A notebook entry written by Friedrich Nietzsche in 1880 raises the following question about tragedy: “The inclination toward horrible themes: rape, incest, etc.—to what end?” (Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 4[23]). Nietzsche here broaches a perennial theme in the history of philosophical engagement with tragedy. Plato, the first theorist of tragedy, is also the first writer to have clearly articulated “tragic pleasure” as a phenomenon in need of explanation (see Republic 605d-608a; cf Philebus 48a), and since his time the curious conjunction of attraction and repulsion, the commingling of pleasure and pain, has been an enduring source of fascination for would-be unriddlers of tragedy.

Nietzsche, one of the most influential modern theorists of tragedy, certainly shares this preoccupation. In the penultimate chapter of The Birth of Tragedy, he formulates the question explicitly and locates the source of tragic pleasure in the “primordial joy” of the will, conceived along Schopenhaurian lines as the metaphysical ground of being (§24). That first book looms so large in discussions of the topic that one often overlooks Nietzsche’s subsequent reflections on tragedy, and this is particularly true in the case of his 1881 volume, Daybreak. Take for example the major survey by Silk and Stern titled Nietzsche on Tragedy, which in over four hundred pages contains, to my knowledge, not a single reference to the passages on tragedy in Daybreak and the related Nachlaß from that period.
This neglect is unfortunate, for *Daybreak* deserves and repays serious study by those interested in Nietzsche’s thought on tragedy, as I hope to demonstrate in what follows. Beyond that, however, by focusing on the treatment of tragedy in *Daybreak*, I aim to clarify a key aspect of the strategy Nietzsche employs in waging one of his most ambitious battles, a battle which, on his own subsequent testimony, is first joined in this pivotal early work: “With this book [*Daybreak*], my campaign against morality begins” (Nietzsche, *Ecce*, “Daybreak” §1). Nietzsche indicates in the Preface to *Daybreak* that conventional philosophical strategies will not be sufficient to win the day in this high-stakes engagement. All philosophers hitherto, he argues, have failed to overcome what he portraits as the tyranny of morality. This is in part because morality has the means (“conscience, reputation, Hell, sometimes even the police”) to intimidate potential attackers, but even more so, because it has at its disposal “a certain art of enchantment” (Preface §3).\(^3\) Morality, Nietzsche announces with a flourish, is “the greatest of all mistresses of seduction” (Preface §3). As a consequence, prevailing over this rival requires more than a conventional campaign. We might say, stretching the image a bit, that something like a “charm offensive” is necessary. Or, as Nietzsche will eventually put it, the needful thing in this case is a counter-seduction, the introduction or inspiration of a new passion, a *Neue Leidenschaft* (§429)—the passion for knowledge.

*Leidenschaft* is in fact a crucial term here, and a focal point for our present concerns. On the one hand, it underscores the psychological character of Nietzsche’s project. He wants to comprehend, and eventually to overcome, the emotional investment, the desire or love that, as he sees it, lies at the root of moral commitment.\(^4\) At the same time, however, the term itself signifies suffering (*Leid*).\(^5\) As we shall see, this suffering and its originating cruelty are at the core of both
Nietzsche’s account of morality and his campaign against it. And this returns us to our primary theme. The idea that we might somehow be drawn to suffering, even seduced by it, is of course the riddle of tragedy Nietzsche has in mind when he asks about “the inclination toward horrible themes.” And so, by tracing Nietzsche’s deployment of tragedy in *Daybreak* and the related *Nachlass*, I hope not only to gain insight into the state of his thinking on tragedy a decade after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but also to account for the prominence of cruelty and suffering in a campaign against morality that sets out to win not only minds but also, and above all, hearts.

To gain a full sense of the role of tragedy in *Daybreak*, it is important to recognize that there is a fairly straightforward sense in which it serves the book’s overt argument: Nietzsche uses the ethos of tragedy as a foil set against the morality he seeks to undermine. I begin, therefore, by sketching out how this argument works in *Daybreak*. Noting that the text itself insists on the limitations of such an argument, I then reconsider Nietzsche’s remarks on tragedy with a view toward clarifying his more ambitious inquiry into the psychology of desire, its connection to suffering, and proceeding from this, his invocation of the *Passio Nova*.

**I. Pity, guilt, and the tragic alternative**

In his 1886 Preface, Nietzsche makes it clear that one goal of *Daybreak* is to critique and undermine the moral worldview, which has heretofore been unassailable. Put in general terms, his book argues against morality by attempting to demonstrate that moral judgments are made on erroneous or arbitrary presuppositions. He identifies and describes certain core assumptions of moral thinking—for example, that human beings consciously choose their actions, or that a law-
giving God is the ultimate source of universal justice—and then argues against the validity of these assumptions. One way Nietzsche does this is by proposing alternatives to the prevailing “prejudices of morality,” showing that human beings can and have thought differently about “good and evil” than they currently do. In the context of this strategy, Nietzsche presents tragedy as part of a counterargument, an example that bespeaks a radically alternative vision. Tragic drama both proceeds from and exemplifies a culture and a worldview that stands in opposition to the modern moral perspective. The argument is made with particular clarity and force in relation to two pillars of moral thinking: pity [Mitleid] and guilt [Schuld].

