

PHILOSOPHY OF HEALTH

Nietzsche's humanism on health and on the aesthetic acts of the human being

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Abstract: The following work takes into consideration Nietzsche's late conception of health positioning him as a humanist philosopher and approaching a definition of illness and health from the analytical interweaving of the prefaces from 1886/1887, as well as from certain posthumous fragments from 1887 to *Twilight of the Idols' Skirmishes 8* and *9*. It will be shown that health is at the core of all gnoseological processes in which the individual projects their particular vision of the world, mirroring their inner state. The idealisation of the gnoseological processes - or aesthetic processes - will be characterised by the Nietzschean interpretation of the artist, who transforms reality from their fullness of health. Such an ability will be presented as a model of health, since health itself will not be understood as a finished state, but rather as a continuous process that can show the diversity of human beings, as well as the existing diversity in recognising and classifying what is harmful to themselves, what makes them ill, and what is ultimately beneficial and strengthens their individual health. This model will be defined then on the basis of the transfiguration capacity of human beings to see in illness an opportunity to increase strength and to turn it into something positive by understanding it as intrinsically contained in health itself.

Keywords: illness, health, transfiguration, diversity, artist.

1. Introduction

To understand Nietzsche as a humanist is by no means inaccurate when one considers that throughout his work the human being, understood both as an individual and as a social being, is at the centre of his ideas. It may be beneficial then to re-read his philosophy, emphasizing normative and moral aspects that become new guidelines, especially for individuals today. For if one point is clear and univocal among Nietzsche's scholars, it is the contemporary application of his thinking.

Essential in the consideration of Nietzsche's philosophy as a humanist is his commitment against excessive generalizations, an aspect of his thinking that must be highlighted and revalued today, not only in the social sciences, but ideally also in the natural sciences: the fact that his philosophy provides the human being with a toolbox for building and expressing their particular self. With Nietzsche philosophy finally

overcomes universals which, for the sake of redundancy, lack specialised content. On the contrary, in philosophical movements that only advocate generalisations, ironically no true humanism can be found. For humanism must not only think of a society with certain values, but also of individuals who generate society from their own multiplicity.

Within the margins of a humanist philosophy it is worth asking what would make a philosopher more humanist than their actual developments and focus on the area of health, and this alludes not only to a potential notion of health, but also to parameters and values for shaping it. Overcoming the lack of meaning that the notion of health has undergone throughout the history of philosophy, Nietzsche proposes a conception of health that finally claims the diversity and often-unseen particularities involved within its processes. What could be more humanist than to push forward a philosophy of the future that has at its centre, perhaps for the first time in the history of Western philosophy, individual health? Why not make the axes of the Nietzschean philosophy part of the conversation on health, in order to generate a reflection committed to the plurality of bodies in both individual and collective endeavours?

In order to understand Nietzsche as a humanist from a perspective of health, it is necessary to review and reconstruct his thinking on the topic, in particular the ideas that he developed between 1886 and 1889. The main purpose of this article will therefore be to review various writings from that period to explain and describe Nietzsche's notion of health and illness and to understand the normative and moral aspects behind them. At the same time, anyone who has delved into Nietzsche's work will probably know that there is no such thing as a concept in his philosophy which can be followed in a direct and linear way, nor can the full development of his ideas be found straightforward in one particular work of his. The challenge lies there too, not only in interpreting with a certain degree of precision and objectivity the concepts of health and illness, but also in reconstructing their meaning in the various writings belonging to the last years of his production and putting them into dialogue in order to arrive at more comprehensive and in-depth notions.

In the first part of the article, the prefaces of the 1886 editions of *Human, All Too Human I* and *II* will be analysed mostly in search of an understanding and a definition of what Nietzsche belatedly interpreted as illness and health. The five prefaces for the new editions of *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Human, All Too Human I and II*, *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science* published between 1886/1887 are understood to be the source of gestation of both of these concepts, which are central to the last years of Nietzsche's work. In this

segment, the individual process towards “convalescence”¹ will be explained, a process that starts from illness and then transforms into a period of “liberation”² until reaching a state of health relative to the particular individual and understood as a non-closed process. The main thesis here illustrates health not as something finished, but as a dynamic process that points to the plurality not only among human beings, but to a plurality in itself. Health must be conquered continuously and must be at the core of a person’s life until the point it becomes futile to refer to health as if it were something closed. An attempt will then be made to defend and argue for health not as a state, but as a transformative capacity. The human being can no longer say that they are healthy because they enjoy a certain health, but because they possess the transfiguration forces necessary to face up to any evil that may come their way. It is on the basis of self-analysis, of the recognition of oneself as a psycho-physiological unit, that one can determine what is beneficial or harmful to oneself: each individual as the physician of their own illness.

The second part of the article will analyse and develop Nietzsche’s conception of aesthetics presented mainly in the posthumous fragments from 1887 and in *Twilight of the Idols’ Skirmishes 8* and *9*. For Nietzsche, the “beautiful” and the “ugly” bear no relation to the traditional parameters of beauty, but exclusively to biological values. Based on certain posthumous fragments from 1887 the theory he presents on art in *Twilight of the Idols* and on health in his later work can then be understood in greater depth. Both theses in this second segment will consider the psycho-physiological state of each individual as the basis, firstly, of all gnoseological acts of reality and, secondly, to see the artist as a model, or rather as an ideal - perhaps unattainable - of what Nietzsche understands by health. In other words, the explanation that he gives about art and the artist in *Twilight of the Idols* is actually the representation of the gnoseological processes of human beings as well as their inseparable relationship to health, and in the case of the artist, an excessive health. In this way, Nietzsche presents not only a model for health, but above all provides the reader with the keys to conquer it again and again in its own multiplicity and in the plurality of individual forms. Ultimately, based on the above-mentioned theses, Nietzsche’s philosophy on health can then be understood as a philosophy of a humanist nature.

