

## NIETZSCHE ON THE NECESSITY OF SOCIAL DECADENCE

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The aim of this article is to elucidate Nietzsche's idea of the necessity of social decadence. It is discussed that the necessity indicates an inevitable or necessary historical process, on the one hand, and the decadent being necessarily produced in society, on the other. Nietzsche presents a seemingly contradictory idea regarding this necessity. While he describes decadence as a necessary part of life, he also demands disposing of a decadent part in society. This article suggests a solution to this problem and argues what should be fought is not decadence itself but its metastasis that risks the health of the whole, and Christian morality of equality plays a key role in this metastasis.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche – Decadence – Necessity – Christian morality – Ressentiment

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to elucidate Nietzsche's idea of the necessity of social decadence, primarily presented in Nietzsche's late writings. Concerning decadence on an individual level Nietzsche refers to 'the loss of a centre of gravity [*Schwergewicht*]' (EH 'M', 2; 'Schicksal', 7)<sup>1</sup> that stems from the failure of being in accordance with one's nature or physiological constitution, which leads to 'disintegration of the instincts' (GD 'Streifzüge', 35). In the same manner, decadence on a social level is concerned with the lack of order and failure to be an integrated whole. Thus, social decadence indicates the disjointed system of society that permits people to lead a life haphazardly given to them and fails to be the space that trains people for a certain way of life. In this respect, it is discussed that there is connection between individual decadence and social decadence.<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche seems severe in his criticism of the phenomenon of decadence and people infected with it, decadents. However, in a letter to Carl Fuchs in 1886, he writes

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<sup>1</sup> I cite Nietzsche's works using and often revising the existing translations according to Nietzsche's German text. Other translations of Nietzsche's notes are my own. For quotations from Nietzsche, the well-known German abbreviations are used. References to Nietzsche's writings are to section and aphorism or fragment numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Huddleston (2019, ch. 5) considers the relationship between the individual and social decadence as 'one of individual microcosm to cultural macrocosm'. Conway (1997, ch. 3) considers the

that the word 'decadence' is used 'not to repudiate but only to describe' (KSB, 7:688). Furthermore, especially in the Nachlass, Nietzsche often considers decadence as necessary and says we need to embrace it. While this necessity is broadly understood in terms of the 'cycle of growth and decay' and 'the inevitable decay of cultural idols',<sup>3</sup> there is a dearth of detailed analysis of it. In this respect, section 2 and 3 present an analysis of Nietzsche's idea of the necessity of decadence. As I shall show, the necessity of decadence can be considered in two ways: (1) from a diachronic perspective in long history, and (2) from a synchronic perspective in a society. The former is concerned with the development of decadence through time in the big picture of history as an inevitable or necessary historical process, the latter with the fact that there is always a decadent part in society.

In relation to the question of how we should deal with social decadence, we come to encounter Nietzsche's seemingly contradictory idea of the necessity of decadence. On the one hand he describes decadence as an inevitable or necessary part of life, while on the other hand he demands getting rid of a decadent part in society. In this respect, section 3 also suggests a solution to the problem of contradictory statements. Based on the analysis section 4 then further clarifies his idea of how to deal with social decadence.

## **2. The Necessity of Decadence: The Diachronic Picture**

First, the necessity of decadence refers to the periodicity of decadence in an individual life or history of a culture. There are the stages of the rise and fall in life, as Nietzsche mentions: 'A long, all-too-long succession of years means recuperation for me, – it also unfortunately means at the same time relapse, decline, the periodicity of a kind of decadence' (EH 'Weise', 1; cf. KSB, 8:1036). Nietzsche often reminds the readers of the long perspective of history and the fact that everything is hedged or bounded in time, and sometimes makes analogies between one's life and seasons (MA II ii, 269) and between the culture of a people and seasons (FW, 23). That there are peaks and valleys in the history of a human society and culture is in fact a plain and general statement that anyone with some historical knowledge will recognise and accept. The question is what kind of picture of social decadence in history Nietzsche has in mind more specifically.

Conway argues that Nietzsche 'interprets Western history in terms of a renewable cycle of inexorable growth and decay',<sup>4</sup> and maintains that the cycle of 'all macro-

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relationship as one between the micro-capacitor and macro-capacitor. He puts emphasis on the macro-capacitor, arguing 'the vitality of the macro-capacitor determines the health of its corporate micro-capacitors' (Ibid., 69).

