PAEDEIA: North South Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Law, Vol 1, 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47126/nsushssjournal.of0001

"*Heilige Grausamkeit*" ("Holy Cruelty"): A "Perspective" on Nietzsche and Infanticide

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ABSTRACT

In his Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science), Nietzsche writes an aphorism (Book 2, No. 73) titled "Heilige Grausamkeit" ("Holy Cruelty"). There is no obvious scholarly engagement in the literature with this particular aphorism to elucidate its meaning. Clearly, the very juxtaposition of the two concepts—holiness and cruelty—is problematic, even as the content of the aphorism is interpretively problematic for the counsel the holy man gives to a father seeking advice as to what to do with his deformed newborn, i.e., to kill the child. At issue here is the moral rationality involved in Nietzsche's perspective in this particular instance, but also in relation to the perspective of Christian moral rationality of which Nietzsche is critical. The exposition provided here analyzes the text and contributes an interpretation as an important element to understanding Nietzsche's "ethics" as it relates to contemporary discourse on euthanasia qua mercy killing.

Keywords: Cruelty, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Euthanasia, Infanticide, Mercy Killing, Nietzsche

Introduction

In the history of late modern philosophy, the 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is notorious (not to say 'famous') for his deliberate contravention of all philosophy hitherto, so much so that the twentieth century philosopher Martin Heidegger (1987) considered Nietzsche's philosophy (along with that of Friedrich Hegel) to be the "completion" of the Western tradition of "first philosophy" (*protē philosophia*), i.e., metaphysics. After all, Nietzsche had declared himself a "godless anti-metaphysician," rejecting all "onto-theo-logy" as conceived within this tradition.[1] The themes of Nietzsche's notorious thinking are well known—perspectivism,[2] the death of God, twilight of the idols, transvaluation/revaluation of all values, critique of nihilism, eternal recurrence of the same, the will to power, master morality vs. herd morality/slave morality, the *Übermensch (*Overman*)*, and *amor fati* (love of fate).

[1] Nietzsche (2001), "Aphorism 344." For an overview of various interpretive positions on Nietzsche's philosophical perspective on metaphysics, see Remhof (2021). 'Onto-theo-logy' refers to study of being(s) and study of the highest being (*theos*, god).

[2] Bernard Reginster (2000), p. 40, cites the definition given by David Hoy thus: "according to perspectivism, 'verification procedures are both internal and relative to the particular kinds of perspectives. There is no general epistemology to specify a single verification procedure that any particular perspective would have to satisfy…If perspectivism is true, then there could be beliefs different from, and perhaps incompatible with out own, which are, in some sense, justified, albeit in terms of principles, or 'verification procedures', different from our own."

In all of the foregoing, anyone reading Nietzsche's texts will find readily manifested therein his concern for the origin of human suffering and its relation to morality since the time of Greek antiquity, but especially as formulated in Christian theology. Nietzsche (2023) dispensed a severe critique of Christian doctrines that ostensibly explain the cause of human suffering. That is, he rejected traditional appeals to supernatural "imaginary" causes and supernatural "imaginary" effects, insisting instead on natural causes and effects.[3] The problem of human suffering unavoidably links to Nietzsche's concept of cruelty as a lived experience. However, of concern in the deliberation being advanced here is not cruelty in general such as Nietzsche expounds it. Rather, the concern of the present discussion is to interrogate one particular aphorism insofar as it relates an example of human suffering, and to expound Nietzsche's meaning, or at least a plausible meaning—bearing in mind, of course, that with Nietzsche one may present only a "perspective" on a particular theme, and never a definitive interpretation.

The aphorism at issue is No. 73, Book 2, in Nietzsche's *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*). It begins with a title: "*Heilige Grausamkeit*," "Holy Cruelty." The passage of text (in German and in English translation) is as follows:

> *Heilige Grausamkeit.* –Zu einem Heiligen trat ein Mann, der ein eben geborenes Kind in den Händen hielt. "Was sol ich mit dem Kinde machen?" fragte er, "es ist elend, mißgestaltet und hat nicht genug Leben, um zu sterben." "Töte es," rief der Heilige mit schrecklicher Stimme, "tote es und halte es dan drei Tage und drei Nächte lang in deinen Armen, auf daß du dir ein Gedächtnis machest—so wirst du nie wieder ein Kind zeugen, wenn es nicht an der Zeit für dich ist, zu zeugen."—Als der Mann dies gehört hatte, ginger enttäuscht davon; und viele tadelten den Heiligen, weil er zu Grausamkeit greaten hatte, den er hatte greaten, das Kind zu töten. "Aber is es nicht grausamer, es leben zu lassen?" sagte der Heilige. (Nietzsche, 2011)
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> *Holy cruelty*. A man holding a newborn in his hand approached a holy man. 'What should I do with this child?' he asked; 'it is wretched, misshapen, and doesn't have life enough to die' 'Kill it!' shouted the holy man with a terrible voice; 'kill it and hold it in your arms for three days and three nights to create a memory for yourself; thus you will never again beget a child when it is not time for you to beget.' When the man had heard this, he walked away disappointed; and many people reproached the holy man because he had advised a cruelty; for he had advised killing the child. 'But is it not crueler to let it live?' said the holy man. (Nietzsche, 2001)

The Interpretive Task

The foregoing aphorism seems to have no substantive engagement by Nietzsche scholars, which is surprising as a matter of commentary and interpretation of Nietzsche's moral psychology and his moral thinking more generally. Given contemporary moral sensibilities,[4]

[3] See Nietzsche (2023), *The Antichrist*, "Aphorism No. 15."

[4] See Porter and Gavin (2010). The authors write: "The prevailing public view on women who kill their babies is that they are either monsters or psychotic, or both," even though statistical data show that, "the murder of infants and children remains a significant problem," one that represents an "unfolding morbidity" linked to "existential torment" in those whose conduct is condemned thereby for violating "the sanctuary of childhood." On the latter see, Makyx (2023).

one might reasonably expect a reading and commentary on the aphorism that expresses reproach of the holy man's counsel to the father of the deformed child, given the general moral prohibition of infanticide, especially from those subscribing to a religiously grounded moral rationality.[5] And, the more pertinent question, of course, is whether the holy man's counsel expresses Nietzsche's own perspective on infanticide—not with reference to any and all possibilities of such an act, but specifically in the case of a newborn suffering from some wretched congenital deformity, such that a parent may, with some moral warrant, contemplate the question of "killing it" in an act of what today would be called "nonvoluntary euthanasia" ("mercy killing," "easeful death").[6] That said, it is to be noted, as philosopher Jeff McMahon (2012) reminds, that, "Almost everyone believes that infanticide is [morally] wrong," although at issue in the moral reasoning involved is "the scope of stringent moral constraints." Marina Benjamin (2017) perhaps states the point starkly: "There is—our culture assumes—no love so great as that of a parent for a child, and no crime so unequivocally evil as the murder of an innocent infant. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to suppose that this attitude is genetically determined. What could be a more basic evolutionary imperative than to protect one's offspring from harm?"[7]

