

Undermining the Current Concept of Health. *Untimely Meditations* between Physiology and Aesthetics

Minar el concepto actual de salud. *Consideraciones intempestivas* entre fisiología y estética

Minando o conceito atual de saúde. *As Considerações extemporâneas* entre fisiologia e estética

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Resumen

El artículo aborda el problema de la salud en Nietzsche, manifestando su centralidad ya en las *Consideraciones Intempestivas*. De este modo se pretende ampliar el alcance de la investigación del tema de la salud en Nietzsche, que se suele quedar confinado en las obras posteriores. Se mostrará cómo esa obra es relevante para el tema, pues allí el autor denuncia por primera vez la insuficiencia de las fórmulas generales de salud. Sobre esta crítica, acabará construyendo su propia concepción de la salud y la enfermedad. En primer lugar, se aborda el tema de la enfermedad cultural y histórica que Nietzsche diagnosticó ya al principio de la década 1870: una enfermedad que, a su vez, genera una noción inadecuada de lo que es la 'salud'. En consecuencia, se trata de la reacción nietzscheana a esta enfermedad generalizada, ilustrando la concepción de la salud como un *proceso individual*. Esta concepción adopta la forma de una conexión inédita entre los ámbitos estético y fisiológico. Por último, se problematiza el concepto de las innumerables saludes del cuerpo, aludiendo a algunos desafíos contemporáneos.

Palabras clave: salud, cuerpo, estética, filosofía de la medicina, filosofía contemporánea.

Abstract

The article deals with the problem of health in Nietzsche's philosophy. While secondary literature on this topic has been usually confined to his works posterior to 1878, this text especially focusses on an earlier work, i.e., the *Untimely Meditations*. It is shown how that work is relevant to the topic, for there the author denounces for the first time the inadequacy of general formulas of health. Upon this criticism, he will eventually build his own conception of health and illness. This analysis starts with what Nietzsche called a cultural and historical illness in the early 1870s: an illness that, paradoxically, generated an inadequate notion of 'health'. Secondly, this investigation deals with the Nietzschean reaction to that generalised illness, dwelling on the concept of health as an *individual process*, in the form of a connection between the aesthetic and the physiological fields. Finally, this article elucidates the problems within the concept of the innumerable healths of the body, hinting at some contemporary challenges.

Keywords: health, body, aesthetics, philosophy of medicine, contemporary philosophy.

Resumo

O artigo trata do problema da saúde na filosofia de Nietzsche, mostrando a sua centralidade já nas *Considerações Extemporâneas*. Desta forma, pretende-se alargar o âmbito da investigação sobre o tema da saúde em Nietzsche, a qual geralmente se limita às obras posteriores a 1878. Mostra-se como esta obra é relevante para o tema, pois aí o autor denuncia pela primeira vez a inadequação das fórmulas gerais de saúde. Com base nesta crítica, Nietzsche acabará por construir a sua própria concepção de saúde e doença. Em primeiro lugar, analisa-se a questão da doença cultural e histórica que Nietzsche diagnosticou já no início da década de 1870: uma doença que, paradoxalmente, gerou uma noção inadequada de "saúde". Em segundo lugar, estuda-se a reação de Nietzsche a esta doença generalizada, ilustrando a concepção da saúde como um *processo individual*. Esta concepção toma a forma de uma conexão inédita entre os campos estético e fisiológico. Por fim, problematiza-se o conceito das inumeráveis saúdes do corpo, aludindo a alguns desafios contemporâneos.

Palavras chave: saúde, corpo, estética, filosofia da medicina, filosofia contemporânea.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of inquiry of this paper is the concept of health in Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, as well as its reappearance and expansion in later works. The fact that the concepts of health and illness play a fundamental function in Nietzsche's works, as cornerstones of the creation of new values, has been widely recognised and discussed since some decades. On the other hand, the focus has often been on Nietzsche's work from the so-called "Enlightenment period", neglecting fervent insights that already appear in the writings of the early 1870s and which, if properly considered, chart a coherent course in the opposition to the modern paradigm. Conversely, the main critical studies on the *Untimely Meditations* have focused on problems such as the status of history, the connection between art and life, the relationship between consciousness and oblivion, rather than on the specific concept of health.

What the present article aims to do is: 1) to trace the genesis of the concept of "innumerable healths of the body" (FW 120, Nietzsche 2001a 117) in what Nietzsche writes, in the First Meditation, about the inadequacy of the *cultural philistine's* concept of health; 2) to inspect the specificity of a health theory centred on the singularity of each individual and on the dimension of the *Leib* (body), highlighting the connections established between physiology and aesthetics; 3) to sketch an assessment of the practicability and the effectiveness of Nietzsche's health doctrine in the face of the challenges of contemporary times.