<sup>3</sup> Conway (1997, 111).

<sup>4</sup> Conway (1997, 72).

capacitors' is between two types, 'healthy peoples and ages' and 'declining peoples and ages'.<sup>5</sup> Although Nietzsche works with a broad idea of health and decline, this description is not the accurate picture of historical stages that Nietzsche has in mind concerning decadence. In a note that Conway does not consult, Nietzsche divides this evolution into three stages: 'The *accumulative* ages and individuals', 'the *prodigal* [*verschwenderisch*] [ones]: the ingenious, the victorious, the conquering, the discovering, the adventurous', and 'after the latter the *decadent* necessarily follows' (KSA, 13:14[88]). Therefore, the temporal development is the accumulation, expenditure, and decadence.

This view actually reflects to some extent the physiological and biological discussion of inheritance at the time. There was a debate throughout the nineteenth century about whether inheritance is a *force*, whose strength or effects could be 'accumulated and could be reinforced over generations – or weakened by neglect' and which 'granted the persistence of type',<sup>6</sup> or *matter*, a material structure 'that was transmitted over the generations',<sup>7</sup> though 'the dominant belief was unequivocally of heredity as a force'.<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche would probably be familiar to some extent with both sides from his reading of contemporary scientific literature. For example, on the former, the concept of heredity as a force was 'particularly widespread among nineteenth-century breeders, and it influenced Francis Galton'<sup>9</sup> whose work Nietzsche read and consulted for several years.<sup>10</sup> As for the latter, Nietzsche read Carl von Nägeli who presented a hypothetical hereditary substance 'idioplasma'.<sup>11</sup> While it seems that Nietzsche did not seriously participate in the debate and did not distinguish the positions and take one particular side on this specific issue, but was influenced eclectically, we can certainly find in his work the trace of the idea of hereditary accumulation. For Nietzsche, life is 'the will to the accumulation of force [*Kraft*]', which 'all the processes of life depend on' and which is 'specific to the phenomena of life, to nourishment, procreation, inheritance, to society, state, custom, authority' (KSA, 13:14[81], 14[82]; AC, 6). Based on this view, he sees the history of human society through the lens of the accumulation of force.

In this understanding, greatness does not arise suddenly in virtue of 'a miracle as a gift of heaven and "chance"', but because the 'ancestors have paid the cost' for it,

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<sup>5</sup> Conway (1997, 75).

<sup>6</sup> Rheinberger and Müller-Wille (2016, 157).

<sup>7</sup> Müller-Wille and Rheinberger (2005, 5 f).

<sup>8</sup> Gayon (2000, 71).

<sup>9</sup> Müller-Wille and Rheinberger (2005, 5).

<sup>10</sup> See Haase (1989). Nietzsche obtained a copy of Galton's *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* in 1883, and also mentioned his *Hereditary Genius* in a letter in 1888 (KSB, 8:1176).

<sup>11</sup> Emden (2014, 34).

in which ‘one discovers the history of a tremendous storing up and capital accumulation of force through all kinds of renunciation, struggle, work, and prevailing’ (KSA, 12:9[45]). In this way, ‘the beauty of a race or family [...] is the final result of the accumulated work of generations’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 47). Therefore, an age of exuberant richness is preceded by the times of preparatory work, that is, ‘The *accumulating* ages, where force and means of power are discovered that the future will one day make use of’ (KSA, 12:5[59]).

Similar to the contemporary breeders emphasising the continuance in a breed with the idea that hereditary force of character becomes more powerful through a long-continued transmission of it, about which Darwin was doubtful,<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, on a social level, emphasises the durability of the social structure. He believes that, for the accumulative times, there should be a society that is rigorously structured and durable because only when there is one, is ‘the *increase of force*’ as a whole ‘despite the temporary falling of the individual’ (KSA, 12:9[174]) possible.

On this subject, Nietzsche highly appreciates *imperium Romanum* as a model structure for the social durability required for the accumulation. The Romans understood that it took time to create a culture, and they built a structure that had ‘the will to tradition, to authority, to responsibility for centuries to come, to the *solidarity* of chains of generations forwards and backwards *in infinitum*’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 39). The Roman Empire, he asserts, is something with ‘great style’, something ‘that has duration, that promises life a future’ with ‘the genius of organisation and administration’, and accordingly, that makes it possible ‘to gain the ground for a great culture’ (AC, 58, 59). Nietzsche implies that an accumulation stage involves some domination that prevents force from being scattered, but he certainly believes that a durable structure of this kind is what allows the accumulation of force that cultivates the soil for a great culture in the future. This is the point which he laments about ancient Greece. Though Nietzsche is amazed by the Greeks who are ‘the *first cultural event* of history’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 47), he feels they lacked the Roman genius of organisation and failed to construct an enduring structure, so that their accumulated power couldn’t last long (MA I, 261).

