

Nietzsche, Darwin, and the Greeks:

On the Aesthetic Interpretation of Life

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Abstract

For Nietzsche, Darwinism misses the artistic expressiveness of organic life. In opposition to Darwin's instrumental approach for which the only purpose of life is survival, Nietzsche suggests a form of teleology for which the beauty of a higher type of human being represents the true purpose of life. The essay shows that Nietzsche never gives up the idea, expressed most emphatically in his early work, that life can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. The essay lays out how such an aesthetic justification can be understood. It shows that Nietzsche's aesthetic *theory* is in its core the search for an aesthetic *experience* of life, because a higher type of human being can prove his existence only through the perspective on life that he is able to adopt. This leads to an aesthetic *exceptionalism* which makes it impossible for philosophy to define such an experience in general terms. The essay also shows that there is no cognitive, non-ambiguous criterion that allows for the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic, that is, moral points of view, especially with respect to the need for a justification of life.

1. Introduction

At the time Nietzsche lived, Darwin had already become an epitome. He stood for a certain idea of life, and Nietzsche usually referred to him not so much as an individual scientist but as a name representing this idea. Nietzsche most probably never read or studied Darwin's work himself. But "Darwin" had become a powerful symbol which summarized, in Nietzsche's view, what the entire late nineteenth century held to be true about life's inner character and purpose. In his criticism of modernity, Nietzsche could therefore position himself as "Anti-Darwin," as the strict opposite to all modern assumptions about human and biological life. This

criticism of Darwin has often been discussed. What gets easily neglected is the fact that Nietzsche's engagement with Darwin can well be connected to the very beginnings of his work in which he was concerned with the tragic experience of life expressed by the ancient Greeks. What was at stake in his criticism of Darwin was not just the modern understanding of life, but the philosophical understanding of life as whole, which for Nietzsche first became problematic in his reading of ancient tragedy. This makes it necessary to identify as broadly as possible the perspective from which he engaged the modern ideas. As the following will show, what allows us to link the discussion of Darwin to the reading of the ancient Greeks is his attempt at an aesthetic interpretation of life, which in turn sprang from his question how life can be justified. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche famously came forth with the bewildering idea of an "aesthetic justification of life." Although he later ridiculed this idea as representing an "artists' metaphysics"¹ (BT, "Attempt" 2)—an enthusiastic, speculative worldview emerging more from artistic imagination than from philosophical thought—he never gave up the idea that life, and especially human life, is in need of a justification which can only be found through the adoption of an aesthetic point of view.

Our attempt at tracing this theme across very different periods in Nietzsche's work, and also across very different contexts of discussion, is no doubt risky and exposes us to all sorts of criticism. One might ask whether the interpretation of ancient Greek culture isn't simply too different from his engagement with contemporary Darwinism to be linked to it in any meaningful way. Especially the idea of an aesthetic justification of life seems to be limited to his early work. A later passage in the *Gay Science*, for example, only states that "as an aesthetic phenomenon,

¹ English translation: Basic Writings of Nietzsche, translated and edited, with commentaries, by Walter Kaufmann. New York 1992.

existence is still *bearable* to us” (GS 108).² This sounds certainly very different from the early approach in the work on tragedy. Still, as we will see in the following the idea of a justification of life is never completely given up, even if it is expressed in different ways. What we are aiming at, hence, is no philological reconstruction of the way in which the ideas have changed throughout the course of Nietzsche’s work. Such reconstructions are no doubt useful and necessary but would lead to a very different paper. We rather want to suggest a broader perspective, which then hopefully allows us to draw connections that remain overlooked if one only focuses on particular contexts and themes. Through these connections, so we claim, one can better understand what drives Nietzsche’s approach to the problem of life as a whole.

The main points of Nietzsche’s anti-Darwinism are well known. Nietzsche opposes the ideas of a struggle for life, of the survival of the fittest, and of the formative role of the environment in the evolution of species. It is, however, not easy to see what exactly he criticizes in Darwinism, and why he criticizes it. What is the ultimate purpose of his posture as the “Anti-Darwin”? After all, Nietzsche shares many of Darwinism’s basic assumptions. From early on, he welcomes Darwin’s new conception of the human being, “the horrible consequence of Darwinism, which, by the way, I consider to be correct.”³ The human being, he agrees with Darwin, “is wholly a creature of nature” (*Naturwesen*; UO I, 7).⁴ Nietzsche never gives up this idea. In his later work, it culminates in his formula of the “*homo natura*” (BGE 230).⁵

² English translation: *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge 2001.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of the Unfashionable Observations*. Translated, with an Afterword, by Richard T. Gray. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 11. Stanford 1999, 44; 1872/73, 19[132], KSA 7.461.

⁴ English translation: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*. Translated, with an Afterword, by Richard T. Gray. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 2. Stanford 1995.

⁵ English translation: *Beyond Good and Evil*. Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Cambridge 2002. For a more detailed discussion of Nietzsche’s relation both to Darwin and the Darwinism of his time, see Aldo Venturelli, *Kunst, Wissenschaft und Geschichte bei Nietzsche*. *Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung* 47, Berlin/New York 2003. Werner Stegmaier, *Darwin, Darwinismus, Nietzsche. Zum Problem der Evolution*. *Nietzsche-Studien* 1987, 264-287, emphasizes Nietzsche’s acceptance of the scientific principles of Darwinism

But Nietzsche also agrees with the idea of evolution. He never questions the basic idea that manifestations of life can be only understood by looking at the process or development through which they emerge. Although he occasionally ridicules Darwinians as “our ape-genealogists” (UO I, 7), his own genealogy of morals will describe the human being quite similarly as an animal that only slowly became domesticated by civilization. Nietzsche is evidently as much the child of the century of history and historicism as Darwin.⁶ His point is therefore not to argue whether there is a natural evolution of the human being at all. It rather concerns the question how this evolution has to be interpreted, and what its goals and outcomes are.

This essay follows Nietzsche’s interpretation of life first with respect to the theory of natural selection, then in a broader, philosophical sense. Aesthetic criteria, we will see, provide the main arguments in his criticism of Darwinism. For Nietzsche, every biological theory has to be able to include the aesthetic expressiveness of organic life (2.1. and 2.2). He criticizes Darwin also for conceiving of evolution as a continuous process of improvement in which all surviving species are by definition better than the ones that do not exist anymore. But despite this criticism, Nietzsche’s understanding of life contains what can be called a teleology of his own; a teleology that sees the purpose of evolution in the appearance of beauty as it emerges in and through a higher type of human being. This Nietzschean teleology does obviously not rely on any objective, natural tendency in life according to which life would inevitably strive to reach a certain goal, but

(264). In Nietzsche’s work, he states, these principles find their “deepest interpretation” (287). For Dirk Robert Johnson, Nietzsche’s Early Darwinism: the ‘David Strauss’ Essay of 1873. *Nietzsche-Studien* 30 (2001), 62-79, Nietzsche’s discussion is “highly nuanced and multi-faceted” (63). Dieter Henke, *Nietzsches Darwinismuskritik aus der Sicht gegenwärtiger Evolutionsforschung*. *Nietzsche-Studien* 13 (1984), 189-210, mentions Nietzsche’s positive impact on the further development of the theory of evolution. For a systematic account of the Darwinian elements in Nietzsche’s philosophy, see also John Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*. Oxford 2008, and Michael Skowron, *Nietzsches ‘Anti-Darwinismus.’* *Nietzsche-Studien* 37 (2008), 160-194.

⁶ Darwin’s significance for the development of a truly historical view, not only with respect to nature but also in relation to human culture, is acknowledged several times in Nietzsche’s works (cf. GS, 357. See also 1885, 34[73], KSA 11.443).

rather on the contingent occurrence of higher types which emerge from time to time as an exception to the average character of human beings. Despite their contingency, such higher types can be seen as the goal of human life (2.3.). If this is true, the question follows how one can identify the higher types. Nietzsche's answer can be summarized by saying that the higher type would also have a higher perspective on life and therefore be able to manifest *himself* as being different from those adopting another (moral, scientific, etc.) view of the world. This means that while in the beginning of this essay, following his criticism of the theory of evolution, Nietzsche's aesthetic interpretation of life can appear as yet another objective theory—for which life would be the *object* of inquiry—it will eventually reveal itself as *subjective*, insofar as it is based on the individual capacity to experience life in an aesthetic way. The higher type cannot be generally defined by philosophy but has to appear in an individual's (*another* individual's) look on the world (3.) The following section will further explain the aesthetic interpretation of life by showing how it can lead to a form of justification. Life is justified through the creation of a world as an aesthetic vision. However, it is not justified *by* human beings, that is, by any particular human judgment. Human beings rather have to experience their existence as one that *is being justified* together with the world to which they belong (4.). Finally, it will become clear that the subjective character of aesthetic justification leads to an aesthetic exceptionalism, insofar as the individual experience on which it is based remains by definition limited, particular, and unique. Nietzsche's aesthetic theory of life reveals itself ultimately as an expression of hope, as a meditation on the elusive possibility of making such a specifically aesthetic experience (5.). In the final chapter, we will raise the question why life needs justification at all, which will bring us to the, perhaps surprising, conclusion that aesthetic and moral worldviews are not as fundamentally different as they seem but rather share a common root (6.).

