The Irony of Pity: Nietzsche contra Schopenhauer and Rousseau

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It has almost become an unwritten law among those who defend Nietzschean ideals of self-cultivation to skirt the issue of his critique of pity, dismissing it as an extraneous diatribe or an embarrassing fulmination. On the other hand, critics who denounce Nietzsche’s ideal of self-cultivation as a dangerous solipsism that all too easily gives license to indifference or outright contempt for others seize on this aspect of his thought as cut-and-dried evidence for the claim that, as Charles Taylor coyly phrases it, “Nietzsche’s influence was not entirely foreign [to fascism].”

Rather than dismissing or denouncing the “pitiless” Nietzsche, this essay carefully examines his subtle psychological analysis of *pitié/Mitleid*. It does so by training a spotlight on his principal object of criticism: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Arthur Schopenhauer’s ethics of pity. I shall argue that Nietzsche’s psychological analysis presents a compelling case for interpreting Rousseauian and Schopenhauerian pity not as a sign of living *for* others or as a form of mutuality and recognition, as its defenders routinely assume, but as a veiled means of assuaging narcissistic loss at the other’s expense. In this respect, I claim that Nietzsche joins hands with and strengthens Stoic arguments and anxieties to the effect that pity breeds vengefulness and cruelty and that he does so by drawing on his psychoanalytic insights into our subterranean intrapsychic and intersubjective stratagems for restoring to ourselves the illusion of majestic plenitude.

The Gilded Sheath of Pity: Rousseau and Schopenhauer

*Pity*:—In the gilded sheath of pity there is sometimes stuck the dagger of envy.

—AOM 377

Nietzsche is intent on stripping away pity’s golden luster. He builds his case against *pitié/Mitleid* largely on the basis of his suspicions about the psychological dynamics that, so he claims, we can use to lay bare Schopenhauer’s and Rousseau’s gilded rationalizations of this pathos. According to Nietzsche, the type of *pitié/Mitleid* they expound is symptomatic of what we might call, drawing on psychoanalytic terms, the narcissistic malaise. Boldly stated, he argues that as a psychological transaction *Mitleid* satisfies the ego’s desire to assuage its loss of narcissistic plenitude. In making this case, Nietzsche dramatically
reverses their perspective, arguing that *Mitleid* should not be understood as an affective bond with the other, not as a sign of living for others, but, rather, as a veiled means of restoring self-affection at the other’s expense. To show this he analyzes the *moral psychology* that underpins the precepts of the ethics of pity. If Nietzsche’s psychological analysis is correct, then *Mitleid* is not antithetical to revenge against others but, in fact, closely linked to one of its subtle shadings and masks, which he calls envy. “In the gilded sheath of pity,” as he puts it with signature pithiness, “there is sometimes stuck the dagger of envy” (*AOM* 377).

Whereas Rousseau and Schopenhauer claim that *Mitleid* is the only source of ethical concern for others, Nietzsche argues that their psychology of *Mitleid* uncritically accepts a paranoid-schizoid splitting of the object world, to borrow Melanie Klein’s terminology, into the enviable and the pitiable. He claims that because these forms of pity are generated by a paranoid-schizoid psychological constellation, they are better characterized as what we might call “hateship” rather than friendship. In this respect, Nietzsche sees in the psychology of the pityer an immature or infantile attempt to resolve the narcissistic malaise. Nietzsche pursues this critique of Rousseau and Schopenhauer as part of a broader concern that informs his middle period: his concern with theorizing a mature transformation of narcissism that does not entail such damaging splitting and projection.

We can reconstruct and elaborate three steps in Nietzsche’s critical analysis of the psychological configuration that engenders the type of pity that Rousseau and Schopenhauer advocate: his claim that pity is deeply complicit in envy and its projective identifications; that it ultimately tends toward a diminution of others; and, finally, that the twinning of pity and envy in the construction of the object world blocks our ability to live well with others. In other words, Nietzsche builds a strong case for reversing Schopenhauer and Rousseau’s central, unexamined presumption: he shows that far from overcoming our “colossal egoism,” as Schopenhauer calls it, pity is a species of pathological narcissism that damages the individual’s capacity for composing or “restoring” balanced (*gleichgewicht*) relations with others (*HAH* 376). Nietzsche especially underscores the point that a morality built on these psychological foundations prevents individuals from developing a subtle, penetrating, and therapeutically efficacious understanding of another’s intrapsychic world and experiences.

In criticizing the ethics of pity, then, Nietzsche specifically targets the conceptualization of this pathos or affect that lies at the heart of both Rousseau’s and Schopenhauer’s ethical philosophy. In prosecuting his case against their ethics he brings to bear his method of “psychological dissection,” claiming that it can help explore and fathom pity’s intrapsychic significance in a way that sheds new light on both Rousseau’s moral pedagogy of *pitié* and Schopenhauer’s metaphysically based ethics of *Mitleid* (*HAH* 35, 37). His core thesis is that *pitié/Mitleid*, as they conceive it, merely crystallizes the structure of affects and
defenses characteristic of a psyche ensnared by a primitive means of soothing the narcissistic wound. Contextualized this way, Nietzsche argues, *Mitleid* should be treated first and foremost as a pathological stratagem through which the psyche seeks narcissistic gratification. His analysis might stand as an illustration of his broader claim that moral philosophy should not be based on or give credence to belief in conceptual oppositions (*HAAH* 1). For he turns common sense inside out and claims that *pitié/Mitleid*, which Schopenhauer identifies as action devoid of “all egoistic motivations,” has its roots in envy.7 It is his psychological dissections that place Nietzsche several steps ahead of not only Rousseau and Schopenhauer but also those critics who invoke this tradition of pity against Nietzsche without carefully examining, as he does, its theoretical and psychological presuppositions.8 We can orient ourselves to Nietzsche’s critique of this type of pity by briefly examining Rousseau’s and Schopenhauer’s very similar treatments of the origins and worth of pity.9

In book 4 of *Émile*, Rousseau argues that *pitié* should be the first and most important emotion cultivated in future citizens. It ought to be cultivated, he claims, because it is the sharing of suffering that reconciles human beings to their fellow creatures:

> Man’s weakness makes him sociable. Our common sufferings draw our hearts to our fellow creatures; we should have no duties to mankind if we were not men. Every affection [or attachment] is a sign of insufficiency; if each of us had no need of the others, we should hardly think of associating with them. So our frail happiness has its roots in our weakness. *A really happy man is a hermit;* God only enjoys absolute happiness; but which of us has any idea of what that means? . . . I do not understand how one who has need of nothing could love anything.10

According to Rousseau, the social bond is forged through an acknowledgment of a shared condition of insufficiency, and it is for this reason that teachers should educate individuals to recognize that “all are liable to the sorrows of life, its disappointments, its ills, its sufferings of every kind; and all are condemned at length to die.”11 Rousseau’s moral pedagogy pivots on the notion that beneficent citizenship derives from educating future citizens to understand that they are equally vulnerable to the sorrows and misfortunes that cast others down. From the notion that attachments are premised on insufficiency, weakness, or lack, Rousseau attempts to draw a less than obvious corollary: “[I]t follows that we are drawn towards our fellow-creatures *less by our feelings for their joys than for their sorrows*; for in them we discern more plainly a nature like our own, and a pledge of their affection for us. If our common need creates a bond of interest our common suffering creates a bond of affection.”12

