

The Epistemology of Nihilism in Otto Weininger's 1903

*Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*¹

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“Es ist unmoralisch, ein menschliches Wesen zur Wirkung einer Ursache zu machen, es als Bedingtes hervorzubringen, wie das mit der Elternschaft gegeben ist; und der Mensch ist im tiefsten Grunde nur deshalb unfrei determiniert neben seiner Freiheit... weil her auf diese unsittliche Wiese entstanden ist. Daß die Menschheit ewig bestehe, das ist gar kein Interesse der Vernunft; wer die Menschheit verewigen will, der will ein Problem und eine Schuld verewigen, das einzige Problem, die einzige Schuld, die es gibt. *Das Ziel ist ja gerade die Gottheit, und Aufhören der Menschheit in der Gottheit; das Ziel ist die reine Scheidung zwischen Gut und Böse, zwischen Etwas und nichts.*”²

Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter*, 458

Preface: Philosophical Presuppositions

This essay returns to Adi Ophir's intuition that nihilism is fundamentally related to the possibility of generating values or undermining them.³ Understood in that way, nihilism's privileged role would be best seen as (surreptitiously) providing justifications for action. For this ethico-pragmatic reading of nihilism, Ophir is indebted to Walter

Benjamin and to Nietzsche, insofar as nihilism, as ingredient in values, need be neither conscious nor spelled out in a program of political or cultural engagements.

This essay proceeds on the distinction between epistemological and methodological nihilism. The distinction is somewhat artificial in that epistemological nihilism may require methodological nihilism, or indeed ground and justify the outcome of a nihilistic method. Nevertheless, the distinction is important for understanding a work that has been called the foremost manifesto of Viennese expressionism, Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (1903).

Simply put, *epistemological nihilism* states that there is no fundamental meaning to existence, whether human or cosmic. We find expressions of this in Gorgias' arguments surviving from the lost treatise *On Nature*.⁴ It occurs surreptitiously in philosophies of history whose coherence is assured by an entelechy, whether secular or spiritual. It may be found in thoughts where the human task or destiny is one of becoming an end or attaining a perfection so enigmatic or solipsistic that one can but rely on intuition (and quite possibly fantasy) to reach that promise. This is not to say that epistemological nihilism is wrongheaded, much less wholly avoidable. What I am highlighting is Nietzsche's criticism of those systems moved by entelechies for which we invest or sacrifice our lives. Of course, part of the difficulty in determining what *is* an epistemological nihilism is that many such are philosophies of history and secularizations of messianism; this includes Hegel and Schelling, notably, but many romantic visions as well, and I add Schopenhauer to that list. Nietzsche, on the other hand, is explicit about the nihilist component of his thought and, like Benjamin, takes it up and uses it as a method.

Methodological nihilism takes at least two forms: the one, as a moving adjuvant to epistemological nihilism; the other, as critique moved by the consciousness of our finitude or fundamental limitation. The first form stands in service to certain epistemological nihilisms, denoting the motor through which historical or spiritual entelechies are gradually reached, provided one grasps the architectonic of the logic; for example, the “work of the negative” in Hegelian and neo-Hegelian philosophies. The second form is Benjamin’s brilliant rethinking of the aforementioned methodological nihilism, which consists in appropriating and subverting its infinitist trend, which has consequences for epistemological nihilism. Again, what Benjamin works with is a *restricted nihilism* consisting of the ongoing (ethical) critique of institutions and practices, as if a sense could be discerned in history.

Further, as Nitzan Lebovic points out in his analyses in this volume, epistemological nihilism may take an explicit or an implicit (unacknowledged) form. As explicit, such nihilism, in arguing for the absence of ultimate sense in human existence, whether social or individual, calls for responses that may be esthetic or esthetico-existential, certainly of a solipsistic cast. What is intriguing about more implicit nihilisms lies in the construal of what moves a history or a society toward the culminating entelechy announced at the beginning or the end of the system. The attainment of a certain absoluteness of mind, nature, or society (or all three) proceeds here thanks to a *method* by which realities are transformed through negation or contrariety. This is not simply to equate negation or its “work” with nihilism *eo ipso*. The nihilism in question is largely invisible, like the shadow cast by the sun of the absolute. The conundrum is that methodologies of transformation and becoming, when operative within the philosophical

nihilism of entelechies, produce formal utopias of knowledge or existence, thereby hardening divisions between principle and enactment, theory and practice, even as they deny this hardening. Against such a sequestration of theory and practice, it bears repeating that the same “work of the negative” *continues*, undermining the gains or institutions whose unfolding it assured, motivating dreams of renewed beginnings—or, in the best of cases, rethinking the logic that underlay the initial conception of ascent involved.

These dilemmas have been widely discussed, although the curious outcome is often the pitting of an existential nihilism against the methodological or epistemological nihilisms uncovered. It is not my concern to pursue these discussions here, but rather to revisit a moment of epistemological nihilism in a parodic vein. Thus I return to the aforementioned moment in the history of thought in which a moral vision of the “ends of man” was proposed as a response to advances in embryology, the nascent “woman question,” and the rise of race science. That was the hybrid work of young Otto Weininger entitled *Sex and Character: An Investigation in Fundamental Principles*.

Before turning to this uncanny treatise, let me make one last remark about the circle of reason opened by nihilism when it inhabits epistemology. That is, when philosophies of history or of mind open to utopia, then utopia needfully figures in the *legitimation* of the philosophies in question. In cases of such circularity, we may suspect epistemological nihilism and demand that the implications of this either be made clear or that the separation between the ideal and the practical be explored. This is part of what Walter Benjamin intended, it seems to me, when he argued for (restricted) *methodological* nihilism, or the vigilant critique of utopian practices and institutions

coupled with the full *awareness* of mortality, ours and that of institutions. It is from Benjamin's *Theologisch-politisches Fragment*, then, that the distinction between epistemological nihilism and methodological nihilism takes on its meaning. What Benjamin understood is that nihilism is not simply something we can overcome—notably through a “restoration of metaphysics” or through revolution—but rather something to be taken up as a *practice* (Benjamin, 2002, 306). It is *only* in practice that nihilism's relationship to values can be concretely evinced and the two above-mentioned domains (epistemological nihilism and nihilism as critique) held in a tensed rapprochement.⁵

Weininger's Investigation of Fundamental Principles

My argument here will be that Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* begins from a restricted methodological nihilism (“First Part: Sexual Diversity”) only to slide into a full blown epistemological nihilism (“Second or Main Part: The Sexual Types”).

