

## Meet Helene Druskowitz

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**ABSTRACT:** The article introduces the Austrian woman philosopher of Croatian origin, Helene Druskowitz (1856–1918). After providing an overview of her life and publications, we present two main lines of her philosophical thought. The first is her original attempt to create a systematic doctrine that should replace religion: an anti-materialist monistic system in which there is an “Over-Sphere” as an ideal unattainable for everything related to matter. We can approach the “Over-Sphere” only by distancing ourselves from anything material. This presupposes a fundamental social reform: for Druskowitz, it is sexual reform. Women are much more intellectual and spiritual beings than men: by abandoning the patriarchy and giving absolute priority to women, society as a whole would come closer to the ideal Over-Sphere. In its radical form, this would require the complete separation of men from women, leading to the extinction of the race, with women as leaders in death. The second line of her philosophical thought – her position on free will – is less original. According to Druskowitz, the ideal of free will is an oriental idea that was adopted by Christian theology, and from there it spread into philosophy. Druskowitz fully accepts Schopenhauer’s critique of libertarianism, but tries to elaborate on the possibility of responsibility as a mental by-product of nature despite the lack of free will.

**KEY WORDS:** Helene Druskowitz, Friedrich Nietzsche, free will, radical feminism, pessimism, Over-Sphere.

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### Introduction

In this text we introduce a relatively little-known philosopher, Helene Druskowitz.<sup>1</sup> It is our deepest conviction that she deserves more attention

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a result of the project “Croatian Women Philosophers in the European Context” financed by the Croatian Science Foundation (HrZZ-UIP-2017-05-1763). The text presents abridged results of our year-long research on Helene Druskowitz, some of which we

and academic focus than she has hitherto been given.<sup>2</sup> In scarce secondary literature on Druskowitz, she is occasionally mentioned either as one of the women around Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>3</sup> or as the author of the curiously poignant misandrist “manifesto” *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze*, whose longest and central chapter bears a strong and telling title: “Man as a logical and moral impossibility as well as the curse of the world” (“Der Mann als logische und sittliche Unmöglichkeit und als Fluch der Welt”).<sup>4</sup>

However, upon closer inspection, one realizes that her philosophical ideas deserve to be more thoroughly studied, because her philosophical position was quite original for her time. Equally dissatisfied by any form of religiously intoned philosophical systems on the one hand and by the attempts of their substitutes by what she perceived as atheistic philosophical positions (Comte, Mill, Feuerbach, Nietzsche and others) on the other, she argued for a radical neo-Platonist view. The novelty of her argument is that she does not argue merely from history or sociology – although she does list various examples of nefarious activity typical of men which support her position – but develops a sort of ontology, or a scale of being, in which the “Over-Sphere” (*die Übersphäre*) presents the highest reality and purity. The opposite pole is occupied by matter and the male principle, man, as the personification of the lowliest forms of material existence, identified with the evil in the world. Having adopted a form of Darwinism, she argued that women are higher on the scale of being: they are closer to the Over-Sphere.

In this article we present a more detailed view of some of the main positions of Helene Druskowitz’s philosophy and her intellectual development.

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have published in the introductory study and commentaries to our translation and bilingual (German and Croatian) edition of Druskowitz’s *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Druskowitz has mostly been in the focus of German-speaking scholars, especially in the context of feminist and gender studies; more detailed texts are Ankele (2007), Gronewold (1992) and Kubes-Hofmann (2014). The book *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* has been translated into the following languages: Swedish (Druskowitz 2014), Italian (Druskowitz 2017), Croatian (Druskowitz 2018), and Spanish (Druskowitz 2020). There is also a German edition of the book (Druskowitz 1988).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Diethel (1996) and Holub (2018). There are a number of texts on Nietzsche’s life and philosophy in which Druskowitz is simply mentioned without any further analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. several texts by Schwartz (2005, 2007, 2008).

## Biography of Helene Druskowitz

Helene Druskowitz was born as Helene Maria Franziska Druschkovich on May 2, 1856 in Hietzing, which was then a suburb of Vienna and today is the 13<sup>th</sup> District. Her father was Lorenz Druschkovich,<sup>5</sup> a salesman, whose origin most likely goes back to the island of Korčula in Croatia. Her mother was Magdalena Maria,<sup>6</sup> a pianist, with whom Helene maintained a very close relationship throughout her life. Lorenz Druschkovich was a relatively successful businessman with some reputation in Vienna, which can be concluded based on many instances of his appearances in Viennese newspapers from 1850 until his premature death of tuberculosis in 1858 when he was thirty-nine years of age. After his death, Magdalena Maria continued his business, remarried, and took the last name of her second husband, Gerstner. One child, Helene's half-brother, was born into that marriage. In 1863, Magdalena Maria's second husband died. Like Lorenz, Gerstner also had some successes in business and left the family financially cared for, giving Helene and her brothers the opportunity to receive a good education. The young and well-educated Helene Druskowitz must have made an extraordinary impression to the conservative and largely misogynistic society of mid-nineteenth-century Vienna: there is a newspaper article about her when she was seventeen. Therein it is written that she required and was allowed to pass the *matura* exam that would enable her to continue her studies. It is also reported that she had decided on her future path: she wanted to study philosophy and oriental languages.<sup>7</sup> Some of this early talent is mirrored in her autobiographical drama *Unerwartet* (*Unexpected*), published in 1889, in which she wrote that everyone called her "ein Wunderkind" ("a wonder child") (Druskowitz 1889: 102). In 1873, she completed her piano studies at the Vienna Conservatory. A year later, in 1874, after receiving private tuition, she passed her *matura* exam at the Piaristengymnasium in Vienna.

