

Nietzsche and the Limitations of the *Will to Power*

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Abstract

Nietzsche's notion of the *will to power* has long been misunderstood and not given sufficient attention for its utility in understanding social dynamics. Much of this trouble is a function of the polemic overtones of Nietzsche's writing style. We should read Nietzsche not as a Nazi, nihilist, or motivational speaker—as many have in the past—but rather as a perspectivist illuminating a serendipity by which we can understand much of the world—i.e., will to power. This paper will advance an immanent critique of the self-sufficiency of Nietzsche's notion of the will to power. Following an overview of the notion and how it should be interpreted, will to power will put it through a “stress test.” This paper will show precisely where the notion “breaks” and how we should remedy this shortcoming with a supplemented understanding of will—namely with my notion of *will to decadence*. The utility of this supplemented understanding of will is it better explains various forms of decadence (i.e., decay and stagnation) in art and aesthetics in a manner which Nietzsche's notion of the will to power alone cannot.

Citation guide

A common method by which Nietzsche is cited is by book abbreviation followed by aphorism number. Roman numerals are used to indicate the section number in the book. “P” is used to cite the preface, and “E” is used to denote the epilogue. All numbers are references to aphorisms, not page numbers. All references to non-Nietzschean works will use standard MLA citations. I have cited all Nietzsche abbreviations as the following:

AC = The Antichrist

BGE = Beyond Good and Evil

BT = Birth of Tragedy

CW = The Case of Wagner

CWI = A Musician's Problem

CWII = Nietzsche *contra* Wagner

CWII-I = Wherein I Admire Wagner

CWII-II = Wherein I Raise Objections

CWII-IV = A Music Without A Future

CWII-VI = Wagner As The Apostle Of Chastity

DD = Day of Dawn

EH = Ecce Homo

TI = Twilight of the Idols

WP = Will to Power

GM = Genealogy of Morals

Z = Thus Spoke Zarathustra

1. Will to Power

“And do you know what “the world” is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror?.....This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!” (WP, 550)

Nietzsche’s concept of the *will to power* initially appears as a metaphysical claim on the fundamental nature of reality. However, coupling Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power with his perspectivist philosophy seems to lead to some trouble. How can we understand the will to power as a plausible means by which we understand the world when Nietzsche himself was vehemently opposed to objectivism in any capacity? The answer I argue is we should read the will to power as neither entirely objective nor mere storytelling, instead, will to power is what Nietzsche sees in his “mirror”—i.e., a perspective from which Nietzsche sees the world—(WP, 550). Will to power acknowledges the perspectival quality of metaphysics through storytelling. Will to power should be interpreted as a perspective on *will* that Nietzsche takes to be descriptive of reality—not an imperative to which people acquiesce, but rather, a rudimentary primordial *truth*—i.e., a perspective (not the thing-in-itself). Through this framework, we can better untangle the notion of the will to power in the web of Nietzschean thought.

1.1 Perspectivism

When reading Nietzsche’s perspectival metaphysics it is important to keep in mind that perspectives are not the sort of thing that can be “proven.” For example, if someone were to say “When I look at that door I see the color green,” it would not be appropriate or make sense for me to respond and say “Prove it.” It is simply a perspective and an interpretation of the thing-in-itself—meaning the form of the thing independent of any perspective. Will to power should be read in the same light as the green door—that is, it is a perspective on the world. However, it is different from the green door in the sense that will to power has a much more

long-winded and convincing explanation—albeit a perspective seen through Nietzsche’s “mirror.” It is also important to be clear that Nietzsche believes that we can never be certain about the thing-in-itself because our knowledge of the thing-in-itself is necessarily defiled by our perspective.

Sir William Jones investigated a specific perspectivist line of thought and wrote a book titled “Asiatic Researches” which Arthur Schopenhauer later drew from and to which Nietzsche then added substance. In this essay, Jones writes of perspectivism in the following manner:

The fundamental tenet of the Vedanta school consisted not in denying the existence of matter, that is, of solidity, impenetrability, and extended figure (to deny which would be lunacy), but in correcting the popular notion of it, and in contending that it has no essence independent of mental perception; that existence and perceptibility are convertible terms. (Jones 1970, 164)

Granted, the perspectivism of the Vedanta school, Schopenhauerian, and Nietzschean varieties are in tension with one another in many important ways, but at the highest level the underlying point is to showcase that perspectivism does not deny the existence of things, but it merely “corrects the popular notion of [the thing-in-itself].” Moreover, the thing-in-itself may exist, but is inaccessible to us because all we have in this world are our perspectives. Nietzsche’s perspective of the world is the will to power—and nothing besides (WP, 550).

1.2 The Name

Another layer of difficulty in interpreting the will to power is the name. Neither “Will” nor “power” should be interpreted in the absence of the other. More accurately we should read and interpret “will to power” as a single, unified concept. A Nietzschean scholar—Raymond Belliotti—falls into this trap and perpetuates an at best reductionist description of will to power by trying to separate the terms “will” and “power” (Belliotti 2016, 39). This framing of “power”

without “will” commits the error of putting the doer before the deed—the deed is everything (GM, I, 13).

But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; ‘the doer’ is invented as an afterthought,— the doing is everything. (GM, I, 13)

Without will there is no power to be spoken about. Power only exists due to the intrinsic nature of will. Moreover, when we separate the terms the world is no longer “the will to power and nothing besides” it is “will” and “power.” Will to power is one unified concept that functions as a verb and a noun that cannot be separated.

1.3 Mechanistic Causality

Nietzsche believes that will to power is neither cause nor effect, it is the playing field of reality itself. Will to power is the thing from which everything stems and it is the thing to which everything goes. It exists, in itself, by itself and for itself. “This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!” (WP, 550). This leads to another difficulty. How do we interpret the relation between human agency and will to power? Instead of viewing the actions of the subject through a framework of mechanistic causality—i.e., cause and effect—the actions of the subject are better understood as the manifestation of will (WP, 477, 689). Rather than viewing a series of events the whole thing is seen as one event. Through this framework, we can perceive a symbiotic relationship between will to power and actions (even using the word “actions” is misleading because it implies a degree of autonomy of the subject independent of the will. Schopenhauer uses a more accurate term to describe the manifestation of will which we colloquially refer to as “actions”—*representation* (Schopenhauer 2012, 3)). To reiterate, the symbiosis is not a draconian imperative on actions by will, but a representation of the operation of will. To Nietzsche getting

rid of will to power would mean getting rid of existence itself. Moreover, getting rid of the subject/ego/spirit/doer/self would get rid of an avenue by which will to power can express itself—a representation of will.

