

NIETZSCHE'S CONCEPT OF DECADENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL¹

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This article aims to analyze and elucidate Nietzsche's concept of decadence, which has often been mentioned in Nietzsche studies and thus feels familiar, but in fact has not been thoroughly analyzed. As Nietzsche describes many phenomena in terms of decadence and the extension of the term may be seen as too broad, some would think we cannot construct one picture of decadence from Nietzsche's various descriptions and consider that it is sufficient to say it has a general meaning of decline or decay. However, this article seeks to combine Nietzsche's scattered remarks on decadence together into a coherent picture. I argue that the essence or the fundamental principle of decadence is the lack of self in the sense of the loss of the fundamental instinct as the center within the person. Grasping this principle, we can understand how the various phenomena Nietzsche describes as decadence belong together; furthermore, we can understand why Nietzsche sees Christians or Socrates, despite their struggle for improvement, as decadents.

Keywords: Nietzsche – Decadence – Self – Redemption – Socrates

The problem of the term “decadence”

This article aims to analyze and elucidate Nietzsche's concept of decadence, particularly the decadence of the individual.² Nietzsche's use of the term “decadence” does not seem to fashion a coherent picture of it. Here the vagueness of the term as used by Nietzsche becomes a challenge. Nietzsche does not present the concept of decadence with a clear definition. He describes many phenomena in terms of decadence and the extension of the term may be seen as too broad, so “one could

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

² As this article focuses on Nietzsche's use of the term “decadence” itself, for the broader studies on his idea of decadence, see Conway (1997) and Huddleston (2019). Benson also deals with the subject, but interprets decadence in a musical term, leaving behind “the quest for the historical Nietzsche” (2008, preface). For a broad perspective on modern decadence, see the chapter “The Idea of Decadence” in Calinescu (1987).

almost think that he simply uses terms like ‘degeneration’ and ‘decadence’ to describe whatever he does not like” (Hunt 1993, 101). Because of this, some would consider decadence not to be a technical term that requires analysis but that it is enough to say it has a general meaning of decline or decay.³ In this regard, due to the vagueness of the concept of decadence, the term nihilism, which Nietzsche presents in a clearer way, has been the subject of far greater focus.⁴

Even without a clear definition as mentioned – Conway points out Nietzsche’s “failure to develop an adequately articulated account of decadence” (1997, 23) – many phenomena are described as decadence. Bauer suggests that what Nietzsche calls decadence is something that can be recognized only by its symptoms (Bauer 1984, 50). Following Bauer, Horn maintains that Nietzsche does not show the evident relations between decadence as the cause, and its symptoms (2000, 15). Horn traces the symptoms of decadence in several aspects, suggesting that we simply perceive the symptoms or epiphenomena of decadence as if we sense the symptoms of a disease but do not know what the disease may be or what may have caused it. In a similar vein, due to this vagueness and broad use of the concept, Bernheimer believes we cannot construct one picture of decadence out of Nietzsche’s various descriptions of its symptoms (2002, 27).

It may be because of this elusiveness that when scholars briefly deal with decadence, they usually discuss its symptoms.⁵ However, unless we grasp the essence or the fundamental principle of decadence in which the symptoms originate, we cannot fully understand how the various symptoms are connected and/or even whether those symptoms refer to the same “decadence.” As such, it is necessary to grasp the essence of decadence that allows all those symptoms to belong to decadence together. In this respect, this article seeks to find out the core of decadence, based on which various symptoms can be explained, and combine Nietzsche’s scattered remarks on decadence together into a coherent picture. My overall argument is that decadence is

³ In *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, Burnham presents a general but more comprehensive understanding that by “decadence” Nietzsche means “any period of cultural history – or any state of the human organism – which has lost its good taste and value judgement [...], health and sureness of instinct [...], discipline and sense of a future. It is to be associated either with the decline of old cultures, or with moral revolutions.” (2015, 93 f.)

