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**NIETZSCHE’S *THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY* AS ANTI - PESSIMISTIC**

In this paper I will argue that *The Birth of Tragedy*[[1]](#footnote-1) is not a pessimistic book. If it is a pessimistic book, my argument would not be valid because Nietzsche has later developed anti pessimistic teachings such as *Amor* *Fati*, eternal recurrence and the will to power. As I have argued in the earlier writings, (*Nietzsche’s Response to Schopenhauer*) *BT* can be understood as a template for Nietzsche’s later work, rather than just the early phase during which he, according to Julian Young, completely succumbs to Schopenhauer’s pessimism. As he asserts: ‘*The Birth* incorporates *without modification* Schopenhauer’s metaphysics’ (1992, p. 26, emphasis mine)[[2]](#footnote-2). I will prove that the message of *BT* is very different from that of Schopenhauer’s.[[3]](#footnote-3) To do this, I will show how *BT* reflects Nietzsche’s position that life is worth living and opposes Schopenhauer’s pessimism and life denial. If I am right, this chapter will prove, contrary to the view propounded by Young that Nietzsche could not escape life-denying pessimism in *BT*, that *BT* is the beginning of Nietzsche’s development of the teaching of life affirmation and also the will to power.

Although Young suggests that ‘Nietzsche’s retrospective self-descriptions, considered from the point of view of scholarly accuracy, are deeply unreliable’ (1992, p. 29), I believe that this statement is dependent on the interpretation of Nietzsche’s retrospective self-description. For example, when Young claims that in section 1005 of *WP*, Nietzsche expresses the truth of pessimism in *BT*, he hastily concludes that this section confirms that *BT* is a pessimistic book. Because I see the message of the aphorism 1005 in *WP* differently, let’s remind ourselves what Nietzsche actually says in the same section, named *Art in the* *“Birth of Tragedy”*:

The antithesis of a real and an apparent world is lacking here: there is only *one* world, and this is false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning – A world thus constituted is the real world. *We have need of lies* in order to conquer this reality, this “truth,” that is, in order to *live* – That lies are necessary in order to live is itself part of the terrifying and questionable character of existence. Metaphysics, morality, religion, science – in this book these things merit consideration only as various forms of lies: with their help one can have faith in life. “Life ought to inspire confidence”: the tusk thus imposed is tremendous. To solve it, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an *artist*. (*WP*, 853)[[4]](#footnote-4)

I see this section as Nietzsche’s confirmation of his intention in *BT*, which is to overcome Schopenhauer’s pessimism and justify life. Yes, he agrees with Schopenhauer that our world is cruel and full of suffering. Although Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer’s descriptive aspect of suffering, that does not automatically qualify *BT* as a pessimistic book. Contrary to Schopenhauer’s evaluation of suffering as our biggest obstacle in life, which should be avoided, Nietzsche sees suffering as necessary for the justification of life. For Nietzsche, tragedy (the apex of art) is the way to overcome pessimism and make life justified. If art is the only way to see life as worth living, then illusions (or lies), are necessary because they are an inseparable part of art. As he says at the end of the above quote, in order to have faith in life, to justify life, ‘man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an artist’, meaning he must include illusion in his new evaluation of life, and also that his new evaluation of life must be an artistically creative process, which is the main message of *BT*.

Even though Nietzsche had to employ illusion as an essential part of artistic experience to justify life, that does not mean that his life affirmation equals Schopenhauer’s pessimism. Although Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer that hitherto life was not justified, Nietzsche makes a step forward. While they both inherited the same world in which life had been devalued, they took-off in opposite directions. For Nietzsche, the pessimism of the pre–Socratic Greeks had a different cause: ‘What, then would be the origin of tragedy? Perhaps joy, strength, overflowing health, over great fullness?’ (*ASC*, 4)[[5]](#footnote-5). Since the pessimism of strength is the consequence of the ‘overflowing health’ and abundance of existence, it could have also been called a particular expression of the will to power. Although Nietzsche did not develop the concept of the will to power that early, the teaching had already started in *BT*.[[6]](#footnote-6) As for my argument that *BT* can be used as the template for Nietzsche’s later work, and that *BT* cannot be a pessimistic book, Nietzsche will later say:

 Art and nothing but art! It is a great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life.

 Art as the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, antinihilist *par excellence*.

 Art as the *redemption of the man of knowledge* – of those who see the terrifying and questionable character of existence, who want to see it, the men of tragic knowledge.

 Art as the *redemption of the man of action* – of those who not only see the terrifying and questionable character of existence but live it, the tragic – warlike man, the hero.

 Art as the *redemption of the sufferer* – as the way to states in which suffering is willed, transfigured, defied, where suffering is a form of great delight. (*WP*, 853)

We see from this quote that Nietzsche (in his late, unpublished notes) approves of his earlier analysis of art and its purpose in *BT*, as well as tragic knowledge being the consequence of the amalgamation of Apollonian and Dionysian arts. In *BT* we also see the beginnings of his later teachings of *Amor Fati* and Eternal recurrence through his emphasis on the tragic hero as the *man of knowledge* and also the *man of action* who was able to bounce back after acquiring tragic Dionysian truth and continue cherishing life. All these statements suggest that Nietzsche’s main teachings, which developed later in his career, had strong foundations in *BT*.

For the creation of tragedy, the pessimism of strength was necessary. Whilst in their art, the Greeks only had an illusion of their god Apollo, who was the soothsaying god (*BT*, 1), to keep them in a temporary dream-like state, they felt that their justification of life as they knew it was not enough; it was not sustainable. They needed the proof, the challenge, that would test their strength and offer something more: sustainable life justification. Morally, life could not be justified for them due to ever-present suffering. Although the existing art gave them some solace, pre-Socratic Greeks needed more imperishable life justification, which, thanks to tragic illusion, they found in tragedy.

A view that equates Schopenhauer’s pessimism of the weak and Nietzsche’s pessimism of the strong, because of their descriptive perspective, which is the same in both cases, would be against the central message of *BT*.[[7]](#footnote-7) Although they are often confused when called by the same name, these two types of pessimism are opposingly different. What makes them radically different is their evaluative perspective – their evaluation of life. Even if we take away the illusion that Nietzsche had to employ in order to justify life, the difference between the pessimism of the weak and that of the strong will be in the difference of the individual characters. It will be the expression of the different individual physiologies or the drives that will manifest themselves through their strength. Because of their own ‘impotence’ (*GM*, I, 13)[[8]](#footnote-8), the weak will seek resignation due to their inability to overcome suffering, while on the other side, the strong will, due to their propensity for expansion and domination, see life rather as an opportunity to challenge and prove their own strength.[[9]](#footnote-9) Thus, although their respective value of existence will be the same, the reasons for seeing life as unbearable will be very different. On the one hand, the motive of the weak to experience life as unendurable will be in the overwhelming suffering. They would rather succumb to life resignation as the only palliative measure. On the other hand, the motives driving the strong to see life as unbearable will be the overabundance of strength, the need to challenge it, and also finding the proof that there is more meaning to life than they previously experienced. The former, caused by ‘decline, decay, malformation, of tired and debilitating instincts’ (ibid), is the foundation for life resignation, while the latter propagates life affirmation.

