

# Socratic Optimism in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and Pyrrhonism

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**Abstract:** In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche attempts to show two conclusions: 1) pessimism is *not necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts, and 2) optimism *can be* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. He attempts to show these conclusions in order to undermine the distinction between pessimism and optimism, which is also a distinction concerning the attitude towards certain moral features in a society or culture. The dissolution of this distinction is a central assumption in many of his later works and is, thus, necessary. However, Nietzsche's attempt to show the second conclusion is not as steadfast as one would hope. Using controversial cultural analysis and historical analysis, Nietzsche's evidence is seemingly circumstantial and indirectly related. In this paper, I attempt to show that Pyrrhonism is a viable option for Nietzsche to easily show the second conclusion and, most importantly, maintain the dissolution of the distinction between pessimism and optimism. I argue this through two points: 1) Pyrrhonism is a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts, and 2) If Pyrrhonism is a sign of these negative goods, then Socratic optimism is a sign of them as well. Overall, if these two points can be demonstrated, then optimism can be a sign of the above negative conditions and, by extension, the distinction between pessimism and optimism remains dissolved.

## 1. Introduction

In his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," Nietzsche recalls one of the central questions from *The Birth of Tragedy*: "is pessimism *necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts- as it once was in India and now is, to all appearances, among us "modern" men and Europeans?" (Nietzsche 17, § SC1). For most who have read *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's response is resoundingly negative. In other words, Nietzsche claims that it is not an essential property of pessimism that it must be an indication of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts.<sup>1</sup> In fact, looking to the Greeks, there is a concrete example of such pessimism in the form of tragedy that is not an indication of the aforementioned conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> I take it that "essential properties" are those properties that an object or thing must have in order to be that object or thing.

Thus, it cannot necessarily be the case. However, this conclusion is not the most radical of *The Birth of Tragedy*.

The more radical conclusion arrives as a result of Nietzsche addressing the inverse of his previous question: *can* optimism be a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts? If so, then there are sufficient grounds for claiming that the distinction between pessimism and optimism is undermined. And, of course, Nietzsche's response is resoundingly affirmative. Pointing to the optimism of Euripides and Socrates, Nietzsche attempts to show that optimism can be such a sign. Still, in primarily analyzing Socrates and Euripides, I find that Nietzsche's conclusion, which is necessary to undermine the distinction between pessimism and optimism, can be further, but better demonstrated elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I will show that Nietzsche's conclusion can be arrived at through Pyrrhonism, which I will argue is directly related to Socratic optimism.

## 2. Philosophical Pessimism and Optimism

At the onset, there is a distinction at play in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* that needs to be fleshed out: that of pessimism and optimism. Both terms are a substantial inheritance from Schopenhauer. But, it is only through a firm understanding and inversion of the consequences associated with this distinction presented by Schopenhauer that Nietzsche is ultimately able to show that historical contingency lies at the core of each term and that there are no ahistorical or essential properties that necessarily fix the meaning of these terms or necessarily entail certain claims about the world. As such, it is important to clarify the meaning of these terms to proceed with Nietzsche's argument and my own argument.

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<sup>2</sup> I will only focus on Socratic optimism in this paper.

As associated with Schopenhauer, pessimism is an attitude associated with the negative characterization of existence as a result of the negative goods (or the impossibility of the positive) that accompany existence. These negative goods can be anything from pain, dissatisfaction, and ignorance to humiliation, boredom, and grief. Ultimately, for Schopenhauer, this negative characterization of existence results in non-existence being intrinsically better than existence because non-existence has no goods accompanying it, whatsoever. Further, on a more concrete level, this conclusion entails the negation of one's Will-to-Live, which is the manifestation of Will that urges one to satisfy those ends related to your arbitrary and basic desires. Altogether, I take it that Schopenhauer's argument is as follows:

1. The Will is ceaselessly, yet blindly, striving to satisfy its ends.
2. But, there are no ends for the Will.
3. If the Will is ceaselessly, yet blindly, striving to satisfy its ends, when there are no ends for the Will, then the Will's satisfaction is impossible.
4. The Will's satisfaction is impossible (follows from 1, 2, 3).
5. If the Will's satisfaction is impossible, then existence is characterized by dissatisfaction and suffering as the result of this dissatisfaction.
6. Existence is characterized by dissatisfaction and suffering as a result of this dissatisfaction (follows from 4, 5).
7. If existence is characterized by dissatisfaction and suffering as a result of this dissatisfaction, then non-existence (which has no value) is intrinsically better than existence (which has negative value).
8. Therefore, non-existence is intrinsically better than existence (follows from 6, 7).