⁴ While it is recognized that both terms are interconnected, “nihilism” is still understood to be more central. Thus, Tongeren understands decadence as a physiological explanation in relation to nihilism (2018, 40 f.), and as part of the history of the development of nihilism (2018, 90 f.). Moreover, Stegmaier argues that Nietzsche calls it decadence when nihilism emerges in a culture (2011, 174 f.). In this kind of understanding, decadence comes to be a term referring to the phenomenon of nihilism.

⁵ For example, Nietzsche remarks that wanting what is harmful to oneself is one of the symptoms or characteristic marks of decadence, but Leiter takes this as “the very essence of ‘decadence’” (2015, 128).

(1) the absence within the person of a fundamental instinct as a centering or unifying drive or instinct,⁶ which (2) amounts to the failure to form a whole and the loss or lack of self. (3) This causes instinctual and motivational disorder, which (4) leads one to seek what is harmful to one. In the following, I first trace Nietzsche's text, particularly his late writings, and discuss what the essence or principle is that allows various phenomena to be called decadence. Based on such a principle I then further clarify why Nietzsche views Christians or Socrates, despite their struggle for improvement, as decadents.

Essence of decadence

It is analyzed in *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch* that Nietzsche views decadence as the inability to form a whole and describes it in physiological-psychological terms (2004, 540 f.). This article generally agrees with this but understands that a fundamental drive, or a set of drives, as a unifying center within the person is required to form a whole. In other words, an underlying cause of such inability is the absence of a fundamental drive. In this respect, we understand that for Nietzsche decadence is in essence "the loss of a center of gravity [*Schwergewicht*]" (EH M 2; Schicksal 7),⁷ which means the absence of a fundamental drive or instinct within the person. This absence of a centering or unifying drive or instinct corresponds to "the lack of self" (GD Streifzüge 37), or deviation from the self in the sense of the loss of the fundamental instinct as the center.⁸ As Nietzsche argues that drives constitute our being (M 119), the self consists in an arrangement of drives. To this arrangement the fundamental instinct is crucial as the center dominantly organizing other drives.⁹ In this respect, decadence refers to the lack of the "dominant instinct," and a decadent is one who squanders themselves in other activity that disrupts their dominant instinct (KSA 13:23[2]).

What kind of drive should be the dominant as the center depends on one's

⁶ Nietzsche does not clearly differentiate between the terms "instinct" and "drive" in a significant way. However, he seems to use "instinct" more in relation to decadence and the center of the self; thus Conway claims that "Up until 1888, Nietzsche treats the terms *Trieb* and *Instinkt* as roughly synonymous" but in 1888 he makes a distinction between the terms, so the instinct refers to "any specific organization of the drives" (1997, 30 ff.). However, this claim needs to provide decisive textual evidence (Cf. Katsafanas 2016, 77; Gemes, Patourel 2015, 598).

⁷ For quotations from Nietzsche, the well-known German abbreviations are used. References to Nietzsche's writings are to section and aphorism or fragment numbers.

⁸ It can be argued regarding Nietzsche's concept of self that the master drive sublimating other drives is central to the concept (Gemes 2009; Gemes, Patourel 2015), or that a harmonious relation "between drives and conscious thought" (Katsafanas 2011, 87 f.) should be emphasized. Still, it is clear that Nietzsche connects the loss of a center of gravity with the lack of self in relation to decadence.

⁹ Nietzsche understands what one is or "who he is" as "meaning in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other" (JGB 6).

physiological constitution or “the structure” of the soul in terms of “what groups of sensations within a soul awaken most quickly, speak up and give the command” (JGB 268). Nietzsche understands one can form a healthy self only when one can develop a dominant drive according to one’s nature or physiological make-up.¹⁰ In this sense, as the fundamental instinct is to be formed differently according to one’s physiological constitution, decadence implies the disvalue of the way people are physiologically.