Granted, there are in contemporary philosophical discourse utilitarian (and presumably metaphysical[8]) arguments propounded on this question.[9] In his *Practical Ethics*, e.g., the utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer (2011) argues that, "Defective infants lack [traits such as rationality, autonomy, and self-consciousness]," that "Human babies are not born self-aware," that "they are not persons," that "It does not seem wise to add to [society's] burden on limited resources by increasing the number of severely disabled children," in which case "Killing them…cannot be equated with killing normal human beings, or any other self-conscious beings." In *Should the Baby Live?* Singer and his co-author Helga Kuhse (1999) argue that parents may decide (i.e., have the moral authority to decide) whether "the infant's life will be so miserable or so devoid of minimal satisfaction that it would be inhumane or futile to prolong life."[10] Then, in an editorial published in 2013, Singer (2013) again offered his utilitarian ruminations (with reference to Jeremy Bentham) that there is "a plausible ground" to argue

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[5] 'Moral rationality' and 'practical rationality' will be used interchangeably here to refer to a particular moral framework of analysis, that framework including moral principles and/or a set of values and method of evaluating and resolving moral dilemmas.

[6] I use the term 'nonvoluntary euthanasia' in the sense more or less common in bioethics discourse. See, e.g., Ronald Munson (2012). Munson (p. 579),defines the term thus: "*Nonvoluntary euthanasia* includes those cases in which the decision about death is not made by the person who is to die. Here the person gives no specific consent or instructions, and the decision is made by the family, friends, or physicians." In relation to the issue of cruelty in relation to termination of the life of an impaired infant, Munson writes (p. 517):

> If we could speak of nature in human terms, we would often say that it is cruel and pitiless. Nowhere does it seem more heartless than in the case of babies born into the world with severe physical impairments and deformities. The birth of such a child transforms an occasion of expected joy into one of immense sadness. It forces the parents to make a momentous decision at a time when they are least prepared to reason clearly. Should they insist that everything be done to save the child's life? Or should they request that the child be allowed an easeful death?...No one involved in the situation can escape the moral agonies that it brings.

[7] See also, Daly and Wilson (1984) for commentary on a "sociobiological" analysis of human infanticide.

[8] See, e.g., Long (1988).

[9] See Tooley (1974).

[10] See also Sloane (1999).

that infanticide "should not be thought of as morally equivalent to the murder of beings who are capable of 'knowing what existence is' and of learning that beings like them can be, and sometimes are, killed."

Of course, responses to Singer, especially those published in public media, have taken issue with him as "a renowned apostle of infanticide," his reasoning represented to be "dangerous," "abrasive," and "violent" towards those who are disabled, his position on infanticide even accepting such death "with a happy face," and thus issuing what for many should be an "unspeakable" perspective in moral philosophy.[11] Yet, these perspectives of critique have their own moral rationality, most influenced in large degree by religious valuations that accord dignity to human life and to the lives of the newborn, all infants presumed to have a right to life *post-partum* that is inviolate. Yet, Nietzsche, as a student of ancient Greek moral sensibilities, likely would have juxtaposed this sort of moral framework to that of Spartan life experience and the literature of Greek tragedy. And, he would very likely remind, as Wu Mingren writes, that

> Infanticide is not only found in Greek mythology, but also practiced by the Greeks themselves…In Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* [16.1-2], the ancient writer reports that in Sparta, new-born babies would be taken to a place called Lesche, where they would be examined by the elders of the tribe. If the baby is found to be healthy, the father would be allowed to raise it. On the other hand, children found to be sickly or deformed would be sent to Mount Taygetos, where they were thrown into a chasm called the Apothetae (which means 'Deposits'). By this means, the Spartans ensured that only healthy individuals had a place in their society.[12]

Plutarch's explanation is clear: that a deformed child would be selected for death "on the grounds that it is neither better for themselves nor for the city to live [their] natural life poorly equipped."[13]

In his attention to the Greeks of antiquity, Nietzsche was familiar with, and critical of, Euripides's dramatic works (see *The Birth of Tragedy*, Book XI[14]), thus likely aware of

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[11] See Booth (2018), Hentoff (1999), and Klusendorf (2009/2023).

[12] "The Chilling Ancient Practice of Infanticide Was Once Accepted as Normal," (2019), https://www.ancient-origins.net/history/infanticide-0011396, accessed 24 September 2024. See further, Huys (1996), who characterizes the Spartan practice as "the eugenic selection of newborns."

[13] It is noteworthy that Andrew Curry (2021) is critical of the customary view and characterizes the supposed Spartan practice as "Plutarch's tale"—"But archaeological evidence and a closer look at literary sources suggests the legend may be pure myth." He refers to Sneed, "Disability and Infanticide in Ancient Greece."

[14] Nietzsche is critical of Euripides for a style of writing that emphasized "thought" over "instinct," for betraying the tradition of tragedy such as given in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides embarking "on an enormous campaign against the works of art of Aeschylus and Sophocles—not in the form of polemics, but as a dramatic poet who opposes his idea of tragedy to the traditional one" (Book 1). He writes, further: "What we now see revealed, indeed brilliantly illuminated, is the tendency of Euripides, which was to expel the original and all-powerful Dionysiac element from tragedy and to re-build tragedy in a new and pure form on the foundations of a non-Dionysiac art, morality, and view of the world" (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 12, p. 59). Critical of Euripidean rationality, Nietzsche observed: "Dionysus had already been chased from the tragic stage, and, what is more, by a daemonic power speaking out of the mouth of Euripides. In a certain sense Euripides, too, was merely a mask; the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysus, nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn daemon called *Socrates*. This is the new opposition: the Dionysiac versus the Socratic, and the work of art that was once Greek tragedy

Euripides's *Medea* (2008) and the tale told therein about Medea's murder of her two sons.[15] As represented in this classic text, the Greeks (at least as represented by Euripides) had a concept of guilt. Thus, e.g., Nietzsche would have been aware that Medea accused her husband Jason of guilt for abandoning his two sons—"whom he should love"—for the love of King Creon's daughter and a royal marriage (Line 91, 140), even as the tutor of the two boys tells Medea's nurse that it is unsurprising that, "each man loves himself more than his neighbor," a guilt, he opines, that is shared by all men. Medea, of course, bespeaks her suffering, her struggles so "unhappy" that she wishes she could die (Line 105), in which case she chastises the children: "O children, accursed, may you die—with your father!" (Line 119). Jason's guilt includes that of betraying his oath, witnessed and certified by the gods, Medea therefore appealing to both Themis, "the protectress of oaths" (Line 209), and Zeus "the enforcer of oaths" (Line 171) to witness her call for justice. Medea's motivation is clear—she is faced with an injustice; and, as she puts it, in that moment "there is no other mind more murderous" (Line 271). She is intent on killing Jason's betrothed princess "by deceit" (Line 399), even as she has "the utmost nerve" to do so (Line 402). But, that deceit is rational, not instinctive.