1.4 Growth, Overcoming and Expanding

Until this point, we have been over some methodological principles for studying the notion of the will to power. However, the methodology of interpretation and elucidation of the concept tend to be intertwined. Thus, in explaining methodology we have been explaining the notion of the will to power in the periphery. However, I would like to switch gears at this point and grant chief importance to elucidating the notion of the will to power.

Nietzsche argues that will to power expresses the fact that all life is growth, overcoming, and expansion both physically and psychologically. Life never retracts, it is always shifting into another space trying to grow, overcome, and expand. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche says the following:

Wherever I found a living thing, there found I Will to Power; and even in the will of the servant found I the will to be master. (Z, 125)

It is important to note that for Nietzsche the will to power is not limited to “living things” it also applies to the non-living—i.e., inorganic—things (WP, 299). When Nietzsche says “living” things he refers to the adjectival form of a specific variety of “life”—which I take this to be a reference to Schopenhauer's notion of *will to life*. Moreover, there is no substantive distinction between human and non-human to either Nietzsche or Schopenhauer because everything is an outgrowth of will to power/life—To Nietzsche, will to power is the primordial *truth*.

1.5 Schopenhauer & Will

In the following analysis, we will trace the genealogy of the notion of the will to power beginning from Schopenhauer's notion of the Will to Life. We begin with Schopenhauer due to the difficulty of outlining the notion of will to power otherwise. This difficulty is because throughout Nietzsche's career, he never defined will to power with any degree of brevity. Thus, we are forced to work from the bottom up. Schopenhauer takes will to be the base metaphysical reality from which everything stems. This will is inherently suffering and misery. In *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer writes of this will as the following:

The world, in all the multiplicity of its parts and forms, is the manifestation, the objectivity, of the one will to live. Existence itself, and the kind of existence, both as a collective whole and in every part, proceeds from the will alone. The will is free, the will is almighty. The will appears in everything, just as it determines itself in itself and outside time. The world is only the mirror of this willing; and all finitude, all suffering, all miseries, which it contains, belong to the expression of that which the will wills, are as they are because the will so will. (Schopenhauer 2012, 450)

Immediately it appears as if Schopenhauer makes the tacit claim that Will to Life is the *ens realissimum*—i.e., the most real thing. However, Schopenhauer was also a perspectivist.

Therefore, if will is the *ens realissimum* we must add a perspectivist qualification. Through Schopenhauer's perspective, we see the world as the subject through which will manifests itself. When observing this manifestation of will Schopenhauer noted that will is suffering and is inherent in all life. Schopenhauer writes about the relationship between will to life and suffering most directly in the following passage.

All willing arises from want, therefore from deficiency, and therefore from suffering. The satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied. Further, the desire lasts long, the demands are infinite; the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out. But even the final satisfaction is itself only apparent; every satisfied wish at once makes room for a new one; both are illusions; the one is known to be so, the other not yet. No attained object of desire can give lasting

satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification; it is like the alms thrown to the beggar, that keeps him alive to-day that his misery may be prolonged till the morrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we can never have lasting happiness nor peace. (Schopenhauer 2012, 254)

There is will because there is space for the will to will. There is a void where will expands to reaffirm its existence. Moreover, will is inherently expansionary because there is suffering (Schopenhauer 2012, 87). This to Schopenhauer is will and the world is merely a representation of this will. This expansionary nature of will is at the heart of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power.

1.6 Nietzsche *contra* Schopenhauer

The immediate differences between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer's interpretation of the will—and the reason Nietzsche developed the concept of the will to power—are twofold:

First, Nietzsche references that the will to life in Schopenhauer's account lacks substance: “The meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind” (GM, III, 28). The suffering in will to life is a meaningless function developed by a pessimist, and thus, negatively valued will to life. Therefore, to add flesh to the concept of will and to explain its utility, Nietzsche developed the notion of the will to power. The modification of will from life to power in Nietzsche's account is instrumental because this shift permits us to move from a negative valuation of the will which was a function of deficiencies and suffering to a positive valuation which is a function of strength and overcoming.

Second, the perspectivism of the Nietzschean and Schopenhauerian variety differentiates the two in a meaningful enough manner to necessitate a different understanding of will.

Schopenhauer's perspectivism was a function of his metaphysics. Meaning will is the only real

thing-in-itself, all else is a perspective to be understood as a representation of will's form. In *The World as Will and Representation*, he writes the following:

Will is the thing-in-itself, the inner content, the essence of the world. Life, the visible world, the phenomenon, is only the mirror of the will. (Schopenhauer 2012, 355)

In a Schopenhauerian worldview, we see one base metaphysical reality from which all else stems. Nietzsche's conception is precisely the opposite—his metaphysics is a function of his perspectivism. Nietzsche spent his entire career dismantling our colloquially accepted understanding of the notion of the “thing-in-itself.” In one of his notes in 1887 Nietzsche writes the following:

The "thing-in-itself" is nonsensical. If I remove all the relationships, all the “properties,” all the "activities” of a thing, the thing does not remain over; because thingness has only been invented by us owing to the requirements of logic, thus with the aim of defining, communication (to bind together the multiplicity of relationships, properties, activities). (WTP 558)

Nietzsche points out that every interaction we have with the “thing-in-itself” is a result of a projection of at least one of our senses on the “thing-in-itself” (WTP 556). Since we cannot interact with things outside of our senses, we cannot be certain of their existence. Thus, understanding will as a base metaphysical reality—that is to say, understanding will as the thing-in-itself—would fundamentally run afoul of Nietzschean thought.

We should understand Nietzsche's perspectival notion of the will to power as growth, overcoming, and expansion. Moreover, it is always relational because will can only manifest itself when it is in tension with something else (GM, II, 12; WP, 656). Since Nietzsche's story holds the will to power as the exclusive metaphysical principle by which we understand the world it follows that the “something else” that will to power is in tension with itself. Will to power exists in itself, by itself and is perpetually in tension with itself. Moreover, it manifests itself through the subject physically, psychologically or however else will wills.