To analyze the term in more detail, decadence generally is “declining life” (GD Vernunft 6) with “the general loss of *vitality*” (GD Streifzüge 37), and more precisely, “decadence” is identified with “physiological decline,” which exists when “the will to power falls off in any form” (AC 17). Considering the will to power is the expression for Nietzsche to describe human beings and the world, we see that the reason why the extension of “decadence” seems so broad to the extent that it is taken to include anything he disapproves of, is that he understands it from the perspective of decline of will to power. Although the distinction between the weakness and strength in power is fundamental to Nietzsche’s critique of decadence (Huszar 1945, 259), it seems this broad sense of decline of power leaves much to be explained regarding decadence and its symptoms.

What I am focusing on here is the “physiological decline.” Just as Nietzsche warns of “the error of confusing the cause and effect” in Cornaro’s skimpy diet (GD Irrthümer 1), he emphasizes the physiological basis from which other symptoms and phenomena arise. Thus, he points out that “one confuses cause and effect: one fails to understand decadence as physiological and mistakes its consequences for the real cause of being in bad condition” (KSA 13:17[6]). In a different way to “psychologists, whose glance involuntarily lingers only on symptoms of decadence” (KSA 11:35[27]), we need to look into the physiological basis of the concept. If we should understand decadence as a physiological term, then what does this physiological decline mean?

As mentioned, decadence implies the disvalue of the way people are physiologically. Different physiological types should develop different dominant or fundamental drives in accordance with their physiological constitution. Otherwise, they cannot be active, suffering from “physiological absurdity” and “contradictoriness of instinct” (KSA 13:25[1]), which leads to “physiological decline” as “the will to power falls off.” Nietzsche explains the connection between a dominant drive and the will: “The multiplicity and disintegration of the impulses [*Antriebe*], the lack of any system

¹⁰ Nietzsche believes that there are “several physiological types” “determined and best developed for different activity,” and the rank order is “only the sanctioning of a natural distance” between these types (KSA 13: 14[221]). Here each type has “its own hygiene, its own realm of work, its own feelings of perfection and mastery” (A 57). Different types therefore have their own health physiologically fit for them respectively.

among them, results in a 'weak will'; the coordination of them under a single predominant impulse results in a 'strong will'; – in the first case it is the oscillation and the lack of the center of gravity; in the latter, the precision and clarity of the direction" (KSA 13:14[219]; 17[6]). In this respect, a dominant drive should be developed first, which will function as the centripetal force to form the self by organizing other drives; otherwise, the oscillation and the lack of the center of gravity occur, which result in the physiological decline. This can be understood in terms of self-lessness as the lack of center and the deviation from what one is physiologically. In this sense, Nietzsche calls "selflessness [*Selbstlosigkeit*]" "the principle of decadence" (NW Antipoden).

From this self-loss, or "the de-selfing [*Entselbstung*] and de-personalizing [*Entpersönlichung*]" (JGB 207; WA Epilog; AC 54; EH M 2, Schicksal 7), come various other symptoms of decadence. First, people come to suffer the physiological discord within them, and this discord is expressed as the disorganization and disruption of instincts. The will to power refers to the activity that interprets, transforms, organizes, and assimilates what one encounters into oneself for one's growth. But the self-loss means there is no focal point for this activity for growth, the point around which different experiences come together. So, decadence in this sense of "selflessness" indicates the "weakening of an individual's self-interest" (AC 20), "instinctual contradictoriness" and "the loss of a center of gravity" (EH M 2, Schicksal 7).

This loss, Nietzsche asserts, also means that people are not in line with their instincts and become alienated from them. Individuals are internally split into dispersed interests, without being able to organize their instincts to form a whole. Thus, decadents suffer the "chaos and anarchy of the instincts" (GD Sokrates 4). They come to feel strange about their instincts, and they "have to fight the instincts – that is the formula for decadence" (GD Sokrates 11). With "the lack of self and self-assurance" (GD Streifzüge 37), they distrust the instinct and lead "life [...] without instinct, in resistance to the instincts", which is "a sickness" (GD Sokrates 11).

