level for his philosophy's charge: somewhere beneath the imperious universal demands of categorical rationalism, but above the mere prudential advice of Galenic medicine. I have used the phrases "art of living" and "life-technique" interchangeably to indicate my understanding of what Nietzsche takes that level to be. Such a technique will not be to everyone's taste or, he thinks, within the ability of all. While it is not clear to me that this last judgment is entailed by Nietzsche's view of the substance of pessimism, he clearly does not expect it to be a universal ethic. But even Nietzsche's antidemocratic moments are not all that they are often cracked up to be. His philosophy, he wrote in 1887, will be best suited to those he calls "the most moderate": "Those who do not require any extreme articles of faith; those who not only concede but love a fair amount of accidents and nonsense; those who can think of man with a considerable reduction of his value without becoming small and weak on that account" (*WP* 55). These are the humans he considers "the strongest"—not those who can destroy the most, or the towering egotists of Ayn Rand's imagination, but those pessimists who can withstand the

most destruction without giving way to pity and resignation. "*I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage*" (*WP* 382). Like Don Quixote, the best pessimists have a strength of character and a sense of humor—for this world, both are needed.

# Chapter Six

## CERVANTES AS EDUCATOR

### *DON QUIXOTE* AND THE PRACTICE OF PESSIMISM

*Don Quixote* . . . is an allegory of the life of every man who, unlike others, will not be careful merely for his own personal welfare, but pursues an objective, ideal end that has taken possession of his thinking and willing; and then, of course, in this world he looks queer and odd.
—ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Today we read *Don Quixote* with a bitter taste in our mouths, almost with a feeling of torment, and would thus seem very strange and incomprehensible to its author and his contemporaries: they read it with the clearest conscience in the world as the most cheerful of books, they laughed themselves almost to death over it.
—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

IN THE last chapter, I depicted Nietzsche's Dionysian pessimism as an ethic of radical possibility linked to radical insecurity. The lack of natural boundaries both between and within humans permits, simultaneously, our capacity for novelty and distinctiveness as well as our capacity for enormous cruelty. We cannot, on this account, have one without the other. But if Dostoevsky provides a horrible image of what such a world would look like, he does not offer the only one. As the quotations above indicate, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer before him, felt a profound affinity between the worlds they describe in philosophy and the one Cervantes created in *Don Quixote*. Nor are they the only pessimists to have done so. Both Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset devoted entire books to this text.[1] Leopardi praised Cervantes and spoke of his desire to

[1] Miguel de Unamuno, *Our Lord Don Quixote* (orig. 1905); José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote* (orig. 1914); Unamuno's is a page-by-page commentary, Ortega y Gasset's, as his title suggests, is a more thematic reflection. As the remainder of the chapter will make clear, my interpretation of Quixote owes a great deal to their efforts. Since I have discussed Unamuno at some length in chapter 4, more attention is given here to Ortega y Gasset's interpretation as a way to expand the reader's understanding of the pessimistic tradi-