Rousseau identifies two reasons for the belief that citizens can form bonds of affection with others *only* by cultivating a feeling for their pain and neediness. In the first place, he argues that granting equal value to others depends on recognizing ourselves in them and that such recognition is anchored in seeing that
we share similar experiences of sorrow or insufficiency. Sorrow or vulnerability constitutes the foundation of sociability, understood as the extension of the concern we have for ourselves to others, because it forms the single point of mutual recognition. We only see ourselves in others when they suffer. Martha Nussbaum nicely sums up this specifically psychological (rather than logical) claim integral to the ethics of pity:

The claim . . . is that one will not respond with the pain of pity, when looking at the suffering of another, unless one judges that the possibilities displayed there are also possibilities for oneself . . . . The point seems to be that the pain of another will be an object of my concern only if I acknowledge some sort of community between myself and the other—to the extent that I am able, in imagination, to see that suffering as a possibility for me and to understand, on the basis of my own experience, what its meaning might be for the person who has it.13

Second, Rousseau claims that recognizing the other’s neediness and insecurity reassures individuals that their desire for a community between themselves and others is not at risk of being unilateral or nonreciprocal. Our fellow creatures’ suffering, as Rousseau notes, “[is] a pledge of affection for us.” It is their suffering that holds others in bondage to us. Rousseau maintains that sorrow must be the exclusive force of sociability, therefore, not simply because it is a shared condition, for one might after all point to many other things that human beings have in common, but because it allays the fear that others can remain indifferent or unconcerned about us should they so choose. To put it in slightly different terms, Rousseau treats pitié as the only possible social cement because by imagining others as needy and suffering, pitié allays the fear of their independence and the threat that it carries that they may abandon us to a condition of loveless solitude. Like those needless and carefree Epicurean gods who are “indifferent to our merits and immune from our anger,” happy individuals, so Rousseau fears, must remain divinely unconcerned about other mortals.14 Such deities can have no sympathy for suffering mortals. Rousseau’s moral psychology thus splits the object world into two radically exclusive categories: happily self-sufficient individuals modeled on the carefree Epicurean gods and needy human creatures bound to one another through nothing other than their shared suffering.

However, according to Rousseau, if these godlike individuals are divinely indifferent to the travails of other mortals, these mortals are certainly not indifferent to the pleasures of the godlike. Rousseau slides from the contention that “we” suffering mortals “are drawn towards our fellow-creatures less by our feeling for their joys than for their sorrows” to an acknowledgment that such pitié constructs a social world shot through with envy: “The sight of the happy arouses in others envy rather than love, we are ready to accuse him of usurping a right which is not his, of seeking happiness for himself alone, and our selfishness suffers an additional pang in the thought that this man has no need of us.”15
A similar entanglement of pity and envy bedevils Schopenhauer’s attempt to give pity a metaphysical basis. The fundamental theoretical problem confronting Schopenhauer’s ethics is how non-egoistic actions can arise from a monadic, predatory ego—or, as Nietzsche puts it, how living for others can derive from egoism. Schopenhauer’s “solution” to this problem is unashamedly metaphysical. In On the Basis of Morality, Schopenhauer claims that only an insight into the metaphysical unity of all things can explain the origins of pity. He argues that pity follows in the wake of a pure, mystical vision of the shared identity of all human beings as transient phenomena of the one will to life.

It is in view of the “colossal” and “boundless egoism” that forms humanity’s innermost core as the phenomenon of an insatiable will to life, an egoism that unchecked generates the bellum omnium contra omnes, that Schopenhauer sets himself the task of explaining how the immorality of egoism is overcome in acts of pity. In the eyes of the egotist,” Schopenhauer says, “there is a wide gulf, a mighty difference, between the ego . . . and the non-ego embracing the rest of the world.” And this ego standpoint, he adds, has empirical validity: “[A]ccording to experience, the difference between my own person and another’s appears to be absolute. The difference in space that separates me from him, separates me also from his weal and woe.” Given his presupposition that Mitleid is purely disinterested, Schopenhauer’s monadic conception of the ego leaves him with the difficult task of explaining how it is possible to transcend the ego’s self-interested standpoint. “How,” Schopenhauer asks, “is it possible for another’s weal and woe to move my will immediately, that is to say, in exactly the same way in which it is usually moved only by my own weal and woe?” This problem is especially acute because he holds that egotistical self-interest is our “chief and fundamental incentive.” Egoism, as he describes it, is “boundless”:

Everything opposing the strivings of egoism excites wrath, anger and hatred, and he will attempt to destroy it as his enemy. If possible, he wants to enjoy everything; but as that is impossible, he wants at least to control everything. “Everything for me and nothing for others” is his motto. Egoism is colossal; it towers above the world; for if every individual were given the choice between his own destruction and the rest of the world, I need not say how the decision would go in the vast majority of cases. Accordingly, everyone makes himself the center of the world, and refers everything to himself.

Schopenhauer claims that Mitleid is a purely disinterested regard for the well-being of others that arises from a direct participation in their los und leiden. He argues that the “merging” of egos that he believes makes Mitleid possible can only be explained metaphysically. It is, he exclaims, “astonishing . . . the great mystery of ethics; it is the primary and original phenomenon of ethics, the boundary mark beyond which only metaphysical speculation can venture to step.”
For he acknowledges that from an empirical standpoint the difference that egotists perceive between themselves and others is justified. His fundamental metaphysical premise is that all phenomena are manifestations of one and the same essence; plurality and difference therefore belong only to the world of appearances. Schopenhauer explains the ethical consequences of his metaphysical monism thus:

[I]f plurality and separateness belong only to the phenomenon, and if it is one and the same essence that manifests itself in all living things, then that conception that abolishes the differences between ego and non-ego is not erroneous. . . . [C]ompassion [Mitleid] is the proper expression of that view. Accordingly, it would be the metaphysical basis of ethics and consists in one individual’s again recognising in another his own self, his own true inner nature.

Those who pity, in short, recognize and love their own true inner nature in all others; the partition that normally separates them from others dissolves through this “mystical” act of recognition. Pity, in short, is the practical manifestation of the metaphysical unity of all things.

Schopenhauer believes only this metaphysical explanation can show us how we surmount our colossal egoism. Pity, he insists, does not arise from imagining ourselves in the position of the suffering and believing we are suffering their pains in our person. Rather, Schopenhauer believes that pitiers experience the other’s suffering in just the same way as they experience their own but in the other person: “[H]e is the sufferer not we; and it is precisely in his person, not in ours, that we feel the suffering, to our grief and sorrow. We suffer with him and hence in him; we feel his pain as his, and do not imagine that it is ours.”

Pity, he claims, does not stem from merely imagining the other’s suffering as our own but, rather, actually experiencing “his” suffering “in him.” This is what Schopenhauer means when he describes the pitier as participating in the other’s suffering as such.

Such immediate participation in the other’s suffering is possible, he claims, because the separation among individuals is an illusion—ontologically we are all expressions of one and the same metaphysical will to life. Schopenhauer argues that Mitleid involves “the immediate participation, independent of all ulterior considerations, primarily in the suffering of another, and thus in the prevention or elimination of it. . . . As soon as compassion is aroused, the weal and woe of another are nearest to my heart in exactly the same way . . . as otherwise only my own are. Hence the difference between him and me is now no longer absolute.”

Schopenhauer’s suggestion is that just as our own suffering moves us to seek alleviation, so when we experience the other’s misery “in him” this experience provides us with exactly the same kind of incentive to alleviate “his” suffering.

