

The Pain(s) of Modernity: From Nietzsche's Overman to Transhumanism

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Pain as *Conditio Humana*

The early twentieth century constitutes a cultural epoch in which the significance and metaphors of bodily pain were renegotiated on multiple levels and placed into question. This article demonstrates how the emerging discourse succeeded in bundling previously disparate motifs- cultural decline, the perceived failures of modern natural science, and the notion of pain as a catalyst of fateful forces- into a coherent intellectual framework. The consequence was a far reaching rupture with naïve faith in progress and with a bourgeois world and value order, a rupture that heralded the onset of modernity.

Pain has long belonged to the *conditio humana* alongside birth, death, and mortality. Fantasies of eternal life, of bodies that endure unblemished through the ages, continually rejuvenated by literal or metaphorical fountains of youth, have fascinated the visual arts and literature as culturally sanctioned compensatory myths since time immemorial [1]. Lucas Cranach the Elder staged this theme opulently in the sixteenth century in his painting *The Fountain of Youth*. The topos endures into twenty first century popular media: examples include the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films (2011) and adventures in contemporary video games in which protagonists search for rejuvenating elixirs [2]. Yet however powerfully rendered in image or word, most writers, thinkers and artists of earlier centuries arrive at the sobering conclusion that a rejuvenated human would merely repeat the follies he regretted in old age, precisely because of his intractable and divided nature. Since the biblically narrated expulsion from Paradise, pain has been intimately bound up with human existence. In Luther's translation of Genesis we read the suggestive verses: "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you' " (Gen. 3:16 ff.). Thus, at least in the biblical register, pain, desire and asymmetrical power relations appear together at the outset of creaturely existence. Whatever else humanity may be according to this anthropology, it is certainly one thing: an experiencer of pain.

This article takes the phenomenon of pain as an occasion to sketch a history of ideas from antiquity to modernity. Pain is not a constant fact of life that remains identical in every epoch. It is a profoundly bodily phenomenon that is culturally differentiated

and socially coded. Each particular codification incorporates cosmological outlooks, master narratives and philosophical interpretive schemes that contribute to our understanding of the animal dolens-the suffering animal that human beings essentially are. The argument carries the reader from ancient conceptions of pain through Nietzsche's figure of the *Übermensch* to contemporary formulations of transhumanism, which represent a new anthropological model.

Pain as a Coordinate of Meaning Formation

The conceptualization of pain in antiquity was a multifaceted phenomenon that was addressed on physical, psychological and spiritual levels [3]. Since what has been called the Axial Age, philosophical and religious systems have sought to construct coordinative frameworks in which pain could be given some form of interpretation and meaning. Stoicism, for example, aimed at ataraxia-tranquillity of the soul-and the suppression of perturbing affects (ibid.: 79). Epicureanism privileged eudaimonia and apatheia, understood as the absence of bodily pain. Aristotle acknowledged pain as an ineradicable part of life but situated the experience of pain and pleasure within the context of his virtue ethics; handling pain could count, in his view, as an index of moral character (ibid.: 85). In ancient medicine, pain was typically regarded as a symptom of disease; therapeutic aims focused on restoring the balance of the humours in the framework of humoral pathology [4]. The Roman physician Galen contributed substantially to ancient theories of pain by investigating the role of the nervous system in pain transmission; he differentiated already between acute and chronic pain and proposed various therapeutic approaches (ibid.: 35). Despite substantive advances in medical theory and practice, pain remained in much of the ancient world a visitation, a trial, or a divine punishment (Flasch: 42). In Greek tragedy pain repeatedly figures as a central theme, frequently associated with the hubris of the acting characters.

Pain within the horizon of Christian world experience

Christianity inaugurated a new era of pain conceptualization characterized by an unresolved ambiguity. On the one hand, pain appears as a concrete punishment from God for sins or transgressions-an interpretation that, in the Middle Ages, framed catastrophic experiences such as the plague as divine punishment. On the other hand, pain points to the suffering Christ on the

cross, who endured all the world's pains in his own body. In a third register Christ is represented as having transcended earthly sufferings altogether (ibid.: 53). This discursive operation-declaring the present imperfect and locating perfection in a transcendence-remains a defining feature of Christian worldview. It is an eschatological structure: the ultimate and the end time (the eschaton) remain beyond human disposal [5]. In this vein, the Apostle Paul can assert in the First Epistle to the Corinthians: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; then face to face. Now I know in part; then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). Latin further differentiates the verbs *sufferre* and *dolere*-between bearing or enduring on the one hand and grieving or feeling pain on the other. Latin idioms such as *caput dolet* ("the head pains") are grammatically common and translate into German as "I have a headache," thus demonstrating that the Latin construction already denotes the painful body part without requiring an explicit subject. This example illustrates a tendency toward grammatical abstraction that, over the centuries, has contributed to a linguistic objectification of pain [6].