In the case of pity, the critique runs along several tracks at once, and while I will not recapitulate the argument in full, the cardinal points can be summarized as follows. Nietzsche rejects the idea that the principle of pity has transhistorical value, proposing instead a historicized and psychological account of its ascendancy (§§131-132). He denies that pity motivates compassionate action (e.g., §§133, 174); argues that altruistic acts spring not from a positive virtue (i.e., pity) but from low self-esteem or even self-hatred (§§131, 174); and maintains that actions motivated by so-called pity may not even succeed in improving the lot of the pitied party (§174).

It is important to note that Nietzsche is far from advocating a simple disregard for the well being of others—quite the contrary. He is rather arguing that pity, as currently practiced and understood, does not on the whole result in bettering the lot of others and of humankind in general. Moreover, he raises the concern that altruistic morality may actually contribute to a general enervation and debasement of humanity. Humankind under the sway of altruistic morality is in danger of becoming, as he puts it in one disconcerting image, “Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand!”(§174).
Nietzsche sharpens his critique of the morality of pity by contrasting it with what he presents as a superior alternative, and it is here that tragedy enters the picture. Nietzsche’s claim trades in part on a general esteem accorded to Greek culture in 19th century Germany. Even though Nietzsche is critical of the then-dominant Humboldtian variety of philhellenism, his own revisionist account of antiquity still speaks of Greek culture in terms of highest admiration. Therefore, when Nietzsche insists that Greek civilization did not attach moral value to pity, that the Greeks in fact considered it to be “a morbid recurring affect, the danger of which can be removed by periodic discharge,” he is virtually making an empirical argument against pity (§134). Look at modernity, he is saying, which idealizes pity and (at least partly) for that reason is slouching into decadence, and then look at Greek antiquity, which thrived and flourished (at least in part) because it denigrated pity. With the allusion to Aristotle’s theory of catharsis in the passages just cited, Nietzsche uses tragedy as evidence that the Greeks, far from idealizing pity, actually considered it to be toxic.

The point is driven home in the aphorism titled “Tragedy and Music” (§172), in which Nietzsche argues that tragedy appeals to souls that are hard, war-like, and resistant to fear and pity. For such types, pity is experienced as something “rare, bittersweet, and dangerous,” something that seizes them like a “demonic force.” This is the case with the Greeks in the age of Aeschylus, Nietzsche argues, and so their enjoyment of tragedy furnishes evidence that they generally resisted pity, regarding it as something to be indulged rarely, and surely not as an admirable emotion in terms of practical moral life. Compared to the Greeks, whom Nietzsche will later call “the best turned out, most beautiful, most envied type of humanity to date, those most apt to seduce us to
life” (Nietzsche, *Tragedy*, “Attempt at Self-criticism” §1), pity-besotted modern souls look like pale, weak, stunted half-selves.¹²

In a separate argument against pity, Nietzsche maintains that insofar as we commiserate with others in their suffering and are thereby “made gloomy,” we are of no help to them, for they will merely suffer all the more from our gloominess (§144). If we could look on human misfortune and be edified, rather than being made unhappy, things would be different, but this seems to be impossible for beings like us. An exception, Nietzsche notes, is to be found in our enjoyment of tragedy. Insofar as we enjoy tragedy, we manifest a capacity to witness suffering without feeling pity, or at least, to overcome the feeling of pity and be edified by the spectacle. Importantly, the aphorism indicates that such an attitude toward suffering actually succeeds, where pity fails, in helping and uplifting the sufferer. Nietzsche is suggesting that the enjoyment of tragedy discloses in us the workings of a radically different moral (or non-moral) psychology, one which is free of the modern prejudice in favor of pity and which has the potential to effect a genuine philanthropy. Clearly, understanding the source of our enjoyment of tragedy would be instrumental to the critique of morality. This is an issue to which I shall return below.

As with pity, Nietzsche’s critique of the modern moral conception of guilt, and the attendant notion of justified punishment, forms an essential component of his analytic assault on morality. “Take the concept of punishment,” he urges, “and root it out! There exists no more noxious weed!” (§13). He writes that it would be “a relief for the general feeling of life” if humankind were to rid itself of the belief in guilt (§202). The actual argument against guilt and punishment, which can only be cursorily summarized here, begins with a denial of the claim that actions are primarily motivated by conscious intention (see, e.g., §§115, 116, 119). Because human
beings cannot honestly be considered the authors of their own deeds, punishment cannot be justified by guilt. And since Nietzsche denies the consistency of identity that would justify subsequent punishment for prior deeds,\(^{13}\) he argues that the notion of a “moral world order” in which “every guilt will be atoned and paid for” is a delusion (§563).