When ‘the acquired and accumulated forces of many generations have not been squandered and dispersed but bound together’ for a long time, in the end come the prodigal or lavish ages, in which there appear human beings ‘who are the heirs and masters of this slowly acquired manifold richness’ (KSA, 11:26[409]). The accumulated

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<sup>12</sup> Darwin (2010, 62). ‘It is a general belief amongst breeders that the longer any character has been transmitted by a breed, the more firmly it will continue to be transmitted. I do not wish to dispute the truth of the proposition, that inheritance gains strength simply through long continuance, but I doubt whether it can be proved’.

force ‘waits for an heir who spends it lavishly’ (FW, 354), and these heirs are social fruits of long preparatory work. These social fruits Nietzsche also calls explosives: ‘Great men, like great ages, are explosives in which an immense force has been accumulated; their prerequisite is always, historically and physiologically, that things have long been gathered up, piled up, saved, and preserved for them – that for a long time, no explosion has taken place’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 44). Therefore, the age of richness is when people capitalise on the inherited power lavishly and explosively. Hence, Nietzsche views this age also as conquering and adventurous, with ‘the high spirits and an overflowing, prodigal will’ (KSA, 13:11[44]) where ‘a lot can be dared, a lot can be challenged, a lot can also be *squandered*’. As Nietzsche asserts that ‘ages are to be measured according to their *positive forces*’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 37), he includes in this prodigal age the age of classical Greece, where ‘never has life been lived so prodigally, so exorbitantly’ (MA I, 261), and the age of the Renaissance, which is ‘so prodigal and fateful’ as ‘the last *great age*’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 37).

However, ‘The *danger* that lies in great human beings and ages is extraordinary; exhaustion of every kind, sterility follows in their wake’. Thus, Nietzsche adds ‘the great age, the Renaissance for instance, is an end’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 44). The problem is that even if exhaustion and decadence necessarily follow, the great age failed to have a society constructed to maintain its cultural force and accordingly, was too short as ‘Greek history races so fast’ (MA I, 261). On this point, Nietzsche writes: ‘What does the Renaissance *prove*? That the reign of the “individual” can only be brief. The squandering is too great; the very possibility of collecting and capitalising is lacking; and exhaustion follows on its heels. These are times when everything is *squandered*, when the very force is squandered, with which one collects, capitalises, and accumulates riches upon riches’ (KSA, 13:15[23]).

Therefore, when various, extraordinary cultural energies explode and flood, there already has to be a steady social structure capable of storing these energies and allowing them to continue to flow for future generations. In this sense, ‘A culture of exception, of attempt, of danger, of nuance – a *hothouse* culture for the extraordinary plants has a right to exist only if there is enough force now to make squandering itself economical’ (KSA, 13:16[6]). This profligacy can be economical when there is a substantial society in which the energies are not to be just wasted but also to sustain, to be marshalled and concerted. In this respect, Nietzsche especially in the late period praises Rome for its durable structure.

When the various energies are not marshalled together to form a closely knit culture, they are only to be spent and exhausted, leading to the decadent age. On the one hand, this age witnesses the ‘racial exhaustion’ (KSA, 13:14[171]) that wants ‘rest’, ‘peace’ and ‘tranquillity’ as expressed in ‘the *happiness* of nihilistic religions’

(KSA, 13:14[174]). On the other hand, this age may seem to be vibrant with all its diverse cultural practices. However, this vibrancy really means the dispersed interests and a decadent need for strong stimulants and excitement. Thus, the exhausted has often been confused with richness when the former ‘appears with the gesture of the highest activity and energy’ (KSA, 13:14[68]) as in Wagner. In this way, ‘the race is corrupted because it did not recognise exhaustion as exhaustion’. These ‘physiological confusions are the source of all ills’ (KSA, 13:15[13]), but common. In this regard, Nietzsche also confesses a mistake in that he understood ‘the philosophical pessimism of the nineteenth century’ as a ‘victorious *fullness* of life’, and ‘Wagner’s music’ as ‘the expression of a Dionysian might’ (NW ‘Antipodes’; FW, 370). He realised later that these concerned not the richness of culture but the exhaustion and decadence in which dissolved forces consume each other without directional stability as a whole.