Pain Between Physiology and Cultural Normalization the Origins of the Placebo Concept

Pain has an irreducibly physiological dimension, but that dimension is always culturally normed and encoded. Which expressive modes of pain are legitimized in a given society? Which may be given discursive and gestural form? The history of the term *placebo* offers profound insights here [7]. The term appears in the late Middle Ages in the context of the liturgy for the dead. In the Office for the Dead, the Vulgate Psalm 116 opens with *Placebo Domino in regione viventium*- read as "I will please the Lord in the land of the living" in standard translation. From this liturgical context a metaphorical usage of placebo emerged to refer to persons who sought to please the living by excessive expressions of mourning during wake keeping (ibid.: 315). In nineteenth century medical terminology *placebo* became a term for treatments that aimed more at producing a psychological effect in the patient than at effecting a causal cure. A placebo is therefore a seeming treatment that has no specific causal effect on disease but can nevertheless produce a positive effect on the patient's well being. Today the notion of placebo is used in clinical trials to test the efficacy of medications and therapies (ibid.: 316).

As noted above, since the rise of Christianity pain has figured in three registers: as concrete divine punishment, as participation in Christ's suffering, and as a symbol of future redemption. In this light the ostentatious public suffering of Pope John Paul II can be understood: he did not conceal his pain and frailty from the public, but regarded them as part of creaturely existence and a form of worship. With the onset of modernity the *Corpus Christianum* gradually lost its cohesive power. Paradoxically, medieval scholasticism helped to pave the way for modernity by bridging ancient philosophical ideas and a scientific approach. By emphasizing the triad of faith, reason and critical reflection, scholasticism laid the foundations for consequential developments in philosophy, science and education in the modern era.

Pain in Nineteenth Century Medical Discourse

Guillaume Duchenne, who is still regarded as a founder of electrotherapy, articulated in his major work *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* in 1862 a physiological nexus between pleasure and pain. Using electrical stimulation, he examined which facial muscles are engaged in which emotional expressions [8]. The muscular coupling of pain and pleasure, he suggested, may be visible, for example, in what has been called a "melancholic smile" (ibid.: 52). Over the course of the century such ideas became a

point of departure for the pathologization of sexual pleasure: the fundamental proximity of pain and pleasure increasingly came to be regarded as perverse. Contemporary clinical literature began to distinguish between violence directed at the subject and violence directed at another person [9]. A decisive contribution to a typology thus conceived was Richard von Krafft Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which appeared in a French translation in 1895 and exerted considerable influence even in the Anglo Saxon world [9]. In his sexual psychological study Krafft Ebing distinguished four forms of paræsthesia, that is, sexual arousal by inadequate stimuli: sadism, masochism, fetishism and contrary sexual sensations (ibid.: 43). Sadism denotes sexual arousal from the pain of others; masochism, as he described it, is the counterpart of sadism insofar as it rests on the pleasure tinged imagination of being subjected to unbounded violence (ibid.: 46). Krafft Ebing warned that such phenomena could escalate into an urge "to shed blood and to see blood" (ibid.: 48). He argued that a later distinction between "seeing" and "experiencing" becomes blurred (ibid.: 49). Consequently, artistic depictions of violence ought to be reconsidered psychiatrically, since they may act as excitatory stimuli on those who behold them. Krafft Ebing also discussed in detail the disturbing effects of the conjunction of sex and pain: "Cruel acts are the greatest impact that one human being can exercise on another outside of coitus" (ibid.: 51). This interplay of apparently opposed sensations corresponds to the physiological link between pleasure and pain posited by Duchenne. After the turn of the century Iwan Bloch published a standard work of sexual science, *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit*. Bloch gives a descriptive cross section of contemporary sexual practices and maintains that the pleasure in pain has deep biological roots: "At its core the pleasure in one's own pain is an elementary phenomenon of the confirmation of love" [10]. The French scholar Théodule Ribot had already argued in 1896 that the "plaisir de la douleur" is an essential part of human nature. In the nineteenth century, then, the entanglement of psychopathology, sexuality and pain gave rise to previously unimagined permutations and artistic liaisons [11].