Tragedy serves Nietzsche’s argument, here as it did in the case of pity, by offering evidence of an alternative worldview. Nietzsche argues that Christianity was the first moral regime to place misfortune and guilt on a balance and declare that wherever there is great misfortune, there must also have been great guilt (§78). The Greeks, by contrast, consider guilt to be merely “like the stone over which the heroes stumble,” something that should have been avoided. But for them, misfortune is no indication of the magnitude of guilt, and certainly not a justification for punishment. Nietzsche writes: “That is why Greek tragedy, which speaks so richly yet in so different a sense of misfortune and guilt, is a great liberator of the spirit” (§78).\(^{14}\)

To summarize, we can say that there is a sense in which tragedy plays a fairly straightforward role in *Daybreak’s* critique of morality. Nietzsche is arguing against the modern moral worldview, with its conceptions of pity and guilt, and in favor of a worldview that does not share these conceptions. Tragedy serves as an illustrative example of the latter, and the argument against morality gains force from the contrast.

**II. Noch nicht genug!**

The arguments outlined above are certainly contentious, and evaluating them would be a task beyond the modest goals of this essay. But in a way, Nietzsche gives license to bracket such an analysis, even demands that one do so, in light of a different kind of question. For even if he
were to argue successfully that the philosophy of pity is logically inconsistent—even if he were to
offer irrefutable evidence that pity and guilt are only valorized in modernity and therefore cannot
be considered universal standards—even if he were to demonstrate that actions motivated by pity
do not achieve what Schopenhauer claims they do or that the modern conception of guilt is not a
legitimate basis for punishment—even if he were to prove all these things, on Nietzsche’s own
terms it would not be enough. As he writes in §330, “Not enough!—It is not enough to prove
something, one has also to seduce or elevate people to it.”

Nietzsche’s point, at least in part, is that success in the project Daybreak inaugurates
cannot simply be a matter of arguing against morality, or asserting some new morality to replace
the old one. He insists that moral theory as it has existed hitherto must be overcome, but he is
quick to add that such overcoming will not be achieved simply by producing better arguments.
“Why is it that from Plato onwards every philosophical architect in Europe has built in vain?” he
asks, and then responds: “Oh how false is the answer which even today is reserved in readiness for
this question: ‘because they [philosophers] had all neglected the presuppositions for such an
undertaking, the testing of the foundations, a critique of reason as a whole’” (Preface §3). It is not
that Nietzsche finds it senseless or unnecessary to examine presuppositions and subject them to
rigorous critique. As we have already seen, he puts a great deal of energy into such efforts. It is
rather that in addition to a rational critique of morality, he is also trying to open up a different kind
of inquiry, one that aims not at re-categorizing good and evil actions, nor even at renovating the
foundation for such judgments, but instead at figuring out how and why moral thinking altogether
has such purchase on us. Why do we find moral interpretations of events and actions so attractive?
And Nietzsche means here not just the average citizen’s conception of justice and virtue, for he
argues that philosophers have been at least as susceptible to the enticements of morality as anyone else.

Nietzsche’s position seems to be that morality’s influence does not derive merely, not even primarily, from the rational validity of its claims. As noted above, he writes in the Preface that its power derives from “a certain art of enchantment it has at its disposal—it knows how to ‘inspire.’ With this art,” he continues, “it succeeds, often with no more than a single glance, in paralyzing the critical will and even in enticing it over to its own side” (Preface §3). And again, he suggests that the way to understand this art is to think in terms of the erotic, in terms of desire and seduction. To elaborate the point, he relies on an image with deep resonance both within *Daybreak* and throughout his writings: “For as long as there has been speech and persuasion on earth, morality has shown itself to be the greatest of all mistresses of seduction—and, so far as we philosophers are concerned, the actual *Circe of all philosophers*.” As so often in Nietzsche, these allusive, image-rich passages are of paramount significance. By invoking the Homeric sorceress, Nietzsche emphasizes that he is not talking about some modern conception of love that would have at its core autonomous agents making free and reasoned choices, but rather the ancient Greek notion of the erotic, in which choice plays little role and violence, deception, and danger are foregrounded. And he is indicating that any effort to overcome morality will have to grapple with this erotic power; victory will depend more on enchantment and seduction than on demonstration and deduction.

Now, we have already seen how the tragic worldview is presented in this book as an alternative to the moral perspective, specifically in regard to the questions of pity and guilt. But there remains the question of our “inclination toward the horrible,” the mesmerizing effect of
tragic pleasure. For it is not only the propositional content, as it were, of the tragic worldview that interests Nietzsche. Also, perhaps more so, it is tragedy’s capacity to entice and enthrall adherents that commands his attention. As we shall see, Nietzsche ultimately finds that the same basic phenomenon lies at the root of both tragic and moral psychology. And it is with this key insight that he launches his campaign against morality and conceives the need to reveal and inspire a “new passion.”

