

**NIETZSCHE AND PROBLEM OF NIHILISM**

**by**

**Zahra Meyboti**

**A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts  
in Philosophy**

**at**

**The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

**August 2016**

**ABSTRACT**

**NIETZSCHE AND PROBLEM OF NIHILISM**

**by**

**Zahra Meyboti**

**The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016  
Under the Supervision of Professor William Bristow**

It is generally accepted that life-affirmation is central to Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche's aim is to affirm life despite all miseries for human beings conscious of the horror and terror of existence and avoid nihilism. He is concerned with life affirmation almost in all of his works, In my thesis I will consider how he involved with avoiding nihilism to affirm life according to his two books *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Genealogy of Morals*.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Introduction .....	1
I. Nietzsche and life affirmation .....	2
II. Nietzsche as a pessimist .....	12
III. Nietzsche and his self-criticism .....	16
IV. Conclusion .....	21
References.....	22

## **Introduction**

Nietzsche spent a significant part of his life attempting to ascribe meaning to human existence. He starts his intellectual journey in *The Birth of Tragedy* by referring to what he identifies as the Dionysian and Apollonian ancient Greek art impulses of nature and later he considers Socrates' wisdom in Greek culture. Nietzsche's aim is to affirm life despite all miseries for human beings conscious of the horror and terror of existence and avoid nihilism. In the first part of my thesis my aim is to show how Nietzsche stands against nihilism, considering the way pre- Socratic ancient Greek culture, as his favorite example of life affirmation, deals with suffering in life. I have asked myself, what does Nietzsche mean by nihilism in *BT*, and what is the nature of the challenge between the notion of nihilism and pessimism in *BT*? Nietzsche never clarifies nihilism directly in *BT*, but the concept is detectable in *BT*. I want to show that there is a distinct difference between the concepts of pessimism and nihilism in Nietzsche's view. Also, I will try to clarify the concept of pessimism in his view by explaining optimistic worldview about life. By the end of this section I will introduce the response to suffering that emerges in Socrates' wisdom and Plato's philosophy, which Nietzsche believes leads to nihilism.

In the second part of my paper I consider *Genealogy of Morals*, I address Christian and modern European morality as a nihilistic response to suffering, by considering the origins of modern morality and discussing Nietzsche's account of Christianity. Here my goal is to determine how he believes Christian morality, which is a successful morality to gain the power, is nihilistic. I seek to show how his critique of Christian morality could be problematic even though Nietzsche means to convince us that Christian morality is nihilistic.

In the third part, I will examine the puzzle of the ascetic ideal since Nietzsche believes that these ideals are mostly nihilistic. Then I will consider Nietzsche's probable alternative to find the solution for human suffering. I wonder whether or not he responds successfully to the puzzle of ascetic ideal and whether he himself is stuck in the same trap as Christian ideal according to his *GM*. My aim in this section is to show that he wasn't successful in responding to the problem of nihilism, and his critique is a self-contradiction.

### **I. Nietzsche and life affirmation**

It is generally accepted that life-affirmation is central to Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche is concerned with life affirmation, even in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872. In *BT*, Nietzsche explores classical Greek civilization. Ancient Greek civilization is admired as the climax of classical Greek civilization and culture because of the birth of philosophy, through Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Greek philosophy gives birth to the rationalistic philosophy that impacted Western culture, which is exemplified in modern Western science. But Nietzsche, in *BT*, argues that the birth of philosophy through Socrates' wisdom, in ancient Greek culture, represents its decline, rather than its climax. Besides, Nietzsche argues that the strength of Greek culture is exemplified by pre-Socratic Greek tragedy and art.

Schopenhauer's philosophy<sup>1</sup> had a big amount of impact on Nietzsche's arguments and positions, as Nietzsche put them forward in *BT* and later in *GM*. Therefore, I summarize some essential points of Schopenhauer to clarify the importance of this impact. Also another advantage

---

<sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer's metaphysics itself impacted from Kant's. According to Kant, the world presented to us through the senses, which is the same world as the natural scientist explains, the realm of nature, which is a realm of mere appearances. According to Kant, this realm is a realm that is constituted according to forms such as space, time and causality, which are merely human forms of sensing reality. Kant claims that we cannot know the part of reality, which is independent of our human modes of sensing. Our knowledge is restricted to a realm of mere appearances. Schopenhauer criticizes Kant's claim that, behind the realm of appearances available to us through the senses, there is an unknowable realm of things as they are in themselves. However, Schopenhauer does not reject the Kantian distinction between appearances and things in themselves, but he interprets it differently.

of providing this introduction is that it sets the stage for the discussion of the will to truth as nihilistic as it emerges in part three of the paper.