2. BEYOND THE NORM: THE INNUMERABLE FORMS OF HEALTH

The polemical target of the First Meditation (*David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer*) is the educated class of post-war Germany following the victory of the Franco-Prussian War. Proud of their victory, the German bourgeoisie churns out new exemplary writers [*Musterschriftsteller*]. However instead of representing German culture [*deutsche Kultur*], these writers express a petty and barbaric erudition [*Gebildetheit*], which is not at all unified, confusing, and lacking in style. According to Nietzsche, the victory over France is not a cultural victory since German culture still appears entangled in barbarism. The figure of the *Bildungsphilister*, who represents the paradigm of modernity, precisely expresses a barbarism masquerading as culture. As a matter of fact, the philistine paralyses any new cultural impetus and, characterised by a certain intellectual laziness, rests on the already known. The things that matter most to him are his profession, his business, his family, which he keeps well away from art and every cultural demand. The latter is seen as a distraction and mere leisure, something that does not befit bourgeois seriousness.

In addition to the cultural stagnation and realist pseudo-philosophy of the "*nil admirari*" ("to wonder at nothing"¹; Nietzsche 1997 11), according to which nothing is worthy of admiration and capable of disturbance, the cultural philistine supports a mannered universalism, which forgets individual peculiarities. For instance, he specifically invents [*erfindet*] a concept of health that is always and everywhere valid, beyond individual differences:

Finally, he invents for his habits, modes of thinking, likes and dislikes, *the general formula "healthiness"*, and dismisses every uncomfortable disturber of the peace as being sick and neurotic (my emphasis; Nietzsche 1997 12).

The generally effective formula of health has a very specific purpose: it serves to standardise human beings and to banish all divergent and 'untimely' thought, instilling the suspicion that it is simply an expression of illness. This is how David Strauss, perfect cultural philistine² regards Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, for example, which he accuses of being unhealthy and sterile

¹From Horace, *Epistles*, I.VI.1: "to wonder at nothing is perhaps the only thing that can make a man happy and keep him so".

²On Nietzsche's confrontation with Strauss, Ross 353-361 and Fellmann.

– [ungesunde und unersprießliche Philosophie] (UB I 6, KGW III/1 188). Thus, the cultural philistine's concept of illness and health, i.e., the 'modern'/ 'timely' concept of illness and health, goes hand in hand with the adherence to bourgeois morality, and the myths of progress and rationalism. This concept is not adapted to the personal needs of every individual, and rather aspires to apply to all individual cases. Scientific-technical progress leads to the identification of a norm, represented by the type of the cultural philistine, and any deviation from this norm is judged as a sign of disease and insanity. Thus, it is invented the universal and normative concept of health a) abstracted from individual cases, b) opposed to illness, which is nothing but a negation of health.

Whoever questions the point of view of the cultural philistine does not represent an alternative form of health, but a suffering and sick life. Nietzsche is not slow to discover in the profile of the cultural philistine a form of weakness rather than health: “[. . .] It might be advisable to refer to them [*the Bildungsphilister*], not as the “healthy”, but as the weaklings or, more strongly, as the weak” (Nietzsche 1997 13).

Dwelling on this youthful formulation of the problem of health and illness is interesting from a genealogical perspective. The well-known aphorism 120 of *The Gay Science (Health of the soul)*, which is perhaps the most representative passage of Nietzsche's theory of health, and which has so far been adequately considered by critics, stands as an ideal continuation of the discourse undertaken in *David Strauss*. Starting from the problem identified in the First Meditation is thus fruitful for the understanding of aphorism 120, representing its genesis and prefiguration. In this way, the anti-modern charge of the aphorism becomes evident, since its origin is due to the critique of the modern paradigm and its insufficient concepts of health and illness.

[. . .] There is no health as such, and all attempts to define such a thing have failed miserably. Deciding what is health even for your body (*Leib*) depends on your goal, your horizon, your powers, your impulses, your mistakes and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul. Thus there are innumerable healths of the body [. . .] (FW 120, Nietzsche 2001a 116-117).

It is read there that there is no single form of health, universally given once and for all, but rather “innumerable healths of the body” [*unzählige Gesundheit des Leibes*] (Nietzsche 2001a 117; KGW V/2 155), from time to time dependent on the desires and energies of individuals. The one who disregards the plurality of individual healths does not know its own *Leib* with its continuous variations, which give rise to a process of health instead of a ‘state’ of health.

The weakness of the cultural philistine's vision is explained as follows: he is weak because he invents a norm that crushes individual particularities. On the contrary, Nietzsche writes, doctors should abandon the notion of a “normal health, along with those of a normal diet and normal course of an illness” (FW 120, Nietzsche 2001a 117). There are infinite healths, infinite ways of good life, each conforming to different projects of existence.