The same year she moved to Zurich with her mother, where she studied from 1874 to 1878. The reason for her departure to Zurich was

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<sup>5</sup> Somewhere it is stated that his name was Fraune Druskowitz, but in the baptismal records of Hietzing Parish he is referred to as Lorenz Druschkovich. See Taufbuch: VI der Pfarre Hietzing 1856 bis 1869, <http://data.matricula-online.eu/en/oesterreich/wien/13-maria-hietzing/01-06/?pg=8> [accessed June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020].

<sup>6</sup> Her name is sometimes mentioned as Mathilde. Helene Druskowitz would say that her mother was of noble heritage, calling her Madeline von Biba.

<sup>7</sup> *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, August 3, 1873, p. 3.

that at the time this city was the only place where women were allowed to be inscribed as regular university students and receive degrees. We do not know much about her studies: most likely she attended classes in philosophy, and oriental (probably Sanskrit) and modern (probably English) languages; some sources testify that she also attended archeology classes. She must have been a diligent student and

[...] it is indisputable that she must have been a young, very talented woman who wanted to go through life confidently and independently, looking for orientation, role models and fixed points so that she could use her education, which at the time presented also a worldview, to make something of her life. (Kubes-Hofmann, 2014: 164)

At the age of twenty-two, she received her PhD “mit Ehren” (“with honors”) from the University of Zurich after defending her thesis titled *Don Juan bei Lord Byron. Eine litterarisch-ästhetische Abhandlung* (*Don Juan by Lord Byron: A literary-aesthetic treatise*). Helene Druskowitz was the first German-speaking woman to earn a doctoral degree in a regular manner.<sup>8</sup>

In 1880 we find Druskowitz back in Vienna having spent some time in Switzerland and Munich. In Vienna she gave several public lectures, mostly on literary and cultural-historical topics: on Percy Shelley, on Indian drama, on salon de Rambouillet, the last of which demonstrated Druskowitz’s interest in women’s emancipation. These lectures were successful and well attended, and all of them received positive reviews in Viennese newspapers. In 1881, Druskowitz met the Austrian aristocrat and writer Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and became a member of her literary circle, with Betty Paoli, Louise von François and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. As was true of practically all of Druskowitz’s interhuman relationships, this one was marked by interchanging phases of closeness and conflicts: like many of her other friendships, it started with enthusiasm, but soon became burdened, presumably, by her outbursts of hostility and anger. Despite their difficult relationship, Ebner-Eschenbach and Druskowitz preserved their friendship, occasionally traveled together, and corresponded regularly. In 1881 Druskowitz wrote a positive review about Ebner-Eschenbach’s book *Erzählungen* (*Stories*) in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Ebner-Eschenbach, an influential philanthropist, later offered

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<sup>8</sup> Sometimes Stefania Wolicka, also known as Stefania Wolicka-Arnd (1851 – after 1895), a Polish historian, is mentioned as the one to have earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Zurich in 1875 with a thesis titled *Griechische Frauengestalten* (*Greek Female Figures*). However, due to political issues she had to leave Zurich and was promoted *in absentia* in 1875 (<http://www.matrikel.uzh.ch/active/static/28307.htm>) [accessed June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020].

Druskowitz financial help when she was interned in a psychiatric facility in Ybbs in Lower Austria, but Druskowitz declined the offer rather harshly. Besides frequenting the circle of Ebner-Eschenbach, Druskowitz made friends with the Swiss historian, philosopher and friend of Friedrich Nietzsche, Meta von Salis-Marschlins.<sup>9</sup>

However, one of the most important meetings for Druskowitz happened in October 1884 in Zurich, where she met Friedrich Nietzsche. Their first encounter must have been quite friendly and intellectually stimulating for both of them. Indeed, we have a letter Nietzsche wrote to his sister in which he, enthusiastically in his particular style, comments on meeting Druskowitz:

In the afternoon, I went for a long walk with my new friend Helena Druscowicz [*sic*], who lives with her mother a few houses away from the Neptune Guesthouse. Of all the women I met, she studied my books most seriously, and not in vain. [...] I think she is a noble and fair creature, who does no harm to my "philosophy".<sup>10</sup>