¹ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I*, KSA 2, Sämtliche Werke, kritische Studienausgabe, 15 Bände, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari, München 1980, tr. en. R. J. Hollingdale, *Human, All Too Human I*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 8.

² *Ibid.*

2. The 1886/1887 prefaces

2.1. Part one: the origin of Nietzsche's late conception of illness and health

From the perspective of this article, the five prefaces published between 1886 and 1887 to *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Daybreak*, *Human, All Too Human I* and *II*, as well as those to *The Gay Science*, will be considered the genesis of Nietzsche's late interpretation of illness, which in those same writings he also denominates "romanticism" and "pessimism"; as well as the genesis of the late interpretation of health, also called "courageous pessimism".³ It is precisely in these five prefaces that Nietzsche describes illness and health for the first time using those terms exclusively associated with the topic of health and through the intertextuality of the prefaces he devotes a fairly extensive and precise development of what he understands by it.⁴ The illness to which Nietzsche alludes in these prefaces is rather a psychological one with somatic consequences, which in this work will be understood as a psycho-physiological illness – but yet again also in correlation to a psycho-physiological health. As it will be seen later, illness is understood in Nietzsche's late philosophy as any kind of threat to the individual well-being, and anything that means a diminution of internal forces. Romanticism is understood as an illness without a cure, an idea that Nietzsche later culminates in *Ecce Homo*.⁵ However, he does this without falling into a biological determinism: the human being becomes "romantic" or, as he puts it from 1888 onwards, "decadent" after a very long period of illness, in which the body can no longer react instinctively against it.⁶

³ NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human II*, p. 211. For the purposes of this work, the prefaces dedicated to the new editions of HH I and HH II will mainly be analysed. To better understand these five prefaces as one of the main sources of the late conception of illness and health cfr. Marina SILENZI, *Eine psychophysiologische Lektüre der Vorreden von 1886/87. Genese und Bedeutung von „Krankheit“ und „Gesundheit“ in Nietzsches Spätphilosophie*, "Nietzsche-Studien", 49, 1, 2020, pp. 1-28.

⁴ On the concepts of illness and health in the prefaces of 1886/1887, see also Melanie SHEPHERD, *Let Us Return to Herr Nietzsche: On Health and Revaluation*, "The Journal of Nietzsche Studies", 50, 2019, pp. 125-148. In contrast to the present article, the author focuses in her analysis on the preface to GM and the role of health in relation to morality.

⁵ In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes about the romantic who becomes a decadent: «I made myself healthy again: this is possible - as any physiologist will admit - as long as you are basically healthy. Something with a typically morbid nature cannot become healthy, much less make itself healthy», Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Ecce Homo*, KSA 6, tr. en. R. J. Hollingdale, *Ecce Homo*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 76.

⁶ Cfr. *ibid.* Nietzsche writes about the function of the instincts on the one hand in a healthy person and on the other hand in a decadent: «Granting that I am a decadent, I am the opposite as well. My proof for this is, among other things, that I have always instinctively chosen the correct remedy for bad states; while complete decadents always choose the means that hurt themselves».

The preface to *Human, All Too Human I* begins with the description of Nietzsche's own illness that occurs when he is under the influence of the two great representatives of Romanticism mentioned in the five prefaces of 1886/1887: Schopenhauer and Wagner. The period of illness is followed by the moment of rupture with what is harmful, Nietzsche thus enters the second stage of the disease: which he calls "liberation".⁷ He claims that such a break with the past occurs abruptly, as something that suddenly sets free the young soul: «the youthful soul is all at once convulsed, torn loose, torn away».⁸ In the depths of this soul, a drive arises that causes the soul to break free and cut the connection with what is holding it back. As Nietzsche also describes it in the preface to *Human, All Too Human II*, his «still healthy instinct»⁹ was responsible for guiding him to recovery. The individual's inner need for health is so great that, in return, they put their whole life at risk before continuing in a state of illness. «"Better to die than to go on living here"— thus responds the imperious voice and temptation: and this here, this "at home" is everything it had hitherto loved!».¹⁰ The meaning is clear: the individual becomes free and leaves behind something that from now on is only a part of the past, regardless of the affection they feel for that time. What made them feel at home until then, what gave them confidence, turns into something foreign. The most intimate instinctive desire for recovery leads them to regain their autonomy: «A sudden terror and suspicion of what it loved, a lightning-bolt of contempt for what it called "duty", a rebellious, arbitrary, volcanically erupting desire for travel, strange places, estrangements, coldness».¹¹

"Liberation" is described here as a positive event, thanks to which the human being reaches to find its own path. Nietzsche recognises also that the liberation process has a negative and painful side, which can also be dangerous for the individual: «such bad and painful things are part of the history of the great liberation».¹² He still understands this period as part of the illness: «It is at the same time a sickness that can destroy the man who has it».¹³ It is precisely this first manifestation of strength and «the will to self-determination»¹⁴ that results in a certain degree of illness. Therefore, the individual experiences two essential things through the process of liberation: the cut, which leads

⁷ NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human I*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 7.

