

## CHAPTER 1: TRAGEDY CONTRA JUSTICE

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature – neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some people who have long lived a past, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities.

Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*

### 1. The Making of the World

It seems that tragedy is on shaky ground every time man appears not to be. Enlightenment thinking, that epitome of human self-assertion, is essentially optimistic, especially in its modern variation. Reason, objectivity and disinterestedness are on the side of the unfortunate, or can at least be employed to ameliorate their fate. Spinoza wrote that whatever seems to the virtuous individual ‘impious, horrible, unjust or disgraceful, rises from the fact that he conceives these things in a disturbed, mutilated and confused manner, and on this account he endeavours above all to conceive things as they are in themselves’.<sup>14</sup> Where godly justice disappointed, mystified or enraged, human reason would create a better world. This is possible because, to quote Spinoza again, ‘in the universe there exists nothing contingent’, a lack of fortuitousness that makes the world untragic. If nothing could have happened other than it did, there is no point in lamenting it. On the contrary, one should try to *understand* it. After all, who needs tragedy if a little knowledge can make the world just? Philosophy itself has its roots in man’s utopian attempt to conquer Fate with knowledge. Where the gods were, there Justice shall be. In antiquity – at least after Plato – philosophy claimed that it could safeguard man against tragedy. For Plato the goal of the good life is to become rationally self-sufficient, impervious to circumstance, essentially sealed off from events and other

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<sup>14</sup> Spinoza, B. *Ethics*. London: Avebury Press, 2000, p.137.

people. Plato does not imply that this will prevent terrible events from happening to the individual in rational self-control, but rather that these events cannot deprive the self-possessed individual of his self-control, his sense of well-being and being at home in the world. Socrates, in particular, is not simply *not* a tragic figure, he is decidedly *anti*-tragic. The Stoic Socrates of the *Symposium* stands calmly in a snowstorm – oblivious to external circumstances and quite the opposite of Lear who rages against the elements. Plato appears to have set out to create a character to whom tragedy could never happen. Through the subsequent history of ‘Platonism for the people’, this dream continues. For although Fate, like the dead God of *FW* 108,<sup>15</sup> still manages to cast its shadow over human thought for a very long time, it formally comes to an end with the anti-fatalism of Christianity. With the death of fate arises the possibility of what will eventually become the modern liberal subject. The early Church Fathers wrote ‘*contra fatum* and *contra mathematicos* – that is, against the astrologers, the learned predictors of fate’, as protest against the excuse of fate in ethical matters. For fate is really God’s rival in matters of omnipotence and divine love. Tatian writes: ‘We Christians are raised above *heimarnene* and know only one Lord, who never strays’.<sup>16</sup> After the Renaissance, this ‘God’ is replaced with the ‘subject’ – a fiction implicated in power games even to a greater extent than the God of the Middle Ages. In the twentieth century, this dream of a highly rationalized (now also de-sacralized and highly technologized) culture with a firm grasp of, and control over, practical problems was brutally deflated. Michel Foucault wrote that ‘humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination’.<sup>17</sup>

The dream of progress may have been dampened down, but was not extinguished. Despite the fact that the dream of a world fully under human control has ultimately resulted in fascism and the commoditisation of everyday life, belief in a malleable, controllable world persists. Faith in pluralism of every possible kind, in plasticity, dismantlement, destabilization, re-creation and the power of endless self-

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<sup>15</sup> *Neue Kämpfe*. – Nachdem Buddha todt war, zeigte man noch Jahrhunderte lang seinen Schatten in einer Höhle, – einen ungeheuren schauerlichen Schatten. Gott ist todt: aber so wie die Art der Menschen ist, wird es vielleicht noch Jahrtausende lang Höhlen geben, in denen man seinen Schatten zeigt (*FW* 108).

<sup>16</sup> Tatian in *Early Christian Writing*. Roberts, F. (ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.178.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, M. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977, p.156.

invention continues to flourish in a post-capitalist world led by the United States where a strenuously self-affirming moulding of ‘Nature’ has always gripped the imagination more than values like self-doubt or determinism.

These values are not limited, of course, to the New World alone. According to Odo Marquard, the concept of fate is antiquated, obsolete. Modern man has met Kant’s challenge to become emancipated from traditional authority, but this was possible because man has – even before Kant – been emancipated from an interconnected cosmological order characterized by a logic of ambiguity, contagious pollution and insoluble paradox,<sup>18</sup> a universe governed by maleficent gods and impish sprites, where human transgression can cause upheavals of the entire order. Modern life is seen as shaped and produced by human self-determination, and a concept like fate does not appear to carry much weight against this perception. In the words of the ultimate believer in the human capacity to *make* a world less hostile to its inhabitants, Karl Marx, ‘men make their own history’. Similarly, the early Fichtean, Novalis, sees the historical world as a ‘handiwork’. During the nineteenth century, fate migrated to the artistic preserve: *Die Macht des Schicksals* survived only in what Nietzsche has contemptuously called ‘the culture of opera’, and there only in reference to romantic love, the world of Strauss and *Der Zigeunerbaron*.

The desire to have the totality of the world submit to the power of modern technology is not a dominant theme in Nietzsche, but he was certainly aware of its implications. Speaking of machines, for instance, he writes:

Prämissen des Maschinen-Zeitalters. – Die Presse, die Maschine, die Eisenbahn, der Telegraph sind Prämissen, deren tausendjährige Conclusion noch Niemand zu ziehen gewagt hat (*MAM* 278, *KSA* 2.228).

In this passage, Nietzsche expresses an awareness of the fact that the modern age, especially during the nineteenth century with its industrial revolution, has created the condition for a global domination of the earth. This condition is characterized by the explosion of possibilities of controlling nature and humans. The full meaning of this event can be surmised only when taken in conjunction with the death of God and the nihilism this engenders. The convergence of nihilism and technology makes the contemporary age a period incomparable with any other in the history of the Western

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<sup>18</sup> Concepts like these have made their return to the philosophical stage in the form of Derrida’s *aporia*.

world. The covert nihilism of Western existence since the Renaissance made possible with its destructive force, the re-organization of historical life according to the imperatives of the mobilization of potential energy. The Will to Power is never at rest. However, this mobilization is not simply the result of the nihilistic movement of European history, but also of the project of *the subject* announced at the onset of the modern age. Both events, the murder of God and the mobilization of potential energy in the form of technology, are manifestations of the original project of modernity, namely the freedom of the absolute subject.

Hans Blumenberg is one of the few thinkers who still defend, albeit carefully, emancipated man and the form of subjectivity that accompanies it. He views modern ‘self-assertion’ – an active, reconstructive engagement with the world – as a legitimate response to the challenges posed by the theological absolutism of late nominalism. Nominalism prioritizes God’s omnipotence over his wisdom and goodness, so appeal can no longer be made to divine reasons for the creation of this world order, such as, ‘it is as it is because God willed it so’, just as no reason can be given for the mysterious workings of God’s grace. Reality at the end of the Middle Ages came to be regarded more and more as an inexplicable fact (in the sense of *factum*, something done or made) confronting mankind, a contingent state of affairs no longer necessarily adapted to human needs. At the same time the intensification of divine omnipotence in the arena of human salvation, reflected in the doctrine of predestination, deprived human beings of the meaningfulness of an otherworldly orientation.

This experience of being left to the brute facticity of the world became an irritation and provocation for self-interested activity aimed at extorting from this faceless and indifferent reality a new humanity. Nominalistic explanations of the world provided a new structural framework for the understanding of reality, which gradually became re-occupied by early modern materialistic and mechanistic explanations of reality: ‘The radical materialization of nature is confirmed as the systematic correlate of theological absolutism. Deprived by God’s hiddenness of metaphysical guarantees for the world, man constructs for himself a counterworld of elementary rationality and manipulability’.<sup>19</sup> Since the actual quality of the world escapes man’s grasp, pure, quality-less matter is postulated as the minimal substrate

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<sup>19</sup> Blumenberg, H. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Translated by Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge (Mass.) MIT Press, 1983, p. 75.

of nature, Since the postulated material substratum is meaningless in itself, it is potentially available to man's rational disposition. It presents itself as a malleable substratum susceptible to human rationality and technical mastery. We may not know how nature actually operates, but we can construct mathematically sound models that can accurately predict its behaviour. The production of desired phenomena then becomes a matter, sometimes complicated, sometimes simple, of the reconstruction of, or the artificial intervention in observed processes.

This shift in man's relation with the world is characterized by the surrender of the traditional claim to truth as *adequatio* and by the new use of theory to recreate the world. The measure of human knowledge is now located within the human mind as a 'principle of economy'. Blumenberg locates the truly modern aspect of Descartes' thought in his reduction of the process of doubt to the final regaining of an absolute fundament in the immanence of the *cogito*. The *deus absconditus* is brought *down* and driven inwards. It becomes the *cogito*, which is to say the embodiment of the requirements that must be met by reason in the face of theological absolutism if it is to find a new ground in itself.

Divine spirit and human spirit, creative and cognitive principles operate as though without taking each other into account. The gratuitousness of Creation implies that it can no longer be expected to exhibit any adaptation to the needs of reason. Rather than helping man to reconstruct an order *given* in nature, the principle of *economy* (Ockham's razor) helps him to reduce Nature forcibly to an order *imputed* by man.<sup>20</sup>

When God as measure becomes absolutely transcendent and hence unavailable, the words of Protagoras ring true again: man is recognized as the measure of all things. However, this is precisely where the possibility of nihilism enters, for man is by no means the stable, grounding source for knowledge and moral laws that modernity supposed, and so the yardstick itself eludes the grasp of the would-be measurer. In addition, as we shall see, the world is constantly in the process of being measured, and not by man alone. As Nietzsche asks in *JGB* 3: 'Gesetzt nämlich, dass nicht gerade der Mensch das "Maass der Dinge" ist –' (KSA 5.18).

Nietzsche was even more untimely than he supposed, for in raising this question he staged a confrontation between what can best be described in terms

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<sup>20</sup> Blumenberg, H, *ibid*, p.154.

borrowed from Claude Levi-Strauss<sup>21</sup>, namely a separatist cosmology and an interconnected cosmology. A separatist cosmology, such as that which followed the rise of Cartesianism in Europe during the seventeenth century, is characterized by the separation of entities and categories and their subsequent unification. In an interconnected cosmology, such as that of the ancient Hellenic world, entities and categories are also distinguished but the distinctions are not so absolute; they hide various implicit connections. This dual categorization is of course not a precise distinction; all cultures apply principles of differentiation, categorization, and ordering. Without such differentiation, man would be lost in a chaos of shifting impressions. As S.K. Lange renders it, ‘man can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with, but he cannot deal with Chaos. Because his characteristic function and highest asset is conception, his greatest fright is to meet what he cannot construe – the uncanny, as it is popularly called’.<sup>22</sup>

Now Modern European cosmology sought to deal with this problem in a specific way, by separating entities from all obscurities until they are totally transparent, and by attempting to separate them from all implicit metaphorical comparisons with other things until they are completely distinct from one another. The separation of the unclear from the clear and of the indistinct from the distinct takes the shape of an abstractive reduction, disregarding the diversity of the individual. Confusing aspects of entities are eliminated until a clear and distinct hard core has been distilled. Such a description does not speak of a ‘threatening thunderstorm’ but of ‘electric discharges’, a concept stripped of all connotations of fear of cosmic violence and reduced to its molecular or physical skeleton. When abstractive reduction succeeds, entities tend to be identified with their ‘hard core’. Unification again becomes possible, but in a radically new way. Newton was able to fuse falling apples and falling stars in one law of nature.

This Cartesian<sup>23</sup> view of nature endeavours to separate what is perceptible and changeable from what is constant and can therefore be known rationally. Descartes stands in the tradition of Kepler, who reduced all aspects of the universe that might make it comparable to something holy and organic to parts of an immense clockwork.

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<sup>21</sup> Levi-Strauss, C. *Structural Anthropology*. London: Hammondsouth 1968, p.iv.

<sup>22</sup> Lange, S. K. *Philosophy in a New Key: Studies in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967. p.76.

<sup>23</sup> The word ‘Cartesian’ here only means that Descartes is the most obvious exponent of this tradition. It did not originate with him and its roots can be traced back to the twelfth century.