For the Greeks justice and piety require that a man perform his duty according to his oaths, the breach of which is itself an act of unholiness (impiety) before the gods, as Aegeus says to Medea (Line 777), in which case justice and holiness are in accord as virtue even as injustice and unholiness are adjoined as vice. Thereafter (at Line 811) Medea reveals her plan to murder the children, whom she "loves so dearly" (Line 816), which deed "chokes [her] with sorrow" (Line 811). And, the Chorus is unequivocal (Line 865)—once Medea murders the children she inescapably becomes a "most unholy woman." Thus, Medea deceives Jason as to her intentions (Lines 884-927), the Chorus lamenting that Jason is unaware of his fate (Line 1019) as Medea puts her plans into motion to cause the death of the princess-bride. And, as Euripides represents the matter, the gods are complicit in Medea's acts (Line 1035)—"The gods and I devised this strategy." Medea realizes that the pain of childbirth, the toil of child rearing, all was undertaken with hope and a mother's expectant "admirable fate." But, appealing to "the Furies," who are "the primordial spirits of vengeance" and "who live below in Hades," Medea then vows to preempt the murder of her children, expected in recompense for the death of the princess and king caused by Medea's deceitful gifts. And so, she yields to her "spirit," which is stronger than her "mind's deliberations"—"the source of mortals' deepest grief" (Line 1104), and thus the source of her own overwhelming grief.

The Chorus muses before Medea takes on her dreadful, yet fated, act: "What is the point, then, if the gods, adding on to the pains that we mortals endure for the sake of our children, send death, most distressing of all? Tell me, where does that leave us?" Hence, the act is by no means merely Medea's—it involves and inculpates the gods; for, they have the power to send death upon all who are mere mortals, even as Creon, mourning the death of his princess daughter, decried the god who had dishonored and destroyed her so (Line 1230). Yet,

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was destroyed by it." (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 12, p. 60). In this sense, then, Nietzsche would likely complain the Euripides's Medea acts with reason, not with instinct, and in that sense there is no tragic *ethos* in the sense one finds its dramatized in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

[15] See Henrichs (1986), who argues that Nietzsche "blames Euripides and Socrates—the sum total of Athenian rationalism before Plato—for [the demise of Greek tragedy," and thus for the demise of the tragic *ethos*. See also, Toledo (2021), Hinden (1981), Silk and Stern (1981), and Arnott (1984).

Medea knew there would be retribution against her sons for the death of the king and princess; and hence, she reasoned: "They must die anyway, and since they must, I will kill them. I'm the one who bore them" (Line 1265). To Medea's reasoning, the act was admittedly a necessary, even if terrible, crime (Line 1267), even if "an unholy deed," (Line 1267 and 1375), and even though the gods compel the fate of mere mortals such as she.

Bearing in mind this classic example from Greek drama, Nietzsche (1999) himself observed (with reference to Euripidean tragedy and in comparison to Descartes's certification of empirical reality in "the truthfulness of god"): "Euripides makes use of the same divine truthfulness again, at the end of the drama, in order to reassure the public about the future of his heroes; this is the task of the infamous *deus ex machina*."[16] The problem with Euripides's "aesthetic Socratism," in Nietzsche's view, is that it incorporates the theoretical (the perspective of "theoretical man," ἄνθωπος θεωρητικός) and the rational in opposition to the artful and instinctive—so much so, says Nietzsche, that "one also finds a profound *delusion* which first appeared in the person of Socrates," "namely the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of *correcting* it."

The foregoing speaks to contemporary moral-philosophical engagement of the question of infanticide, even though in the case of Euripides's *Medea* the children are not infants and are surely self-aware, hence Euripides's tale telling of a filicide rather than infanticide. But, nonetheless Euripides tells of an act that, in the Greek sensibility, combines cruelty and unholiness (impiety) in the deed. Yet, according to this sensibility and its moral rationality, fate plays its hand despite the hand played by mere mortals. As the final choral ode puts it (Lines 1464-1469):

> Zeus on Olympus enforces all things;
> the gods can accomplish what no one would hope for.
> What we expect may not happen at all,
> while the gods find a way, against all expectation,
> to do what they want, however surprising.
> And that is exactly how this case turned out.

It behooves use to recall the reference to utilitarian ethics with a reminder of Nietzsche's engagement of Greek antiquity and the tragic *ethos* such as it was represented in Greek poetry and by the dramatists such as Euripides in particular. The fact, of course, is that Nietzsche himself was not a utilitarian; and, he was rather critical of utilitarian moral philosophy insofar as (so he argued in *The Twilight of the Idols*) humanity (in general) does not strive for "happiness" (*Gluck*) such as the utilitarians conceive it, notwithstanding the fact that "the Englishman" does (thus, as do utilitarians such as J. Bentham and J.S. Mill) (Anomaly, 2005). Whatever interpretation of Aphorism 73 is to be given, it is not the utility or disutility of any given action that is at issue for Nietzsche. It is not a matter of moral action

[16].Toledo (2021, 73) provides a critical note on this claim, however, in writing: "…we can see that once again, Nietzsche prematurely applies an overly philosophical schema to the poet. Such an incoherence that would not have occurred if Nietzsche had taken into account two exponential works: *Medea* and *The Bacchae*, in which the appeals to deities, whether *ex machina* or not, do not incur redemptive denouement, quite the contrary."

undertaken in view of the good (beneficial) or bad (harmful) consequences that are expected to obtain from the given act as part of a quest for some "general good." Thus, it is not a matter of undertaking an action that contributes positively (or "optimally") to the general good and that accordingly reduces the comparative general disutility. That leaves us, then, with an ambiguous interpretive task in the engagement of the aphorism, since it is not immediately clear what Nietzsche means or why he presents the view given therein.

