On what grounds could life be made worth living, given its abundant suffering? Friedrich Nietzsche was among many who attempted to answer this question. While always seeking to resist pessimism, Nietzsche’s strategy for doing so, and the extent to which he was willing to concede conceptual grounds to pessimists, shifted dramatically over time. His reading of pessimists such as Eduard von Hartmann, Olga Plüümacher, and Julius Bahnsen – as well as their critics, such as Eugen Dihring and James Sully – has been under-explored in the secondary literature, isolating him from his intellectual context. Patrick Hassan’s book seeks to correct this. After closely mapping Nietzsche’s philosophical development on to the relevant axiological and epistemological issues, it disentangles his various critiques of pessimism, elucidating how familiar Nietzschean themes (e.g., eternal recurrence, aesthetic justification, will to power, and his critique of Christianity) can and should be assessed against this philosophical backdrop.

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NIETZSCHE’S STRUGGLE AGAINST PESSIMISM

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Many of the key issues that Nietzsche grappled with, and that are the subject of this enquiry, are close to my own philosophical interests. The
question of the value of life; the function of beauty and sublimity in framing the worth of things; the roles of religion, art, and the sciences with respect to how we address pervasive suffering, and if those roles are compatible; the existential implications of a wholly naturalistic worldview; the dangers of individual or cultural nihilism of various forms – all are areas about which I continue to find Nietzsche both a provocative and an enlightening source for thought. I have enjoyed discussing such issues more broadly with friends as the years have passed, and I take such discussions to have contributed in small but significant ways to this project. There are too many to mention, but special thanks to the engaging company and insight of Staffan Snitting, Tomas Hubbard, Max Bienkowski, Reham El-Morally, Kev Walsh, Max Mitchell, Anna Zehnpfund, Kevin Chaffey, Panos Paris, Orestis Palermos, and my two brothers.

A Note on Primary Sources

Works by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are cited by section and/or page number. I use the following abbreviations and translations (except where I occasionally have modified the translation as I have felt appropriate):

Works by Nietzsche


x

A Note on Primary Sources


Works by Schopenhauer
A Note on Primary Sources


For the original German:


For abbreviations of primary texts by other authors, see the Bibliography.