If understood as the means to achieving the end, which is life justification, especially in the tragic period of Greece (fifth century BC), an illusion cannot be rendered pessimistic. We might use the analogy of taking medication when I am sick to demonstrate this. The instrumental value of a medication does not qualify me as a pessimist who admits that my sickness is proof that life is not worth living, but precisely the opposite. Although the fact that I am taking a medication recognises sickness as suffering, it shows that I value life and will do anything to affirm it. But, as I will show, contrary to the pessimism of the weak, the pessimism of strength will not try to eliminate suffering, but rather use it as a necessary condition to challenge and prove the strength of their will. Therefore, Nietzsche sees the pessimism of strength as the main cause of the tragedy, and as he puts it:

Is pessimism *necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts – as it once was in India and now is, to all appearances, among us, “modern” men and Europeans? Is there a pessimism of *strength*?... Is it perhaps possible to suffer precisely from overfullness? The sharp-eyed courage that tempts and attempts, that *craves* the frightful as the enemy, the worthy enemy, against whom one can test one’s strength? ...What then would be the origin of tragedy? Perhaps joy, strength, overflowing health, overgreat fullness? (*ASC,* 1)

Tragedy’s life affirmation instrumental value highlights the necessity of illusion. If something cannot be achieved purely rationally, it does not automatically qualify as pessimistic. And this is the case with art, especially music, which clearly expresses all our inner states that cannot be conceptualised. For that reason, we cannot call it ‘pessimistic’. What is needed is a clear distinction between these two types of pessimism. When I say that *BT* is not a pessimistic book, I will refer to the ‘pessimism of strength’ as a life-affirming position, contrary to the ‘pessimism of the weak’ as a sign of weakness, decay and decline, which is used within the context of Young’s argument. The tragic individual in *BT* becomes the proponent of life affirmation. To fulfil the purpose of Attic tragedy, which is life justification, the emergence of such a unique type of individual represents the key message in *BT.*

3: 1 *The Birth of Tragedy* as Pessimistic

In this section, I will present Young’s arguments, which he believes prove that *BT* is *de facto* a pessimistic book. The main argument, explained in his book *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art*, is that Nietzsche’s employment of illusion as a necessary condition for life justification renders *BT* a pessimistic book. Young suggest that the presence of Apollonian illusion in tragedy provides the necessary veiling of the horrors of life, hence in illusion, or ‘lies’, deceive us to continue living. However, Young believes that the role of the Dionysian is also to help us escape from reality into metaphysical solace. As for the Apollonian illusion, Young writes:

For what the solution offers as a way of overcoming pessimism, of avoiding the pessimist judgement on life, is self-deception, telling oneself “lies”. But this implies that in the fullness of knowledge one would not affirm life as worth living. It implies, more briefly that life is not worth living. (1992, p. 48)

The Dionysian world, which can be compared with the state of intoxication and frenzy once entered via the power of music and dance in the Attic tragedy, leads to contact with the ‘primordial unity’, which causes individual defragmentation or ‘orgiastic self-distraction'. For that reason, Young concludes that:

… the question of the stance taken in it towards pessimism is, I suggested, the question of whether or not the Dionysian solution to suffering is pessimistic. But it is pessimistic […] since the only being to whom the life lived by a human being is said to have any kind of value is nonhuman, external spectator. Human beings are offered as a solution to their suffering, a transcendence of their humanity, an escape from individuality into a feeling of absorption into the Primal One… Like Schopenhauer, therefore, Nietzsche offers flight from human individuality as his solution to its pain and absurdity. Like him therefore, he denies (human) life. (1992, p. 54)

It is clear from this paragraph that for Young, the Dionysian solution represents the essence of tragedy, and he has, like Schopenhauer, taken tragedy to be the best proof of pessimism. The flight from human individuality is actually seen as the only redemption from the hardship of life. This is why Young speculates that Nietzsche had to endorse the Dionysian solution as the one that offers the greatest service for life. But for Young, Dionysian art provides a pessimistic assessment of human life. Therefore, he says:

Dionysian art **“**seduces” us into continued life, provides a “metaphysical comfort” for life, turns the horror and absurdity of life into “notions with which one can live” (*BT*, 7). None of these turns of phrase suggests human existence to be a particularly attractive state of being. (1992, p. 48)

Neither Apollonian nor Dionysian solutions are acceptable for Young since they both require some type of illusion to work. He rejects Nietzsche’s attempt to justify the world only as an aesthetic phenomenon, as aesthetic justification clearly requires artistic illusion and, for that reason, cannot be a justification at all. Young suggests that the only epistemically acceptable solution regarding human existence would be Schopenhauer’s moral meaning of the world, which is the pessimistic repudiation of life. He agrees with Schopenhauer that only through knowledge can we abolish the will and get rid of pessimism. And since Nietzsche has, according to Young, failed to justify life aesthetically, he has proven, like Schopenhauer, that life as we know it is not worth living. It follows that the implementation of illusion renders *BT* a pessimistic book.

To prove that Nietzsche could not justify life aesthetically in *BT*, Young further compares Nietzsche’s aesthetic criteria with Schopenhauer’s moral criteria, in which, according to Young, Schopenhauer, by denying life and developing full-blown pessimism as our only salvation, ends up being more ‘human’. Although Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have both agreed about the descriptive aspect of suffering, Schopenhauer’s position in evaluating suffering and giving in to the total pessimistic outcome looks more ‘attractive’ to Young. As he puts it:

Nietzsche, that is, suggests that only aesthetic criteria are to be employed in judging the world and its creator. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, judges according to moral criteria and condemns the creator for failing to be constrained by moral ideals (see *WP* 1005). It has to be said, I think, that, given Schopenhauer’s and Nietzsche’s identical assessment of the character of the human world, Schopenhauer’s response is the more attractive, the more *human*. (1992, p. 54)

In his continuous attempt to qualify *BT* as a pessimistic book, Young claims that *BT* is essentially religious in nature. As he remarks:

Given, that is, that art has value only to the degree that it serves life, and given also the claim that, in the end, *The Birth of Tragedy* holds this life not to be worth living, it follows that art can ultimately only be of service to us by bringing, like religion, hope of another kind of life. (1992. p. 37)

I find this claim objectionable because religion offers hope for a better life after death, whilst Nietzsche’s justification of life proposes immediate change in this life. Furthermore, the religious hope of a better life requires repudiation of this earthly life, whilst Nietzsche’s call for life justification in *BT* cherishes this life as the only one we have. Young continues with his attempt to identify *BT* with Christianity, and in the following section, he concludes:

The best way, however, to see that *The Birth* is a life-denying work is to note its fundamentally religious character and to conjoin this observation with well-known view of the later Nietzsche that religion, in particular Christianity, is the product of those who, damaged and demeaned by life, are fundamentally hostile to it. (Although claiming in Ecce Homo, that The Birth already shares in his later abhorrence of Christianity – it exhibits, he claims, a “profound and hostile silence about Christianity” (*EH* IV, I; cf. *BT*, “Attempt at a Self-Criticism.” 5) – the truth is that it in fact interprets at least German Christianity, Lutheranism, as a rebirth of the Dionysian [*BT* 23]. (1992, pp. 48, 49)

The biggest problem that I have identified in all of Young’s arguments is his lack of understanding of the difference between Christianity’s and Schopenhauer’s pessimistic surrendering in front of suffering/hardship of life on one side and Nietzsche’s aesthetic justification of life on the other. Aesthetic justification of the world and existence is not yet another passive *surrendering*,but rather an active artistic creation through the fusion of Apollonian and Dionysian arts/elements, as presented in *BT*. Schopenhauer’s pessimist and a Christian both deny life by extinguishing desires and life forces; Nietzsche’s tragic individual, refusing to succumb to Dionysian power, thanks to the help of Apollonian art, bounces back to life and creates a platform from which he can now justify life. So, Young claims that: ‘In *The Birth of Tragedy*, as we saw, Nietzsche discovered a substitute for God in art.’ (1992, p. 94) is fallacious. This fundamental difference between the religious and pessimistic attitudes to life on one side, and the attitude toward life justification on another, is, at the same time, the core idea of Nietzsche *BT*. It seems as though Young has forgotten his claim that *BT* is religious in nature and, in the following section reminds us that, contrary to the religious act of passive surrendering, Nietzsche wants us to become *creators and artists* of our lives:

We must, says Nietzsche, continuing a theme from *Assorted Opinions* *and Maxims*… become artists who produce not (or not primarily) “the art of works of art” but rather their own lives. We must learn the art of “staging…ourselves” (GS 78), we must become poets of our lives” (GS 299). (1992, p. 99)

It remains questionable how, for Young, passive religious repudiation of life can be identified with the artistic production of our lives?

It follows that for Young:

1. Only an epistemically proven justification can be valid.
2. Any type of illusion renders a putative life justification a failure.
3. Ultimately, the only epistemically approved solution can be Schopenhauer’s life- negating pessimism.
4. For the same reason, art, as inclusive of illusion, cannot be seen as life-justifying.
5. Schopenhauer’s pessimism ends up being more ‘attractive’ and ‘human’ than Nietzsche’s aesthetic justification of life.
6. *BT* is definitely of religious character.

3: 2 Tragic Versus Schopenhauer’s Life Denial

Although I agree with Walter Kaufman’s view[[10]](#footnote-10) that *BT* is anti-pessimistic, I believe that a more detailed analysis is needed in order to sustain Nietzsche’s denial of Schopenhauer’s pessimism in *BT*.

Regarding the above explanations and according to Young and his Platonic anti-illusion view, we will have to conclude that, historically speaking, all the influence that illusions have had on mythology, art, religion and philosophy should be rendered invalid. History has proven exactly the opposite. Contrary to Nietzsche’s reminder that *BT* dared: ‘*To look at science through the prism of the artist; but also to look at art through the prism of life’* (*ASC*, 2) and his message that all that matters is life enhancement, regardless of our rational abilities, it looks as if Young speculates about some kind of epistemic approval that life is worth living before it is lived. For Nietzsche, vitality or ‘youth’ in the individual cannot even be explained conceptually. Regardless of epistemically proven views, Nietzsche says:

This youth can itself discover no concept or slogan in the contemporary currency of words and concepts to describe its own nature, but is only aware of the existence within it of an active power that fights, and divides, and of an ever more intense feeling of life. (*UM* *II*, 10)[[11]](#footnote-11)

Suppose we understand our epistemic enquiry as the only way to discover the truth and consider truth to be the supreme criterion. In that case, as Schopenhauer has done, we will end up resorting to pessimism as our only solution to suffering. But, for Nietzsche, life is more important than the epistemically proven truth. In his later view of *BT*, Nietzsche asserts:

One will see that in this book pessimism, or to speak more clearly, nihilism, count as “truth.” But truth does not count as supreme the supreme value, even less as the supreme power. The will to appearance, to illusion, to deception, to becoming and change (to objectify deception) here counts as more profound, primeval, “metaphysical” than the will to truth, to reality, to mere appearance: - the last is itself merely a form of the will to illusion. In the same way, pleasure counts as being more primeval than pain: pain only as conditioned, as a consequence of the will to pleasure (of the will to become, grow, shape, i.e., to *create*: in creation, however, destruction is included). A highest state of affirmation of existences conceived from which the highest degree of pain cannot be excluded: the *tragic – Dionysian* state. (*WP*, 853, III)

Nietzsche insists in *BT* that the world and existence were in need of justification. The reason for this is Schopenhauer’s reliance on only an epistemic analysis of reality/life. Schopenhauer’s purely logical conclusion led him to pessimism which culminated in his realisation that the moral meaning of the world is to deny life. Therefore, since morally, the world and existence cannot be justified, the only solution for Nietzsche was aesthetic justification. The fusion of Apollonian and Dionysian elements in *BT* is a creative process performed by strong characters, or, as Nietzsche calls them, ‘nobly formed natures’ (*BT*, 18). The same nobly formed natures, ‘who actually feel profoundly the weight and burden of existence’ (ibid), are not devoid of suffering. Consequently, their affirmation of existence has to contain the ‘highest degree of pain’. Contrary to Schopenhauer’s life resignation, which eliminates suffering as the biggest obstacle in life, Nietzsche’s life affirmation requires suffering.

The root of the central argument against the view that *BT* is a pessimistic book is placed in the heart of Nietzsche’s later retrospective explanation of the pessimism of strength:

*Is pessimism necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, malformation, of tiered and debilitating instincts… Is there a pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual preference for the hard, gruesome, malevolent and problematic aspects of existence which comes from a feeling of well-being, from overflowing health, from an *abundance* of existence?... Is there tempting bravery in the sharpest eye which *demands* the terrifying as its foe, as a worthy foe against which it can test its strength. (*ASC*, 1)

Facing the hardship of life and the ubiquity of suffering due to ‘overflowing health’ and ‘an abundance of existences’ is not a sign of Schopenhauer’s life-denying pessimism. Nietzsche identifies two types of pessimism: pessimism of the weak and pessimism of the strong. While both types of pessimism have the same descriptive character regarding their relationship to life, they differ in the types of individuals or groups who will embrace them. Weaker characters, who are guided by hedonistic measurements of value, see the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure as the ultimate motivation of their actions. Since, according to Schopenhauer, suffering dominates, and lasting pleasure is unachievable, a hedonistic evaluation of human actions, advocated by the weaker characters, will end up avoiding pain through life resignation. Although the strong will also subscribe to the descriptive evaluation of suffering, they will not take suffering to be a supreme evil. And since suffering is not a conclusive evil for them, they will not subscribe to the hedonistic measurements of value. Instead, they will replace hedonistic values with values based upon power.