It is not just a matter of inter-individual differences, whereby what is ‘healthy’ for an individual may not be seen as healthy for another. Nietzsche's view is more radical: what is ‘healthy’ for an individual also varies according to different life stages. A certain idea of a healthy life may turn out to be unsuitable for a different life stage of the same individual.

To clarify this passage, it should be referred to another aphorism from *The Gay Science*, entitled *Brief habits* (295). In this text, Nietzsche says he is grateful for brief habits, which accompany an individual for a part of life – proving to be functional to some aspirations – and then make way for new habits, new goals, and parameters of good life. The subject of health is included in the discourse, since a unique species of health [*eine einmalige Art Gesundheit*] is conceived as an “enduring habit” (FW 295, Nietzsche 2001a 168), which crystallises individuals' ambitions, deadening their life force. Since every human being is constantly evolving and changing, it is necessary from time to time to adapt one's good lifestyle to the changes that occur. On closer

inspection, then, the generally effective health formula is, even for the same individual who inevitably changes over time, a form of disease rather than health.³

Thus, on the basis of what has been said, and as already mentioned above, health cannot be conceived as a state, but as a process, a project which requires commitment and dedication from time to time (see Long 117). Indeed, health cannot be conceived as a good to be preserved, but, in the light of the mutability of existence, as a balance that is constantly threatened and always to be rediscovered and redefined.⁴ Hence, it does not exclude illness from itself, as if there were a polarity between the two extremes, but rather can only be defined on the basis of illness. Authentic health is only achieved through the difficulties of illness. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche writes, in *Health of the soul*:

[. . .] the great question would still remain whether we can *do without* illness, even for the development of our virtue; and whether especially our thirst for knowledge and self-knowledge do not need the sick soul as much as the healthy; in brief, whether the will to health alone is not a prejudice, a cowardice and a piece of most refined barbarism and backwardness (Nietzsche 2001a 117)⁵

Thus, the boundaries between health and illness blur, as the concept of health is pluralised, and what is healthy behaviour for one can only turn out unhealthy for others, i.e., harmful, not in accordance with their life goal. Moreover, illness and health are not simply opposites, but interdependent, and the fruit of illness can be the attainment of a more robust health.

The opposition of Nietzsche's health theory to the modern paradigm can be understood from these observations. Nietzsche develops an *untimely* theory of health and illness, a theory that aims to go beyond the general norm. The concept of illness/health of the cultural philistine presupposes a situation of illness. An insufficient concept of illness/health is in fact produced by an epochal psycho-physical disease. What Nietzsche wants to oppose in the early 1870s is precisely a generalised illness, a harmful and unhealthy state in which contemporary human being is immersed. In the Second Meditation, the weakness of the cultural philistine and of the contemporary age is thus explicitly attributed the character of illness.

The excess of historical culture, i.e., the aforementioned *Gebildetheit*, is physiologically portrayed as a "fever" [*das historische Fieber*]⁶; an inordinate accumulation of notions, the symptoms of which include indigestion [*Unverdaulichkeit*] (UB II 4, 9, KGW III/1 269, 310), and insomnia [*Schlaflosigkeit*], (UB II 1, KGW III/1 246). That is, the excess of possessed notions causes a sort of tireless activity in contemporary human being, due to the inability to rest and enjoy the moment. German culture, based on a sterile erudition perpetually striving for the storage of intellectual materials, does not allow itself to be penetrated by acquired knowledge, but always produces and stores anew. Indigestion and insomnia are typical symptoms of a living being that spends its time ruminating and processing data, having now lost the link between knowledge and life, between knowledge and action. Acquired intellectual materials either linger in the stomach, causing indigestion, or in the brain, causing insomnia, and do not prompt action. Of these diseases such a culture may one day die.⁷

³See also: "one can say that all generalizing words now wear artificial and unnatural finery" (Nietzsche 1997 179).

⁴Since human being is "das noch nicht-festgestellte Thier" (JGB 69, KGW VI/2 79), health cannot but be conceived as a path (*Weg*), to be taken on an experimental basis (Carbone – Jung 324).

⁵The relationship between illness and increased knowledge is also emphasised by the results of the research carried out by the physiologist René Leriche (1879-1955), summarised as follows by Georges Canguilhem: "Disease reveals normal functions to us at the precise moment when it deprives us of their exercise. Disease is the source of the speculative attention which life attaches to life by means of man. If health is life in the silence of the organs, then, strictly speaking, there is no science of health. Health is organic innocence. It must be lost, like all innocence, so that knowledge may be possible. Physiology is like all science, which, as Aristotle says, proceeds from wonder. But the truly vital wonder is the anguish caused by disease" (Canguilhem 52).