The work and life of Weininger, in all its pathos and perplexity, thus illustrates an argumentative drift, from practical nihilism as critique of the dominant values of the *Belle Époque* toward epistemological nihilism as the man's overcoming of his bodily nature. Driven by a boundless intellectual curiosity, Weininger set out to explain the wealth and diversity of human “character” (in his day, “differential psychology”) while also uncovering the forces underlying sexuation, erotic attraction, and the ‘perceptual’ dimensions of anti-Semitism. From scholarship in the Classics, Weininger moved into biology at the University of Vienna, and ultimately into idealist philosophy and Nietzsche's thought. His doctoral thesis, *Eros und Psyche*, was a study on the fundamental sexual hybridism of all living beings and the impact of this on human

characters. He submitted the thesis to an ambivalent jury. Once defended, he set to work on an expanded version consisting of two unequal parts: the scientific discussion of the chemical components of masculinity and femininity, characterology, and algorithms for sexual attraction. Part I closed with a discussion of the “woman question” and examined prospects for female emancipation. Elements from sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld’s research into sexual indeterminacy (*sexuelle Zwischenstufen*) and “Uranians,” or a “third sex”—not to mention physician, Wilhelm Fließ’s hypotheses about physiological periodicity—supported his principal argument that every *de facto* human being was physiologically a combination of maleness and femaleness. Part II exploded into a philosophical discussion of ideal types, “*Die sexuellen Typen*” he called “*Mann*” and “*Weib*” as opposed to *de facto* “*Man*” and “*Frau*.” This part proceeded on the *formal* definition of the two limit types; it opened onto masculine and feminine essences, consciousness, and finally talents and “*Genialität*.” It extended theoretical discussion of the types into ethics, social teleology or social entelechy, and the essence of the feminine and its meaning in the universe (Chapter XII, “*Das Wesen des Weibes und sein Sinn im Universum*”). Chapter XIII was devoted to “*Das Judentum*” (Jewry), and struggled against more metaphysical forms of anti-Semitism such as supercessionism. The ultimate chapter developed the equation “*Problem des Juden = Problem des Weibes = Problem der Sklaverei*.”

At the core of this ‘dilemma’ was the ultimate status of femininity: how to comprehend it, how to determine it? If—within the logic of ideal types—activity, reality, substance, could be symbolized as 1 or unity, then passivity, unreality, and absence should be formalized as 0. Between 1 and 0 lay the spectrum of sexuation in living

beings. Yet the 0 that abbreviated the *ideal type* that was femininity also entailed an indeterminate activity that Weininger characterized as *Kuppelei*, coupling or bonding (the English translation renders the derogatory connotation with the term “matchmaking”).

In order to understand the purpose of Woman we must start with a very old and well-known phenomenon, which has never been seriously considered, let alone properly recognized. *It is none other than the phenomenon of **matchmaking**, which can lead us to the deepest, most important, insight into the nature of Woman.* (Weininger, 2005, 231)⁶

In short, the nothing was active; it nothinged. It was active essentially as correlational, thanks to the presence and influence on it of the *all* or masculine ideal type. Replaying a conundrum that a philosopher like Georges Canguilhem would observe about attempts to define “the pathological” *against* a single standard of normality, Weininger thereby found himself caught in the paradox of a feminine ideal type defined on the basis of the masculine—and yet somehow necessarily implicated in bringing human beings together erotically.⁷ The problem was significant because the feminine ideal type was present by degrees in all living things and went some way toward defining what Weininger understood as the difference between Aryan and Jewish men.

First, however, I will explain exactly what I mean by Judaism. I do *not* mean either a *race* or a *nation*, and even less a legally recognized religious faith. *Judaism must be regarded as a cast of mind, a psychic constitution, which is a **possibility** for **all** human beings and which has only found its most magnificent **realization** in historical Judaism.* (Weininger, 2005, 274)⁸

Any group possessed of a high percentage of femininity qualified thus as lacking in spirit—“even the most masculine Jew has a Platonic *methexis* [participation] in Women” (Weininger, 2005, 276). It thus redounded to beings of high masculine ‘content’ to develop their potentiality for genius, above all in terms of moral self-awareness. The moral agent was able to bridge the distinction between nature and freedom by incarnating the moral law in himself. The clearest way, Weininger argued, to bring this about had to pass by a focus on the relationship which offered the greatest danger of instrumentalization of another human being. Not unpreciently, Weininger identified this relation as sexuality. In order that a human being realize its (masculine) potential—i.e. its creative ability to self-overcome—it should abide by the moral law within, avoiding, amongst other things, the instrumentalization of women as sexual beings. However, as it was the male gaze that constituted woman as a distinctly feminine entity (the feminine being in itself nothing, mere *Kuppelei*), avoiding sexual contact also implied the dissolution of the category of woman (*Weib*). Now, the disappearance of woman as ideal type (and implicitly as gender) promised their true emancipation as *de facto* women, hopefully allowing women to realize that percentage of their creative potential coming from the male principle in them. If the human species were thereby condemned to disappearing, perhaps the price was not as great as it seemed, as part of humanity would have realized Nietzschean self-overcoming via the enactment of the Kantian moral law extended to sexuality. Human kind would gradually merge into a Schellingian divinity, in which Schelling’s principle of inertia or Weininger’s nothing (*das Weibliche*) was absorbed into pure light.

As I pointed out, a nihilistic epistemology may not acknowledge its commitment to “nothing,” much less its inability to exit the circle of dismantling and rebuilding logical phantasms. I will attempt to show how Weininger moved from a positivistic vision of critical openness toward a stultifying cosmological ethic. Indeed, *Sex and Character* went initially unnoticed until his suicide in the same year (1903) aroused such a stir that the volume sold off the shelves, going through over twenty editions and influencing authors as far flung as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Kraus, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce—to mention but a few. Weininger became a sort of ‘canary’ in the ‘coal mine’ that was an epoch of anxiety before emergent feminism, homosexual movements, socialism, and literary mysticism. The question is why he slid irresistibly from critique and science into epistemological nihilism. I hope to illustrate this in the narrative that follows.

Weininger started from the hypothesis that all living beings were composed of elements of masculinity and those of femininity—at the cellular level (“arrhenoplasm” and “thelyplasm”). He hoped to explain human nature starting, this way, from embodiment. In so doing he believed he held a key to understanding *eros* itself, as attraction and the possibility of love. Influenced by the elaborate research and the emancipator’s zeal of sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, Weininger turned to science to explain racial differences in light of his paradigm of dynamic intersexuation. His project could not have come at a better time. Sexology was a burgeoning field thanks to the works of Richard Krafft-Ebing, Georg Groddeck, Paul Julius Möbius, and indirectly Emil Kraepelin and Eugen Bleuler—not to mention Freud and Breuer. The binarism of masculine and feminine appeared to be opening to the possibility of a third sex, homosexual men, and the German-language movement for the “*Schutz des Mutterrechts*”

(protection of motherhood) inaugurated an early feminism (Rosa Mayreder). Explaining anti-Semitism in light of the “effeminacy” of Jewish men certainly displaced focus from the theological claim against Jews as the murderers of God toward a socio-biological misfortune devoid of any particular danger. Finally, proposing a synthesis of Nietzsche and Kant, such that self-overcoming passed through self-perfection and the free election never to treat women as sexual instruments, rejoined the ascetic creativity of (a notably Viennese) expressionism. These were the objectives of Weininger’s study.