1.7 Christian Will to Power

The hierarchical relationality of will to power is noteworthy because within this hierarchy there is a perpetual tension between the strong and the weak. Nietzsche's most famous account of this tension is the Christian transvaluation of values. As a result of their will to power the Christians have turned the duplexity between the strong and the weak into one between good and evil (GM, II, 7). In *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche's philological historicism begins in a time before these value judgments existed—i.e., the pre-Christian aristocratic era. Prior to the Christian transvaluation in values the knightly aristocrats dominated the position of the good as a result of their physical strength (GM, I, 2). Moreover, anything the strong did was good not because of any intrinsic quality of the action, but by virtue of it having been done by the strong (GM, I, 2). Indeed, even preying on and dominating the weak was seen as good due to it having been done to the end of reaffirming one's own existence.

In order to examine Nietzsche's polemic against our modern conception of these value judgments, the Roman Empire serves as an acceptable starting point. The Roman Empire signifies the last great empire prior to what Nietzsche coins the “slave revolt.” This empire—and all other empires prior to it—held the old knightly aristocratic mode of valuation—where the strong were good and the good were strong. (GM, I, 13) The physically strong knightly aristocrats had physical power over the weak Christians and thus the weak Christians were exploited and dominated by the strong. This exploitation is not because the strong aristocrats resented or hated the weak Christians it is simply because it is a necessary condition for the strong's existence to prey on the weak—because it reaffirms their existence (GM, I, 13). However, the weak Christians did in fact hate the strong (GM, I, 13). This is of course no surprise because they were literally being dominated (GM, I, 13). Building from this hatred and resentment, the weak Christians

were in desperate search of escape from this domination (GM, III, 18). A physiological revolt ensued, best seen in Nietzsche's analogy of the Eagle and the lamb. In this analogy, the “birds of prey” are the strong knightly aristocrats, and the “lamb” are the weak Christians.

There is nothing strange about the fact that lambs bear a grudge towards large birds of prey: but that is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying off the little lambs. And if the lambs say to each other, ‘These birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey and most like its opposite, a lamb, – is good, isn’t he?’, then there is no reason to raise objections to this setting-up of an ideal beyond the fact that the birds of prey will view it somewhat derisively, and will perhaps say: ‘We don’t bear any grudge at all towards these good lambs, in fact we love them, nothing is tastier than a tender lamb. (GM, I, 13)

Thus, the Christian “revolt” waged a two thousand-year-long psychological war on the creation of a new system of morality in which they subsequently emerged victorious.

The slaves’ revolt in morality begins with the Jews: a revolt which has two thousand years of history behind it and which has only been lost sight of because – it was victorious . . . (BGE, 195)

This “slave revolt” is a paragon of the “inwardly” expression of will to power—a way by which a subject can express power not contingent on physical strength.

At this point in Nietzschean scholarship, there is a somewhat common tendency to place primary importance on the phenomenon of the victory itself meanwhile overlooking the causes of the persistence of this victory. Why has the will to power of the physically strong persistently been dominated by the will to power of the physically weak? Indeed, most—if not all—Nietzschean scholars will agree that it was because the psychological “war” was won by the Christians. However, what exactly does it mean to have “won the war?” It is not simply a momentary feeling of power over. It is a persistent victory on the method by which we orient moral values to the point where we “lose sight” of the source of our modern moral orthodoxy—to Nietzsche, this is *tradition* (DD, 9). Christians have gained power over the physically strong

because they have gained power over tradition. In section nine of *Daybreak* Nietzsche says the following:

Thus, for example, the fundamental clause: morality is nothing else (and, above all, nothing more) than obedience to customs, of whatsoever nature they maybe. But customs are simply the traditional way of acting and valuing. Where there is no tradition there is no morality; and the less life is governed by tradition, the narrower the circle of morality... What is tradition? A higher authority, which is obeyed, not because it commands what is useful to us, but merely because it commands. (DD, 9)

This “higher authority” is an authority on moral value judgments. In our modern society, these value judgments come from Christianity (DD, 9). The persistence of their victory on tradition is owed to the inward expression of their will to power—the will to power that turns against the Christians themselves. Through this will to power, we see notions of bad conscience, original sin, resentment, guilt, moral accountability, and the responsible subjects which have perpetuated the Christian's psychological victory—subsequently taking the form of “tradition”—to the point where we have “lost sight of the war” (BGE, 195; GM, I, 10, II, 1). It is clear that we have lost sight of the war because despite the Enlightenment and modern rejection of traditional Christianity as a source of political authority the conventional Christian moral values have survived today, into modernity. The victory over moral orthodoxy is self-evident; when we speak of acts of kindness, charitability, non-violence and the likes our instinctual response is not to immediately characterize these as acts of “weakness,” but rather serendipitous acts of “good.” This was the effect of the Judio-Christian slave revolt; this was the manifestation of their will to power.

The trouble with attacking the concept of the will to power is that any attempt to negate the will to power seems to figure that thing—whatever it may be—in tension with the will to power which is itself an expression of will to power. Thus it appears that any attack on will to power has to be within the framework of will to power. However, I will argue that a negation of the will

to power can be made such that there is another will simultaneously being categorically different from will to power while also not in “tension” with will to power—I will call this will the “will to decadence.” In general terms “decadence” can be understood as regression and decay—the opposite of power, as Nietzsche understands it.

2. A Failed Stress Test: *Decadence*

But what if the reverse were true? What if a symptom of regression lurked in the “good,” likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living at the expense of the future? Perhaps more comfortably and less dangerously, but at the same time in a meaner style, more basely?—So that precisely morality would be to blame if the higher power and splendor actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained? So that precisely morality was the danger of dangers? (GM, P, 6)

In the following section, I will put Nietzsche’s notion of the “will to power” through a stress test. Beginning with an examination of the notion of decadence on Nietzsche's own terms I will show how it is incompatible with his understanding of the world as the will to power and nothing besides. I will then show that will to power fails to provide a fruitful explanation of various vicissitudes in the realm of art and aesthetics and therefore we need an expanded understanding of will. This new supplement to the perspectival metaphysical notion of will is the *will to decadence*—what Nietzsche in the above quotation suspected as the “regression lurk[ing] in the good.” This *will to decadence* is to be understood as the negation of will to power and thus, everything will to power is not. Will to decadence is to be understood in general terms as stagnation and decay (i.e., stupidity, indolence, and sickness).

The trouble Nietzsche runs into by holding the will to power as the exclusive metaphysical principle from which we are to understand the world is that he must portray any cases of decadence as an outgrowth or manifestation of will to power. Decay must be understood as development; stupidity exists merely as a valence for brilliance (Nietzsche would call this a

“mask”); indolence must be industriousness; and sickness must be strength. If this list seems counterintuitive, your instincts are probably not deceiving you. These are the points at which I understand Nietzsche's notion of the will to power as failing to provide a convincing perspectival explanation of the base metaphysical principle of will. In all fairness, Nietzsche and Nietzschean scholars do attempt to find a remedy for these ostensible contradictions in his argument.