Nietzsche’s understanding of power as overcoming resistance, which is in fact suffering, renders suffering as something that should be welcomed, not renounced. Since higher suffering will be the ‘worthy enemy, against whom one can test one’s strength’ (*ASC*, 1), the overflowing of existence will ultimately require suffering to be able to justify itself. Thus, *BT* is furnished with the central idea that life is worth living despite the ubiquity of suffering (acceptance of the descriptive meaning of pessimism). Only through tragedy will a unique type of individual be able to justify life (the evaluative meaning of pessimism). Without understanding the difference between the descriptive and affirmative aspects of suffering, and between the pessimism of the weak and the pessimism of the strong, *BT* can indeed be understood only as a pessimistic life-denying book. Thanks to the redemptive vision that life can be justified, achieved through the aesthetic experience of Attic tragedy, the individual is capable of relieving himself from the burdensome seriousness and fear regarding his previous individual existence and, finally, go on living. As Nietzsche asserts:

At the same time, however, we encounter Apollo as the deification of the *principium individuationis* in which alone the eternally attained goal of primordial unity, its release and redemption through semblance, comes about; with sublime gestures he shows us that the whole world of agony is needed in order to compel the individual to generate the releasing and redemptive vision and then, lost in contemplation of that vision, to sit calmly in his rocking boat in the midst of the sea. (*BT*, 4)

That synthesis of Apollonian and Dionysian elements/illusions as the redemption from suffering, which is more sustainable than the short-lived escape from suffering offered by purely Apollonian or fragmenting Dionysian illusion, is also observed by Reginster:

Tragedy fascinates Nietzsche because it manages to represent the most terrifying and questionable aspects of our existence in a way that incites us to affirm, rather than deny it. And the terrifying and questionable aspect of existence on which Nietzsche focuses most persistently is the inevitability of suffering, understood as the experience of resistance to the satisfaction of our desires. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, he has argued that tragedy could make such suffering tolerable only by producing a comforting view of it by resorting to certain sorts of illusion. (2014, pp. 33, 34)[[12]](#footnote-12)

Following the same line of argument, Richard White signifies the importance of the tragic myth and the Dionysian presence, which was eliminated from tragedy by Socratic rationalism/optimism, as the necessary elements in an attempt to justify individual life:

Socrates condemned what he could not understand; and since, according to Nietzsche, Socrates is the paradigm of our own scientific ideal, he still continues as the guiding spirit of our own decline, with respect to the most complete oblivion of all tragic wisdom… In this way, Nietzsche seeks to persuade us that Socratic optimism has already sown the seeds of its own distraction. Indeed, he argues, that such an overcoming will be absolutely decisive since it leaves us without any ruling value or myth that might encourage the striving of the individual life in the absence of the Socratic framework. (1988, p. 60)[[13]](#footnote-13)

Nietzsche saw the cultural scenery of Europe as dominated by pessimism, in the form of Schopenhauer's nihilism, and in the form of inherited anti-life Christian morality together with the Socratic optimism of the theoretical man. For this reason, that European cultural landscape started to crumble because it was unable to provide sustainable redemption from suffering. And for him, ‘life has become a problem’. As Richard Schacht has remarked:

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche places his hope for a revitalisation of Western civilisation, in the face of the collapse of both other-worldly religiousness and rationalistic – scientific optimism, in a re-emergence of a tragic sense of life. (2002, p. 507)[[14]](#footnote-14)

In *BT*, Nietzsche is explicitly focused on Socratic optimism. Socrates thought that only life based on rational approval could be justified since, according to him, knowledge is a virtue. In that sense, it would be wrong to believe in anything without rational explanation/evidence. Regarding Nietzsche’s view on pure knowledge, Daniel Breazeale, remarks:

Thus in his unpublished writings in early 1870’s, Nietzsche had already clearly grasped the basically nihilistic character of the demand for pure knowledge…the secret concerning “scientific Socraticism” was out: it leads towards decline. (1990, p. xxxiv)[[15]](#footnote-15)

But there is also another important side of the Socratic rational evaluation of life. If the life that we all know, in its wholesomeness, made from our emotions, instincts and passions, is apparently wrong, then there has to be a better life that is hostile to our non-rational nature. And for Nietzsche, that is clearly a life-denying position, which is at the same time a moral evaluation of the same. As Came puts it: ‘Socratism can be seen as a form of morality, and one which bears more directly on Nietzsche’s overall project in *BT*’ (2004, 5). Socrates rejected tragedy and art by saying that all those famous artists ‘performed it only by instinct. ‘” Only by instinct”: the phrase goes to the heart and centre of the Socratic tendency’ (*BT*, 13). But while he focused on Socrates explicitly, criticism of Christianity is implicit in *BT*, as Nietzsche puts it:

Perhaps the best indication of the depth of the anti-moral tendency in the book is its consistently cautious and hostile silence about Christianity – Christianity as the most excessive, elaborately figured development of the moral theme that humanity has ever had to listen too. (*ASC*, 5)

Dominating all other values, Christian moral values that lead to life resignation render life affirmation impossible. And for Nietzsche, this is what makes morality and life affirmation incompatible: ‘Before the court of morality (especially Christian, which is to say unconditional,

morality) life *must* constantly and inevitably be proved wrong because life is essentiallysomething amoral’ (*ASC*, 5). It is this reason that, for Nietzsche, life cannot be justified rationally/morally, but only aesthetically. So, to justify life, Nietzsche has opted for a non-moral evaluation of life and explicitly presented aesthetic evaluation as the only way to justify life sustainably. But, as Nietzsche points out, Socrates himself also admitted that truth could not be discovered by often confessing ‘to knowing nothing’ (*BT*, 13) while also needing to make music (*BT*, 15). Thus, by his own example, Socrates has undermined the power of rational/moral ability to discover the truth or essence of being, and also secretly admitted that art can help us justify existence. And in the following paragraph, Nietzsche also denies rational justification of life: ‘One also finds a profound delusion which first appeared in the person of Socrates, namely the imperturbable belief that thought…reaches down into the deepest abysses of being’ (ibid). In the same paragraph, Nietzsche concludes:

But science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly towards its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck… When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail – suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, tragic insight which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy. (ibid)

With *BT*, Nietzsche is asking: is life worth living? Contrary to Schopenhauer's pessimism and Christian anti-life morality, and as in the case of the Attic tragedy, the answer is yes! So, I agree with Aaron Ridley’s comment:

Tragedy, in his eyes, tells us the deepest and most horrifying truth about ourselves, but does so in a way that makes the news not merely bearable, but welcome, enlivening, and even intoxicating; so that against the backdrop of a fundamentally pessimistic take on existence (the deepest truths are horrifying) tragedy offers us a paradoxical form of redemption. (2007, p. 10)[[16]](#footnote-16)

3: 3 Why *The Birth* *of Tragedy* is Not a Pessimistic Book

Julian Young argues that Nietzsche’s employment of illusion renders his attempt at life justification a failure, making *BT* a pessimistic book. I seek to challenge his argument in five different areas.