Weininger did not so much write a philosophy as a hybrid study that began by exploring the embryology and sexology of his day. The second part of the work brought philosophical reflection to bear on the meaning of the ideal types of masculinity, femininity, and the genius. One might qualify *Sex and Character* as a “middlebrow” essay, whose principal challenge was to develop categories able to bridge the ideal and the practical levels (unrestricted methodological nihilism), to give European humanity the conceptual wherewithal by which to live an ethical life as sexually intermediate beings.

Prior to publishing his thesis, Weininger was very active in the intellectual life of Vienna. Like Freud and many Viennese intellectuals at the turn of the century, he attended the Philosophical Society of the University of Vienna, many of whose discussions concerned the initially disturbing movements around women’s emancipation, and “Uranians.” These questions must be considered in light of the larger context that combined German-language socialism, syndicalism, and the chilling mood promoted by the popular anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger (1844-1910; Mayor from 1897 to 1910). It is difficult to calculate the symbolic impact, especially in the discussions of the Philosophical Society, of the rise of the Jewish population of Vienna between 1860 and

1910, where numbers went from 6000 to 175,000, a thirty-fold increase in two generations.⁹ It is not false, though it is easy to say that, at the turn of the century during the *Belle Époque*, philosophers found themselves singularly inept at dealing with the reverberations of what could only have been conceived as new vectors of conflict and change: females, polychromatic colonized peoples, Western and Eastern Jews—but also, embryology and genetics.¹⁰ That is, genetics, but without a genetic code. “*Zuchtung*” or breeding was a matter of debate at the turn of the century. The sexuate indeterminacy of the embryo until ten weeks spawned debates about originary femininity in all beings versus a “revolution” of the masculine in that transformative event we today call hormonal activation (thanks to Paul Möbius).¹¹ We might think too of the uncertain status of the Malthusian-Spencerian “survival of the fittest,” as compared to the optimistic residues of Lamarckian “adaptation,” present even in the Darwin who wrote *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (1872)—one year after *The Descent of Man* (and thirteen years after the *Origin of Species*).¹² Evolution, but without population genetics. I have not even touched on the anxiety of cultural degeneration and civilizational decadence—calling, half-consciously, for the salvation from without that Benjamin so sharply criticized. How then to calculate the effect of all this on philosophy—notably, those philosophies that worked at the middlebrow level, integrating popular science into questions of ethics and politics?

Within this context, a number of traditional philosophical binaries that had retained their polemical force come into view, albeit with waning value: sameness and otherness, activity and passivity, presence versus absence, hearth and polis, static intermediacy versus dynamic intermediacy, causality versus spontaneity. *The peculiar*

*interest of Weininger's thought lies in its attempt to lead Nietzsche's self-overcoming into Schelling's unity with divinity*¹³—via Kant's Kingdom of ends. In this project, the idealism of the second part of his treatise hardened the binaries, giving them a permanent and formalist status in tension with his scientific discussion. This tension reflected his attempt to move past what he considered the nihilism of declining mores, but leapt to the fore with his resurrection of a battery of sclerotic philosophical dichotomies. But this constitutes his interest for us as well.

The Belle Époque Canary

Weininger is a child of his time (1880-1903). He reflects its concerns and enacts an idealistic reversion not unknown to it.¹⁴ That is, Weininger passed from a typical *fin de siècle* Austrian interest in empiricism and philosophical monism, to a discovery of Freud's emerging psychoanalysis, and finally to an attempt to reconcile Kant, Nietzsche, and Schelling.¹⁵ The brilliant and retiring *Volksschuler* who studied the classics had the gift for Latin and Greek that Nietzsche evinced. In 1898, he left philology for the natural sciences at the University of Vienna, turning by 1900 to biology, medicine, and philosophy, rather like Freud (Luft, 2003, 50). Like Freud as well, he knew Franz Brentano, and all three attended the Vienna Philosophical Society meetings. The university student Weininger studied zoology and physiology and proved a promising student in psychology (Luft, 2003, 50). The child of a famous goldsmith known throughout Europe, Weininger worked himself from the economic *bourgeoisie* into the cultured *Bildungsbürgertum*, mastering languages with the ease that Freud himself had

shown. Everything would suggest that, absent his disposition to depression, Weininger would have turned into a great psychologist or empiricist philosopher.

Two events contributed to his aforementioned idealistic turn. Around 1901, Weininger's encounter with German philosophy, notably the works of Kant, Schelling and Nietzsche, lead him to revise his voluminous, scientific thesis "*Eros und Psyche*," producing instead a 600 page manuscript that he submitted to his crestfallen directors Jodl and Müllner for the doctorate. The final, published work, *Geschlecht und Charakter* was hardly shorter, coming in at 461 pages. As I indicated, the shorter version proved to be a two-part exercise: it evinced the uneasy coexistence of scientific research into sexuation (before "modern synthesis" genetics were framed in the late 1930s) and a hybrid of conceptions about the genius, Nietzschean self-overcoming, and the Kingdom of ends—which Weininger framed in terms of Kant's second formulation of his categorical imperative: always treat humanity, whether in yourself or another person, as an end and not merely as a means.

This philosophical aggregate was unstable. In Weininger's case, it was vitalism and Kantianism that ultimately triumphed, and he came to regard his early scientific research as shallow. Correlatively, his increasingly unstable personality accounts for the Nietzsche-like eruptions in his book, which argues at length about the "feminine," but also tries to undercut the anti-Semitism of his time. Two things must be kept in mind. First, Weininger was himself Jewish. His goal was to argue, circularly, that anti-Semitism was rooted in *ressentiment* and that anti-Semites often evinced characteristics more "Judaic" than many Jews in Vienna at the time; moreover, Jews were not to be blamed for "eliminating God," the "Aryan" dislike of Jews was due to the greater effeminacy of

the former. To be sure, his view reflected stereotypes around Jews from reactions to the *Ostjüde* to assimilationist bromides such as we even find in the remarkable director of *Die Fackel*, Karl Kraus, who would later defend Weininger's work.

As indicated, my concern is with nihilism as epistemology, and we see a restricted methodological nihilism, akin to Benjamin's critique, at work in Weininger's initial deconstruction of sexual identity, which is the thematic that structures *Sex and Character* Part I. Weininger was among the first to develop a dialectics of sex *versus* gender, and to a lesser degree biology *versus* culture. He would argue that every living being was a mixture of masculine and feminine characteristics, and therefore one *became* a man or a woman through a process of cultural institution. Radicalizing Schopenhauer, he deconstructed sexuality into three dimensions of embodied sexuate intermediacies, social construction, and idealization.¹⁶ Like Nietzsche and his multiple forces or "intelligences" in bodies, Weininger argued that there is nothing that allows us to speak of a purely masculine genotype, much less a feminine one. Prior to any understanding of genes, hormones or their action, Weininger distilled from the zoological and embryological literature of his time what had to be the most plausible hypothesis: "the occurrence of intermediate sexual forms is *determined* by the different degrees of original sexual characteristics, in conjunction with the inner secretions (which probably vary in quality and quantity in each individual)" (Weininger, 2005, 25). Underlying the debates about sexuation were two questions: First, how and why does life diversify as it grows? Second, how are individuals to be thought in relation to species and sexuation? Rejecting two popular hypotheses about sexual difference, that it was a matter strictly of forms or that sex concerned only particular sites in an otherwise neutral human body, Weininger

adopted a cellular theory in which, “it is possible to imagine an infinite number of different sexual characteristics of every single cell” (Weininger, 2005, 17). We should keep in mind that Nietzsche glimpsed at least one of the terrible questions underlying this investigation: Why is it, or what is it, that causes a cell to start to divide?¹⁷ What forces transform the nucleus into two nuclei? What is active, what is passive? In a different sense, this too was a problem for Schelling’s cosmology as it was for Freud.