2. Nietzsche's aesthetic criticism of Darwinian ideas

2.1. The struggle for existence

Nietzsche's criticism of the idea according to which evolution is driven by a "struggle for existence" is not immediately clear. What seems more evident than the idea that life is a constant fight to stay alive, a fight against both the external conditions of nature and the other animals? It seems hard to deny this Darwinian intuition, not only because of its apparent plausibility but also because it seems to provide the only possible reason as to why certain species go extinct.⁷ Extinction seems to result, more than anything else, from a lack of aptitude to react to the challenges posed by the environment or other animals. Indeed, Nietzsche does not want to exclude completely the possibility of a struggle for existence: "It does occur, but as the exception" (TI, "Expeditions" 14).⁸ Life forms, from time to time, may have to fight for the survival of their species. What he opposes instead is the idea that the struggle for existence is the dominant condition of life and the sole and only motor of evolution; that all higher forms of life emerge "from the war of nature, from famine and death" as basic conditions to which they have to react.⁹ Life, for Nietzsche, cannot be defined as a struggle simply to stay alive: "The general aspect of life is *not* hunger and distress, but rather, wealth, luxury, even absurd prodigality—where there is struggle it is a struggle for *power*..." (TI, "Expeditions" 14). The inner dynamic of life that generates and furthers the course of evolution exceeds what is needed to stay alive.

⁷ "As more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life. [...] Although some species may be now increasing, more or less rapidly, in numbers, all cannot do so, for the world would not hold them" (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (first edition, 1859), edited with an introduction by J.W. Burrow. London 1985, 117).

⁸ English translation: *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale, Introduction by Michael Tanner. London 1990.

⁹ Cf. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 459.

Organisms have an inner force that they do not simply want to maintain but desire to increase, and that they sometimes wish, or even need, to *squander*.

Compared to this perspective, Darwin's view of organic life is essentially instrumental; for him, organic life is defined by the capacity to maintain its own existence. In every detail, its organization is tailored to fulfill the necessary, life-sustaining functions (i.e. the procurement of food, protection of territory, procreation, etc.). For Nietzsche instead, the inner tendency of life is decidedly anti-instrumental. Organic life is adventurous, risk-taking, and joyful. However, it is not at all clear how this intuition could be proven to have any more plausibility than Darwin's. Nietzsche states: "As regards the celebrated 'struggle for *life*,' it seems to me for the present to have been asserted rather than proved" (ibid.). But couldn't one say the exact same thing for his ideas of "wealth" and "prodigality": are they not also merely "asserted rather than proved"? Certainly there is evidence to sustain his claim. One can think of the elegance of a tiger or the beauty of exotic birds. There are phenomena of natural beauty which perhaps can never be explained from an instrumental point of view. However, it is not immediately clear how Nietzsche could ever validate his claim as a general alternative to Darwin's theory. What makes this point even more difficult is the fact that Darwin himself is far from attributing to every existing species the same instrumental capacity to master the challenges of life. For him, natural selection is characterized not only by "contingency"; it sometimes preserves formations that seem to go counter to the presumed utilitarian function of organic life.¹⁰

Taken immanently, insofar as only Nietzsche's work is concerned, his claims can be justified through the idea of the will to power.¹¹ Only a few points can be mentioned here. For

¹⁰ "Nor ought we to marvel if all the contrivances in nature be not, as far as we can judge, absolutely perfect; and if some of them be abhorrent to our ideas of fitness" (Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 445).

¹¹ Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's compilation *The Will to Power* is not used in this essay. When possible, translations of Nietzsche's unpublished writings are taken from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Edited

Nietzsche, what appears as a struggle for existence, as an interest in the pure maintenance of life, is in reality a struggle for power. Life is what it is only if it constantly tends to increase its power. Nothing organic simply *is*, but maintains itself only insofar as it wants to be more than it is. “I consider life itself instinct for growth, for continuance, for accumulation of forces, for *power*” (AC 6).¹² On the organic level, growth and duration, dynamics and stability, are one and the same; they are both based on the desire to increase the potential of force. An organism wants to secure its duration, not because it needs to do so—objectively, there is no need for any living being to stay alive—but because *it feels strong enough to secure the conditions to stay alive*. It survives if it invests all its energy and passion in achieving what is necessary for life. All instrumental utility, hence, is the result of a primarily anti-instrumental drive.¹³

For this reason, the idea of will to power also stands against the traditional concept of self-preservation. Nietzsche’s criticism of this concept is well-known.¹⁴ If self-preservation is seen as the dominating principle of life, life is reduced to a situation of permanent “distress” (*Nothlage*). This cannot be the case (cf. GS 349). Nietzsche does not miss the occasion to ridicule Darwin in this regard: “English Darwinism exudes something like the stuffy air of English overpopulation, like the small people’s smell of indigence and overcrowding” (*ibid.*). The focus on self-preservation makes life small and miserable because it implies that our main goal is to withstand

by Rüdiger Bittner, translated by Kate Sturge. Cambridge 2003. Where such translations are not available yet, quotations are taken from the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) and translated by the author.

¹² English translation: *Twilight/Anti-Christ*, translated by Hollingdale.

¹³ The whole kingdom of life, Nietzsche states, is determined by an “unconditional” will to power (1885/ 86, 1[54], KSA 12.23). See also 1885, 35[60], KSA 11.538. The will to power is equivalent to “expansion of power” (1885/86, 2[108], KSA 12.114; Writings, 80. See also 1885/86, 2[157], KSA 12.142; Writings, 91f. / 1886 /87, 7[9], KSA 12.297 / 1887/88, 11[96], KSA 13.44; Writings, 217 / 1888, 14[82], KSA 13.262; Writings, 248. This means that the will to power is always the will for “an augmentation of power” (1888, 14[121], KSA 13.300f., Writings, 256; see also 1888, 15[120], KSA 13.120f.)

¹⁴ Cf. BGE 13. See Günter Abel, Nietzsche contra ‘Selbsterhaltung’. Steigerung der Macht und Ewige Wiederkehr. Nietzsche-Studien 10/11 (1981/1982), 367-384.

the forces which deny us the right and possibility to exist. It prevents us from seeing the freedom and unforced joyfulness of life.¹⁵

If the will to power, however, has to be seen as an essentially unforced and anti-instrumental drive it can have no further explanation. The will for more (that is, more power) cannot be traced back to another will; it contains both its origin and its purpose in itself. For this reason, the will to power has to be seen as an aesthetic principle. Organisms, according to Nietzsche, exist in order to release or even squander their potential; their only purpose is to conduct life in a joyful, exuberant way. The wealth and luxury of life that were mentioned above can so be qualified as the interest of life to be lived in an aesthetically stimulating way, that is, as the interest of life to display its potential and have pleasure in such a display *as display* (and not, or at least not exclusively, as satisfaction of basic needs).

Obviously, this interpretation of the will to power needs more explanation than can be provided here. More evidence both from Nietzsche's published and unpublished works would be needed to support the claim that it is primarily an aesthetic notion (although some evidence will be given in the following).¹⁶ But for the purpose of our essay, all we have to show is that Nietzsche cannot prove that his idea of life has any more right than Darwin's. This point remains unchanged even in light of the theory of the will to power, and it does so for obvious reasons: one cannot prove anything with the help of an aesthetic principle. Being able to say that "wealth" and "prodigality" are the main characteristics of organic life depends entirely on the way in which life is described, and life can obviously be described in various ways. Nietzsche was quite aware of

¹⁵ For Nietzsche, modern culture, with all its pragmatism and its egalitarian convictions, is "plebeian." It owes this quality especially to the English attitude toward life, for which Darwin is one of the most typical examples (cf. BGE 14 and 253).

¹⁶ Heidegger famously begins his study of Nietzsche's philosophy with a reference to the will to power as art (cf. Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche. Volumes One and Two, translated by D.F. Krell. San Francisco 1991). See also Babette E. Babich, Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life. Albany 1993: "The second (active) expression of the Will to Power is from a superabundance of power and a need for creative expression" (196; see also 179, 183, 237).

the status of his theory as a mere “interpretation” and “experiment”.¹⁷ The idea of will to power can therefore never be seen as a biological theory that attacks Darwin’s theory on its own grounds. It is not another empirical theory, based on different data or on an alternative explanation of given data, but has the purpose of problematizing the goals and assumptions of biological theory itself. Nietzsche’s concern can be summarized through the question whether it is desirable to have a theory that denies aesthetic expressiveness a role in the interpretation of biological phenomena. Why does the biology of his time exclude the perspective of an aesthetic of life? Is the instrumental understanding according to which an organism is nothing more than a tool used to maintain its own existence the only possible account of life? Why should life not rather have *no* instrumental purpose at all?¹⁸ The following points will shed further light on this concern.¹⁹

2.2. The influence of the environment

Nietzsche’s ironic attitude towards English culture, towards the “stuffy air of English overpopulation” quoted above, leads to another criticism of Darwin. He denies that species are influenced by their environment (in the language of his time: by their “milieu”). “In reality,” he

¹⁷Cf. BGE 22 and 36; 1992, 220f. and 237.

¹⁸ In an important note, Nietzsche also refers to the ambivalence of any instrumental conception of life. The “utility” of an organ, he states, can be understood in different ways. If one organ, for example, is too strong, it might even prevent the duration of organic beings or at least hamper their further development. On the contrary, deficient organs might also serve as a stimulus for ongoing adaption. One can therefore not justly assume that the utility of an organ consists in the fulfillment of only one specific instrumental purpose. Survival and adaption might result from conditions that are initially *not* instrumental for them (cf. 1886/87, 7[25], KSA 12.304; Writings, 134f.).