First, I argue that the role of illusion in *BT* is not to prove, as argued by Young, that from the perspective of the book, life is unbearable. Although Nietzsche has accepted Schopenhauer’s descriptive aspect of suffering, Nietzsche’s implementation of illusion in *BT* actually denies Schopenhauer’s evaluative aspect of suffering and helps overcome Schopenhauer’s pessimistic view that life is not worth living. I also argue that illusion does not serve to hide the truth that life is essentially suffering; it is quite the opposite. Apollonian illusion in tragedy is a necessary part of the alliance with the Dionysian truth. This fusion of the Apollonian and the Dionysian is of great importance for tragedy, without which it would be meaningless. Whilst for Nietzsche, the Greeks found life justification in tragedy, Schopenhauer could not grasp it. As Nietzsche puts it in *WP*:

And supposing Schopenhauer was right that one should learn resignation from tragedy (i.e., a gentle renunciation of happiness, hope, will to life), then this would be an art in which art denies itself. Tragedy would then signify a process of disintegration: the instinct for life destroying itself through the instinct for art. Christianity, nihilism, tragic art, phycological decadence – these would go hand in hand, come into predominance at the same time, assist one another froward – *downward* – Tragedy would be symptom of decline. (*WP*, 851)

It is true that for Nietzsche, life as we know it is unbearable, and he accepts Schopenhauer’s descriptive meaning of pessimism. Still, instead of yearning for non-existence and trying to justify the moral meaning of the world in life negation, Nietzsche saw eternal justification of existence and the world only as an aesthetic phenomenon. As an aesthetic phenomenon, life as it is, with all its suffering, is not negated but rather embraced. And this is where Nietzsche's pessimism of strength stands against the pessimism of weakness and with that Nietzsche rejects Schopenhauer's life-negation. Nietzsche has praised the Greeks for their courage to look into the horrors of life and still embrace it. Although both Schopenhauer's pessimism of weakness and Nietzsche’s pessimism of strength in their descriptive content are not different, as they both acknowledge the horrors of life, they differ in their evaluative aspect of suffering. Whilst pessimism of weakness recommends withdrawal from life, the pessimism of strength, which comes from the abundance of life and its overflowing health and strength, on the contrary, affirms life. The pessimism of strength will later develop into Nietzsche’s famous credo of ‘giving style to one’s character’ (*GS*, 290)[[17]](#footnote-17).

Already in *BT*, Nietzsche suggests that ‘only as an aesthetic phenomenon’ life can be justified. He insists that, while the moral evaluation of life has hitherto eliminated the Dionysian (passions and instincts), the aesthetic mode of evaluation has been an essential part of the fusion the Dionysian with the Apollonian and for achieving the artistic whole necessary for life justification. The difference between these two types of pessimism can also be understood as the difference between the characters of those who have accepted that life is essentially suffering. Illusions necessary for life affirmation will be employed only by strong individuals capable of surviving close contact with the Dionysian truth. As Nietzsche puts it:

These three stages of illusions are actually designed only for the more nobly formed natures, who actually feel profoundly the weight and burden of existence, and must be deluded by exquisite stimulants into forgetfulness of their displeasure. (*BT*, 18)

Second, I question Young's claim that the Apollonian solution cannot be Nietzsche's position in *BT* and suggest that Nietzsche needs to endorse Dionysian tragic art as the best solution to the suffering in life. ‘Nietzsche has to endorse Dionysian, tragic art as offering the best solution to the suffering in life' (1992, p. 48). Young's answer to whether the Dionysian implies the pessimistic solution to human life is: ‘It seems to me clear, even obvious, that it does.' (ibid). This is what Nietzsche says regarding his implementation of the Dionysian element:

At the same time I grasped that the instinct went into opposite direction from Schopenhauer’s: towards a *justification* *of life*, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious; for this I had the formula “*Dionysian*”. (*WP*, 1005)

But, within *BT*’s context, the Dionysian implies instead the tragic and not the pessimistic solution. Neither pure Apollonian nor pure Dionysian solutions are compatible with the idea of tragedy that Nietzsche endorses to justify life eternally. Nietzsche clearly states:

These two very different drives exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent in the opposition between them… until eventually, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic ‘Will’ they appear paired, and in this pairing, finally engender a work of art which is Dionysiac and Apolline in equal measure: Attic tragedy. (*BT*, 1)

Nietzsche is not interested in purely Apollonian or Dionysian culture but rather in the tragic culture, which will affirm life. Whilst pure Apollonian art offered only momentary justification, and pure Dionysian art was psychologically impossible to endure for the individual, only the unity of both arts, which makes Attic Tragedy the apex of art for Nietzsche, offered the eternal life justification. The uniqueness of the Attic tragedy is explained in the following Nietzsche’s quote:

Tragedy closes with a sound which could never come from the realm of Apollinian art. And thus the Apollinian illusion reveals itself as what it really is – the veiling during the performance of the tragedy of the real Dionysian effect; but the latter is so powerful that it ends by forcing the Apollinian drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom and even denies itself and its Apollinian visibility. Thus the intricate relation of the Apollinian and the Dionysian in tragedy may really be symbolized by a fraternal union of the two deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysus; and so the highest goal of tragedy and of all art is attained. (*BT*, 21)

And the above argument is what Young persistently failed to grasp, as he religiously keeps repeating:

Nietzsche offers us a choice of solutions: on the one hand, we are offered the redemptive power of Apollonian illusion – profound superficiality, in other words; on the other, the redemptive power of Dionysian sublimity. But the latter too is, as he points out in *The Birth* (*BT* 18), a species of illusion, an evasion of the actuality of our human existence. What we are offered, therefore, is a choice between two forms of dishonesty: human life is to be made bearable either by telling ourselves beautiful lies about it or else by pretending to belong to an order of being other than that of human individuality. The implication of this is clear: life, real life, is unaffirmable. (192, p. 139)

There is so much inaccuracy in the analysis of *BT* in the above quote that the following has become obvious:

1 -Young does not recognise tragic illusion as the fusion of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which is the main message of *BT*.

2 - He understands illusion as the evasion of the actuality of our human existence (I will analyse the importance of illusion in more detail in Chapter 5 and in the Conclusion) instead of seeing it as an essential attribute of the fabric of human life.