It will help first to review some familiar explanations of the attraction to tragedy that Nietzsche rejects in *Daybreak*. One such explanation Nietzsche himself actually proposes in an earlier draft of the text, at a point when the aphorisms were collected under the title *L’Ombra di Venezia*. Tragedy, he says in one aphorism from that preliminary collection, is “a means of comfort for passionate and unrestrained characters; it advises that peace and inner freedom are to be expected only beyond this world . . . it seems to say: to be incapable of the impossible ought not to cause concern” (Nietzsche, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 9, 3[65]). The theory expressed in this passage, redolent of the Schopenhaurian interpretation that Nietzsche will eventually dismiss as “resignationism,” drops out of subsequent drafts of *Daybreak* and is nowhere to be found in the final text. He also explicitly rejects the notion that tragedies impart moral lessons: that *Macbeth*, for example, chastens the ambitious; or that *Tristan* warns us against adultery (§172). The pleasure in tragedy does not derive from seeing the wicked punished; nor does it come from witnessing the triumph of human free will over physical necessity, as Schiller and Schelling had argued; nor is it even to be found in the kind of metaphysical comfort which Nietzsche himself had proposed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. 
Against such interpretations, *Daybreak* traces the spectator’s attraction to and pleasure in tragedy to two primary sources. These correspond to what Nietzsche refers to as the “two species of happiness,” namely, “the feeling of power and the feeling of surrender” (§60).¹⁹ The latter, which is less interesting for our current purposes, is expressed straightforwardly enough in the aphorism titled “Tragedy and music” (§172). There Nietzsche argues that “hard,” “warlike,” predominantly pitiless souls enjoy the rare occasions on which they can be overcome, as through a demonic force, by the feeling of pity. As Nietzsche notes in a related passage, for such violently striving types, “it is indescribably pleasant to feel themselves overcome,” albeit for only a brief spell (§271).

About the spectator’s other source of pleasure, the feeling not of surrender but of power, there is a more complicated story to tell. In the first place, we must return now to Nietzsche’s claim that the enjoyment of tragedy discloses the potential to respond to the spectacle of suffering without pity, and thereby to effect a genuine philanthropy. In the relevant aphorism, Nietzsche argues that insofar as we play the sympathetic spectator to the suffering of another, we only make ourselves, and therefore also the sufferer, more miserable. He concludes that the only exception would be if we, like the Olympian gods, could “elevate ourselves by the misfortunes of mankind instead of being made unhappy by them.” And this is precisely what we do in our enjoyment of tragedy. Pleasure in tragedy is, Nietzsche writes, “a step in the direction of this ideal divine cannibalism” (§144).

It is worth dwelling on this concept for a moment. The German word is *Götter-Kanibalenthum*, probably Nietzsche’s own coinage, but the idea is drawn from Herbert Spencer’s *Data of Ethics*, which Nietzsche was reading during the composition of *Daybreak*.²⁰ While
references to Spencer are scattered throughout the notebooks, one brief fragment provides the essential clue for our present concern, a single, freestanding, pregnant phrase: “Devil-worship [Teufelsanbetung] Spencer p. 31” (Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 1[11]; cf. 1[17]). Examining the edition of Spencer Nietzsche was using, we find that he is pointing to the third chapter of The Data of Ethics, where Spencer is arguing that we judge conduct ethically good or bad depending on whether its net result is pleasurable or painful.\(^{21}\) Moral goodness is therefore correlated with the feeling of pleasure. The only possible alternative would be the belief “that men were created with the intention that they should be sources of misery to themselves; and that they are bound to continue living that their creator may have the satisfaction of contemplating their misery [Elend]” (Spencer 28).\(^{22}\) According to Spencer, “inferior creeds are pervaded by the belief that the sight of suffering [Anblick des Leidens] is pleasing to the gods” (29). He recognizes that there are modern adherents of this belief, but the majority, he maintains, actually hold that self-inflicted pain in this life will bring greater happiness in the afterlife. Those who hold this view, such as Christian ascetics, he judges to be operating according to the hedonistic calculus he has proposed: “changing the venue cannot alter the verdict,” as he puts it in a nice turn of phrase (28). Any other modern avatars of such “inferior creeds,” those who are not looking toward a happy hereafter and so would seem to be exceptions to Spencer’s theory, he simply dismisses as being “beyond or beneath argument.” But he includes this colorful flourish, which Nietzsche apparently found memorable:

supposing that from the savage who immolates victims to a cannibal god [cannibalischen Gotte], there are descendants among the civilized who hold that mankind was made for suffering, and that it is their duty to continue to live in misery for the delight of their maker, we can only recognize the fact that devil-worshippers [Teufelanbeter] are not yet extinct. (29)
Here we have the likely source of Nietzsche’s reference to the “divine cannibalism” that we mortals are said to sample in our enjoyment of tragedy. Moreover, the psychology of those whom Spencer calls devil-worshippers, and that of their ascetic cousins, is a topic of endless fascination for Nietzsche, in *Daybreak* and beyond. He agrees with Spencer that, behind both ritual human sacrifice and Christian ascetic practice lies the belief that “the sight of suffering is pleasing to the gods,” even if this is no longer the self-articulated belief of the practitioner. But in the text of *Daybreak*, Nietzsche adds some crucial steps to the genealogy of what he calls the “morality of voluntary suffering” (§18). Whereas Spencer begins with the alleged fact that some people believe, or act as if they believe, that the sight of human suffering pleases the divine, Nietzsche wants to know how such a belief could arise in the first place.