⁹ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*, KSA 2, tr. en. R. J. Hollingdale, *Human, All Too Human II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 210.

¹⁰ NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human I*, p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

to the search and elaboration of one's own values, but also to a new phase of illness, which, however, eventually identifies with recovery: «From this morbid isolation, from the desert of these years of temptation and experiment, it is still a long road to that tremendous overflowing certainty and health».¹⁵

But why does Nietzsche refer to a victory?¹⁶ “Victory” is understood to signify the overcoming of the illness, since liberation means the beginning of the individual's recovery. According to his interpretation of health, Nietzsche understands the reaction of the instincts as the expected defence against the reduction of forces, the accomplished liberation of the individual already means the beginning of their recovery, which must always contain the illness as a prerequisite in itself. A «tremendous overflowing certainty and health [...] may not dispense even with wickedness»,¹⁷ on the other hand it is necessary to cultivate years of recovery, «[i]n between there may lie long years of convalescence».¹⁸ Human beings' illness should encompass health, otherwise they would become someone who goes against their own physical nature, namely a “romantic”. Those who do not fall under the categories of a romantic, assert their life and strive for health, since they must naturally overcome illness. In this way they become healthy or healthier: they never renounce illness; increasing health contains in itself its own cause, i.e. illness.

In his philosophy, Nietzsche develops an open concept of health, which represents a continuous movement or, better put, a health that strives towards a higher state. This concept of health implies a dynamism because the human being is constantly searching for their own well-being. When they reach a healthier state, however, this does not mean that this state is the final conclusion of a development. On the contrary, an overflowing health is a dynamic dimension in the human being: «La maladie est ici une maladie utile, nécessaire à la vraie santé, et partielle».¹⁹ By means of avoiding to bring a closed concept of health into play, Nietzsche leaves open the possibility of understanding health as relative, or better said: as being in any case particularly shaped.²⁰ The fact that there is no such thing as health as a completed state, but that

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 7.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 8. The original text in German uses the term “Krankheit”: “überströmenden *Sicherheit* und *Gesundheit*, welche der *Krankheit* selbst nicht entrathen mag”. The term “wickedness” doesn't seem to cover the full scope of the term “Krankheit”.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Laurent CHERLONNEIX, *Nietzsche: Santé et Maladie*, L' Hartmattan, Paris 2002, p. 84.

²⁰ Thomas LONG, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Medicine*, “Nietzsche-Studien”, 19, 1990, pp. 112-128, here p. 117: «[Nietzsche's] view of health is perspectival, as, indeed, are all other views about the “nature” of health. We must avoid the idea that our concepts are gifts, needing only refinement, and learn to see them as tools we “make and create”».

health is always simultaneously determined by illness, leads to the conception of health as a gradual phenomenon: a realisation of health that denies a conceptual opposition between health and illness.²¹ Thus understood, strong health is within the reach of the general individual. Nietzsche reflects in his philosophy a “real” human health instead of aiming at an ideal concept - an empty concept.

In the preface to *Human, All Too Human II*, Nietzsche draws a comparison with treatments carried out by physicians, who look at their patients in a different way so that the patients can free themselves from their worries and fears. It seems that the image of the physician introduced by Nietzsche actually refers to a kind of psychologist, because they have a healing analytical ability. The recovery he suggests is achieved through this “self-treatment”,²² a psychological treatment that each individual should carry out on themselves.²³ The psychologist can then reflect on what is already “behind”²⁴ and “beneath”²⁵ the patient - or “behind” and “beneath” themselves, if the psychologist and patient are united as one person - with a coldness that allows them to reinterpret their life. Especially the painful and terrible things make a person a psychologist in the sense of a physician who directs the examination towards the unconscious in order to consciously understand its processes and learn from them. Psychology is primarily understood experimentally, so that the state of illness is

²¹ Nietzsche takes this theory from Charles Féré and presents it in a posthumous fragment from 1888, cfr. Marina SILENZI, *Dionysischer Histrionismus. Charles Féré und die Genese Nietzsches später Ästhetik*, here p. 152. Claude Bernard had already pointed out that there is no opposition between health and illness, cfr. Marco BRUSOTTI, *Reagieren, schwer reagieren, nicht reagieren. Zur Philosophie und Physiologie beim letzten Nietzsche*, “Nietzsche-Studien”, 41, 2012, pp. 104-126, here p.122.

²² NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human II*, p. 210.

²³ To this idea, Diana Aurenque claims: «Nietzsche sieht in der Gesundheit ein höchst individuelles Phänomen [...]. Vielmehr bildet die Gesundheit je nach Menschen ihre eigene Dynamik; Sie verweist auf einen individuellen Prozess, zu welchem stets Krankheit und Leiden gehören», Diana AURENQUE, *Nietzsche und die „unzähligen[n] Gesundheit des Leibes*, in O. FRIEDRICH, D. AURENQUE, G. ASSALDI, S. SCHLEIDGEN (eds.), *Nietzsche, Foucault und die Medizin. Philosophische Impulse für die Medizinethik*, [transcript], Bielefeld 2016, pp. 23-38, here p. 29. Nicola Nicodemo defines the philosophy of “art-of-living” developed by Nietzsche «als individuelle Lebensgestaltung», Nicola NICODEMO, *Dem Leben einen Sinn geben. Nietzsches Lebenskunst am exemplarischen Fall von Ecce Homo*, in G. GÖDDE, N. LOUKIDELIS, J. ZIRFAS (eds.), *Nietzsche und die Lebenskunst: ein philosophisch-psychologisches Kompendium*, Springer, Stuttgart 2016, pp. 199-208, here p. 206. Jörg Zirfas expresses a similar interpretation: «Lebenskunst nach Nietzsche meint eine individuelle Stilisierung des Lebens nach ästhetischen Gesichtspunkten, die einerseits die Kontingenzen des Lebens anerkennt und andererseits diesem Leben eine absolute Gültigkeit verleiht», Jörg ZIRFAS, *Optionen. Wissens-, Macht- und Selbstverhältnisse bei Michel Foucault und Wilhelm Schmid*, in G. GÖDDE, N. LOUKIDELIS, J. ZIRFAS (eds.), *Nietzsche und die Lebenskunst*, pp. 228-237, here p. 229.