Schopenhauer argues that our bodies are given to us in two distinct ways; first as an object of perception, one among others in the world, second as something we inhabit and move about through our intentional actions. This is the basis of his fundamental distinction between “representation” which is objective and “will” which is subjective. Schopenhauer posits that all objects of our perception and all natural phenomena are “representations”. However, each has another aspect, which is considered as “will”. For Schopenhauer, the world of objects that we represent is a merely apparent world, however the world as it is in itself is the world as “will”.

Schopenhauer is also considered an irrationalist philosopher, because he takes reality to be a blind and law-less struggling. He posits that human beings unconsciously create the world of distinct individuals that challenge them in their experience, because of the central organizing role of the principle of sufficient reason in their thought. He believes the world of distinct individuals is nothing except a projected dream image, which has its source in the primal impulses of will. Schopenhauer philosophy is famous for pessimism, which he found in Hindu and Buddhist thought, according to which all human existence is fundamentally meaningless struggle and suffering.

Schopenhauer maintains that “death is actually the purpose of existence” towards which we should just be “resigned”<sup>2</sup>. Nietzsche described Schopenhauer’s pessimism as follows: “The world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them. In this the tragic spirit consists; accordingly it leads to resignation” (*BT*, 10).

---

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. II, Book 4, #49

In *BT*, Nietzsche is concerned with how ancient Greek culture deals with the suffering, how they make it meaningful and bearable for themselves. Nietzsche's admiration for ancient Greek culture prior to Socrates was due to the way that the ancient Greeks were able to affirm life, even in tragedy. Thus, Nietzsche tries to find a way to genuinely affirm life, in the face of the Schopenhauerian consciousness that life is fundamentally suffering, without meaning or goal. To oppose to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche also adds immediately in the introduction that he wrote to the second edition (1886) of *The Birth of Tragedy*: “How differently Dionysius spoke to me! How alien to me at that time was precisely this whole philosophy of resignation!” (*BT\**, p10).

Nietzsche denies the idea of “resignation” and passivism. Raymond Geuss (*BT\** xxv) makes a distinction between pessimism-optimism towards life on one hand and life affirmation-negation on another in Nietzsche’s account. In Geuss’s account, according to both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, life is full of dissatisfactions and miseries. This is the pessimism that both of them shared. But facing this *description*, we can have two opposite *prescriptions*: we can prescribe “resignation” as Schopenhauer did or we can prescribe “affirmation” as Nietzsche did. In “resignation” we are passive, we just accept and endure the miseries, the pains and the dissatisfactions of life. But in “affirmation” we actively “embrace eternal suffering with sympathetic feelings of love” (*BT\** 87-8). We can “resign” to death, weakness and sickness as Schopenhauer *did* or we can “affirm” life, strength and health with all the pains and suffering which is involved in it, as Nietzsche did. In Nietzsche’s view Schopenhauer’s pessimism is mostly nihilistic. What is the meaning of nihilism in Nietzsche according to *BT*?

Nietzsche never clarifies nihilism directly in *BT*, but the concept is detectable in *BT*: nihilism being the concept that restricts human being from affirming life. Therefore, there is a distinct difference between the concepts of pessimism and nihilism in Nietzsche’s view. Also the

word pessimism in the subtitle of the *BT*, “Hellenism and Pessimism” is meant to show the importance of this concept to him. The subtitle calls to mind that for Nietzsche pessimism is a sense of being conscious of all the meaninglessness of life.. However, the detectable concept of nihilism is what Nietzsche describes of the “wisdom of the sylvan God, Silenus”, “What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is – to die soon” (*BT*,p42).

While nihilism is present in *BT* as “the wisdom of the sylvan God”, it is not called by that name. Nietzsche himself does not distinguish nihilism from pessimism in this context, the context in which he presents the wisdom of the sylvan God, and that makes his text somewhat confusing. But, in his view we can detect that nihilism is a denial of the value of existence, which is not the same notion as pessimism. Nietzsche doesn’t define even the contrast between pessimism and nihilism in *BT*. However, in his interpretation pessimism means that one can affirm life in face of the terror and horror of existence, but nihilism means that one cannot affirm life in face of terror and horror of existence. As I already mentioned, Nietzsche is against Schopenhauer’s pessimism because he believes that his pessimism leads to nihilism.