⁶An expression that also appears in several fragments from summer-autumn 1873 (group 29), see KGW III/4.

⁷It is interesting to note that here, too, Nietzsche emphasises the variety of individuals, who bear the burden of historical knowledge in different ways and to varying degrees. The culture contemporary to him is generically ill, but each

It is not only an individual disease, rather a social disease which afflicts the culture contemporary to Nietzsche. The remedies that must be found against this state of cultural and social emergency will serve to forge healthy individuals, but above all to medicate the corrupt culture. The philosopher must be able to present himself as a *doctor of culture* and propose new values necessary for a concrete cultural rebirth.⁸

Against the malady of history – Nietzsche writes – it is necessary to oppose remedies that are in the hands of the younger generations. These can make themselves the bearers of a “more robust health” [*kräftigere Gesundheit*] (UB II 10, Nietzsche 1997 121; KGW III/1 327). What is important here is that this more robust health is not only distinguished from the old idea of health by essence or content or by particular values. Rather, it is also a change in perspective, it is a new view on needs and the body. What changes in the new concept of health, therefore, is not so much the ‘what’, but the ‘how’. Indeed, the mission to which the younger generations are called consists in “to undermine the concepts this present has of ‘health’” (“die Begriffe, die jene Gegenwart von “Gesundheit”[...] hat, zu erschüttern”, *ebd.*). And the way in which they can undermine the current idea of health is by considering health and illness in a personal, individual manner, by making the doctrine regarding health a “teaching intended for themselves” [*persönlich gemeinte Lehre*] (UB II 10, Nietzsche 1997 121; KGW III/1 328).

To sum up, the cultural renaissance envisaged in these years by Nietzsche passes through a valorization of individual singularities. The hopes Nietzsche pins on the new generations are therefore also hopes for a new conception of health, based on individual varieties.

3. SINGULARITY OF STYLE: TOWARDS AN AESTHETICS OF HEALTH

Another *symptom* of the poor health of David Strauss, and of the cultural philistine or contemporary human being in general, is found in the style.

Extreme sobriety and aridity, a truly starving sobriety, nowadays awakens in the educated masses the unnatural feeling that precisely these are the signs of flourishing health [*das Zeichen der Gesundheit*], so that here there apply the words of the author of the *Dialogus de Oratibus*: “illam ipsam quam iactant sanitatem non firmitate sed ieiunio consequuntur”. With instinctive unanimity, they hate all *firmitas* because it bears witness to a healthiness quite different from theirs [*weil sie von einer ganz anderen Gesundheit Zeugnis ablegt, als die ihrige ist*], and seek to throw suspicion on *firmitas*, on conciseness, on fiery energy of movement, on abundant and delicate play of the muscles. They have agreed together to invert the nature and names of things and henceforth to speak of health where we see weakness, of sickness and tension where we encounter true health. That is how David Strauss comes to be accounted a “classic” (UB I 11, Nietzsche 1997 52-53).

Strauss’ style rejects the concise and measured period, in which true *firmitas* is condensed. The concept of ‘classical’ is innervated by the problem of health: there are healthy styles and styles from which illness transpires. Nietzsche, not only in the passage just quoted, strives to make the aesthetic sphere interact with physiological considerations,⁹ unmasking a state of the body beneath every conceptual construction. Behind the beautiful semblance of the concept

individual is recognised as having his own capacity to react to the weight of history. To determine the degree to which the past can be borne, Nietzsche writes, one must investigate the conformation of every individual, his or her power to heal wounds [*Wunden auszuheilen*] (UB II 1, KGW III/1 247). There is no law that is generally valid always and for everyone, but the degree to which the burden of the past can be borne depends on each organism.

⁸The motif of the “philosopher as doctor of culture” makes its first appearance in Nietzsche’s writings of the early 1870s: for an analysis of this point, see Poltrum 2016 363-364; Lemm.

⁹The rapprochement of aesthetics and physiology proposed here is based on certain insights in Gerhardt 76-77 (on the analogy between the *Leib* and the artist, based on the creative and transformative force); Moore 85-111 (on the Nietzschean consideration of evolution as an artistic process).

of 'classical' lies a concept of health that expresses itself in the form of vigour of the body and readiness of spirit.