Analyzing the Text of the Aphorism

In his *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872, new preface published in 1886), Nietzsche tells of a tale in which "the wise [demigod] Silenus, the companion of Dionysus," answers a question posed by King Midas, though the demigod averred it would be "most expedient" for the king not to hear the answer. Why not? Because, Silenus continued (with seeming derisory laughter at the king's persistence), "What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*." After all, the demigod had remarked, humans are a "wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery." Yet, he allowed: "the second best for you is—to die soon" (Nietzsche, 1999, 22-23).

Nietzsche's view of human suffering is consonant with these claims from Silenus. For him human existence is, indeed, wretched, filled with meaningless suffering and cruelty. Yet, Nietzsche is not a nihilist—he does not dismiss the value of human existence, despite the reality of existential torment. He does not think that one can or should "correct" existence, i.e., what "Nature" delivers over to us as "fate." He prefers a trans-valuation (or re-valuation) of values,[17] a "yes" to life on that basis (hence his commitment to *amor fati*), an acceptance of human suffering for the ineradicable reality that it is, but with a revaluation that eliminates the false Christian quest for eventual redemption through supernatural causes, and that issues from the Christian sense of sin and guilt and the self-condemnation that follows from this valuation. Hence, it is unlikely Nietzsche would concur with Silenus's response that, given the fact of one's birth and one's life one should accept the counsel and simply "die soon," no matter the means. Rather, he would likely quote Goethe and say, "*ceterum censeo*," "but I'm of the opinion…" or, "I judge otherwise" (as Nietzsche says in the "Foreword" to his *Untimely Meditations*). What is at stake here, however, is the valuation that permits the perspective such as Silenus asserts, but also any valuation that interrogates the causes of human suffering and that seeks to provide some meaningful remedy acceptable to either human sensibility or reason.

Nietzsche recognized the power of valuations, how they are both useful and abused in the context of human history (better said, the *narratives* of that history, as given in historiography and other types of discourse representative of a given culture).[18] This is particularly so for those who characterize the ancient Greeks as exemplified in Homeric epic poetry and in the tragic dramas of such as Euripides and Sophocles, as well as in the dialectic ("Apollonian") rationality of Socrates and Plato, both in contrast to the Judeo-Christian (and especially the Pauline Christian) "table of values." Especially at issue for Nietzsche is the

[17] For a thoughtful discussion of Nietzsche's concept of transvaluation or revaluation, see Kranak (2014).

[18] Friedrich Nietzsche (1997), "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life."

moral rationality that is fundamental to these valuations and that determines an individual's sense of self-worth or self-pity (and thus self-affirmation or self-condemnation), what counts as "the true, the good, and the beautiful"—if indeed such are to be had in the world of lived experience that discloses so much of human existential torment. Nietzsche ("Foreword," 1997) approved of Goethe's refrain as a welcome comportment toward life—"In any case, I hate everything that merely instructs me without augmenting or directly invigorating [enlivening] my activity." What matters to Nietzsche is what conduces to life, *without guilt*, thus without privileging any judgment of guilt.[19]

The Title of the Aphorism

Our effort at interpretation should begin with the title of the aphorism. Why does Nietzsche speak of a cruelty that is holy? How can cruelty be holy? Is this juxtaposition of ideas merely oxymoronic, an expression of Nietzsche's polemical style, or instead to be taken as contradictory, at least *prima facie* so? Or, is Nietzsche being deliberately hyperbolic, provocative, even ironic here, but seeking to teach us through that irony? None of this is clear. We have only our speculations, no grounded conclusions.

In the Christian tradition, of course, cruelty is considered to be evil, a phenomenon of human conduct that is contrary to divine imperatives, while holiness is reserved for all that corresponds to that which is divine in substance or otherwise ascribed so by extension—e.g., in a set of texts such as the "Holy" Scriptures; or as in a given trait accorded a prince of the Church (e.g., "the Holy Father," denominating the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church); or as in a sacrament of that church (e.g., "Holy" Matrimony, "Holy Unction," etc.). Yet, if one sets aside the Christian valuation here, and appropriates instead a valuation such as Nietzsche prefers in a post-Christian, post-metaphysical, value dispensation, then the juxtaposition of 'holy' and 'cruelty' is permitted. And, in that case, the juxtaposition, while provocative insofar as it challenges Christian moral sensibilities, has a meaning Nietzsche intends in the text that is given.

The Text of the Aphorism

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[19] The Greeks, of course, had a concept of guilt, of which Nietzsche was quite aware. Thus, e.g., he would have been aware of Euripides's *Medea*, in which Jason is accused of guilt for abandoning his two sons—"whom he should love"—for the love of Creon's daughter and a royal marriage (Line 91, 140), even as the tutor of the two boys tells Medea's nurse that, "each man loves himself more than his neighbor," a guilt shared by all men. Medea, of course, bespeaks her suffering, her struggles so "unhappy" that she wishes she could die (Line 105), in which case she chastises the children: "O children, accursed, may you die—with your father!" (Line 119). Jason's guilt includes that of betraying his oath, witnessed and certified by the gods, Medea appealing to both Themis, "the protectress of oaths" (Line 209) and Zeus "the enforcer of oaths" (Line 171). Medea's motivation is clear—she is faced with an injustice, and as she puts it, in that moment, "there is no other mind more murderous" (Line 271). She is intent on killing Jason and his bethrothed "by deceit" (Line 399), even as she has "the utmost nerve" to do so (Line 402). Justice requires that a man perform according to his oaths, and breach of which is itself an act of unholiness before the gods (as Aegeus says to Medea, Line 777), in which case justice and holiness are in accord even as injustice and unholiness are in accord. Thereafter (at Line 811) Medea reveals her plan to murder the children, whom she "loves so dearly" (Line 816), which deed "chokes [her] with sorrow" (Line 811). And the Chorus is unequivocal (Line 865)—to murder the children is to become a "most unholy woman."

a. Nietzsche does not clarify *how* or *why* or *with what warrant* the holy man is said to be "holy" (and one must be careful to consider that Nietzsche may be deliberately equivocal here). We know only that the forlorn father approaches the holy man for his counsel. It seems a normal course of action, nothing out of the ordinary in and of itself. Since, in the context of the Christian valuation there can be no holiness that includes cruelty, and since a Christian cleric would not likely prescribe infanticide contrary to the explicit divine imperative prohibiting murder, then, given his counsel to the father, this holy man is very unlikely to be a Christian cleric. Hence, we should not think him to be such. His "holiness" derives from some other source—bearing in mind that 'holiness' here is not, therefore, the kind that derives from transcendent or supernatural causes. And, for Nietzsche, this source must allow for the juxtaposition of 'holiness' and 'cruelty', and thereby, with unspoken warrant, allow for *this* holy man to counsel an act such that those receiving or hearing the counsel find it to be at once disappointing (i.e., not what they expected or would have expected from him) and even reproachful (thus, their moral sensibility being different from that of the holy man, in which case they take issue with the holy man and his counsel).