2.1 Reciprocal Forming

Nietzsche could argue that all apparent manifestations of decay are really just a restructuring of a certain hierarchy within will to power. One will to power did not “decay,” but rather it was assimilated by another will to power. Ciano Aydin calls this “Reciprocal Forming” (Canio 2007, 29). There are various manifestations of will to power within its playing field—i.e., within itself—that are constantly acting upon one another *ad infinitum* (Canio 2007, 29). These manifestations of will that act upon one another are perpetually in a state of tension and struggle with one another as a result of the subject’s will to power trying to assimilate other wills to its command. In one of Nietzsche's notes written between Spring-Fall of 1887, he writes the following:

The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks that which resists it—this is the primeval tendency of the protoplasm when it extends pseudopodia and feels about. Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and has increased the same.— If this incorporation is not successful, then the form probably falls to pieces; and the duality appears as a consequence of the will to power: in order not to let go what has been conquered, the will to power divides itself into two wills (in some cases without completely surrendering the connection between its two parts) (WP, 656).

The resistances that will to power manifests itself through are restructurings within a certain hierarchy within itself. Moreover, the dynamic, tense duality is between the “strong” and the “weak.”

In order to show the operation of reciprocal forming—and how it attempts to prove the self-sufficiency of will to power—I will outline the dichotomy between the strong and the weak, as Nietzsche understands it. Within this hierarchy, the weaker will is assimilated into the stronger will’s hierarchical structure of command. This assimilation is done to reaffirm the “stronger” commanding will’s existence. However, following this assimilation the assimilated will does not merely acquiesce to its state of forced subservience; it desperately struggles to find some physiological transfiguration that allows it to grow, overcome and expand from its current state of slavery. On the other hand, as for the strong who assimilated the weaker will it would be erroneous to say the strong will merely resorts to a state of internal tranquility or complacency as master—this would be non-expansionary and thus, a variety of decay incompatible with that of will to power, and thus, a manifestation of will to decadence. The strong too need a struggle in which they grow, overcome, and expand by reorganizing the structure of their own will to power to allow the strong to assimilate and perpetually dominate the weaker will to power within their own organization. This is the only modus by which these subject’s will to power can reaffirm their existence. Indeed, this was the case with the Christian transvaluation of values.

Drawing from Nietzsche’s historicism, he explains the increasing salience of Christianity until the *Death of God* as a function of what Aydin would call “reciprocal forming” (GS, 125; Z, P, 2; Canio 2007, 29). At the risk of reductionism, but in the name of brevity Nietzsche's thesis in *Genealogy of Morals* can be understood at the highest level in relation to his understanding of decadence as the following: To reaffirm and expand their will to power the Christian system of morality perpetuated a value system organized around the principle of “mutual refrain from injury, violence, and exploitation” (BGE, 259). Moreover, the Christians took these principles to be fundamental to society which subsequently manifested a nihilistic “will to the denial of life.”

According to Nietzsche, the will to the denial of life in the case of the Christians was merely an operation of the will to power. The Christian decay in aggression, violence and exploitation was superficial because it was a method by which the physically weak could reaffirm their existence—by shifting the war from the physical to the psychological battleground in which the Christians were subsequently able to perpetuate will's craving for the expansion and reaffirmation of power/life. This is the means by which Nietzsche would understand decadence in Christianity as an operation of will to power.

We have every right to call Christianity in particular a large treasure-trove of the most ingenious means of consolation...of the physiologically obstructed, at least temporarily. For, to speak generally: with all great religions, the main concern is the fight against a certain weariness and heaviness that has become epidemic. We can regard it as inherently probable that from time to time, at certain places on earth, almost from necessity, a physiological feeling of obstruction will rule amongst large masses of people which, however, is not consciously perceived as such, through lack of physiological knowledge, so that its 'cause' and its cure can be sought and tested only on the psychological-moral level (— actually, this is my most general formula for what is usually called a 'religion'). (GM, III, 17)

We can see in the above quote that Nietzsche is casting a broader net than merely Christianity, he is saying “religion.” Indeed, Nietzsche has a tendency to fixate on Christianity, but this is only because this is the form of the dominant “religion” during his time. Nietzsche would likely perceive little substantive difference between the proper nouns used in replacement of “religion.” The substantive point is the Christians broke from their state of slavery by way of their will to power manifesting a transvaluation in values in which they could grow, overcome and expand.

In this sense, the decadence in the Christian transvaluation of values can indeed be understood as an outgrowth of will to power. I will refer to this variety of decadence and decay as Nietzschean decadence. However, positing the will to power as the exclusive metaphysical principle from which we understand the world concocts a bit of a tragedy of the commons—by this I mean Nietzsche turns a blind eye to something corroding the very thing he is trying to

protect (the sovereign artistic productions that archive a transvaluation in values). Will to power is expansionary, dynamic and it creates. The multiplicity of views—which are an outgrowth of this will to power—cannot be protected or reaffirmed if we dismiss conformity, decay and sameness as mere functions of the creative, dynamic and expansionary process of will to power. I grant that Nietzsche is right about the variety of decadence seen in Christianity as an operation of will to power growing, creating, expanding, etc... However, he misses the mark on the variety that takes away from the sovereignty of artistic productions which decay not as a means to an end but an end in itself.

2.2 Self-Valorizing Decadence

There exists another categorically different variety of decadence that exists not as a valence of will to power, but rather as an operation of a qualitatively distinct will: the will to decadence. This variety of decadence I will refer to as self-valorizing decadence. Self-valorizing decadence exists not as a means to an end, but an end in itself. It exists through the will to decadence, for the will to decadence, and alongside—yet separately from—will to power. Self-valorizing decadence is to be interpreted as the verb that gives legitimacy to the dynamic process of will to decadence. It is the same notion as will to decadence, but it constitutes a process rather than a thing.

To be clear about the relationship between all of the notions discussed thus far, where Nietzsche sees will to power as the exclusive principle by which we understand will, I see both will to power and will to decadence. In the supplemented framework I offer, Nietzschean decadence is an operation of will to power, and self-valorizing decadence is an operation of will to decadence.