According to Silenus’ wisdom, it is better not to exist. In this account Greeks are not nihilist because not only do they not deny the value of life and existence, but also they affirm life despite of all miseries and dissatisfaction. Nietzsche admires the pre-Socratic Greeks and their Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies, because their pessimism gives rise to art<sup>3</sup> and through their artistic impulses, life is redeemed in the face of the pessimistic truth. Therefore, they are pessimists who accept the terror and horror of existence; however, being pessimists does not

---

<sup>3</sup> Also, Schopenhauer interprets the significance of art in relation to the suffering and struggle of human existence. He elevates music above the other representational arts, exactly because, as non-representational, it is a direct expression of the primal energies of will, and because, in our appreciation of great music, we experience a release from the demands of will, we lose our individuality, which is responsible for much of our suffering.

make them nihilists: they embrace life and say yes to existence. So, according to pessimism, it is possible to affirm existence despite the contradictions of a chaotic, purposeless and meaningless life. According to nihilism it is not. Nihilism acknowledges that, ultimately it has no meaning, purpose, or goal. But in pre-Socratic Greek pessimism it is possible to affirmation of existence.

How in Nietzsche's interpretation, are pre-Socratic Greeks able to affirm life? Nietzsche explains that there are two different art forms that characterize Greek art, and through them each manages to affirm life. Nietzsche's presentation of these art forms is bound up with a presentation of them as "art-impulses of nature". Nietzsche posits a clear distinction between two kinds of art forms in Greek culture, the Apollonian and the Dionysian forms of art. Using this distinction, he gives an interpretation of how it is possible to affirm existence in face of a pessimistic attitude toward life.

The Apollonian art impulse shows itself mostly in plastic arts, especially sculpture. Their art is based on the world of *dreams and illusion*. In dreams we are all artists, in the sense that, in dreaming, we all create beautiful illusions. The Apollonian have faith in the *principium individuationis*<sup>4</sup>, which is inspired by Schopenhauer's metaphysics. According to the principle of individuation, we distinguish between things and individuate them. The Apollonian work involves having joy and making beauty in clear boundaries, which is associated with precise *measure* (BT, p 46). Therefore, the Apollonian art creates beautiful forms as an illusion, which is captivating to us. Nietzsche associates this illusion with ordinary, everyday reality but the artist

---

<sup>4</sup> Schopenhauer maintains the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Schopenhauer argues that our bodies are given to us in two distinct ways: a) as an object of perception, one among others in the world, and b) as something we inhabit and move about through our intentional actions. This is the basis of his fundamental distinction between "representation" (objective, external) and "will" (subjective, internal). Schopenhauer generalizes with the claim that all objects of our perception, all natural phenomena, are "representations"; each has another aspect as "will". For Schopenhauer, the world of objects that we *represent* and cognize around us is a merely *apparent world*, a world of *appearances*, whereas the world as it is *in itself* is the world as will.

does not create everyday reality. Nietzsche indicates, “philosophical men even have a presentiment that reality in which we live and have our being is also mere appearance” (*BT*, p 34).

The relevant background here is that Nietzsche accepts, and takes the ancient Greeks to accept, that the world of individual things presented to us through the senses is not real, it is like a dream, it is nothing but a realm of mere appearances, and that it is created, similar to an artist’s painting, through the employment of the Apollonian art-impulse of nature. In that sense, “everyday reality” is a creation of an art-impulse. But it isn’t “art” properly speaking, since the artist goes beyond everyday reality to create further illusion. Rather, the Apollonian artist creates an improvement upon everyday reality. According to the Apollonian-impulse, the artist is conscious of the illusory character of his artwork, however he is seduced himself to live in the dream world by the beautiful illusion. The beautiful illusion of the dream world as presented in Apollonian art seduces human beings to say yes to existence despite all miseries in everyday life. How is life affirmed through this art-impulse, despite consciousness of the terror and horror of existence? Nietzsche emphasizes the *creation* of beauty through Apollonian art-impulse; and this is *conscious* of the illusory nature of the creation, that it is a veil that covers the reality, which is horrible and terrible. But art here is a trick by which one can live, despite consciousness of the terror and horror of existence.