Now if Schopenhauer is correct about the ontological identity of all individuals, then it should also be possible for one person to participate directly in
another’s pleasures or joys. Yet he does not consistently maintain his metaphysical conviction that there is no ontological gap among human beings. In fact, Schopenhauer qualifies this claim to such an extent that he undermines the metaphysical foundations he uses to support the ethics of pity. For he ultimately claims that it is only the suffering of others and not their joy that motivates the moral agent. According to Schopenhauer, whereas other people’s distress inspires disinterested action, their joy never spurs the same kind of non-egoistic response. This restriction is incompatible with his claim that good persons make no distinction between their own and another’s interests and recognize in every creature an “I once more.”

Schopenhauer, in other words, unwittingly undermines his metaphysical conviction that pity is the practical expression of the unity of all things. For he claims that far from directly participating in the other’s feelings, the Mitleidigen “feel no sympathy” for the lucky person, “on the contrary, as such he remains a stranger to our hearts.” The expressions of that pure, disinterested, objective participation in the lot and conditions of another,” he claims, “are reserved for him who in any way suffers.”

The other’s good fortune as such “may easily excite envy, which, if he should once fall from the heights of fortune, threatens to turn into Schadenfreude.” According to Schopenhauer, the reverse side of pity is envy of the other’s good fortune. Thus, in elaborating his notion of pity he gradually unravels his own metaphysical doctrine. Although he claims that, given the metaphysical unity of all creatures, sharing joy is at least in principle possible, he in fact begins with the view that the Mitleidigen are merely apathetic toward the other’s joy before finally suggesting that far from being indifferent, they are envious of this joy and cannot have any regard for others until misfortune strikes.

This is the same conceptual shift we witness in Rousseau’s analysis of pity. It constitutes a dramatic shift in Schopenhauer’s perspective: from the initial claim that the only condition for pity is a mysteriously immediate participation in the other’s feelings, he now maintains that pity only flows when one’s envy is appeased by the sight of the lucky person’s fall from grace:

For as soon as the lucky man falls, there occurs a great transformation in the hearts of others, which for our consideration is instructive. . . . Envy is reconciled and has disappeared with its own cause; Mitleid takes its place and gives birth to loving-kindness. Those who were envious of and hostile to the man of fortune have often become, after his downfall, his considerate, consoling, and helpful friends. . . . For misfortune is the condition of compassion, and this is the source of philanthropy.

We can see here how Schopenhauer’s account of the genesis of pity departs radically from his metaphysical claim that pitiers recognize their own inner nature in others and act toward them without any egotistical motive, for he now suggests that this “recognition” is contingent on others not enjoying good fortune lest they stir up envy.
Putting the matter somewhat too facetiously perhaps, for Schopenhauer there is “one and the same essence that manifests itself in all living things,” and this is the basis on which it is possible for us to participate in the condition of all creatures. However, apparently this essence does not manifest itself in the happy person, for it is certain that the pitier does not participate in fortunate individuals’ happiness in exactly the same manner as they do. Schopenhauerian pitiers are obviously not sharing the feeling of pleasure in the happy other but, rather, responding to the displeasure they experience in themselves at the sight of the other’s state of gratification. The relationships that pitiers forge are profoundly self-interested: on the one side, their pitying response springs from their own painful feelings of deprivation, which leads them to deny, negate, or spoil others’ pleasure in themselves. On the other, pitiers cleave to the sorrowful and misfortunate because the sight of another’s suffering brings them relief from the feelings of deprivation and impotence that fuel envy. Schopenhauer’s philanthropic souls suffer less from themselves when they see the other suffer; hence their sense of well-being depends on others’ weakness and emasculation. For Schopenhauer the exercise of friendship is therefore contingent on the diminution or weakening of others; where others continue to enjoy good fortune, they remain estranged objects of envy.

We can see in both Rousseau’s and Schopenhauer’s moral psychology many of the hallmarks of what Klein describes as the paranoid-schizoid position. A brief elaboration of Klein will help to illuminate the genesis of pity and envy as related aspects of a primitive defense mechanism for dealing with narcissistic loss. As we shall see shortly, Nietzsche’s analysis brings to the foreground precisely these dimensions of Rousseau and Schopenhauer’s concept of the ethical subject.

Turning to Klein first, she identifies the paranoid-schizoid position as the incipient ego’s primitive response to the anxiety that its rage over the loss of its perfection (or the demise of primary narcissism) might also lead it to destroy the good object on which it depends for its material and psychic survival. Indeed, this rage, or persecutory anxiety as Klein calls it, seems so potent and threatening that the good object must be rendered sublime and perfect in order to protect it from its own rage. In order to crystallize these intrapsychic processes, Klein formulates the concept of the paranoid-schizoid position: the idea that the ego splits its object world into idealized and debased objects (schizoid splitting) and projects them into the other (paranoia).

According to Klein, the presence of envy is symptomatic of an abnormally strong paranoid-schizoid tendency. Envy arises, she asserts, because we harbor a fantasy of a condition of inexhaustible plenitude or self-sufficiency. This fantasy is disturbed by the painful discovery of our dependence on others and the limits this places on our narcissistic dream of perfection and omnipotence. Following Freud’s lead, she holds that we attempt to maintain and nurture this
fantasy and that the ego, at least in part, is constituted and develops as a mechanism for warding off the anxiety generated by this loss and restoring the fantasy of plenitude.\(^{34}\) In this context, Klein conceives idealization as a projective mechanism that protects this divine image of the self by putting it into the other. She believes that the paranoid-schizoid position serves the ego as a necessary initial stage in fending off and dispersing anxiety. However, individuals who remain fixed in this position, she asserts, establish all the intrapsychic conditions for badly damaged object relations characterized by, among other things, envious spoiling and the consequent inability to accept the other as a separate and independent agent.

Although her account of pathological object relations is too elaborate to unpack in detail here, it is possible to discern in Klein’s analysis the following account of the relationship among narcissism, idealization, and envy. In order to protect the fantasy of our ideal condition, she argues, we project into our objects the plenitude or omnipotence that we desire for ourselves. In other words, through the mechanism of idealization the object is endowed with all the qualities of self-sufficiency or plenitude that the ego wants for itself but cannot attain. This idealization, however, can only be a transitional solution to the demise of our primary narcissism. For the discovery of the idealized object’s independence engenders in the primitive ego the fear of being abandoned by it and shame over its own needy dependence. According to Klein, this early emotional matrix generates either a compulsive attempt to control the object or, when it can no longer be controlled, to spoil and destroy it. However, if in its narcissistic rage over the independence of the other and shame over its dependence on it, the ego enviously spoils and destroys the other, it also thereby prevents itself from assimilating or reintrojecting the good that it has put into the other.

This is precisely the psychological constellation Nietzsche illuminates in Rousseau’s and Schopenhauer’s accounts of the moral subject. Both Rousseau’s and Schopenhauer’s moral psychology remains fixed in the paranoid-schizoid position and its damaging object relations. That is to say, their psychology uncritically accepts the primitive mechanism of assuaging narcissistic loss through enviously destroying or spoiling the joy of others, on the one side, and taking pleasure in their suffering, on the other.\(^{35}\) Unlike Nietzsche, then, neither Rousseau nor Schopenhauer attempts to theorize the psychological transformations and modulations of narcissism.