Schopenhauer then provides a few responses one might have to the negative condition of existence or one's pessimism. The most relevant for the purposes of this paper is to adopt a form of asceticism or denial of the Will-to-Live or nihilism. For either option, one must come to accept an attitude of suspension, resignation, and a lack of will. Or, in other words, one must come to deny the strivings of the Will towards the many ends of our arbitrary and basic desires that delude it. These ends can include anything from the accrual of knowledge, the possession of transcendence in art, the satisfaction of bodily desires, moral achievement, and so on. Thus, having ceased the Will's striving, the Will arrives at composure or tranquility because it no longer strives and fails with the results of dissatisfaction and suffering. To illustrate such renunciation followed by tranquility, Schopenhauer provides Christian ascetics as prime examples (Schopenhauer §68 and §70). Now, we must turn to Nietzsche and the pessimism that is characterized in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Though the usage might be the same, Nietzsche's views on pessimism and the response one should adopt towards it differ substantially from Schopenhauer. Nietzsche holds that it does not follow necessarily from a negative characterization of existence that there are grounds for thinking non-existence is intrinsically better than existence or that there is a negation of the Will-to-Live. On the contrary, it is a matter of historical contingency, particularly through certain institutions or ideas, that such a relationship has been established. Looking elsewhere in history, we can see examples of a negative characterization of existence that indicate an affirmation of existence and the Will-to-Live. For Nietzsche, the Greeks and the tragedies they produced were the best example of this claim. Thus, pessimism can be a sign of more than just dissatisfaction and suffering for Nietzsche; it can be a sign of strength, "overfullness," and "a craving for beauty... in some deficiency, privation, melancholy, pain... (Nietzsche 21, §SC4)."

What can be said for optimism? The easiest, and perhaps best, analysis that can be given for optimism is to turn pessimism on its head. So, rather than being an attitude associated with providing a negative characterization of existence, optimism is an attitude associated with providing a positive characterization of existence as a result of the positive goods (or lack of negative goods) that accompany existence. These positive goods can range from happiness, pleasure, and enlightenment to meaningful belief, knowledge, and progress. If such a positive characterization of existence were true, then existence would have intrinsic value that makes it better than non-existence- contrary to Schopenhauer's conclusion. However, Schopenhauer's usage of this distinction is set in such a way that optimism, much like pessimism, is a necessary sign of the affirmation of existence and the Will-to-Live. The negative connotations that Schopenhauer attaches to optimism, better yet, his vehement disparaging of optimism is primarily due to the reality of existence, which is negative, not corresponding to this characterization of existence.

Though Nietzsche might agree with Schopenhauer in disparaging optimism, here again there is a substantial difference between the two that is crucial in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Whereas Schopenhauer has it that optimism is necessarily a sign of affirmation of existence and the Will-to-Live, even though it is fundamentally incorrect in its assessment of the reality of existence, Nietzsche has it that optimism can be a sign of the affirmation of existence and the Will-to-Live, but it can also be a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. In this way, for Nietzsche, optimism can be an attitude that is a sign of the negation of existence and the Will-to-Live. Either type of possible optimism can be found in history, thus the essential properties of optimism, exactly like pessimism, are not fixed nor ahistorical- it is a matter of

historical contingency whether pessimism or optimism affirms or negates existence and the Will-to-Live.