It is important to note that Weininger’s attempt at philosophical systematicity patently *fails*. However, it fails in one significant sense: Weininger cannot reconcile the transcendental with the empirical; his nihilism as critical method slides directly into a nihilism as epistemology. His thought reflects the exacerbation of the critique of decadence arguing in favor of the self-overcoming of man, even at the cost of the gradual disappearance of the species. However, the path it takes to that end is not necessarily stranger than other philosophies that themselves evinced an “*unendliche Mangel an Sein*” [unending falling short of being], as Manfred Frank said of Schelling. Weininger writes:

We may thus arrive at the following notion, which is hypothetical from the point of view of formal logic, but which is raised almost to the level of certainty by the...facts: *every cell of the organism* (as we will provisionally say) *has a...certain sexual emphasis* [*bestimmte sexuelle Betonung*]. According to our principle of the generality of intermediate sexual forms we add *that this sexual character can be of different degrees*.

The...assumption of different degrees in the development of the sexual characteristics would make it easy...to incorporate into our system pseudo-hermaphroditism and even genuine hermaphroditism (the occurrence of

which among many animals has been established, albeit not with certainty among humans)... If...as all empirical facts seem to dictate, *the principle of innumerable transitional forms of sexuality between M and W is extended to all cells of the organism*, [then] the difficulty that troubled Steenstrup is removed [how bisexuality would be distributed] and bisexuality [or bisexuation] no longer runs counter to nature. Based on this principle, it is possible to imagine *an infinite number of different sexual characteristics of every single cell*, from total masculinity through all intermediate forms down to its complete absence...total femininity. (Weininger, 2005, 17)

While that does not mean that gonads are equivalent to kidneys, much less to brains, Weininger hastens to add:

The gonad is the organ in which the sexual characteristics of the individual appear most *visible* and in whose elementary morphological units they can most readily be demonstrated. (Weininger, 2005, 19)¹⁸

Following a current respected in biology but largely unknown to philosophy, which appears to be a refinement of Haeckle's ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis thesis, Weininger writes:

...Naegeli, de Vries, Oskar Hertwig, *et al.* developed the...theory...that every cell of a multicellular organism carries in it *all* the qualities of the *species* and in the gonads these are only concentrated in a particularly marked form—as will perhaps appear to all researchers one day

[since]...every living being comes into existence through the...division of *one* single cell. (Weininger, 2005, 19-20)¹⁹

The idea of life originating from a single cell with “forces” in it may have led Weininger to Schelling and his living “*Basis*” (Schelling, 1986, 30). Before the hypothesis of a kind of fundamental living matter, a base material which 19th century science called the “*idioplasm*,” the question of what fuels initial differentiation suggested the necessity of a binarity of forces so that there be something like activity and passivity, something like emergence and inertia—of which all the vitalists and *Lebensphilosophen* had spoken. Weininger proposes his solution.

...we too can, and must, create the concepts of *arrhenoplasm* and *thelyplasm* as the two modifications in which any *idioplasm* can appear in sexually differentiated beings, bearing in mind that these concepts [arrhenoplasm and thelyplasm]...again stand for *ideal cases*, or boundaries, *between* which empirical reality resides. Thus the protoplasm which exists in reality increasingly departs from the ideal arrhenoplasm and, passing through a (real or imaginary) point of indifference (true hermaphroditism), turns into a protoplasm which is closer to thelyplasm [a feminized idioplasm] and from which it is...distinguished by a small differential. (Weininger, 2005, 20)

This was Weininger’s response to debates about the emergence of sexuate characteristics in embryology. In order for the multiple degrees of sexuation at the cellular level to be meaningful, *two ideal boundaries* had to be established, for the sake

of heuristics. These ideal boundaries would form the center of the investigation in the second half of the book, *An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*—the moment at which Weininger’s critical nihilism slides into epistemological nihilism.

Working with a polarity of ideal masculine and ideal feminine, which phenomenize as “emphases” [*Betonungen*] in bodies, Weininger inserted his schema into a German-Darwinian (Wilhelm Roux and Ernst Haeckel) framework: the *Betonungen* had to serve an evolutionary purpose. For him, this purpose was the facilitation of sexual attraction and reproduction. Influenced by his classical education, Weininger started from the Aristophanic thesis of the divided, one-time complete being in search of its complement. He thus proposed that the quantity of masculine influence in a given being was proportionate first to the quantity of feminine influence, and could be expressed as a ratio, like 61 to 39 in a given individual. Further, this person, most likely a male, would be attractive to another person, no matter what their *socialized* gender was, provided they had something close to the inverse proportion of emphasis, say 61% femininity to 39% masculinity. For this, he developed the algorithm of maximal sexual affinity, factoring in two other elements: the “analytical function of the *time* individuals are able to act upon each other” (Weininger, 2005, 35), and a constant, supposed to represent what we know, scientifically, about sexuality now, versus what we should know in the decades to come.

I want to emphasize that Weininger is here separating sexual expression from sexual attraction, but also sexual attraction from sexuation *per se*, i.e., sex from gender. In terms largely untouched by philosophers up until then, we might say that Weininger

was attempting to approach the question of *identity* in an *a priori* sense that simultaneously took account of sexuation even as it dissolved the social criteria with which his society had defined sexuality. He pursued this down to the movement of animals and sex cells.

Wilhelm Pfeffer called these movements [of sex cells like spermatozoids] *chemotactic* and coined the term *chemotropism* for all these phenomena....

There seem to be many indications that among animals the attraction exercised by the female when perceived by the male...through the sense organs...is...analogous to chemotactical attraction. (Weininger, 2005, 37)

Weininger cited other research of his time and recalled Goethe's chemical novel, *Elective Affinities*, as a prescient literary speculation on forces at work in sexual attraction. From there, he dealt with education and socialization, feminine men and masculine women (Weininger, 2005, 50 ff.). Above all, he was looking to combine what he called a "differential psychology" with biological concepts; notably the principle of correlation phenomena and the concept of function (Weininger, 2005, 54-56). The correlation principle argued that organs in a body were mutually adapted to each other, facilitating nutrition, safety, and competitiveness. Weininger extended it to a range of physical preferences between individuals. He did so using an evolutionary notion of function in light of species.