It is in answering this question that Nietzsche takes the crucial step, positing as the source of this belief the original human experience of pleasure in cruelty. Cruelty, he writes, is “one of the oldest festive joys of mankind.” Because human beings enjoy it, they imagine that the gods too “are refreshed and in festive mood when they are offered the spectacle of cruelty.” And once it is believed that human suffering is pleasing to the gods, this leads inevitably to the “idea that voluntary suffering, self-chosen torture, is meaningful and valuable” (§18). Unlike Spencer, Nietzsche sees this notion as originating in the human enjoyment of the spectacle of cruelty. And in this way, he locates a common root for both ascetic self-mortification and tragic pleasure.

In another set of notebook entries, Nietzsche indicates how his critique of pity will incorporate this notion of gods who delight in human misery. He observes that “real pity [Mitleid] actually only doubles the suffering [Leid] and is perhaps itself the source of the inability to help” (Nietzsche, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 9, 2[35]). And in a subsequent fragment, he adds, “only when one
knows about [suffering], but does not suffer, can one act for the sake of the other, as a doctor.” And there are even those, he concludes, who “know about it and are happy (the gods of cannibals and ascetics)” (2[39]). These “gods of cannibals and ascetics”—again a reference to Spencer—thus come to represent an alternative to pity as a response to suffering. In these gods, Nietzsche finds the image of beings who are not only untroubled by the sight of suffering, but who actually take pleasure in it.

When Nietzsche suggests that our enjoyment of tragedy reveals a nascent capacity to partake of a kind of “ideal divine cannibalism,” he is thereby proposing that the source of tragic pleasure is to be found in our enjoyment of “the spectacle of cruelty.” For the ascetic and the cannibal, it is the divine that takes pleasure in witnessing human misery. But as we have seen, Nietzsche traces this theology back to an original human experience. “Cruelty,” to repeat his assertion, “is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind.”23 We can now also recognize that the pleasure one enjoys in watching a tragedy discloses that other source of happiness, not the “feeling of surrender” but the “feeling of power.” Insofar as the tough and pitiless soul can be briefly overcome by pity when watching a tragedy, he experiences the joy of surrender—one source of happiness. But insofar as the spectator of a tragedy has the god-like sensation of presiding over a pageant of cruelty, his feeling of power is indulged. In Nietzsche’s frank language, “the one who is cruel enjoys the highest thrill of the feeling of power” (§18).24

Wherein lies the allure of tragedy? The answer that emerges from the published text of Daybreak is not only far from the kind of moralizing interpretations which the text explicitly rejects, but far also from Nietzsche’s own tentative explanation, as expressed in the Ombra draft, to the effect that tragedy comforts passionate souls by offering the wise solace of resignation.
Against the moral interpretation, Nietzsche argues that tragedy enflames rather than alleviates passion; it is the “thrill of all thrills,” which seduces the vaultingly ambitious, for example, to yet greater ambition (§240). And the feeling of submission invoked in §172 is nothing like the comfort of resignation. Rather, with a “demonic force” the soul is seized and cast into frenzy and ecstasy. Finally, perhaps most significantly, Nietzsche suggests that our enjoyment of tragedy reveals a persistent human, all too human desire for the spectacle of cruelty, through which the spectator enjoys the feeling of power (§144).

III. The New Passion

To see how this general conception of tragedy fits into the broader strategy of *Daybreak*, let us focus on the final point, pleasure in cruelty. For it is not only gods and tragic audiences who delight in this strange fruit. Nietzsche contends, in fact, that the “morality of distinction,” or what we might call “virtue ethics,” is ultimately founded on “pleasure in refined cruelty” (§30). This “logic of feeling,” he writes, may still persist in humankind, and he ultimately maintains that the morality of “striving for distinction” is simply the internalization of pleasure in cruelty (§113). The ascetic “feels the highest enjoyment by himself enduring . . . precisely that which . . . the barbarian imposes on others.” Both the barbarian who torments his victims and the ascetic who torments himself experience the same thing: “an unspeakable happiness at the sight of torment” (§113). In depicting the ascetic here, Nietzsche underscores the parallel with tragedy. The ascetic looks inward and beholds “man split asunder into a sufferer and a spectator,” a scenario Nietzsche calls “the final tragedy of the drive for distinction in which there is only one character burning and consuming himself” (§113). It is not merely that, at bottom, the modern day ascetic is enthralled by
the same pleasure as the tragic spectator. The ascetic himself *is also* a spectator—a spectator of his own suffering. In this respect, the psychology of tragedy mirrors the psychology of morality. This psychological parallelism opens up a line of inquiry into the relationship between cruelty and seduction to which Nietzsche will return at key junctures in future writings. Even in the context of *Daybreak*, however, there are important ramifications, and I would like to conclude by indicating what I take to be the most significant.