This stripped the universe of its vital and religious connotations. Whoever believes the clockwork to be animated confuses it with its maker. The cosmos was now unified under a single mechanistic banner. In a similar fashion, Descartes stripped nature of its resemblances to the organic and the divine. Essentially, nature is but '*nombre, poids et mesure*' and acts mathematically. Unlike the Aristotelian *physis* and the scholastic *natura*, Descartes denies nature's divine power:

First of all, you must realize, by Nature I do not mean a Goddess or another kind of imaginary power, but that I use it to designate Matter itself.<sup>24</sup>

Descartes does not, of course, deny divine impact upon nature. He is convinced that the whole of nature, even all mathematical truths, are permanently dependent upon God's *creatio continua*. Nevertheless, although God upholds the whole of nature, he does not *manifest* himself in it. He is the cause of nature, but does not influence individual chains of causation; otherwise, clear and distinct knowledge of nature would be impossible. God is transcendent and has no properties that can be found in nature. Cartesian cosmology postulates a mechanical and internally secularized nature, implying that man possesses a great deal of freedom from nature, and freedom of action over and towards nature. If the universe is ordered in eternal laws, there are no limits to man's ability to obtain rational knowledge of nature. Man can become its master and possessor.

By contrast, interconnected cosmologies such as that of the Hellenic world of antiquity do not know such a rationalist separation of nature from the divine. For them, nature is permeated with religious significance, as is the world in general. Aristotle, in *De partibus animalium*, tells the following story:

A story is told of Heraclitus, that visitors came, wanting to meet him, but hesitating when they saw him warming himself at the stove in the kitchen. He told them to be bold and enter, '*for there are gods even here*' (645A: 20-24).

This view does not preclude man's intervention in the processes of nature, but insists that technical knowledge touches on only one aspect of nature's divine power, the whole of which is conceived of as too powerful to be mastered.

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<sup>24</sup> Grayling, A.C. *The Descartes Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.188.

In Descartes' cosmology, the separation of the natural from the organic and the divine is repeated on a microcosmic scale in man himself. In Cartesian philosophy, man is divided into two substances, extension and thought, the natural and the rational. Man's true essence is reached by abstractive reduction, and only the thinking subject is essential. Man's essence is separated from every material substance, every situation, though not, for the time being at least, from God – at least, not entirely. In essence, in Descartes, relation to God is reserved for man as a rational being. God is no longer reached through vision or imagination; he is a necessity of thought. When man reaches his finiteness, and opposes it to the idea of the infinite, which can be no mere negation of the finite, he realizes there can be only an infinite cause of this idea: God. Here, as elsewhere, Descartes emphasizes the transcendence of God, not only with respect to the world, but also with respect to man. God's properties are now – in true *Christian* fashion, as Nietzsche would hold – the exact opposite of those of man: God is infinite, eternal, immovable, omniscient, almighty. In addition, he is purified from all possible obnoxiousness and fallaciousness once the hypothesis of the *genius malignus* is discarded. This means that man is not able to attribute qualities to God in the same sense he is able to ascribe them to man. The fissure between God and man is so deep that real understanding of God is precluded.

There is one property however, that, according to Descartes, man undoubtedly shares with God. Like his creator, man is endowed with an infinite will. This is why it is possible for Descartes to agree that man is indeed created in God's image. Here, however, the danger of confusion between the human sphere and that of the divine crops up again. Despite his limitations, man has an infinite will that spurs him on to the *hubris* of trying to be God-like. However, once more, rational separation is able to avoid confusion. The finite can be divided from the infinite. Man accomplishes this by making a rational separation within his will, and reducing it to striving for what is clear and distinct. If man controls his own will in this manner, he will inevitably stay within his limits and avoid hubris, because God is the author of clear and distinct truth, which precludes the dangers of error. In Descartes' cosmology, the divine is thus rationally separated, both from the natural and human spheres. Where confusion threatens, further separation is the answer. That God is known rationally and not through public worship is another exemplification of his transcendence.

This methodical device of separating clear ideas from 'unclear' ones presupposes a thorough individualism. To be rational, man has to be independent,



conscious of his own existence. When dependent upon others, man tends to follow ingrained habits, which leads to error. To make rational separation possible, yet another separation is necessary, that of the individual from others. The rational man withdraws into himself, until he cannot even be sure that others exist. Rational knowledge implies isolation: no one can do my understanding 'for me'.<sup>25</sup> Like the rationally reduced entities of nature that can subsequently be unified, the rationally isolated subject forms an ideal unity as well. After his salutary isolation, every rational subject, that is, every human being, is capable of coming to the same conclusion. Because all human beings share man's essence, rationality, abstractive reduction of the ego results in perfect inter-subjectivity: '*la puissance de bien juger et de distinguer le vrai d'avec le faux est naturellement égale en tous les hommes*'.<sup>26</sup>

This idea has found extensive application in the development of the modern European cosmology. Stripped of accidental variation, every person is regarded as a unique, free subject, qualified to make his own free decisions. At the same time, all subjects are taken as a community of equals, in which there are no ingrained structural differentiations. Here we encounter the two pillars of modern conceptions of justice: liberty and equality. The individual is an independent monad, conscious of existence, while the community is a community of monads, whose pre-established harmony is pre-supposed. There is therefore a deep analogy between Descartes' methodological isolation of clear and distinct ideas, his isolation of the rational individual and the premises of democracy. As Jean-Paul Sartre puts it, writing about Descartes:

One human being cannot be more human than another, because freedom is equally infinite in everybody. In this sense, nobody has shown better than Descartes the link between the spirit of science and the spirit of democracy, for no one can base universal suffrage on anything else than the universally disseminated faculty to say no or to say yes.<sup>27</sup>

The longevity of the Cartesian subject is a remarkable phenomenon, especially given the fact that even before Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, the hermeneuticians of suspicion, formally issued a challenge to the rationally self-sufficient self, the rise of Hegelianism had focused attention on the reality of negativity and disorder in the

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<sup>25</sup> Sartre, J-P. *La Liberté Cartésienne*. In: *Situations I*, Paris 1947. Translation from Strange, C.W. *Sartre and Existentialism*. London: Hammonds Worth, 1983.

<sup>26</sup> Descartes, R. 'The World' in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* Vol XI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, p.11.

<sup>27</sup> Sartre, J-P. *La Liberté Cartésienne*. In: *Situations I*, Paris 1947, p.59.

realms of thought. It is no accident that Hegel's notion of the acknowledgement of negativity re-introduced classical tragedy, the *Antigone* in particular. However, this re-introduction is still set within a rigidly teleological form, and hope for reconciliation with a hostile universe persists.

Ideals like these are no longer feasible. What modern thought has taught us through the masters of distrust is to face the non-identity of man's thinking about himself and his alienated situation. According to Paul Ricoeur, man is constantly confronted with humanity's position of alienation from the rest of the cosmos:

The initial position from which reflection sets out is 'oblivion': I am lost, 'gone astray' among things and separated from the center of my existence, just as I am separated from the others and am the enemy of all.<sup>28</sup>

Considering the paradoxical unity of freedom and necessity in man's life, we are forced to speak of a lesion, or a rift in being. And the suffering that results from this is not merely a feeling; it is a way of discovering man's diversity and negativity, especially where life and death are concerned. Ricoeur says:

I am diverse, I am legion, and here my future as dust announces itself. Undoubtedly, only a composed being is capable of lesions. This negativity is revealed to me in suffering.<sup>29</sup>

The existence of evil despite man's fundamental *innocence* and supposedly rational nature implies that the unity of man with himself and his world cannot be comprehended within the limits of Cartesianism.

This has important implications for how we view justice, since the modern conception of justice is predicated upon a liberal subject held to be ontologically prior both to the practices and forms of life characteristic to the community to which it belongs, as well as to its own autonomously chosen ends. Liberalism's traditional conception of subjectivity is based upon the Cartesian-Kantian conception of the subject, and is as such thoroughly metaphysical and essentialist. Liberal theories of justice with their traditional prioritizing of the right over the good – or more crudely put, of equality over quality – are logically committed to particular conceptions of selfhood that can no longer be taken for granted. This means that liberal morality

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<sup>28</sup> Ricoeur, P. *Of Interpretation: Essays on Freud*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971, p.46.

<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur, P. *Freedom and Nature*. Seattle: Northwestern University Press, 1966, p.450.

must either be wholly rejected, or at the very least radically overhauled. This is partly why Nietzsche returns to tragedy, and with it, in his typically ‘untimely fashion,’ to the interconnected cosmology of ancient Greece and its *cosmic* notions of justice.

## 2. The First Genealogy

Genealogy can be broadly understood as an attempt to articulate a historical vision of human reality in which humanity is asked to understand itself as a product of its self-made history and to appreciate that its interpretation of history reflects and decisively influences the way in which it understands itself. In light of this understanding of genealogy, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and Nietzsche’s early essays on the Greek *polis* and the pre-Socratic philosophers already contain traces of a genealogical approach. Nietzsche’s genealogy, after all, does not aim at precise historical explanation, but rather at a proper understanding of human excellence or the significance of particular moralities. His method appropriates the story of the past by recounting a series of linear familiar events. The practice of genealogy always risks the temptation to substitute the sequence of events for their significance, or to abstract the significance of events from their sequence. The true genealogical approach, however, is committed to maintaining the relationship of tension between the sequential and the significant by insisting that the ‘story’, though embedded in and inextricable from the events, is nevertheless not reducible to them.

Bonnie Honig describes Nietzsche’s overall philosophical project as one of *recovery*, in three particular senses of the word: recovery from an illness, rediscovery of past understanding, and re-covering with new layers of meaning. Firstly, Nietzsche hopes to help European man to recover from a self-induced illness, the debilitating disease of nihilism, by identifying the values responsible for this sickness. Against nihilism, Nietzsche posits the ideal of a newly rediscovered health continually *fought for*:

*Die grosse Gesundheit.* Wir Neuen, Namenlosen, Schlechtverständlichen, wir Frühgeburten einer noch unbewiesenen Zukunft – wir bedürfen zu einem neuen Zwecke auch eines neuen Mittels, nämlich einer neuen Gesundheit, einer stärkeren gewitzteren zäheren verwegneren lustigeren, als alle Gesundheitigen bisher waren. Wessen Seele darnach dürstet, den ganzen Umfang der bisherigen Werthe und Wünschbarkeiten erlebt und alle Küsten dieses idealischen ‘Mittelmeers’ umschiffen zu haben, wer aus den Abenteuern

der eigensten Erfahrung wissen will, wie es einem Eroberer und Entdecker des Ideals zu Muthe ist, insgleichen einem Künstler, einem Heiligen, einem Gesetzgeber, einem Weisen, einem Gelehrten, einem Frommen, einem Wahrsager, einem Göttlich-Abseitigen alten Stils: der hat dazu zuallererst Eins nöthig, die grosse Gesundheit – eine solche, welche man nicht nur hat, sondern auch beständig noch erwirbt und erwerben muss, weil man sie immer wieder preisgiebt, preisgeben muss! (*FW* 382, *KSA* 3.635).

The second sense in which Nietzsche's is a project of recovery is that, through his genealogical project, he 'recovers' the origins of values that are taken to be universal, transcendent and true, showing that they are in fact conditional and partial. These values, he says, developed out of struggles with alternative forms of life and ethical ideals that have since been lost, silenced, ignored or concealed. The most obvious example here is the major theme of *Die Genealogie der Moral*, in which Nietzsche attempts to recover the pre-Socratic ethic of the nobles, contrasts it with the current slave morality based on the dichotomy of good and evil, and traces the history of the war of values in which the slaves have triumphed. This project should be seen against the background of the total project of recovery, namely the recovery of an ethic that, strictly speaking, belongs to an interconnectedness, a cosmological framework without rigidly demarcated spheres of life. Nietzsche does not simply resurrect an old ethic. Genealogy does not recover old, forgotten pasts *en toto*, but aims to disrupt existing sets of conceptual, linguistic, moral and juridical settlements. Thus Nietzsche does not attempt to heal original disruptions or smooth over old wounds. Instead, as genealogist he seeks to wound even more. His wounding in this particular sense consists of showing the inferiority of the Socratic-Euripidean worldview that would eventually become Platonic-Christian optimism.

In his reinterpretation of Schopenhauer's distinction between 'will' and 'representation' in the form of the eternal dichotomy of Apollo and Dionysus, Nietzsche brings the separative *philosophical order* discussed above into contact with its own origin and predecessor, the interconnected cosmos of antiquity. The oldest desire or *philia* of philosophy is for the *archē*, the *principium* or overarching principle, 'an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities [...] this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession'.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> Foucault, M. 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in Bouchard, D.F. (ed.) *Language, Countermemory, Practice*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1977.

*archē* provides unity that governs multiplicity, necessity that cancels out chance, order that tames chaos. Justice understood in the traditional philosophical sense is for all practical purposes synonymous with the *archē*, because where the *archē* is, there justice shall be. Once the ‘origin’ of reality is found, so the theory goes, it will be possible to bring the human world into accord with it. The Platonic concept hopes for a justice that can be deciphered and captured in law. This philosophical justice loves law, order and *regulae*.