So much for the scientific beginnings of *Sex and Character*. Its ambition was to emancipate men and women from the straightjacket of essentialist sexuate types; it was

also hoped that anti-Semites might realize the groundlessness of their *ressentiment* against somewhat effeminate beings.

From the Empirical to the Ideal Types: Mann und Frau to Mann und *Weib*

We are perhaps more sophisticated today than the morphologists, social theorists, and physiognomists of the *Belle Époque*. Nevertheless, the question of the relationship between acculturation and biology, or discursive practices, cultural objects, and bodily drives, remains. Indeed, it turns on the nihilistic social imaginary underlying and conditioning the turn of the century embryology—not to mention the *logics* of life that philosophers like Schelling had contributed to German language physics and biology.²⁰ Above all, Weininger's sexuate "*Betonungen*" depended on the limit conditions which he calls "heuristic," the ideal types that make up Part II. The ideal types required a philosophical elaboration in order to be grounded *principially*. The second half of the book effectuated the passage from the scientific literature, a popularized empiricism, to a syncretic idealism whose concepts would promptly show their uncanny superannuation. Underlying this was Weininger's Kantian-Schellingian vision: a world in which no one treated another in the worst instrumental sense possible, i.e., sexually. And this alone permitted man to rise in purity toward unity with the godhead (Schelling's vision).

What is worse than the science Weininger attempted to popularize was his conviction of the necessity of a meta-biology, grounded transcendently. There, his fear of effeminacy and nihilism cashed itself out in static *a priori* categories. As indicated, the ideal symbolization for masculinity was presence, action, *energeia*, plenitude, or simply the number 1. As ideal type, the feminine was passivity, inaction,

dunamis, absence, or the cipher 0. *Bon gré mal gré*, Weininger's own anti-Semitism was an attempt to protect Jews from worse forms of Jewish hatred than his own: what made "the Jew" dislikable was the surprising quantity of femininity he possessed. In classic colonialist language, Jews, like women, like Africans, were imitative unoriginal creatures, incapable of creation or innovation. Caught in service to the species, all these groups consisted of herd animals rather than true individuals. I would like to make you laugh with citations from Weininger to this effect, but as indicated, he is a canary in the coalmine called nihilism: he stated what philosophers discussed in euphemisms and code, but did not generally publish. The conundrum was how to *think* socio-political upheavals with the inherited categories.

Interesting here is that the great stigma in all these cases is the *lack*, or abyssal inertia that characterizes "*Weiblichkeit*" (femininity) as a component in women *or* men. That lack means that femininity and even "Jewishness" become analogous to Schelling's "principle of darkness" or ground that is the inertial prime matter in all things, including God. In 1809, Schelling argued:

All birth is birth out of darkness into light... We recognize...that the concept of becoming is the only one adequate to the nature of things. But the process of their becoming cannot be in God, viewed absolutely, since they are distinct from him *toto genere*....To be separate from God, [things] would have to carry on this becoming on a basis different from him. But since there is nothing outside God, this contradiction can only be solved by things having their basis in that within God which is not *God himself*, i.e. in that which is the basis of his existence. (Schelling, 1986, 33)

Lacking all definition, the feminine—like the dark *Basis* in God and nature—is boundariless, yet paradoxically serves as *quanta* of exchange. “Matchmaking [*Kuppelei*] is a blurring of boundaries,” argued Weininger, “and the Jew is the blurrer of boundaries *kat’exokhen*. He is the opposite pole of [the] aristocratism [of individuation]. The principle of any aristocratism is the strictest *observation* of all *boundaries* between human beings, but the Jew [just like the female] is the born communist and always wants community” (Weininger, 2005, 281).

While *we* might find this qualification complimentary, an enduring philosophical difficulty is evinced. Slavoj Žižek finds in Weininger the precursor to Lacan’s “the woman does not exist,” and by extension the anticipation of our own recognition of the profound void at the heart of what we call subjectivity.²¹ It remains that we have here a *nihil* that is *active*. It is active as *Eros*—just as Schelling’s *Basis* was active as longing or “*Sehnsucht*.” All of these terms express the search for ways to conceptualize movement and affect between beings. That is why “matchmaking” is a genteel translation of the derogatory “*Kuppelei*.”²² But that *Kuppelei* could be dissociated from the unifying force of *Eros*, that cipher, is doubtful. It is unclear how a cipher—how the transcendental feminine—can matchmake but not cause movement or consolidation. All of this, of course, revolves around the epistemology of nihilism and Weininger’s futile search for ways beyond it.

Weininger’s solution to the difficulty *at the ideal level* could *only* be ratified by the *empirical* fact that all beings are composed of masculine and feminine forces at the cellular level. But the empirical solution of intersexuation ran aground the self-

destruction of its definitional limits and, notably, the active nothingness that was ideal femininity. This underscores the reciprocal dependence in Weininger of the empirical and transcendental levels, as well as their impossible coexistence.

The Nietzschean dimension of the work concerns self-overcoming: every man must overcome the nothingness in him, but the only ones who can truly do this are those qualified as “geniuses.” A Romantic theme, the genius recalls the saint in Nietzsche’s writings like *Human, All too Human* (1878). The genius in Weininger was the bridge—between the empirical *mischling* and the overman. The genius was also the true moralist and authentic monad.²³ The genius’s connection with the universe is his Kantian-Nietzschean capacity to find and bestow meaning, to approach the sublime in one’s own figure. “Consequently he evaluates everything,” said Weininger, “both within and outside him according to this idea [of intrinsic unity]; and for that reason...everything in his view, rather than being a function of time, represents one great and eternal idea” (Weininger, 2005, 148).

From the genius too flows the moral law; it is not the affair of formal, practical reason alone.

[Ordinary human beings] may relate to the sun or the moon, but they certainly lack the “starry heavens” and the “moral law.” The moral law comes from the human soul, which holds all totality, and *which can contemplate everything because it is everything*. The starry heavens and the moral law, they too are basically one and the same thing. The universalism of the categorical imperative is the universalism of the universe, the infinity

of the universe is only a symbol of the infinity of the moral will. (Weininger, 2005, 150)

Here, Weininger attempts to open a path to the *Übermensch* precisely by a *return* to the pre-critical Kant's sublime, embodied by great men, or the genius.