¹⁹A critical and helpful overview of Nietzsche’s philosophical discussion of Darwin is given by Rafael Winkler, Nietzsche and l’*élan* technique: techniques, life, and the production of time. *Continental Philosophy Review* 40 (2007), 73-90, and Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Trans-Human Condition*. London 1997, 90-108. Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, biology, and metaphor*. Cambridge 2002, describes the historical background of Nietzsche’s criticism of Darwin, which leads him to a rather negative conclusion: “Far from advancing a radical, coherent and effective critique of Darwin, Nietzsche simply reiterates the many errors and misunderstandings perpetrated by his contemporaries” (55); namely the “pre-Darwinian basic commitment to non-adaptive modes of evolutionary change”(27). But apart from the fact that such conclusions take Darwin’s theory as a stated truth, which seems methodologically naïve, they also miss the difference between biology and its philosophical interpretation in Nietzsche (or better: between biology as a science and the philosophical interpretation of the underlying conceptual decisions that it makes).

states in a little too assertive way, the environment is “absolutely indifferent”; species suffer no “modification through climate and nutrition” (1888, 14[133], KSA 13.316). In a weaker formulation he notes that “Darwin absurdly *overestimates* the influence of ‘external conditions’” (1886/87, 7[25], KSA 12.304; Writings, 135).

Again, it is hard to see how such claims could be proven or at least validated through a more empirical account of evolution. But like before, Nietzsche’s major concern does not lie in the biological facts but rather in the general assumptions that guide biological theory in its Darwinian form. Instead of limiting the essential function of organisms to a mere reaction to the environment, there is no reason why biology should not assume an internal force that originates without any outside influence. Nietzsche explains this force again in aesthetic terms, as a force “which shapes, creates form from within” that only “*utilises*” and “*exploits*” external conditions (1886/87, 7[25], KSA 12,304; Writings, 135). The force works “from within” as a self-expression of the organism radiating into the outside world. It is, however, crucial to understand this “from within” in the right way. The inner force can be no separate, mysterious power that exists within the organism independent from its appearance in the outside world. The analogy to artistic expression makes clear that the inner character of living organisms is a modeling force which translates itself into organic forms, or better: the inner character is nothing besides this translation of force into external forms, which then interact with the environment. Nietzsche, thus, does not need to explain organic life any different from Darwin. The only difference is that, according to him, organic life cannot be reduced exclusively to a reactive force but also has to be granted the potential to express an unsolicited inner drive. Why should biology *not* want to accept this dimension of aesthetic expressiveness in the interpretation of life? Why not accept a dimension in

which life is unforced, productive, and individual, just like artistic creation?²⁰ That is, why not accept a different, aesthetic interpretation of the very same phenomena?

The question of the external influence has for Nietzsche also another important function, which cannot be explained in detail here. Besides the aesthetic vision of life, the idea of an inner, modeling force also allows for a non-moral account of evolution. According to Nietzsche, Darwinism gives far too much weight to the “domestication” of the human being, that is, to the adaptation to a certain cultural environment. It assumes that there is a “deep, even fundamental” adaption (1888, 14[133], KSA 13.315) that transforms humans from a natural into a civilized being. But human beings either degenerate or suffer such transformations in a purely superficial way (ibid.). Their nature does not evolve into a more benevolent one but retains essentially the same, morally neutral or even strictly immoral tendencies. But again, this aspect cannot be further discussed.²¹

2.3. The Survival of the Fittest

Nietzsche’s criticism of the idea that the fittest species survive parallels the way in which he criticizes the idea of a struggle for existence. Again, he does not deny the corresponding facts, namely the obvious fact that organisms have to be sufficiently fit in order to survive. He rather attacks the general assumptions underlying the idea. For Nietzsche, there is a hidden teleology in

²⁰ Nietzsche refers to the creative, modelling force of the will to power throughout his notes (cf. 1885, 36[31], KSA 11.563; Writings, 26 / 1885/86, 2[76], KSA 12.96; Writings, 72 / 1886/87, 7[2], KSA 12.252f.; Writings, 129. Beauty, he states, is “the highest sign of power” (1886/87, 7[3], KSA 12.258). Despite Nietzsche’s claim according to which the will the power is the force that drives the formation of the organic world, its ultimate realization can only be understood in analogy to artistic creation (see also 1887/88, 11[363], KSA 13.160 and 1888, 14[117], KSA 13.293-95). With respect to the problem of truth, the will to power is equivalent to the “will to deception” (1886/87, 7[54], KSA 12.313; Writings, 138), that is, to the creation of a world in which appearance and illusion are embraced as such (see also 1887/88, 11[415], KSA 13.193f.).

²¹As we said before, Nietzsche’s criticism often concerns not Darwinism itself but contemporary attempts at using the Darwinian ideas for the interpretation of culture. One such attempt uses the idea of evolution for the genealogy of morals. The attempt is untenable in Nietzsche’s eyes, mainly because it generalizes a particular, modern form of morality. Cf. GM, Preface 7. English translation: Basic Writings, edited Kaufman. See also 1885/86, 2[161], KSA 12.143f./ 1885/86, 2[203], KSA 12.165f.; Writings, 98f.

the notion of the survival of the fittest. It presupposes that the species that continue to survive do so because of the increasing fitness they acquire in the course of evolution. Their persisting survival means that they “grow more perfect” (TI, “Expeditions” 14). Darwin’s theory of evolution, hence, is for him based on the assumption of an ongoing enhancement of organic abilities. It entails the typically modern idea of *progress*. In this respect, it can even be suspected to be a hidden continuation of the “disastrous belief in divine *Providence*” (1887, 10[7], KSA 12.457; Writings, 174), he notes occasionally.²²

The point at which this presumed Darwinian teleology seems most problematic for Nietzsche is precisely the evolution of the human being. In fact, it has often been noted that Nietzsche is far more interested in weighing the consequences of Darwinism for the understanding of human life than in using it as a scientific method to explain the development of animals in general, let alone plants:

Mankind does *not* represent a development of the better or the stronger or the higher in the way that is believed today. ‘Progress’ is merely a modern idea, that is to say a false idea. The European of today is of far less value than the European of the Renaissance; onward development is not by *any* means, by any necessity the same thing as elevation, advance, strengthening. (AC 4)

Modern humans, according to Nietzsche, are not only far from having become more perfect over time, they even degenerate and regress in their physical and spiritual capacities. This diagnosis

²² On Nietzsche’s critical reflection of the modern condition, see Robert Pippin, Nietzsche’s alleged farewell: The premodern, modern, and postmodern Nietzsche. *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, eds. B. Magnus/K.M. Higgins. Cambridge 1996, 252-278. As the following will show, the whole idea of an aesthetic justification only makes sense as a typically modern experience of the world.

stands indeed in opposition to Darwin's ideas. For Darwin, the "natural selection" driving the evolution of species works necessarily towards their enhancement:

It may be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life.²³

What survives is by definition better than what does not survive. The "good" species are preserved and made even better through the constant, "silent" test of natural selection. Darwin's conception is based on an inherent optimism: for him, only the continuous improvement of species explains the process of evolution. Species would not survive or develop further if it were not for the increased abilities they achieve. Even if he attributes no particular, normative value to such "better" organisms, and even if his conception remains without any explicit hint at an underlying natural teleology—there is no tendency toward greater perfection in nature as such, only in the process of selection—it still presupposes that the surviving species are in one way or another superior to those that became extinct.²⁴ Nietzsche, instead, disconnects evolution from improvement. Evolution, for him, contains the possibility both of enhancement and decadence; it does not necessarily go only in the first direction, especially not in the case of human beings. The survival of the fittest cannot be the only model that explains the development of organic life.

²³ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 133.

²⁴ See also the underlying idea of progress: "And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 459). On Darwin's "ambivalent" attitude toward evolution as progress, see Moore, *Nietzsche, biology, and metaphor*, 29. Ernst Mayr, *The Idea of Teleology*. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992), 117-135, describes evolution as "an optimization process" that has no "definite," that is, overall goal and therefore results "in an irregular zigzag movement" (132).

Biological theory has to accept the possibility that species might survive without reaching a fitter or more perfect state.²⁵

Nietzsche's criticism, however, is more ambiguous than it seems. The ambiguity lies in the very idea of the "survival of the fittest," which can be read in a twofold way. On the one hand, it presupposes a general improvement of organic life. This aspect can well be criticized. On the other hand, the "fittest" organisms are simply those that have won the struggle for life, without any reference to an intrinsic enhancement of their organic capacities. Nietzsche himself refers to this possibility:

Species do *not* grow more perfect: the weaker dominate the strong again and again—the reason being they are the great majority, and they are also cleverer... Darwin forgot the mind (—that is English!): *the weak possess more mind...* [...] He who possesses strength divests himself of mind [...]. One will see that under mind I include foresight, patience, dissimulation, great self-control, and all that is mimicry. (TI, "Expeditions" 14)

Certain organic species survive not because of a process of improvement they have undergone, but because they outnumber and outwit other species. The weak, acting collectively, overcome the strong, exceptional creatures which by definition can only be few. The survival of the fittest can so mean the survival of those who are able to turn their deficiency and weakness into strength.