Nietzsche argues that the art form of Greek tragedy grew out of the Dionysian art-impulse. He introduces the Dionysian, with the help of Schopenhauer’s *principium individuationis*, he writes:

In the same work Schopenhauer has depicted for us the tremendous terror which seizes a man when he is suddenly dumfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena

because the principle of sufficient reason, in some one of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception. If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the principium individuationis, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian, which is brought home to us most immediately by the analogy of intoxication. (BT, p 36)

According to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, the source of suffering is individuation, and so we experience a release in being delivered from being an individual, among other individuals. For instance, we can experience this release in Dionysian festivals. In *Dionysian festivals*, people experience intoxication together, and lose their individuality and go beyond boundaries. It includes wild parties, wine, song, dance, theater, in which the normal mood would be turned upside down. A Dionysus festival is characterized by losing self-consciousness through music. Nietzsche describes the Dionysian moment as:

Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or 'impudent convention' have fixed between man and man are broken. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity (BT, p37).

In Dionysian culture pleasure and pain, joy and torment are together and one. They are inseparable aspects of life and embracing life means embracing not only joy and pleasure, but pain and torment as well. Dionysian culture for Nietzsche represented the value of life and ecstasy. Nietzsche thought that a Dionysian culture of ecstasy leads to full affirmation of life despite of all miseries and the horror and terror of existence. Dionysian art affirm life, in the face of the consciousness of the terror and horror of existence, in which people get intoxicated together, and lose their individuality and go beyond bounds through the music and forget their miseries.

Greek tragedy for Nietzsche is a unity of Dionysian and Apollonian art elements, which is born out of the spirit of music. Here I am not going to recount the details of Nietzsche's account of the origin of Greek tragedy out of the spirit of music. What matters for my purposes is that it is for Nietzsche the height of ancient Greek culture, because in order to affirm the misery and pain of life, in order to be able to embrace the tragic, Nietzsche believed that we should have recourse to music and tragic art (*BT\**, 80) to do that. He talks about the necessity of a "tragic culture", a "Dionysian ecstasy", that in it, "despite fear and pity" we can be "happily alive" (*BT\**, 81).

Clearly Nietzsche admires the pre-Socratic Greeks, because of their pessimism, however he sees the emergence of the optimistic outlook of Greek philosophy by Socrates as a decline in Greek culture. Defining "optimism" may help here to define the meaning of "pessimism" as Nietzsche employs in *BT*. The optimistic outlook is the philosophy holding that reality is knowable, intelligible, and ordered; also, from the philosophical and scientific perspective we can comprehend reality. The eighteenth century, the "age of reason" or "age of Enlightenment" is characterized by philosophical optimism in general. In this age, natural science is advancing very fast, and the development of technologies transform human life to a higher level. This advance of scientific knowledge of the world is making human life better, more realized, and happier. The concept of optimism derives from the philosophy of Leibniz, according to him this world we live in is the best of all possible worlds. Therefore, Leibnizean optimism leads to the view that the world is rationally ordered and intelligible. This rational inquiry leads one to affirm that the world is rational and intelligible and good.

Nietzsche continues his inquiry of the course of Greek culture by examining the spirit of Socrates. In his diagnosis, Socrates emerges in Greek culture and then "the art of Greek tragedy

was wrecked on this” (BT,p 82). To clarify how that happened we need to know more about the Socratic spirit. According to the Socratic account, “to be beautiful everything must be intelligible” (BT,p 84). Socrates presents his practical philosophy against art, by asking Athenian to find justification of the values by which they lead their lives. Socrates asks for reasons and intelligibility and criticizes Apollonian and Dionysian elements in everyday life such as living unconsciously. Nietzsche, inspired by Socratic wisdom, believes that the optimistic outlook on existence is associated with how reality is knowable and intelligent and organized. In this case, the more a person knows reality, the more they affirm life. Also, it is associated with the idea that through knowledge and science we should be able to make life better and better. In other words we are able to correct the existence.

Nietzsche describes Socrates as a “theoretical man” (BT,p94), and an honored man actively searching for truth, which is opposed to artistic activity. To criticize Socrates, Nietzsche claims that the Socratic view is supported by a metaphysical illusion:

[T]here is, to be sure, a profound *illusion* that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abyss of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of *correcting* it. This sublime metaphysical illusion accompanies science as an instinct and leads science again and again to its limits at which it must turn into *art* – *which is really the aim of this mechanism* (BT,95-96).

According to Socrates, being is not pointless and absurd; rather there is a rational order to the world. According to the Socratic spirit, our knowledge of that rational order can help us to live better, more fulfilled, happier lives. Second, thought can correct existence and even though being is what it is, we have the power to change its course. However, Nietzsche believes that we cannot escape from the faith and change it, but we may be able correct existence through music.