We have distinguished the three ages above – the accumulative, the prodigal or lavish, and the decadent – but they are not completely separate stages. In other words, the accumulative ages also spend force, so to speak, and the Roman imperium was a structure in which power could be used economically while still accumulating. Furthermore, in a prodigal age the social system would be more complex with all the vitality, and this complexity is shared with the decadent within a fragmented and less organised system. Therefore, although in the big picture the accumulative ages are followed by the squandering and the decadent, the ages should be understood in terms of interacting movements. Related to this, Nietzsche distinguishes two forms of movements that respectively partly respond to the previous times: one is ‘newly awakened [...] accumulated force, joyous, exuberant, violent: health’, and the other is ‘fatigue from a preceding movement’ that is related to ‘sickness’ (KSA, 10:8[27]). In this respect, the prodigal ages are when the former movement is stronger, and the decadent ages are the latter movement is dominant.

These movements can happen concurrently in a society. In the prodigal age ‘the tremendous tension’ of ‘the bond and the constraint of the old discipline’ ‘eases up’ in a sense and the cultural forces flood, and ‘the means of life, even for the enjoyment of life are abundantly present’ (JGB, 262). However, when the movement of squandering is not economical at all without a social structure to support it, this will give the initiative to the other movement of decline rapidly. In this decadent age, ‘we no longer collect, we squander the capital of the ancestors’ (KSA, 13:14[226]).

The accumulated force does not automatically make a prodigal age. When the accumulated force is wasted in a dispersed manner as in a democratic society, it is the decadent age of the chaotic consumption of force, which could have been a prodigal age. In this respect, while Nietzsche sees the decadence prevailing in contemporary Germany, characterising ‘modern democracy and all democratic halfway measures,

such as the “German Reich”, as a *decaying form of the state*’ and ‘the declining form of organizational force’ (GD ‘Streifzüge’, 39), he still recognises the inherited force in it, saying ‘the new Germany represents a great quantity of ability, inherited and acquired by training, so that for a while it may spend its accumulated store of force lavishly’ (GD ‘Deutsche’, 1). Therefore, although in the big picture temporal progress is manifested in accumulation, expenditure and decadence, these stages should not be considered separate but should be understood in terms of what kind of movement is dominant. Therefore, while these movements of accumulation, expenditure and decadence are there at the same time in society, the dominant movement determines the age in a big picture, and thus Nietzsche thinks decadence is also present as a concurrent movement in a society.

### **3. The Synchronic Picture and the Tension in Dealing with Decadence**

Second, the necessity of decadence can be considered from a synchronic perspective in society. Regarding this point, Nietzsche writes assertively in a note from 1888 under the title ‘*The concept of “decadence”*’:

*Waste, decay, the defective* are not in themselves to be condemned: they are necessary consequences of life, of the growth of life. The phenomenon of decadence is as necessary as any ascent and advance of life: one is in no position to *abolish* it. [...]

It is a disgrace for all socialist systematisers that they think there could be circumstances, social combinations, in which vice, sickness, crime, prostitution, *distress* would no longer grow. But that means condemning *life*. A society is not free to remain young. And even in its best force it has to form refuse and waste materials. The more energetically and boldly it advances, the richer it will be in failures and deformities, and the closer to decline (KSA, 13:14[75]).

Here Nietzsche views decadence as a concurrent movement in the process of life. This understanding is particularly based on the physiological perspective that an organism or life develops the ‘healthy’ and ‘degenerate’ parts. Furthermore, society as a whole is seen in a way analogous to an organism that necessarily produces waste matter. This point also refers to Nietzsche’s demand for the affirmation of life as a whole; that is to say, not only the joy in life but also all of what are considered the dark corners of life must be affirmed. This attitude is opposed to all the idealist movements that aim to have society as a pure space in which no distress or affliction exists.