Only the man of genius is a complete human being. What is contained in every individual as a possibility of being human...in the Kantian sense, as *dunamei*, is alive and fully developed as *energeia* in the genius... He is himself the quiescence of all laws and therefore free.... (Weininger, 2005, 151)

Consistent with the practical task of the book, which changed as Weininger studied Nietzsche and Idealism, the highest human destiny had to permit the authentic embodiment of its ideal. If recourse to the genius is Romantic, it remains that the bridge beyond "man" could only be unity with the divine. For such a self-overcoming, man had to overcome two things: first, his action had to be based not on an ethics of compassion, but on one of respect. "As was first articulated by Kant, the only being in the world that we *respect* is the human" (Weininger, 2005, 154-55). But how to respect the non-genius; how to respect other human beings, say women, or Jews? "The first [way is] by *ignoring* them...the second, by taking notice of them...and the third, trying to *recognize* them. *Only* by being interested in them, thinking of them...trying to *understand* them as themselves...can one *honor* one's fellow-humans" (Weininger, 2005, 155). This first overcoming required a Nietzschean forgetfulness as well. More specifically, man had to

overcome his bisexual nature. This meant that he had to overcome *eros* or *Kuppelei* in himself. Such overcoming was crucial from the moral perspective too, because it was ultimately man's desire that constituted woman as a gender (*not* as a sex). "Man" makes "women" by desiring them, in the way that Schelling's "self-will" is aroused in order that love find a material basis or resistance through which to realize itself (Weininger, 2005, 219ff).²⁴ This material is his own flesh—or the feminine—just as, in Schelling's beginning, it was the *Basis*, the almost-nothing out of which God arose as the "One." But Weininger continued to argue, in Kantian terms, that the instrumentalization of a being with more "femininity" than "masculinity" in it, was morally reprehensible to human destiny (Weininger, 2005, 224-25). Nothing impeded our reunification with the deity more effectively than the instrumentalization of another human, notably but not exclusively, erotic instrumentalization.

Thus sexual intercourse in any case contradicts the idea of humanity; not because asceticism is a duty, but...because in sexual intercourse Woman wants to become an object, a thing, and Man really does her the favor of regarding her as a thing and not as a living human being with internal psychic processes. That is why Man despises Woman as soon as he has possessed her, and Woman *feels* that she is now despised, even though two minutes earlier she was idealized. The only thing that a human being can respect in a human being is the *idea*, the idea of humanity. The contempt for Woman (and for Man himself)...is the surest indication that the idea has been violated. And anybody who cannot understand what is meant by this Kantian idea of humanity might at least consider that the women concerned

are *his* sisters, *his* mother, *his* female relatives: it is *for our own sake* that Woman should be...respected as a human being and not *degraded*, as she always is through sexuality. (Weininger, 2005, 312)

I hope that this quote (*and* the underlying science, at this time more *footling* than sheer “pseudoscience”) shows why this book was so confusing yet so seductive to a host of German and English intellectuals from Wittgenstein to Karl Kraus, to Schoenberg, to Hermann Broch,²⁵ Elias Canetti, Thomas Bernhard, James Joyce, and Heinrich Böll.²⁶ Between 1903, the year Weininger committed suicide following his conversion to Protestantism, and 1947, *Sex and Character* went through 28 editions and was translated into many languages. Wittgenstein called it a *great* error. Molly Bloom was said to be, in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, modeled after Weininger’s Woman. But then the *Belle Époque* knew *so much worse*.²⁷

My argument concerns the attempt of middlebrow philosophy, in the era of the demise of Idealism, to come to terms with biology and the socio-political mutations of the time. With the separation of psychology, psychiatry, and philosophy, thinking faced what could be called a problem of concepts or categories. A philosophy like Weininger’s, which began as critique and a subtle understanding of finitude, veered into what I have called a nihilistic epistemology. Middlebrow philosophy proved inadequate to explanation without *normalization*, and an ethical-theological vision of redemption in nothingness.

Many who were still impressed with the older philosophy could not separate Idealism, Romanticism and the *Lebensphilosophie* inaugurated in part by Schelling. And it is not without interest to note that the ultimate, contradictory conclusion of *Sex and Character* follows closely the structure of Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*.

In Schelling, the Absolute must be considered alive, lest it drift into the formalism he suspected of Hegel. Like all life, the Absolute or universe gives birth to itself, thanks to the coexistence of two principles that were interdependent but did not interact directly with each other. In the place of Hegel's dialectic, Schelling brought *Lebensphilosophie* into the Absolute itself. Weininger would resort to this exceptional logic to situate his Nietzschean-Kantian self-overcoming within a cosmological framework. The ultimate outcome of this process for Schelling had to be the triumph of the light or the form-giving dimension of the Absolute—for Weininger, it was the Masculine. With that end, the inertial *Basis*, which was present at the beginning as “almost nothing,” would gradually be eliminated—like “*das Weib*” in Weininger. The divergent principles would never be fully reconciled, but the unmoving, amorphous *Basis* had to be left far behind or simply disappear into pure light. In so doing, the attraction the *Basis* exerted on the One or the light, like an ordinary gravity, would be annulled.²⁸ Schelling urges,

For, as in the beginning of creation, which was nothing other than the birth of light, the dark principle had to be there as its *Basis*, so that light could be raised out of it (as the actual out of the merely potential); so there must be another basis for the birth of spirit [in humans], and hence a second principle of darkness [the unconscious source of human evil], which must be

as much higher than [the status of the basis] as the spirit [or divine love in humans] is higher than light [in nature]. This principle is precisely the spirit of evil which has been awakened in creation through the arousing of the dark natural *Basis*—that is the *disunion* of light and darkness—to which the spirit of love is now opposed as a higher ideal, [just] as before[,] light was opposed to the unruly movement of nature in its beginnings.... (Schelling, 1986, 52-53; 85)

Conclusion

The reader who began Weininger's book likely thought that Weininger was working out a law bringing bodies and personalities together, even as he argued that there was no simple norm for "empirical" males or females. Yet, not even half way through the work, one notes the change in tone and ends. In their ideal forms, Man and Woman, *Mann und Weib*, are aligned with Schelling's two principles in the Absolute, the *Basis* and the One. Consistent with Schelling's logic, the unfolding and destiny of these two forms are related but different. Like Schelling's *Basis*, Weininger's ideal Nothing exerts an arousing force on the One, which in turn creates *empirical* femininity through its emergent, "masculine" desire. In Weininger, the One and the Zero of ideal masculinity and femininity are directed to follow the course of Schelling's two principles, proceeding toward the entelechy of union-in-divinity. Weininger's peculiar reading of Kant's "Kingdom of Ends" provides the practical itinerary toward union with the godhead. Reinterpreting Kant, such that One and Zero might no longer instrumentalize each other by coupling, Weininger aligns Kant with the return Schelling described of the two

principles to their ultimate situation, where the force of love has sublimated the *Basis* in pure spirit, thereby making the *Basis* obsolete as a pseudo-force and pseudo-presence. For Weininger, that would be the ideal destiny of the type “Woman,” of *das Weib*.

If the repetition of historic tragedy looks like farce, then Weininger was farce and suffering, but he was *not* alone as playwright of nihilism. The consequences of his philosophical nostalgia and the patent superannuation of idealistic concepts had consequences for the decades that followed.²⁹

The Weininger effect was a powerful, intellectual fashion, which endured for more than a generation. It should be emphasized that, in the *Belle Époque*, opposition to capitalist expansion and concentration took the form of sometimes shocking critiques of Liberalism, but also of ethnic and economic chaos.³⁰ Karl Kraus, the influential editor of the review *Die Fackel* (1899-1934), had some sympathy for social democracy. But he was deeply influenced by a comparably powerful aristocratic elitism. Kraus defended Weininger after his suicide and his influential journal appeared up to the famous issue of 1934 entitled “Warum *die Fackel* nicht erscheint”—“Why the *Fackel* is No Longer Published.”