²⁴ NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human II*, p. 209.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

presented to the psychologist as an experiment, which later will be the subject of analysis.

It is important to understand, however, that the motivation for addressing the psychological dimension in the prefaces is not only to reflect on the author's individual therapy. In the sixth part of the preface of *Human, All Too Human II* Nietzsche writes:

- Shall my experience - the history of an illness and recovery, for a recovery was what eventuated - have been my personal experience alone? And only my "human, all-too-human"? Today I would like to believe the reverse; again and again I feel sure that my travel books were not written solely for myself.²⁶

Nietzsche's story serves as a model, since he shows people the path from illness to recovery. The experiences and situations he analyses correspond to his story of recovery as he presents it in the five prefaces. In this way, Nietzsche creates his late conception of illness and health in the intertextuality of these writings. Not least, however, he shows the reader a model of health and suggests a concrete path to be followed. In other words, Nietzsche teaches people how to develop ever stronger health. In the prefaces from 1886/1887, he unfolds a philosophy of life that could also be denominated as a philosophy of health. As he himself claims in the preface of *Human, All Too Human II*, this is «the way to a new health, and alas! to go along it, a health of tomorrow and the day after».²⁷

2.2. Part two: the transfigurative act of the human being

The ability to determine life based on one's own values allows the individual to overcome the earlier traumatic state. When Nietzsche refers to this "self-determination",²⁸ this has a literal meaning: Everyone should achieve what is beneficial and supportive for life. The psychological and also somatic limitation by the illness is broken through by the will to self-determination alone. The interpretation of the world is no longer dominated by a depressed state of mind, but is now nourished by a force that allows us to appreciate the world and our own existence. The task of every human being is to develop in all possible situations of life the ability and power to create an individual interpretation of the world. In the prefaces of *Human, All Too Human I* and *II* Nietzsche emphasises several times how important it is to determine oneself and to gain distance from everything that paralyses and numbs the individual. This is the essence

²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 213.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human I*, p. 7.

of the process of liberation: «“You shall” - enough: from now on the free spirit knows what “you shall” he has obeyed, and he also knows what he now can, what only now he - may do...». ²⁹ After breaking with the “romantic” state of mind, the creative powers are again at hand and one can play with them. With the liberation the individual regains their plastic ability, strengthens it in the course of the creative process and in this way approaches a state of increasing health.

To set liberation in motion one must fight against oneself, against certain morbid mechanisms that have now become habits: «alone and sorely mistrustful of myself, I thus, and not without a sullen wrathfulness, took sides against myself and for everything painful and difficult precisely for me». ³⁰ The act of recognition and then the separation from certain characteristics that have become a part and properties of the ill individual implies a deep will to recover. By challenging those features and traits, one finds the «way to that courageous pessimism that is the antithesis of all romantic mendacity». ³¹ Nietzsche sees the path to courageous pessimism as «the way to [himself], to [his] task». ³² This statement is of utmost importance, since Nietzsche here associates the contrast of a state of illness with good pessimism: The will to recover is identified by him with the courageous pessimism. On the contrary, it is a characteristic of romanticism to feel comfort in a state that is detrimental to health and therefore threatens life.

Why do people fall ill? In general, illness occurs when a person gives up their “task”. ³³ In Nietzsche’s own words: «Illness is the answer every time we begin to doubt our right to our task →». ³⁴ What does the “task” of a person mean here or generally in Nietzsche’s philosophy? First, it must be emphasised that in this passage of the preface to *Human, All Too Human II* he no longer writes about his own task and illness, but about the task of the human being in general. To explain this, one must consider the totality of his thinking and realise that his philosophy can be solely understood under the optics of life. At this point, it should only be remembered that Nietzsche thinks of life in analogy with the plastic forces in art. ³⁵ This means that the creative processes in life function in

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 9.

³⁰ NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human II*, p. 211.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See *An Attempt at Self-Criticism*, where Nietzsche proposes to see art from the prism of life, establishing a similarity between both. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, KSA 1, tr. en. Ronald Speirs, *The birth of tragedy and other writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 5.

the same way as in art or must be shaped in an ‘artistic’ way by the individual.³⁶ He describes life itself in the following way: «Life - that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame -also everything that wounds us; we simply *can* do no other».³⁷ With the emphasis on the word “can”³⁸ Nietzsche defines the task of the human being in life: to transform everything into “light”,³⁹ i.e. into something good. This is the basic ability of every individual; this is their nature. Their essential task is therefore to carry out a constant transformation of things and life and to realise in it the inner movement of existence.