b. Next, the father is clearly unhappy about his newborn's condition, not knowing what to do with the child. He describes the child as wretched, seemingly because it is misshapen. It is unclear what he means in saying that the child does not have enough life to die (*hat nicht genug Leben, um zu sterben*), in and of itself a peculiar expression that seems dissonant in the moment one hears it. That is, it sounds "out of tune," as it were. One would expect the father to say instead that the child has not enough life *to live*, in which case we could understand that the child is moribund, whatever the cause of its deformity, and there may then be no cause for active effort at preserving the life of the newborn. Yet, the father seems to think the child perhaps *should* have died, should *be* dead, according to the natural pathology at work in the child's body—except that, to his reckoning, the child's physiological capacity is itself deficient to contribute readily and with efficacy to the child's active dying, as opposed to contributing to its living. Hence, inasmuch as the child lacks the vigor needed for active dying, the father seeks a remedy, perhaps to assist the child's deficient physiology to proceed more readily towards its natural death, sooner rather than later.

c. Then comes the counsel from the holy man. The imperative is terse, explicit, without reservation, and unconditional. The father is to kill the newborn (*Töte es*). Significantly, the word the holy man chooses concerns "killing," not "murder" (i.e., he does not say, "*Mord es"*), the difference of which is significant as a matter of both law and morality. An act of killing in and of itself is neither immoral nor illegal. An act of murder, in contrast, is considered both immoral and illegal, at least when viewed from the Christian valuation that Nietzsche rejects, of course. But, even so, the holy man does not counsel the killing be undertaken with any sense of violence, malice, or joy. There is no suggestion of something like the Freudian *schadenfreude* (joy in suffering) that the father should feel in killing the child. The next point of counsel is therefore important.

d. Presumably, after killing the infant, by whatever means he himself is to choose, the father must perform yet a further act—he must hold the infant in his arms for three days and three nights. One wonders: What is the significance of this time frame? Again, Nietzsche may be polemical and ironic here. The referent is manifestly biblical, since the Gospels report that Jesus was entombed after his death, and it is said that he was dead for three days and three nights before being resurrected. In that sense, the designated time frame is a motif, perhaps having meaning to the father if he is of Christian religious sensibility. It may provide an implicit assurance—the child will die, but he will be resurrected, though perhaps not in "this world." But, the *purpose* of this act to be taken by the father is likewise significant: so that the father thereby *creates a memory for himself*. What is the purpose of this memory? Following Nietzsche's text here, the memory is to serve the father in and for his *future* conduct, specifically to preempt a similar outcome of congenital malformation in a future newborn, so that the father will never again beget a child *in an untimely manner*, i.e., when it is *not the right time* for him to beget a child. The presupposition is that in present case, the child was begotten in an untimely manner and, hence, the implication is that the infant's wretched condition is *explainable* by the fact that it was begotten in an untimely way. This is all a matter of *natural* causation—there is, therefore, no implication of either the father having either sin or guilt, in which case the father need not concern himself with either.

e. The foregoing point is to be related to what Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Part One, "On Free Death"—"*Vom freien Tode*"), where Zarathustra observes that, "Many die too late, and some die too early," but also that there is a doctrine to be heeded insofar as Zarathustra teaches it—"Die at the right time!" This, of course, suggests a choice, a determined intervention. The infant's life and death are at issue, one may say, taking the cue from Zarathustra's words, such that this wretched child did not *live* "at the right time" and, hence, it could not *die* "at the right time" either. In such a case, Zarathustra would say of one who could neither live nor die at the right time: "Would that he were never born!" Thus, presumably, it would have been "better" if the infant had never been born (just as the demigod Silenus said to King Midas), given that this child is capable of neither actively living nor actively dying at the right time, having insufficient life to die (as the father seemingly hoped, awaiting the infant's lingering somewhere between life and death). There are some, Zarathustra reminds, for whom "life fails: a poisonous worm eats its way to their heart. Let them see to it that their dying succeeds all the more." Thus, it seems the holy man's counsel here is that in the case of one whose life fails, whose birth is untimely, one may expect that its dying *should* succeed all the more. In present case of the father's wretched infant, it seems its life fails it, in which case its dying *should* succeed. But, the question is, of course: by what means?

Zarathustra states his desire: "Would that preachers of the *quick* death came! They would be the right storms and shakers of trees of life for me! But I hear only preaching of the slow death and patience with all things 'earthly'." The reference here

is to the holy men of the Christian valuation, who seek to preserve life at all cost, in view of a seemingly inviolate divine imperative. In this case, however, the holy man seems to counsel *a quick death* for the wretched child, and in that sense perhaps counsels a "holy cruelty." In this sense, perhaps it is to be said that this holy man is a preacher of the quick death, hence one who subscribes to and preaches a different valuation, not being a preacher of "the slow death," such as are the Christian clerics who preserve life at all costs. This holy man does not counsel slow death or even patience with the child's congenital deformity as it is, for whatever length of time might be needed to await its natural demise or, otherwise, to "correct" existence, the infant's existence, through some intervention. That would mean the child dies "too late," and thus has an "untimely" death. Following the holy man's counsel, then, the father could kill the newborn child without being contemptible of himself—especially if he thinks the child's suffering "undeserved," in as much as every child is deemed "innocent" of sin and, therefore, has no guilt as such. The holy man's imperative to the father permits the father to exercise his "human" mercy, rather than await whatever "divine" mercy might obtain in the natural course of events without his willful intervention.

f. Of course, it is unclear what the father will do. He walks away. He is disappointed in the holy man's counsel. Why the disappointment? Because, one may surmise, he expected a different counsel from this holy man, a counsel more compassionate perhaps, a counsel more akin to that of Christian sensibility, an expression of sympathy if not empathy, a prayer and absolution as release of the father from guilt and sin, since the birth of this newborn is likely perceived to be evidence of divine punishment for the father's sins.