Modernity: the Experimental Laboratory of Pain

New discourses of pain proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century. Around 1880 pain itself seemed to be experienced as more unbearable than in earlier eras [12]. This shift was certainly related to pioneering medical discoveries that transformed practice and expectation: chloroform and ether became available as anesthetics, morphine was introduced into clinical use in 1803, and the inhalation anaesthesia of 1846 set new standards in surgical anaesthesia. Chloroform was adopted in 1846 and cocaine entered use as a local anaesthetic from 1884 [13]. A culminating work for these scientific developments is the monograph *Wesen und Bedeutung des Schmerzes (On the Nature and Meaning of Pain)* by surgeon Ferdinand Sauerbruch in collaboration with the philosopher Hans Wenke, published in 1936. Yet even at the outset of the First World War a now almost unimaginable frenzied enthusiasm for war, suffering and pain circulated widely. Thomas Mann, for example, referred to the war as the greatest visitation and test of the German spirit, likening it to a tonic for a corrupted organism [14].

Culturally, the Hippocratic maxim continued to hold currency: great pains were often explained as the expulsion of a pathogenic matter (*materia peccans*) from the diseased body [15]. The First World War was understood in some quarters as a purgative bloodletting and as a "steel bath" for cultural decadence. Such conceptualizations of pain can be found in Ernst Jünger's *Das abenteuerliche Herz* [16]. As a representative of a counter enlightenment intellectual posture, Jünger denounced the early

twentieth century project of humanitarian modernity as infantilizing. For Jünger, pain became the bearer of a new, universal truth [16]. He and many of his contemporaries appealed to an intellectual lineage that culminated in Friedrich Nietzsche, a philologist from Basel whose thought was to become explosive for the twentieth and twenty first century. Nietzsche registered and examined pain upon his own bodily frame with meticulous attention and from the 1870s onward made suffering a central theme of a new philosophy.

The Übermensch: Nietzsche's Attempt at a New Anthropology

For Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosophical "world destroyer," the notion of health is not primarily biological or medical but existential (Nietzsche, KSA 3: 414). Nietzsche may be characterised as a corporeal phenomenologist or an anticipatory psychosomatic thinker who subjected his own body to rigorous scrutiny and, in doing so, anticipated certain somato physical reflections. Under some readings he can be seen as an early precursor of psychosomatic thought. The concept of "embodied reason" (Leibvernunft) plays a significant role in his philosophy (ibid.: 418). For Nietzsche, sickness and health are problems of life that he ties to his conception of the will to power. He diagnoses nihilism as the disease of his epoch; health, for Nietzsche, is the "overcome disease" (ibid.: 318), a health that is directed toward the future. "I am not simply spirit nor simply body, but something third. I always suffer in the whole and from the whole [...] My self overcoming is essentially my greatest force" (Nietzsche, KSA 10/7: 29). From this vantage point Nietzsche derives a philosophical principle of self overcoming, conceptualised as the will to power. This interpretation transgresses categories of medical and therapeutic utility.

For Nietzsche, who regarded illness as the experiential matrix for the revaluation of values, the great experiment was not the complete eradication of pain but the transformation of its meaning in his own life (ibid.: 38). Resistance in life- illness, suffering and displeasure- are for him necessary elements of self overcoming. Hence the continual will to self transcendence is equivalent to the "will to suffer" or "will to pain" (ibid.: 41). "I teach you the Overman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?" (Nietzsche, KSA 4,3: 48). With this statement Nietzsche articulates a doctrine of the *Übermensch* who affirms and overcomes himself through the passions of life and, simultaneously, a reproach toward those who lack the will for self transcendence. "Man is something to be overcome: this is the doctrine of life as the great self overcoming" (ibid.: 51). He further writes that the passions may be harnessed "like steam for machines" (Nietzsche, KSA 3: 338). Thus, for Nietzsche, the self overcoming of man springs from the passion for life itself.