Health is not a state but corresponds to a person’s ability to solve different problems, to overcome the negative by transforming it into something that no longer causes pain. The healthy person is, therefore, the one who can transform reality according to the sense of their own well-being and fulfilment: «he simply cannot keep from transposing his states every time into the most spiritual form and distance: this art of transfiguration is philosophy».⁴⁰ The projection of the spiritual wealth onto the world depends directly on the psychophysiological state. The “transfiguration”⁴¹ ability will always be available to the person who is healthy in their depths, i.e. they will always know how to transform something terrible into something that loses the negative effect of the terrible in order to leave it behind: illness is an amplifier of life. The individual learns to feed their thoughts from the pain of the illness, not to deny the problem or traumatic condition, but to interpret and transform it: «constantly, we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and, like mothers, endow them with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, “fate, and catastrophe”».⁴² The illness demands a continuous effort from the individual, and only through this effort can they achieve better health.

³⁶ For the function of aesthetic forces see Günter ABEL, *Nietzsche. Die Dynamik der Willen zur Macht und die ewige Wiederkehr*, De Gruyter, Berlin/New York 1998, pp. 72-81. At this point Abel clarifies the plasticity of the will to power: «Das Ästhetische hat seine quasi naturphilosophische Wurzel in dem als Mit- und Gegeneinander von Willen-zur-Macht-Komplexen zu verstehenden Spiel der organisierenden Kräfte, der Organe, Formen, Farben, Fähig- und Fertigkeiten, die als die Gestaltungen der Wirklichkeit erscheinen. Das Ästhetische ist die Entfaltung dieser Beschaffenheit», here pp. 82-83.

³⁷ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, KSA 3, tr. en. Walter Kaufmann, *The gay science*, Vintage Books, New York 1974, p. 36.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, p. 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ivi*, pp. 35-36.

This process consists of a plasticity in which the forces of the individual perform a transformative act. Therefore Nietzsche claims in the preface to *Human, All Too Human I* that the «superfluity of formative, curative, moulding and restorative forces which is precisely the sign of great health».⁴³ The increase of inner strength only takes place when the individual collects victories over various challenging and difficult situations in life: the conquest of gradual health leads to an ever stronger state of well-being. However, this does not mean that people of this kind are completely beyond illness. On the contrary: they need challenges and difficulties to put their inner strength at risk. What they develop is the ability to precisely transform such situations and events.

3. The sense of aesthetics: its connection with health in the posthumous fragments from 1887 and in “*Twilight of the Idols’ Skirmishes of an untimely man*”

As a preliminary stage to the *Skirmishes* 8 and 9 from *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche writes a series of notes in 1887 that accentuate his growing interest in the treatment of health in his philosophy, an interest that had been awakened and begun to be addressed previously in the five prefaces previously mentioned in this article. These posthumous fragments are directly related to aesthetic actions, i.e. to cognitive actions of individuals in general. In these posthumous writings it is possible to see how Nietzsche thinks every interpretative act as an aesthetic act that has health of human beings at its base: aesthetic acts reflect the inner state of each individual, questioning and redefining the sense of the beautiful and the ugly.⁴⁴ In KSA 12, 10 [167], p. 554 he writes about the aesthetic dimension of the individual:

On the creation of the beautiful and the ugly. What instinctively resists us, aesthetically, has been proven to be harmful, dangerous, distrust-deserving by longest experience: the suddenly talking aesthetic instinct (in disgust, for example) contains a judgment. In this respect the beautiful is within the general category of the biological value of the useful,

⁴³ NIETZSCHE, *Human, All Too Human I*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche assigns the body, its organs and their specific functions, a hierarchical order that is established throughout history. Reason, being the last developed organ in the body, is precisely the least reliable faculty of the human being. Together with the historical development of the body, he sees the formation and development of instincts, which he explains with his concept “Züchtung”. Nietzsche understands the breeding of the body not only in relation to physiological phenomena, but also in relation to social, cultural and psychological phenomena. In Nietzsche’s philosophy, the historical body combines the physiological and the psychological phenomena of human beings. Nietzsche uses genealogy as a philosophical methodology to be able to decipher and understand more deeply the meaning behind the body. This part of the article will emphasize the history of instincts and their cognitive functions.

the benevolent, the life-enhancing: but in such a way that a multitude of stimuli, which remind us of useful things and states from afar and tie up with them, give us the feeling of the beautiful, i.e. the increase of the feeling of power (- not only things, then, but also the accompanying sensations of such things or their symbols).⁴⁵

What the individual faces is defined aesthetically, i.e. it is defined in the immediate dimension of instincts: Nietzsche equates the instinctive level with aesthetics. The aesthetic dimension of the individual includes all processes of interpretation and, in connection with them, all transformative and creative processes of the world. The aesthetic processes take place constantly, as the individual continually assimilates the environment and thus creates a personal point of view.⁴⁶ In this way and above all the individual is an aesthetic being whose aesthetic ability reveals their state of health. With Nietzsche's philosophy, aesthetics no longer refers to the parameters of beauty or ugliness. He therefore proposes a radical rethinking of the term "beautiful" in the history of philosophy and art. If illness and health can be determined in degrees, the aesthetic dimension also stands for the greater or lesser degree of the respective health power. Aesthetics is thus the manifestation of the psychological and physiological condition of each person in all transformative processes: what is threatening to the human being falls into the category of the ugly. The aesthetic instinct determines the subsumption under the terms "beautiful" or "ugly" insofar as life events are evaluated according to whether they are beneficial or harmful to life.