This "separation from instincts" (KSA 13:16[51]) is also connected with "the disintegration of the will," as we have discussed the will as the expression of the organization and coordination of drives. The will is so fragmented that people do not know what they should do with any certainty. In this respect, the disintegration of the will is understood as the disintegration of the instincts and "degeneration of the instincts" (GD Irrthümer 2).

This instinctual failing, which signifies "a decline in *organizing* power, in 'will,' to speak physiologically" (KSA 13:14[117]), leads to another characteristic symptom: wanting what is bad for oneself. "The instinct is weakened. People are attracted to the things they should avoid" (WA 5). Concerning this, Nietzsche again emphasizes the physiological basis of decadence: "What is best is missing when self-seeking starts to

be missing. To choose instinctively what is harmful to *oneself*, to be *tempted* by ‘disinterested’ motives, is virtually the formula for decadence. ‘Not to seek one’s own advantage’ – that is just the moral fig leaf for a totally different, namely physiological factuality: ‘I don’t know how to *find* my own advantage anymore’ – Disintegration of the instincts!’ (GD Streifzüge 35) People are so physiologically dislocated that their instincts are not to be organized but dispersed, so that they lose “the internal necessity” (AC 11) to lead an instinctual life and are not able to choose with an “instinctual certainty” (EH wise 2) what is good for them.

Nietzsche summarizes these phenomena with the word “corruption”: “I understand corruption [...] in the sense of decadence: [...] I call an animal, a species, an individual corrupt when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers*, what is detrimental to it. [...] I regard life itself as the instinct for growth, for duration, for accumulation of force, for *power*: where the will to power is lacking, there is decline” (AC 6).

Simply, decadence consists in the fact that people deviate from their physiological constitutions and accordingly from the self, so that they suffer instinctual disorder and contradictoriness. They are internally dispersed and fragmented, and lose the instinct to seek what is good and avoid what is bad for them. With this internal disorder, decadents come to be so weak that they shrink from accepting their natural instincts and deny the joy they would feel when following them. “When the instinct of life compels us to act, pleasure proves that the act is *right*,” but a morality of selflessness sees “pleasure as an *objection*” (AC 11). The renunciation of the self is praised, and happiness as feeling the increase of power (AC 2) is taken to be filthy. Thus they fight the instincts, while in fact, “as long as life is *ascending*, happiness is the same as instinct” (GD Sokrates 11). In this sense, decadence is “the lack of nature” or “*anti-nature*” (EH Schicksal 7).

The decadents “want to *escape* from themselves” (WA Epilogue). Thus, Nietzsche further avers that compassion, which makes one look away from the self, is the virtue of decadence (WA 7; EH wise 4), the virtue that “has a depressive effect” and brings about the loss of vitality. Moreover, religions that have selfless compassion as their main teaching are “decadence-religions,” since “by *multiplying* misery just as much as by *conserving* everything miserable, compassion is a prime instrument for the increase of decadence” (AC 7).

Redemption

“To understand how all forms of corruption belong together” (KSA 13:14[6]), we have analyzed “decadence” in terms of the lack of self as the deviation from one’s physiological constitution. Decadence indicates that “the individual becomes untrue to his own instincts” (KSA 13:22[21]). Different types have different dominant drives under which the self develops. In this sense, “corruption is something fundamentally different depending on the life-form in which it manifests itself” (JGB 258).¹¹

Without being aware of the nature of the problem, people seek a number of ways to overcome decadence and their weakness. However, though they may not realize it, “what they choose as a means, as salvation, is itself just another expression of decadence – they *change* its expression, they do not get rid of it itself” (GD Sokrates 11). They are already decadents, but they pursue the ways of dealing with their unsatisfactory circumstances only to deteriorate them. Indeed, their ways to overcome decadence are just an expression of it because they all stand against the instincts in some ways (GD Sokrates 11).