Nietzsche’s aim in *Daybreak*, as we have already observed, is not only to undermine morality, but also to seduce his readers away from it with a more enticing object of desire. He offers, in effect, a *remedium amoris*, a cure for love or a countercharm against the enchantments of morality. Against morality, Nietzsche posits a “new passion . . . the passion for knowledge [*Leidenschaft der Erkenntniss*]” (§429). This new passion is a prominent trope in the notebooks, appearing in an earlier stage as the “passion for honesty,” and at one point Nietzsche even considers titling the whole collection “*Passio Nova* or On the Passion of Honesty.” Its ultimate form in the published volume, however, is “the passion for knowledge.”

How, we may ask, will this new passion gain and maintain adherents? Wherein will *its* seductive power lie? More specifically, will it tap into the same source of the feeling of power as does both tragedy and morality, namely, the pleasure humans take in the spectacle of cruelty? The answer seems to be yes. In calling it a “*passio nova,*” something that would replace the Christian passion story and its vision of a self-sacrificing divinity, Nietzsche underscores the dimension of pain involved. Furthermore, in what sounds virtually like a profession of faith, he insists on the *suffering* implicit in this passion for knowledge: “we believe in all honesty that all mankind must believe itself to be more exalted and comforted under the compulsion and suffering of *this* passion.
than it did formerly.” This passion “shrinks at no sacrifice,” and he even goes so far as to say, “Perhaps mankind will even perish from this passion for knowledge!” (§429).

Elsewhere, Nietzsche writes of suffering and sacrifice in hortatory style, denouncing the dominant modern morality, advocating a “higher and freer viewpoint,” and using the passion for knowledge as the exemplary case (§146). The pursuit of knowledge, he exhorts, should be undertaken even “at the cost of the suffering of others.” The free spirit who is genuinely dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge will necessarily cause pain to others—in the first place to friends and family, but then to a broadening circle of acquaintances. These others will be “plunged into doubt, grief, and even worse things,” as the free spirit questions and challenges, and perhaps undermines and destroys, beliefs and bonds both familial and social. Dedication to the pursuit of knowledge means that one must be prepared to inflict such suffering and to endure it oneself. Nietzsche draws his readers into this new passion: “We, on the other hand, would, through sacrifice—in which we and our neighbor are both included—strengthen and raise higher the general feeling of human power” (§146).

No easy yoke or light burden offered here. The new passion entails relentless suffering. To be “an aeronaut of the spirit,” one must be prepared to make the greatest sacrifices: of oneself, of one’s neighbor, of humankind. Passages in Daybreak in which these themes are most prominent often read like admonishments, as if the free-spirited author of the book wanted to warn away the faint-hearted, those not prepared to endure and produce great pain. Yet there is another sense in which such passages are meant as enticements. “Of all the means of producing exaltation,” Nietzsche writes in an aphorism portentously titled “A tragic ending for knowledge,” “it has been human sacrifice which has at all times most exalted and elevated humanity” (§45). On Nietzsche’s
reading as articulated in *Daybreak*, the allure of both tragedy and morality derives from this promise of exaltation. And the new passion—if it is to be exalting and elevating, if it is to triumph over morality—can offer no less. The aphorism continues:

Perhaps every other endeavor could still be thrown down by one tremendous idea, so that it would achieve victory over the most victorious—the idea of *self-sacrificing humanity*. But to whom should humanity sacrifice itself? One could already take one’s oath that, if ever the constellation of this idea appears above the horizon, the knowledge of truth would remain as the one tremendous goal commensurate with such a sacrifice, because for this goal no sacrifice is too great (§45).

The tragedy Nietzsche describes here is set in a distant tomorrow, a day that has not yet broken, but it holds out the promise of a joy commensurate with the sacrifice. Such is the extreme passion play Nietzsche composes in his bid to overcome an arch rival, “the greatest of all mistresses of seduction.”

**Notes**

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1 All *Nachlaß* citations, unless otherwise noted, refer to fragment numbers in Nietzsche, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 9, which corresponds to Nietzsche, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5, part 1. English translations of the fragments are by the present author.

2 Tragedy remains an important point of reference throughout Nietzsche’s career. See, for example: *The Gay Science*, §§342, 382; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§229, 239; *Twilight of the Idylls*, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” §24; and notebook entries from 1884 (Nietzsche, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 11, 25[95]) and 1888 (Nietzsche, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 13, 14[89], 17[3];
Nietzsche’s concern with tragedy specifically during the composition of *Daybreak* is also evidenced by the fact that in the Spring of 1880 he was reading A. Siebenlist’s *Schopenhauers Philosophie der Tragödie*; see the references to Siebenlist in Nietzsche, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 5, part 3. My thanks to Thomas Brobjer for calling this to my attention.