In practice, of course, as John Caputo points out, ‘justice is less of an *archē* than an *an-archē*’.<sup>31</sup> Justice is beyond all forms of *archē* construction. If justice could be captured, there would be no need for an *archē*. Justice is what rules and laws seek to possess but cannot have, due to their structural limitations. According to Derrida, the reign of justice is not to be confused with the rule of law. Law can be accounted for in terms of a rule applied in a particular case, which Kant would call a determinate judgment. Justice, on the other hand, involves singularity and ‘moments in which the decision between just and unjust cannot be insured by a rule’.<sup>32</sup> Since it concerns ‘the other as other’, justice in Derrida’s definition cannot be reduced to principles of duty, rights or objective law. This comes very close to what Levinas calls ‘ethics’. As Levinas puts it, ‘to address oneself to the other in the language of the other seems to be the condition of all possible justice’.<sup>33</sup> Later in *Force of Law*, Derrida explicitly invokes Levinas, and approvingly cites his equating of justice and ethics as ‘the relation to others’.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Derrida identifies the propinquity of such an ethics of justice to the Hebrew definition of sanctity, which is a condition of acknowledging the ‘infinite demand of the other’, a demand that is for all practical reasons an infinite right and whose asymmetry transcends the humanist concept of man.

The difficulty about this position is that this notion too requires institutions and constitutions to function, and so justice once more becomes law. The infinite demand of the other at some stage or another inevitably transposes into a legal system of anonymous exchange and equal distribution. Incalculable justice eventually demands calculation. All the same, even in cases where the singular case of the

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<sup>31</sup> Caputo, J. ‘Hyperbolic Justice: Deconstruction and Politics’. In: *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol 21, Humanities Press, 1991, p.2.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, J. *Force of Law: The Mythical Foundation of Authority*. In: *Cardozo Law Review* 11, no. 5, 1990, pp.919-1047.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p.949.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.959.

‘other’ is made subordinate to the universalized code, there remains a crucial trace of justice. Derrida associates this justice with the ‘undecidable’:

The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or tension between two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged to give itself up to the impossible decision while taking account of laws and rules. A decision that did not go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmatic application or unfolding of a calculable process. It might be legal, it would not be just.<sup>35</sup>

Nietzsche’s notion of justice similarly eludes concise definition. But there is an important difference between Nietzsche and his deconstructivist successors: for Nietzsche, though not for Derrida and Levinas, *justice is no moral imperative*. A far more accurate description of Nietzsche’s conception of justice would be an extra-moral (*außermoralische*) principle, including but also exceeding personal virtue. As was the case in antiquity, justice in Nietzsche’s understanding is also an impersonal cosmic principle that operates beyond the reach of human desire and ability. In the closest he comes to a definition, Nietzsche says ‘Gerechtigkeit, als Funktion einer weit umherschauenden Macht, welche über die kleinen Perspektiven von gut und böse hinaus sieht, also einen weiteren Horizont des Vortheils hat – die Absicht, etwas zu erhalten, was mehr ist als diese und jene Person’ (Aphorism 9413, *NL* 84-85 KSA 11.118).<sup>36</sup>

Contrary to the Kantian position that sees justice as an objective standard that must be found and maintained, Nietzschean justice has as much to do with the establishment of standards as with their maintenance. Establishing standards of justice always involves a harsh act of demarcation, an arbitrary drawing of boundaries between the lawful and the unlawful, something that the slavish upholders of justice hitherto appear to have forgotten, Nietzsche says. This is why Zarathustra challenges his interlocutors at the market-place with the violence of the law-table: ‘Die Stunde, wo ihr sagt: “Was liegt an meiner Gerechtigkeit! Ich sehe nicht, dass ich Gluth und Kohle wäre. Aber der Gerechte ist Gluth und Kohle!’ (*Z, Vorrede*, KSA 4.16). Rather than offering a concise definition of justice, Nietzsche treats the concept the way an artist of the impressionist school might treat his subject matter: he leaves it

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<sup>35</sup> Derrida, *ibid*, p.963.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Ansell-Pearson, K. *an Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. p.41.

*unfinished*.<sup>37</sup> Rather than a complete law, he offers a number of brief examples and subtle hints that enable the careful reader to see a picture emerging gradually but surprisingly clearly, if the trouble is taken to decipher it carefully.

Among Nietzsche's tactics is the resurrection of an ancient idea of justice, commonly but not exclusively rendered as *dikē*. But nothing resurrected remains unchanged: *Noli me tangere*<sup>38</sup>, said the resurrected Christ, I have returned, but I am different now. By inserting elements that in the passing of time had become strange, foreign, other to the rigid separative cosmos of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche introduces his own *miasma*, confronting comfortable *bourgeois* ideals of justice with their necessarily unjust origins. According to Foucault, Nietzsche frequently employs the concept of 'origin' (*Ursprung*) in a stressed opposition to those of 'descent' (*Herkunft*) and 'emergence' (*Entstehung*). He sets up this opposition not as part of a philosophical quest, but in search of a new form of history. 'Descent' invokes the intermingling of biological and social characteristics and the body as the 'inscribed surface of events', while 'emergence' suggests the 'non-place' of an agonal contest between forces which deprives the phenomenon of a single source. Nietzsche's genealogy, with its concern with descent and emergence, shatters the identity of the subject and the ideal of 'apocalyptic objectivity'. His version of historical sense is

explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice.... It is not given to a discreet effacement before the objects it observes and does not submit itself to their processes, nor does it seek laws, since it gives equal weight to its own sight and to its objects.<sup>39</sup>

All values have murky rather than clear-cut origins, and Nietzsche's new values are no different. If tragic justice is to live again, it will be under new terms. An entirely new worldview is necessary.<sup>40</sup>

Ein andres Ideal läuft vor uns her, ein wunderliches, versucherisches, gefahrenreiches Ideal, zu dem wir Niemanden überreden möchten, weil wir Niemandem so leicht das *Recht darauf* zugestehn: das Ideal eines Geistes der

<sup>37</sup> 'Impressionism' was originally used to denote a painting that was considered 'unfinished' by the standards of the French academy.

<sup>38</sup> Touch me not, Vulgate, Ev. St. John. 20:17.

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *ibid*, p.157.

<sup>40</sup> This is a very problematic notion, and I address it again in chapter 5, which deals with justice and the historical. In that chapter I examine to what extent Nietzsche himself was unable to break free from nostalgia.

naiv, das heisst ungewollt und aus überströmender Fülle und Mächtigkeit mit Allem spielt, was bisher heilig, gut, unberührbar, göttlich hiess; für den das Höchste, woran das Volk billigerweise sein Werthmaass hat, bereits so viel wie Gefahr, Verfall, Erniedrigung oder, mindestens, wie Erholung, Blindheit, zeitweiliges Selbstvergessen bedeuten würde; das Ideal eines menschlich-übermenschlichen Wohlseins und Wohlwollens, das oft genug *unmenschlich* erscheinen wird, zum Beispiel, wenn es sich neben den ganzen bisherigen Erden-Ernst, neben alle Art Feierlichkeit in Gebärde, Wort, Klang, Blick, Moral und Aufgabe wie deren leibhafteste unfreiwillige Parodie hinstellt – und mit dem, trotzallem, vielleicht *der grosse Ernst* erst anhebt, das eigentliche Fragezeichen erst gesetzt wird, das Schicksal der Seele sich wendet, der Zeiger rückt, die Tragödie beginnt... (FW 382, KSA 3.635).

This introduces the third sense in which the concept of recovery animates Nietzsche's work: recovery as meaning 'to cover again'. In the context of the Nietzschean project, this means introducing a new layer of meaning, a new veil of significance to cover the naked abyss that appears before the feet of the last man. The recognition that all value systems are palimpsests of interpretation enables the latecomers in history to recognize the self-defeating character of most modern moral frameworks, reject them, and then replace them with more viable and potent alternatives. 'Wer über alte Ursprünge weise wurde, siehe, der wird zuletzt nach Quellen der Zukunft suchen und nach neuen Ursprüngen' (Z, III, 'Von alten und neuen Tafeln' 25, KSA 4.265).

In the context of Nietzsche's total project of recovery, in its varied senses, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* – admittedly one of Nietzsche's less refined books – is much more than merely an analysis of an ancient art form or even, as Peter Berkowitz<sup>41</sup> maintains, a simple treatise about wisdom. It is also a primitive genealogical study of the *fall of justice*, from Aeschelyean or tragic justice to poetic justice or justice understood as universal fairness on a personal basis.

### 3. A Detour through the Ancient World

The tale of the fall of justice is no simple one. It appears in fragmented form throughout the Nietzschean *oeuvre*. The first explicit discussion of the origin of justice occurs in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* I, section 92, in which Nietzsche

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<sup>41</sup> Berkowitz, P. *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, p.45.



describes the egoistic and economic origins of justice in terms of economic exchange and equivalency:

*Ursprung der Gerechtigkeit.* – Die Gerechtigkeit (Billigkeit) nimmt ihren Ursprung unter ungefähr gleich Mächtigen [...] wo es keine deutlich erkennbare Uebergewalt giebt und ein Kampf zum erfolglosen, gegenseitigen Schädigen würde, da entsteht der Gedanke sich zu verständigen und über die beiderseitigen Ansprüche zu verhandeln: der Charakter des Tausches ist der anfängliche Charakter der Gerechtigkeit. Jeder stellt den Andern zufrieden, indem Jeder bekommt, was er mehr schätzt als der Andere. Man giebt Jedem, was er haben will als das nunmehr Seinige, und empfängt dagegen das Gewünschte. Gerechtigkeit ist also Vergeltung und Austausch unter der Voraussetzung einer ungefähr gleichen Machtstellung: so gehört ursprünglich die Rache in den Bereich der Gerechtigkeit, sie ist ein Austausch (*MA I 92, KSA 2.89*).

Since Nietzsche's postmortem migration to France, the dominant reading of his work on the question of justice sees him as offering an alternative to the economics of exchange in the form of an ethic of gift giving and generosity. George Bataille's reading epitomizes this tendency:

Nietzsche is on the side of *those who give*, and his thought cannot be isolated from the movement that tried to promote a resumption of life in the moment, in opposition to the *bourgeoisie*, who accumulates... Nietzsche's gift is the gift that nothing limits; it is the sovereign gift, that of subjectivity.<sup>42</sup>

However, Nietzsche is on no one's side, except perhaps, as we shall see, on the side of those who measure. To think about justice in Nietzschean terms requires more than a choice between a libidinal economy and an economics of reciprocal exchange. It would be more correct to state that *what has come to be known as justice*, i.e. justice defined by the slave's morality, has its origins in an economics of exchange. Nietzsche maintains, however, that the logic of exchange is not originary; it is already a compensatory strategy, and already a mask. If Truth loves a mask, Justice is no different. The origins of justice lie deeper than the quasi-Hobbesian explanation of justice in terms of the law of equal return.

In *Homer's Wettkampf* of 1872, Nietzsche offers a less frequently cited version of the origins of justice. This version, with its Aristotelian-sounding rhetoric, falls harder on the postmodern ear than the friendlier words on gift giving, and is hence

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<sup>42</sup> Bataille, G. *The Accursed Share*, Vol III, London: Verso, 1992.

frequently ignored or overlooked. The origins of justice are far more ancient and more violent than any logic of exchange. At first sight, justice in its embryonic form seems to embody its exact opposite:

Und wie sich in Wahrheit vom Morde und der Mordsühne aus der Begriff des griechischen Rechtes entwickelt hat, so nimmt auch die edlere Kultur ihren ersten Siegeskranz vom Altar der Mordsühne. Hinter jenem blutigen Zeitalter her zieht sich eine Wellenfurche tief hinein in die hellenische Geschichte (*Homer's Wettkampf*, KSA 1.785).