3 - Young interprets ‘real life’ as completely devoid of illusion, consequently meaning devoid of art, artistic creativity, love, hopes, beliefs and passions (more about it in Chapter 5 and the Conclusion). He stops short of explaining what ‘real life’ means for him. Maybe ‘real life’ for him means an illusion free Christian life?

Third, it seems that Young does not differentiate between the Dionysian role in tragedy and Schopenhauer's general assessment of the will, and he concludes that ‘"intoxication," the central metaphor for Dionysianism, carries with it pessimistic associations' (1992, p. 48). For Young, they are both the same and discovering either Dionysian truth or the will means the escape and fragmentation of an individual in metaphysical comfort, hence a pessimistic assessment of human life. As he put it: “Like Schopenhauer, therefore, Nietzsche offers a flight from human individuality as his solution to its pain and absurdity. Like him, therefore, he denies (human) life’ (ibid, p. 54). Although Nietzsche never rejected Schopenhauer's descriptive aspect of ineluctable and ubiquitous suffering, that does not mean that Nietzsche accepted his evaluative aspect of suffering. Even though Schopenhauer's pessimism and the pessimism of classical Greek culture (Silenus' wisdom) are identical in their descriptive content that life is essentially suffering, they differ in their evaluative character and their recommendation of attitudes toward life. While Schopenhauer denied the value of life and renounced willing and desires, the Greeks affirmed the value of life and recommended living as intensely as possible. Nietzsche identified the tragedy of the pre-Socratic culture as the paradigm for the revival of the European culture of his day that was, according to him, already showing ‘sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts' (*ASC*, 1).

Contrary to Young’s interpretation of the Dionysian, and within the context of *BT,* it is clear that the Dionysian element offers a crucial opportunity for restoring our appetite for individual life, which Schopenhauer’s metaphysical view denies. Purely Dionysian experience, for Nietzsche, would be intolerable. Nietzsche uses Dionysus in *BT* as the means for achieving life justification. The concept of the will in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics is the end in itself. For Schopenhauer, once we discover the nature of the will as the ultimate suffering, our best moral

choice is to repudiate life. On the contrary, for Nietzsche, the discovery of the Dionysian truth is necessary for life justification.

Fourth, relying on a strictly epistemically and morally warranted justification or a purely rational approach to life, Young qualifies *BT* as a pessimistic book. Nietzsche's employment of illusion has rendered his pursuit of life justification a failure, according to Young. Suppose human life can be identified with some mathematical algorithm without any subjective emotional experiences. In that case, a purely rational evaluation of it may be correct. Still, since subjective experiences such as love, pleasure and happiness have nothing to do with rational explanations, Nietzsche opted for an alternative type of justification. Presume we consider a non-epistemically warrantied justification: a pragmatic, practical and illusion-based justification, that I believe Nietzsche had in mind while setting the plot of *BT* in pre-Socratic tragic culture. In that scenario, life can indeed be eternally justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. Nietzsche’s justification does not require any epistemic valuation or evaluative truth. Instead, it is there to create a positive attitude towards life, which does not depend on its objective evaluation. As Came observes:

So, given that Nietzsche’s justification aims to generate life-affirmation in us, and that such an attitude does not necessarily involve entertaining any explicit beliefs about the value of existence, that Nietzsche’s justification does not demonstrate the positive value of existence does not militate against it. (2009, p. 47)[[18]](#footnote-18)

Consequently, if aesthetic justification serves as life affirmation, that does not render it pessimistic due to its neutral position on the normative (rational) evaluation of existence. Again, implementing illusion as a necessary tool for justification of life relates to the *pessimism of strength*, which cannot be identified with the *pessimism of the weak*. Whilst the former champions life affirmation, the latter is directed towards life resignation. According to Nietzsche, the pessimism of strength gets elicited from ‘overflowing health, from an ‘*abundance* of existence’, and it is directed towards testing the strength of the bravest, strengthening the feeling of power which has a rejuvenating and life-enhancing effect. During this early stage of Nietzsche’s philosophical development, the idea of the will to power was conceived. Since Nietzsche wants to see art through the lens of life, or rather as the means to achieving life affirmation, the implementation of illusion does not render *BT* as pessimistic in the conventional, life-denying sense. He saw a revival of tragic culture as possible (Wagner’s music). He hoped that German and European culture could rise from their life-denying morality and direct their creative capital towards life affirmation. As for the tragic culture, it:

finds nothing objectionable in falsehood, provided that it serves the affirmation of life. Accordingly, from the perspective of tragic culture, illusion is unobjectionable. On the contrary, the recognition that illusion is necessary for life is partly constitutive of the tragic world view. (Came, 2013, p. 215)[[19]](#footnote-19)

Pessimism of the strong can also be compared to a ‘playing child’. As Nietzsche put it: ‘[a] playing child who sets the stones here, there, and the next place, and who builds up piles of send onlyto knock them down again’ (*BT*, 24). By challenging their resilience against the terrifyingDionysian truth, strong characters will test the strength of their will. And as the ‘playing child’, who cannot judge morally, they will engage in destruction and construction that are not morally evoked but instead aesthetically elicited. Nietzsche aimed to highlight the non-moral justification of the world by emphasising the Greek way of life that did not repudiate suffering, but because of it saw life as worth living, and justified it through art. As Nietzsche asserts:

*The tremendous task and dignity of art in this task!* Art must create everything anew and *give* *new birth to life alone!* What it is capable of is shown *to us by Greeks*: if we did not have them our faith would be chimeric. (*WEN*, pp. 103, 104)[[20]](#footnote-20)

Regarding the purely moral or epistemically warranted understanding of tragedy, according to which pessimism prevails and the rational approach has the upper hand over the aesthetic, illusion-based proposition, Nietzsche concludes:

Admittedly, our aestheticians have nothing to report about this return to home and origin, about the brotherly bond between the two deities of art and tragedy, nor about the combination of Apollonian and Dionysian excitement felt by the listener; on the other hand, they never tire to characterizing the true essence of tragedy of the hero with the fate, triumph of a universal moral order… such persistence makes me think that they may not be suspectable to aesthetic stimulation at all, and that when they are listening to tragedy, they can perhaps only be considered as moral beings. (*BT*, 22)

This is yet another call to understand the amalgamation of Apollonian and Dionysian arts/elements as an artistically creative process, rather than just through passive moral surrendering to pessimism which uses tragedy as the proof that life is not worth living. It leads us to the fifth objection to Young's criticism of Nietzsche's *BT*, which is Young’s characterisation of *BT* as of 'fundamentally religious character'. In the passage that I quoted earlier (1992, p. 48, 49), Young claims that Nietzsche has by creating the redemption through the aesthetic justification of life for those who are 'damaged and demeaned by life, and generally hostile to it', identified *BT* with religion (Christianity). Since, for Nietzsche, religion is the product of those who were hostile to life, it follows, according to Young, that Nietzsche has, in fact, interpreted Christianity in *BT*.