Nietzsche argues that rather than seeking to overcome envy, Rousseau and Schopenhauer’s ethics of pity constructs social relations oriented around the need to assuage the feeling of self-lack. He claims that the envious subject soothes itself through Schadenfreude. It follows, therefore, that if pity also assuages envy, then it must be closely related to Schadenfreude. According to Nietzsche, Schadenfreude results from the projection of an envy-fuelled wish for the other’s downfall beyond the social realm into the realm of chance:
Schadenfreude originates in the fact that in certain respects of which he is well aware, everyone feels unwell, is oppressed by care or envy or sorrow: the harm that befalls another makes him our equal, it appeases our envy. . . . The disposition bent on equality thus extends its demands to the domain of happiness and chance as well: Schadenfreude is the commonest expression of the victory and restoration of equality within the higher world order too. (WS27, emphasis added)

Nietzsche comically draws the links between pitying others and taking delight in their sorrow in the following aphorism: “What is ‘elevating’ in our neighbour’s misfortune.—He has experienced a misfortune, and now the ‘compassionate’ [Mitleidigen] come along and depict his misfortune for him in detail—at length they go away content and elevated: they have gloated over the unfortunate man’s distress and over their own and passed a pleasant afternoon” (D 224). Nietzsche here comically deflates one of the human, all-too-human vices he discovers writ large in Schopenhauer and Rousseau’s ethics: the thrilling pleasures of the pitier’s voyeurism, which Rousseau unwittingly discloses in his obsessive emphasis on the visual aspects of suffering; for Rousseau, human suffering is an “object,” “sight,” “scene,” impression,” “picture,” or “spectacle” that leaves us feeling pleasantly satisfied.36

Strange, as if in clairvoyant agreement with Nietzsche’s criticism, in defending pity Schopenhauer himself links it to the gloating of Schadenfreude. As we have seen, on the metaphysical plane, Schopenhauer claims that our concern for others springs from a mysterious, direct participation in their feelings. Yet his psychological analysis in fact shows that the emergence of pity turns on the devaluation or diminution of others. Schopenhauer might baulk at the notion that those who take pity on others enjoy their suffering, but even as he attempts to shuffle aside this affect, he nevertheless maintains that without the malicious wishes of Schadenfreude coming to pass, pity is impossible. Pity flows, according to Schopenhauer, only when one’s envy is appeased by the sight of the lucky person’s fall from grace. Bluntly stated, Schopenhauer’s own point is that love of others (Menschliebe) pivots on their misery. We can see this in his thesis that the appeasement of our envy at the other’s joy is the primary condition of pity:

A man will not obtain demonstrations of genuine philanthropy from others as long as he is well off in every respect. . . . For the lucky man as such we feel no sympathy; on the contrary, as such he remains a stranger to our hearts. . . . Indeed, if he has many advantages over others he may easily excite envy, which if he should once fall from the heights of fortune, threatens to turn into malicious joy. . . . For as soon as the lucky man falls, there occurs a great transformation in the hearts of others, which for our consideration is instructive. . . . Envy is reconciled and has disappeared with its own cause; compassion takes its place and gives birth to loving-kindness. Those who were envious of and hostile to the man of fortune have often become, after his downfall, his considerate, consoling, and helpful friends. . . . For misfortune is the condition of compassion, and this is the source of philanthropy.37
Schopenhauer reveals here that the pitying person’s disposition is not a product of a direct participation in the other’s condition and does not therefore require any metaphysical explanation. Rather, our pity for others emerges from the easing of our envy over their happiness. This kind of pity, therefore, demands no understanding of the other’s suffering at all, let alone the merging of identities that Schopenhauer presupposes in his metaphysical explanation of pity. On Schopenhauer’s own analysis, pity is not a mysterious merging of identities but, rather, a psychological metamorphosis anchored in the dissolution of the pain of envy or, to state this point in positive terms, the return of a feeling of self-plenitude in the acknowledgment of the other’s lack. We do not grow “tenderer” toward the other because we feel his suffering in him, as Schopenhauer puts it, but because in his state of deprivation he no longer causes us suffering. In Schopenhauer’s example, as pitiers our relationship to the other undergoes a change when we no longer see or imagine the other as enviable, not because we miraculously enter into and are motivated by the other’s suffering.

Chastising the psychological naïveté of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical account of pity, Nietzsche confirms this point in his claim that the Leid that we attend to in the act of pity is not the other’s Leid but, in fact, our own feeling of self-lack. Paradoxically, therefore, for Nietzsche, Schopenhauerian Mitleid is not Mit-Leid or “suffering-with”: “That pity [Mitleiden], on the other hand, is the same kind of thing as the suffering [mit dem Leiden] at the sight of which it arises, or that it possesses an especially subtle, penetrating understanding of suffering, are propositions contradicted by experience, and he who glorifies pity precisely on account of these two qualities lacks adequate experience in this very realm of the moral” (D 133). Nietzsche argues that because Schopenhauer fails to understand how his notion of pity is anchored in the desire to restore one’s self-affection, he also fails to see that it subverts the very regard for others, or “the realm of the moral,” that he unwisely attempts to base on the structure of the emotion as he understands it.

Of course, the corollary of Schopenhauer’s position is that although the visible signs of envy may disappear with the misfortune of others, the paranoid-schizoid position that fuels envy remains even more firmly entrenched. For rather than curing envy, this kind of pity merely serves to satisfy the envious need for others to be diminished so that one can feel whole and complete. Though by this means pitiers pleasurably assuage their narcissistic wound, it is, as Nietzsche underscores, a damaging and enervating means of doing so because it creates an addiction to finding pleasure in themselves through enviously spoiling the other. According to Nietzsche, the tonic effect of envy is outweighed by its harmful effects on not only the envied but the envier. The psychological consequence of this addiction to envy is melancholia: that is to say, not only do we attack and spoil the other’s joy, but inevitably this spoiling constructs a world in which we feel that our own joy may similarly become the object of attack.38 If Schopenhauer’s
analysis of the moral psychology of pity is correct, then the others’ return to joy must make them strangers to our hearts and excite our envy, and with this envy must also come the return of the menace of Schadenfreude. Nietzsche makes just this point regarding the disjointed rejoicing of pity: “The compassionate Christian.—The reverse side of Christian compassion for the suffering of one’s neighbour is a profound suspicion of all the joy of one’s neighbour, of his joy in all that he wants to do and can” (D 80). In other words, within the framework of Schopenhauer’s ethics of pity we can regard others as of equal worth only so long as they suffer equally. Suffering thus bridges the gulf among egos—but not, as we have seen, because as pitiers we mysteriously enter into or participate in the condition of others but, rather, because their demise brings them down to our level and thus appeases the envy we feel at the sight of their self-sufficient happiness (see D 138). The sight of others’ suffering, in short, makes their independence more palatable to us because in this debased state they no longer arouse in us painful feelings of deprivation or the anxiety that we may be abandoned. To recall Rousseau on this latter point, the suffering of others is a pledge of their affection for us. As Schopenhauer’s analysis implies, taking pleasure in the other’s suffering is a tonic for restoring damaged narcissistic self-affection. It is for this reason, Nietzsche believes, that when persistent feelings of envy threaten to attenuate our self-affection we pursue social or intersubjective means for reviving the pleasant feeling of Schadenfreude.