But not only this: Nietzsche at least indirectly admits that the weak have also enhanced their capabilities, insofar as they have become more intelligent or at least more "cunning." It is

²⁵Cf. 1888, 14[123], KSA 13.303f.; Writings, 258f. For similar discussions in the current theory of evolution, see Stephen Jay Gould, *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin*. New York 1996.

therefore hard to see in which sense he contradicts the Darwinian theory at all. Darwin could have said that the intellect is but a tool that was developed in the process of natural selection and allowed for a higher chance of survival; and current theories of evolution see the human brain in precisely this way.²⁶ The weak organisms have so in fact improved, at least in some regard, and the idea of natural selection functions for Nietzsche just as it does for Darwin, that is, as a model that explains survival through the capabilities of those who are more apt to survive. This way, Nietzsche's criticism seems to vanish up in the air.

The only way for Nietzsche to avoid this conclusion is to introduce a qualitative point of view. According to it, "mimicry," "foresight," and the like are not really signs of an improvement of organic life: spirit is a product of decadence that compensates a loss in genuine vitality. A species that became more intelligent than others is deficient, weaker, and less developed in its organic force, and it achieves only a secondary, defensive improvement of skills. But where does this qualitative difference come from? What distinguishes "weak" from "strong" in this exact sense? Can the difference be explained in biological, that is, empirical terms? The answer is clearly no. What Nietzsche envisions as a stronger species is also called a "higher type", and this "higher" quality can only be explained from an aesthetic point of view. In continuing a passage quoted above, he states:

In another sense there are cases of individual success constantly appearing in the most various parts of the earth and from the most various cultures in which a *higher type* does manifest itself: something which in relation to collective mankind is a sort of superman. Such chance occurrences of great success have always

²⁶ For a recent example, see Michael C. Corballis, *The Recursive Mind: The Origins of Human Language, Thought, and Civilization*. Princeton 2011.

been possible and perhaps always will be possible. And even entire races, tribes, nations can under certain circumstances represent such a *lucky hit*. (AC 4)

Higher types cannot be explained, let alone be produced; their appearance in the history of mankind is random like the appearance of great works of art. Beings that are truly strong—“the richer and more complex forms” of life (1888, 14[133], KSA 13.317)—remain an exception that emerges from the general evolution of life without contributing to its overall improvement. They are the manifestation, the display of a happy, fortunate accomplishment that life is able to reach, if only from time to time. “The short duration of beauty, of genius, of Caesar, is *sui generis*; something like this cannot be inherited” (ibid.). Like the beauty of a work of art, the higher types do not belong to a chain of biological mechanisms but truly stand out; they are genuine and individual. And even if they might have a certain biological constitution which could then be further analyzed or even explained—Nietzsche at least suggests that this is possible—in being nothing but a “lucky hit” they eventually escape all classification and generalization. There is no other word, no other qualification for them than “beauty”. Without the possibility of an aesthetic of life it could not even be said what a “higher type” is. This means that Nietzsche, again, does not deny any of Darwin’s empirical findings. He rather introduces a different interpretation of these findings, based on a criterion that is left out in the narrative that describes evolution as a linear process of improvement. According to it, within the story of the general progress of organic life there is yet another story to be told, which is based on particular, disconnected events.

But strangely enough, with the idea of a “higher” type Nietzsche alludes to a teleology of his own, a teleology even stronger than Darwin’s one. For Nietzsche, there are degrees of quality in life (which Darwin did not assume); life separates the “lucky hits” of beauty from the mass of

ordinary forms. Obviously, this kind of teleology does not drive the evolution of life like a natural force; life does not protect or even favor beauty in its exceptional form. But insofar as Nietzsche deplores the absence of beauty, he states it implicitly as the goal of life. Nietzsche's teleology is negative, pointing at the lack or even the failure of "lucky hits," but precisely in this negative form life reveals the true, proper evolution it is supposed to undergo: the evolution that would repeat and reaffirm the possibility of beauty. The evolution of beauty is no progress in the modern, Darwinian sense but consists of isolated, irruptive events. There is no linearity, let alone a necessary striving for improvement that would cause the phenomenon of beauty to appear, and yet the "higher type" *has* to appear in life from time to time, if only for the reason that such types always remain possible, as quoted above. Nietzsche's criticism of Darwin's teleology does therefore not mean that life can have no goal at all. There is a teleology that is inherent and specific to Nietzsche's aesthetic understanding on life. We will further show and explain it in the following remarks.

3. A Human Being That Justifies Being Human

The most obvious question we have to answer here is: how is it possible at all to speak about a form of teleology in the context of Nietzsche's thought? If we follow, for example, his discussion of the nihilistic tendencies in modern life, it seems clear that for him the idea of a purpose or goal of life is by no means tenable anymore. In the past, assuming such a goal required the "belief in God and an essentially moral order" of nature, a belief which modern culture slowly but definitely has lost (1886/87, 5[71], KSA 12.212; Writings, 117). On the other hand, the absence of a natural order does not mean that life has to be without any purpose or meaning. As Nietzsche famously points out, nihilism, the belief in the meaninglessness of life, is

still linked to the idea that there should be an objective meaning. It presupposes that if there is no God or overarching order, life can have no purpose at all. Nihilism, thus, is still as metaphysical as the belief in God.²⁷ What it fails to see is that there can be another source of meaning, a source that is not given to life from outside (through God or a pre-established order) but originates in life itself. “There is nothing in life that has value except the degree of power” (ibid., KSA 12.215; Writings, 119), Nietzsche states, which means that life can be given meaning and purpose according to the will to power that is invested and realized in it.²⁸

Tracing meaning back to the will to power, however, raises another immediate question: is such meaning not entirely subjective, based on the perspectives and modeling forces that define the will to power? For Nietzsche, the will to power can be described as an individual impulse to interpretation. It understands and discloses the world in a radically individual way: “The *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing [...] be” (GM 3, 12). There is no seeing except for a particular eye, limited to its particular perspective on the world. “Perspectivism,” Nietzsche notes, “is only a complex form of specificity” (1888, 14[186], KSA 13.373). But if this is so, what is the status of any “value” that can be attributed to life, and what can be a “higher type”? Does the idea of such a type not amount to a rather idiosyncratic fantasy, hardly relevant for anyone besides the individual who indulges in it? It seems that if we are able to make sense of Nietzsche’s teleology at all, we have to define it in a very specific way. Our question is then whether there can be a goal of life that is neither strictly objective (which is not

²⁷Cf. 1885/86, 2[109], KSA 12.114; Writings, 80.

²⁸Cf. 1888, 16[12], KSA 13.486; Writings, 274. The teleological elements in Nietzsche’s thought have often been noted. However, they are also often misunderstood as a general and objective condition of life, not as an idea and vision that is projected from out of life’s active force (cf. Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life*, 107). Elaina P. Miller, *Nietzsche on Individuation and Purposiveness in Nature*, in: Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *A Companion to Nietzsche*. Oxford 2009, 58-75, rightly emphasizes the subjective, that is, perspectivistic character of all teleological assumptions in Nietzsche (cf. 68f.).

possible anymore) nor strictly subjective (which denies the possibility of any more general interpretation of life).

In order to answer this question, we have to shift our own perspective. So far, we followed the assumption that life has to be treated as an *object* that can be described as bearing certain characteristic traits. We followed Nietzsche's criticism of Darwin, which led us to believe that he replaced the biological theory of evolution with an aesthetic description of life. But in reality, Nietzsche's approach cannot lead to anything like a "theory" which simply describes or explains certain structures and facts. This is particularly so for the kind of teleology we are dealing with here. A Nietzschean teleology cannot be based on the assumption that life possesses any general, objective qualities. The goal of life that he envisions is rather a product of life itself, a perspective that emerges out of the very desires and intentions of organic life:

The problem I raise here is not what ought to succeed mankind in the sequence of species (—the human being is a *conclusion*—): but what type of human being one ought to *breed*, ought to *will*, as more valuable, more worthy of life, more certain of the future. This more valuable type has existed often enough already: but as happy accident, as an exception, never as *willed*. He has rather been the most feared, he has hitherto been virtually *the* thing to be feared— and out of fear the reverse type has been willed, bred, *achieved*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick animal man—the Christian... (AC 3)

This passage evokes a number of ideas, including Nietzsche's idea of breeding which cannot be discussed in detail here.²⁹ For us, it is important to see how the idea of a more valuable type of human being is introduced. The higher type is valuable insofar as he is "willed." He is no natural, inherent goal of the human race but an outgrowth of its intentions; he incorporates what humans desire, wish, and strive to accomplish for themselves. The higher type represents the "future" of life, its orientation toward something it wants to become.³⁰ In addition, the higher type is "more worthy of life" not because all other types should be let die but because he offers a purpose for which human beings *can* live, a purpose given through life itself in its desire for a future and a goal. Human life creates its own teleology, and such teleology exists only insofar as it motivates and directs the conduct of life. If human beings ever ceased to will, they would also lose their goal.³¹

Still, it might seem that we haven't answered the other question that was raised before: how can such a teleology at the end *not* be merely subjective? We also have to ask how Nietzsche

²⁹ In his later works such as the *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche apparently wants to overcome the randomness of higher types, just as he wants to secure the beginning of a new post-Christian age (cf. the "Law against Christianity" in this work). The idea of breeding appears then as the attempt to stir actively, and not merely to suffer, the course of evolution. Because of the vulnerability and rare occurrence of higher types they have to be protected against the envy and aggression of the mass. This entails no less than the problem of eugenics which can also not be followed here. The same holds for the ethical aspects of the idea of breeding, especially the notorious criticism of pity. In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche famously states that one should help the weak perish (AC 2). Whether this means that their lives should actively be ended or that one should simply withdraw the consolation of Christianity from those who cannot live without it has to be left open here. With respect to the preparation of higher types, the idea of breeding often seems to be more an attempt at educating individuals than at their biological manipulation. However, even if this is true, Nietzsche does in fact use biological vocabulary to describe an effort that has very little to do with biology. At least his *language* displays a certain brutality which cannot but make his *thought* appear ambiguous. For breeding as education cf. BGE 61. For more ambivalent formulations, compare TI, 'Improvers' 2-5, and 1888/89, 25[1], KSA 13.637f. For a detailed interpretation of this topic see Gerd Schank, "Rasse" und "Züchtung" bei Nietzsche. Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung 44, Berlin/New York 2000.