This idealist tendency is represented in history by Plato, as well as by socialists and Christians in contemporary times. For them, this earthly life is not true life, whose

locus is considered other-worldly or in the great future. Nietzsche sees this kind of idealism is the expression of exhaustion and disgust for earthly life. As is well known, for Plato (or Socrates) idea or form is the true being which is the foundation of what we see in the world. In a dialogue, Socrates affirms that there is a form [*eidōs*] of 'just, and beautiful, and good, and everything of that sort'. However, when he is asked if there is a form of 'absurd' things like mud and filth or 'anything else totally undignified and worthless', he answers 'Not at all', saying 'it is too outlandish to think there is a form for them'.<sup>13</sup> In this way, ugly things like filth are banished from the world of true beings, while at the same time we see that they are still there in the world. Thus, they remain incomprehensible as things which exist without *raison d'être*.

Nietzsche seems to demand the recognition of such things, the decadent part of life, as he presents '*Dionysus*' as 'the religious affirmation of life, life whole and not denied or in part' (KSA, 13:14[89]). As decadence is necessary in society, while a sick person or decadent is considered as parasitic (GD 'Streifzüge', 33), he even tries 'to measure the health of a society and of the individual according to how many parasites they can endure' (M, 202). However, here a certain tension occurs. Although it is recognised that the development of life naturally involves decadence, this does not seem to mean it has his complete approval. It seems decadence is not, so to speak, waste matter simply to be accepted but waste matter to eliminate, hence 'decadents as *excrement* of society' (KSA, 13:16[52]). Thus, the tension is between his assertion that decadence should be accepted as a necessary part of life and the fact that he also often demands getting rid of a decadent part in society, as in the following passage:

When within an organism the least organ neglects, however slightly, to pursue its self-preservation, its energy renewal, [...] with complete assuredness, then the whole degenerates. The physiologist demands that the degenerating part be *cut out*, he denies any solidarity with what is degenerating, he is at the furthest remove from sympathy with it. But the priest precisely *wants* the degeneration of the whole, of humanity: that is why he *preserves* the degenerate – at this price he dominates it (EH 'M', 2).

Nietzsche here seems to regard decadence not as a necessarily entailed part in life, but as a diseased part to be done away with. He seems then, contrary to the passage quoted earlier, to want to make society free of decadence. He writes in a note in a more direct and emphatic manner: 'One should amputate sick members: first morality of society. [...] Society is a body in which no member may be ill, if it does not want to

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<sup>13</sup> Plato (*Parmenides*, 130 b – d).



run into danger at all: a sick member that is corrupted must be amputated: [...] My writing opposes all natural types of decadence' (KSA ,13:15[13]).

Further, like Plato who advises abandoning 'the children of inferior parents, or any child of the others that is born defective',<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche demands to question 'the right to procreate, the right to be born, the right to live' for the decadents or the physiologically degenerate (GD 'Streifzüge', 36). In this respect, Nietzsche does not show any mercy or tolerance for decadence even though he understands that life can be naturally ill and defective. Is decadence in the end merely something to extirpate, in Nietzsche's view? How should we then understand the earlier suggestion that the denial of decadence is connected to the condemnation of life?

The clue to resolving this apparent contradiction is found in a note where Nietzsche presents 'basic insight regarding the essence of decadence': 'Decadence itself is not *something to combat*: it is absolutely necessary and peculiar to every age and every people. *What to combat* with all strength is the introduction of the contagion into the healthy parts of the organism'. In this respect, decadence concerns the 'basic *biological question*' (KSA, 13:15[31]), and Nietzsche still draws an analogy between human society and an organism. It may reasonably be said that the best or most ideal scenario is one in which there is no decadent or diseased part in life, but this is not possible. Instead, the partial illness should be prevented from spreading across the whole to spoil and deteriorate it. What should be fought is not decadence itself but its metastasis that risks the health of the whole.

Apropos of this, there should be a durable society to deal with decadence. Inevitably, a society has a decadent part, and it could even exhibit some vibrancy, which, as mentioned, can be confused with richness but is in fact exhaustion. Whether it is the illness that should be counteracted or some new element that will enrich a culture, society should be strong enough to deal with either. Society should be durable not to allow the partial illness to dismantle the whole but also to be able to digest something new for its growth and development, because a society or 'a people that starts to crumble and grow weak somewhere, but is as a whole still strong and healthy, is capable of absorbing the infection of the new and incorporating it to its own advantage' (MA, 224).