In other words, when we enviously spoil others we surreptitiously restore to ourselves our narcissistic self-affection. Our envy does so by enabling us to construct ourselves as those who, by comparison with the spoiled object, are exempt from suffering, need, and loss. Through envy we aim to make the other abject or pitiable so that we no longer feel or experience our own abjection. The damage we inflict through envy reduces the other to the needy, insufficient, pitiable condition that we ourselves experience. It thereby soothes our painful feeling that in the face of a fantasized self-sufficient other we are superfluous or unloved. The imaginative work of envy reaches a successful resolution when it enables us to achieve a reversal of roles and our formerly abject self can feel itself as whole and complete in comparison with the now diminished other: “Sometimes we love the rich man in the midst of misfortunes; but so long as he prospers he has no real friend, except the man who is not deceived by appearances, who pities rather than envies him in spite of his prosperity.”39 In Rousseau’s framework, pity is the use to which envy puts the imagination. To clarify, it is the means through which Rousseau believes that wounded narcissists can reverse the positions of lack/plenitude: by pitying others we transform ourselves into those who, like the Epicurean gods, are divinely free of anxiety and exempt from suffering and pain. In this respect the conception of the moral subject that lies at the heart of his ethics of pity exemplifies the paranoid-schizoid defenses of pathological narcissism. It is apparent, to begin with, that Rousseau’s moral subjects have not
relinquished or tempered their fantasy of narcissistic plenitude insofar as they harbor the regret that they do not occupy the privileged position of the needless Epicurean gods. Indeed, it is partly because they bitterly measure their own loss against this fantasy of divine tranquility that they brim with painful envy at the sight of others' joy. (In accusing the other “of seeking happiness for himself alone” they repeat what Klein describes as the basic complaint of infantile envy: the accusation that its first object “has an unlimited flow of milk” that “it keeps for its own gratification.” For Klein this image of a wholly self-gratifying object is the ego’s projection of its own most desired state.)

Rousseau then begins not with a subject who seeks mutual recognition but with one who suffers deeply from the loss of narcissistic self-sufficiency. The only way he conceives of this subject becoming sociable is to give full rein to its primordial envy to spoil others so that it does not suffer from its own sense of self-lack or narcissistic wound. Envy’s conjuring trick is to restore self-affection through diminishing others. This is how Rousseau arrives at the perverse position of affirming a moral psychology in which we experience the other’s joy as a source of bitterness and the other’s suffering as a source of sweet pleasure. Pity is a disjointed rejoicing. The other’s suffering is sweet because it restores to us our narcissistic self-affection: “Pity is sweet, because, when we put ourselves in the place of the one who suffers, we are aware, nevertheless of the pleasure of not suffering like him. Envy is bitter, because the sight of a happy man, far from putting the envious in his place, inspires him with regret that he is not there. The one seems to exempt us from the pain he suffers, the other seems to deprive us of the good things he enjoys.”

It is for this reason that Nietzsche claims that overcoming the feeling of self-lack and restoring the vanity of self-affection are the motivating forces of the kind of pity Rousseau and Schopenhauer identify as the source of all our moral actions. Couched in psychoanalytic terms, our feelings of self-lack are a reignition of infantile rage over our asymmetrical dependence on an idealized, self-sufficient other. Pity serves to soothe this envious rage by overturning the asymmetry that the needy, dependent child fears may lead to its abandonment. These psychoanalytic insights are implicit in Nietzsche’s treatment of Rousseau and Schopenhauer. It is because Nietzsche sees how their notion of pity is shaped by this psychological matrix that he argues that it is both self-serving and damaging to the other. On the plane of fantasy, he suggests, as pitiers we imagine the others on whom we depend as self-sufficient and we play the game of pity in order to redress this asymmetry. We do so by attempting to make ourselves appear as enviable and self-sufficient individuals on whose beneficence others must depend. In the psychological transaction of pity, as Nietzsche sees it, we aim to spoil others by making their suffering the occasion for undermining their independence and asserting our own. As Nietzsche explains in the following aphorism:
If we love, honour, admire someone and then afterwards discover that he is suffering... our feeling of love, reverence and admiration changes in an essential respect: it grows tenderer; that is to say, the gulf between us and him seems to be bridged, an approximation to identity seems to occur. Only now do we conceive it possible that we might give back to him, while he previously dwelt in our imagination as being elevated above our gratitude. This capacity to give back produces in us great joy and exaltation... [W]e have the enjoyment of active gratitude—which, in short, is benevolent revenge. If he wants and takes nothing whatever from us, we go away chilled and saddened, almost offended... From all of this it follows that, even in the most favorable cases, there is something degrading in suffering and something elevating and productive of superiority in pitying—which separates these two sensations from one another to all eternity. (D 138)

As Nietzsche analyzes it here, as pitiers our giving is motivated by the desire to usurp the position of imagined omnipotence, rather than by the other’s desire for our pity. (It is this insight that informs Zarathustra’s caution that pity should always be a conjecture—“May your pity be a conjecture: that you may first know if your friend wants pity” [Z:1 “Of the Friend”].) For Nietzsche the fact that as pitiers we are driven by our desire to restore our self-affection is disclosed by our feeling of offence if the other does not appreciate our “gift” of Mitleid: “Refusing gratitude.—One may well refuse a request, but one may never refuse gratitude (or what comes to the same thing, receive it coldly or conventionally). To do so is very wounding—and why?” (D 235). Through gift giving inspired by such pity, Nietzsche implies, we try to exact from the other the kind of acknowledgment that can aid us in our attempt to restore our fantasy of plenitude. As a sign of their subordination to us, the gratitude of others can serve to bolster our fragile illusion of omnipotence. In this context, therefore, if others refuse our gift of pitying concern, they are, as it were, refusing to grant us the right to feel or imagine ourselves as elevated above them. In this regard, the gift of Mitleid is really a gift we attempt to bestow on ourselves at the other’s expense.
Tocqueville’s anxiety about the dangers of modern commercially based societies: namely, the danger that market-driven atomization and deindividuation can easily engender a form of communitarian tyranny. In this context, Nietzsche maintains, the notion of Mitleid and its cognates such as sympathy and philanthropy have become little more than bywords for a communitarianism that drives toward the complete adaptation of the individual to the whole. Nietzsche defends the practice of self-cultivation against the theoretical limits and practical dangers of this nightmare communitarianism. However, as we shall see, if Nietzsche objects to market-driven communitarianism in the name of self-cultivation, he does so because he thinks that, unlike the modern practices that go by the name of “pity,” self-cultivation can enrich the relationship between self and other.

In Daybreak Nietzsche claims that Mitleid, which, he observes, was once merely a subsidiary or minor Christian norm, has been transformed and valorized in a post-Enlightenment political and sociological discourse that seeks to legitimate what he calls “the moral undercurrent of our age.” Nietzsche explains this moral undercurrent as the “weakening and abolition of the individual” for the sake of enhancing communitarian integration. According to Nietzsche, a cult of philanthropy was the “secret spur” of all “free thinkers from Voltaire up to Auguste Comte.” The teachings of the “sympathetic affects” and “pity” were then given the widest currency by Schopenhauer, J. S. Mill, and, by implication at least, Rousseau and flourished in the socialist doctrines that placed themselves on the common grounds of these teachings. Here Nietzsche clearly rides roughshod over the significant philosophical and theoretical differences among the program of the Enlightenment philosophes, nineteenth-century liberalism, and socialism.