Such a claim, I believe, goes against everything that *BT* stands for. Although I have already explained the difference between the pessimism of the weak and the pessimism of the strong, I have to reiterate Nietzsche’s view that tragedy is born from the pessimism of the strong; not those who have struggled under the burden of life, who have looked for redemption from hardship and suffering, but from the strong characters who were overflowing with health and fullness of existence. In his second preface to *BT*, Nietzsche asks:

Is it perhaps possible to suffer precisely from overfullness? The sharp – eyed courage that tempts and attempts, that craves the frightful as the enemy, the worthy enemy, against whom one can test one’s strength? (*ASC*, 1)

It is clear from the above quote that Nietzsche is talking against the individuals who represent the pessimism of the weak characterised by ‘sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts’ (ibid). He further asks: ‘What then, would be the origin of tragedy? Perhaps joy, strength, overflowing health, overgreat fullness’ (*ASC*, 4)? So, the proponents of tragedy and the ones[[21]](#footnote-21) who will be able to justify life are not the ones who ‘are damaged by life, and generally hostile to it’ as Young interprets, but the ones who ‘suffer precisely from overfullness’.

For Nietzsche, the ideals of Christianity are opposite to those of the proponent of aesthetic life justification. Nietzsche sees the nature of Christianity:

As the most dangerous and uncanny form of all possible forms of a “will to decline” – at the very least a sign of abysmal sickness, weariness, discouragement, exhaustion, and the impoverishment of life… life must then be left to be unworthy of desire and altogether worthless. (*ASC*, 5)

Another incompatible characteristic between *BT* and Christianity is in Nietzsche’s inauguration of art in *BT*. Art plays the central role in *BT*, and as Nietzsche puts it:

With this chorus the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art – life. (*BT*, 7)

The aesthetic justification of life can only happen through tragedy, as the apex of art. For Nietzsche, Christianity was anti-life, and at the same time also anti-art. As he clearly explains:

In truth nothing can be more to the purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world which are taught in this book than the Christian teaching, which is, and wants to be, *only* moral and which relegates art, every art, to the realm of lies; whit its absolute standards, beginning with the truthfulness of God, it negates, judges and damns art. (*ASC*, 5)

While Christian morality demands complete surrendering and unquestionable acceptance of the absolute truth objectified in religious dogmas, which, as Nietzsche claimed, are anti-life and anti-art, aesthetic justification of the world and existence require a very different attitude to life. While the former is a passive acceptance and surrendering, the latter is an active artistic creation that culminates in the spectator’s ability to reconcile and merge opposing Apollonian and Dionysian forces. So, labelling *BT* as an interpretation of Christianity is evidently objectionable from the above explanations.

3: 4 Concluding Remarks

I hope I have proved that contrary to Young’s belief that *BT* is a pessimistic book in the Schopenhauerian sense, Nietzsche has sent us the anti-life denial message in his first book that life is, despite the ubiquity of suffering, worth living and can be justified. I have shown that the role of illusion in *BT* is not to hide the terrors and horrors of life but rather, as a *necessary* condition for art, to find the solution to suffering and absurdity in life. As an indispensable part of aesthetic experience, illusion is required for the world and existence to be eternally justified. Aesthetic justification of the world is the core idea of *BT* since existence and the world cannot be justified morally, as Schopenhauer has proven. While Schopenhauer’s pessimism, founded on a purely rational basis, culminates in life resignation, Greek pessimism, powered by artistic illusion, to the contrary, endorses cherishing life: it affirms life.

The claim that the Dionysian reflects the pessimistic life-negating nature of *BT* is false because the Dionysian in *BT* is tragic in nature, and not pessimistic. Misplacing the tragic element in *BT* with pessimistic is erroneous since Nietzsche is interested in a culture capable of resisting the Buddhistic negation of the will on one side and ‘debilitating chase after worldly power and honor’ (*BT*, 21) on the other, hence tragic culture. To do so, the philosopher of tragic knowledge must incorporate tragic art in order to justify life. As Nietzsche remarks:

He does not restrain the uncontrolled drive for knowledge through a new metaphysics. He establishes no new faith. He feels that *the removal of the ground of metaphysics* from under-foot is tragic and yet can never be satisfied by the bright whirligig of science. He is building a new life: he restores to art its rights. (*WEN*, p. 103)

Neither pure Apollonian nor pure Dionysian art can offer life affirmation. Only the fusion of both arts can deliver the ultimate message of Attic tragedy. The message is that life can be eternally justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon, as Nietzsche puts it: ‘…we must remember the enormous power of *tragedy* to stimulate, purify, and discharge the entire life of people’ (*BT*, 21). It is essential to acknowledge that the type of tragic individual, who is the only one capable of justifying life, must be distinguished from Apollonian and Dionysian types.

By purporting that the Dionysian equals Schopenhauer’s will, Young has disqualified the unique role that the Dionysian element plays in tragedy. It is not there to eradicate the individual, but to the contrary, to present him with the ultimate terrifying truth of existence. In the symbiosis with the Apollonian in Attic tragedy, the Dionysian will save the individual to justify life. As Nietzsche has it:

Suppose a human being has thus put his ear, as it were, to the heart chamber of the world will and felt the roaring desire for existence pouring from there into all the veins of the world… how could he fail to brake suddenly? ...Here the tragic myth and the tragic hero intervene between our highest musical emotion and this music… Yet here the Apollonian power erupts to restore the almost shattered individual with the healing balm of blissful illusion. (*BT*, 21)

Although Dionysus plays a decisive role in life justification in *BT*, Young does not acknowledge the difference between the Dionysian in *BT* and Schopenhauer’s will, and sees both as the total distraction of individuality. Contrary to Young’s view that in Dionysus, Nietzsche offered a flight from individuality, and as Schopenhauer denied human life, the close contact with the Dionysian truth achieved through tragedy does not repudiate the individual. Instead, it allows him to return to his individual life and, invigorated and purified with the discovery of the eternal life/flux, life is justified. As Ridley asserts:

If Dionysus stands for the will in Schopenhauer’s sense, then in Nietzsche, touching base with Dionysus is not the crowning confirmation of pessimism, as it is in Schopenhauer, but rather its revitalizing antidot. (2007, p. 20)

In *BT*, Dionysus should be understood as the means to achieving the end of life justification, contrary to Schopenhauer’s will, which is clearly, once contemplated, the ultimate end that culminates in life resignation.

Based on purely epistemically warranted justification, Young has understood *BT* as a pessimistic book in which, by employing illusion as the necessary condition for life justification, Nietzsche has failed. Since Nietzsche was interested in pre-Socratic tragic culture,

for which implementation of illusion is justified as long as it helps justify life, we have to consider a different non-epistemically warranted, illusion based justification. As Leiter puts it: ‘for what is really at stake for Nietzsche is that life should be experienced as worth living, not that a rational or cognitive warrant exists for continuing to live’ (2018, p.156).