The oldest legal principle does not grow from an economic relationship between equals, but from the ultimate relationship of *inequality*, namely between man and cosmos, or man and God. This relationship is based upon a logic of *atonement*, and although this is like the economic relationship in that it implies a *duty* of making reparation for a transgression, the terms of this duty differ radically from the creditor-debtor relationship underlying the concept of justice in separatist cosmological frameworks. Full compensation for injuries against God or the gods is impossible and gifts from a deity or deities cannot be repaid in kind, even if, as was the case in ancient Greece and Scandinavia, humans maintained a certain degree of power over their gods (*Morgenröte* 130, KSA 3.121). The word 'atonement' is an abbreviated form of the expression 'to set as one', i.e. to reconcile, to expiate or to bridge a gap. Importantly for our purpose, atonement happens on *a larger scale than an economy of reciprocal exchange*. Atonement concerns the fate of entire nations, peoples or tribes, even if the transgression is committed by only one individual, and it nearly always affects at least the immediate circle around the transgressor. Boundary transgressions, for example Oedipus' act of incest, result in pollution, something for which no material restitution is possible. Pollution is not merely contact with something physically dirty or unhygienic; it embodies defilement by what has to be rejected in order to maintain the differentiated categories without which no society can function. The example of murder from *Homer's Wettkampf* refers to 'blood pollution', defilement. The 'Greek justice' in question refers to rituals of cleansing and atonement that maintain the cosmological order itself. In other words: the order itself comes into being through ritual and its processes of differentiation. These rituals, which are sometimes themselves violent (as in the case of executions, banishments and sacrifices), cannot be regarded as *punishments*, but rather as strategies of

differentiation; the concept of ‘murderer’ has to be defined, the murderer separated from the rest of the law-abiding community.

Because boundaries in such a society are not clearly distinguished, as in a separatist cosmology, but rather dispersed and complex, marginal figures and transgressions cause a great deal of anxiety. The fear of overstepping cosmological boundaries is clear from the frequent use of phrases like ‘stepping over a line’ and ‘trampling underfoot’. Homer calls the breaking of a solemn oath a transgression *parabainein* (*Iliad* III, 107). The same is said of social offences and even of lack of insight, which Achilles displays in the *Iliad* (IX, 501). This abhorrence of disturbances of the order is condensed into the ubiquitous fear of *hubris*. As an interconnected phenomenon, *hubris* is not limited to human beings. It concerns natural phenomena too; it may denote an overflowing river (*uperballousan*, from Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Vincetus* 717), or an intrusion into the domain of the gods.<sup>43</sup> For the Greeks, pollution is closely related to the concept of measurelessness, or the mixing of what should remain separate. The verb *phurein*, for example, means both ‘to mix’ and ‘to pollute’. In this spirit Herodotus calls Xerxes the temple burner one ‘who made the sacred (*ira*) and the profane (*idia*) alike (*en homoiein*), thereby destroying an entire world’.

That pollution was to the Greeks a cosmological and not a physiological concept can be seen from the fact that it concerned every aspect of life. Diseases wreak havoc on the nature/culture distinction because ‘diseases as intrusions from nature into culture soil the body’.<sup>44</sup> As we have seen, human intrusion in the domain of the gods destroys the individual concerned (see note 30). Regarding the life/death distinction, Hesiod warns against the polluting confusion of death and procreation.<sup>45</sup> The common factor in all these examples is that the pollution or transgression is not defined by the act itself, such as killing another human being, but depends on the context and spirit of the crime. This is truly a morality beyond good and evil; bad deeds are bad because they are considered to be cowardly, mean-spirited deeds, whereas similar acts in other circumstances can be praised. Therefore, killing on the battlefield can lead to great praise, but slaying a kinsman to pollution and dishonour.

<sup>43</sup> See for example the Chorus (lines 120-122) from *Oedipus at Colonus*: ‘None of us here / Would venture into the sacred grove. / The implacable goddesses – Hush! Do not take their name in vain’. Sophocles. *The Theban Plays*. Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p.75.

<sup>44</sup> Parker, R. *Pollution and Purification in Ancient Greek Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983 p.32..

<sup>45</sup> Hesiod. *Opera et Dies* 735-736 in *The Collected Hesiod*. Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p.177.

The social distinction between friend and enemy helps determine the degree of contamination, according to the famous pre-Christian maxim, ‘Help your friends and hate your enemies’<sup>46</sup> (Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 869-872). Pollution is simply a matter of fact, a consequence of action; it does not refer to any ‘inner being’ or the morals of a ‘real’ self behind the actor at all. A polluted object or person spreads pollution around, confusing categories and threatening the established order. Like *hubris* itself, it has to be stopped sooner than a raging fire. This fear of pollution can be seen in the words Antiphon speaks about a murderer:

It is against your interest to allow this polluted man to enter divine precincts and pollute their sanctity, or pass on his contamination to the innocent by eating at the same table with them. This is the kind of thing that causes crops to fail.<sup>47</sup>

In cosmologies where the self and his world are strongly interconnected, there is no separation between natural and man-made laws; law and order literally coincide. Cosmic order is pre-eminently embodied in the law of *talion*, the principle that the universal balance of forces is only preserved if every act is offset by an inverse act. The law of *talion* has two complementary sides: it demands that credit be given where credit is due and that violations of the cosmic order be punished by a similar counteraction. The *talion* of credit and that of revenge mirror one another and the system of *talion* regulates all other categories.<sup>48</sup> The order of nature is conceived of as reflecting a moral order; physical disaster is *talion* for human transgression. Religious sacrifice functions according to the *talion* of credit, by putting the gods under obligation by its gift. A gift or sacrifice is also more symbolic than economic in nature, and often the compensation exceeds the ‘damage’ of the transgression, e.g. the sacrifice of Iphigenia to atone for the slaying of one of Artemis’ protected animals. The duty to atone is also more about maintaining the balance of cosmic forces rather than making reparation. The duty to take revenge, for example in the case of Orestes, is no mere emotional need for a *vendetta* but rather a cosmologically founded duty, the neglect of which may expose the individual or group to danger.

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<sup>46</sup> Hesiod, *ibid*, p.212.

<sup>47</sup> O’Brien, J. V. *Thirty Classical Writers*. Cambridge: Cambridge: (Mass.) Harvard University Press, 1989, p.199.

<sup>48</sup> Guépin, J-P. *The Tragic Paradox: Myth and Ritual in Greek Tragedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

The order of the *lex talionis* often hides its tragic aspect. Delay in the gods' retaliation for sin is often so extended that the credibility of the system falters. It operates on the scale of divine lives, not human ones, and the mills of the gods grind so slowly that their movements can become almost imperceptible to the limited scope of mortal eyes. Because *talion* operates on a cosmic scale, it may from the point of view of the human being be grossly unjust. It is only an ironic consolation that an innocent man should suffer for the sins of his forebears,<sup>49</sup> while present evildoers continue to thrive.<sup>50</sup> It is humanly impossible for humans to adopt the perspective of the law of *talion*.<sup>51</sup> As we shall see, this is precisely what interests Nietzsche; how is it possible that a people who found themselves in a blatantly unjust cosmological order can be so much more *cheerful* than others who have devoted themselves to creating a social order that serves the interests of every individual? The solidarity of generations does not always conceal the fact that individuals are often the innocent victims of the grand cosmic movement. The order of *talion* can only be maintained by violence and counter-violence, by violation and counter-violation, which implies that this order is inextricably intertwined with disorder.

As long as mechanisms of substitution and controlled ambiguity are in operation, the essential violence of *talion* can be concealed, but from time to time a ritual crisis sets in, which can only be contained by an appeal to outside authority, as when Athena ends the curse on the house of Atreus in the concluding scene of the *Oresteia*. Other tactics for coping with crisis may include sacrificial killing, which, however, requires careful efforts to prevent retaliation. For example, great emphasis is placed on the willingness of the victim, in what Burkert<sup>52</sup> calls 'the comedy of innocence'. All these rituals, however, cannot overcome the fact that *talion*, too, is a transgression, and therefore potentially dangerous. This is abundantly clear in the inevitable mixture of purification and violence in the perverted rituals the reader encounters in the *Oresteia*. Little wonder, then, that Aeschylus should speak of the justice within this trilogy as 'the grace that comes with violence' (*Agamemnon* 182-183).

The significance of Nietzsche's challenge to contemporary conceptions of justice can only be appreciated with a little more background information on the

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<sup>49</sup> Hesiod. *Theogonia* 731-736 in *The Collected Hesiod*. Hammondsworth: Penguin 1961, p.379.

<sup>50</sup> Hesiod. *Theogonia* 373-385, *ibid*, p.197.

<sup>51</sup> Hesiod. *Theogonia* 203-204, *ibid*, p.89.

<sup>52</sup> Burkert, W. *Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.106.

ancient self that found itself intertwined within the connected cosmological order. Naturally, *pace* Gadamer, we can make no claim to ‘reconstruct’ the ancient cosmological framework, even if the scope of our project allowed for this, which it does not. What is significant for our purposes, however, is the fact that cultures without distinctive spheres of life are not distinguished from ones where such spheres develop merely by a lack of separation. In cultures with interconnected spheres of life, differentiation is just as important as in separatist ones, but not as a procedure of reduction and re-assembly. In interconnected cosmologies, differentiation does not lead to clear and distinct categories. Demarcation is not clear but *cumulative*; there are many interconnected modes of expressing the meaning of a cosmological difference, and these modes form a dense pattern of variable, rich meanings. It is almost impossible to speak meaningfully of what we today so easily call the ‘legal subject’, because even at the most basic level, the word ‘self’, let alone ‘subject’, is very problematic. Snell<sup>53</sup> points out the lack of Homeric words that can readily be translated as ‘mind’ or even ‘soul’, in the post-Platonic Christian sense of a locus where the individual’s unique thoughts and feelings occur: ‘Any touch of a unitary self in Homer is so lightly expressed that abstract concepts such as *psyche*, *thymos*, *kradia* and physical features such as hands and feet, should likewise be seen as springs of action’. The most familiar of these, *psyche*, does not simply translate as ‘soul’ or ‘self’. It is closer to ‘life-force’, that entity the absence of which defines death (*Iliad* V: 696). After death, no return of the *psyche* is possible, and Achilles complains that he constantly risks his *psyche* in war (*Iliad* XXII: 696). Our closest word is *élan*, but it must be noted that a person and his *psyche* are separable and not self-identical: Achilles states that ‘not all the treasure in Troy is equal to his *psyche*’ (*Iliad*: IX 401). *Thymos* is equally difficult. It is located in the chest, and conveys an impression of a sudden surge of fire. Etymologically, it is associated with the Latin ‘*fumos*’. According to Taylor,<sup>54</sup> the closest translation would be ‘surge of pride’. Overall, words like *thymos*, *kradia* and *etor* seem to be used to record Homeric man’s experiences as he experiences them. He lacks a conceptual framework that distinguishes between psychological and physical phenomena. This must not be mistaken for the simple reducing of mental and spiritual qualities to material ones or *vice versa*, because for Homer, as a pre-Christian Greek still deeply steeped in an oral

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<sup>53</sup> Snell, B. *The Discovery of the Mind*. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1953.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, C. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.118.

tradition, such a dichotomy does not exist. This is evident from the passive role given to the more ‘intellectual’ concepts of *phren* and *nōōs*, which suggest something acted upon rather than acting itself. *Phrenes* includes grief (Hector) and lust (Paris). *Nōōs* is more cognitive, noticing the things that *phren* reasons about.

No single word, then, ‘adds up’ to the Homeric man. As Taylor puts it, ‘Homeric man is a being whose parts are more in evidence than the whole, and one very conscious of sudden unexpected excesses of energy.’<sup>55</sup> Homer has no non-material language; even an ethereal concept like *psyche* is composed of tenuous ‘stuff’ that resides in the body and flies out through some orifice (including a wound) and down to Hades. As a result, there is no clear distinction between inner and outer. The two-way relationship between the two is mercurial, ambiguous, fluid and divine. What is inside and outside are seen in terms both biological and daemonological, that is, related to the suprahuman or the transcendent realm of the gods. In interconnected societies, nature is conceived of as a living whole in which categories such as living/dead, man/animal are recognized as distinct but at the same time as connected by internal links. This interconnectedness makes it difficult to reconcile opposite demands where relations between man and nature are at stake. On the one hand, human civilization has to be kept free from all aspects of wild and polluting nature, but on the other, nature is understood to be part of an interconnected cosmos, implying that nature can be separated from neither the divine nor the human sphere. Men and gods can only maintain themselves thanks to their continuous possession by natural powers. The power of erotic attraction, for example, unites plants, humans and animals, as well as gods, and the same goes for a phenomenon like inspiration.

Snell<sup>56</sup> notes that the Homeric hero is frequently carried to great heights by a surge of power infused in him by a god. The *daimon* is present even in what appears to be the activity driven to the greatest degree by intentionality, namely *poiēsis*, which includes all ‘form-giving’ activities. In the *Apology*, Socrates states that poets do not produce their work through wisdom but rather by some instinct when possessed by *entheos*.<sup>57</sup> The same seems to be true of tragic mistakes; Agamemnon blames his unfair and unwise treatment of Achilles on a certain madness (*menos*) visited on him

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<sup>55</sup> Taylor, C, *ibid*, p.119.

<sup>56</sup> Snell, B. *The Discovery of the Mind*. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1953, p.89.