### 3. Tragic Pessimism and Socratic Optimism

Now that there is a working understanding of pessimism and optimism both as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche might have used the terms, it is important to turn to one of the central arguments of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Essentially, Nietzsche's project in the line of argumentation that I will pursue is to show that pessimism and optimism as a distinction about the attitudes one can take towards the characterization of existence does not necessarily indicate anything about a given period of history. These attitudes can indicate any number of conditions about a specific period that conflict with the characterization of existence that is presented. As such, the distinction is ultimately a matter of historical contingency that must be evaluated for each period of history. Further, in this and subsequent works (e.g. *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Will to Power*), an overcoming of this previously facile distinction might be a way of creating a new attitude that is not bound by either one. However, to go into any more detail about this aspect of Nietzsche's argument is overreaching the bounds of this paper. What is in the bounds of this paper, though, is to show Nietzsche's argument that pessimism is not necessarily a sign of negative leanings in a period of history, nor is optimism necessarily a sign of positive leanings in a period of history. Nietzsche accomplishes this task by examining to aspects of the Greek world: tragic pessimism and Socratic (or Euripidean) optimism. I will try to present Nietzsche's explication of each of these phenomena, and then I will try to show why his argument with regard to Socratic optimism can be further, but better demonstrated elsewhere.

Simply put, as Nietzsche did, one can turn an eye to the Greeks (or any society/culture for that matter) and wonder- why does a society or culture develop a pessimistic attitude? Specifically, why does a society or culture, such as the Greeks, turn to tragedy and tragic myth as a form of art to portray this pessimism? And, not just censored tragic events, the kind of tragedy and tragic myth that deals in armies being slaughtered, fratricide, wives murdering husbands, sons murdering mothers, incest, rape, and torture. It does not seem like any subject was beyond portrayal in these tragedies or tragic myths. Not only were the subjects dark, they were profoundly and predominately pessimistic in their characterizations of existence. For example, the chorus in *Oedipus Colonus* states:

Not to be born conquers all reckoning. But once one has appeared,  
to go as fast as possible to the place from which one came, is  
second best by far (Sophocles trans. Blondell 206-7, lines 1224-  
28).

Commonly referred to as the “wisdom of Silenus,” Nietzsche also mentions it in *The Birth of Tragedy* as a pessimistic strain. Essentially, it is the statement that never to have been born is better than to have been born, and if one is born, then it is best to die soon. There is no doubt that this attitude is reflected by Schopenhauer’s account of pessimism. Perhaps this ancient sentiment is shocking to the modern sentiment, but, as Nietzsche argues, such tragic spectacles and wisdom were an essential and “typical” part of the Greek art form. Further, it is important to note that entertainment was not the primary reason for attending such spectacles, otherwise we might not want to view tragedy or tragic myth as anything other than glorified horror spectacles designed to shock and awe. As John Duncan notes:

Athenians were drawn to genuine tragedy not by the prospect of exciting entertainment, but rather by the prospect of a vicarious experience of being overcome by the inevitability of the life-force in a manner that would rekindle the lust for life itself. Life as unbearable- but also the very same life relished (Duncan 66).

This is also an important point because Nietzsche's argument only holds if tragedy and tragic myth is not a manifestation of lamentation or dissatisfaction as a result of the nature of existence. Tragedy or tragic myth must reaffirm existence and the Will-to-Live in order to resemble Nietzsche's understanding of tragic pessimism.

Still, why does Nietzsche think that tragic pessimism is not necessarily an indication of decline and decay? Answering this question is a simple matter that requires a set of assumptions about the historical period of the Greeks under discussion. This set of assumptions revolves around the cultural achievements of the Classical Age of Greece, for the innovations and high period of tragedy corresponded to the Classical Age of Greece coming to full fruition in many other areas as well. In sculpture, Pheidias sculpted cult statues beyond compare for the Temple of Zeus at Olympia and the Parthenon in Athens while Praxiteles sculpted works like the Aphrodite of Knidos. In warfare, the Greeks triumphed over the Persians with the creation of the far superior phalanx formation. In vase-painting, Athenian black- and red-figure painting were reaching an unparalleled sophistication with the work of Andokides, the Amasis Painter, and Exekias. In architecture, the construction of the Parthenon, Theater of Dionysus, the Temple of Hephaistos/Theseion, and other great works were completed. The list of the other great achievements that are concurrent with the great achievements in tragedy is continuous and impressive. Nietzsche claims:

Almost every era and cultural stage has at some point sought in an profoundly ill-tempered frame of mind to free itself of the Greeks, because in comparison with the Greeks, all their own achievements, apparently fully original and admired in all sincerity, suddenly appeared to lose their color and life and shriveled to unsuccessful copies, in fact, to caricatures (Nietzsche 93, §15).