The culture that was based on the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides was able to accept the descriptive aspect of pessimism ‘The Greeks new and felt the terrors and horrors of existence’

(*BT*, 3), but at the same time was able to affirm life by imposing the world of gods between themselves and those horrors. Came comments:

It was able to do this, he claims, because its dominant evaluative categories weren’t moral but aesthetic. Because of this, the Greeks were able to affirm the world as they found it, even its problematic aspects. (2004, p. 27)[[22]](#footnote-22)

Seen in the context of the tragic culture of the Greeks, in which illusion was distinctly unobjectionable and art was valued more than logical reasoning, life can be clearly justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. As Nietzsche puts it:

In this way, this book is even anti-pessimistic: that is, in the sense that it teaches something that is stronger than pessimism, “more divine” than truth: *art*. Nobody, it seems, would more seriously propose a radical negation of life, a really *active* negation even more than merely *saying* No to life, than the author of this book. Except that he knows – he has experience of it, perhaps he has experience of nothing else! – that art is *worth more* than truth. (*WP*, 853)

I have shown that equating the message of *BT* with that of Christianity, as Young attempted, is surely unacceptable. Not only are proponents of aesthetic life justification diametrically different in their attitude to life compared to Christians, who surrender to absolute and unquestionable dogmas, but as the active creators of their lives, proponents of aesthetic justification of life clearly differ from the passive Christian attitude to life. Nietzsche has seen Christianity as anti-life and anti-art, whilst *BT* acts as apotheoses for life justification. Young understands *BT* as a life-denying book due to its ‘fundamentally religious characters’ and characterises the proponents of life justification as ‘damaged and demeaned by life’ who ‘are fundamentally hostile to it’ (1992, p. 48). But these characterisations apply exactly to the adherents of the pessimism of the weak, and not the ones who are overflowing with health and life and who ‘suffer from overfullness’ (*ASC*, 1).

It was important to prove that *BT* is not a pessimistic book to strengthen my argument that *BT* can be used as the template for later Nietzsche’s work. Although Nietzsche’s retrospective comments regarding *BT* are not always consistent, I have proven that they overwhelmingly suggest that *BT* is essentially anti pessimistic. The way Nietzsche has constructed the message that *BT* delivers, his unique fusion of Apollonian and Dionysian elements/arts, clearly suggest an anti-pessimistic and anti-Christian attitude towards life. Although *BT* is often seen as the first stage of Nietzsche’s philosophical development in which he was still strongly under Schopenhauer’s influence, I have proven that although accepting some of Schopenhauer’s views, such as the descriptive aspect of suffering and the nature of music, Nietzsche had already rejected the core of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, which is life denial. His understanding of tragedy as the platform for life justification, and his rejection of Schopenhauer’s understanding of tragedy as proof of pessimism clearly suggests Nietzsche’s intention from the very beginning to be life affirmation. The core ideas, which Nietzsche will later develop into his main teachings of life, *Amor Fati*, Eternal Recurrence, *Ubermensch*, and will to power, have already been planted in *BT*. Therefore, *BT* should be understood as the template for Nietzsche’s later work.

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

*BT* Nietzsche, F. 1967. *The Birth of Tragedy*, Kaufmann, W. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books).

*WP*  Nietzsche, F. 1968. *The Will to Power*, Kaufmann, W. and Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books).

*GS* Nietzsche, F. 1974. *The Gay Science*, Kaufmann, W. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books).

*UM*  Nietzsche, F. 1997, *Untimely Meditations*, Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

*GM*  Nietzsche, F. 1989. *On The Genealogy of Morals*, Kaufmann, W. and Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books).

*WEN*  Nietzsche, F. 2018. *Writings from the Early Notebooks,* Lob, L. (trans.), Geuss, R. and Nehamas, A. (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

*ASC*  Nietzsche, F. 1967. ‘Attempt at Self Criticism’ in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Kaufmann, W. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books).

1. Nietzsche, F. 1967. *The Birth of Tragedy*, Kaufmann, W. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Young, J. 1992. *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For Nietzsche’s detailed view that *BT* was an anti-moral and anti-pessimistic, see *ASC.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Nietzsche, F. 1968. *The Will to Power*, Kaufmann, W. and Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nietzsche, F. 1967. ‘Attempt at Self Criticism’ in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Kaufmann, W. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The importance of *BT* is reflected not only in Nietzsche’s aesthetic justification of the world and existence but also in the fact that he has already in *BT* started with the revaluation of all values (*TI*, X, 5), for which pessimism of strength was necessary. Overcoming the terrible Dionysian truth that individual life is full of suffering and its powerful attraction, which would defragment individual, required overcoming oneself and justifying life. This process of overcoming the gloomy cultural tradition of ‘Greek folk wisdom’, presented by Silenus (*BT*, 3), and creating new values that will help one see life as worth living, will later develop into Nietzsche’s teaching of the will to power. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (*ASC*, 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Nietzsche, F. 1989. *On The Genealogy of Morals*, Kaufmann, W. and Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The difference in the character will also apply to the different understanding of tragedy. As shown in Chapter 1, Schopenhauer understood tragedy as the best proof of his pessimism, in which spectators can clearly understand the terrible side of life and succumb to pessimism. Such understanding of tragedy will apply to the characters determined by the pessimism of the weak. On the other hand, strong characters who seek life affirmation will perceive tragedy as proof that life is worth living. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In his book, *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Kaufmann says: ‘Instead of proving himself in his first book as an unswerving follower of Schopenhauer – as has so often been taken for granted - Nietzsche discovers in Greek art a bulwark against Schopenhauer’s pessimism. One can oppose the shallow optimism of so many Western thinkers and yet refuse to negate life. Schopenhauer’s negativistic pessimism is rejected along with the superficial optimism of the popular Hegelians and Darwinists: one can face the terrors of history and nature with unbroken courage and say Yes to life’ (1974, p. 131). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Nietzsche, F. 1997, *Untimely Meditations*, Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Reginster, B. 2014. ‘Art and Affirmation’, in Came, D (ed.), *Nietzsche on Art and Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 14-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. White, R. 1988. ‘Art and the Individual in Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28/1: 59-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Schacht, R. 2002. *Nietzsche*, Honderich, T. (ed.), (New York: Routledge). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Breazeale, D. 1990. *Philosophy and Truth*, Breazeale, D. (ed.) and (trans.), (New York: Humanity Books). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ridley, A. 2007. *Nietzsche on Art* (Abington: Routledge). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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21. It is important to remind us that Nietzsche is not an egalitarian philosopher. The attribute ‘nobly formed natures’ does not belong to everyone. Not once does Nietzsche mention the difference between the ones who will be able to overcome the Dionysian truth in tragedy and justify life and others who will, as Schopenhauer professed, find tragedy as the proof of pessimism. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
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