<sup>57</sup> The word literally translates to an ‘indwelling deity’ or *daemon*. Two modern words are derived from this word: ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘enthetic’ (which refers to a class of diseases introduced from without).

by a god. Men frequently act ‘as their *kradia* and *thymos* bid them’ (*Odyssey* IX: 320) and Odysseus, when wondering whether to attack the Cyclops, is restrained by ‘another *thymos*’ (*Odyssey* I: 306). The absence of will forms part of a culture that allows a hero to retain his heroic status even when he turns out to be a mere plaything of the gods.

Thus the Greek self (the usage of ‘subject’ is inappropriate here, because, as has been indicated, the individual was not regarded as a fount of meaning) was more than a collection of soluble ego boundaries. Greek identity is hard-won through outer engagement, a precariously balanced unity under perpetual threat of slipping away. Sloterdijk's description of Nietzsche's *Übermenschlichkeit* also describes the Homeric self: ‘something radical, cybernetic,<sup>58</sup> eccentric, and Dionysian; a site of sensibility within the ruling cycle of forces, as a point of alertness for the modulation of impersonal antagonisms, as a process of self-healing for primordial pain’.<sup>59</sup> The individual's identity is determined by a greater ordered totality prior to that individual. Charles Taylor describes this position as follows:

In those earlier societies, what we could now call identity was largely fixed by one's social position. That is, the background that explained what people recognized as important to themselves was largely determined by their place in society, and whatever roles or activities attached to this position.<sup>60</sup>

For Nietzsche, the ancients offer a window into a world where the *principium individuationis*, and the foundational metaphysics that were to follow it, have not yet become absolute. The ego, with its constitutive dream of autonomy, is still merely the unreal seam at which the Dionysian force of irrational vitality encounters the Apollonian vision of order. In this encounter, subjectivity appears as an epiphenomenon within the interplay between great subjectless cosmic forces, in the *interspace* between the tendencies toward self-preservation and self-annihilation that exist within a vivacious yet unintentional and indifferent natural process. Likewise, only in the light of the primacy of the cosmos as a whole is it possible to read Aeschylus' and Sophocles' descriptions of the vicissitudes of human life. Reversals of

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<sup>58</sup> The word ‘cybernetic’ is derived from the Greek *kuber*, meaning ‘to move’. The use of the word here points to a self unconstrained by the demands of autonomy.

<sup>59</sup> Sloterdijk, P. *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.x.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, C. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.



fortune are not primarily human phenomena which are deplored or cheered. Tragic insight shows, mostly without the actors being aware of the fact, that man's actions are part of the cosmic whole. In this context, the following words from the Messenger in the *Antigone* are of particular interest:

There is no estate of mortal life that I would either praise or blame as settled (lit. 'standing'). Fortune (*Túche*) sets straight (*orthoĩ*) and Fortune lets down (*katarrépei*) the fortunate and unfortunate from day to day.

And no one is a seer to mortals concerning those things which are established. (*Antigone*, lines 1156-60)

The messenger is not lamenting pessimistically the terrors of human existence. He is offering a dispassionate description of established cosmic law. He is neither optimistic nor pessimistic: sometimes the lucky are brought down and sometimes the unlucky are raised. The messenger is simply referring to the cosmic movement of generation and destruction.

#### 4. What Nietzsche Found in the Greeks

For Karl Marx, the major fault of philosophers is that they tend only to *interpret* the world in various ways, whereas 'the point', he says in his 'Theses on Feuerbach', 'is to change it'.<sup>61</sup> Quite the opposite is true for Nietzsche: in his view, the greatest fault of philosophers is that they tend to think that they are changing the world when all they actually do is interpret it. And the name they give their attempts to 'improve' humanity is *morality*: 'Zu allen Zeiten hat man die Menschen "verbessern" wollen: dies vor Allem hiess Moral' (*GD*, Die 'Verbesserer der Menschheit', KSA, 6.98). For Nietzsche, the true revolutionary (the *Übermensch*) does not desperately try to establish justice in a world that furiously resists all such attempts, but learns to reconcile himself with the fundamental injustice that accompanies life in the human world. The Greeks were masters of many arts, but they were especially brilliant at this one. It takes a phenomenally strong people to resist the urge to justify the world in otherworldly metaphysical terms:

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<sup>61</sup> Marx, K. 'Theses on Feuerbach' in *The Essential Karl Marx*. Carver, T. (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Ich war der erste, der, zum Verständniss des älteren, des noch reichen und selbst überströmenden hellenischen Instinkts, jenes wundervolle Phänomen ernst nahm, das den Namen des Dionysus trägt: es ist einzig erklärbar aus einem Zuviel von Kraft (*Götzen-Dämmerung*, ‘Was ich den Alten verdanke’, KSA 6.158).

But the world must be justified nevertheless. In the Old Testament, the word ‘justify’ has connotations of acquittal, of rendering innocent in the eyes of God, a status not so much achieved as conferred on those who have obeyed the Law, or have rendered what is due to man and God in terms of God’s revealed will for mankind. The Jewish world is justified in terms of an absolute transcendent standard and requires no further human involvement except obedience to God’s will, particularly in the fulfilment of God’s Law. To justify the world means to render it *meaningful*, to establish a framework within which an apparently chaotic world makes sense. For the Greeks, as Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes, this is of course not a moral, but an *aesthetic* experience:

Bereits im Vorwort an Richard Wagner wird die Kunst – und nicht die Moral – als die eigentlich metaphysische Thätigkeit des Menschen hingestellt; im Buche selbst kehrt der anzügliche Satz mehrfach wieder, dass nur als ästhetisches Phänomen das Dasein der Welt *gerechtfertigt* ist. (*GT*, Versuch einer Selbstkritik 5, KSA 1.17).

This principle is important enough for Nietzsche to repeat it twice more, in *GT* 5 and *GT* 24. In the first two cases, the word ‘justified’ is emphasized. This emphasis only makes sense, however, when we consider the conditions needed before we can speak of a world at all. The most fundamental of these conditions is the absence of a transcendental point of reference to which all questions of meaning refer; the world must be justified in human terms and this, inevitably, is always accompanied by an aesthetic dimension. It is impossible to throw out the matter of *taste* where judgement is involved; it is by its very nature demiurgic, perpetually accepting, rejecting and evaluating. In the most fundamental sense, this is because of man’s linguistic nature. In denying the possibility of correctly reproducing the world of becoming in language, Nietzsche analyzes the referential theory of meaning and the correspondence theory of truth in a way that opens traditional epistemological inquiry to the freedom of the creative play of interpretation. Language emerges not as a tool for mirroring reality, but as an anthropomorphic creation through which human beings

delineate their relatively idiosyncratic relationships with each other and ‘nature’. The ‘world’ is what comes into being as a result of these interpretations. Heidegger makes this central to his interpretation of *Dasein* as a being that only exists *as Dasein* because it shares the world with others in an interpretative manner.

For Nietzsche, all interpretation is creation inasmuch as it is engaged in the re-interpretation and re-configuration of the world. As will be demonstrated later, every intellectual construction or category imposed upon the world, claims to ‘objectivity’ notwithstanding, has an artistic and therefore subjective dimension to it. Art carries out a selective, world-constitutive operation in the manner of that ultimate impersonal ‘artist’, the will to power. And this means that both the negatives and positives of the world can only be explained in terms of preliminary categories of quality, not permanent moral foundations.

Against the tendency to read the world in simple binaries, Nietzsche posits a polyvalent monist force that distinguishes between degrees and kinds of power. This force is the will to power, neither essence, structure, *telos* nor meaning in itself, but rather at once the full force of appearance, the continual sublation of every *telos* and the transgression of all ends. The will to power establishes new hierarchies and then continually undermines them. To impose hierarchies according to which the value of phenomena can be measured is the ultimate artistic endeavour, in which ‘truth’ plays no role whatsoever. Nietzsche’s thought is a perpetual challenge to those who tend to simplify the world, who operate under the illusion that they make the world more accessible by establishing simple dichotomies such as good and evil, spirit and body or, epistemologically speaking, mind and body, truth and error. The announcement that everything is will to power suggests the radically contingent and contextual nature of all conceptual distinctions and throws immediate suspicion on any unexamined dichotomy. This is cause for celebration; the world is at once neither entirely within the reach of the knowing subject, nor entirely beyond its grasp. It is just enigmatic enough to be stimulating:

Tiefe Abneigung, in irgend einer Gesamt-Betrachtung der Welt ein für alle Mal auszuruhen; Zauber der entgegengesetzten Denkweise; sich den Anreiz des ängstlichen Charakters nicht nehmen lassen (Aphorism 11036, *NL* 85-86 KSA 12.142).

Everything that happens consists of a group of phenomena that are gathered and selected by an interpretative being. Despite Nietzsche's appeal to a more *natural* man (*GM I*, 6), there is no *physis* without *nomos*. Nietzsche does not simply unite the two; he has re-thought their relationship entirely, suggesting that what we call *physis*, nature or the world, is nothing more than an illusion that we create through the *nomos*, because we forget that the law, or metaphysical framework within which we operate, is itself merely a human convention. *Nomos* creates *physis* through generality: we become so accustomed to our rules and habits that they begin to pass for nature.

This is the origin of the 'idealist' conception of culture that began to dominate European thought from the mid-eighteenth century. 'Culture' was almost invariably seen as the refined mental and spiritual faculties which the rising middle classes of Europe imagined set them apart from the allegedly brutish, nasty and short lives of manual workers, peasants and savages. The conception of culture as something 'superorganic', a self-contained world of reason and manners, served as a token to demarcate, separate, deny and exclude 'natural' categories such as workers, women and children. In the words of M. Jackson: 'A persistent theme is the denial of the somatic, a scotomacizing of the physical aspects of Being where our sense of separateness and distinction is most readily blurred'.<sup>62</sup>

Demarcation for purposes of elevation and sublimation is not a problem for Nietzsche. Greek culture, too, is characterized by a series of exclusive – even violent – self-demarcations from nature. This is, after all, the 'holy simplicity'<sup>63</sup> that ennobled the Greeks: 'Simplicität des Griechischen: die Stimme der Natur den Frauen und den Sklaven gegenüber unverdorben. Der besiegte Feind. Humanität ist ein ganz ungriechischer Begriff' (Aphorism 373, *NL* 69-74, *KSA* 7.127). Violence is instinctual for Nietzsche, a process deeply ingrained in nature, including human nature.

It is necessary to separate the human and 'natural' domains, but the absence of ready definitions means that the criteria for this demarcation are open to interpretation – the demarcation is as unfinished as the human animal itself. Nietzsche also writes:

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<sup>62</sup> Jackson, M. *Paths Towards A Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*. London: Bloomington, 1989, p.20.

<sup>63</sup> This expression *O sancta simplicitas* was first used by St Jerome, but became more popular when used by Johannes Huss at the stake, on seeing an old peasant bringing a faggot to throw on the pile.

Wir wehren uns gegen den Instinkt, als etwas Thierisches. Darin liegt selbst ein Instinkt. Der natürliche Mensch empfindet eine starke Kluft zwischen sich und dem Thier; im Begriff es sich deutlich zu machen, worin die Kluft bestehe, verfällt er auf dumme Unterscheidungen (Aphorism 286, *NL* 69-74, KSA 7.102).

In the first essay of *Die Genealogie*, ‘natural’ operates as synonym for ‘potent and robust’, which is Nietzsche’s interpretation of what constitutes ‘quality’. This value system, like all others, as Nietzsche never ceases to remind us, emanates from a *creation*. But this creation is not necessarily an individual’s deed, the movement of a will seen as a *cause*, or a creation in the sense of an imitation of ‘prior’ nature. Rather it is the very creation of nature and life itself. A world comes into being through our selecting features and isolating them from others, by our delimiting areas of life and demarcating spaces, privileging certain concepts, persons, facets and features over others. The world is justified, rendered meaningful or perhaps more importantly, *worthy*, by the imposition of such an order or framework, and the person associated with this task is he whom Nietzsche calls the *lawgiver*:

Der Gesetzgeber (oder der Instinkt der Gesellschaft) wählt eine Anzahl Zustände und Affekte aus, mit deren Thätigkeit eine reguläre Leistung verbürgt ist (ein Machinalismus, als Folge von den regelmäßigen Bedürfnissen jener Affekte und Zustände). (Aphorism 11533, *NL* Herbst 1885 bis Herbst 1887 KSA 12.459).