Nietzsche could defend the self-sufficiency of the notion of will to power from my understanding of decadence, as listed in the previous two paragraphs, on two grounds. I will argue both objections fall a bit short when “stressed.” First, decadence can be understood as a stroke of artistry—any task that seeks to affirm life from “the perspective of life” (BT, P, 4)—exhibited within the ambit of will to power. The artistry appearing to regress and decay may just be better at deception than others—meaning they do a better job of tricking the subject into believing the subject exists merely to regress when it is actually growing, overcoming and expanding in the background. In other words, all decadence is Nietzschean decadence. Second, decadence of the self-valorizing variety can be seen as a phenomenon of the herd, and through this, it grows, overcomes and expands.

2.2.1 Objection One: Artistry

As for the first objection, there are two distinctions that I will discuss: first, the difference between artists and the decadent types; second, the difference between art and aesthetics. First, the Nietzschean artist and the decadent types should both be understood as categorically different. Art for Nietzsche is as any sovereign production which archives a transvaluation in values. The Christian transvaluation of values is a good example of this variety of artistry. In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche writes the following:

The transvaluation of Christian values,- an attempt with all available means, all instincts and all the resources of genius to bring about a triumph of the opposite values, the more noble values. . . . This has been the one great war of the past... I see before me the possibility of a perfectly heavenly enchantment and spectacle: it seems to me to scintillate with all the vibrations of a fine and delicate beauty, and within it there is an art so divine, so infernally divine, that one might search in vain for thousands of years for another such possibility; I see a spectacle so rich in significance and at the same time so wonderfully full of paradox that it should arouse all the gods on Olympus to immortal laughter (AC, 61)

In the case of the artist—that is true artists—will to power manifests itself through engagement in difficult and challenging tasks to expand and dominate, though crucially, not in any “stable” sense—the subject exists only as a self-overcoming. For this reason, Nietzsche chooses the “war” language—it is inherently unstable, and implies a tension within the ambit of will to power which is seeking expansion and domination. Moreover, Nietzsche would see Beethoven and Rossini as a different variety of *higher men* falling into this general class of artists.

[O]nly in Beethoven's and Rossini's music did the Eighteenth Century sing itself out—the century of enthusiasm, broken ideals, and fleeting joy (CWII-IV).

The decadent types are precisely the opposite. Their productions are either not sovereign or do not archive any transvaluation in values. In other words, through these subjects, we see conformism, sameness, a regression in difficulty—perhaps fueled by indolence—or possibly worst of all nihilism. For example, Nietzsche would see later Wagnerian music as falling into this camp:

In this sense Wagner is a seducer on a grand scale. There is nothing exhausted, nothing effete, nothing dangerous to life, nothing that slanders the world in the realm of spirit, which has not secretly found shelter in his art, he conceals the blackest obscurantism in the luminous orbs of the ideal. He flatters every nihilistic (Buddhistic) instinct and tugs it out in music; he flatters every form of Christianity, every religious expression of decadence. (CW, Postscript)

The technical term that I would like to assign to the art of the latter variety is *herdistry*.

Second, for Nietzsche, art is not merely a physical phenomenon—paintings, festivities, sculptures, music, etc... Art is anything that serves as the antithesis and countermovement of decadence (WP, 794). In one of Nietzsche's notes between March and June 1888, he writes the following:

Our religion, morality, and philosophy are decadent forms of man. The countermovement: art (WP, 794).

Though crucially, when discussing Nietzschean metaphysics—i.e., will—and its relationship with art, art and aesthetics should not be read as equivalent. “Art” for Nietzsche a metaphysical activity *par excellence*.

“I am convinced that art is the highest task and the properly metaphysical activity of this life” (BT, Forward to RW)

Art is about the process, not merely its face-value appearance—its aesthetic. The delineation can be analogized as the experience of walking into an art museum. It would be entirely consistent for someone to walk into the museum and assign a negative aesthetic judgment to a piece—say “it's ugly”—while still granting that it is a work of art. I delineate between art and aesthetics because the polemic overtones of Nietzsche's writing—namely against Wagnerian music—can create a sort of distraction—of tangential importance—from Nietzsche's otherwise interesting and important understanding of art's relationship with metaphysics—and subsequently, as I will argue, shortcomings of will to power.

On this note, Nietzsche's metaphysics—specifically his alchemization of the “self” (namely, via self-overcoming) through will—should be interpreted as co-relational with his view on art—not aesthetics. By this I mean both his metaphysics and his view on art are each a function of the other—they cross-pollinate one another—in a manner that should be read in isolation from his view on the aesthetic quality of the thing—whatever it may be. In the introduction of *Nietzsche on Art and Life* Daniel Came writes the following:

Nietzsche was interested, not in the nature of art as such [i.e. its aesthetic quality], but in the relationship between ‘art’ and ‘life’, and in the role that art can play in discharging the principal tasks he set himself as a philosopher—to identify the conditions of the affirmation of life, cultural renewal, and exemplary human living (Came 2014, 1).

This is not to say that we should not focus on Nietzsche's view on aesthetics at all. For Nietzsche, “existence and the world appear justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon” (BT, 28).

As Nietzsche analogizes it, there is a long series of “costumes” with no real transcendental value that people throughout history repeatedly put on (BGE, 223). These “costumes” never quite fit and thus the subject keeps changing from one costume to another (BGE, 223). Moreover, even though there is no transcendental value in the costumes, the dynamic and perpetual process of changing and self-overcoming is precisely the art that needs reaffirming. In this framing, despite Nietzsche’s abhorrence of the aesthetic quality of Wagner’s later “costume”—i.e., his music—this aesthetic aversion is of derivative importance. More foundationally we must focus on the process of changing (i.e., art—“the great stimulator of life” (TI, IX, 24; WP, 802, 821-822, 952-853)). The base question is: How does the art seek to positively affirm life?

This is precisely the point at which Nietzsche would see decadence—and therefore not art—in Christianity and Wagnerian music (Although, Nietzsche did see the Christian transvaluation in values as art, his view on the internal workings of Christianity is almost exactly the opposite). Not only do Christianity and Wagnerian music not seek to affirm life, they outright deny life and they are nihilistic (CWI, 3, E; GM, I, 12: II 21). In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche connects Christianity with Nihilism by arguing that Christianity is modern alchemized form of decadence (AC, 6):

Life itself appears to me as an instinct for growth, for survival, for the accumulation of forces, for power: whenever the will to power fails there is disaster. My contention is that all the highest values of humanity have been emptied of this will—that the values of decadence, of nihilism, now prevail under the holiest names [i.e., Christianity]. (AC, 6)

Moreover, in *The Case Of Wagner*, Nietzsche says “Wagner stood for the Christian concept” (CWI, 3). The artistic problem Nietzsche identifies with Wagner’s music is that it became an emissary of nihilistic Christian ascetic ideals—which is a modern incantation of nihilism (AC, 6). Thus, we cannot see the ascetic ideal of either as art—thus, we cannot categorize either the Christians or Wagner as artists.