Again, in opposition to Socrates’ optimistic worldview of reality, Nietzsche’s view of the Dionysian power of art presupposes a metaphysical account of reality—one that suggests that

reality is unknowable, chaotic, and absurd. However, Socrates' wisdom is also an attempt to affirm and get at the truth of reality. In other words, both Greek pessimism and Socrates' optimism seek to affirm life, but their respective approaches differ. On the one hand, for the pessimists, life is chaos; and on the other hand, for the optimists, life is ordered and intelligible. That is, their approaches and attitudes differ, but the goal of life affirmation is the same. But how is the optimistic worldview problematic for Nietzsche's project of life affirmation? How does it give rise to nihilism?

At the end of *BT*, Nietzsche refers to Plato's dialogues about Socrates' death. In them, Socrates happily accepts his own death. Nietzsche describes it as follows: "*The dying Socrates* became the new ideal, never before seen, of noble Greek youths: above all, the typical Hellenic youth, Plato, prostrated himself before this image with all the ardent devotion of his enthusiastic soul" (*BT*, p 89). Plato, as Socrates' best student, pictures the dying Socrates as an ideal, a hero. The death of Socrates poses a challenge to Socratic wisdom because according to Socratic philosophy if one lives virtuously, then he would be happy and his life would be the best. Therefore, Socrates as philosopher should seek to live happily. So, why does all his virtue become doomed to end as a criminal? On the face of it, it seems that Socrates death is a self-contradiction for Socratic philosophy. In Plato's representations of the dying Socrates, Socrates welcomes death, contrary to the common fear of death; and he believes by killing him, the Athenians are harming themselves out of ignorance. In this account, for Socrates what matters is what is ultimately real: that which is eternal and changeless such as truth and virtue. Thus, he does not care about what is not important like death. So the death of Socrates comes to be, after Plato, a kind of inspiration.

Socrates wanted to die – it was not Athens, it was he who handed himself the poison cup, who compelled Athens to hand him the poison cup. ... 'Socrates is no

physician,' he said softly to himself: 'death alone is a physician here. ....Socrates himself has only been a long time sick ...' (TI,p 44).

In fact, according to Plato's description of Socrates in his writings, the dying Socrates becomes an ideal. The way that one can realize the ideal of the dying Socrates is by practicing and studying philosophy, using the Socratic method to question what matters. As Plato illustrates in his allegory of the cave, one becomes oneself—timeless and eternal—by “knowing the eternal realities”, and the intelligible forms. It is a process of dying to the life of the changing body and entering the realm of mere appearances.

Obviously, in Nietzsche's view, this “ideal” of the dying Socrates is ultimately nihilistic. But the ideal is powerful, not only in ancient Greece, but also in pre-Christian Rome. In some aspects the ideal of the dying Socrates is similar to the Christian ideal, which I will discuss it further in my third part. Nietzsche believes that Socratic wisdom and Plato's philosophy are not successful to respond to human suffering. Similarly, he criticizes the Christian morality as unsuccessful to solve the suffering problem and describes it as ultimately nihilistic response. In second section considering the *Genealogy of Moral*, I will argue how Christian morality runs counter to Nietzsche's project of life affirmation.

## **II. Nietzsche as a pessimist**

Even though it seems that human life is essentially doomed to suffering, humans endure life on the basis of interpretations, to make life more bearable. These interpretations would form the basis of each culture. As I mentioned, for pre-Socratic culture, the remedy to suffering was their art. They cured the pain of suffering through the art and music. Also, Socrates' attempt to question beyond the basic necessities, gave the birth to philosophy to reduce suffering. However, Nietzsche found Socratic ascetic ideal as nihilistic. In a similar way, Nietzsche starts questioning

the Christian tradition for in which way it reduces suffering. Nietzsche tries to break apart the Christian “hero system”, because he recognizes the same sort of nihilism in Christian morality in his *Genealogy of Morals*.

Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* has the task of self-understanding and of orienting us better toward our future, the task of criticism of ourselves and of our culture. Nietzsche considers what is morality and what he means by criticizing morality. Nietzsche’s critiques morality doesn’t mean that he is against moralities. He is not against morality’s value; rather he is an advocate for a particular moral system. He is against Christian morality, the morality of pity. Nietzsche criticizes Christian morality because he believes it promotes a life denying existence. In order to understand Nietzsche’s critiques of Christianity we need to consider Nietzsche’s perspective on the origins of morality, and how it developed negatively.