Since the human being can distinguish the beautiful from the ugly in a physical sense through the aesthetic instinct, Nietzsche ascribes a normative character to it: the aesthetic instinct contains a judgement. What is understood on an unconscious level as the instinctive world of the human being, Nietzsche relates to something that in the history of philosophy was otherwise generally situated on the rational level of the human being. One may claim that judgement is not a priori and does not depend on reason. This judgement, which refers to the aesthetic instinct, is generated first by necessity and then by habit.⁴⁷ The category of beauty, which Nietzsche transforms into

⁴⁵ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Nachgelassene Aufzeichnungen*, KSA 12, 10 [167], p. 554. The translation is mine.

⁴⁶ The interpretative act is the core of all processes that are guided by the will to power. Abel complements Nietzsche's view that everything is interpretation with his formula «und Interpretation ist alles, was ist», ABEL, *Nietzsche*, p. 182.

⁴⁷ The idea that instincts are shaped throughout history by necessity and then by use is expressed by Nietzsche in some posthumous fragments also from 1887. In KSA 11, 34 [81], p. 444 he writes for example: «To put it at the top: the instincts have also been developed, they prove nothing for the supernatural, not even for the animalistic, not even for the typically human. That the spirit has been

an expression of the psycho-physiological qualities of a healthy person, corresponds to a feeling of increased strength. He writes in the same posthumous fragments: «Hereby the beautiful and the ugly are recognised as conditioned; namely, with respect to our highest conservation values. To set aside a beautiful and an ugly from this is senseless. The beautiful exists so little as the good, the true».⁴⁸ Neither the beautiful nor the ugly are possible concepts for Nietzsche, as long as one tries to think of them separately from life-related values. They do not exist in themselves and cannot be measured against a parameter of beauty, as long as this is only understood as a historically contingent and codified norm. The category of beauty points to an increase of forces and the affirmation of existence. Ugliness, on the other hand, is a threat that leads to a loss of strength and a negative attitude towards life. Things that are perceived as beautiful awaken a feeling of gathering strength, which reminds individuals of positive things and states.

In this process, driven by aesthetic instincts, Nietzsche opens the way to the transfigurative act by saying that the individual in this state cannot remain objective. Nietzsche's interpretation of aesthetics can be summarised in the following way: «1) the beauty judgment is short-sighted, it only sees the next consequences 2) it overwhelms the object that excites it with charm caused by the association of different beauty judgments, - but which is completely strange to the essence of that object».⁴⁹ The strength of the healthy individual leads to a transformation of the world, with the individual bringing the same degree of abundance to each interpretive act. Thanks to this aesthetic process, in which the individual transforms things in accordance with their nature, the overcoming and transfiguration of the evil and ill takes place. This is how the aesthetic processes work. They are conditioned by the psycho-physiological state of the individual in and from which the interpretation takes place. Nietzsche writes in response to this: «It is the question of power (of an individual or a folk), if and where <the> judgment “beautiful” is applied».⁵⁰ A healthy individual can distinguish between what is most beneficial and what is most harmful to them, and their instincts will act accordingly, either by responding to the stimuli and assimilating them to their wealth,

developed and still develops, that, among innumerable kinds of reasoning and primal healing, the most familiar one now is somehow most useful to us and has been inherited, because the individuals thinking in this way had better chances: that nothing about true and untrue is proved by it».

⁴⁸ NIETZSCHE, *Nachgelassene Aufzeichnungen*, KSA 12, 10 [167], p. 554. The translation is mine.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, the translation is mine.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 555.

or by ignoring them and thus avoiding useless reactions.⁵¹ As soon as the healthy individual acts, because their condition allows it and their instincts make them do so, the interpretation always seems to be positive: the things reflect the individual's wealth and increase their strength even more. Health, which in the prefaces of 1886/1887 Nietzsche presents as the purpose of human beings, is consolidated in 1888 as a condition of every aesthetic process.

Before presenting the interpretation of aesthetics in relation to health in *Twilight of the Idols* it is important to re-emphasise that instincts are configurations that respond to the history of the human being. This means that instinctive actions can be altered at the social level as well as at the individual level. This is precisely the case with Wagner who, according to Nietzsche, is moving away from his own health and even from Nietzsche himself who despite being the son of his decadent era, is becoming the master of it and therefore the master of health.⁵² Instincts alone do not make an individual's health, but they are at the base as a great foundation of it. However, without further analysis and understanding of what is harmful and beneficial to the individual's life, one would never arrive at an integrative health, which is what Nietzsche proposes according to his interpretation of the body. This aspect can be seen below with the analysis of the gnoseological acts, i.e. the interpretative acts of the artist.

Skirmish of an untimely man 8 "Towards a psychology of the artist" mainly takes up the theme of frenzy, i.e. the increase of inner forces. Here, for the first time in a published work, Nietzsche postulates frenzy as the first condition of *all* artistic creation: «If there is to be art, if there is to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological condition is indispensable: frenzy».⁵³ Frenzy is the first indispensable element for art, but this state seems, as he himself emphasises, to be purely physiological. He adds: «Frenzy must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine; else there is no art».⁵⁴ According to Nietzsche, frenzy is the trigger of physical excitement; only through it does the ideal physiological state for art come about. Without physical excitement there can be neither "aesthetic doing and seeing". This means that the inner forces of the body must

⁵¹ See *Why I am so wise II* in *Ecce Homo*, the idea that a healthy individual does not react continuously to every stimulus when they have to recover or save their strength. Nietzsche conceives Wagner as the opposite of these processes, as he reacts incessantly without having the necessary strength at his disposal. This idea is presented by Nietzsche in *The case of Wagner: a musician's problem*. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Ecce Homo*, KSA 6; Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Der Fall Wagner*, KSA 6, both books tr. Judith Norman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007.