A later passage in *Beyond Good and Evil* is also clear on this point, continuing to show the close connection between beautiful style and individual health:

When ancient people read, if they read at all (it happened seldom enough), it was aloud to themselves, and moreover in a loud voice. People were surprised by someone reading quietly, and secretly wondered why. In a loud voice: that means with all the swells, inflections, sudden changes in tone, and shifts in tempo that the ancient, public world took pleasure in. At that time, the rules for written style were the same as those for spoken style, and those rules depended in part on the astonishing development and subtle requirements of the ear and larynx, and also, in part, on the strength, endurance, and power of the ancient lung [*Macht der antiken Lunge*]. What the ancients meant by a period is primarily a physiological unit insofar as it is combined in a single breath [*Eine Periode ist, im Sinne der Alten, vor Allem ein physiologisches Ganzes, insofern sie von Einem Athem zusammengefasst wird*]. Periods like the ones that occur in Demosthenes and Cicero -swelling up twice and twice sinking down and all within a single breath-those were a delight for people of antiquity who knew from their own training to value the virtue of the rarity and difficulty involved in performing periods like these. We have no real right to the great period, we who are modern, who are short-winded [*wir Kurzathmigen*] in every sense! (JGB 247, Nietzsche 2001b 139).

The contemporary human being, with whom style is degraded, has shortness of breath and weaker lungs than those of the ancients (on the degeneration of style in late 19th century Germany, see again the work on David Strauss: Nietzsche 1997 6-11). Quite apart from value judgements on what characteristics beautiful style should have, what is important to note here is that Nietzsche's viewpoint is innovative (and *untimely*), since, through the connection of (psycho)physical health and linguistic-conceptual expression, it overcomes the split between mind and body. Nietzsche's health theory considers human being from a global point of view, whereby information about his/her health process can be deduced from each of his/her 'spiritual' manifestations. The overcoming of the split between mind and body, which is the basis of the observations on style, is made possible by the concept of *Leib*, animate body, living body, organism. The *Leib* is a field of forces, a system of relations between forces, within which, according to an *adualistic* perspective, the mind acts as its part. The complex and unpredictable dynamics of the *Leib* challenge the intellectual capacity, the power of the concept. The tools of "small reason", which classify and define, are mocked by the germinal power of the constantly renewing *Leib*. The fact that the *Leib* changes ceaselessly prevents human beings from grasping it and fixing it once and for all. The challenge of the *Leib* is, therefore, that of mutability and singularity, which confronts the fixity and universality of general definitions. The "great reason" of the body mocks, indeed, the "little reason" [*kleine Vernunft*] of the "spirit", the latter being a "plaything" [*Spielzeug*] of the *Leib* (Z I, Nietzsche 2006 23; KGW VI/1 35).

As a matter of fact, Nietzsche does not speak of the 'Körper', or the body as an object, as mere

matter, but of the 'Leib';¹⁰ making it the point of contact between *psyche* and *soma*.¹¹ The focus on the integrated phenomenon of *psyche* and *soma* leads to an extension of the concept of health, which has much to do with artistic work. The art of good life demands discipline, necessary to 'give style' to one's character [*seinem Charakter 'Stil geben'*] (FW 290, KGW V/2 210), to channel the energies of the *Leib*. The second nature thus acts on the first, which is not left uncultivated, but is treated as artistic matter.¹² The truly healthy human being neither annuls nor denies his/her own weaknesses, rather, like an artist, he/she camouflages them, leaves them in the background, and acts on the possible perspectives from which they can be observed. Treating ourselves as a work of art, giving style to our character, implies a new consideration of illness, which, as will be better observed later, becomes an opportunity for renewed strength.

Among the many letters written by Nietzsche, one letter is particularly significant in this regard, as it condenses the main theoretical points we have discussed up until now, and moreover bears witness to the close connection between Nietzsche's theory of health and his concrete life experience.¹³ It is the letter 267 to Erwin Rohde, dated mid-July 1882:

[...] it is too difficult for me to live unless I do it in the grandest style. [...] This is actually my only excuse for the kind of things which I have been writing since 1876; it is my prescription and my home-brewed medicine against weariness with life. [...] *ipsi scripsi* – and there it stands; and thus everyone should do for himself his best in his own way – that is my morality, the only remaining morality for me. If even my physical health reappears, whom have I to thank for that? I was in all respects my own doctor; and as a person in whom nothing stands separate, I have had to treat soul, mind, and body all at once and with the same remedies. Admittedly, others might perish by using the same remedies; that is why I exert everything in warning others against me. Especially this latest book, which is called *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, will scare many people away from me – you too perhaps, dear old friend Rohde! There is an image of myself in it, and I know for sure that it is not the image which you carry in your heart. (Nietzsche 1996 187; KGB III/ 1 Bf. 267).