Nietzsche in *GM* explains the origins and development of Christian morality by telling a story, the story about Master-Slave morality. First, he describes humanity as two parts, the master class and the slave class. Nietzsche describes the masters as healthy, brave, and fundamentally powerful. In contrast, there are the slaves, whom Nietzsche characterizes as weak, unhealthy, powerless and unhappy about their status in life. The master class controls the slaves and they distinguish themselves as “good”, in the sense that their lives are good, healthy, happy, strong and noble. Obviously, it follows that the masters characterize the weak slaves, as “bad”. According to Nietzsche’s story, in pre-Christian moral thought the word “good” was related to a master class that called themselves good as a description of their healthy and powerful status.

In contrast, the master class called the slaves who were weak and unhealthy as “bad”. However, the slaves who were resentful at the masters flourishing, while they suffered, created the idea of “evil” in reference to the master class, and used “good” to describe themselves.

Nietzsche describes it as a slave revolution in values. That is, slaves revolt against those who have power, but they don't revolt outwardly, on the battlefield. They cannot because they do not have enough power to fight physically. Instead they start a spiritual revolution by revaluing values. Nietzsche's hypothesis is that modern values arise in a spiritual war or revolution, in which the noble mode of valuation has changed completely.

Therefore, the slave class turned things that were once associated with goodness, like health and wealth, into "evils". Nietzsche explains how the slave values originate psychologically in Section 10 of *GM*; "the slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself become creative and gives birth to values: the resentment of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge." The slave's resentment cannot express itself in actions because in the external world slaves are powerless.

In other words, the hatred that exists within the slave class leads to spiritual revenge. The slave overturns the masters' moral system. Therefore; "the miserable alone are good; the poor, powerless, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly are also the only blessed in God, for them alone is there blessedness,--whereas you, you noble and powerful ones, you are in all eternity the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless, you will eternally be the wretched, accursed, and damned!" (*GM*, 16-17).

The slave revolt has been successful to gain power; also, as Nietzsche indicated in preface, power seems to be a criterion for measurement of values. In this case slave morality seems powerful after revaluing the nobles' values. So, what is the criticism of slave morality if slave morality is successful and powerful? The slave success in revenge raise the problem of how exactly Nietzsche is able to convince us that Christian morals are nihilistic. Even if the Christian ideal is one that falsifies existence, on his interpretation, Christian values are an

expression of the will to power and the Christian interpretation has been successful in the struggle against master morality. If it has been successful, then it is more powerful, thus it should be more life-affirming than nihilistic.

Nietzsche's probable response would be as follows: slaves, who were so oppressed with a miserable life, construct a new interpretation for their suffering. Because their modern moral value system amounts to life turned against life itself, as he puts it. According to the story that Nietzsche tells, this is exactly what Christian morality did. Even though they were unable to exercise power in external world and material sense, the slaves had to reconstitute their sense of power, by inventing a "beyond" world in which they will be rewarded for their weaknesses in this world. Therefore it is a story which Nietzsche finds a sort of nihilism in it: the way slaves make their suffering meaningful, leads to inventing another world in which they will be compensated for their miseries.

Nietzsche characterizes this new mode of valuation as nihilistic, because it devalues this world in the name of another world. He calls this tendency the "ascetic ideal". Thus, nihilism also means that our life can be devaluated by the change of value into another and goes beyond the upper world or fictional realm. It is mainly Christianity that Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks of this mode of evaluating, and which he regarded as "Platonism for the people". Christianity is at the top of a list of enemies of life. This is mostly because of Christianity's affirmation of an afterlife at the expense of the negation of this worldly life:

I was the first to see the real antithesis\_ the *degenerated* instinct which turns against life with subterranean vengefulness (-Christianity, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in a certain sense already the philosophy of Plato, the whole of idealism as typical forms) and a formula of *supreme affirmation* born out of fullness, of superfluity, an affirmation without reservation even of suffering, even of guilt, even of all that is strange and questionable in existence . . . This ultimate,

joyfullest, boundlessly exuberant Yes to life is not only the highest insight, it is also the *profoundest*, the insight most strictly confirmed and maintained by truth and knowledge [...] He who not only understands the word 'dionysian' but understands himself in the word 'dionysian' needs no refutation of Plato or of Christianity or of Schopenhauer – *he smells the decomposition* (EH 50).