Those standing about observing the moment of interaction between the father and the holy man are also disappointed. They responded with reproach of the holy man. They disagreed with his counsel, and so they took issue with him. Nevertheless, the holy man was not moved by their reproach to rescind his counsel. On the contrary, he challenged them with his evaluative question: "But is it not crueler to let it live?" ("*Aber es nicht grausamer, es leben zu lassen?*") The question is left hanging in the air. No response is given. We, too, are left suspended, seeking an answer to that question. We, too, are called to give an answer, if well we might. Where is the greater cruelty—in letting the newborn live its life, lingering in its torment, disfigured in its deformity, its physiology and pathology at odds one against the other, as it has not enough life to die, and maybe even letting it live to the point that it is conscious of its suffering, so that thereby there is both physical and mental suffering compounded? Or, is the greater cruelty to be found in killing the child, assisting this misshapen newborn in its dying, exercising a human mercy, not awaiting an indeterminate time at which a divine mercy *may*—or *may not*—be forthcoming? Which "cruelty" is one to choose? And that, indeed, is the point: There is room for *choice*, room for the *father* to choose, though he may *think* otherwise as he does not contemplate such agency.

"Rational Death"

The element of choice is central here. One recalls at this point "The Wanderer and His Shadow" in Nietzsche's *Human All Too Human* (§185). There, Nietzsche introduces the concept of "rational death" (*vernünftigen Tode*), which is pertinent here in present discussion. It matters to *his* moral sensibility that Nietzsche turns away from the superstitions of religious metaphysics, in which case there is no concern for sin, guilt, divine punishment, or imperatives that have their provenance in some transcendent source of authority, including thereby any imperative that proscribes killing. What matters to Nietzsche is the *healthy* development of *life*, not the perpetuation of a disabled life that is (on some views) parasitical upon the healthy. Since a congenital deformity has only natural causes, it is not to be represented as a divine castigation upon the parent, neither the father nor the mother. It is what it is simply as a natural phenomenon of the infant's human nature (*homo natura*) and gestation in that sense, as Nietzsche might say, given his sense of this as expressed in *Beyond Good and Evil* (§230). From this point of view, an act of mercy killing is *life affirming*, despite the apparent contradiction, given that, for Nietzsche (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 54-55), quick death is preferable to slow death.

Accordingly, one must consider how Nietzsche understands "rational death."[20] He introduces an analogy and asks: "What is more rational, to stop the machine when the work one demands of it has been completed—or to let it run until it stops of its own accord, that is to say, until it is ruined? Is the latter not a squandering of the costs of maintenance, a misuse of the energy and attentiveness of those who service it?" The criterion of judgment here is Nietzsche's sense of rationality that appeals to natural causes and natural effects, despite the reference to the utility or disutility involved and the wastage or misuse of human energy. Thus, one may ask concerning what is represented in the aphorism: What "life," what *kind* of life, does the father "demand" of the newborn by "letting" it "live" (bearing in mind here Nietzsche's emphasis on the vitality of life and not mere living)? The question is loaded with critical force: To *let* the newborn live is not some merely passive act; it is in fact to *demand* that the newborn continue its suffering, and the father's conduct proceeds accordingly. One asks further: To what *end*, goal, purpose, does the father "let" the newborn live? And, for *whose* purpose is this child to live? Is it to live to the end/goal/purpose of *exhausting* its suffering *to its very limit*, the limit such that this life is *ruined wholly* through that suffering? Is this eventuality of suffering "to the limit" *rational* in view of the natural cause and natural effect of that particular life?

Clearly, one cannot, on *this* rationality, appeal to any divine restraint upon an act of mercy killing. At issue is only the demand the father makes on the newborn's life that he already declares to be wretched because of the infant's misshapen body. A "natural" death is what occurs according to the *pathology* of the body and that alone as natural cause. Knowing this, one may set aside the salvific interventions such as a physician or "caretaker" (in this case, the infant's father) would provide according to some real or imagined moral obligation. But, a "rational" death is, in this case, the free choice of the father and, thereby, if taken freely then a "courageous" choice. He seeks, if he makes this free choice, a "free death" for the wretched newborn child. The father—so it seems from the holy man's remarks—did not know

[20] For a fuller discussion, see Wienand et al., (2018).

"the right time" to conceive and beget the child; but he can *know* and *choose* "the right time" for this child's death, i.e., its *quick* death that is the *rational* death that terminates its suffering long prior to that suffering reaching its limit. In choosing this child's quick death, the father then is called to swear an oath *to himself*, consistent with the "memory" he forms. To what end?—to the end of assuring a healthy life in any prospective newborn, and avoiding the procreation of a deformed child as occurred in present case.

There is a further point here. In *Human All Too Human* (§88), Nietzsche is unequivocal: "There is a right according to which we may deprive a man of life, but none that permits us to deprive him of death: this is mere cruelty." To deprive a man of death is mere cruelty (Nietzsche thus inverts the expected assertion, 'To deprive a man of life is cruelty'). Public law—e.g., a statute authorizing capital punishment—is clearly one ostensibly legitimate basis for a "legal right" to deprive a person of life. The laws of just war are another insofar as they authorize killing of combatants. But, Nietzsche states an unusual point here. Is there any *right*—legal, moral, political, economic, cultural, etc.—that permits us to deprive a person of his or her *death*, his or her *own* death? With what authority is someone to be deprived of his or her death, if so? And, if there is no authority to be found, no authority having warrant, then *why* is someone to be deprived of his or her death, i.e., a death that *belongs solely to him or her*, that is, in short, a *free choice*, a *free death*, and in that sense a "rational" death (again without appeal to utility)?

Return again to the analogy. In §185 (emphasis added) of *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche tells us concerning the machine that is being wasted,

> Are we not propagating a kind of *contempt* of the machines, in the sense that many of them are so *uselessly* maintained and operated?—I am speaking of involuntary (*natural*) and voluntary (*reasonable*) death. Natural death is *independent of all reason* and is really an *unreasonable* death, in which the pitiable substance of the shell determines how long the kernel should exist or not; in which, accordingly, the deteriorating, ailing and dull jailer is lord and indicates the moment at which his noble prisoner shall die. Natural death is the *suicide* of nature—in other words, the annihilation of the *rational being* through the *irrational being* that is attached thereto. Only a religious perspective can make the reverse appear; for them as is equitable, the higher reason (God) issues its orders, which the lower reason has to obey. *Outside religious thought pattern natural death is not worth glorifying*.—The wise dispensation and disposal of death belongs to that now quite incomprehensible and immoral-sounding morality of the future, whose dawn must be an indescribable bliss to behold.