However, if Nietzsche thus conflates a number of very different discourses, his conceptualization of the social phenomenon he objects to remains much more sharply focused. In theorizing the cult of philanthropy, he accentuates what he sees as the tight connection between the modern form of communal integration and a lamentable process of deindividuation:

Today it seems to do everyone good when they hear that society is on the way to adapting the individual to general requirements, and that the happiness and at the same time the sacrifice of the individual lies in feeling himself to be a useful member and instrument of the whole. . . . [T]here is . . . a wonderful and fair-sounding unanimity in the demand that the ego has to deny itself until, in the form of the adaptation to the whole, it again acquires its firmly set circle of rights and duties—until it has become something quite novel and different. What is wanted . . . is nothing less than the fundamental remoulding, indeed weakening and abolition of the individual: one never tires of enumerating and indicting all that is evil and inimical, prodigal, costly, extravagant in the form individual existence has assumed hitherto, one hopes to manage more cheaply, more safely, more equitably, more uniformly if there exists only large bodies and their members.
Nietzsche’s analysis of this post-Enlightenment transformation and valorization of *Mitleid* is significant for our purposes because it reveals the notion of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that underpins his lament over a communitarianism that, as he sees it, *entirely* enfolds the individual into the collective. Nietzsche suggests that the concepts of pity, sympathy, and *vivre pour autrui* have become little more than the ideological stalking horses for the “moral fashion of a *commercial* society” (*D* 173, emphasis added)—a moral fashion, that is to say, that transforms individuals into industrious, calculable instruments of social labor. He argues that what unites the modern mantras of “pity,” “impersonal action,” “self-sacrifice,” “adoption,” and the “blessing of work” is the fact that they share one covert idea: the fear of individuality. “In the glorification of ‘work,’” as he writes, “I see the same covert idea as in the praise of useful impersonal actions: that of fear of everything individual” (*D* 173). (The scare quotes around “work” are Nietzsche’s; he evidently means to imply that the worship of instrumental, material labor, or “hard industriousness,” should not be confused with what he considers the more valuable work, the work on the self [*D* 173].)

In this context, then, his critique of pity highlights his resistance to philosophical and sociological perspectives whose conception of human beings is exhausted by the image of *homo faber* and *homo economicus*. Nietzsche challenges the legitimacy of social relations that construct individuals as nothing more than disciplined instruments of labor and uniform members of an integrated collectivity. Such perspectives, he implies, are symptomatic of an anxious desire to cordon ourselves off from the intrapsychic domain. The “blessing of work,” he jokes, “is the best policeman. . . . [I]t keeps everyone in bounds and can mightily hinder the development of reason, covetousness, desire for independence” (*D* 173). Instrumental labor, we might say, is our psychological cordon sanitaire.

Of course, Nietzsche concedes, this policing of the self through the discipline of work also has its benefits insofar as the regular satisfaction of small, instrumental problems gives one a sense of “security.” However, this is not merely material security but, indeed, a security from the temptations of “reflection, brooding and dreaming,” and such security, as Nietzsche puts it, “is now worshipped as the supreme divinity” (*D* 173). In *Daybreak* he defines the post-Enlightenment age as one in which the metaphysical and theological dream of salvation has been displaced by the worship of a divinity that protects one from the risks (and possible gains) of confronting and working on one’s own psychical reality. According to Nietzsche, the idol of security that modern commercial society worships is a divinity it has erected in order to save us the trouble of working on and cultivating ourselves.

Nietzsche maintains that by seeking to secure ourselves from the travails of self-cultivation we also create for ourselves strict limits on how we can engage
with others. In this regard, his critique of modern communitarianism and its “fear of everything individual” is not a rejection of engaging with others but, rather, of the kind of turning to others and the treatment of their suffering that is integral to a culture in which individuals flee from the intrapsychic realm of “reflections, brooding and dreaming.” Because this culture treats our personal engagement with ourselves as a troublesome obstacle that should be overcome, or so he claims, “helping” others can only take the form of ensuring that they too learn to police themselves with instrumental labor and find their happiness in the blessings of self-oblivion. In this context, helping others, to use Nietzsche’s metaphors, must mean helping them transform themselves into “small, soft, round, unending” granules of “sand” or, translating these metaphors, into interchangeable, undifferentiated atoms that can be smoothly adapted to meet the imperatives of a commercially driven collectivity. Nietzsche argues that in a commercial culture that deifies security, the practices of “pity,” “help,” or “sympathy” can only ever be either “superficial” or “tyrannical” (D 174). These practices must become superficial to the extent that commercial culture compels individuals to flee from the “labyrinth” of the soul and “tyrannical” to the extent that its market imperatives ultimately exclude nonutilitarian self-cultivation and unprofitable, unassimilable forms of alterity (D 174, 169).

Nietzsche claims, then, that it is a flight from the labyrinth of a complex, differentiated self that underpins modern commercial culture and its transformation of the relations between self and other. In opposition to the desert of undifferentiated atoms this culture creates, Nietzsche conjures up the image of an oasis. It is not, however, an image depicting either the lost glories of Homeric agonism or the splendid isolation of the great individual.49 Rather, in a passage largely overlooked in the Nietzsche literature, he depicts the self’s engagement with others through an overdetermined allusion to the complex thread of Old Testament, classical, Christian, and medieval-romance images of the “paradise garden”:

The question itself remains unanswered whether one is of more use to another by immediately leaping to his side and helping him—which can only be superficial where it does not become a tyrannical seizing and transforming—or by creating something out of oneself that the other can behold with pleasure: a beautiful, restful, self-enclosed garden perhaps, with high walls against the storms and the dust of the roadway but also a hospitable gate. (D 174)50

Nietzsche’s image of the “self-enclosed garden” is one that draws on the long history of Western iconography and ideas of paradise as a topos rather than “an abstract state imagined in terms of . . . metaphysical ecstasy.”51 Etymologically, the notion of paradise originally derives from the Persian word paradeiza for “walled garden” or a circular walled enclosure that came to be applied to royal parks. As a recurrent dream in Western literature and iconography, this figure of the enclosed paradise garden has become, as Robert Hughes observes,
“saturated in nostalgia: this is the innocence our ancestors lost for us, at the close of a period over whose vanishing we had no control.”

From the accent he places on its beauty and restfulness, Nietzsche seems especially drawn to the classical conception of the paradise garden as an “epigram of order,” albeit, as the abode of Venus, an orderly topos of pleasure. Nietzsche’s taste for the classical idea of paradise also becomes apparent in his subtle inversion of Christianity’s allegorical interpretation of the garden, which added to the image of the *hortus conclusus* the *porta clausa*, or locked gate. In his metaphor of the self as a garden of paradise Nietzsche replaces this locked gate with the hospitable gate. Nietzsche’s alternative to the desert of pity is thus the cultivation of oneself as a paradise garden that is open to the other. To cultivate oneself, as he understands it, is to create oneself as a paradise garden for the other. By contrast, Nietzsche implies, by exercising the kind of pity that precludes us from taking pleasure in the other’s joy and which “helps” by transforming the other into an undifferentiated nonentity, we create a *porta clausa*. Ironically, then, it is through the exercise of pity that we lock ourselves and others out of paradise.

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**Notes**

1. Theodor Adorno stands as the exception that proves this rule. In his review of Ernest Newman’s biography of Wagner, Adorno argues that the motive of Nietzsche’s turn against “pity” is not “complicity with the dawning relapse into barbarism” but, rather, an expression of “the humane in a world in which humanity had become sham” (1947, 160–61).

2. Taylor 2001, 396. Elliot Jurist illustrates the manner in which Nietzsche’s critique of pity is often casually associated with the act of casting others into oblivion: “[Nietzsche’s] repeated condemnation of pity offers tacit justification for discounting the feelings of others” (2000, 258). Karl Barth (1985), a Protestant theologian and leading church opponent of Nazism, develops an impassioned and poignant defense of the ethics of pity against Nietzsche, and he does so in an essay whose title intriguingly and neatly sums up the central anxiety informing Jürgen Habermas’s resolutely intersubjectivist paradigm.

3. Martha Nussbaum identifies and elaborates this particular link between Stoicism and Nietzsche’s ethics, especially as he develops it in *Human, All-Too Human* and *Daybreak*. This essay can be regarded as pursuing some of the interpretive possibilities that Nussbaum (1994, 2001, 358–59, 361–64, 366–67) has made possible through her astute sense of the Hellenistic and Roman Stoic motifs and ideas that are central to Nietzsche’s middle works.