Nietzsche indicates in *The Will to Power*: 'What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer' (*WP*: 2 I p.9). Nietzsche in this explanation presents the problem of having a goal. Life is meaningful, suffering has meaning, insofar as we see it as directed toward a goal, something above us, which calls us to something higher than we are. According to this account we can conclude that Nietzsche is trying to find the meaning for human life which I will discuss it in next section while he is discussing the problem of escaping the ascetic ideal in section three.

It refers to our natural ways of interpreting the world, and our actual experience of the world. We have learnt to think of value as existing in another world or superior realm, which is distinct from this one, due to Christianity. With Such a deceptive interpretation, we are motivated to regard the world as completely lacking in meaning, because we get used to locating value in another world. Therefore it is highly nihilistic. But, what is exactly the ascetic ideal? How Nietzsche describes it? What comes to the question when Nietzsche tries to find an alternative solution for suffering which somehow is parallel with ascetic ideal? In third part of my paper considering the third part of *GM*, I am considering Nietzsche's own response to problem of suffering. I wonder if his view is self-contradictory.

### **III. Nietzsche and his self-criticism**

Nietzsche in his third essay of *GM*, calls himself into question about his own writing

beside criticizing Christianity and ascetic ideal. In this essay Nietzsche goes beyond his own writing and critiques. He reviews his own process of ideas regarding its aims, its conditions and its consequences, which is his proposal for a life-affirming ideal according to *GM*. His main question in third essay is “What is the meaning of ascetic ideals”? Then he gives an interpretation of ascetic ideals, as presented by artist, philosopher, and priests. According to Nietzsche asceticism is the way of life that leads to self-denial, by denying pleasure, for achieving a higher existence. He writes: “All those aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, to instinct, nature, animal, in short all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world...” (*GM2sec24*)

Nietzsche, found a paradox in asceticism, because on its face, it is life-denial, for the sake of nothing. The ascetic ideal on the face of it is the will turned against nature, because there is no outside of nature, no ideal territory that can be able to explain any phenomenon, and so the only place to look for an explanation is within nature itself. How does nature come around to denying itself? How does the human deny himself? On one hand, he posits the problem of asceticism, and tries to interpret it. On the other hand Nietzsche tries to “give meaning to the earth” by using some other sort of ideal (such as will to truth), which has the same problem as ascetic ideal. Nietzsche is criticizing the ascetic ideal because ascetic ideals are ultimately nihilistic, however he is asking himself if his own alternative for giving the meaning to the earth would be nihilistic as well.

How is a meaningful life on earth possible for a human? Responding to this question needs the creation of a non-ascetic ideal as alternative. We can recognize that as a question that Nietzsche has been struggling with from the beginning of his writing *BT*. But by the end of *GM*, Nietzsche is trying to give human beings a goal, as an interpreter of ascetic ideals. He critiques

ascetic ideals because they are constructed as an attempt to give meaning to suffering but they do not succeed in doing so. However, if Nietzsche himself is addressed to the task of giving meaning to suffering in the light of the will to truth and science he may get stuck in the same trap. But the important point is that he himself noticed that he may not respond any better in face of the problem of life affirmation and nihilism.

There is again another consideration about Nietzsche's metaphysics that comes into question. Nietzsche is criticizing the ascetic ideal as something that goes further into a fictional realm. But considering his interpretation of the ascetic ideal as paradoxical, it is questionable whether what he himself is doing is also self-contradictory for the same reason. Nietzsche presents in his life affirmative project the act of going beneath the appearance to the facts as they really are, to something like the opposite of the appearance. It seems that Nietzsche by giving meaning to our life on this planet, our ascetic existence, puts himself in a position parallel to that of the ascetic priests.

Nietzsche intends to replace the ascetic ideal with a better interpretation of asceticism as the protective instinct of a degenerating life opposite to what the proponents of the ideal think, insofar as the ideal is misleading for the preservation of life. However, this attempt could be appealing to another sort of ideal, and be subject to the same problem. For Nietzsche the desire to go beyond is an aspiration; this compares to the claim that he made: better to will *nothing* than *not will*; willing nothing is still *willing*. Emphasizing the power of this willing, the ascetic priest is the greatest conserving force of life. This metaphysics in fact establishes a relation between Nietzsche himself and the ascetic priest.

