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Editorial Introduction

The Agonist Editorial Board

“THOUGHTS ON DISEASE—To soothe the imagination of the patient, in order that he may at least no longer keep on thinking about his illness, and thus suffer more from such thoughts than from the complaint itself, which has been the case hitherto—that, it seems to me, is something! and it is by no means a trifle! And now do ye understand our task?” *Daybreak*, 54

Emergency! Welcome to our special midseason issue of *The Agonist*: “Nietzsche & Illness.” Of course, Nietzsche discusses illness, sickness, disease, and health in different contexts in different texts. Sometimes illness refers to the trauma produced by the mass psychosis of Christianity (*The Antichrist*), sometimes an intellectual neurosis (“On the Prejudices of Philosopher” in *Beyond Good and Evil*), and sometimes illness simply denotes physiological pain—including Nietzsche’s own bodily ailments. The current COVID-19 pandemic has ignited new scholarly treatments of these illnesses. We have tried in this issue to imagine not what Nietzsche would say about COVID, but how his works can inform our response to the virus. Our contributing writers contend with how to act and react to our ongoing public health crisis by offering panaceas, coping devices, and defense mechanisms for the body, mind, and free spirit:

Jankse Hermens essay explores Nietzschean dietary regimes as preventative medicine and other philosophical digestifs. Lawrence Hatab confronts cultural ills and the power of Nietzsche to bolster the author’s own mental health and depression. Jared Russell diagnoses our current brand of American nihilism in the form of racism, untruth, political corruption and other self-destructive tendencies under the pandemic—illnesses that Nietzsche warned might violently destroy us 140 years ago. And finally, Thomas Steinbuch narrates a heartbreaking but hopeful, anecdotal tale of COVID anxiety from the streets of Hangzhou City, which ignites a genealogical invective against bullying and unfreedom.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has crippled many of the most powerful economic, political, social and medical institutions our species has ever known. Like an episode of the *Leftovers*, we have watched as world leaders fumbled about, continually squandering what could have been extraordinary opportunities for radical scientific and cultural change. Instead, our repeated failure to reckon with nature’s benign indifference to our suffering recalls Nietzsche’s



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opportunities concerning the arrogance of the human intellect at the beginning of *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*. Or as Pierre Klossowski reminds us, “For Nietzsche, the moral question of knowing what is true or false, just or unjust could now be posed in the following terms: What is sick or healthy?”