However, it was not a long-lasting friendship: already in December of the same year, Druskowitz had a change of mind, as she wrote in a letter to her Swiss friend and a patron, Ferdinand Conrad Meyer:

[...] My enthusiasm for Nietzsche's philosophy turned out to be just a *passion du moment*, a miserable short-lived fire. Nietzsche's prophetic expression now seems so ridiculous to me.<sup>11</sup>

Their interaction must have ended in 1885, when Nietzsche sent her a rare copy of the recently published fourth part of his *Also sprach Zarathustra*, which Druskowitz returned to him. This was a deep insult. After that, we have no evidence of their meetings and/or correspondence, except one, in 1887. Probably provoked by a remark made by Carl Spitteler, Nietzsche wrote in parentheses in *post scriptum*: "The little literary

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara Marghareta von Salis-Marschlins (Meta) (1855–1929), was a Swiss historian, philosopher and feminist. She corresponded with Friedrich Nietzsche and his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. Sometimes one reads in rare secondary literature about Druskowitz that she met Rainer Maria Rilke and the Russian psychoanalyst and writer Lou Andreas-Salomé. However, it is very unlikely that Druskowitz met Rilke, as the latter was born in 1874 and was thus only seventeen years old when Druskowitz was interned in a mental institution. Rilke spent some time in Vienna in 1897 as a student, but there is no evidence that Druskowitz might have been in Vienna at the time. Nevertheless, it is possible that Andreas-Salomé and Druskowitz met during one of the former's many visits to Vienna.

<sup>10</sup> "Brief an Elisabeth Nietzsche" [October 22, 1884], *Nietzsche Source*, digital critical edition of the complete works and letters of F. Nietzsche, edited by P. D'Iorio, <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1884,549> [accessed June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020].

<sup>11</sup> Conrad Ferdinand Meyer Nachlass, Central Library of Zurich, sig. Ms CFM 331.7.

goose Druscowicz is anything but my ‘student.’”<sup>12</sup> It is beyond doubt, however, that Nietzsche had a significant influence on Druskowitz. This influence was not only negative, i.e. treating Nietzsche’s philosophy as an example of bad philosophy, as is apparent in all of her later writings. One should also notice that her style of writing was partially influenced by Nietzsche’s characteristic aphoristic philosophical style.

In 1883, her half-brother died, and in 1884 her eldest brother as well. Her mother, with whom Helene lived most of her life, and whom she frequently visited in Zurich after moving to Vienna, died in 1888. After her mother’s funeral, Helene went to Rome and intended to travel to North Africa, but, probably because of financial difficulties, she canceled her trip. These losses greatly shook Helene, all the more so as her second brother left for South America at the time and she lost track of him. Shortly before her mother’s death, Druskowitz moved to Dresden. There, around 1887, she might have begun a love affair with the celebrated German soprano Therese Malten, but there are doubts whether there was an affair or not.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout her life, Druskowitz was addicted to alcohol and smoked cigarettes and pipes. After the painful loss of her mother and brothers, her alcohol consumption went out of control, and she made frequent outbursts. In 1891, Therese Malten ended their relationship/friendship, which further affected Helene’s already disturbed mental health and triggered an existential crisis in her. After an uncontrolled outburst at a boarding house where she lived in a rented room, Helene was taken by police to a psychiatric hospital in Dresden. Starting from there, she spent the rest of her life, altogether twenty-seven years, in various psychiatric clinics, mostly in Austria (specifically in Ybbs and Mauer-Öhling). She suffered from audible and visual hallucinations. However, she continued her literary production. In 1905, she published her most original book, *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze: Ein Vademekum für die freiesten Geister* (*Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions: Manual for the Freest Spirits*). In 1907, she wrote her last will, in which she demanded that all her letters, texts and manuscripts be burned; perhaps for this reason we have significant lacunae in her opus. During the last twenty-seven years of her stay in hospitals, she was financially supported by her only surviving brother.

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<sup>12</sup> “Brief an Carl Spitteler” [September 17, 1887], *Nietzsche Source*, <http://www.nietzsche-source.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1887,914> [accessed June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020].

<sup>13</sup> Therese Malten (1855–1930), was a German soprano. She made her debut in 1873 in Dresden with the role of Pamine in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. Her real name was Therese Müller.

She probably died from tuberculosis in Kaiser-Franz-Joseph-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt in Mauer-Öhling on May 31, 1918.