One can ask in similar manner, as Nietzsche seemingly intends here: Are we not propagating a kind of *contempt* of *human life* when we "uselessly," even *abusively*, preserve ("let live") a human life and deliberately *deprive* it of its own death, i.e., its quick death, its free death, its rational death? What is it that is being preserved? A shell of a life (the body), regarded (from a religious valuation) as a "pitiable" substance, the conjoined physiology and pathology of which determine how long it should live by natural means and thus have a natural death? By whose ostensibly legitimate "demand" is this shell of a life being preserved? Or, is the demand perceptibly, even explicably, illegitimate in view of the "moral" (or "immoral") valuation that grounds and motivates it? All that one finds in the body as body is a "non-rational" process—

it has no reason to it, even as the human body is non-rational, merely the natural interplay of the physiology and pathology that moves it, sustains it, deteriorates it, etc. Does one (i.e., one having religious sensibility) tacitly, if not explicitly, "glorify" human life no matter how it presents itself to our lived experience, therefore even as in the case of the infant who suffers manifestly *wretched torment from its body,* as the father himself declares to be a matter of fact?

For Nietzsche the "morality of the future" refuses the supposed "higher reason" (divine) that superintends the "lower reason" (human). "In truth," Nietzsche would say, there is no *originalis intellectus* ("God") in relation to a *derivatum intellectum* (human). In that case, "truth be told," there is no higher reason superintending the father's reason for a decision as to what is to be done with the child. *He must choose,* according to *his own reason,* even as proxy for the infant that is manifestly incapable of such decision. If one champions Nietzsche's doctrine of *amor fati*, such that "One [*must*] love it," then one can either accept or reject the holy man's counsel to the father, without placing before one the counterfactual reflection '*If only I had…*' or '*If only it were so rather than as it is*'. Instead, perhaps Nietzsche would say, as he put it in Aphorism No. 2 of *The Antichrist*: "*The weak and the unfortunate should perish: the first sentence of our human love. And one should also help them*" (italics added). Thus, if the "fate" of the father and the newborn "must be" ("*es muss sein*") as *amor fati* would have it, then the father is expected to accept *his* and *the child's* fate—and love it as such. The father is counseled to hold the child in his arms for three days and three nights—for what purpose? To provide him time for thoughtful reflection. In other words, "To give such weight to the moment is to focus one's attention, to block distracting projections into the distant future or the merely nostalgic past" (Solomon and Higgins, 2000). The father's focus allows him time to create the memory, presumably thereby assuring that any subsequent newborn will be conceived and begotten "at the right time."

But, there is also the question of pity. Does the father pity the infant for its wretched pathological condition? If so, one may ask, what is his motivation? Does the father disclose (unwittingly) his sense of "superiority" to his "inferior" child through his pity, wishing that, contrary to fact, the child would have been born otherwise than it is? As far as the holy man is concerned (and perhaps thereby also Nietzsche), the father's "untimely" procreative act is a contributing cause—but a natural cause—of the child's pathological state. The deformity is a morbid natural effect that contraposes any presumed legitimacy of any feeling that might "justify" the father's superiority (meaning here that, as the "normal" assumption goes, 'it is better for any human to be born without deformity', deformity (supposedly) an obvious manifestation of an "inferior" human being). Of course, in *The Antichrist* (Aphorism No. 7), Nietzsche reminds that Christianity is the religion of compassion. No doubt, a Christian is expected to be compassionate in his or her interpersonal relations. And, one might say a Christian is especially to be compassionate with an innocent newborn life, even if misshapen, even if "wretched" thereby. The father, if he *were* Christian in his moral sensibility, *would* have to desist from any such sense of superiority that consequently *depreciates* the life of his misshapen newborn. For Nietzsche, however, the Christian practice of compassion crosses (violates, disrupts) "the law of selection" insofar as this compassion "preserves what is ripe for destruction," doing so out of "pity" and "defend[ing] itself in favor of the disinherited and condemned of life"—a harsh statement, perhaps, but Nietzsche's perspective nonetheless.

Concluding Critical Remarks

The foregoing seems to be a reasonable interpretive "perspective" attributable to Nietzsche on the question of infanticide in the case of a disabled, congenitally malformed, infant. As a matter of statutory law, but also as a matter of a newborn's fundamental human right to life in relation to human rights doctrine today, of course, infanticide is without question a crime in most societies. But, separately from what is stipulated in and as positive law, the act of infanticide *can* have its *moral* warrant such as Nietzsche understands it to be defensible, i.e., from a critique of a religiously grounded moral rationality such as articulated in Christian doctrine. Morally, we have seen, there is also a contrary position advanced by some such as Singer in the camp of utilitarian rationality.

Even so, the analysis of Aphorism 73 as presented here raises further questions about what *this interpretation* may imply in contemporary moral deliberation, even as one may argue that one can speak (even if only "in a Nietzschean way") of a "perspective" and not of some unequivocal "truth" of the matter at hand such as a metaphysical realist may desire or require.[21] Unavoidably, it seems, moral rationality and one or another religious sensibility are inextricably engaged when it comes to contemporary discussions such as the foregoing about what to do at the moment that a newborn presents the parents and medical staff with a congenital malformation (whether subject to a reasonably efficacious medical intervention or not, 'not' understood with reference to the concept of medical futility). Thus, either way, there are moral prejudices involved to determine the course of deliberation and decision.

Sometimes these prejudices are explicit, sometimes tacit. But, to be consistent with a hermeneutics of practical rationality, it is especially important to make such prejudices explicit.[22] Nietzsche obviously has his own prejudices concerning moral rationality, in which case his perspectivism[23] is but one moral framework within the *agon* of contestation of both concepts of justice and frameworks of rationality (to use a concept advanced by moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1998)). Nietzsche himself understood this. Even so, as R. Lanier Anderson reminds, "Given that perspectivism is only one view (by its own standards), it seems that the perspectivist [such as Nietzsche, one may add] cannot offer any principled theoretical grounds for preferring her epistemology over its dogmatic competitors."[24] Furthermore, as Anderson adds, "The incompatibility of cognitive perspectives is the source of this self-referential difficulty. In the most extreme cases, perspectives may have differences in their standards of rationality and theory choice which make them not simply *incompatible*,

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[21] For discussion of this issue, see Strong (1985). Strong observes: "Most commentators have assumed that perspectivism is Nietzsche's attempt to given an account of how knowledge of the world is (or is not) possible. An obvious range of conclusions has been reached: For some Nietzsche is successful in that he establishes a credible epistemological position; for other the position is coherent but incorrect; for still others his is an impossible and self-contradictory enterprise," although Strong notes that "there is reason…to doubt that epistemology is what Nietzsche has in mind." However, see Hales and Welshon (1994) and Hales (2020), "Chapter 2: Nietzsche's Epistemic Perspectivism." Also see, more recently, Lewin (2024).

[22] One has in mind here the philosophical work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose *Truth and Method* and *Philosophical Hermeneutics* engage this issue of prejudice in rational deliberation and matters of practical reasoning in particular.