As it can be read, Nietzsche speaks of his project to live in the greatest style. This means administering his own personal health recipe.¹⁴ He professes to be his own doctor [*sein eigener*

¹⁰See: „Der Körper. 1) In der weitesten Bedeutung, ein jedes aus Materie bestehendes Ding, im Gegensatze eines Geistes. In dieser Bedeutung wird es besonders in den Wissenschaften gebraucht, wenn man von Dingen dieser Art weiter nichts bestimmen will oder kann, als daß sie aus Materie bestehen. Ein runder, ein viereckter Körper. Ein fester Körper, ein flüssiger Körper. Harte, durchsichtige, elastische Körper. Die Himmelskörper, die großen runden Massen, welche den unermeßlichen Raum des Himmels ausfüllen. In der Geometrie sondert man auch noch den Begriff der Materie von den Körpern ab, und schränkt sich bloß auf den Raum ein, den sie einnehmen, und da ist ein Körper eine umgränzte stetige Größe, welche nach allen Gegenden zu ausgedehnet ist. 2) In engerer Bedeutung wird der stärkere, dickere Theil eines Dinges in manchen Fällen der Körper genannt, zum Unterschiede von dem schwächern oder dünnern Theile; in welcher Bedeutung es vermuthlich eine Übersetzung des Franz. *corps* ist [...] 3) In noch engerer Bedeutung ist der Körper der Leib eines Thieres und besonders eines Menschen, im Gegensatze der Seele, die natürliche Maschine, mit welcher ein Geist verbunden ist [...] Einen starken, schwachen, gesunden, siechen Körper haben. [...] Ein todter, ein entseelter Körper, der Leichnam“ (Adelung 1727-1728): in this dictionary entry, the thought on the 'body' from the century before Nietzsche's lifetime is condensed, and the distinction between *Körper* and *Leib* is explained. In particular, relevant for our purposes is the meaning (3), which assumes a distinction between 'body' (*Körper*) and 'living body' (*Leib*) of an animal, placing *Körper* in opposition ("im Gegensatze") to *Seele* (soul).

¹¹On the centrality of *Leib* in Nietzsche's doctrine of health, see almost: Faustino 2010 225; Aurenque 2016 30-31. Probably the most important considerations about *Leib* occur in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, KGW VI/1 35-38 (*Von den Verächtern des Leibes*): on this point, and in particular on the relationship of equivalence between *Leib* and *Selbst*, see Arifuku 132-135; Gerhardt 52-55; Müller-Lauter 126-136.

¹²On the connection between art of good living and art in the strict sense, first manifested by the ancient tragic philosophers, see Müller. On the philosophical project of life as *Kunstwerk*, also van Tongeren.

¹³On the unity of life and work in "the search for the meaning of suffering", see Long 113-114. Nietzsche's personal library (Campioni *et al.*) reveals an interest in medico-physiological and psychological studies: „so etwa Werke, die dem Einfluss von Ort, Klima und Ernährung auf die Gesundheit nachgehen, andere, die das Verhältnis von Körper und Geist aus einer sinnesphysiologischen Perspektive neu zu begründen versuchen, sowie psychologische Studien“ (Carbone – Jung 325). The interest in these readings does not appear to be purely speculative but related to practical life requirements (see Jaspers 43). Furthermore, on the derivation of the philosopher's psychological insight, as well as his introspective interest, from his experience of pain, see Brock.

¹⁴Self-care is for Nietzsche a formative and creative process, not merely a theoretical-cognitive one. Everyone has to

Arzt], as the custodian and supervisor of his own particularity and singularity¹⁵. What was fortifying for him could turn out to be disastrous for others, as there is neither a universal recipe for health, nor an unambiguous style of good living. The subjective foundation of Nietzsche's health theory is stated,¹⁶ along with its *holistic* nature ("I have had to treat soul, mind, and body all at once and with the same remedies" [*habe ich Seele Geist und Leib auf Ein Mal und mit denselben Mitteln behandeln müssen*]).

4. HEALTH IN NIETZSCHE: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

What Nietzsche does to the modern concept of health is a reversal [*Umkehrung*]. This reversal consists of three parts: 1) there is no *universally valid* definition of health/illness – or rather, the definition of health acquires different meanings in individual cases; 2) health is not a state [*Zustand*], but a process; 3) the *process* of health is not exclusively the opposite of illness (see Faustino 2010).

1) As has been extensively analysed in the previous sections, Nietzsche dismantles every 'generically effective' notion of health and illness since the *Untimely Meditations*. There is no longer a health concept which will be valid for all in all cases, but several possible healths: the concept of health is pluralised (see Aurenque 2016). Necessity, linked to what is universal, is replaced by the dimension of freedom and possibility. It happens as with *freedom* of opinion: when absolute foundations disappear, individual is entitled to a 'freedom of health', to express health in a personal way (see MaM I 286, KGW IV/2 237). Precisely because the *Leib*, the psycho-physical centre around which Nietzsche's health doctrine revolves, is the most subjective and indefinable element, health can be declined in various ways.