Before ending this biographical sketch, it should be mentioned that we know little about Druskowitz with certainty. There are several reasons for this. First, it is probable that she personally destroyed some of her documents together with her literary works. Second, there are only a few preserved personal letters scattered among different *Nachlasse*, and they are often written in almost completely illegible handwriting.<sup>14</sup> Third, she was prone to fabricating alternative stories about her origin, provenance, and so forth. For instance, not only did she change her name from Druschkovich to Druskowitz, but she also added a “von” before her family name to indicate a sort of nobility. Why she did so we can only conjecture. Did she feel inadequate and not on the same footing as the other members of the aristocratic circle whose company she sought, given that she came from a well-off but civil family? Was it a consequence of her understanding of women as a more noble and “aristocratic gender,” as she wrote in her work *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze*, so that the addition of “von” would be an extension of her philosophy? It cannot be determined exactly when Druskowitz started signing as “von Druskowitz”, but the fact is that she used that last name until her death. Besides adding a “von”, there is some evidence that she would tell different fairytale-like stories about her origin and so on.

In the correspondence between Ferdinand Conrad Meyer and Louise von François, Druskowitz was one of the most recurring themes and, so to say, a muse, especially to Meyer, who based some of the characters in his plays on Druskowitz. From this correspondence we learn that she was tall, with blonde hair and fair eyes; she was not considered particularly attractive, but there was something special and impressive about her physical appearance. She was always neatly dressed and refined, even while in psychiatric care. She was regarded as cheerful, proud, and arrogant. Moreover, she paid little respect to the social norms of the time. On April 29, 2008, a small park was dedicated to Druskowitz in Hietzing, which was a suburb of Vienna in her time, but today is part of the city. Ironically, the park faces a hospital.

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<sup>14</sup> Ebner-Eschenbach herself complained that she could not read Druskowitz's letters.

## Druskowitz's works

Druskowitz composed three types of texts: theatrical pieces (dramas and comedies), literary-critical texts, and philosophical texts. She published under different pseudonyms: Adalbert Brunn, H. Foreign, Erna (von Calagis), E(rich) René, H. Sackorausch, H. Sakrosankt. The list of her preserved works is the following:

### THEATRICAL PIECES

- *Sultan und Prinz* (1881)
- *Der Präsident vom Zither-Club* (ca. 1884)
- *Aspasia* (1889)
- *Die Emancipations-Schwärmerin* (1890)
- *Die Pädagogin* (1890)
- *International* (1890)

### LITERARY-CRITICAL TEXTS

- *Über Lord Byrons "Don Juan"* (1879)
- *Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1884)
- *Drei englische Dichterinnen* (1885)

### PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS

- *Moderne Versuche eines Religionsersatzes* (1886)
- *Wie ist Verantwortung und Zurechnung ohne Annahme der Willensfreiheit möglich?* (1887)
- *Zur neuen Lehre* (1888)
- *Eugen Dühring. Eine Studie zu seiner Würdigung* (1889)
- *Zur Begründung einer überreligiösen Weltanschauung* [a new edition of *Zur neuen Lehre*] (1889)
- *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze. Ein Vademecum für die freiesten Geister* (1905)

Various contemporary sources, like almanacs and lexicons, list around twenty other titles attributed to Druskowitz. These texts are nowhere to be found. Moreover, Druskowitz is often – even in present-day secondary sources – listed as editor of two proto-feminist magazines, *Der heilige Kampf* and *Der Fehderuf*, but despite our many efforts, we were not able to locate any copy of any of these magazines in Austrian, German or Swiss libraries. There are two possible reasons for this textual absence.



The first is that Druskowitz herself might have destroyed some of her works because, as we know from her last will, she was prone to doing so to her manuscripts. The names of the manuscripts preserved suggest their thematic content – “Teilung der Städte nach den Geschlechtern” (“Division of Cities According to Gender”), “Ethischer Pessimismus” (“Ethical Pessimism”), “Das Männerproletariat oder die Fällung des Mannes als Tier und Denker” (“The Proletariat of Men or the Falling of Man as Animal and Thinker”) – and we presume that some of these titles might have been manuscripts that were later included in her other publications, especially *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze*, which contains these themes. Second, it is not impossible that Druskowitz herself fabricated “fake news” about her own literary activities, especially after she had been interned in psychiatric institutions: we know from her *Krankenakte* that she used to tell her doctors stories about her royal lineage, heritage and so on. This possibility does not have to be immediately understood as an expression of pathological delusions and/or narcissistic disorder; it might be the case that such fabrications were something that we would today call “artistic performances”. An important part of her philosophical thought presupposes a superiority of women, and it may be the case that her inventions served as the performative acts of political activism of a person who was constrained to stay within the walls of a mental institution due to being “different”.