However, we can see the manifestation of will to power through the Christian subjects as artistry. This is what Nietzsche refers to as “art where it appears without an artist” (WP, 796). The thesis of the *Genealogy of Morals* makes this case for this claim. At the highest level, will to power manifested itself through the Christians and found a psychological outlet to dominate—by destroying and redefining aristocratic morality by tailoring it for the weak (this is the shift from Good and Bad to Good and Evil). This is significant because we can see a psychological phenomenon that perpetuated wills craving to grow, overcome and expand and indeed, subsequently be understood as art (AC, 61). So long as there is a transfiguration of values or powers, reaffirmation of one's own existence, or expansion of one's will to power there is artistry—regardless of whether there is an artist.

As for the decadent types who become an emissary of some existing ascetic ideal—they conform, become the same and subsequently decay. Decay, sameness and conformity are necessarily not creative expressions nor are they indicative of a transfiguration of value. If sameness could be seen as a manifestation of creativity it would be reasonable to say “same creativity” exists. If the term seems a bit oxymoronic that is because it is—there is simply no room for sameness as it relates to will to power. Thus, it must be concluded that this variety of decadence—decay/sameness—must be understood as something other than artistry. I argue it should be understood as a manifestation of will to decadence.

2.2.2 Objection Two: The Herd

The second objection that decadence of the self-valorizing variety can be seen as a phenomenon of the herd—through which it grows, overcomes and expands—is a bit stronger but also does not hold. The “herd” is a group of subjects through which will to power manifests itself (GM, III, 13, 15). Thus, the possible objection that self-valorizing decadence can be seen as an

expression of will to power due to its relationship with the herd is as I understand it unconvincing. It is precisely the reverse: self-valorizing decadence can be seen as an expression of the will to decadence due to its relationship with the herd.

First, to further elucidate the notion of the herd; the herd to Nietzsche is a multiplicity of will to powers manifesting themselves synchronously to try to overtake or dominate another stronger will to power—a slave revolt of sorts (WP, 282). The herd bands together like a cluster of slaves because the individual will to power of the herd's constituent subjects is too sickly and weak to overcome the will to power of the *higher man*, the strong, the *good*. The only outlet in which they can grow, overcome and expand is in that of the many. The operative word in the preceding sentence is “they.” When talking about the manifestation of the will to power through the subject, Nietzsche shifts from a focus on the part to the whole. Nietzsche makes this move because it is the only way to perceive decadence—of the subject—as an operation of will to power. In any case, this is where the operation of a quantitatively distinct will—self-valorizing decadence—is hidden. The self-valorization of decadence is seen through the subject entering the herd, it is the “regressive trait lurking in the background.” Although the herd does indeed grow, overcome and expand the subjects that make up the herd decay and regress.

In some sense, the counterinsurgency of the herd instinct—namely decay through conformity—can be understood as a parting from our natural primordial animal instincts—will to power (AC, 57). To Nietzsche, this parasitic partition to—non-expansionary—mediocrity was necessary for humans—all too human—to exist in a civilization (AC, 57). In *The Anti-Christ* he writes the following:

A high civilization is a pyramid: it can stand only on a broad base; its primary prerequisite is a strong and soundly consolidated mediocrity. The handicrafts, commerce, agriculture, science, the greater part of art, in brief, the whole range of occupational

activities, are compatible only with mediocre ability and aspiration; such callings would be out of place for exceptional men; (AC, 57)

This mediocrity, sameness, stagnation or conformity is an outgrowth of a phenomenon incompatible with that of will to power. So to the Nietzschean disciples—not free spirits—who say “But what of the herd?” I respond “Exactly, the herd!”

3. Will to Decadence Alongside Will to Power

In order to showcase the function of will to decadence in modern society I will offer a genealogy of art and aesthetics in which we see the operation of self-valorizing decadence. When reading the following examples readers may see points in which it can reasonably be argued that will to power has manifested itself. Your suspicions are probably not leading you astray; will to power has indeed most likely been manifested. My perspectival metaphysical framework recognizes the existence of both power and decadence everywhere where will wills. Moreover, the following genealogy is not to be read as a tale of decline in society, it is to showcase the existence of will to decadence. To use the same words Nietzsche uses to describe will to power, the addition of will to decadence in my framework is “Granting that as a theory this is a novelty—as a reality it is [a] FUNDAMENTAL FACT of all history let us be so far honest towards ourselves!” (BGE, 259)

Both wills are to be read as categorically different and neither an outgrowth of the other. Like two pillars independently supporting a beam, these two wills—power and decadence—serve as the bedrock of all life. The coupling of these two wills is the will to life. Just as the beam is supported to varying degrees at different points by one pillar as opposed to the other, we can see the will to power and the will to decadence independently manifested to varying degrees via subjects throughout all of life and art.

3.1 Wagner

One of Nietzsche's more interesting polemics is against Richard Wagner. A friend of Nietzsche turned into yet another victim of his “hammer” which he subsequently sent to what Nietzsche would likely see as his personal mausoleum full of philosophies he left in the ruins (EH: Why I am so Clever, 5: Human, All Too Human, 2, 3; TI, P). Notably, this attack is not fueled by animosity against Wagner, but rather to the ideals he embodied—namely, asceticism. As mentioned before, the problem Nietzsche identified with Wagnerian music was not merely an aesthetic dislike, but rather he viewed Wagnerian music as an expression of Christian ascetic dogmas.