³⁰ On the notion of future in Nietzsche as "an unconditioned future, a moment for which there exists no antecedent cause," see Winkler, Nietzsche and l'élán technique, 83. "For Nietzsche, man is the temporal and futural animal par excellence" (Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life*, 14). The orientation towards the future of life, which is also manifest in the ideas of overcoming and the *Übermensch*, the overhuman, can be seen as a characteristic moment of Nietzsche's thought.

³¹ Those who do not have a goal because they suffer a lack of will would be like the "last humans" (cf. Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Za) I, Introduction 5. English translation: Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for Everyone and Nobody. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Graham Parkes. Oxford 2005).

can prevent the higher type from becoming an ideological construct, the dangerous illusion of a higher class of human beings used precisely by those who want to dominate. To approach these questions, we can look at the way he describes the actual appearance of the higher type. The higher type is neither present nor imagined but “willed”; he appears as a form of life that has to be developed in a future that is yet to come. What individuals wish for as a higher type transcends them as result of a coming evolution for which they can only wait or prepare. In their openness toward the future their willing is directed to something other than their own, particular imagination. This becomes clear in a passage that mirrors and confirms the remarks quoted above:

But grant me from time to time—if there are divine goddesses in the realm beyond good and evil—grant me the sight, but one glance of something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant, something still capable of arousing fear! Of a man who justifies *man*, of a complementary and redeeming lucky hit on the part of man for the sake of which one may still *believe in man!* / For this is how things are: the diminution and levelling of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary. [...] Here precisely is what has become a fatality for Europe—together with the fear of man we have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the will to him. The sight of man now makes us weary—what is nihilism today if it is not *that?* – We are weary of man. (GM 1, 12)

Nietzsche’s invocation of the gods, imploring them to allow him a glimpse of a higher type, gives a new, more serious tone to his reflections on the evolution of the human being, despite the

rhetorical character of his lines. His prayer to the gods “beyond good and evil” comes out of a soul “weary” of modern life. It asks, in an attitude echoing Christian prayers, for the strengthening of his waning faith in the future of human beings. If we take this prayer seriously (and nothing seems to indicate that we shouldn’t do so), then the higher type is nothing that can be forced to exist; no political or artistic effort would be enough to secure his appearance. In addition, the faith in the future of human beings is presented not as an individual attitude but as an orientation shared with a community of others, who in the text are vaguely addressed as “we.” It requires a whole culture turning toward new and higher possibilities. Like a work of art, we can perhaps say, the higher type does not come out of nothing but appears within a certain time, speaks to a certain time, and needs the receptivity of others to be acknowledged in what he is. He needs certain conditions in order to thrive, and such conditions cannot be produced at will.

But there is yet another step. The human being who would justify “man,” that is, human life in general, is described as “happy, mighty, and triumphant.” The higher type knows about his superiority and thoroughly enjoys living it. For him, life is a series of victories. This means that what characterizes the higher type, as he is invoked in Nietzsche’s prayer, is not so much his specific character as his ability to look differently on life, to explore perspectives that are otherwise obscured in a world more and more concerned with equalizing and securing the conditions of life. The higher type would give something to fear because he would be able to see beyond the limits that human beings have set. But what is the perspective he would be able to have? Despite his fearful appearance which would allow him to look “beyond good and evil,” this perspective is again described in aesthetic terms. The higher type is “perfect” as a “lucky hit”; he follows only his own, personal criteria and taste. He is “happy” and “triumphant” because of the beauty, the aesthetic spectacle, he both sees and through his seeing creates in the world.

This step completes Nietzsche's argument. As we have seen, it started out as an aesthetic theory of life that could be seen as a modification of the existing form of evolutionary biology. As a theory, it describes and talks *about* life as an object. In the second step, Nietzsche showed that such a description is no merely theoretical attitude but a tendency that emerges in life itself: human desires and wishes make them long for the beauty of the higher type; the higher type appears as expression of their need for having a goal. Still, this only explained assumptions that are made *about* the higher type. In the final step we see that Nietzsche's goal is the perspective *of* the higher type, the way in which *the higher type*—and not we or Nietzsche describing him—would be able to see life. Instead of an aesthetic *theory* of life the goal of Nietzsche's reflections is an aesthetic *experience* of life. His theoretical stance would not be possible if it could not be grounded in, or at least related to, the perspective of *someone* who originally and without even wanting it, just as a "lucky hit," is able to adopt such a point of view. Nietzsche's teleology is based on the fact that such a higher point of view was and always will remain possible. Nothing guarantees its existence, but on the other hand, nothing necessarily prevents it from occurring in or growing out of the conditions of life.

This also allows for a final answer to the question whether Nietzsche can prevent the higher type from being a merely subjective, arbitrary product of human imagination, from being a mere illusion. The higher type, if ever there is one again, would prove his quality through the perspective he would be able to adopt. The higher type would look *at us*, describe *us*, and the way this would happen would then be indicative of the character that he has. Philosophy cannot create or even lead to such a type of human being, but can at best prepare us for the case that he might come. It can prepare for the higher type who would come to challenge and judge his contemporaries. We can therefore summarize the idea of a higher type as Nietzsche's longing for another, higher subject's look on us.

What remains to be explained in the passage quoted above is the problem of justification. Justification is linked to the experience of beauty; the higher types that justify the human being do so because of the beauty that life acquires through them. But what exactly is the role of aesthetic criteria in all this, how does beauty relate to life in order to allow precisely for its *justification*? These questions have to be answered in the following. In order to do so, we have to shift our focus away from the particular idea of a higher type and ask in a more general sense for the relation between art, life, and human experience.

4. Aesthetic Justification

In order to understand Nietzsche's idea of justification, we have to go back to his early work on *The Birth of the Tragedy*, one of whose most astonishing claims entails the concept of an aesthetic justification of life. The assertion that "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* existence and the world are eternally *justified*," is stated several times throughout the book.³² This statement needs to be read carefully: art (or aesthetic experience in the larger sense) is not one possibility among others that make life interesting, stimulating, and deep; it is the only possibility. And it makes life not only interesting and desirable but truly *justifies* the existence of the human being and the world. Art provides the goal and value that life otherwise lacks. In doing so, it replaces the traditional idea of a divine order inscribed in nature and life. Any order, from now on, necessarily appears as the result of an artistic illusion. Nietzsche famously criticized his early work in later times as indulging in an "artists' metaphysics" which then appeared to him "arbitrary, idle, fantastic" (BT, "Attempt" 5). But this criticism does not imply that the main philosophical ideas of his early approach are to be dismissed. As we will see, they align quite well with the later ideas about life that we have treated so far. The questions we can start from in

³² BT 5, as well as BT 24 and BT, Attempt 5.

order to explain the idea of an aesthetic justification of life are the following: *how* is existence justified this way, and *for whom*?

First, we have to consider the question of “how.” In *The Birth of Tragedy*, art appears as a remedy for the deep and unbearable pain that comes inseparably with human existence. The Greeks, according to Nietzsche, knew that human life in its inner character is too terrible to be lived.³³ Human life is essentially pain; pain not only in the physical sense but more important, and more deeply affecting, in a metaphysical sense. In the face of nature no single, individual being is supposed to exist. Nature destroys and dissolves individual life and all assumptions of significance and relevance that are made about it. Individual human life is essentially a contradiction that has to revoke and cancel itself.³⁴ This way, art not only has a place and function *in life*—the function to embellish, entertain, and stimulate human experience—but reconciles human beings with the very fact of living.

It was in order to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods [...]. Out of the original Titanic divine order of terror, the Olympian divine order of joy gradually evolved through the Apollonian impulse toward beauty, just as roses break forth out of thorny bushes. (BT 3)

Art does not have a specific pragmatic purpose within a given world but creates and unfolds a sphere of illusion that can be accepted *as a world*, as a totality of liveable conditions and goals. If anything, it creates the pre-condition for having purposes. Art determines the whole culture of a people as a web of mythical narratives through which it defines itself.³⁵ One might object that art (true art at least) never has a pragmatic purpose anyway. But if art is seen as a specific activity or

³³ Cf. BT 3.

³⁴ Cf. BT 5, and also BT 24.