[23] For a discussion of 'perspectivism' in relation to relativism and metaphysical realism, see Lanier Anderson, (1998).

[24] Anderson, "Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism," 7.

but *incommensurable* world views, in the sense that they cannot be measured in any common standard."[25]

That said, even as MacIntyre himself rejects perspectivism and relativism, nonetheless the claim from the argument about the plurality of concepts of justice and practical rationality is that there can be, in the contestation of moral frameworks, a *prevailing* line of reasoning (e.g., MacIntyre himself prefers virtue ethics over modernist conceptions of practical rationality, even as he eventually commits to a Thomist account). However, Reginster (2000) argues that Nietzsche solves his seeming "problem of justification by adopting a strategy of internal criticism: he criticizes value judgments by showing that they are not acceptable *by the very lights of the perspective from which they are made*." In other words, Reginster adds, "criticism in terms internal to the perspective under consideration is meant to *replace* criticism in terms of objective 'foundational' standards." In the given Aphorism 73, when the holy man asks his question as to which action is "more cruel," he is, in effect, engaged in an act of internal criticism as he contests those who reproach him for his counsel, since at issue is *their* concept of cruelty and the way in which *they* measure it.

Thus, it is noteworthy when juxtaposing matters of human physiology and pathology that a physiologist such as R. Sullivan (2001) speaks to the issue of prejudice and discrimination against individuals suffering from some physical deformity. 'Deformity' (in Nietzsche's aphorism—'*mißgestaltet*') is the correct word here, not 'disability', whether congenital or acquired, although in present account the deformity is congenital, i.e., the newborn of which the father speaks is "misshapen" at birth.[26] Insofar as deformity may be represented in *aesthetic* terms as well as moral terms, thus it is evaluated in a context that distinguishes beauty and ugliness as well as good and evil (at least in the manner in which Nietzsche would evaluate the phenomenon) (Paris, 2017).

Sullivan (2001) accounts for the "negative stereotype" that makes physical deformity a matter of social discrimination in Western society. But, Sullivan also accounts for the difference in view held by the ancient Egyptians, in which "deformity was viewed favourably, even as a mark of divine beneficence, elevating those affected [e.g., dwarfs] from all social strata to important magico-ritualistic positions." Further, Sullivan (2001) comments, "In Egypt the artist [who represents deformity, e.g., in dwarfs and hunchbacks] does not attempt to 'beautify' deformity which suggests that there was a prevailing attitude of cultural acceptance of deformity." Important to the interpretive context is the fact that even Egyptian divinity could include deformity, in contrast to the "perfection" of being that characterizes "God" in the Christian dogma. Thus, Sullivan (2001) continues, "As compared to later religions [think here Christianity], deformity may not have been viewed as an expression of sin and punishment meted out in consequence. In Ancient Egypt physical deformity may have been received as a positive mark of divinity."

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[25] Anderson, "Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism," 8.

[26] For a related discussion, see Joshua (2017), "Chapter 4: Disability and Deformity: Function Impairment and Aesthetics in the Long Eighteenth Century," 47-61. Joshua remarks: "Deformities are usually understood in aesthetic terms, without explicitly referencing function."

The genealogy of the idea of deformity and its value or disvalue includes a significant contrast between the Egyptian and the ancient Greek and Roman. Some may find it surprising, as Sullivan reminds, that Aristotle (*Politics*, Bks. VII, 1335a[27]) "[proposed] a law to prevent parents rearing deformed children," even as (as already noted) "In Sparta parents were legally obliged to abandon deformed infants to their death," given that "a belief that deformed children were an expression of divine anger is certainly present in early Greek literature, e.g., in the works of Hesiod…" Further, "the Romans regarded the birth of a deformed child as portentous," with "Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, acknowledg[ing] that the body determined the 'shape' of the soul. This belief in the shape of the body determining the quality of the soul is still found in Western culture through the maxim *'Mens sana in corpore sano*'".[28] Thus, if a newborn is not healthy of body due to congenital deformity, the assumption is that it will not be healthy of soul (*psuchē*, mind).

The foregoing analysis makes it clear that infanticide may be deemed morally warranted according to one or another religious sensibility or utilitarian rationality, or, as with Nietzsche, according to a plausible concept of "rational," "free," "quick" death. Ultimately, there can be a moral resolution to the question of infanticide, but its "justification" is to be found unavoidably in one or another practical/moral rationality with or without religious sensibility. Despite its dissonance in relation to many contemporary ethical reflections, Nietzsche's "*Heilige Grausamkeit*" nonetheless provides one such rationality. Indeed, it is one manner of response one might make in relation to an anonymously authored article in *The Atlantic* from the year 1957, in which the author wrote,

> There is a new way of dying today. It is the slow passage via modern medicine. If you are very ill modern medicine can save you. If you are going to die it can prevent you from so doing for a very long time.
>
> We cannot inquire from the dead what they have felt about this deterrent. As they fight for spiritual release, and are constantly dragged back by modern medicine to try again, does their agony augment? (Anonymous, 1957, 53)

That is a question anyone engaged in clinical ethics and in the debate in biomedical ethics about death and dying with dignity cannot but consider seriously.[29] Nietzsche may well have spoken against the medical *ethos* characterized in the above passage, even as he likely

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[27] Aristotle (1959), *Politics*, pp. 623-624: "…in all the states where it is the local custom to mate young men and young women, the people are deformed and small of body….Let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared…and if any people have a child as a result of intercourse in contravention of these regulations, abortion must be practiced on it before it has developed sensation and life; for the line between lawful and unlawful abortion will be marked by the fact of having sensation and being alive."

[28] Sullivan, "Deformity—A Modern Western Prejudice with Ancient Origins," 262.

[29] For those interested in further reading, see Zucker and Zucker (1997). See also Gawande (2014), who, as a practicing surgeon and public health specialist, is concerned about how we (medical practitioners and society) respond to "the unfixable" (i.e., what lacks a "technological fix") when human bodies suffer from terminal disease; how living (quality of life) relates to the process of dying notwithstanding the stated prognosis; how to align medical care to the priorities of the patient as a person, thus accounting for human dignity; how living is not just a matter of survival; how fears for the present relate to fears for the future, and, most importantly, in such moments having to yield to the fact of our "being mortal," despite the physician's morally grounded determination to preserve a human life to the best of his or her technical ability.

preferred—where “rational,” where “justified,” according to the internal coherence of his perspective—the “quick, free death” to the “slow death” that modern medicine sustains on some notion of beneficence in relation to a principled commitment to non-maleficence. Nietzsche’s question therefore resonates even still: Which is “the greater cruelty” in any decision, in any “demand,” *to let live* rather than *to let die*?

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