### Druskowitz’s philosophy

In Druskowitz’s short but promising philosophical career we can follow two main thematic lines. The first line of her philosophy stretches from her *Moderne Versuche eines Religionsersatzes* from 1886 to her last work *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* from 1905, and contains Druskowitz’s main and most original philosophical contribution. The second theme is contained in her work *Wie ist Verantwortung und Zurechnung ohne Annahme der Willensfreiheit möglich?* from 1887 and contains her ideas about the free will problem.<sup>15</sup>

In *Moderne Versuche eines Religionsersatzes*, Druskowitz analyzes the philosophical systems of A. Comte, J. S. Mill, L. Feuerbach, F. Nietzsche, J. Duboc, W. M. Salter and E. Dühring. Different elements of a larger

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<sup>15</sup> Here we are omitting her book *Eugen Dühring. Eine Studie zu seiner Würdigung*, a study dedicated to the specific issue of admiring E. Dühring as a moral force, rather than as a theoretical philosopher.

project of replacing religion with a philosophical system can be found in each writer, but no attempt seems quite successful on its own. The main objection is that they were all building a new religion instead of offering something structurally new that would replace religion. The problem is that they were almost exclusively dealing with ethical rather than metaphysical and social problems. According to Druskowitz, first a form of social progress must occur that would enable a new material basis for a new society in which religion will become superfluous. Further, in *Zur neuen Lehre* Druskowitz relies on Darwin's theory of evolution to argue for humans' drive, which goes "beyond itself", striving to developing toward a higher type in which "thinking" and "being" overlap and the intellect becomes the leader.

A more complete picture is given in Druskowitz's last published book, *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* (*Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions*). It is not a big book, consisting of some 7,300 words divided into six chapters, written as numerated arguments, thoughts or impressions. One of the main argumentative lines of the whole book leads to a profoundly pessimistic conclusion: that it would be best for humanity to disappear. This utterly negative tone, associated with the psychological distress of the author, may cast doubt on the value of this book, which she wrote some fourteen years into her internment in various psychiatric clinics, euphemistically called sanatoria. However, if we adhere to the principle of charity and move away from these extra-philosophical assumptions and psychologisms, we have a very interesting work, both argumentatively and historically.

The main line of philosophical argumentation in *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* begins by clearing the ground for an overall atheistic society. God as traditionally conceived – as a male avenger – is, according to Druskowitz, the main reason for theological nonsense: not only is an anthropomorphized image of a cruel god a caricature of a supposedly metaphysical being, but also the whole concept of the god-creator towering *above* the world is contradictory. Does not every creator strive to create something above and bigger than himself, rather than under and smaller? What does it say about this creator who created something so much *inferior* to him in all respects?

Having refuted the theistic worldview, Druskowitz in the next two chapters gives an alternative to both positivism (which she calls "Com-tism") and materialism, i.e. she offers her central position, which is, as she sees it, essentially Platonic. A monism or a positivism that acknowledges the reality (or substance) of matter alone is not only superficially

banal because it does not recognize any reality beyond itself, but also does not offer an answer to the problem of evil in the world. This type of materialism is for Druskowitz too indifferent and too optimistic, closing its eyes to the horrors of this world. On the other hand, she also attacks some form of hylomorphic dualism in which matter would have an ontic advantage and be shaped by form. For Druskowitz, there is an insurmountable gap between what she calls the “Übersphere” (“Over-Sphere”) – her coinage, perhaps a reaction to Nietzsche’s term “Übermensch” – on the one hand and matter on the other. Matter is

the Other, the lowly, the self-polluted, the dissatisfied, the divided, the fully split, the indented and the discordant, feeling itself unhappy and from outside, the formless, the abandoned, conceptualized in perpetual fleeing from itself, the eternally unpleasurable being, the changing, the constantly evolving, and finally, the agonizingly and with involuntary irony being driven towards an unfortunate and discordant level of consciousness. (Druskowitz 1905: 15)

It is contrary to the Over-Sphere. The relationship between the Over-Sphere and matter is marked by deprivation: one is all that the other is not. However, there is a relationship between the Over-Sphere and matter: the Over-Sphere is the *causa finalis*, the teleological goal toward which matter tends. The evolution of matter is the ascent to the Over-Sphere, which can never be reached as long as there is anything material. This represents the gradation of Being (*Sein*): starting from the material level, it ascends over animal, then to human consciousness (*Bewußtsein*), until it finally, and only imaginarily, comes closer to the Over-Sphere, where it suspends itself. This is also one of the main arguments against materialism: the “masterpiece” of materialism, consciousness, falls short of reaching the level of intellect (*Vernunftgrad*) necessary to grasp the Over-Sphere in its full meaning, which lies fully outside its capacity.

After these metaphysical chapters, Druskowitz comes to the fourth chapter, which we could describe as sociological. It is the longest and most important chapter, in which she argues that attachment to matter, to the material world, and so on, is the consequence of male domination of the world, or to put it in present-day parlance, the consequence of patriarchy. As she poignantly notes in the title of the chapter: man is a logical and moral impossibility and the curse of the world. Thus, if one understands the structure of reality correctly, wiping out men is the only acceptable consequence. This chapter is built as a picturesque sequence of harsh descriptions of male depravities: man is the source of all pessimism, he is a disturbance to the order of the world, he is unintelligent, raw, treacherous, ugly, vulgar, evil, jealous, litigious, garrulous, belligerent, he