Let us look in detail at why attempts to overcome decadence fail. There are broadly two ways sought to escape decadence; one is to smooth away the self, and the other is to redefine the self. Although Nietzsche suggests that these ways are not divided but rather connected with one another, I argue that the Christian is representative of the former, and Sokrates the latter.

Consider first those who try to diminish or remove the self. Decadents want to escape from themselves and this life because, Nietzsche asserts, they suffer from life and reality, and so they long for a form of redemption. In this “need for *redemption*,” which is “the most honest expression of decadence” (WA Epilog), people believe that the locus of true self and genuine life is not here but somewhere else or some status they wish to reach. They cannot feel pleasure as what it feels to accord with instinct. Rather, they suffer from this life and feel its reality not as something true but as something wrong and which they have failed in. So, they have “a deep discontent with the reality” and “*hatred* of the natural (–of reality!–).” In this sense, “The preponderance of feelings of displeasure over feelings of pleasure [...] provides the *formula* for decadence” (AC 15).

In Nietzsche’s understanding, the physiological condition that gives rise to the doctrine of redemption is “an extreme over-sensitivity and capacity for suffering” (AC 30). This sensitivity concerning suffering is not an ultimate cause, but already a sign of decadence. They are so weak and fragmented that they respond to every stimulus

¹¹ This also implies that the physiological rank order is required, in which each type can find a place and the self of each type develops according to its nature, and without which the instincts of each type are physiologically dislocated. See note 10.

in a kind of piecemeal, haphazard way, with a lack of the unified self or center of gravity, based on which what they encounter is filtered and digested for their growth. They show an “inability to resist reacting to any stimulus and to ‘control’ oneself” (KSA 13:14[113], 14[209]). They are overwhelmed by the stimuli and become sensitive to any contact with the world; thus, they escape or shrink from the world. The typical type of this case is the Buddhist who shrinks himself to minimize contact with suffering. Although Nietzsche takes the Buddhist to be healthier than the Christian in that “it no longer says ‘the struggle against *sin*,’ but rather, giving reality its dues, says ‘the struggle against *suffering*’” (AC 20), he considers both as decadence (AC 20, 42) for the diminished vital force, which cannot fully embrace the world.

The sensitivity that makes one shrink is also what allows Nietzsche to see Epicurus as a decadent. The Epicurean’s sensitivity leads him to have “his ‘garden’” (FW 306) and he stops expanding the realm of life. He fears the world and confines himself in his private garden, so Nietzsche writes “Epicureans [...] enjoy the freedom as [...] prisoners” (KSA 10:20[5]). In “decadents” Nietzsche finds “a certain warm, fear-repelling narrowness and confinement,” and says “Thus I gradually came to understand Epicurus, the antithesis of a Dionysian Greek” (NW Antipoden). The Epicurean way of life in which one shies away from the relationship with the external world is the expression of lassitude or “the wise tiredness” (KSA 13:14[99]). This kind of isolated individual, far from being able to govern himself, could barely keep only its own private realm. He cannot carry out self-mastery, so he cannot be the master of his life if he is subjugated to the order of the external world when he sets foot outside his private realm. Thus, Nietzsche finds “reduced men” (KSA 11:25[222]) in the Epicurean self-contained life that is afraid to come out of its private garden. The Buddhist and Epicurean are decadents in that they are so shrunken and unable to step into the world where suffering is inevitable. Nevertheless, they do not go further to negate life as Nietzsche understands as the Christian does, making life a sin.

Of course, Nietzsche does not deny that there are respectable aspects of the Buddhist and Epicurus,¹² who especially opposes the Christian concept of sin. Still, Nietzsche views Epicurus, along with Pyrrho, as one of “forms of Greek decadence,” “representing a state in which one is neither sick nor healthy, neither alive nor dead” (KSA 13:14[99]). In this respect, one’s opposing decadence does not make one not decadent. Epicurus is a decadent even though he has a noble aspect, just as Pyrrho has “the instinct against [...] the Socratic, Plato” (KSA 13:14[100]) but is still a decadent.