All citations in this essay that include the section marker (§) are, unless otherwise noted, from Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, with occasional minor corrections based on Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 3. Section numbers, in English and German, refer to the aphorism or section of the text.

The second definition of *Leidenschaft* given by the Grimms’ dictionary roots the word firmly in the experience of desire: “von einer heftigen seelenregung, deren grund eine drängende sinnliche begierde ist.”

The term is first attested in the 17th century as a neologism to express the concept of a suffering that is more acute than what is captured by *Leiden* (Grimm and Grimm). It originally surfaces in connection with translations of the French *passibilité*, which is derived from the Latin *passibilis*, “capable of feeling or suffering” (Andrews et al.). It is worth noting that the *passio* word-group is used to translate *pathos* words in New Testament Greek as they pertain, in particular, to the sufferings of Christ. So for example the *pathêmata tou Christou* of 2 Corinthians 1.5 is rendered in Latin as *passiones Christi*. See Gould 66. In this connection, it is significant to note that Nietzsche at one point contemplates “*Passio Nova*” as the title for the collection of aphorisms eventually published as *Daybreak* (Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 6[461]).

“Hitherto, the subject reflected on least adequately has been good and evil: it was too dangerous a subject . . . in the presence of morality, as in the face of any authority, one is not allowed to think, far less to express an opinion: here one has to—obey! (Preface §3). The “morality” to which Nietzsche refers throughout *Daybreak* is, in broad terms, the modern Western reception of the Judeo-Christian tradition, decisively influenced, on Nietzsche’s reading, by Kant and Schopenhauer.

For the clearest statement of this strategy, see §103.

On Nietzsche’s grand philanthropic ambition in this volume, see for example the idea of serving as a physician to mankind [*Arzt der Menscheit*] in §134. See also §§54, 103, 146, 148, 164, 208, 449, 552.

See also §429; Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 7[96], 6[163], 10[D59-60]. Nietzsche seems here to be rejecting the optimistic Enlightenment belief that excessive passions, set against one another, will have a mutually moderating effect that is ultimately conducive to moral virtue, as found for example in Herder’s *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*: “Thus in human powers abuses carried to excess wear themselves down to good practices” (Herder 461). The idea, sometimes even expressed in these metaphorical terms, is that just as the jagged edges of sea-tossed stones are smoothed by mutual abrasion, so too the clash of passions wears down the rough
edges of human nature. Nietzsche seems to be warning that the result would be no virtue worth the name, but rather, the reduction of humankind to an undifferentiated mass. My thanks to John Duncan for calling attention to this and for the reference to Herder.

10 See Butler; Landfester; Rüegg.

11 That Nietzsche has in mind Aristotle here is borne out in a related notebook entry: “Die Griechen litten nach Aristoteles öfter an einem Übermaß von Mitleid: daher die nothwendige Entladung durch die Tragödie. Wir sehen, wie verdächtig diese Neigung ihnen vorkam” (Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 4[110]).

12 See also Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 7[32]. There is a certain ambiguity on this point. The predominant claim seems to be that Greeks were for the most part free from pity, as suggested in §172 (and supported by notebook entries such as 7[32] and 7[123]). Yet the claim in §134 that the Greeks had to purge themselves regularly of pity might be taken to suggest that in fact they were prone to experience pity (see also Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 4[110], where Nietzsche states this more explicitly). So were the Greeks largely immune to pity, or did they suffer from it and so need regular purgations? One possible resolution offered in the text is that the earlier Greeks (of Aeschylus’ time) were hard, warlike, and pitiless, whereas the “later” Greeks of Plato’s time (though, n.b., this is only some 100 years later) were softer, more sensitive, more prone to pity (see the related point in The Birth of Tragedy, Preface, §4). Despite this ambiguity, Nietzsche is consistent in asserting—and this is the decisive point—that the Greeks never elevate pity to a principle for moral action. For a contrasting view, see the recent argument by Stephen Halliwell that Nietzsche here means that pity was valuable to the Greeks of Aeschylus’s time because it reminded them “of their lack of self-sufficiency” and their need for community (Halliwell 230-33). As I argue below, I rather think Nietzsche’s position is that pity is valuable for such types only insofar as it provides an intense pleasure and a brief respite from “the unwearying quest . . . for power” (§271).