has destroyed the equilibrium of nature by his lust and desire for procreation, he is completely – mentally and physically – inferior to woman, he is a less accomplished variant of human being. Moreover, the male-built system of sciences that is made in such a way as to perpetually question its fundamental premises is bound never to go forwards. The arts are nothing but “instigators of affection, as servants of idols and superstition, and as mediators of every sort of false and frivolous appearance” (Druskowitz 1905: 31). There are merely a few exceptional works of art that arouse only pure emotions. Druskowitz uses the opportunity to explicitly criticize Arthur Schopenhauer’s concept of art and Friedrich Nietzsche’s “will to power”. However, both criticisms are reduced to just a few sentences and can hardly be understood as any sort of elaborated criticism: it is rather to be seen as a declaration of distance from those two thinkers who – positively and negatively – mostly influenced her philosophical thought.

The rest of the book is a call for social reform, which takes as its starting point the idea that women are much more sublime, much more refined, much closer to the Over-Sphere. If society were organized according to this principle, humanity would be elevated, more sublime, more intellectual; there would be no atrocities, no wars, no ruthless exploitation of nature, no famine, no overpopulation (published in 1905!). The book ends with a series of advice to men and women on how the world should be organized in order to achieve a more spiritual and sublime way of being. These pieces of advice boil down to a radical separation of men and women. This would, of course, lead to the extinction of the human species, with women the “leaders in death”. For Druskowitz this is not a problem but a solution: this is why the book is called *pessimistic*.

Stylistically, the book is written in a Nietzschean aphoristic style, interwoven with emphatic, almost euphoric claims. Combined with her sharp and brutal criticism of Nietzsche, this leads one to conjecture that the intention of the work, put in the context of the criticism of Nietzsche contained in her earlier *Moderne Versuche eines Religionsersatzes* from 1886, was to “out-Nietzsche” Nietzsche. This mixture of radical criticism and emulation points at an implicit conviction that Nietzsche, in his attempts to redefine society, stopped too soon, that his project was not brought to an end, that he lost his nerve before completing it. Hers, on the other hand, is more far-reaching, more radical, more complete, from her perspective at least.

We have not been able to locate any quotation or paraphrases of the *Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions* before the last few decades of the

twentieth century, and it was mentioned only in rare encyclopedic articles on Helene Druskowitz. However, it has received more attention recently, especially with the reappearance of some more radical feminist ideas and movements in our time. According to Druskowitz, the material aspect of reality is identified with the male-dominated “real world” and all male iconography of theism. Man is “an intermediate link between human and beast” (Druskowitz 1905: 19), both physically and morally inferior to woman in all respects, responsible for all the hardships of social injustice. The only possibility of transcending the baseness and vulgarity of existence in the real world she sees in the radical and perpetual criticism of men or, more radically, in wiping out men. Druskowitz’s *Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions*, with all her radical man-hating claims, can be read as a sort of a proto-misandrist manifesto. Such claims come close to some later feminists’ radical positions, such as Valerie Solanas’ infamous *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* from 1967, but we could not find any evidence that Solanas might have been familiar with Druskowitz’s text.<sup>16</sup>

However, Druskowitz’s radical feminist positions should be contextualized. Her misandry can be understood as a reaction to the raging misogyny of the late nineteenth century. For example, her statement that man is an intermediate link between human and beast reflects Schopenhauer’s infamous “definition” of woman as “a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man, who is a human being in the real sense” (Schopenhauer 1974: 614-615). One could quote *ad libitum* many misogynistic positions as they were promoted in *fin-de-siècle* Central Europe (e.g. O. Weininger, P. J. Möbius, C. Lombroso).

Another interesting aspect of *Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions* are several claims that resonate later positions of ecofeminism. For instance, we can read the following claims: “Man is the most avaricious of all creatures. He has ransacked Mother Earth in every possible way worse than a wild beast and extracted from her all her treasures” (Druskowitz 1905: 23). Moreover, men’s attitude toward animals is senselessly cruel, he kills or catches animals “partly out of his blind drive for annihilation, partly out his blind lust for possession, and partly making them victims of his gluttonous hunger” (Druskowitz 1905: 22). It is evident that Druskowitz sees men as the worst destroyers of nature and thus considers them to be the lowest of all natural beings. On the other hand, women are “not only worthier and lovelier beings, but are of a more perfect and noble ancestry which is reconfirmed by numerous relationships of women with

<sup>16</sup> More on Druskowitz’s misandry can be found in Boršić (2017).

the sea mythologies” (Druskowitz 1905: 20). Woman appreciates and loves nature; she behaves with respect toward living creatures. Man, on the other hand, is

an evil and foolish devil, who continually disturbs the peace in nature, and turned life, which is laid out for joy, ease, and brevity, into an endless satanical hell. With his sexual lust he turned the human race, which as the noblest of all should have been limited to few valleys, into a swarming and dissolute mob, sick in innermost soul. (Druskowitz 1905: 18)

As we have already mentioned, the peak of human achievement – which she calls *Endesende* – is in her opinion the total separation of men and women until the consequent extinction of humanity, except for the chosen few who will live in distant valleys, in harmony with nature. Such claims, scattered around in Druskowitz’s book, bear resemblance to certain late twentieth-century and present-day positions of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism, in very broad terms, can be described as a form of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. Similar to Druskowitz’s position, it is more normative than descriptive. Patriarchy and capitalism are understood as responsible for the subjugation of women and the degradation of the environment. Consequently, ecofeminism is not meant to be simply a theoretical observation but an appeal for political activism that seeks to improve women’s position in society, and crucially, not in a way that would perpetuate the harming of nature and *vice versa*.