Nietzsche raises the question of the alternative of the ascetic ideal. He emphasizes the

monstrous power of this ideal. He deeply admires the will to power and sees it at the basis of all life; therefore Nietzsche himself would honor the power of the ideal. Nietzsche's emphasis on the power of the ideal, as an interpretation of existence, shows that in his view all interpretations are an expression of the will to power. Regarding this point, we may ask why we shouldn't keep them (the ascetic ideal as powerful)? He asks what is the opposing will that might express an opposing ideal? Nietzsche is proposing the question of his own ideal. My concern is whether or not he is merely knocking down an ideal, or is he also creating a counter-ideal. If the latter, what is the counter-ideal to the ascetic ideal that he is creating?

Finding the alternative or counter-ideal for ascetic ideal, Nietzsche appeals to modern science as an opponent of the ideal due to it attacks the religious interpretation of the world. He writes about science that; "it has up till now survived well enough without God, the beyond, and the virtues of denial"(GM,p146). However, appealing to this alternative is questioned and criticized by Nietzsche himself in *GM*. Nietzsche writes of science that it "has no more belief in itself, let alone an ideal above it and where ideals are still inspires passion, love, ardor, and *suffering* at all, it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather the *latest and noblest form of it*"(GM,147) . Nietzsche is cannot be a fan of any program that would remove ideals, therefore modern science which is able to remove ideal cannot be a suitable alternative for Nietzsche' counter-ideal too.

By the end of the *Genealogy of Morals* there is some evidence against Nietzsche's support of natural science in which he uses natural science against religion. Nietzsche supported some naturalistic accounts of morality and science such as Darwinian ones. According to those systems, moral values are representatives of a certain kind of organism that can be explained as serving the survival purposes of that organism, in the same way that its other features and

properties can be explained. Nietzsche doesn't take that Darwinian perspective on morality to be necessarily true, but he believes they are more or less adaptive. Nietzsche is associated with such accounts, but this doesn't mean that he gives us just this perspective on value systems.. But where Nietzsche seems clearly opposed to such scientist accounts of moral values is that such accounts also can debunk values and ideals in general, and seem to leave us without values and ideals in terms of which we struggle to transcend ourselves. Modern science won't do that, from the point of view of Nietzsche's struggle to find goal to human for suffering.

The modern scientist debunks value in the world in the following way; in our practical striving, we see the world as meaningful, and our sufferings and our actions as having significance, in light of the ideal toward which we are striving, an ideal that is typically religious. The scientist disillusion us by new interpretation of the world against religion showing that our suffering is false. So, from the standpoint of scientific explanation, not only do we not believe in this religious ideal, we don't believe in any ideal.

Nietzsche claims that those scientific inquirers are not totally free of the ideal, but they are just the latest representatives because there is still the will to truth behind their scientific approaches. Therefore that attempt to appeal to truth can always be considered as sort of appealing to the ideal. He says, "they are far from being *free spirits*, for they still have *faith in truth*." (GM, p151). The faith in truth is a manifestation of the ascetic ideal because it comes from a belief in another world, the true world, underneath the apparent world, which is totally a self-contradiction. Also as Nietzsche explains that: "the value of truth must be called into question" (GM,p153). Science does not create values; therefore it is not the opponent of the ascetic ideal, merely its latest manifestation.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Nietzsche's proposal for a life-affirming ideal doesn't sound clear in *GM*, because he is criticizing and interpreting himself as an interpreter of nihilistic priest ideal who himself is not totally free from the ideal. In this account he accuses himself of getting stuck in the same trap, as he believes ideal priests does. Also it seems that Nietzsche's attempt to find a counter ideal and alternative for the ascetic ideal wasn't successful either. As I have shown, his appeal to modern science as an alternative to acetic ideal turns out as not to pose a counter ideal against the ascetic ideal, because science itself appeals to will of truth as an ideal. Therefore, that proposal is neither convincing nor adequate itself. Also, Nietzsche's critiques himself in the *GM*, is an exemplification of the will to truth. In conclusion, it seems impossible to escape from asceticism, and thus nihilism, given the "monstrous power" of asceticism. Therefore Nietzsche is not able to avoid nihilism, according his account and his proposal of life affirmation in *GM* turns out as self-contradictory.

## References

BT\*: *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

BT: *The Birth of tragedy*, Basic Writings of Nietzsche, translated by Walter Arnold Kaufmann, New York: Modern library, 2000.

EH: *Ecce Homo, How One Becomes What One Is*, Basic Writing of Nietzsche, translated by Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern library, 2000.

GM: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Basic Writing of Nietzsche, translated by Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Modern library, 2000.

TI: *Twilight of the Idols*, in *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, translated R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1990.

WP: *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Arnold Kaufmann; R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 1967.