But, from a philosophical point of view, is it really acceptable to admit a pluralisation of the concept of health? Does this not mean demolishing the concept of health as such, and by doing so, losing all definitions and parameters of what health is? Do so many, countless healths mean *no health at all*? Upon closer inspection, this is not just a theoretical problem, of epistemological interest, but a problem that touches on, for example, state policies on health: how could be possible to reconcile a right to health that is in itself supra-individual with the infinite declinations of health envisaged by Nietzsche?

Therefore, we now ask ourselves whether Nietzsche's health philosophy is an expression of pure relativism, irreconcilable with any collective dimension. In other words, it is necessary to ask whether Nietzsche, by upholding the possibility of innumerable healths of the body, also eliminates a criterion for recognising various healths.

Even if he demolishes the universal and already given notions of health – as well as the absolute values of good life that originate from the false dogma of equality of all human beings –, Nietzsche, in my opinion, maintains a supra-individual criterion which prevents him not only from erasing the distinction between health and illness, but also from enclosing each individual in the solipsism of a health that cannot be understood by other individuals. In this regard, it is useful to read Fragment 2[97] of 1885, in which Nietzsche explicitly refers to a standard, a parameter [*Maaßstab*] for judging illness and health. This *Maaßstab* is "die Efflorescenz des Leibes, die Sprungkraft, Muth und Lustigkeit des Geistes" (KGW VIII/1 106) / "the efflorescence of the body, the pouncing force, courage and merriness of the spirit" (Nietzsche 2020 349). Although in the same fragment Nietzsche inserts a bipartition between the strong, those who use pain as

shape himself/herself, choose his/her own personal *diet* in all things. The importance of the ancient dietetics, not only as a science of nutrition, but as an art of healthy way of life, and its influence on the Nietzschean conception, has been emphasised in Carbone – Jung 329. On the common therapeutic intention of Nietzschean and Hellenistic philosophy – albeit with substantial differences in values – see Faustino 2017, Gödde 2003.

¹⁵Nietzsche's written production can then be read as an attempt at self-therapy: for a closer examination of the subject, Poltrum 2016 365-367; Poltrum 2009; Volz.

¹⁶On the comparison of Nietzsche's health theory with other health theories, in particular Boorse's naturalistic one and Nordenfelts' normativist one, see Aurenque 2016 25-32.

a *stimulans* of life and as a tool for the 'great health'¹⁷ and the weak, who are instead mortified by pain, the parameter for decreeing healthy and ill is unambiguous. There can be various and multiple manifestations of health, but what is common to all of them is the flourishing of soul and body, the constant renewal of psychic energies. And it is this parameter that makes it possible to distinguish what is healthy from what is ill.

2) Health is not a once and for all formula that one just has to follow and put into practice. It is rather a process, something worth striving for. From the very own conception of the *Leib* as a living organism, a patchwork of drives, instincts and affects,¹⁸ derives the constitutive instability of the phenomenon of health. The desire for stability, peace, and permanence – Nietzsche warns us – is already a symptom of illness (see Faustino 2010 227).

But a symptom of illness is above all to understand 'healthy' and 'ill' as mutually exclusive poles. The conquest of health is a gradual process, which includes illness in itself. Nietzsche elaborates a *dynamic* concept of health, far from the dichotomous thinking of the 'hinterworldlings'. The real states of human being overcome the dichotomy of illness and health because they embrace both in themselves (see Silenzi 2020 15-26; Long 1990 117).

3) It follows from this point that illness is no longer the exact opposite of health, but its driving force. Health includes illness as its constitutive part. Giving style to one's own character, it has been seen, means working on weaknesses in an artistic and creative way. A healthy person is someone who has known and gone through illness, integrated it and overcome it, drawing strength from it. The enterprise of striving for health enables the acquisition of a new perspective on illness, now seen as a prodrome of renewed and stronger health. Illness is thus a possibility offered to health, the possibility of growing and thriving beyond illness itself!¹⁹