The most obvious example of the operation of the lawgiver through the medium of language is the naming process;<sup>64</sup> ‘so beginnt die Philosophie mit einer Gesetzgebung der Größe, ein Namengeben ist mit ihr verbunden.’ (*PHG*, 3, KSA 1.816). Naming involves an artificial process of designation, differentiation and classification giving rise to *concepts*. Through giving two different things, which are at best similar, the same name, we render them identical. Whereas tradition would have it that God gave His creation its essential nature by naming it, for Nietzsche naming merely involves creating a surface with neither depth nor reference. He argues that ‘es genügt, neue Namen und Schätzungen und Wahrscheinlichkeiten zu schaffen, um auf die Länge hin neue ‘Dinge zu schaffen’. (*FW*, 58, KSA 3.422). Things thus created have no reality or reference behind the name. Theologians and metaphysicians make the mistake to

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<sup>64</sup> The question of language and naming in Nietzsche is a very complex one, and will be more fully addressed in a subsequent chapter.

assume that ‘big words’, or words that name, are automatically of value. They have, according to Nietzsche, value only as flags in a battle: ‘Christenthum, Revolution, Aufhebung der Sklaverei, gleiches Recht, Philanthropie, Friedensliebe, Gerechtigkeit, Wahrheit: alle diese großen Worte haben nur Werth im Kampf, als Standarte: nicht als Realitäten, sondern als Prunkworte für etwas ganz Anderes (ja Gegensätzliches!)’ (Aphorism 11864, KSA 13.62). Names, like everything else, have a history, which is passed on to whoever appropriates them, whether approved of or not. ‘Knowledge’ emerges as the rapid categorization and classification of similar things. Concepts are born through the equation of things that are not equal. This means that language cannot be seen as representational, for there is nothing to be represented. Whoever goes beneath the surface of language does so at his peril. Representation is illusion. Nietzsche asks

Ja, was zwingt uns überhaupt zur Annahme, dass es einen wesenhaften Gegensatz von ‘wahr’ und ‘falsch’ giebt? Genügt es nicht, Stufen der Scheinbarkeit anzunehmen und gleichsam hellere und dunklere Schatten und Gesamttöne des Scheins, – verschiedene valeurs, um die Sprache der Maler zu reden? Warum dürfte die Welt, die uns etwas angeht –, nicht eine Fiktion sein? Und wer da fragt: ‘aber zur Fiktion gehört ein Urheber?’ – dürfte dem nicht rund geantwortet werden: *Warum?* Gehört dieses ‘Gehört’ nicht vielleicht mit zur Fiktion? Ist es denn nicht erlaubt, gegen Subjekt, wie gegen Prädikat und Objekt, nachgerade ein Wenig ironisch zu sein? Dürfte sich der Philosoph nicht über die Gläubigkeit an die Grammatik erheben? (*JGB* 34, KSA 5.54).

Truth depends to a large extent on comparison and degree, and language is the sum of the concepts that result from the artistic imposition of an image onto other images. As Derrida was to emphasize later, there is no originary presence at the inception of language. The intelligibility we discover in nature can only be achieved with the aid of words and concepts, that is, only through a creation of man, mainly, as we shall see in greater depth in chapter 3, through the operation of language. In the strictest sense, no knowledge of the world is really possible, only the different kinds of knowledge of man.

Knowledge that comes to be regarded as ‘true’ employs language according to conventions and repeats these conventions infinitely. Language masks its origin as anthropomorphism. Realism, as we have seen, is the ultimate symptom of the denial of language as creative imposition. This is why it has become time for man to own up to his status as artist, and make the most of it.

Als Baugenie erhebt sich solcher Maassen der Mensch weit über die Biene: diese baut aus Wachs, das sie aus der Natur zusammenholt, er aus dem weit zarteren Stoffe der Begriffe, die er erst aus sich fabriciren muss. Er ist hier sehr zu bewundern — aber nur nicht wegen seines Triebes zur Wahrheit, zum reinen Erkennen der Dinge. Wenn Jemand ein Ding hinter einem Busche versteckt, es eben dort wieder sucht und auch findet, so ist an diesem Suchen und Finden nicht viel zu rühmen: so aber steht es mit dem Suchen und Finden der ‘Wahrheit’ innerhalb des Vernunft-Bezirktes (*WL* 1.KSA1.883).

Truth is a lie that was repeated enough to lend it the stability it needed to become truth. Jacques Derrida calls this phenomenon ‘iterability’.<sup>65</sup> This word combines the Latin *iter*, meaning ‘again’ and the Sanskrit word *itara* (‘other’). For any word or image – Derrida uses the word ‘mark’ - to have meaning, it must be repeatable in other contexts. The more often it gets repeated, the more stable the word, image or sign becomes. But metaphor remains unavoidable.

Thus, instead of a rationally accessible world with metaphysical foundations, Nietzsche offers a tragic or Heraclitian world, stripped of stability, purpose and predictability. Because every conceptual framework is at bottom arbitrary, it is necessary to create a framework with the greatest possible potential. What makes one framework ‘better’ than another is not its ‘correctness’ but its ability to stimulate life to the maximum, to allow the games of the different forces of power to spill out their energies most powerfully. The major complaint that Nietzsche has against traditional metaphysics is that it works counter to this purpose. In Nietzsche’s universe (perhaps multiverse would be more correct) life becomes a terrifying and tragic experience amid the constant flux of becoming. Such a world, however, also recovers a lost innocence and a resuscitated freedom. Although fearsome, it offers the greatest form of liberty possible, which is *tragic freedom*. In Nietzsche’s world, humanity becomes free to create itself anew; it is constrained to neither a transcendental nature nor a teleological program. Nietzsche champions the absolute necessity of a total liberation from ends; only reconciliation with the innocence of becoming can give us genuine freedom.

This is why culture’s self-demarcation from ‘nature’ is not sufficient to demarcate or define what animated Greek culture. What Nietzsche calls the realm of ‘einer verklärten Physis’ (*UB* III 3, KSA 1.361) is part of ‘nature’ – the ‘superorganic’

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<sup>65</sup> Derrida, J. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. Chicago University Press, 1981, p. 17. This term makes its appearance in nearly every Derridean text.

is part of the organic. Differentiation occurs internally, according to the logic of the *agon*. In the simplest sense, *agon* means contest or competition. It is, however, not a contest of annihilation (*Vernichtungskampf*) in which ‘the winner takes all’, but a signature aspect of pre-Socratic Greek culture; and a contained and productive form of contestation (*Wettkampf*), in which adversaries compete with one another in a process of mutual empowerment and provocation, and is contained in the process by mutual disempowerment or restraint. Rather than separating nature from culture, Nietzsche offers an enriched and ennobled concept of nature, inspired by Nature’s own ‘contained’ volatility:

Wenn man von Humanität redet, so liegt die Vorstellung zu Grunde, es möge das sein, was den Menschen von der Natur abscheidet und auszeichnet. Aber eine solche Abscheidung giebt es in Wirklichkeit nicht: die ‘natürlichen’ Eigenschaften und die eigentlich ‘menschlich’ genannten sind untrennbar verwachsen. Der Mensch, in seinen höchsten und edelsten Kräften, ist ganz Natur und trägt ihren unheimlichen Doppelcharakter an sich. Seine furchtbaren und als unmenschlich geltenden Befähigungen sind vielleicht sogar der fruchtbare Boden, aus dem allein alle Humanität, in Regungen Thaten und Werken hervorwachsen kann (*HW*, KSA 1.783).

In the phrase of Herman Siemens:<sup>66</sup> ‘The key to Nietzsche’s thought here is a notion of productive and inclusive conflict’. It is through an assimilation and transformation of natural drives into something decidedly *human*, that the *agon* is born. Nietzsche writes on Homer:

Der Dichter überwindet den Kampf um’s Dasein, indem er ihn zu einem freien Wettkampfe idealisirt. Hier ist das Dasein, um das noch gekämpft wird, das Dasein im Lobe, im Nachruhm.

Der Dichter erzieht: die tigerartigen Zerfleischungstriebe der Griechen weiß er zu übertragen in die gute Eris (*HW*, KSA 1.783).

The good Eris is the Muse of the *agon*. The point of *Homer’s Wettkampf* is to demonstrate how the Greeks turned the bad Eris of destruction into the ‘good’ Eris of inspiring conflict. In contrast to the ‘measureless’ Christian tradition, which stems from Plato, as we shall see in the next chapter, which tries to *erase* negativity and so

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<sup>66</sup> Siemens, H. ‘Agonal Configurations in the Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen’. In: *Nietzsche-Studien* 30, Berlin 2001, p.101.



safeguard itself, the Greeks prevented the destruction of social life by including and eventually sublimating the negative forces of destruction.

The dramatic potential of base, destructive forces were recognized and used as stimulus (*Reiz*) in a process of measured discharge in contests that ruled all aspects of life, from art and politics, religion and love, to sport and education. This is well depicted in the pan-Hellenic Homer:

Die grösste Thatsache bleibt immer der frühzeitig *panhellenische Homer*. Alles Gute stammt doch von ihm her: aber zugleich ist er die gewaltigste Schranke geblieben, die es gab. Er verflachte, und deshalb kämpften die Ernstern so gegen ihn, umsonst. Homer siegte immer. Das *Unterdrückende* der grossen geistigen Mächte ist auch hier sichtbar, aber welcher Unterschied: Homer oder eine Bibel als solche Macht!

Die Lust am *Rausche*, die Lust am *Listigen*, an der *Rache*, am Neide, an der *Schmähung*, an der *Unzüchtigkeit* – alles das wurde von den Griechen *anerkannt*, als menschlich, und darauf hin eingeordnet in das Gebäude der Gesellschaft und Sitte. Die Weisheit ihrer Institutionen liegt in dem Mangel einer Scheidung zwischen gut und böse, schwarz und weiss. Die Natur, wie sie sich zeigt, wird nicht weggeleugnet, sondern nur *eingeordnet*, auf bestimmte Culte und Tage beschränkt. Dies ist die Wurzel aller Freisinnigkeit des Alterthums; man suchte für die Naturkräfte eine mässige Entladung, nicht eine Vernichtung und Verneinung (Aphorism 2211, *NL* 75-76, *KSA* 8.78).

From the modern, arch-humanist perspective, with its obsession with ‘equality’, nothing could be more alien. This is perhaps why none other than Gilles Deleuze distances himself so violently from the notion of the *agon*:

One cannot emphasize the extent to which the notions of struggle, war rivalry and even comparison are alien to Nietzsche and to his conception of power. It is not that he denies the existence of struggle, but he does not see it in any way creative of values. At least the only values that it creates are those of the triumphant slave. Struggle is not the principle or motor of hierarchy, but the means by which the slave reverses hierarchy. Struggle is never the active expression of forces, nor the manifestation of a will to power that affirms any more than its result expresses the triumph of the master or the strong. Struggle, on the contrary, is the way in which the weak prevail over the strong, because they are the greatest number.<sup>67</sup>

Few readings could do less justice to a key Nietzschean concept. Not only does Nietzsche practise his own version of the *agon* in his critical contest with the values of his day, but also his references to the Greek *agon* appear from *Die Geburt*

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<sup>67</sup> Deleuze, G. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Translated by H. Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.82.

*der Tragödie* to his last notes, sometimes as example, sometimes as sparring partner in its own right. The Greeks were not merely to be imitated, but to be *overcome*, for that is what *fruitful* learning is. For as will become clear later, a *just* man is a fruitful or *productive* one.

The Greeks answered Greek fire with Greek fire. They believed that every ability must unfold itself in contestation; otherwise the twin evils of tyranny and creative barrenness will follow. As great stimulant, the *agon* prevents this: a great playwright who envies his predecessor is provoked by the latter's achievements into producing masterpieces of his own, and even to outshine his rival, living or dead. Nietzsche calls this reciprocal logic of challenge

die ungeheure Begierde als Wurzel dieses Angriffs uns denken, selbst an die Stelle des gestürzten Dichters zu treten und dessen Ruhm zu erben. Jeder große Hellene giebt die Fackel des Wettkampfes weiter; an jedergroßen Tugend entzündet sich eine neue Größe (*HW*, KSA 1.788).

A great new figure *limits* the achievements and potential to be dangerous of the other players in the *agon* without denying or annihilating their achievements. The true participant in the *agon* is a just figure: he does not seek to destroy or impoverish his opponent, since the *agon* thrives on a plurality of geniuses. After all, one does not have to choose between Aeschylus and Sophocles – thanks to the genius behind the institution of the *agon*, the Athenian public could experience the work of both geniuses. It is precisely because of this system of 'checks and balances' that chances for tyrannical abuse and injustice are limited. 'Totalitarian' genius – a single giant 'who doth bestride the narrow world / Like a Colossus'<sup>68</sup> – like Wagner, in Nietzsche's opinion – is something particular to the modern age, and inimical to the spirit of the ancient *agon*. There, any individual genius who rose beyond contest to a position of absolute power would be ostracized.