It bears repeating that the constitution of social and political identity proceeds thanks to aesthetics; I mean the proliferating imageries that help constitute Cornelius Castoriadis’s “social imaginaries,” which he describes as “*miasmas*.”³¹ But these images could not take hold, obtain legitimacy, much less engage debate—including, among intellectuals—if it were not for the ability of *certain concepts* to survive their depletion of content and recombine with other concepts, a process intrinsic to the expansion of nihilism. The unfolding of these combinations is not tidy, but in 19th century society, it

followed certain patterns: the ability for alterity to be aligned with potentiality, effeminacy, or degeneracy;³² the ability for alterity to assimilate to hypertrophism, whether that of masculinity in the case of colonized peoples, or of intellect, in the case of Jews. Once displaced, both masculinity and femininity permitted combinations with infantilism, whether corporeal (written indelibly into African bodies), or political (inscribed on the Jewish body). When correlated with idealist logics, these categories took on a semi-conscious affective charge, influencing the use and value of concepts like identity, unity, plurality, difference. Here is where the epistemology of nihilism shows itself most clearly. In the case of Weininger, but also in that of Schopenhauer and other post- or para-Kantians, categories were often animated by the drive to reconcile a root of pure reason with freedom and the practical good. This is why Benjamin insisted that nihilism, understood as a method, must never let go of finitude and can only proceed as unremitting critique. There is not enough space here to pursue the two levels I am describing: ongoing popular and middle-brow categorical combinations, which supplement or promote ideology, and some higher level encounters between these categories and philosophy (at least those in the *Belle Époque*).

Karl Kraus had no idea that National Socialists would co-opt the discourse of his satirical review, *Die Fackel*. When this happened he protested in disgust, insisting that his was always a “defense of nature and spirit against the destructive powers of a deviated intelligence and a badly mastered technology” (Jacques Le Rider, 1990, 132, 148).³³ And yet, even in binaries such as “nature” and “spirit,” we hear, still echoing, strains of idealist and vitalist thought, in service to a nihilism Kraus could not have failed to

recognize. The conundrum, for us, concerns perceiving the mutations of the serious into the farcical, *before* what looks like farce to some, is appropriated to nihilistic ends.

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Notes

¹ A version of this paper was published in Daniel M. Price and Ryan J. Johnson (eds), *The Movement of Nothingness: Trust in the Emptiness of Time*, Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 2013, pp. 51-72.

² "...It is immoral to turn a human being into the effect of a cause, to produce a conditioned human being, as does parenthood, and the ultimate source of the bondage and determinacy which accompany the freedom and spontaneity of a human being is the fact that he has been created in such an immoral fashion. Reason has no interest whatsoever in the eternal continuation of humankind. Whoever wants to perpetuate humankind wants to perpetuate a problem and a guilt, indeed the only problem and the only guilt that there are, for the aim is the deity and the ending of humankind in the deity, a pure separation between good and evil, between something and nothing." Otto Weininger, 1921, p. 458. Hereafter GC. See also the recent English translation, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, trans. by Ladislaus Löb; D. Steuer and L. Marcus (eds), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 311-12. Hereafter SC.

³ Adi Ophir, "..." in this collection.

⁴ Gorgias' syllogism was: there is nothing; if there were something, we could not know it; if we could know it, we could not communicate it to others.

⁵ Benjamin phrased this as the imperative "to strive for such a passing away" as can be found in the movement of life and death typical to nature. For him, this would be the task for a "world politics," cognizant of human finitude and the fragility of all institutions and

practices created by human beings. Anti-messianic, anti-eschatological, Benjamin's "Fragment" mobilizes nihilism to hold *open* both conceptions of a good life and a desirable society, without assuring them or merging the theological and the political that are found together in epistemological nihilism.

⁶ Um hinter diesen Sinn zu kommen, muß von einem Phänomen ausgegangen werden, das, so alt und so bekannt es ist, noch nirgends und niemals einer ernsteren Beachtung oder gar Würdigung wert befunden wurde. *Es ist kein anderes als das Phänomen der Kuppellei, welches zum tiefsten, zum eigentlichen Einblick in die Natur des Weibes zu führen vermag* (Weininger, 1921, 337).

⁷ As Canguilhem put it in his landmark, *Le normal et le pathologique*: "The concept of norm is an original concept that cannot be reduced, in physiology or elsewhere, to a concept objectively determinable by scientific methods. *Thus strictly speaking there is no biological science of the normal.* There is a science of biological situations and conditions *called* normal. This science is physiology." See *Le normal et le pathologique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966, 204, my trans.

⁸ Zuvor jedoch will ich genau angeben, in welchem Sinne ich vom Judentum rede. Es handelt sich mir *nicht* um eine *Rasse* und nicht um ein *Volk*, noch weniger freilich um ein gesetzlich anerkanntes Bekenntnis. *Man darf das Judentum nur für eine Geistesrichtung, für eine psychische Konstitution halten, welche für alle Menschen eine Möglichkeit bildet, und im historischen Judentum bloß die grandioseste Verwirklichung gefunden hat* (Weininger, 1921, 402). Henceforth, only the English will be used.

⁹ Albert S. Lindemann, *Anti-Semitism before the Holocaust*, Essex, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2000, p. 57. Albert S. Lindemann recalls that "from the mid-

eighteenth century until the eve of the Holocaust, the Jewish population of Europe increased faster than that of the non-Jewish population. There was also a more rapid move of Jews than non-Jews into urban areas, especially capital cities, another kind of significant rise in status. Per capita income rose more rapidly among Jews...The percentage of Jews who were among the very wealthiest citizens of Europe's nation states shot up by the end of the century, as did the number of Jews who won Nobel prizes after 1905." See Lindemann, 2000, p. 53ff.

¹⁰ We need only think only of telegony and neoteny: the disconcerting "stain of the quagga" or zebra on the mare, who was then crossed with an Arabian stallion only to produce a striped hybrid in her second issue. For neoteny, consider literature on the African child, observed as an infant possessed of greater motor and cognitive abilities than the European child, only to be declared apt to develop up to adolescence and then to stop.

¹¹ See Francis Schiller, *A Möbius Strip: Fin de Siècle Neuropsychiatry and Paul Möbius*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, pp. 49-65.

¹² Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

¹³ F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, trans. by James Gutman, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1936, 1986.

¹⁴ Such idealism even shows up in the positivism of an Ernst Mach, with the "ensoulment" of matter.

¹⁵ David S. Luft, *Eros and Inwardness in Vienna: Weininger, Musil, Doderer*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 51. Hereafter EIV.