Having clarified the internal articulations of the Nietzschean reversal of the concept of health, it is now possible to question the practical effects of the pluralisation of the concept of health. The Nietzschean health doctrine appears to inspire the pluralistic ethics of our times. And this in a number of respects. For example, the theses of *gender* and *disability studies* find an important ally in Nietzsche. In this scope, Nietzsche's contestation of the norm with regard to health acquires fundamental relevance: Nietzsche subtracts an undisputed normative authority from the 'normal' body and the most widespread standards. Every kind of body has a right to health, therefore, and the effort of self-determination outside predetermined 'norms' involves an open concept of health. In my opinion, it is productive to juxtapose Nietzsche's remarks on the contestation of the 'normal' with what Georges Canguilhem states in the second part of his work *On the Normal and the Pathological (Essai sur quelques problèmes concernant le normal et le pathologique, 1943)*, in which he explores the concepts of 'normal', 'anomalous' and 'pathological' (see Canguilhem 63-137). The norm Canguilhem thinks of, not far from Nietzsche (who identifies a parameter to define health, albeit in an individualized manner), is to be understood as a natural activity of the organism itself, a *biological* normativity, a normativity inscribed in life itself. A norm must exist, it is impossible for there to be no norms, as to live is necessarily to prefer and exclude: every organism already elaborates behavioural norms through the 'poles' of ingestion and excretion. The polarity on which each individual bases his or her norm corresponds to the dynamic structure of life itself; on the contrary, if one were to assert that there is no norm, one would be supporting the absurd theory of a biological indifferentism. To conceive of a *biological* norm is, for Canguilhem, to understand it as functional for an organism: a human being is healthy when he or she produces norms that are suitable for the *fluctuations* of his/her environment. With reference to Henry Sigerist's studies, Canguilhem observes: "[...] the normal does not have the rigidity of a fact of

¹⁷For further explanations on the 'great health' and the transformation of pain, see Silenzi, Letteri.

¹⁸On the theme of organism as an inner struggle, Müller-Lauter.

¹⁹Such a view is set out in Stegmaier, where the Nietzschean 'De-Asymmetrisierung' of the concepts of health and illness is discussed; and in Mitchell. On the other hand, it does not seem justified to regard illness as a good in itself, but as something that must and can only be overcome by health. On the *normative productivity* of illness, i.e. the possibility that illness produces new individual physiological norms, which are not the equivalent of the norms prior to illness, but real physiological innovations, see Canguilhem 105-119, in dialogue with the study conducted by Kurt Goldstein (1878-1965).

collective constraint but rather the *flexibility* of a norm which is *transformed* in its relation to individual conditions” (my emphasis; Canguilhem 105). This forms the theoretical basis for the introduction of the concept of the ‘anomalous’, which is to be distinguished from the ‘pathological’, unless it contradicts the functional polarity of life: “An anomaly is a fact of individual variation which prevents two beings from being able to take the place of each other completely. It illustrates the Leibnizean principle of indiscernables in the biological order” (Canguilhem 77). Thus, this is equivalent to arguing that each of us is in a certain sense anomalous, and that anomaly is the paradoxical law of the living. The aim of Canguilhem’s discourse, as well as Nietzsche’s aim, is to legitimize anomalies, not necessarily to be understood as pathologies, but as “other possible norms of life” (Canguilhem 82).

The reconsideration of the notion of ‘normal’ frees medical ethics from sometimes oppressive constraints on individuals. Thanks to the perspective inaugurated by Nietzsche, it is possible to follow the path of a more individualised medical practice, which puts individual needs at the centre.²⁰

Moreover, some recent discoveries in the field of molecular biology have demonstrated the existence of significant genetic distinctions within the *sapiens* species (see Aurenque 2016 33), meaning differentiated approaches to treatment seem more than ever justified. In addition to the purely scientific point of view, the pluralisation of medical practices is also justifiable based on social and ethical factors. A plural conception of health can function as an antidote to paternalism, facilitating each patient’s process of self-determination. According to Nietzsche’s view, neither specialised professionals nor family members have the right to impose their own conception of good life on someone else – and can, if anything, only promote it through dialogue. Finally, a pluralistic conception also fits the new challenges of globalisation in the therapeutic field, providing the theoretical basis for the application of integrated therapeutic approaches, which make use of alternative treatment methods to traditional medicine, often from the Eastern world²¹

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²⁰This intention echoes a conception of medicine already widespread in the Greek antiquity, in which the art of well living was also cultivated through a closer relationship between doctor and patient: “Die Einsicht, dass Krankheit und Gesundheit von natürlichen Gegebenheiten wie der individuellen Konstitution eines Menschen sowie seiner Umwelt maßgeblich beeinflusst werden, veranlasste den antiken Arzt, zuerst auf die Lebensweise seines Patienten regulierend einzuwirken. Diese musste dafür zunächst in einem intensiven Patientengespräch erfragt und erschlossen werden. Der diätetische Zugang hatte daher eine stark individualisierende Komponente und ging nicht von präfigurierten Krankheitsbildern aus. Zudem nahm der Arzt seinen Patienten bei diesem Ansatz in viel radikalerer Weise in die persönliche Verantwortung, als dies heute geschieht“ (Carbone – Jung 329). A radical problematisation of the *modern* conditions of medical knowledge, the scope of which, as ancient medicine teaches, cannot strictly speaking be called ‘scientific’ due to the inexhaustible subjectivity of the human, is conducted in Gadamer.

²¹For a wider inspection of the influence of the Nietzschean thesis on the contemporary medical ethics, see Aurenque 2018.

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