13 E.g., “He who is punished is never he who performed the deed” (§252).

14 Compare §240, which I discuss below.

15 Similar passages characterizing morality as Circe appear in Ecce Homo (“Why I write such good books,” §5; and “Why I am a destiny,” §§6-7.) In Human, All Too Human, §519 “truth” is figured as Circe. The Odyssey theme more generally, which surfaces in many of Nietzsche’s texts, runs like a golden thread through Daybreak. A full accounting is the task of a future essay, but it is worth just mentioning here a few relevant details to indicate the resonance of this allusion to Circe. The Preface itself begins with an image of subterranean descent, and whatever else it may call to mind—Orpheus, Christ’s Descensus ad Infernos, Dante, Dostoevsky—the allusion to the Odyssey’s Nekuia (Book XI) is unmistakable, especially given Daybreak §562. The language in the Preface is replete with Odyssean imagery (e.g., “ich bin zurück gekommen und—ich bin davon gekommen . . . wer auf solchen eigenen Wegen geht, begegnet Niemandem”). The book ends,
meanwhile, with nautical and sea-faring images that combine allusions to Odysseus and Columbus, among others. The name “Odysseus” is mentioned explicitly in at least five aphorisms, the most significant and the real key to the motif being §562, where Odysseus figures as the very image of the free spirit. I would also suggest, though this is mere speculation, that beyond the allusion to the Rig Veda, the book’s title is meant to echo Homer’s rhododaktulos êôs.

16 What that means in detail requires a great deal of interpretation, much of it still to be done. For a start, see Pippin, “Morality as Psychology”; Pippin, “Erotic Nietzsche”.

17 Details on the composition of Daybreak are available in Nietzsche, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 5, part 3. For “L’Ombra” see pp.4-5 and 336.

18 In the 1886 Preface to The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche quotes from Schopenhauer as follows, “That which bestows on everything tragic its particular elevating force . . . is the discovery that the world, that life, can never give real satisfaction and hence is not worthy of our affection: this constitutes the tragic spirit—it leads to resignation.” Nietzsche then remarks: “How differently Dionysus spoke to me! How far removed I was from all this resignationism!” (Nietzsche, Tragedy, Preface §6).

19 See also Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 5[29]: “Das Gefühl des Glückes hat die zwei Formen: das Gefühl der Macht und das Gefühl der Ergebung: letzteres ist da wie Müdigkeit und Absp easiest”; and Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 6[48], as well as Daybreak §§140, 271.

20 On Nietzsche’s reading of Spencer, see Nietzsche, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 5, part 3, pp. 5 and 684. Nietzsche owned the volume Die Thatsachen der Ethik, translated by B. Vetter, Stuttgart, 1879. In a recent article, Gregory Moore offers an extensive comparison of Nietzsche and Spencer on the theory of evolutionary ethics. Moore observes that despite his manifest significance, “Spencer is rarely, if at all, mentioned in discussions of the development of Nietzsche’s thought” (Moore 4); but against this claim, see Orsucci 155ff., Götz, and Brusotti passim.

21 In the translation Nietzsche had, pp.22-50. Page 31 falls in §10.

22 I quote from a later English edition, but on comparison with a copy of the Vetter translation Nietzsche used, the text of the relevant passages appears to be the same as the English edition on which that translation is based. The German words, which I have interpolated, come from the Vetter translation.

23 Linguistic similarities between §18 and §144 underscore this connection. In the act of cruelty, the community is said to “refresh [erquicken]” itself and to throw off the “gloom [Düsterkeit]” of constant fear and caution (§18). Conversely, one who gives ear to suffering but fails to be elevated by it allows himself to be “made gloomy [verdüstern lassen]” by it, with the result that he cannot offer help to nor be “refreshing [erquicklich]” for the sufferer; rather, both must then bear the burden of this “gloom [Verdüsterung].”
24 See also §113, which I discuss below, where the connection between cruelty and the feeling of power is reiterated. A related notebook entry likewise equates, at least for animals, cruelty and the feeling of power and juxtaposes these with the feeling of submission: “Die Thiere haben Gefühl der Macht d.h. Grausamkeit, und Glück der Ergebung d.h. Ruhe Trägheit NB.” Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 7[76].

25 See also, “The third eye” (§509).

26 See, for example, Beyond Good and Evil, §§55, 229; On the Genealogy of Morals, II and III, passim; there are relevant passages scattered throughout the unpublished fragments. One important example, from shortly after the publication of Daybreak, occurs at Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 14[20].

27 The Latin phrase is the title of §415, which alludes to Ovid’s “Remedia Amoris,” a poem that offers advice on how to fall out of love. Nietzsche’s aphorism (§415) suggests that in most cases the “cure for love” is “love in return [Gegenliebe].” As in §379, the underlying thought is that the requital of love spells the end of love, and likewise that only unrequited love endures. Hence the “new passion” proposed in Daybreak, which I discuss presently, must be an unrequited love (see §429).

28 Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 6[461]: “Passio Nova oder Leidenschaft der Redlichkeit.” See also Nietzsche, Studienausgabe, vol. 9, 6[459], 7[19], 7[256], 7[281], 8[1]. For this genetic account, I am indebted to Marco Brusotti.

29 See §§45, 146, 197, 450, 482. For a comprehensive treatment of this topic, see Brusotti 216-310.

Works Cited