³⁵ For the connection between myth and culture, cf. BT 23.

as a specific part of life, distinguished from other activities or parts—science, political action, everyday life, etc.—then within society as a whole even art can have a specific purpose: it can be used to embellish, entertain, and stimulate, as we said before. For Nietzsche, art is not limited to any particular aspect of life but guides and supports Greek culture as a whole. Art equals life, and in such a fundamental and totalizing sense it is indeed possible to say that art has no pragmatic purpose whatsoever, because there can be no pragmatic purpose outside of life.

This allows us to see how the justification of life is achieved. The pain of existence is justified not in an economic way—in the sense of a *quid pro quo* in which aesthetic pleasure is supposed to counter-balance pain—nor in a moral way in which the painful experience of human life is given a higher purpose and value. Existence is rather justified because within the realm of illusion human beings are able to *live*. As a narrative of the world, art creates the vision of a “divine order of joy” in which the conduct of life is both desirable and meaningful, even in light of the suffering that it entails. For Nietzsche’s Greeks, suffering is a part of beauty itself, of the beautiful spectacle that is enacted as *the world*.³⁶ On the contrary, for the economic or moral sense of justification suffering and beauty are separated because suffering is the price that first needs to be paid before any gratifying experience can be made.

To explain this further we can refer to Nietzsche’s later works, where a more pragmatic understanding of the fictions that are necessary for life seems to prevail. However, even conditions that at first seem more or less pragmatic are in fact still conceived in a purely aesthetic way:

³⁶ It has been asked how “we actually can see real suffering as beautiful,” and whether the idea of an “aestheticized suffering” isn’t a pure illusion (Daniel Came, *The Aesthetic Justification of Existence*, in: *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson. Oxford 2009), 41-57, here: 51). Against such questions one has to be aware that Nietzsche never thinks that suffering *itself* could be changed in whatsoever way. It only appears as part of a world whose overall quality is beauty (cf. GM 3, 28).

The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating. And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments [...] are the most indispensable to us; that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical [...], man could not live—that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life. (BGE 4)

The role of fictions described in these words remains utterly vague; how they are supposed to “preserve the species” and “promote life” is never said. The main point for Nietzsche is that the assumption of logical fictions allows for the world to be thoroughly intelligible. The purpose of fictions is to *create* a fictitious world or better: to be able to continue believing in fictions. Not *what* humans believe but *that* they believe is relevant for their attitude toward life.³⁷

From a more formal point of view, what allows art to create a world is the ability to capture human experience under the aspect of unity. In his famous remarks in the *Second Unfashionable Observation*, Nietzsche refers to “the *shaping power (plastische Kraft)* of a human being, a person, a people, a culture” (UO II, 1). This “shaping power” has the power to integrate even unwanted and painful events into one coherent narrative:

Such a nature knows how to forget whatever does not subdue it; these things no longer exist. Its horizon is closed and complete, and nothing is capable of reminding it that beyond this horizon there are human beings, passions, doctrines, goals. And this is a universal

³⁷ Nietzsche’s notion of fiction, hence, is dialectical: the world of appearance is for humans the true world because they cannot live without it. Appearance has to be taken as truth, and vice versa. See Walter Schulz, *Funktion und Ort der Kunst in Nietzsches Philosophie. Nietzsche-Studien* 12 (1983), 1-31, here: 30.

law: every living thing can become healthy, strong, and fruitful only within a defined horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself and too selfish, in turn, to enclose its own perspective within an alien horizon, then it will feebly waste away or hasten to its timely end. (ibid.)

Here again, Nietzsche's description follows the paradigm of the artwork. A world is always a specific world, created by a specific, irreplaceable narrative. Like a work of art has to leave out what makes no sense within its composition, the mythical narrative has to focus exclusively on the inner coherence it can achieve. With this ability to capture life as a unity, art almost achieves a therapeutic purpose: to unify means to disregard all aberrations and adverse events, to re-focus on oneself, and to heal. On the other hand, despite the physiological language, there is nothing strictly "natural" in this therapeutic activity: every degree of unity that can be achieved is the result of artistic creativity; cultures or persons do not simply possess a certain coherence of life but have to build it always anew. The horizon they live in needs constantly to be *drawn*.

To sum up, we can say that art justifies human existence by preventing the world from fading away. Beauty and the "order of joy," the two characteristics that are crucial for *The Birth of Tragedy*, are the result of art's ability to create or at least restore the vision and unity that are necessary for the experience of a world, and to withstand the impact of the negative by integrating it into the coherence and overall sway of its narrative.

This leads us to the second question: justification "for whom?" *The Birth of Tragedy* can help us to provide an answer, precisely with its famous "artists' metaphysic" that involves a Schopenhauerian "primal unity" (*Ur-Eines*), an original oneness out of which emerges the aesthetic vision of the world (BT 5). This unity includes human beings as part of the emerging world:

We may assume that we are merely images for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art [...] —while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it. (ibid.)

Following these lines, art not only has the purpose of making life acceptable and restoring the world which otherwise would fade away, it also lets individual human life be an element of the illusion that it unfolds. Art is created without a human creator and without the direct intention to create a world of aesthetic appeal. It allows human beings to find and experience themselves as part of the emerging world. Nietzsche evidently follows here the romantic idea of the genius who creates unconsciously, out of a natural disposition.³⁸ One can therefore never say that human beings *want* to maintain their life through art. In the perspective of *The Birth of Tragedy* one rather has to say that life and nature want to protect human existence through the encompassing vision of a mythical world. Art not only has no pragmatic purpose (first condition), it also exceeds what could be called a “human” capability by emerging out of natural impulses that are not at the individuals’ disposal (second condition).

The same constellation can be seen in the appearance of the higher type. The higher type is no vision that human beings create in order to give a goal and purpose to their life but rather the exceptional event of something that allows for finding such a goal, for restoring faith in a future of life. The higher type *happens* to human life, just as the aesthetic vision of a world happens to human beings and provides them with something that can be desired and willed.

³⁸ Cf. BT 5. On a more fundamental level, Nietzsche notes that it would be an “absurd question” to ask ‘who wants power.’ All willing entities emerge out of the organization of the will to power and cannot predate it (1888, 14[80], KSA 13.260; Writings, 247). What an individual affirms as valuable (or willable) corresponds to his pre-given degree of power. For a similar argument, cf. BGE 34. For the traditional idea of genius, see section 46 of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*: “Genius is an innate mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.”

Despite the vocabulary of will and creation, Nietzsche in fact never envisioned human beings as producing their own goals in the sense of an intentional process of creation. In aesthetic experience, the image of the world condensates in a way that is more similar to dream than thought.³⁹ One cannot *want* to have an aesthetic experience, as one could not even say what this is without already being overwhelmed by an experience of extraordinary beauty. To put this formally: the aesthetic vision appears in the form of experience, not of judgment; it originates from the object that is seen (fantasized, imagined, envisioned, etc.), not from a subjective intention. Analogously, the willing of a goal is more a passion than an act; human beings have to find themselves both as having the passion to will and as being exposed to an object that triggers their will.⁴⁰

Hence, the question “for whom” the world is justified can be answered by saying that the world is justified not for a human subject that is isolated from the world it justifies. The world, in other words, is not justified *before* the subject. To justify means rather to accept oneself together with all existence, to accept an existence that includes oneself as an inseparable part:

I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as *what is beautiful in them*: — thus I will be one those who *make things beautiful*. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on!

I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse,

I do not even want to accuse the accusers. (GS 276)

This passage from a later work, *The Gay Science*, puts aesthetic justification into a more stoic perspective: beauty, here, comes out of necessity. The transformation of the world into a realm of

³⁹ Cf. BT 1.

⁴⁰ Zarathustra’s “On the Thousand Goals and One” speaks of a similar experience for which the values that are held dear in a people represent what was necessary for them to overcome the hardships they endured. This means that values are not the result of a conscious creation but incorporate and express an experience that is made, primarily with respect to oneself and one’s own reactions and force (cf. Z I, Thousand). A later remark confirms that values and evaluations are forced upon humans by life itself (TI, “Morality” 5).

joy is described as a more individual, even more solitary attitude than in the early works where Nietzsche followed the paradigm of ancient Greece in assuming that the entire culture would contribute to creating a world. The structure of the argument, however, remains the same: the loving attitude toward the world is not based on particular reasons but embraces the world as a whole.⁴¹ It “makes beautiful” what is precisely not beautiful, and not only this: it beautifies what is ugly *because it is ugly*, because even the ugly is seen as a necessary part of the beauty of the world. Paradoxically, this includes even the rejection of the ugly (“the accusers”): in order to embrace the world lovingly as it is one also has to include the attitudes that are directed *against* it. In itself, the world is horrible and utterly unjustifiable. If we justify it, we do so not because this condition could be changed in whatsoever way, but because we are overwhelmed by an artistic vision. To justify the world from an artistic point of view means to be aware that nothing can be justified at all and that the only remaining way is to conceive of one’s whole existence as part of a work of art.⁴² The justification of the world is either absolute or no justification at all. This means that in order to justify life as art the individual must not distinguish himself from it. Life is justified “for me” if I find *myself* justified, even if I want to condemn and reject the world. “Justification” is no judgment either, let alone a moral one, but an experience. It presupposes that no separation is made between the justifying subject and the object that is justified. Even my rejection of the world is embraced as a part that belongs inseparably to it.⁴³

⁴¹ Nietzsche in fact never gives up the idea that art, and only art, can provide a justification of life, even once he has renounced the collective aspirations of his early work. “In art, man takes delight in himself as perfection,” one of the later works states (TI, Expeditions 9). “Art, and nothing than art, is the great enabler of life, the great seducer of life, the great stimulant of life” (1888, 17[3]), KSA 13.521; art is “salvation” (1888, 14[17], KSA 13.226; see also 1888, 17[3], KSA 13.521) and a “counter-movement” against the nihilistic rejection of life (1888, 14[117], KSA 13.293; see also 14[119], KSA 13.296 and 14[170], KSA 13.356).