¹² For a reading that focuses on Nietzsche’s positive appreciation of Epicurus in the middle period, see Ansell-Pearson 2018. However, Nietzsche in the late period sees the lassitude in the Epicurean self-sufficiency, hence he is “*against* Spinozistic or Epicurean happiness and against all rest [*Ausruhen*] in contemplative states” (KSA 12:1[123]).

The Buddhist and Epicurean try to maintain life, albeit a contracted one, with minimal suffering, whether enjoying a small garden or keeping mental peace. Still, this sensitivity to pain has within it the seeds of the denial of life. For if suffering is inevitable in life, denying life could be the final solution. Schopenhauer is one case that illustrates this; influenced by Buddhism, Schopenhauer is considered a decadent for valuing the ascetic life that disowns desires and avoids the suffering that the desires will bring, which, Nietzsche understands, leads to “negation of the will to live” (GD Moral 5). Suffering indicates connection with the world, and the denial of this connection can be the ultimate ending. Nietzsche states that “Epicurus is a typical decadent. [...] The fear of pain, even of the infinitesimal in pain – this *cannot* end any other way than in a *religion of love*” (AC 30). Although Epicurus opposed the Christian concepts such as “guilt, punishment, and immortality” (AC 58), Nietzsche believes the over-sensitivity ends in a Christian movement that is to “divide the world into a ‘true’ and an ‘illusory’ world,” which is “only a suggestion of decadence – a symptom of *declining* life” (GD Vernunft 6), and to condemn life and the world (GD Moral 5; Streifzüge 34). People who are so weakened to the point they cannot bear this world will find refuge away from the world. In this respect, Nietzsche points out “*Epicureanism in Christianity*” (KSA 13:14[87]).

In this way, Christianity, which is the “*denial of the will to life* made into a religion” (EH WA 2), comes to be representative of what Nietzsche ultimately fights against. Christianity has moved the locus of the true self and life to the “beyond.” While “noble morality [...] is rooted in a triumphant Yes said to *oneself*, [...] self-affirmation, self-glorification of life,” “the Christian wants to *escape* from himself.” For them “the I is always *hateful*.” The Christian morality, with the “need for *redemption*, the embodiment of all Christian needs,” “*negates* the world” and “impoverishes, makes pale and ugly the value of things” (WA Epilog). Hence, the Christian denies life and the world, and accordingly promotes “*anti-nature*” morality, and with Christianity, humanity itself has been in decadence (EH Schicksal 7). The decadent judgment that “nothing is worth anything – *life* isn’t worth anything” has infected the earth, “now as religion (Christianity), now as philosophy (Schopenhauerism)” (GD Streifzüge 35).

Socrates: redefining the self

The second way to overcome decadence, which is still perceived as being of decadence, is to redefine the self. Socrates is representative of this route, which Nietzsche deals with in the chapter “The Problem of Socrates” in *Twilight of Idols*. Socrates is a decadent in two aspects: resistance to instinct, and tyranny of reason. Above all, Socrates fights against instinct. He believes “every acquiescence to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads *downward*” (GD Sokrates 10), and he takes instinct to be

a threat to the normal life. In this sense, he is a typical decadent. But why did he combat the instinct? First, Nietzsche found in Socrates the physiological decline that led him to devalue life, even referring to Socrates' lowly origin and ugly appearance (GD Sokrates 2, 3). Socrates was of the declining type and as such, he strayed from his instincts. He was not able to master himself since he deviated and did not know how to organize instincts or drives in an integrated form centered on a ruling drive. Without this center of gravity, he suffered the affliction that he was not "master of himself" and "the instincts had turned *against* each other" (GD Sokrates 9).¹³ In this chaos, he feared he would not be able to manage the instincts and would instead be overwhelmed by them. He felt that the instincts were tyrannical.