4. In this, as in so many other respects, Freud followed Nietzsche. In his case study of the Wolfman, for example, he refers to “the narcissistic origin of compassion [Mitleid],” which, he adds, “is confirmed by the word itself” (1990, 327). John Rajchman also correctly notes that Freud discovered “a sadistic gratification in pity or compassion for the suffering of others” (1991, 59).


6. David Cartwright (1984, 94–96) paints in broad brushstrokes Nietzsche’s attack on Schopenhauer for the extraordinary lack of psychological acumen in his a posteriori descriptions of pity.

7. See Schopenhauer’s *On the Basis of Morality* (1965, §15, 140; hereafter *OBM*).
8. For an example of the casual use of Rousseau’s idea of pity to polemicize against Nietzsche, see, e.g., Appel 1999, 156.

9. In OBM Schopenhauer self-consciously defends pity against Seneca’s, Spinoza’s, and Kant’s moral condemnations of this passion (in De Clementia, Ethics, and The Critique of Practical Reason, respectively) by drawing on Rousseau’s authority. Indeed, Schopenhauer inserts large slabs of quotation from the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality and Émile in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to bolster his argument in the eyes of the judges of the Royal Danish Society for Scientific Study to whom he submitted the essay for competition. However, it should be noted that Schopenhauer also explicitly departs from Rousseau by explaining the possibility of pity \textit{metaphysically}, and in doing so he rejects Rousseau’s belief that the flourishing and expansion of the (supposedly) natural sentiment of pity can be explicated in purely psychological terms as the cultivation of the \textit{imagination}. James Miller (1984, chap. 1, esp. 6–12) brilliantly and incisively analyzes Rousseau’s implicit inversion of the Platonic evaluation of the relationship between idea and image, his ambivalent assessment of the ethical potential of the imagination, and his attempt to distinguish its positive and negative poles in terms of the distinction between \textit{rêverie} and \textit{fantasie}.

10. Rousseau 1974, 182, emphasis added; Martha Nussbaum’s (1994, 144) alternative translation is inserted in brackets.


13. Nussbaum 1994, 142, emphasis added. Nussbaum acknowledges that this point is controversial because, among other things, it implies that pity may be partial or restricted in its scope. It is partly because pity rests on the imagination that it is open to the so-called partiality objection, which targets the limits and lack of durability of this emotion rather than its \textit{intrinsic} value. In her later examination of the philosophical debates on compassion Nussbaum attempts to allay the concern about pity’s potential narrowness or unevenness that Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant evince. She does so by arguing that this emotion can be educated and the horizon of concern thereby extended and refined; see Nussbaum 2001, 386–92.

In her essay on Nietzsche she cites the famous reconciliation scene between Achilles and Priam as a dramatic exemplification of the cognitive and psychological structure of pity and its alleged social benefits. Its benefits turn on the claim that this emotion, as witnessed in the reconciliation between Priam and Achilles, engenders mutual recognition “of the ways in which loss, affliction, and age can come to any human being” (Nussbaum 1994, 141). But the Stoics certainly did not interpret this scene as one of mutual recognition. Rather, if we remove the rose-colored glasses that cast this scene as one of mutual understanding, we can see it as a one-sided exchange in which Achilles soothes his own grief over his mortality by means of consoling Priam for the losses he has inflicted on him. Priam, by contrast, is \textit{forced} to be a spectator and participant in Achilles’ ritual of self-consolation and to \textit{conceal} his own wrath for the sake of appeasing Achilles. Seneca broaches this point in the context of discussing the prudence of concealing one’s suffering from those who have inflicted it. Stoics, he suggests, should conceal their anger on the grounds that to reveal it to aggressors merely encourages them to repeat the wrong: “What did Priam do in the \textit{Iliad}? Did he not conceal his wrath and embrace the knees of Achilles? Did he not raise to his lips that death dealing hand, stained with the blood of his son, and sup with his slayer?” (1902, II.33.5). Seneca sees in the “reconciliation” between Achilles and Priam the fundamental dissymmetry between the pitier and the pitied that Nietzsche insists on in his psychological analysis of pity: simply because Achilles sees his own grief in Priam’s situation is no reason for believing that Achilles will have or seek an especially subtle or penetrating understanding of Priam’s loss; indeed, insofar as it is his own grief that he consoles through Priam’s loss, Achilles’ “pity” can only last as long as is necessary to console himself. The pain (\textit{Leid}) Achilles experiences is only with (\textit{Mit}) as long as he continues to suffer from the
thought of his own losses, and the termination of his pain is not determined by whether or not the way he acts toward Priam actually enables Priam to overcome his sorrow. Achilles could terminate his own Leid regardless of whether Priam himself continues to suffer from the loss of his son. Projecting one’s own possibilities into the situation experienced by another, in other words, does not make one’s Leid an example of Mit-Leid; nor insofar as it brings into play one’s own sense of loss and the desire for consolation does it mean attending to the other. On the other side of the ledger, the one who is pitted, in this case Priam, could hardly be said to see his own pain in the sufferings of his son’s slayer; nor, if Seneca is right, does he “draw close in recognition” of mutual loss so much as conceal his wrath from Achilles.

Rachel Bespaloff’s beautifully rendered analysis of this scene confirms this point. When Achilles scandalously tenders him counsels of resignation, she observes, “Priam remains silent. . . . Why get angry, justify oneself, come to one’s own defense? Encircled by stony fatality, he must turn to stone himself, like Niobe” (1986, 35). Interpreted in this way, the scene is a lesson in the virtues of Stoicism in the face of the provocations of importunate pity. See also Simone Weil’s coruscating essay, “The Iliad, Poem of Might” (1977, esp. 156–57).

16. OBM §14, 131–38.
17. OBM §22, 205.
18. OBM §22, 205.
19. OBM §16, 143.
20. OBM §14, 131.
21. OBM §14, 132.
22. OBM §16, 144. Schopenhauer devotes OBM §22 to this metaphysical speculation.
23. OBM §22, 205.
24. OBM §21, 209.
25. OBM §16, 147. I borrow slightly from David Cartwright’s (1993, 54) formulation of Schopenhauer’s point.
26. OBM §16, 144, emphasis added.
27. OBM §16, 146.
28. OBM §21, 212.
29. OBM §19, 174.
30. OBM §19, 174, emphasis added.
31. OBM §19, 174.
32. OBM §19, 174, emphasis added.
33. OBM §21, 209.
34. In psychoanalytic theory the exact relation between what Heinz Kohut calls this “narcissistic self” and the ego is a matter of contention. Kohut claims that the narcissistic self—the repository of the fantasies of wholeness or plenitude—is in its genesis distinct from the ego as an agency of rational drive control, but he nevertheless claims that the health or disease of the individual depends on the extent to which the narcissistic self’s grandiose fantasies are “integrated into the realistic purposes of the ego.” The healthy, mature ego, in other words, is one that has integrated the early narcissistic fantasies into its “reality-oriented organisation” (Kohut 1985, 107).
35. It is this paranoid-schizoid psychology that partly explains the cruelty of pity, which, as Hannah Arendt argues in her critique of Rousseau and Robespierre, “taken as the spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself” (1973, 89).
37. *OBM* §19, 174, emphasis added.

38. On this point, see Schachtel 1963, 41–42.

39. Rousseau 1974, 184, emphasis added.


41. I borrow this felicitous phrase from Jacques Derrida’s (1997, 54) brief discussion of the tension between *Mitleid* and *Mitfreude*.