Thus, it is no wonder that Nietzsche would have thought that the tragic pessimism that accompanied this great period of Greek history was not a pessimism of decline, but, as he puts it, a pessimism of strength. And, following this conclusion, it seems wholly plausible (if not uncontested) to claim that pessimism is not necessarily a sign of decline or decay in a culture or society, but can also be a sign of strength and growth.

However, with tragic pessimism, there was an equal and opposite reaction in Socratic (or Euripidean) optimism. It is a negative reaction, as well. Just as Schopenhauer was disparaging of optimism for its mistaken views of existence and reality, so is Socrates disparaging of tragedy and tragic myth. Nietzsche points out that, “Socrates, as an opponent of tragic art, refrained from attending tragedies” (87, §13). As the tragedies of this period brought a negative characterization of existence, it seems highly likely that Socrates’s opposition to tragic art is a result of his optimism. For, once again, Nietzsche points out that Socrates held:

The unshakeable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of *correcting* it (95, §15).

This attitude that attempts “correcting” being would presumably result for Socrates in some development of existence that ultimately would result in a positive characterization for it. All of this is at the expense of an account of tragic pessimism as an affirmation of existence and the Will-to-Live. For Socrates, the opposite of an affirmation would have to be true because pessimism is necessarily (essentially) a sign of decline and decay just as much as optimism is necessarily a sign of progress and generation. Nietzsche carefully assesses Socrates’s optimism further:

With it Socratism condemns existing art as well as existing ethics. Wherever Socratism turns its searching eyes it sees lack of insight and the power of illusion; and from this lack it infers the essential

perversity and reprehensibility of what exists. Basing himself on this point, Socrates conceives it to be his duty to correct existence: all alone, with an expression of irreverence and superiority, as the precursor of an altogether different culture, art, and morality, he enters a very world, to touch whose very hem would give us the greatest happiness (87, §13).

The same disparaging attitude that Schopenhauer possesses against the optimism seems to come out in this passage from Nietzsche. Crushing the tragic arts down to a triviality and having the attitude that the metaphysical reality of existence can be or is positive is a fundamental mistake to make when it is exactly the opposite. As such, by negating certain aspects of existence, one is in fact turning against existence and the Will-to-Live itself by negating at all, rather than affirming existence and the Will-to-Live in the face of a dissatisfying existence filled with suffering.

Now, though, we arrive at the central question of this paper: how can Socratic optimism be seen as a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts? This question is difficult to answer because it is historical by nature. It is the same as asking what features of Greek culture and society were undergoing a decline while Socratic optimism took hold of Greek culture and society? A number of things might constitute such a decline. For instance, there is the turn away from tragedy as the predominant theater art and the move towards comedy. Largely, there is also a shift from focus on a smaller, aristocratic elite that is greatly capable militarily and socially and artistically refined to a focus on a larger, non-aristocratic majority that is incapable militarily and socially and artistically unrefined. This shift might account for the loss of Greek independence and the joining of its northern neighbor's, the Macedonians, empire as a result of the conquest of Philip II and Alexander III. As for the other art forms of the period, there is also a shift away from the awe-inspiring forms of the Classical Age to those of the Hellenistic, which is left open as to what it might be called- perhaps, repetitive or decadent, at

best, as Pliny the Elder wrote. This laundry list of decay and decline in Greek culture and society might be sufficient for some, but I find that it can be better and further demonstrated elsewhere. In particular, Pyrrhonism embodies the pessimism and the consequences of it that Nietzsche sought to avoid. All the while, Pyrrhonism is also true to Socratic optimism.

#### 4. Pyrrhonism and Socratic Optimism

Undoubtedly, Pyrrhonism is an outgrowth of the Socratic tradition in terms of method. Using the Socratic method, thought, and reason as its tools, Pyrrhonism established its place in the philosophical landscape by turning these tools upon any and all claims to belief or knowledge until belief and knowledge were reduced to suspension of judgment (*epokê*) on all matters. The process of positive, then negative, then positive, then negative response is an infinite process that is supposed to ultimately show a vicious regress of justification. And, since it is taken for granted that infinite regress is bad for any justification, if there is this vicious regress, then nothing can be ultimately justified and we should suspend judgment on all matters. As such, Pyrrhonism leads to a complete and utter cognitive paralysis. Nietzsche would call this process “Socratic dialectic,” but regardless of what it is called, the result is the same: complete and total cognitive paralysis or confusion (*aporia*) with regard to belief or knowledge.