Nietzsche and Pain: Philosophy as Suffering ship

From the motif of the suffering gods advanced in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche derives a possible origin for that suffering: "Existence under the bright sunshine of such gods is itself felt to be the desirable, and the true pain of Homeric man concerns his separation from it" (Nietzsche, KSA 1: 33). In Nietzsche's account, Greek tragedy is the psychological institution that the Greeks unconsciously fashioned in order to affirm pain as an integral part of life. In the years following the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's reflections undergo a notable reversal; he asks rhetorically, "Is tragedy still possible for one who believes in no metaphysical world?" (Nietzsche, KSA 2: 163). In *Human, All Too Human*, written six years after *The Birth of Tragedy*, he puts the matter thus:

Modern science aims at as little pain as possible and as long a life as possible- therefore a kind of eternal blessedness, albeit a very modest one compared to the promises of religions (ibid.: 166).

In an earlier marginal note, composed in 1875 in the context of a critique of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche interrogates the relation of pain and pleasure in different terms. One fragment reads:

Schopenhauer regards pleasure as negative, pain as positive in sensation: a brilliant theory on the basis of the most superficial considerations. Against that I say: every pleasure is a stimulus which, upon an increase of the stimulus, passes over into pain; every pain differs quantitatively from a pleasure and there is a degree of transition from pleasure into pain. A minimal degree of stimulation and pain is perceived as pleasure: thus every pleasure contains the need, the lack, the desire for stimulation; pain is only the excess of the satisfaction of that lack and need. Thus both pleasure and pain are positive, namely in removing a lack ... after diminution of stimulation longing arises (Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1884, KSA 10/7: 163f).

With respect to pessimism Nietzsche contends that pain is not the origin of a pessimistic attitude; rather, it is the absence of pain that produces pessimism as a life stance.

One hates pain now much more than earlier peoples, and speaks of it far worse than ever, indeed one scarcely tolerates the very idea of pain, and makes of the whole of existence a matter of conscience and reproach. The appearance of pessimistic philosophies is by no means the mark of great, dreadful emergencies; rather these question marks about the value of life are erected in times when the refinement and facilitation of existence already regard the inevitable mosquito stings of soul and body as too bloodthirsty and malignant and, in the poverty of genuine experiences of pain, would prefer to present tormenting general ideas as the highest kind of suffering. There would already be a remedy against pessimistic philosophies and the excessive sensitiveness which seems to me the real "distress of the present" - but perhaps that remedy already sounds too cruel and itself would be counted among the signs on which one now judges: "Existence is something evil." Well! The remedy against "the distress" is: distress. (Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1884, KSA 10/7: 178f)

According to Nietzsche, it is the absence and the active exclusion of pain from life that render existence intolerable. Depriving life of privation does not eliminate privation; it returns as fear and a negation of life.

The Will to Power and the relation to consciousness

For Nietzsche, the activity of the will to power precedes any act of becoming conscious. Consciousness is shaped by the inner struggle of the will to power. In other words, it is not consciousness that makes man a subject in the Cartesian sense of rationalism; rather, it is the will to power that renders man a subject of affirmation. Nietzsche observes: "One must show how everything conscious remains on the surface: how action and the image of action are different, how little one knows of what precedes an action" (Nietzsche, KSA vol. 11: 563). He further notes:

Everything that enters consciousness is the final link of a chain, a closure. [...] The really connected process takes place beneath our consciousness: successive sequences of feelings, thoughts, etc., are symptoms of the actual event! Beneath every thought lies an affect. Every thought, every feeling, every will is not born from a single drive, but it is a total state, an entire surface of the whole consciousness and results from the present determination of power among all the drives that constitute us- thus of the currently ruling drive as well as those that obey or resist it. (Nietzsche, KSA vol. 11: 563)

Nietzsche holds that conscious change in life does not originate from a single drive but arises out of the struggle of manifold drives. "All meaning is will to power" (ibid.: 566). Life, for Nietzsche, is that which must constantly overcome itself (ibid.: 567). He describes becoming as self overcoming: not a subject, but an activity, an act of setting, creative, not reducible to 'cause and effect' (ibid.: 568). Nietzsche conceives life as a play of the will to power, grounded in the struggle of diverse, non equivalent forces/drives in relations of 'obeying' and 'commanding' (ibid.: 568). This conception is metaphorically captured in his comparison with protoplasm, which, he says, is not driven by hunger but seeks resistance to overcome and assimilate, thereby enlarging its power. Nietzsche therefore defines life: "A plurality of forces, bound together by a common nutritive process, we call 'life'" (ibid.: 574). Thus the struggle of the will to power is the organism's inner essence and "the body is a symbol of the interplay of the will to power" (ibid.: 575). Whether Nietzsche's notion of the will to power can be read as a preconscious structuring drive that gives rise to consciousness and so be brought into productive dialogue with Freud's topographical model cannot be pursued here. However, it confirms once more the thesis that Nietzsche was a significant proto psychoanalytic thinker, anticipating many themes of later psychoanalysis in complex and varied ways.