The positions that we have used to exemplify Druskowitz’s misandry and ecofeminism may suggest thinking of her as a “proto-misandrist” or “proto-ecofeminist” according to contemporary meanings of the terms. The problem with such qualifications is that although some of her statements resemble certain key tenets of later and contemporary misandrists’ or ecofeminists’ positions, in Druskowitz’s writing they are scattered and rather undeveloped, representing declarations rather than an attempt at a systematic development of arguments.

As for the second theme in her opus, the free will problem, Druskowitz’s position is less original. Right at the beginning of her book *Wie ist Verantwortung und Zurechnung ohne Annahme der Willensfreiheit möglich?* (*How is Responsibility and Accountability Possible without Acceptance of Free Will?*) from 1887, as the title suggests, she puts her cards on the table: she believes in human responsibility and accountability without accepting the reality of any concept of free will, whether natural or transcendental. The first half of the book is a sort of a brief historical overview of the

concept of free will. According to Druskowitz, the concept of free will originated in Buddhist teachings, and then, by means of subsequent Christian adaptation, made its way to the West. However, the biggest portion of this historical introduction is dedicated to discussing various aspects of Schopenhauer's, Immanuel Kant's, and Paul Rée's understandings of free will.

The main crux around free will is represented in the tension between two common-sensical expressions that both appear equally natural to us: "I do what I want to do" or "I could have done otherwise" as expressions of the illusory reality of free will, and "to feel morally obliged" or "to feel driven" (and so forth) as expressions of causal determinism. There have been many attempts, Druskowitz claims, to solve this riddle, but she gives the most attention to Kant's differentiation between the natural world and transcendental idealism. According to Druskowitz, transcendental freedom cannot be ascertained:

One has to object against Kant's and Schopenhauer's teaching of transcendental freedom: within the empirical world human has to be judged as an empirical subject, and it is utterly unjustified to apply ethical concepts in transcendental sense onto something that completely escapes judging. (Druskowitz 1887: 31)

However, the existence of the good in humanity allows us to conclude that there is a predisposition to it in the primordial foundations of the world (*Urgrunden der Welt*), as it appears to us, but we can never hold the empirical man responsible for his substrate. However, we can say that nature itself calls us to do the good, that this is our perfection or one side of our perfection, but not that the ethical difference can be transferred to the metaphysical background which we cannot characterize in any way. (Druskowitz 1887: 31–32)

According to Druskowitz, the individual is more than a mere "middle link" (*Mittelglied*) in the infinite causal chain of the world's processes. The human individual is an expression of the force of nature, just like the rest of material reality. However, the human must be regarded as something independent that stands out from the rest of existing beings. As soon as the individual understands itself as a self-conscious representative of certain aspects of nature that thinks of itself as independent, it ceases to be a mere automaton; rather, it appears as a being that is independent in a certain sense. The human being is different from other expressions of natural forces: it is the specifically human self-consciousness that makes the human – and only the human, according to Druskowitz (in contradistinction to the animal world) – a responsible and morally accountable author of its actions. If a human being feels through self-consciousness that it is a representative of certain qualities of nature, then it is also responsible

for its actions; the feeling of responsibility stems from the feeling of being the author of one's deeds. This feeling of responsibility extends further beyond individual: by considering itself responsible, the human being not only holds fellow human beings responsible and morally obliged, but is also conscious that they hold him equally responsible and accountable. Thus, for Druskowitz, the concept of free will presupposes a sovereign activity of "the I" (*das Ich*) as if the "I" posits something unconditional in the exercise of the act of will. Responsibility and accountability do not cease to exist with the destruction of the assumption of a sovereign activity of the "I" in the act of will. Moral responsibility is founded in the value of the individual as a self-conscious representative of certain potencies of nature (Druskowitz 1887: 36–37).