Still, one might try to argue that Pyrrhonism is not directly related to Socratic optimism or the Socratic tradition. However, the means to arguing this claim are limited. Sure, the Stoics did not take Socratic optimism to this far extreme, but how can we account for them not doing so? The methods and tools are the same for both schools of thought, yet it seems that the Stoics did not proceed in the further reasoning that the Pyrrhonians did, which for all extensive purposes seems to be correct in its initial assumptions. These assumptions are simple enough: 1)

in order to be justified, all claims must be argued and demonstrated until there is no doubt concerning the claim, 2) an infinite regress of justification shows that there are no sufficient grounds for accepting a given claim, and 3) if a claim is not justified, then we must suspend judgment on the matter. Altogether, the Stoics and other schools that descend from Socrates should not disagree with anyone of these assumptions. In terms of how far the reasoning should extend, they might disagree. But, is this disagreement truly justified if one is attempting to justify a claim that one has not investigated fully or responded to all of the objections concerning it? The answer seems to be negative, otherwise the cut off for how much justification one needs for a claim is arbitrary. In this sense, Pyrrhonism is a school of thought that descends from Socrates and is truest to Socrates's thought because it carries the Socratic method to its fullest conclusion. It is no coincidence that Socrates himself claimed that he knew that he knew nothing. Then again, Pyrrhonism might have been even more true to the Socratic method because it claimed that Socrates should have suspended judgment even for this claim. Overall, any demonstration of the claim that Pyrrhonism is not directly related to the Socratic method or Socratic optimism, ultimately, cannot displace the fundamental relation that Pyrrhonism and the Socratic method have to one another.

So, Pyrrhonism is directly related to Socratic optimism. The previous section's demonstration of how one could see that Socratic optimism was an indication of these negative conditions were loose at best. One could easily make the argument that those points were merely circumstantial rather than directly related. But, on the basis of Pyrrhonism being a direct consequence of Socratic optimism, we will be able to show that Socratic optimism is an indication of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts as Nietzsche believed it to be. How is this the case?

Returning to Schopenhauer, there is an important series of points to make in order to show that Pyrrhonism- as directly related to Socratic optimism- is an indication of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. The first point is that genuine pessimism for Schopenhauer is necessarily an indication of the previous sentence's negative conditions (though Nietzsche disagrees). The second point is that Schopenhauer prescribes as an antidote for pessimism the adoption of a form of asceticism, denial of the Will-to-Live, or nihilism. For any option, one must come to be in a state or attitude of suspension, resignation, and a lack of will. Or, in other words, one must come to deny the strivings of the Will towards the many ends of our arbitrary and basic desires that delude it. These ends can include anything from the accrual of knowledge, the possession of transcendence in art, the satisfaction of bodily desires, moral achievement, and so on. Thus, having ceased the Will's striving, the Will arrives at composure or tranquility because it no longer strives and fails with the results of dissatisfaction and suffering. The third point is that the prescribed antidote for pessimism is similar, if not the same, as the state of *ataraxia* that the Pyrrhonian skeptic must adopt in response to *epokê*. To remind, *ataraxia* is a state of tranquility or freedom from distress about the nature of the world as a result of *epokê*. With this equivalence, there is a close tie between the genuine pessimism presented by Schopenhauer and Pyrrhonism, which is a direct consequence of the Socratic optimism described by Nietzsche. To demonstrate and clarify, if someone tells you that they are taking a medication that you know will help sinus problems, then, presumably, it is reasonable to claim that this someone has sinus problems. In much the same way, if someone adopts an attitude that is in all respects similar to an antidote to pessimism, then, presumably, it is also reasonable to claim that the conditions of pessimism hold in order for that antidote to be needed. Thus, Pyrrhonism is an indication that genuine pessimism holds, and genuine pessimism is an indication of decline,

decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. By extension, if Pyrrhonism is a direct consequence of Socratic optimism, then Socratic optimism is an indication of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. If this argument is correct, then qualitatively there is no difference between the genuine pessimism of Schopenhauer and Socratic optimism with regard to what they indicate. Further, and most importantly, Nietzsche is correct in *The Birth of Tragedy* to think that Socratic optimism is a sign (or indication) of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. And, as a matter of entailment, if Socratic optimism is a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts, then optimism (in general) can be a sign of these negative conditions.