⁴² Cf. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*. Manchester 1990, 224: “If existence can only be justified aesthetically, then ethical goals have no significance.” See also Came, *The Aesthetic Justification of Existence*, 47, on the absence of criteria that justify life objectively.

⁴³ On this paradoxical structure, cf. Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life*, 47.

5. Aesthetic Exceptionalism

To conclude, one last implication of Nietzsche's idea of justification has to be shown. The fact that the aesthetic justification of life in the later works appears in a more individual, solitary way does not come by chance. After all, what does it mean to justify existence through an experience of art? Aesthetic experience is by definition singular and transient. "Art is a state of exception," Nietzsche states; it is a state of mind much closer to an illness than to a regular mental disposition (1888, 14[170], KSA 13.356). We can call the reference to art as an extraordinary experience Nietzsche's aesthetic exceptionalism. This exceptionalism was already visible in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which emphasized not only how limited and transient the period was in which tragedy flourished in ancient Greece. The work made also abundantly clear that there was only one savior who was able to renew and restore the German culture, Richard Wagner. This already showed that the idea of an aesthetic *understanding* of life, insofar as it culminates in an aesthetic *experience*, is necessarily bound to a particular point of view. No general theory of the aesthetic value of life can be meaningful aside from an individual's actual capability to look aesthetically on life. But if this is so, then the wish for a higher type of human is necessarily conceived in a situation of deficiency and lack. The higher type is always only a possibility, an object of hope. The philosopher who describes the need for an aesthetic justification does not possess the means to achieve it all by himself, because philosophy, taken as such, *is no* aesthetic perspective on the world. The philosopher describes a perspective which cannot be his own, at least not insofar as he philosophizes. Philosophical theory, thus, is for Nietzsche transformed from a reflective attitude into the search for a specific, singular

experience. It becomes a practice either of memory or hope; harboring the desire for a fusion of life and art that can only exist in exceptional and uncontrollable ways.⁴⁴

The fact that no general theory of aesthetic experience is possible besides the actual, individual, and therefore exceptional experience of an aesthetic point of view explains many aspects in Nietzsche's work. Obviously, we should be aware not to exaggerate the exceptionality of aesthetic views or describe them as being completely inaccessible to any philosophical account. At the end, aesthetic experience *does exist*, and as such it can be made the point of departure for a philosophical analysis. However, such analysis always has to lead back to a specific experience that can be made. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, there could have been no reconstruction of the meaning of Greek tragedy without the experience that Wagner's music allowed Nietzsche to make—an experience which is indeed described as a very personal one.⁴⁵ The whole conception of the work relies on the possibility of sharing and repeating the ecstasy Nietzsche felt in listening to *Tristan and Isolde*. If this ecstasy is to be made the model for the understanding of all art, the reader has to be persuaded and lured into sharing the author's experience. *The Birth of Tragedy* is therefore in many parts less descriptive than persuasive; its

⁴⁴ Nehamas' interpretation of Nietzsche famously came to the same conclusion. For the ideal that Nietzsche describes, no general definition can be given: "But just as there is no single type of great artist or artwork, there also is no type of life that is in itself to be commended or damned. Nietzsche cannot therefore have a general view of conduct that can apply to everyone and also be specific and interesting" (Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge 1985, 229). However, it is wrong to assume that the only way Nietzsche could reach "a perfect instance of his ideal character" (232) would be to make himself the example of this ideal. Although Nietzsche might have indeed "created himself" in his writings (233), such self-creation is not the only goal of the efforts he made. Nehamas' interpretation is wrong, first, in understanding perspectivism from a purely epistemological point of view. Nietzsche's concern lies not so much in the problem how knowledge is achieved (this problem is trivial), than in the actual process of experience. Perspectives have to be *lived*, and in being lived they can also be shared. Second, Nehamas is wrong in assuming that Nietzsche conceives of the world "as if it were a literary text" (3). Not only would it be much more appropriate to take music as artistic analogy for the understanding of Nietzsche's thought. More important is the fact that the literary model implies a solipsistic perspective on the world, because each text has only one author. Nietzsche, however, looks for an aesthetic experience that would allow for the creation of a community. He looks, in other words, for an experience other than his own.

⁴⁵ It requires, for example, a "truly aesthetic spectator" to "confirm" Nietzsche's particular experience of Wagner's musical drama (cf. BT 24). From a different, but closely related point of view one can say: "Nietzsche principally offers us not his values—though he claims them to be higher than our own—but his method of making values. He offers us himself as an example—perhaps the first ever—of how one may make one's values in knowledge of how values have been made (and so what they've really been for)" (Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 115).

exhortative style tries to invoke a new community of listeners. (This also means, by the way, that the presumed experience of Greek tragedy is first and foremost a very modern one. Critics did not fail to notice that.)⁴⁶

However, in saying that it is well possible to have, and perhaps even share, an aesthetic experience, we presuppose that it is clear how such an experience feels. The idea of aesthetic experience is used as if it were a matter of fact. But this can hardly be the case, especially if the experience carries the exceptional character we described here. To see where things become in fact more complicated than they might seem, we only have to ask how one would know that one's worldview is indeed a happy, artistic illusion. Is there a difference between an aesthetic illusion as it emerges, for example, from the tragic worldview of the Greeks and an illusion that stems from the moral abnegation of life? At the end, both *are* illusions! And not only are both illusions, they also share the experience of the horrors and the negativity of life that is counter-balanced by their vision of the world. In fact, the only difference between them is, again, aesthetic. Those who are able to embrace the tragic character of life see pain as a stimulus for the creation of beauty, not as a reason to resort to a vision of the world which would allow them to minimize or even eradicate suffering. But such a distinction remains difficult to make because it is based on an inner experience of life for which no non-ambiguous criterion exists. Whether the "beauty" that is experienced is the quality of a purely aesthetic point of view or the beauty that results from a moral falsification of the world cannot be said without knowing the meaning of each particular case. Just as each work of art is unique, so is each aesthetic experience. An artistic vision of the world, based on its content alone, can be indistinguishable from a moral or religious

⁴⁶ See Rudolf Fietz, *Medienphilosophie: Musik, Sprache und Schrift bei Friedrich Nietzsche*. Würzburg 1992, 59, for Nietzsche's specifically modern perspective on ancient tragedy.

view, and yet follow a purely aesthetic intent. At least there is nothing in Nietzsche's work that would allow us to exclude this as a possibility.

The reason for this ambiguity is obvious: Nietzsche uses the idea of aesthetic experience in a twofold way, as experience that involves specific works of art or is at least based on some kind of artistic activity, *and* as an experience of life in its essential vitality. On such a fundamental level as the latter, all experience is aesthetic. To see this point, it is useful to turn to a passage from his later works. While for *The Birth of Tragedy* aesthetic and moral views represent two entirely different cultures, and two entirely different ways of living—the tragic and the Socratic one—the later works at times also emphasize their common root and see them as two different interpretations of the same experience of life:

Dionysius versus the 'Crucified One': there you have the opposition. It's *not* a distinction regarding their martyrdom—just that this martyrdom has a different meaning. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, conditions torment destruction, the will to annihilation... / One divines that the problem here is that of the meaning of sufferings: whether a Christian meaning, a tragic meaning... In the former case it's held to be the path to a blissful existence; in the latter, *existence* is held to be *blissful enough* to justify even monstrous suffering. (1888, 14[89], KSA 13. 266; Writings, 249f.)

For both worldviews the ordeals are necessarily the same, as well as the desire for a blissful life. The only difference lies in the way in which they interpret the relation between suffering and happiness; whether they see happiness as a consequence of suffering or concomitant to it. But in practice, do such subtleties really matter? Isn't it most important that one's suffering can be

experienced as bliss, in whatsoever way? Given the general theory of the will to power according to which *all* life is interpretation no other points of view than artistic ones exist, even if not for all of them the world appears in an explicitly aesthetic way. It is therefore possible to say that the only difference lies between *explicitly* and *implicitly* artistic points of view, that is, between points of view that rejoice in the creativity of one's perspective on the world and points of view that require a moral purpose for every negative event and are so unknowingly, and perhaps even unwillingly, artistic.

But the situation is even more complicated than that. Not only is the distinction between explicitly and implicitly aesthetic experiences in itself aesthetic—because it depends entirely on the way meaning is expressed and understood—it is ultimately inaccessible even to those who make the respective experiences. The origin of both worldviews—*aesthetic* and *moral*—has to remain veiled. On the one hand, the tragic soul must not create an aesthetic world out of a certain purpose, that is, out of the purpose to overcome the unbearable negativity of life. The creation has to happen involuntarily, and the negativity has to be overcome simply because a more beautiful vision of life has emerged. On the other hand, the moral soul who resorts to the vision of a better world must also not know that its vision is a mere illusion because otherwise it would not be able to believe in it. Hence, for both the tragic and the moral souls it is necessary *not* to ask for the origin of their vision. There can be no cognitive capacity that controls the production of fictions, at least not in a non-ambiguous sense. This means that even if one can distinguish the different views conceptually one cannot freely *choose* to have either an aesthetic or a moral point of view.