Socrates' solution to this problem is to make reason dominate. He believes "The drives want to play the tyrant; one has to invent a stronger *counter-tyrant*" (GD Sokrates 9), and he makes reason the tyrant. However, as Nietzsche writes, "Socrates' decadence is indicated not only by the admitted chaos and anarchy of the instincts, but also by the hypertrophy of the logical" (GD Sokrates 4); this solution is merely a way to bring about the deterioration of decadence. Socrates finds it "necessary to make a tyrant out of *reason*" (GD Sokrates 10) because he does not know how to deal with the instincts and have self-control. He feels the instincts are a ferocious dark force that has to be neutered by the daylight of rationality. In Socrates' decadence, "the wildness and anarchy of instincts" and "the hypertrophy of logic and of brightness of reason" "belong together" (KSA 13:14[92]).¹⁴

Why is the emphasis on reason not then the way to overcome decadence, but in fact achieves the opposite? On the face of it, this may seem to be an effective means of fighting decadence, as reason can play a central role in integrating instincts. Confronting "the Greeks' strongest instinct, the will to power" and "the tremendous force of this drive" (GD Alten 3), Socrates tries to understand himself in a different way. He redefines the self, believing he can achieve a new integration as a stronger form of self by the reign of reason. Can reason then not be a force that causes drives to be organized or brought to unity?

Nietzsche thinks the human being's rational capacity cannot bring about a unified self. This is primarily because our conscious thoughts are the products of interaction among drives, and reason is not a commander but an instrument of the body

¹³ "His [Socrates'] case was basically only the extreme case, only the most overt example of what was at that time starting to become a general crisis: the fact that no one was master of himself anymore, that the instincts were turning against each other."

¹⁴ In this respect, the difference between Christianity and Socrates is that while Christianity, exalting the faith in the other world, is not only "against nature" and this world but also "against reason" (KSA 13:14[13]), Socrates, exalting reason, tries to make reason the master to repress nature and instinct.

and self (Z Verächtern). In consciousness one can stand back from oneself as an observer, and in this sense, conscious thought itself indicates one's detachment and distance from instinct. In this regard, rationality cannot be the center that organizes drives, and Socrates' way of integration under rationality is possible only in a tyrannical way by repressing the instincts.¹⁵ Therefore, Nietzsche views the dialectic, the Socratic reasoning or argumentative methodology, as producing "mistrust" (GD Sokrates 6). It refers to the rift within oneself and lack of self-confidence, which is caused by being at odds with instinct. In this respect, Nietzsche sees the opposition between instinct and reason: "Socrates [...] as a typical decadent. 'Rationality' *against* instinct. 'Rationality' at any price as a dangerous, life-undermining force!" (EH GT 1) As he states that he recognized Socrates being a decadent early in *The Birth of Tragedy* (EH GT 1, 2), he has already made this point: "While in all productive people instinct is precisely the creative-affirmative force and consciousness acts critically and dissuasively, in Socrates instinct becomes the critic and consciousness the creator" (GT 13).

When Nietzsche speaks of the loss of the center and the lack of self, it is above all referring to the loss of the fundamental instinct as centripetal force. The person can be healthy when its self is formed not based on any drive but on the fundamental instinct.¹⁶ Thus, "decadence" refers to the "total aberration of humanity from its fundamental instincts" (KSA 13:11[227]), and Christianity, against the "*higher type*," "has banished all the fundamental instincts of this type" (AC 5). For Nietzsche the "*fundamental drives* in every race and class express something of the conditions of their existence" (KSA 12:9[173]). Thus, each type, in accordance with its physiological constitution as mentioned, develops different fundamental instincts as the center that functions as a cornerstone around which its self is organized, which leads to the expression of "the strongest, most life-affirming drive, [...] the *will to power*" (GM III 18). Socrates tries to overcome the disorder of instincts by tyranny of reason. But this was a way to hinder the formation of fundamental instincts by ignoring the human being as a body and its physiological constitution. Thus, he still belongs to decadence.

¹⁵ Bernard Reginster distinguishes tyranny and mastery. According to his reading, tyranny is only achieved when a dominant drive suppresses other drives, while mastery allows other drives to be expressed within a dominant drive's end (2003, 76 f.).