Der ursprüngliche Sinn dieser sonderbaren Einrichtung ist aber nicht der eines Ventils, sondern der eines Stimulanzmittels: man beseitigt den überragenden Einzelnen, damit nun wieder das Wettspiel der Kräfte erwache: ein Gedanke, der der 'Exklusivität' des Genius im modernen Sinne feindlich ist, aber voraussetzt, daß, in einer natürlichen Ordnung der Dinge, es immer mehrere Genies giebt, die sich gegenseitig zur That reizen, wie sie sich auch gegenseitig in der Grenze des Maaßes halten. Das ist der Kern der

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<sup>68</sup> Shakespeare, W. Julius Caesar I.ii line 134.

hellenischen Wettkampf-Vorstellung: sie verabscheut die Alleinherrschaft und fürchtet ihre Gefahren, sie begehrt, als *Schutzmittel* gegen das Genie – ein zweites Genie (*HW*, KSA 1.788).

For the Greeks, victory was never absolute, but always provisional and temporary, for a respected opponent can easily issue a fresh challenge at the next opportunity. According to Nietzsche, reading Heraclitus, this was the condition of justice itself: ‘der Streit des Vielen selbst ist die eine Gerechtigkeit!’ (*PHG* 6, KSA 1.827). Justice is the antithesis of decay and stasis. Furthermore, at stake was always some form of cultural achievement: laurel wreaths at the Olympics or the theatrical *agon*. The agonal life is an awe-inspiring adventure beyond the concerns of moralism and commerce, not a house of trade where one can drive a hard moral bargain, fulfilling present obligations and obtaining promissory notes to be redeemed at a later stage. In Nietzsche’s Heraclitian world, human society becomes an experiment; ‘Die Menschen-Gesellschaft: die ist ein Versuch, so lehre ich’s, – ein langes Suchen: sie sucht aber den Befehlenden! – ein Versuch, oh meine Brüder! Und *kein* ‘Vertrag’ (*Z*, III, ‘Von alten und neuen Tafeln’, KSA 4.265).

*Die Geburt der Tragödie* is an *agon* in its own right: dramatization without dialogue, a dramatization of a terrible subject, namely the *disproportionality* between the cosmic, Aeschylean demand for justice and the human, Euripidean need for poetic justice. The birth of tragedy from the spirit of music reflects the primordial event of the birth of the anthropocentric world unfolding from its primitive primordial grounds while at the same time reconciling man with the workings of that primeval world of which he, despite his best efforts, is still very much a part. Tragedy is thus a dramatization of one of the most essential features of Greek civilization, the need to establish and police limits. No society can come into being without understanding this need, but the Greeks arguably *realized* it more fully than all other groups before and after them. Borders and limits establish spaces; the more numerous the spaces or domains, the greater the possibility for freedom.

Unlike proponents of the more nihilistic drives to ‘freedom’ – ‘Die Zuchtlosigkeit des modernen Geistes unter allerhand moralischem Aufputz’ (Aphorism 11498, KSA 12.432) – in his age personified by socialists and anarchists and in our own time by the neo-liberals with their tunnel-vision commitment to the idylls of the marketplace, Nietzsche has a healthy respect for the value of the institution and its ability to enhance life, provided of course that it flows from life-

enhancing energies and not life-denying ones. His contempt for Luther, for example, is provoked by the latter's disregard for the possibilities of a mannered and disciplined institution.

Luther's Widerstand gegen die Mittler-Heiligen der Kirche (insbesondere gegen 'des Teuffels Saw den Bapst') war, daran ist kein Zweifel, im letzten Grunde der Widerstand eines Rüpels, den die *gute Etiquette* der Kirche verdross, jene Ehrfurchts-Etiquette des hieratischen Geschmacks, welche nur die Geweihteren und Schweigsameren in das Allerheiligste einlässt und es gegen die Rüpel zuschliesst (GM III 23, KSA 5. 394).

The concept of the *agon* has in recent years finally received the attention it deserves as the 'key' that unlocks the spirit of the entire Nietzschean *oeuvre*. In light of his chosen Greek context, Nietzsche's belligerent tone, often frightfully misunderstood, makes sense; he seeks to *fire up* the world, not to end it. Nietzsche revitalized the modern European conception of freedom, on a scale hitherto unmatched, by rejecting the 'right of subjectivity', as Hegel described the right of modern individuals to self-determination.<sup>69</sup> For Hegel, the 'right to subjectivity' is the principal difference between ancient and modern times. Nietzsche agrees, but for him this is all the more lamentable. According to Nietzsche, the 'passions' did not present a problem to the Greeks but rather an opportunity for the freedom of creative play. Greek genius did not only 'tolerate' great passions like cruelty and the need for struggle, but *justified* them as being an essential and wonderful part of life.

Das gesammte griechische Alterthum denkt anders über Groll und Neid als wir und urtheilt wie Hesiod, der einmal eine Eris als böse bezeichnet, diejenige nämlich, welche die Menschen zum feindseligen Vernichtungskampfe gegen einander führt, und dann wieder eine andre Eris als gute preist, die als Eifersucht Groll Neid die Menschen zur That reizt, aber nicht zur That des Vernichtungskampfes, sondern zur That des Wettkampfes. Der Grieche ist neidisch und empfindet diese Eigenschaft nicht als Makel, sondern als Wirkung einer wohlthätigen Gottheit: welche Kluft des ethischen Urtheils zwischen uns und ihm! (*Homer's Wettkampf*, KSA 1.786).

Nietzsche celebrates the second Eris and the Greek commitment to the belief that 'contest is necessary to preserve the health of the state. Without the envy, jealousy and ambition of the contest, man degenerates: 'er wird böse und grausam, er wird

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<sup>69</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Philosophy of Right*. Translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, p.124.

rachsüchtig und gottlos' (*HW*, KSA 7.92). In other words, without contest, man becomes *unjust*, lacking in virtue.

And on the edge of the *agon* lies the tragic. The tragic makes its appearance when a hero *oversteps* the boundaries set by the *agon* and becomes a threat for the *polis*. Greek tragedy shows human lives at the mercy of forces over which they have very little or no control. Such is the vulnerability of human beings before the might of fortune that even the strongest individual is powerless to resist its potential for ruining the most considered and honourable attempt to secure a space for human flourishing. But where individuals go under, there their culture flourishes, provided of course that they fall hard *enough*.

Die Psychologie des Orgasmus als eines überströmenden Lebens- und Kraftgefühls, innerhalb dessen selbst der Schmerz noch als Stimulans wirkt, gab mir den Schlüssel zum Begriff des tragischen Gefühls, das sowohl von Aristoteles als in Sonderheit von unsern Pessimisten missverstanden worden ist. Die Tragödie ist so fern davon, Etwas für den Pessimismus der Hellenen im Sinne Schopenhauer's zu beweisen, dass sie vielmehr als dessen entscheidende Ablehnung und Gegen-Instanz zu gelten hat. Das Jasagen zum Leben selbst noch in seinen fremdesten und härtesten Problemen; der Wille zum Leben, im Opfer seiner höchsten Typen der eignen Unerschöpflichkeit frohwerdend – das nannte ich dionysisch, das errieth ich als die Brücke zur Psychologie des tragischen Dichters. Nicht um von Schrecken und Mitleiden loszukommen, nicht um sich von einem gefährlichen Affekt durch dessen vehemente Entladung zu reinigen – so verstand es Aristoteles –: sondern um, über Schrecken und Mitleid hinaus, die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein, – jene Lust, die auch noch die Lust am Vernichten in sich schliesst ... Und damit berühre ich wieder die Stelle, von der ich einstmals ausgieng – die 'Geburt der Tragödie' war meine erste Umwerthung aller Werthe: damit stelle ich mich wieder auf den Boden zurück, aus dem mein Wollen, mein Können wächst – ich, der letzte Jünger des Philosophen Dionysus, – ich, der Lehrer der ewigen Wiederkunft. (*GD*, 'Was ich den Alten verdanke', KSA 6.160)

As we shall see, this leads the way for a strong link between human justice and the acceptance of the impersonal nature of cosmic justice. In the first text in the Nietzschean *oeuvre* to explicitly deal with justice, *GT* 9, the impersonal nature of cosmic justice appears most clearly:

Der aeschyleische Prometheus ist in diesem Betracht eine dionysische Maske, während in jenem vorhin erwähnten tiefen Zuge nach Gerechtigkeit Aeschylus seine väterliche Abstammung von Apollo, dem Gotte der Individuation und der Gerechtigkeitsgrenzen, dem Einsichtigen verräth. Und

so möchte das Doppelwesen des aeschyleischen Prometheus, seine zugleich dionysische und apollinische Natur in begrifflicher Formel so ausgedrückt werden können: ‘Alles Vorhandene ist gerecht und ungerecht und in beidem gleich berechtigt’. Das ist deine Welt! Das heisst eine Welt! (GT 9, KSA 1.71).

The most unnerving element in this passage is the notion that *everything* that exists is *equally* justified, that is, even things inimical to human happiness, and this is how it is and how it should be. It is pointless to try, as certain branches of Christianity do, to *exorcize* ‘evil’ from the world. No particular element can readily be associated with ‘evil’ or even ‘negativity’; all phenomena derive their meaning from their proportional relationships with other phenomena, and are unpredictable, mercurial, pliable and, as we shall see, truly ‘beyond good and evil’. What embodies the evil of excess in everyday life may be an essential activity in the Dionysian festival. Not only is there a place for every possible phenomenon conceivable by man, but also the radical complexity of the world is beyond human power to reduce permanently. The world can be tamed, but not transformed, because eventually an exiled element will show itself again, albeit in a radically different form. The world, like Blake’s strangely ambivalent Love, ‘seeketh but itself to please’. No element can be eradicated to produce a more human or humane world. Brutality, unfairness, ugliness and uncertainty are as much part of life as are more positive aspects. Despite Nietzsche’s perfectionism, he is radically anti- and un-utopian. The ‘ideal’ world is already here, only waiting to be seized. This world justifies itself simply by way of its potency, and the failure to allow a single element to dominate absolutely ensures that there is always a life-enhancing struggle going on, a struggle that reveals different aspects of the world and of the actors who play out their endless games.

It is often said that in Thomas Hardy’s great Wessex novels the countryside becomes a character in itself. In a similar fashion, agonal tension itself may be said to be a ‘character’ in itself in Greek tragic drama; it cuts through the naked stage and allows various oppositions to spring up, like Jason’s dragon teeth from which an army of armed warriors springs. It is Apollo contra Dionysus, Apollo against the Furies and (illegitimately) men against gods – but then the gods never did play fair.

The quote above from *GT 9* summarizes one of the key dichotomies in the Nietzschean *oeuvre*, the eternal struggle between Apollo and Dionysus. Initially, Nietzsche views the Apollonian and Dionysian drives as corresponding to elementary

physiological or psychological states. His contrast between the quiet, peaceful, beautiful world of Apollo ‘the shining one’ and the darker, irrational world of passion and intoxication of Dionysus recalls Socrates’ account of the mixture of sobriety and madness that induces man to philosophize (*Phaedrus*, 244-257). However, Apollonian power in Nietzsche is not a simple case of hylomorphic or formative power. Instead, it is closer to the power of the imagination, that is, the power to make the invisible visible, to make the void radiant. ‘Apollo, als der Gott aller bildnerischen Kräfte, ist zugleich der wahrsagende Gott. Er, der seiner Wurzel nach der “Scheinende”, die Lichtgottheit ist, beherrscht auch den schönen Schein der inneren Phantasie-Welt’ (*GT 1*, KSA 1.27). The Apollonian impulse to fashion soothing dreams flourishes only in individuals characterized by ‘maassvolle Begrenzung, jene Freiheit von den wilderen Regungen, jene weisheitsvolle Ruhe des Bildnergottes’ (*GT 1*, KSA 1.28), which creates a calm fortress of illusion against the senselessness of the world. Apollonian creativity demands a certain self-distancing from the tumultuous striving of the instincts and the whirl of events that constitute everyday life, an almost philosophical detachment and an awareness of the distinction between appearance and reality.