⁵² Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *Ecce Homo*, pp. 74-76.

⁵³ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, KSA 6, tr. en. Walter Kaufmann, *The portable Nietzsche*, Penguin, London 1977, p. 518.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

be increased so that the organs can function to the maximum. In this way two important phenomena are triggered: not only does the individual's perception become sharper, but the perception is also influenced by the feeling of strength that the individual feels.

Nietzsche then begins to enumerate the different types of frenzy, all of which are means of human excitability: «All kinds of frenzy, however diversely conditioned, have the strength to accomplish this: above all, the frenzy of sexual excitement, this most ancient and original form of frenzy».⁵⁵ The most primitive frenzy (being sexually aroused) is followed by other types:

Also the frenzy that follows all great cravings, all strong affects; the frenzy of feasts, contests, feats of daring, victory, all extreme movement; the frenzy of cruelty; the frenzy in destruction; the frenzy under certain meteorological influences, as for example the frenzy of spring; or under the influence of narcotics [...]⁵⁶

The last type of frenzy named by Nietzsche corresponds to the will, «the frenzy of an overcharged and swollen will».⁵⁷ In view of this list, it can be noted that the cause of many types of frenzy lies mainly in physiological processes - such as frenzy caused by movement - or in external events or factors such as in the cases of frenzy during celebrations, victory and meteorological and narcotic influences. The most primitive type of frenzy is based on an unconscious psychic energy and the most basic desires and affects. The frenzy caused by cruelty and destruction is attributed to Dionysus as well as to the Dionysian individual and seems to be based on psychological factors as well, because this kind of frenzy testifies to the desire to destroy the terrible in life. For the development of frenzy in the case of a strong will, the psychological level is essential since it is also central to the development of health. However, a swollen will does not need any external causes to create the frenzy: this type of will contains the cause of the frenzy within itself, better said, it is the cause. Nietzsche then writes in *Skirmish 8*: «What is essential in such frenzy is the feeling of increased strength and fullness».⁵⁸ An overflowing will generates the feeling of fullness and power within oneself, as it has bred this state or ability. This will can only belong to a healthy person who is constantly searching for a stronger sense of well-being. The increase of strength and the feeling of individual well-being are processes that take place together, and all this is mediated by physiological excitability. As Nietzsche already clarifies in the analysed posthumous

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

fragments of 1887, the perception of the “beautiful” occurs in a psychophysiological context, because *being able* to feel the beautiful at all is a question of the forces of the individual.

Thus, the artist is the one who transforms the most painful or terrible situations into life-affirming processes. In this way, at the end of *Skirmish 8* Nietzsche defines his concept of “idealising”⁵⁹ as the projection of the artist onto their own state of fulfilment. From the feeling of increasing power and abundance «one lends to things, one forces them to accept from us, one violates them — this process is called idealising».⁶⁰ The idealisation of the aesthetic human being, in this particular case the artist, is the projection of psychological and physiological abundance. Nietzsche calls «having to transform»⁶¹ to the action of applying the same degree of perfection to things. This makes it clear that Nietzsche understands the creative process as something active: the artist transforms things from their own state of fullness. They can confront the terrible in life and transfigure it until this opposition is presented as an overcoming, a victory, or even as something beautiful. What Nietzsche calls here the “having to transform” things is no more and no less than the process of transformation that every healthy person carries out on the aesthetic level.

Next, Nietzsche makes an important point regarding the “idealising” of things: «Let us get rid of a prejudice here: idealising does not consist, as is commonly held, in subtracting or discounting the petty and inconsequential».⁶² This act of idealising the world must not be confused with the process of abstraction as an approach to the essence of things, which has often been discussed in the history of philosophy,⁶³ and which rejects the specificity of each case. Nietzsche’s “idealising”, in contrast, means the accentuation of the particular main features. He counters the generalisation of things, which ultimately leads to minimising them under the norm of the general, with

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Axel Pichler refers to the term “idealising” in the history of philosophy in contrast to Nietzsche’s own interpretation of idealising as follows: «Nicht mehr logische Oberbegriffe, sondern diejenigen Züge einer Sache, die der „vergewaltigende“ Künstler als deren Hauptzüge in einem vom Text an diesem Punkt nicht weiter ausgeführten Zusammenspiel von Wahrnehmung und beteiligter Konstitution „heraustreibt“, stehen im Mittelpunkt besagter ästhetischer Praxis des „Idealisieren[s]“», Axel PICHLER, *Philosophie als Text. Zur Darstellungsform der „Götzen-Dämmerung“*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2014, p. 259. For the interpretation of idealising in Nietzsche’s TI see also Andreas URS SOMMER, *Nietzsches-Kommentar: Der Fall Wagner und Götzen-Dämmerung*, De Gruyter, Berlin / Boston 2012, p. 431. Sommer also points out the contrast to idealism: «Idealisieren sei nicht Abstrahieren [...]. Die Gestaltungskraft des Individuums ist dabei der Hauptzug dieses neuen Idealisierungsvermögens».

the activity of extracting from things what is important to each individual in aesthetic processes. In Nietzsche's late philosophy, the process of idealisation becomes an individual act, created by the increase of forces and the feeling of corresponding fullness. Idealisation then becomes something relative to each individual: it is a process based mainly on psycho-physiological conditions and is not primarily rational.