Another question lingers: would Nietzsche agree that Pyrrhonism is a means to showing the conclusion he argued? I think so, even though Nietzsche does not state anything explicit. What he does state, though, are a number of points about Pyrrho in *The Will To Power* that give the impression that he would agree. Let us take for granted the negative conditions of genuine pessimism and Socratic optimism- decline, decay, degeneration, weary, weak instincts, and nihilism. One of the first mentions by Nietzsche of Pyrrho in *The Will to Power* is as follows: “ I see only one original figure in those [philosophers after Socrates] that came after: a late arrival but necessarily the last- the nihilist Pyrrho” (*The Will to Power* 240-1, §437). There are also these remarks from Nietzsche about Pyrrho:

*Sagacious* weariness: Pyrrho.... Simple: indescribably patient, carefree, mild.... A Buddhist for Greece;... the unbelief of weariness in the importance of all things.... To overcome contradiction; no contest; no will to distinction; to deny the Greek instincts.... Pyrrho more travelled, experienced, nihilistic... (241, §437).

Similarly, Nietzsche poses and answers a question concerning Pyrrho: “ What inspires the skeptic? *Hatred* for the dogmatist- or a need for rest, weariness, as in the case of Pyrrho” (249, §

455). In each of these quotations, Nietzsche puts forward descriptions of Pyrrho that overwhelmingly indicate an agreement with the conclusion that Pyrrhonism is closely related to the negative conditions that I have repeatedly listed. Nietzsche notes that Pyrrho is a nihilist, weary, has no will to distinction (moreover it seems Pyrrho has no will to anything), is a denier of Greek instincts, and is motivated by what seems to be *ressentiment*, or begrudging onto another one's failures or pain, in his opposition to the dogmatists. Each of these descriptions is directly related to the negative conditions indicated by Socratic optimism. For instance, "sagacious weariness" is related to the negative condition of weariness for Socratic optimism. Rather than acting as a gadfly, Socrates's tradition has resulted in Pyrrhonism amongst other things. In addition, the description of Pyrrho as a nihilist is fitting for one who negates existence and the Will-to-Live. Overall, the comparisons could continue, but I will let these points stand on their own as I think they are sufficient to claim that Nietzsche would agree with the arguments and conclusions in this paper.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to show that Pyrrhonism, in virtue of being a descendant of the Socratic tradition and sharing all the base assumptions of Socratic thought, is a direct consequence of Socratic optimism. I then attempted to show that if this is the case, then due to the similarities between the genuine pessimism presented by Schopenhauer and Pyrrhonism, it follows that Pyrrhonism is an indication of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. And, by extension, I claimed that Socratic optimism, because Pyrrhonism is a direct consequence of it, is also an indication of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. As far as Nietzsche's argument goes in *The Birth of Tragedy*, this conclusion is

welcome. It was one of Nietzsche's central projects to show that optimism could be a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. And, with a demonstration that Socratic optimism shows these signs accomplished, it follows necessarily that optimism can be a sign of these negative conditions. However, it is important not forget the other side of his argument- pessimism is not necessarily a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary, and weak instincts. And, of course, this conclusion is shown through tragic pessimism. With both of these points in conjunction, there is a breakdown in the distinction between pessimism and optimism. As Nietzsche saw it, this distinction was tenuous at best and utterly wrong at worst. Either way, Nietzsche thought that it was more than plausible that each of these terms could be associated with either affirmative or negative value judgments with regard to existence or the Will-to-Live. As such, it is more than possible that what looks like pessimism or optimism could actually indicate the opposite. But, do not take my word for it- take Nietzsche's word in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

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