¹⁶ Luft writes, in “Otto Weininger’s Vision of Gender and Modern Culture” in EIV: “Weininger’s achievement was to separate discourse about gender from literal assumptions about individual men and women...What makes his argument interesting is his attempt to deconstruct his culture’s understanding of gender and to develop a methodology that distinguishes male and female types from individual men and women.” He is careful to observe that Weininger nevertheless “seems to assume [at times] that a man can become 100 percent male, although a woman cannot [lest she be basically nothing],” pp. 54, 57. In addition, while a man can be close to ‘female’, Weininger will write, “the woman can never become a male” (SC, 241; cited by Luft, EIV, 63). This is largely because, like a host of others, Weininger begins from the assumption that the male is largely the human norm (cf. EIV, 61).

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe* XII, 1885-1886, Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari (eds), Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988, 2 [92], pp. 106-07.

¹⁸ The citation continues: “However, we must also assume that the genus-specific, species-specific, and family-specific qualities of an organism are represented most completely in the gonads.” See Weininger, 2005, p. 19.

¹⁹ Note however that this was *not* August Weismann’s theory, which argued that sex cells are specific and localized, not found throughout the body. Weismann’s germ plasma theory was developed before 1900.

²⁰ Schelling was the editor of the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* at the time he published the *Philosophical Inquiries*, 1809.

²¹ Slavoj Zizek, “Otto Weininger, or, ‘Woman doesn’t exist’” in Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, pp. 137-164, esp. 145. But note that whereas, in her inexistence, her

nothingness, Weininger's "Weib" or ideal type of the female is something generated by masculine desire, and is wholly subjected to the "phallus" (Weininger's words), Žižek defends Lacan, arguing that for the latter, "the exact opposite is true: the pre-symbolic 'eternally Feminine' is a retroactive patriarchal fantasy—that is, it is the Exception which grounds the reign of the Phallus....It is thus the very lack of any exception to the Phallus that renders the feminine libidinal economy inconsistent, hysterical, and thereby undermines the reign of the Phallus" (Žižek, p. 151). The outcome is largely the same, as the argument has a circularity to it; the principal difference is that for Weininger, it is actual men who must turn away from sexual engagement with women, if de facto women—as mixtures of masculinity and femininity are to come into their own as human beings.

²² The *Grimm* Dictionary points out that *Kuppelei* is close to *Koppelei*, as "doppel" to "dupple" and comes from the Latin *Copula*.

²³ "A human being may be called a genius if he lives in a conscious connection with the whole universe. Thus genius alone is the really divine element in humans" (Weininger, 2005, p. 149).

²⁴ We might also understand this as being close to Lacan's notion that women are in a sense socially constructed to incarnate or to be the phallus rather than to have the phallus.

²⁵ Hermann Broch, author of *The Death of Virgil*, wrote, "Weininger, the most fervent moralist since Kant, placed himself completely on the ground of this ethic, but he succumbed to the terrible nothingness it contains when he sought to transform it into a dogma." See Broch, *Philosophische Schriften I*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977, p. 248, cited by Jacques Le Rider, *Le Cas Otto Weininger: Racines de*

l'antiféminisme et de l'antisémitisme, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982, p. 229.

²⁶ For a discussion of some of Weininger's influences, see John E. Toews, "Refashioning the Masculine Subject" in *The Mind of Modernism*, Stanford, 2004, pp. 301ff. Also see Le Rider, 1982; Nancy A. Harrowitz and Barbara Hyams (eds), *Jews and Gender: Responses to Otto Weininger*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995, and Chandak Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger: Sex, Science, and Self in Imperial Vienna*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

²⁷ In the same year, in 1903, Georg Groddeck (1866-1934), who gave Freud his concept of the *Es*, thanks to Nietzsche, authored an idiosyncratic prose poem entitled, *A problem of Woman*, in which he rhapsodized:

"The three branches of the future stand before us: beauty, clarity, childhood. What a plenitude of divinity resides in woman! Ever since the culture of man, at its apogee, was broken, with the fall of Athens, the world has lived from the beauty of woman in search of man... woman must presume and cultivate free beauty, that beauty which is its own end and fulfillment. The cult of the goddess of a hundred breasts, the cult of Mary, shall then be a harmonious reality," see Georg Groddeck, *Un problème de femme*, trans. by Roger Lewinter (from the 1903 German edition), Paris: Éditions Mazarine, 1979. At the antipode of this rhapsodic imitation of Zarathustra stood the neurologist, Paul Julius Möbius (1853-1907), arguing for the *physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes*, or physiological feeble-mindedness of females. This was the title of a pamphlet that went through nine printings by 1908. Möbius knew of Weininger, appreciated him, but felt eclipsed by Weininger's "success."

²⁸ For since this Being (*Wesen*) of primal nature is nothing else than the eternal basis of God, it must contain within itself, locked away, God's essence, as a light of life...but longing or desire, roused now by the understanding, strives to preserve this light of life...within [the basis], and to close up in itself so that they always remain [together in the] ground (PINH, p. 36; in Schelling's *Werke* VII, p. 361).

²⁹ George Mosse has studied how syncretic architecture contributed to the nationalization of the masses, but also large popular movements. See George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1999, pp. 183-97; and Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1975, pp. 21-38, 207-16.

³⁰ See Jacques Le Rider, "Karl Kraus ou l'Identité juive déchirée" in François Latraverse and Walter Moser (eds), *Vienne au tournant du siècle*, La Salle, Québec: Editions Hurtubise, 1988, pp. 103-108.

³¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain" in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, trans. by David Ames Curtis (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. In French, *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*, 1986, pp. 3-18.

³² Thus, sex, health, and sanitation, motifs Foucault develops in a number of works. Note, moreover, that in 1892, Max Nordau—famous as a journalist and physician, responsible for coining the term "Muskeljudentum" [muscular Jewry] as antidote for the widespread conception of Jews as effeminate and therefore, degenerate—published his masterwork, *Degeneration*, a term he borrowed from the French psychiatrist, B. A. Morel, who

studied human deviations from a physiological standpoint. Nordau was well known and his work an immediate success. He represents the heritage of a materialism gone awry; one of a host of critics of 19th century culture, comprising Christian and Jewish intellectuals, Nordau preceded Weininger by a decade and anticipated his themes of genius, anti-feminism, sexual morality, and a certain Kantianism. See Nordau, *Degeneration*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993; trans. from the 2nd ed. of his *Entartung* [1892].

³³ He did so notably in *Die Fackel*, Nos 890-905, July 1934, p. 101ff. What has been called Kraus's *jüdischer Selbsthass* is addressed by Adorno's insight (echoed by Sander Gilman), to the effect that one attempts to extirpate from oneself and project onto various others, human or not, that with which one is most profoundly at odds. To this end, the uncanny quality of nineteenth century categories took its sharpest relief in the multiple pretenses at unifying empirical science with post idealistic philosophy, toward moral ends. I thank Oona Eisenstadt for the reference to Adorno. There is little doubt that Kraus believed in a Germany that was unified, open to assimilation, democratic, and anti-capitalist (although he too could speak the language of the anti-Semites and *Judenfeinde*). See Jacques Le Rider, "Karl Kraus ou l'identité juive déchirée," in *Modernité viennoise et crise de l'identité*, Paris : PUF, 1990, pp. 103-53. In English, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, New York: Continuum, 1993.