In *Skirmish 9* Nietzsche goes further into the process of idealisation: «In this state one enriches everything out of one's own fullness: whatever one sees, whatever one wills, is seen swelled, taut, strong, overloaded with strength». ⁶⁴ In this way he underlines once again that the creative process is individual and depends on inner states, whereby the artist projects their own abundance onto the world: «A man in this state transforms things until they mirror his power — until they are reflections of his perfection». ⁶⁵ Here Nietzsche finally introduces explicitly the missing element into the process of idealisation, namely the transformative act. The artist creates a transformation of the world by expressing their fullness. Nietzsche assigns the artist the transfigurative ability of reality, a characteristic that is connected with health in the prefaces of 1886/1887. The artist is therefore the one who can transform all negative and terrible aspects of life into a victorious representation of overcoming and affirmation. This is exactly how Nietzsche defines art: «This having to transform into perfection is — art». ⁶⁶

In *Skirmishes 8* and *9* as well as in the posthumous fragments belonging to the last years, Nietzsche does not explicitly speak about the artistic work, but about the creative process. Art is the idealisation of the world from an individual point of view; «in art man enjoys himself as perfection». ⁶⁷ Hence art is the enrichment of the artist and then of the world. Perhaps this definition of the transformation of the world as “perfection” can be better understood when compared with the view of the so-called “anti-artists”, ⁶⁸ those “starved by life”: ⁶⁹ they «impoverish all things, making them thin and consumptive». ⁷⁰ The anti-artists attack instincts because they are against life, i.e. they are against all manifestations of the increase in strength: they are “anti-artistry by instinct”. ⁷¹ The romantic illness leaves no intact instinct for life. When the instincts are defeated, the body enters this permanent state. Such anti-artists never achieve a sense of well-being in life; on the contrary, the opposite sensations dominate in them:

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the idols*, p. 518.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ivi*, p. 519.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

impoverishment, deprivation and the need to take and not to give. In this passage Nietzsche completes his reflections on the typical process of abstraction in philosophy: the «arbitrary abstractions from an individual case»⁷² is the «subtracting or discounting the petty and inconsequential»,⁷³ to achieve things in themselves. This process of abstraction is contrasted with the kind of idealisation proposed by Nietzsche, in which the artist understands the primordial of all things, which are not generalisations, but depend entirely on their particular inner state. It is precisely in the idealisation of the world that the artist expresses their personal and unique interpretation of things to the fullest. By virtue of the artist's swollen will, they transform their interpretation into the reflection of their own state of perfection. In this way, the artistic processes represent the ideal functioning of the gnoseological processes of human beings, which are undoubtedly based on the psycho-physiological state of each individual. The idealisation of the world is the path to overcome illness.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the prefaces to *Human, All Too Human I* and *II* for the new editions from 1886 made it possible to reconstruct the meaning of the concepts of illness and health in the late philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Health can never do without illness, rather health must have illness at its core as a mobilising force in human beings, motivating them to overcome everything that is presented to them as harmful, i.e. as a loss of inner strength. The individual always possesses the potential to become healthier, however, one can never speak of a state of health as if it were something finished. On the contrary, the overcoming of illness happens continuously and multiple times in the life of each individual. Health should not, therefore, be understood as a state, but should be identified with the power to transform and overcome what is harmful. Health, therefore, refers to the transfiguring capacity of each individual, which is as diverse as illness itself. This is what Nietzsche exposes in the analysed posthumous fragments from 1887, in which he redefines the “beautiful” and the “ugly” under a psychophysical notion, that is, in direct relation to individual health. The beautiful is then what increases the forces, while the ugly is what decreases them, what damages health. The judgment of human beings, shaped throughout history by necessity and habit, is instinctively based on the body's reaction to its organic memory that determines what is beautiful, that is to say, what is healthy, and what is ugly or ill. Nevertheless, insofar as health is relative, what may be beautiful or ugly is entirely

⁷² *Ivi*, p. 517.

⁷³ *Ivi*, p. 518.

particular to the individual, and it is from that individual identification and analysis that each person shapes their health according to what will increase their strength. Learning and recognising one's own health is based on a particular psycho-physiological experience. Within Nietzschean philosophy the only individual who would seem to enjoy a continuously increased state of strength is the artist at the moment of creation. That is why Nietzsche thinks of frenzy as the first condition for art, and it is from this state of plenitude that the artist performs their aesthetic acts, that is, they transform everything into the reflection of their plenitude. All cognitive acts have at their base the psycho-physiological state of the human being, who in order to enjoy an increasingly strong health should try to project the same fullness as the artist when interpreting the world. Beyond this idealisation, it is important to highlight the conceptual plurality that health represents in the philosophy of Nietzsche's last years of production. Health does not represent something universal but is a reflection of the individual's particular state and is a capacity that belongs to each person in a diversity of forms that this entails. Nietzsche makes out of his philosophy of health a humanism because his thinking has at its core the real individual who represents a particular health, and not the emptying of the concept of health by means of abstract notions.

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