Druskowitz does not express any strikingly novel idea about the free will problem. Her position is, as she is aware, a variation of Schopenhauer's ideas who, as she picturesquely claims, put the last nail in the coffin of libertarianism. However, there is *something* novel about her argumentation. This novelty consists in the fact that she includes naturalism in her discussion, hinting at some form of evolutionary theory, at least in a form as she understood it. In her booklet *How is Responsibility and Accountability Possible without Acceptance of Free Will?* Druskowitz does not mention Darwin or Darwinism. However, as we know from the rest of her works, Druskowitz was not only aware of it but approvingly mentioned Darwin's theory of evolution as a key element of understanding society and ethics. The trace of this line of argumentation consists in the fact that she argues about the "force of nature" (*Naturkraft*) or "the necessity of nature" (*Naturnotwendigkeit*) whose by-product is human consciousness, which distinguishes humans from animals, a point on which she is insistent. Humans evolved beyond animals in that, by the law of nature (*Naturgesetz*), they developed self-consciousness. However, she also talks about some inherent "goodness" in humankind, which represents a teleological principle of our progress, but which is also not transcendent: rather, it is a part of nature. Unfortunately, her arguments fall short of explaining what this natural goodness is and how exactly it is related to the law/force/necessity of nature.

This line of reasoning comes as a surprise after her almost diametrically opposite position expressed in her *Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions*, the text in which only women are allowed goodness and which is as pessimistic as it gets. Due to a lack of personal testimonies and the scarcity of sources, we can only conjecture as to this change of mood. Was *How is Responsibility and Accountability Possible without Acceptance of Free*



*Will?* some kind of academic exercise, a conventionally scholarly proof of *métier*, in opposition to the much wilder and authentic *Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions*? Was *Pessimistic Cardinal Propositions* an angry answer to Möbius, Weininger and the like, a sort of programmatic manifesto?

## Conclusion

In this text we have described the life, intellectual development and some central ideas of the Austrian philosopher of Croatian origin, Helene Druskowitz. From the perspective of modern and contemporary tenets of history of philosophy, which is notoriously focused almost exclusively on male philosophers and their mutual influences, it is hard to evaluate Druskowitz's philosophical contribution. Some of the radical positions presented in her last and philosophically most interesting work, *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze*, mixed with the long history of her internments in various mental institutions, leave her open to the attack of being "too radical" or even "too crazy" to be taken seriously. Moreover, as has been mentioned before, we were unsuccessful in finding any successor or philosopher who claimed to have been directly influenced by Druskowitz's philosophy.

However, there are several reasons to take her historical value as a philosopher into serious consideration. First, she was a personal acquaintance and a fierce contemporary critic of Nietzsche's philosophy: Nietzsche's reactions testify that Nietzsche took these critiques to heart (cf. Boršić 2018). Anyone interested in Nietzsche and his circle should be familiar with Druskowitz. Second, during her own time, her philosophical publications were given significant attention by reviewers, including in philosophical journals such as the French *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*,<sup>17</sup> and the British *The Academy*<sup>18</sup> and *Mind*.<sup>19</sup> During her stay in Vienna she must have been a sort of minor celebri-

<sup>17</sup> Lucien Arréat reviewed her *Zur Begründung einer überreligiösen Weltanschauung* in Vol. 27 (1889), pp. 525–526.

<sup>18</sup> Her *Percy Bysshe Shelley* was positively reviewed in a short notice in No. 637 from July 26, 1884, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Mind* published three anonymous reviews: in 1886 (Vol. 11, No. 44, pp. 589–590) of her *Moderne Versuche eines Religionsersatzes*, in 1887 (Vol 12, No. 45., p. 150) of her *Wie ist Verantwortung und Zurechnung ohne Annahme der Willensfreiheit möglich?*, and in 1888 (Vol 13, No. 50, p. 306) of her *Zur neuen Lehre*. Moreover, in 1889 (Vol. 14, No. 53, p. 156) her *Eugen Düring* is simply mentioned as a newly published book by an author already reviewed in *Mind*. It is interesting to note that the sloppy reviewer(s) assumed that Druskowitz was a man and automatically addressed the author as "he."

ty: daily papers such as *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, *Neue Freie Presse*, *Die Presse* and *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on her studies, her receiving a doctoral title in Zurich, her public lectures in Vienna, and so on. Moreover, almost all of Druskowitz's philosophical texts received long, detailed, and positive reviews in *Wiener Zeitung* by the famous "Bruno Walden," the pseudonym used by the Viennese writer, journalist, and intellectual Florentine Galliny. Third, some of her ideas – in their compact and nuclear form as they can be found in her aphoristic writings – have resonated in some successive intellectual and/or philosophical movements. For example, Druskowitz's poignant misandry and misandrist arguments sound quite similar to certain of the arguments of radical feminists some sixty years later, and Druskowitz's criticism of men's destruction of planet Earth resonates in some ecofeminists' ideas of the late twentieth century. As mentioned before, one cannot claim that Druskowitz had a direct impact on any twentieth-century thinker or philosopher, and it is quite unlikely that any – especially American, British or French radical feminist or ecofeminist – would have been familiar with Druskowitz's works. Nevertheless, this does not prevent us from considering Druskowitz an interesting and almost prophetic anticipator of some radical movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and as such worth studying in her own right.

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