Music above other art forms held a particularly important role in Nietzsche's metaphysics. “Without music life would be a mistake” Nietzsche writes in *Twilight of the Idols* (TI, I, 33). Moreover, the sovereign artisanship of Wagnerian music initially praised by Nietzsche was one that reaffirmed the suffering and lack of transcendental value in life in a positive and meaningful way. The will to power of the artist externalizes the subject's perceptions of the world to further allow the subject to reaffirm the lack of transcendental value of life through laughter and acceptance of the multiplicity of all of life's sufferings. For precisely this reason Nietzsche initially viewed Wagner as an artist. However, after the release of Wagner's operetta, *Parsifal*, Nietzsche was appalled by the libretto's proselytization of Christian ascetic ideals. In *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche writes about the libretto in the following way:

We should like to believe that “Parsifal” was meant as a piece of idle gaiety...of the ascetic ideal...An act of apostasy and a return to Christianly sick and obscurantist ideals? And finally even a denial of self, a deletion of self, on the part of an artist who theretofore had worked with all the power of his will in favour of the opposite cause, the spiritualization and sensualisation of his art?...For “Parsifal” is a work of rancour, of revenge, of the most secret concoction of poisons with which to make an end of the first conditions of life, it is a bad work. The preaching of chastity remains an incitement to

unnaturalness: I despise anybody who does not regard “Parsifal” as an outrage upon morality (CWVI, 3).

Nietzsche began to view the nature of Wagnerian music after Parsifal in a more conformist and subsequently decadent manner—the herd was no longer a function of Wagner, but Wagner a function of the herd (CWVI, 3). This flaw which Nietzsche identifies with Wagnerian music is precisely the poison intrinsic to self-valorizing decadence—which subsequently functions as a negator of will to power. The art of the artist is lessened, retracted and destroyed by assimilation within the operation of the herd. In other words, the artist is decayed by their assimilation within the will to power of the herd—perhaps to the point we can only hope the “art” is really a valence for a *drunken* Dionysian joke (CWVI, 3; BT, 1). The metaphysical framework I propose takes Wagnerian conformism as a function of the decadent will. Will to decadence takes away from the higher man such that the “splendor actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained” (GM, P, 6).

Moreover, decadent as Wagner may be he represents but one decadent cobblestone in an infinite cobblestone road. My argument for the existence of will to decadence casts a broader net than merely Wagnerian music. We see will to decadence in relatively modern forms of art and aesthetics as well.

3.2 Industrialization of Culture

Horkheimer and Adorno point out in “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” that we see similar themes of “sameness”—or to use an alternative vocabulary conformity, redundancy and decay—in entertainment through the industrialization of modern culture. Horkheimer and Adorno identify film, radio and magazines as systems that are infected with “sameness” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 94). The problem with culture is not the

individuals involved in the economy, but how culture under late capitalism has become its own industry. The capitalist excuse for this standardization of output is always some variation of the following line of reasoning: similarity is the inevitable byproduct of an attempt to keep up with demand (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 95). When demand for a product goes up standardization is necessary to keep up with the pace of the demand of whatever product (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 95). In other words, the demand is largely a product of the production process itself. Horkheimer and Adorno point out that this is merely a retroactive technical rationalization of a cycle that legitimizes the production of *trash* (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 95).

3.2.1 Herdistry, Trash and Not-Art

Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of *trash* is adjacent to my notion of *herdistry*—the antithesis of *artistry*—but with notable differences. As Horkheimer and Adorno would see it, trash or “not art” is anything that is produced for the growth or reproduction of capital (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 95). Art must transcend reality through a difficult chaotic expression of suffering (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 103). It is any production that reveals the falsity of the social order as a whole (i.e., the failure of capitalism to deliver what it says it can deliver—universal freedom and prosperity). Trash on the other hand is always produced through large-scale industrial output to perpetually valorize the capitalist system of production (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 95).

My notion of *herdistry* differs in two respects: first, in the framework I offer, *herdistry* is a manifestation of the decadent will, not necessarily a concoction of capitalism as is the case in Horkheimer and Adorno conception of trash; second, *herdistry* is not limited to the byproduct of the industrialization of culture—though, my notion of *herdistry* fully incorporate this variety of what Horkheimer and Adorno refer to as “trash.” In other words, *herdistry* acknowledges everything Horkheimer and Adorno coin as “trash,” but incorporates much more.

3.3 Film

In the case of films that have failed to be art, defenders of the medium—practically everyone—often get caught up on superficial differences such as if the hero shoots webs or lasers from their arm, or if they can run fast, or have to fly in a jet to get across the world at supersonic speed, perhaps the question even becomes if the villain flies with wings or if he can just levitate. Regardless of the color of the glitter the director decided to use to dazzle their audience—who is just as much a part of the cycle of trash and herdistry as the directors are—I would be willing to argue that it is difficult to find a movie that does not accord to the following plotline: First, the hero goes about their normal life of sunshine and rainbows. Next, the hero is abashedly destroyed by a villain but narrowly escapes with their life. Next, the villain seems unstoppable and solidifies his—for some reason the villain is nearly universally male—spot at the pinnacle of the bad-guy dominance hierarchy. Next, the hero comes back with a newly found meaning in “the fight” and just barely takes down the villain. Last, it ends with some cliffhanger that allows them to justify making another movie with the exact same plot—perpetuating the cycle of herdistry.

The schematic production and reproduction of herdistry is fundamentally contrary to creative expression which is necessary for will to power to grow and expand. Thus, the decay/sameness/conformity that characterizes modern entertainment cannot be understood in terms of the will to power, and is better understood as an outgrowth of my conception of will to decadence.

3.4 The Monomyth

In modern society, people do not even try to lie about this undermining of true artistic production. Joseph Campbell calls this phenomenon the *monomyth* better known as the “hero's

journey” (Campbell 2008, 245-246). This phenomenon glorifies this conformist will to decadence. It is important to note that this “hero’s journey” is not limited to Hollywood movies, it extends to any medium that shows the psychological development of any subject—theater, film, drama, folklore, religious rituals, etc... This is the point at which my notion of herdistry parts from Horkheimer and Adorno’s notion of trash. For them, trash is necessarily a product of mass production under late capitalism (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 95). Thus, trash cannot extend to folklore, religious rituals, etc... However, my notion of herdistry can and does. The monomyth Campbell points out shows the standardization of output in any art telling a story is not an imperative to which storytellers acquiesced, but an observation of the schematics by which stories have independently manifested in the same way for all of time. This is in my framework the operation of the will to decadence, this standardization is the undermining of will to power’s true expansionary artistic production.