Now, two connected questions are still to be answered. Firstly, what is the social mechanism by which Nietzsche understands decadence to spread to the whole society? Secondly, what does Nietzsche mean when he says that the more energetically society

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<sup>14</sup> Plato (*Republic*, 460 c).

advances, the more decadents it produces? In what follows, I further clarify his idea of decadence while addressing these questions.

#### **4. Decadence and The Morality of Equality**

The basic mechanism of the spread of the illness to the social whole is to make the mediocrities or the herd ill. In other words, the mechanism is to transmute the herd/mediocre into the decadent. As mentioned, decadence indicates the failure of being in accordance with one's nature or physiological constitution. What disconnects people from who they physiologically are and from their positions in the hierarchical order, Nietzsche understands above all, is the Christian morality of equality. This morality plays the key role in transforming the herd into decadents by causing people to find dissatisfaction and injustice with themselves and their positions.

Although Nietzsche gives considerable thought to the birth of the individual that breaks away from the herd and herd instinct, he does not see that the herd is bad per se. He understands that for humanity the herd is a mode of living, because individuals are always in the context of their interaction with others and society.<sup>15</sup> This mode of living should not be denied. As Nietzsche distinguishes the herd/mediocre and the decadent, he believes the herd can lead the healthy life that is true to its nature. 'In itself, there is nothing sick about the herd animal; it is even invaluable'. However, the herd is 'incapable of leading itself, it needs a "shepherd"'. 'The priest understands this', and here he comes into the picture; he leads the herd by 'directing the conscience' and makes people ashamed of their lives, preventing them from being in accordance with their nature. In this way, *'the herd animal has been made sick by the priest'* (KSA, 13:23[4]), and people deviate from the way they are and their way of life that suits them.

As Nietzsche understands, 'it would be completely unworthy of a deeper spirit to find an objection in mediocrity as such' (AC, 57). Rather, for the mediocre 'every step away from mediocrity' leads to sickness (KSA, 13:15[118]). Nietzsche believes that each type has 'its own realm of work' physiologically fit for it, and each type should seek 'its own feelings of perfection and mastery' in its realm of work in order to be healthy (AC, 57). When this fails, when people deviate from what they are, they suffer decadence. In this respect, the herd or mediocre type can have its own health that works for it. However, in Christian morality, 'the decadent forms are worth more

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<sup>15</sup> One of the results of this interaction and social relations is consciousness. Consciousness, which has developed, along with language, for the need of 'connections' and 'communication' between human beings, belongs much more to the 'social and herd nature' than to the individual existence (FW, 354). Thus, consciousness functions as the pressure that detaches one from one's instincts and coordinates them according to social appropriateness. In this way, Nietzsche recognises that the herd is a mode of living that is based on basic human nature.

than the mediocre' (KSA, 13:14[123]). The priest is the one who benefits from people being sick, that is, from the herd or mediocre becoming decadent. Thus, the priest sees 'his means to *power* in Christian morality' (EH 'Schicksal', 7); 'For the type of person longing for power in Judaism and Christianity, the *priestly* type, decadence is only a *means*: this type of person has a life-interest in making humanity *ill*' (AC, 24). In this regard, this priestly type dislocates people in life and society, and makes them negate their being in this world and constantly feel the need for redemption.

With this 'morality of un-selfing' [*Entselbstungs-Moral*], which '*denies* life at the most fundamental level' (EH 'Schicksal', 7), Christianity leads the herd to be sick, and thus it is 'a denaturalisation of herd-animal morality'. Coming into the age of democracy, the situation deteriorates because democracy causes this denaturalisation to be accepted as natural. Now 'the *mediocre nature*' does not stay in its mediocre position but 'at last grows so conscious of itself (acquires courage for itself) that it arrogates even *political power* to itself'. This is what Nietzsche understands as democracy. In this very sense, he writes, 'democracy is the *naturalised* Christianity' (KSA, 12:10[77]).

As this morality of equality becomes prevalent, resentment, which is the expression of powerlessness and dissatisfaction with oneself,<sup>16</sup> comes to be the social affect that promotes the 'organised herd instincts' to oppose the stronger types (KSA, 13:14[123]). 'Being ill *is* itself a kind of resentment' (EH 'Weise', 6). People attribute guilt upwards for the unfavourable conditions of their existence. Consequently, 'the decadents of all kinds are in revolt over themselves and need victims so as not to quench their thirst for destruction by destroying themselves', and they '*shift* the responsibility' for their being born this way to others (KSA, 13:15[30]). Nietzsche calls this attitude 'the pessimism of indignation', which refers to the 'preponderance of resentment' (KSA, 13:15[32]).