Transhumanism: Nietzsche's *Übermensch* Revisited or a Fundamental Misreading

The term "transhumanism" denotes a highly heterogeneous set of conceptions of the human being. Proponents of the movement commonly hold that the natural limits of human capacities and conditions ought to be extended-or in the not-too-distant future, entirely transcended-by means of various scientific interventions [17]. Transhumanism presupposes that the human mode of existence is intrinsically deficient, afflicted by manifold limitations and defects such as disease, senescence, and mortality (ibid.: 9). The movement's motivating rationale is explicitly ethical: labels such as "engineering posthumanism" or "naturalistically oriented posthumanism" are sometimes invoked to capture its orientation [18]. Transhumanist argumentation is often coupled with a utilitarian premise that it is morally obligatory to maximize the number of positive experiential states and to minimize those characterized by suffering across an individual's life (ibid.: 269).

The German philosopher Stefan Sorgner contends that "posthumanism"- a term that entered academic debate in the 1970s- has a distinct genealogy and cultural context, constituting a development of postmodern thought that demands a fundamental reconceptualization of the human, and therefore cannot be conflated straightforwardly with transhumanism [19]. Nonetheless, specific research domains-artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, genetics, information technology, and robotics-that confront questions about the definition of "being human" and the limits of biological life can be linked to transhumanism insofar as they share an intent to instantiate new forms of life [20]. Within the German-speaking transhumanist milieu, Sorgner articulates a position he terms "weak Nietzschean transhumanism," which draws primarily on Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885) and, in particular, on the figure of the *Übermensch*. Sorgner discerns in the progression from the "indeterminate animal" to the "higher animal" and finally to the *Übermensch* a conceptual trajectory that bears affinities to transhumanist thought:

"Like transhumanism, Nietzsche conceives of the human being as a continually self-transcending entity that serves as a bridge between animal and *Übermensch*; thus, several parallels can indeed be established between Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and the posthuman envisaged by transhumanists. Likewise, there are

certainly parallels between Nietzsche's 'higher man' and the 'transhumans' posited by transhumanist discourse."

Yet Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* derives much of its philosophical significance not merely from its depiction of the *Übermensch* but from the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Through that doctrine Nietzsche signals the inexorable repetition of the world in its entirety. As Nielsen observes, the "unrestricted and unreserved affirmation of the eternal identical recurrence of all things, of all that is real- including the most painful and the most mediocre-has its motive neither in pleasure nor in displeasure" [21]. The transhumanist vision appears fundamentally at odds with this doctrine, since transhumanism advances projects that transgress biological boundaries and even seek to overcome death. Transhumanist imaginaries do not accommodate the affirmation of eternal recurrence or an unconditional acceptance of creaturely existence; instead, they often envisage forms of "mind uploading" and other strategies that imply indefinite persistence. Such projections can evoke totalizing, eternalist schemas that resemble a secularized god image. The conception of an eternally living transhuman or a future cyborg-promoted in certain Silicon Valley narratives as an assemblage of technical prostheses supplanting acquired capacities-cannot be readily reconciled with Nietzsche's *Übermensch* or with the logic of recurrence.

Nietzsche himself cautions against a contrary figure: "The earth has become small, and upon it hops the 'last man,' who makes everything small. His species is indelible like the flea; the last man lives longest" (KSA 4: 276). The "last man" is intentionally staged as the antipode of the *Übermensch*. Whereas the *Übermensch* emerges as the self-creating maximizer of new values who transcends inherited metaphysical securities, the last man embodies fatigue and indifference toward existence; he has traded the striving for higher ends and higher truths for complacent satisfaction with the trivial.

Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point and Evolutionary Theory

Even within Christian thought there have sometimes been attempts to reconcile technological development and evolutionary theory with the idea of creation. The French Jesuit and philosopher Teilhard de Chardin sees human life and the cosmos as engaged in a teleological process that has not yet reached completion [22]. De Chardin tried to link evolutionary thinking with Christian theology. According to him, it is above all technological development that drives humanity's further advancement toward the so-called Omega Point. The latter is the final culmination point of humanity (ibid., 25). Technological applications alone ensure evolutionary progression. This culminates in the so-called "noosphere," where a spiritual convergence of all humanity becomes possible (ibid., 27). Within the noosphere, this tendency toward unification inherent in evolution continues, ultimately resulting in a transhuman supra-consciousness, the Omega Point. For de Chardin, such technological improvements are not an end in themselves but are demanded for theological-teleological reasons, since they realize essential steps along the path to the fulfillment of the creation's ultimate goal.

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and the Transhumanist Human Being

Interestingly, the Nietzschean *Übermensch* exists without technologies [23]. Much in Nietzsche's writings could even be formulated so as to suggest that technological achievements amount to a diminution of humanity and to instrumentalization (ibid., p. 216). Through so-called enhancement techniques, it has become possible in the twenty-first century for humans to gain control over individual capacities that once seemed impossible.

However, this would not correspond to self-transcendence in the sense of the *Übermensch*. Rather, the postmodern human thereby develops into a nihilistic "last man," who, devoid of any value commitments, merely bluntly satisfies basic needs (ibid., 217). A human becomes an *Übermensch* only if, without technologies or enhancement techniques—which act as surrogates of yet another ersatz religion—he affirms life on this earth and understands how to confront technological innovations of any kind critically. The *Übermensch* is metaphysically homeless; traditional religious beliefs no longer affect him, yet he has not thereby become nihilistic or misanthropic. He recognizes his task in shaping the world entrusted to him here and now. Thus the *Übermensch* stands for reason, justice, compassion, affirmation of the world, and the will to power. "This transformation also involves the recognition that God and thus infinity do not exist, so that world-shaping must be pursued in the immanent sphere according to the guiding principle of remaining faithful to the earth" [24-26].

Nietzsche and the Turin Horse: Compassion for the Creature

The twenty-first century represents an unprecedented nexus of knowledge and power. At the same time, the isolation and loneliness of human beings in postmodernity are increasing exponentially. Most people in Western societies no longer feel committed to any collective or to any idea that transcends humanity. The principle *homo homini lupus* est seems to apply more than ever. Human life in postmodernity appears atomized with respect to meaningful fulfillment, hollowed out in terms of psychological well being, and in many cases psychosomatically traumatizing. It is the author's view that Nietzsche's image of humanity steers away from the all encompassing technological dependence of capitalist societies in Western civilization, and toward a self determined person who nevertheless knows how to place themselves in relation to and responsibility for the totality of life and the world. Pain is a deeply bodily phenomenon, but it is expressed differently depending on cultural formation. As has already become apparent, it depends greatly on the major narratives and worldviews how pain is situated in an individual life. Through Christianity it had on the one hand the character of punishment and sin and on the other hand the character of redemption. Over the course of Western civilization pain was abstracted, it was turned away from and referred to something else. The tendency toward a body distant abstraction or even the overcoming of death as an human reaches its current peak in contemporary transhumanist projects. Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, by contrast, makes clear precisely the counter movement from abstraction back to the embodied earth, to accepting and transforming pain. It almost seems as if this *Übermensch* is capable of successfully taking a therapeutic shift in perspective, which the last man no longer manages.

This Nietzschean *Übermensch* certainly does not want to live forever in the sense of mind uploading, but continually questions his physical limits anew in order to grow through them. He is certainly not a cyborg of the future, but a human who, mindful of his metaphysical homelessness, will be critical of all movements that end in an "ism" and develop totalizing claims, since they once again attempt to bring the wholeness of the human being under control. Nietzsche was also the thinker who, it is said, on a January morning in 1889 in Turin, on the verge of his mental collapse and overcome with childish tears, embraced a beaten horse. *Pars pro toto*. Embrace of the suffering creature. Had Nietzsche had the opportunity, he would certainly have visited a sweat lodge together with the indigenous Lakota people, to rediscover that connecting, human communal rope stretched above the inhuman, technocratic abyss. Perhaps he would then have cried out his original Eureka, which tragically did not occur in his

actual life. Under the aspects mentioned, it is indeed questionable to continue to figure Nietzsche as a progenitor of transhumanism. "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman— a rope over an abyss." (Nietzsche, KSA 4, p. 16).

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