3.5 Remixes and Samples

Other media that do not *tell a story* in the literal sense of the phrase refer to this standardization of “art” and regression in will to power by many different names. In modern music, the terms are “remix” or “sample.” Musicians of the modern era—more often than not a walking paragon of the decadent type—often take existing rhyme schemes, patterns, chords or melodies and incorporate them into their song and say it is a “remix” or a “sample.” The increasing glorification of remixing or sampling is not to be entirely negatively valued. A degree of conformity may be necessary to not fall into pure chaos both on the side of the artist and the listener. Conformity may be necessary to bridge the gap between the artist and the listener. If the listener has no pathway to incorporate the music in their internal neural network they will not be able to understand anything. If the will to power of the artist is to manifest—and subsequently

dominate or at least give the feeling of power—in a manner that allows it to grow, overcome and expand it must be able to connect to the subject it is dominating over (the only exception is if the subject it is dominating is itself). This is done at the cost of expansion (i.e., an entirely independent—and difficult to produce—artistic production externalizing a subject's will to power). Hence, the co-relationality of power and decadence in will. Decadence takes away from power, but will still wills.

3.6 Rock & Folk Music

The diminishing of will to power—i.e. lessening of difficult independent creativity—by this variety of decadence exists in almost any song. However, one of the more famous examples of this variety of decadence is the 70's band “Led Zeppelin.” The first song that made them famous “Dazed and Confused” drew from an American folk singer Jake Holmes (Robinson 2015, 6). More famously, Led Zeppelin's most notable song “Stairway to Heaven” waged controversy for years about its infringement of the band Spirit's song “Taurus.” Following years of litigation courts ruled in favor of Zeppelin in the copyright case (Skidmore, 2020, 3). However, as criminal defense attorney Larry L. Archie once said on June 5th, 2015 “Just because you did it does not mean you are guilty” (Keller, 2018) Led Zeppelin may have gotten away by following a similar theme. The opening guitar arpeggios in both songs are uncannily similar. Folk music is another paragon of a musical lessening in creativity—further a glorification of the decadent overtones intrinsic to conformity. In 2012 folk musician Bob Dylan addressed this very subject to *Rolling Stone* magazine when pressed on copyright. He says the following:

It's an old thing—it's part of the tradition. It goes way back...I'm working within my art form. It's that simple...It's called songwriting...You make everything yours. We all do it. (Mitchell, 465)

The examples go on and on, but the part that is of primary importance is this phenomenon gives the subject the feeling of the will to power while actually decaying. To be clear, will to decadence is not to be valued negatively, but it is the negating will. It is necessary to have some degree of conformity or sameness in everything around us. Hence, the reason will to decadence is a supplement and not a replacement of the foundational metaphysical principle of will to power. However, once sameness and conformity take primary importance over difficult artistic creations, the dose has become the poison and the doltish herd comes marching—which may be the case if will so wills. Perhaps we are seeing flashes of this in the contemporary period.

3.7 Tik-Tok

The most petulant of all the modern dolts have clustered themselves into a short video platform called “Tik-Tok.” Not only is it a “remix”—alternatively to use Tik-Tokian vocabulary a “trend”—in which a swarm of self-called “influencers” take other people’s content and prop it onto their own platform as if it is their own but the system glorifies itself. Tik-Tok on their own website says the following:

1. Our Mission: Tik-Tok is the leading destination for short-form mobile video. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy.
2. Popular Dances: The best TikTok dances all in one place! Need an easy dance to learn so you can bust a move on the dance floor? Want to see what dance moves are trending? Trying to join in on a popular dance challenge? Your search ends here.

Just as Nietzsche writes of the will to power of the herd manifesting in the whole, the will to power of Tik-Tok also manifests in a similar manner. Though the will to power of the herd—Tik-Tok—does indeed grow, overcome and expand, the will to power of its constituent subjects—the Tik-Tokers—regresses, shrivels, or at best stagnate. The Tik-Tokian will to power—Tik-Tok as a platform—is seen via a transfiguration of artistic values (i.e., creativity to conformity). Moreover the will to power of the platform has expanded and dominated both

language and joy in a similar light as its predecessors. By this I mean the joyful positive affirmation of a lessening of creativity through conformity. Where Campbell says “hero's journey” in storytelling instead of “conformity,” and where Bob Dylan says “tradition” instead of “conformity,” Tik-Tok says “trending” instead of “conformity.”

“Trending” of the Tik-Tokian variety refers to the act of unsolicited copying and relocating of someone else's content—usually a dance. The unoriginal saturation coverage on these dolts’ profiles goes to show the lack of creativity of almost everyone; the same jokes, the same templates, the same “POV,” the same little dances, the same “literally me” comments. The never-ending ebb of the Tik-Tok craze goes to show will’s alchemized form in modern society. Tik-Tok preaches creativity, but Tik-Tokers are anything but.

4. Conclusion

After having considered Wagner, Hollywood, Campbell, Zeppelin, Dylan and Tik-Tok in the case of art and aesthetics I conclude that there is a qualitatively distinct will at play reducing the full manifestation of will to power—and subsequently taking away from the potential of art. The above-mentioned examples are not telling a tale of long-term cultural decline (e.g., “the death of the West”); it is evidence of the existence of a will to decadence.

Nietzsche's understanding of the world as the will to power and nothing besides is his attempt to explain the nature of the world through a story of metaphysics and positive affirmation of everything beautiful in life. In this sense, every bit of his metaphysics, historicism, science, philosophy, mythology and all else should be understood as a function of his perspectivism aimed at joyfully reaffirming the various perspectives around us—in particular through art. Further, Music in Nietzschean thought is an art form *par excellence* so long as it functions to reaffirm the multiplicity of perspectives around us—even though they lack any real transcendental

value. Moreover, Nietzsche's secularism was also a function of his perspectival philosophy because he did not loath the religion itself—at least not in the sense that it is a function of will to power—he hated the ascetic ideal it embodied, one in which Christians took their religion as the one true religion even though it rests on equally a questionable foundation as all others. In Nietzsche's view, every subject in this world is a function of will to power, everything is in a perpetual state of growth, overcoming, and expanding.

My work largely takes this to be a convincing worldview, but if the world is the will to power and nothing besides I push back with a few questions: What is it that will to power is growing over? What is will to power overcoming? Into what is will to power expanding? Nietzsche would respond and say “itself” to all of these questions. I take this answer to be unconvincing. After taking into account various forms of art and aesthetics—Wagner, Hollywood, Campbell, Zeppelin, Dylan and Tik-Tok—it seems unreasonable to conclude that there is one creative and necessarily expansionary principle from which we can understand the world. I have found that there exists a qualitatively distinct will operating as what Nietzsche calls the “regression lurking in the good” (GM, P, 6). Nietzsche points to the need for an expanded understanding of will to include the *will to decadence*. “Granting that as a theory this is a novelty—as a reality it is [a] FUNDAMENTAL FACT of all history let us be so far honest towards ourselves!” (BGE 259).

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