In modern times the decadent situation deteriorates since the resentment as the basic social affect is combined with the mixing of classes. In this way, resentment is no longer the matter of a certain social rank but of the majority of people that cannot bear to see anyone towering above them. Nietzsche's view is that in the democratic age the whole becomes '*the social mishmash*' wherein the 'bearers of the instincts of decline (of resentment, discontent, the drive to destroy, anarchism, and nihilism), including the slave instincts, [...] and canaille instincts of the *long-kept-down* strata,

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<sup>16</sup> I use the term resentment here only in relation to our discussion, but the concept has been discussed in a broader context. It is argued that resentment can be generally understood as coextensive with 'vengefulness' (Jenkins 2018, 192) or as arising from 'a feeling of displeasure' (Elgat 2017, 26). However, the concept is largely discussed in relation to Nietzsche's view of morality and values. See Reginster (1997), Wallace (2007), Poellner (2011).

minge with the blood of all classes: two, three generations later [...] everything has *become of the rabble*' (KSA, 13:14[182]). In this way, Nietzsche understands, in the modern society the decadent instincts overwhelm the social whole. The belief in moral world order and the resentment against the existing order have become the basis of every social movement.

However, what does Nietzsche mean when he implies that the more energetically society advances, the more decadents it produces? What is the point of endeavour to prevent decadence from spreading if even a healthy society produces decadents naturally? A society wherein its members are strictly disciplined for definite life can be stable, but it can also suppress the creative expressions of the members to some degree. Yet, when an age of richness comes, 'the tremendous tension' of 'the bond and the constraint of the old discipline' in the previous society 'eases up'. In this age, 'variation, whether as deviation (into the higher, finer, rarer) or as degeneration and monstrosity, is suddenly on the scene in the greatest abundance and splendour; the individual dares to be individual and stand out' (JGB, 262). This relaxation, so to speak, of the old constraint allows the various expressions of creative forces, but it also allows degeneration. In other words, in this relaxation when people would encounter new and different cultural streams, some would be enriched by incorporating the new forces, but some would become disjointed due to their incapacity to digest the new and foreign influence or environment, which constitutes decadence (KSA, 13:14[65], 15[80]).

Therefore, as the cultural forces form creatively, the decadents are also developed. Each social class and group, whether higher or lower in rank, can produce decadents who exhibit the incapacity leading to a disjointed and exhausted being. Hence, a society comes closer to decline as the cultural energies are not generated continually enough to deal with the decadence it produces. In this respect, decadents are not merely 'the *oppressed* races' but the dregs or 'discharge [*Auswurf*] of previous society of all classes' (KSA, 13:16[53]).

In the modern age, as mentioned, the situation becomes worse with the mixing of classes that leads to the disjointed system. Nietzsche denounces '*modern society*' as being 'no "society", no "body", but a sick conglomerate of chandalas – a society that no longer has the strength to *excrete*' (KSA, 13:16[53]). As a society advances, it also develops decadence; the lack of strength even to excrete means that society does

not grow at all. Nietzsche sees that it is the ideology of equality that fundamentally hinders growth.

### 5. Concluding Remarks

In the decadent age of mixture, Nietzsche understands, the view of the world is fragmented and 'the rank order of valuations according to which a people, a society, a human being has lived' is disarranged. Thus 'every form and way of life' is merely mixed without the focal power to organise the diversity into the whole, and 'thanks to that mixture, our instincts now run back everywhere and we ourselves are a kind of chaos' (JGB, 224). With this loss of the centre, decadents suffer the 'chaos and anarchy of the instincts' (GD 'Sokrates', 4), which mirrors the disjointed social condition.

We can draw two points from the discussion of decadence. First, to overcome a decadent state where one loses the centre of gravity of one's instincts, a social structure is required which enables one's being in accordance with one's nature or physiological constitution. Second, we also recognise the importance of the social structure that enables accumulation of cultural forces. In a society (in a synchronic picture) there is the decadent part as well as accumulating and expending forces. In order for a society to maintain its health, even though from an historical viewpoint it can and will eventually decline, it should be durable enough to accumulate cultural forces, and should be a society in which this accumulation is able to sustain the expenditure and in which decadence does not spread into the whole.

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