The example provided by *The Birth of Tragedy* illustrates this point. Socrates, Nietzsche explains, brings the end of tragedy about by interpreting the play not as an aesthetic vision but as a combination of actions whose purpose is to represent reality. His way of dealing with fictions is explicitly “*inartistic*” (*unkünstlerisch*) and destroys the specific receptivity that an aesthetic play

requires in order to reach its effect.⁴⁷ The aesthetic vision, however, cannot defend itself because in order to defend itself it would have to fight the moral worldview on its own grounds; that is, it would have to be able to conduct a *moral* argument. Tragedy is destroyed by the way Socrates looks at it, and there is no way to prevent this destruction. The distinction between the two worldviews is not accessible from within, and to claim the full right of both views requires a third and separated point of view which is accessible only from a reflective stance.⁴⁸

Again, it needs to be emphasized that despite all ambiguities aesthetic experience does exist for Nietzsche. Even if it has to happen involuntarily, and perhaps most often has to remain misunderstood, at least some experiences can become transparent and then serve as models for the understanding of other experiences that occur. That fact that Nietzsche's theory is based on an aesthetic exceptionalism means first and foremost that no general conclusions should be drawn which would determine such experience to occur *necessarily* in a certain way, that is, to be either always accessible or always inaccessible. Philosophy, for Nietzsche, is not only a practice of memory and hope, as we said before, but also a practice of listening, of savoring carefully what each singular experience means. Nietzsche draws the ultimate conclusion of his aesthetic empiricism by making clear that experience is a form of individualism, a thinking based on singular qualities and events.

6. Why Does Life Need a Justification at All?

The last remarks showed how close the artistic and moral worldviews really are, not only in their common aesthetic character but also in their shared relation to suffering. This allows

⁴⁷ BT 12. Cf. also BT 14.

⁴⁸ In Nietzsche's later works, a physiological explanation prevails that distinguishes worldviews based on whether they represent an "ascending" or "descending" form of life (TI, "Morality" 3-5). The problem, however, remains the same: one can describe these forms of life from a third point of view, but there is no criterion to distinguish them from within.

us to mention one last important aspect in Nietzsche's thought. To do so we can start from the question why human beings ask for a justification of life. That life can actually call for a justification became sufficiently clear in our previous remarks. In the face of nature, human life is both painful and futile; nature constantly revokes any value given to it. It is not clear, however, why Nietzsche thinks that the *only* reaction to this condition is the justification of suffering. Could humans not also react in a different way? As we saw, Nietzsche's idea of justification cannot be understood in a traditional sense where suffering is given a higher—natural, moral, theological, etc.—purpose. The aesthetic justification entails nothing more than life's unlimited creativity, that is, nothing more than the painful process of life itself. And yet, whether Nietzsche is aware of this point or not, the concept of justification is by definition *moral*. Human beings need to be able to say that life is essentially *good*, not bad. Otherwise, what could "justification" mean? But if there is in fact a need to qualify life as good, then Nietzsche's idea of human existence, surprisingly enough, is based on some version of a moral anthropology.

As astonishing as it might seem, Nietzsche never denies this point. One only has to take all relevant passages seriously and, as far as possible, literally. The essay *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, can well be read as an account of a moral anthropology. Only a few passages can be quoted here:

For with the priests *everything* becomes more dangerous [...] but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became *an interesting animal*, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*. (GM 1, 6)⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Cf. GM 1, 7: "Human history would be altogether too stupid a thing without the spirit that the impotent have introduced into it."

The process mentioned here, which is also called the “internalization” (*Verinnerlichung*) of human life (GM 2, 16),⁵⁰ is by no means the final goal of human evolution. Nietzsche obviously denies rationality the merit of being the ultimate realization of human potential. The human being rather “gives rise to an interest, a tension, a hope, [...] as if with him something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise” (GM 2, 16). But wherever this “bridge” may lead, it is clear that it starts from the capacity to develop an inner attitude toward life, that is, to reflect in one way or the other on oneself. And not only to reflect but to give actively an orientation to life: “Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it; he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering” (GM 3, 28). This means that asking for justification, strictly speaking, is not merely a “capacity” of human life, it is rather a necessity without which such a reflective, inwards-directed being could not exist.

From this point of view, we see again that artistic and moral worldviews have many traits in common. If it is true to say that according to the theory of will to power there is no life that is not artistic, then it is also true to say that according to Nietzsche’s anthropology there is no human attitude that is not moral. Art grows out of the same disposition as morality; both stem from the fact that life urges us to ask for justification. But this conclusion should not be astonishing at all. As we saw, there is no non-ambiguous criterion that distinguishes the different worldviews, neither from outside nor from within. The only available criterion is aesthetic and refers to the way in which a specific interpretation of life is achieved—how personal, daring, or deep it can be. It is, after all, only a difference in the *interpretation of life* that distinguishes the worldviews, and not a separation between different types of human beings, as Nietzsche’s

⁵⁰ See also the famous formula “to breed an animal *with the right to make promises*” (GM 2, 1).

physiological language often suggests. Obviously, differences in human nature do exist and not every individual can live up to every kind of interpretation. The interpretations of life are limited in the way all experiences are. But still, if every interpretation is a creative way of dealing with the challenges of human existence, then why should a moral interpretation not also be a “promise” of something else, like all other interpretations that humans give?⁵¹

7. Conclusion

At the end, we can come back to the point we started from, to Darwin. We now see that Nietzsche follows indeed the idea of evolution, only by conceiving of it in a more radical sense. If life is the result of an evolutionary process, there is no reason why the course of its development should not be open. Life works either for or against itself, but there is no neutral point at which it simply remains as it is.⁵² Human beings can lose their artistic ability to create a world that can provide a justification for their life, and by doing so they can lose what is most genuine to them. Evolution, therefore, can take various directions; in a sense, evolution itself evolves. But precisely because life is no pre-determined and linear physical process, it has also the capacity to bear the fruit of a higher type. Every theory of life has to take exceptional perspectives into account, in the sense of particular and uncontrollable points of view emerging in and out of life itself. No theory of life should exclude the possibility of an aesthetic experience of

⁵¹ It has been noted that the aesthetic justification cannot operate in the same way than a philosophical justification, by giving a reason for human suffering. Otherwise, it would not be different from Socratic rationalism (Randall Havas, Socratism and the question of aesthetic justification, in: Salim Kemal, Ivan Gaskell, David Conway (eds.), Nietzsche, philosophy and the arts. Cambridge 1998, 92-127, here: 117). But although aesthetic justification does not actually *give* a reason—instead, it simply shows the beauty of a world—it still *responds* to a deep-felt need, and insofar gives at least an implicit reason.

⁵² Some of Nietzsche’s formulations can be read this way: “The confidence in life is gone; life itself has become a problem. May it never be believed that one has thereby necessarily become a gloomy person, a moping owl! Even love to life is still possible, only one loves differently ... It is the love to a woman that causes us doubts...” (Nietzsche Contra Wagner [NW], Epilogue 1; translation M.S.). For similar formulations on life as a “problem”, see 1973, 29[154], KSA 7.696; Unpublished Writings, 259 (“life as problem”) / 1884, 26[156], KSA 11.190 (the “problem of the organic”) / 1885, 34[240], KSA 11.500 (book title: “*Das Problem ‘Mensch’*”) / BGE 36 (procreation and nourishment as “problem”) / BGE 244 (“the whole problem of ‘man’”).

life. On the other hand, every theory that does include such an experience also has to take into account that aesthetic experience comes in many guises, sometimes under the guise of its own opposite, the moral view on life. Philosophy, for Nietzsche, has to go all the way from theory to experience if it wants to capture the inner potential of life, and it has to acknowledge that for the particular aesthetic experience it relies on no non-ambiguous criterion exists. What counts as genuine experience cannot be said in general terms. Compared to Darwin, this also means that although Nietzsche embraces naturalism in conceiving of human life, and in this sense emphatically aligns with Darwin, his version of the history of nature still looks very “human.” Instead of a deterministic process stirred merely by the anonymous forces of natural selection, he looks at the creativity and aesthetic expressiveness of life, both in a general and human sense. A purely naturalistic point of view means for him to neutralize and disregard the individual and uncontrollable desire for artistic experience.

In addition, what also distinguishes his understanding of life from Darwin’s, and makes it likewise look more “human,” is the fact that for Nietzsche human beings cannot *not* have a relation to their life, especially to their suffering. They experience life as bearing the need for a justification. Humans have to see life as invested with a goal, as allowing for an inherent teleology, even if it is only a negative one that mourns the absence of the aesthetic perspective on life that a higher type of human can achieve. Conceived in a purely physical and non-aesthetic sense, evolutionary biology remains a misunderstanding for humans; it suggests that life could be experienced as the mere fact of being alive. This way, humans would overlook that their first experience of life is suffering, and that they are in need of a perspective that gives suffering a meaning, if only an aesthetic one.