42. Rousseau 1974, 182, emphasis added.

43. “[H]ow coarsely does language,” as Nietzsche remarks, “assault with its one word so polyphonous a being!” (*D* 133). In his thorough survey of the concept of pity in the Greco-Roman world, David Konstan (2001) confirms Nietzsche’s sense of this concept’s lability by examining its different usages and valences across a range of political, social, and judicial practices and institutions.

44. For a brief discussion of the similarities between Alexis de Tocqueville’s and Nietzsche’s critiques of the banality of liberal individualism and its abandonment of self-cultivation, see Ansell-Pearson 1994, 6–7.

45. It is worth clarifying the point Nietzsche makes about the relative insignificance of pity in the Christian table of virtues. It is often asserted that Nietzsche first identifies *Christianity* as the religion of pity par excellence and then suggests that Christianity is the primary source of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ethical philosophies based on pity; see, e.g., Cartwright 1993, 57–58 n. 12. If this common characterization of Nietzsche’s position is correct, it follows that he understood his critique of pity as a wholesale assault on the very heart of Christian ethics. In *Daybreak* 132, however, Nietzsche in fact maintains that at least until the eighteenth century the virtue of pity was only a subsidiary, *nonessential* aspect of Christianity. Indeed, he contends that the modern cult of pity took its initial impetus from *Enlightenment* thinkers such as Voltaire and Auguste Comte, rather than from the institutional authorities of Christianity or Christianity’s central dogmas. Moreover, Nietzsche claims that Voltaire and Comte defend the virtues of pity, philanthropy, and good works as a part of their struggle to justify their break with the fundamentals of Christianity. According to Nietzsche, they justify their liberation from the central *Christian dogmas* by elevating one of its relatively insignificant virtues, the virtue of pity, as a means of rationalizing and masking this liberation. They achieve this feat of rationalization, he suggests, by emptying the minor Christian virtue of pity of any substantive theological content in order to use it to legitimate a social project that is fundamentally alien to the central intentions and doctrines of Christianity: namely, the project of expanding marketplace imperatives and disciplines to every sphere of life.

Once we restore this framework to Nietzsche’s analysis, it becomes apparent that the central target of his critique of pity is the commercially driven collectivity-building project that aims at disciplining bodies and selves and integrating them into a uniform whole. In this context, he treats “pity,” “sympathy,” and “living for others” as signposts or markers for the modern attempt to construct individuals as efficient parts of a tightly integrated, commercially oriented collectivity, not as norms that embody the Christian ethos.

Looking backward, Nietzsche shares Tocqueville’s alarm over the threat of tyranny that accompanies the process of market-based atomization, and looking ahead, he might be said to foreshadow Hannah Arendt’s anxiety about the victory of the realm of necessity (or the *oikos*) over all other spheres of life. However, unlike Arendt, in the middle works Nietzsche does not challenge modernity by appealing to a romanticized image of the grandeur and glory of the classical Greek democratic polis or the Roman res publica. Dana Vila (1992) provides a detailed discussion of the relationship between Arendt’s political theory and Nietzsche’s philosophy.

46. Keith Ansell-Pearson argues that Nietzsche’s portrait of Rousseau as the political thinker of the French Revolution is too simplistic and one-sided insofar as it ignores, among other things, Rousseau’s emphasis on the importance of the education of the psyche or the reform of our inner...
moral sensibilities in social reform. However, Ansell-Pearson also correctly points out that in the middle works Nietzsche himself moves closer in spirit to Rousseau on the importance of education. In fact, drawing on *The Wanderer and His Shadow* 221, he suggests that Nietzsche’s own call for the cultivation of the spirit of the Enlightenment through the work of individual self-enlightenment “accurately captures the spirit of Rousseau’s own teachings.” In other words, Ansell-Pearson implies that in the middle period *Nietzsche is at one with Rousseau* insofar as, like Rousseau, he appeals “to each one of us to find and cultivate the spirit of enlightenment within ourselves and to strike down the revolutionary impulse whenever it threatens to overwhelm us” (1991, 50–52, emphasis added).

Yet if Nietzsche echoes Rousseau’s call for the cultivation of the psyche, the exact kind of cultivation Nietzsche has in mind is not akin to Rousseau’s vision. Although Nietzsche fails to grapple with the complexity of Rousseau’s political theory, arguably his critique of the psychological basis of Rousseau’s pedagogy is much sharper. As we have seen, Nietzsche targets Rousseau’s idea of *pitié*, one of the founding principles of the moral pedagogy expounded in *Émile*. On the one hand, then, Nietzsche shares Rousseau’s concern with the reform of our inner moral sensibilities. On the other, however, he argues that to identify this reform with the cultivation of *pitié*, as Rousseau does, is to badly confuse neurosis with health. According to Nietzsche, as we have seen, Rousseauian *pitié* is a symptom of an envy that wreaks havoc on the intersubjective world. If, as the present article argues, Nietzsche is right to make a link between *pitié* and envy, then he can be considered a far more acute moral psychologist than Rousseau.

47. Michael Brint (1991, esp. chap. 2, “Rousseau: The Echoes of *Narcisse*,” esp. 61) echoes Nietzsche’s point in his discussion of Rousseau’s politics. For an exhaustive critical analysis of Rousseau’s political and social theory, one should consult Judith Shklar’s great study, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (1969), which in many respects, is the ne plus ultra in the field.

48. Nancy Love (1986, 1987) fleshes out Nietzsche’s critique of *homo economicus* and illuminates some aspects of it by comparing it with critical theory’s perspective on instrumental reason.

49. It would take us too afield here to consider Nietzsche’s fascination with heroic agonism in both the unpublished essay “Homer’s Contest” and his later works and the debates it has sparked in contemporary political philosophy. It should be noted, however, that in the middle period Nietzsche develops a much more tempered, indeed sometimes satirically disenchanted view of the hero and his agonism; see, e.g., *HAH* 1, 61–62; *WS* 226; and *D* 30. On the implications of a Nietzschean heroic, agonistic ethos for democratic politics and agency, see Acampora 2000, 2002; Hatab 2002; and Siemens 2002.

50. Graham Parkes (1994, 168, 419 n. 20) briefly touches on this aphorism and notes that Nietzsche adopts a much more defensive tone in a later note from 1885 in which he imagines his work as a garden through which others can stroll at their leisure and break off bits and pieces to take home as souvenirs. Ruth Abbey (2000, 61) also tantalizingly glosses the close of *D* 174 in her discussion of Nietzschean friendship, and Elliot Jurist (2000, 249) paraphrases it in his discussion of Nietzsche on recognition. As well as drawing on a rich history of classical, Christian, and romance images in this allusion to the paradise garden and its hospitable gate (*gastfreundliche Pforte*), Nietzsche may also have been making a personal allusion to the walled city of Pforta, his boarding school built on the grounds of a twelfth-century Cistercian monastery, which contained its own garden and which, according to David Krell, became for him a second *Vaterhaus*; see both Krell’s text and Donald Bates’s photographs in Krell and Bates 1997, 21–35.

51. The following discussion borrows from the second chapter (“A Garden Enclosed”) of Robert Hughes’s magnificent study of the iconography of heaven and hell, *Heaven and Hell in Western Art* (1968).

52. Hughes 1968, 48.
53. Hughes 1968, 47, 51. Hughes points out that the classical idea of the garden as a pan-erotic landscape containing the walled bower of Venus derives from the elaborate descriptions of Claudian.

**Works Cited**