¹⁶ Katsafanas questions the "unity as predominance" model, the unity in which diverse drives are organized under a dominant drive, presenting an example of a high functioning alcoholic with the alcoholic urges "mastering the other drives" (Katsafanas 2011, 98 f.). Here, we can see that the problem arises when only formal unity is focused on. It is misleading to believe that the unity is that which one can have with any domineering drive, such as an alcoholic one. Gemes argues that not just any drive is suitable for being a predominant drive, but only a drive that achieves mastery not by repressing but by sublimating other drives (Gemes, 2009; Gemes, Patourel, 2015). Still, it is not clear whether any drive is capable of sublimating other drives to serve its end. I argue that not just any drive is suited to be the master in organizing drives to make a whole, but the fundamental instinct or drive in accordance with the person's nature or physiological make-up.

Concluding remarks

As we have analyzed the concept of decadence in terms of the lack center within an individual, which is also expressed as the lack of self, a question may arise regarding Nietzsche's statement that "apart from that I am a decadent, I am also the opposite" (EH *weise* 2). Jacqueline Scott (1998) focuses on Nietzsche's admission of being a decadent and argues that Nietzsche should be understood in terms of a strong decadent. However, the important point to note here is that he argues that "the complete decadents always choose the means that are harmful to them," while he has "always instinctively chosen the *right* means of dealing with bad states." Thus he continues, "As *summa summarum* I was healthy, as a corner, as a speciality I was decadent." Here Nietzsche says he is healthy as a whole, and he is not a decadent but only from a certain angle. In this respect, he is not in a state of total self-loss. His center of gravity has not crumbled. Hence, what he experienced could be integrated into him as nourishment for growth, not simply as scattered stimuli. Regarding this, he says "I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again." At the end of the section he writes again: "I am the opposite of a decadent" (EH *weise* 2). Therefore, we understand that Nietzsche's emphasis is not simply on him being decadent but being the opposite and healthy as a whole.

The concept of decadence as the lack of self is deeply rooted in the idea of becoming what one is; that is, Nietzsche's ultimate ethical concern: "You should become who you are" (FW 270). One should follow and develop one's own nature in accordance with one's physiological constitution and thus form the self that is to be formed according to one's nature. This accordance is expressed in the instinctual certainty and one's trust in oneself or "reverence for itself" that "the noble soul has" (JGB 287). Nietzsche refers to the noble human being's "perfect functional certainty of the regulating *unconscious* instincts" (GM I 10) and considers "whoever is "master" by nature" as "the most involuntary, unconscious artists" who instinctively create forms (GM II 17). Appertaining to this, he emphasizes "the *certainty of an instinct*," and adds, "this unconsciousness belongs to every kind of perfection: even the mathematician employs his combinations unconsciously" (KSA 13:14[111]). This instinctual certainty indicates that one is in accordance with one's nature and seeks "perfection and mastery" in one's own "realm of work" (AC 57) and to embody one's innate talent, so that "he really becomes a talent, that is, *becomes* what he *is*, which is to say: discharges it in works and actions" (MA I 263). Regarding this certainty, Nietzsche also speaks of "a perfect automatism of the instinct", which is "the precondition for every kind of mastery, for every kind of perfection in the art of living" (AC 57).

The idea of decadence of the individual is connected with the social soil that allows

different types to live actively in accordance with their nature or respective physiological constitution. As the social order for this accordance fails, society witnesses people of “declining natures” mirroring the social disaggregation and representing “the *physiological contradictoriness*”, whose “instincts lack a *center of gravity*, the *Wohin?*” (KSA 13:14[94]). In this regard, society where such accordance is realized and “one affirms what one *is*, one denies what one is *not*” (KSA 13:25[1]) comes to be one of Nietzsche’s main concerns. While we can recognize the discussion of decadence here is also concerned with Nietzsche’s idea of society, this article focuses on the concept of decadence primarily at an individual level.

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