In contrast to the Apollonian artist’s illusionary dreams, the Dionysian artist gives ecstatic expression to his instincts and passions in his characteristic activity, primal song, dance and extravagant physical activity. Rather than forming an image or copy of events, as in a frieze, the Dionysian artist *becomes* part of the events to such an extent that, as Yeats says, it is no longer possible to distinguish the dancer from the dance. Dionysian art enhances human solidarity, overcomes human alienation from nature, and renders visible the mysterious primordial unity of the world. If the Apollonian dream makes it possible for man to live *as man* by providing shelter from existential storms, Dionysian ecstasy, by offering him up to the storm, makes man, albeit temporarily, live *as a god*:

Jetzt, bei dem Evangelium der Weltenharmonie, fühlt sich Jeder mit seinem Nächsten nicht nur vereinigt, versöhnt, verschmolzen, sondern eins, als ob der Schleier der Maja zerrissen wäre und nur noch in Fetzen vor dem geheimnissvollen Ur-Einen herumflattere. Singend und tanzend äussert sich der Mensch als Mitglied einer höheren Gemeinsamkeit: er hat das Gehen und das Sprechen verlernt und ist auf dem Wege, tanzend in die Lüfte emporzufliegen. Aus seinen Gebärden spricht die Verzauberung. Wie jetzt die Thiere reden, und die Erde Milch und Honig giebt, so tönt auch aus ihm

etwas Uebernatürliches: als Gott fühlt er sich, er selbst wandelt jetzt so verzückt und erhoben, wie er die Götter im Traume wandeln sah. (GT 1, KSA 1.30)

Nietzsche's argument in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is arguably that ordinary human life is a hell of baseness, meaninglessness and suffering, only rendered bearable by the twin therapies of intoxication and dreams. The substratum of the tragic world is the horrific wisdom of Silenus, which engenders the 'terrible need' that produces the 'illustrious company of Olympian beings' (GT 3). It is Greek folk wisdom, not tragedy itself, that for Nietzsche provides the key to understanding the need for tragedy. The frequently quoted passage on the most famous companion of Hercules shows this:

Es geht die alte Sage, dass König Midas lange Zeit nach dem weisen Silen, dem Begleiter des Dionysus, im Walde gejagt habe, ohne ihn zu fangen. Als er ihm endlich in die Hände gefallen ist, fragt der König, was für den Menschen das Allerbeste und Allervorzüglichste sei. Starr und unbeweglich schweigt der Dämon; bis er, durch den König gezwungen, endlich unter gellem Lachen in diese Worte ausbricht: 'Elendes Eintagsgeschlecht, des Zufalls Kinder und der Mühsal, was zwingst du mich dir zu sagen, was nicht zu hören für dich das Erspriesslichste ist? Das Allerbeste ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zum sein, nichts zu sein. Das Zweitbeste aber ist für dich – bald zu sterben' (GT 3, KSA 1. 36).

The Greeks' greatest creative deed, perhaps the greatest creative deed that the world has ever seen, is their skilful concealing of man's inherently miserable lot. The Olympic 'poem' that is Greek religion represents a valiant response to a truly terrible and authentic threat. Like one of antiquity's favourite heroes, Odysseus, the Greeks staunchly stood their ground against a world that is not truly fashioned for man. Through tragedy, the Greeks courageously *made* the world in their own image and revealed themselves to be glorious, courageous aesthetes that could meet the world on their own terms.

If the world was not perfect, neither are the deities that 'redeem' it. The mysterious unity of Apollo and Dionysus comes from their inherent deficiencies; they are necessarily interdependent and intertwined. Neither Apollo nor Dionysus exists in pure form and neither can be separated from the other. The tragic work of art materializes when the Dionysian and Apollinian elements fuse with each other. The fusion is an element of Dionysian intoxication, because Nietzsche imagines the



Apollinian elements of the drama such as the plot and the mythic fate of the unfortunate hero as the dreams of the ecstatic chorus, which sees in the visible fates of the heroes, manifestations of the tragic god Dionysus.

The less discerning Nietzsche reader may take *Die Geburt der Tragödie* to be a Dionysian manifesto. However, in his first treatise Nietzsche stages the compulsion towards an Apollinian compromise. Just as Apollo cannot do without Dionysus, the latter's anarchic impulse can only be appreciated when counterbalanced by the Apollinian appearance of law and order. As Paul van Tongeren points out,<sup>70</sup> the single question from which Nietzsche began his philosophical enterprise is that of why the Dionysian Greek needed to become Apollinian:

warum gerade der griechische Apollinismus aus eine dionysischen Untergrund herauswachsen mußte: der dionysische Grieche nöthig hatte, apollinisch zu werden, das heißt: seinen Willen zum Ungeheuren, Vielfachen, Ungewissen, Entsetzlichen zu brechen an einem Willen zum Maaß, zur Einfachheit, zur Einordnung in Regel und Begriff. Das Maßlose, Wüste, Asiatische liegt auf seinem Grunde: die Tapferkeit des Griechen besteht im Kampfe mit seinem Asiatismus: die Schönheit ist ihm nicht geschenkt, sowenig als die Logik, als die Natürlichkeit der Sitte – sie ist erobert, gewollt, erkämpft – sie ist sein Sieg... (Aphorism 12167, *NL* 87-89, *KSA* 13.225).

Within this arrangement, the unrepresentable Dionysian elements come as close as possible to being represented, provided that they are willing to submit to ultimate Apollinian rule. Without the limits set by Apollo, there would be no performance at all. Everything that happens on stage is being driven by conflict, firstly a conflict within the actor, who has to choose between the different ethical alternatives presented by his situation, and secondly the conflict between actor and chorus. Nietzsche refuses to settle this conflict. The greatness of Greek culture emerged not because of the victory of Apollo over Dionysus, but within the continuing struggle between them and the right proportional relationship that keeps them in check. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche thus establishes the principle of equilibrium that includes Greek art but stretches beyond the domain of the aesthetic to form a basic cosmic principle.

The ideal of 'balance' is not established conscientiously but emerges surreptitiously and subtly throughout the Nietzschean *oeuvre*. The opposition between

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<sup>70</sup> Van Tongeren, P. 'Voltaire and Greek Measure: The Question of Measure according to Nietzsche'. *Rivista di estetica* 28XLV(1), 2005, pp.109-121.

Apollo and Dionysus is not a turbulent opposition that moves freely between the two radical extremes. Instead, as Sloterdijk points out<sup>71</sup>, we find here something closer to a stationary polarity that operates with a mysterious *doubling* of the Apollonian: through the mechanism of the quietly established axiom of balance, the Apollonian Subject ensures that the Dionysian never appears as *itself*, but only in some tolerable masked form. The Apollo-Dionysus mask allows but brief glimpses of the abyss before clothing it with the world of appearance. If Dionysus really brought man in touch with the terrible, chaotic reality he represents, he would cease to play an aesthetic and life-enhancing role and simply add to the horror of groundless existence. Similarly, the tragic characters on the Greek stage are not simply characters in the modern sense of the word: the word *caractēr* means ‘stamp’ or ‘mark’, in other words, a pattern or a mask placed over something else.

Seen in this light, Nietzsche’s enigmatic statement in *GT* 10, ‘aber mit der gleichen Sicherheit darf behauptet werden, dass niemals bis auf Euripides Dionysus aufgehört hat, der tragische Held zu sein, sondern dass alle die berühmten Figuren der griechischen Bühne Prometheus, Oedipus u.s.w. nur Masken jenes ursprünglichen Helden Dionysus sind’ (*GT* 10, KSA 1.71) becomes clearer. The tragic hero *represents* Dionysus, but the act of representation itself remains Apollinian. Tragedy is the *playing out* of the Dionysian in the terrible events of the tragedy, which is eventually cut short by the restorative power of the Apollonian. This is why Nietzsche states ‘dass die Griechen überhaupt Individuen auf der tragischen Bühne nicht ertragen konnten’ (*GT* 10, KSA 1.71), and Aristotle in his analysis of contemporary tragedy focuses on the *action*, rather than the characters of a tragic play: tragedy was more about the operation of cosmic forces than the agonies of the character him- or herself. Just as Japanese Noh theatre is about an actor in a *situation*, tragedy is, as Aristotle held, ‘the imitation of an *action* that is worth serious attention’ (*Poetics* 6, 1449b, emphasis mine). Ancient tragedy, as opposed to Renaissance or modern tragedy, was highly impersonal and public: it was about the fate of Greek man as such rather than Oedipus or Orestes as individuals. Or in Nietzschean terms, rather than a number of tragic characters, the Greek audience encountered one Dionysus after the other: as suffering, dismembered, a barbarized demon, a gentle ruler and a joyful youth.

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<sup>71</sup> Sloterdijk, P. *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.25.

In this fundamental opposition between overweening excess (*Übermass*) and prudence, between measure and over-measure, lies the significance of the Apollo-Dionysus dichotomy. Apollo is the ethical deity that demands measure (*Mass*) and prudent self-knowledge. As such, he is the enemy of *Selbstüberhebung* and *Übermass*, the principle characteristic of Dionysus. Apollo draws boundary lines, and so the danger which threatens when he dominates is formalism, Egyptian rigidity, which can cut off the free movement of ambiguous Dionysian power. In turn, this sea of power sometimes succeeds in demolishing established boundaries.

The opposition between ambiguous power and order propagates itself through a number of well known cosmological categories. Well known is the Dionysian as unbounded nature versus the Apollonian as culture. Before the bearded satyr, cultured man shrinks into a caricature. But that is not all: Dionysus is also the unbounded force of life that sets itself against the boundary of death. Here 'life' must be understood as an unlimited force, not the limited life of the individual. It has to be emphasized, however, that Nietzsche's Dionysus is not just unbounded life-power; he is not to be equated with chaos or the *apeiron*. He is not simply uncontrollable, supra-human power, but also signifies the *absence* of power. This comes to the fore in his guise as Dionysus Zagreus, the god who is torn apart and scattered, both a horrible wild demon and a meek sovereign (*GT* 10, *KSA* 1.72). As we have indicated, the fact that Dionysus is no independent power can be seen in its inability to display itself without an Apollinian channel. Nietzsche is convinced that the chorus constitutes tragedy's original Dionysian element, whereas dialogue represents an Apollonian world of images. One implication is that tragic heroes are conceived of as primarily Apollonian. They are ordered, finite channels of Dionysian power and, as such, deceptive. Spectators tend to identify themselves emotionally with these individuals by pitying the heroes' destruction. In this way they protect themselves from a confrontation with the Dionysian and, importantly, from a *third*, even more terrible deity.

## 5. The Third Tragic Deity

The most significant treatment of the question of justice in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* occurs in the context of Nietzsche's reading of *Prometheus Bound*. Like the tragic Prometheus, Nietzsche does not simply define justice as opposed to injustice, but

engages in the playing of several justice *games*. Like Lyotard in his attempts to rid philosophy of what he calls ‘terroristic’ or master discourses, Nietzsche reads several different *kinds* of justice into the ancient world, all operating on different scales and according to different standards and prejudices. His reading of *Prometheus Bound* reflects upon the function of the boundary or limit that defines each justice game in the ancient Greek world and what the implications for transgressing such a constructed limit are. Aeschylus’s play begins with the theme of the limit: ‘This is the world’s limit that we have come to; this is the Scythian country, an untrodden desolation’ (lines 1-2). The theme of the limit is not limited to geography, but manifests itself throughout the play in the way Prometheus exceeds the Apollonian limits demanded by the Delphic admonition ‘nothing in excess’. The chorus accuses Prometheus ‘Your mind was yours, not [Zeus’s], and at its bidding you regarded mortal men too highly’. Not only is Prometheus’ regard for humans excessive, but he also subverts the natural order of things, placing humans above gods in his regard. Prometheus himself admits to this excess in lines 119-123: ‘You see me a wretched God in chains, an enemy of Zeus, hated of all the gods that enter Zeus’s palace hall, because of my excessive love (*ten lian philoteta*) for Man’. Prometheus’ Dionysian behaviour (excess, blending of the human and divine domains) is punished and Apollonian order is re-established.

Apollo, als ethische Gottheit, fordert von den Seinigen das Maass und, um es einhalten zu können, Selbsterkenntniss. Und so läuft neben der ästhetischen Nothwendigkeit der Schönheit die Forderung des “Erkenne dich selbst” und des ‘Nicht zu viel!’ her, während Selbstüberhebung und Uebermaass als die eigentlich feindseligen Dämonen der nicht-apollinischen Sphäre, daher als Eigenschaften der vor-apollinischen Zeit, des Titanenzeitalters, und der ausser-apollinischen Welt d.h. der Barbarenwelt, erachtet wurden. (*GT 4, KSA 1.40*).

As we have discussed above, in a separatist cosmology the greatest sin is ignorance,<sup>72</sup> but in a unified cosmology, it is *hubris*, the overstepping of one’s demarcated place. Prometheus’ theft of fire and, perhaps more importantly, what he did with it, is a sin, a transgression, a violation of boundaries that threatens the stability of the world. Unlike the Semitic concept of sin, which is a crime committed directly against God,

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. *The Jew of Malta*, ‘Prologue’, 1592: ‘I count religion but a childish toy / And hold no sin but ignorance’.

Greek transgression is to a certain extent a transgression against the *world*, since excess destabilizes and threatens freedom, and it causes anxiety and confusion.

The violation of boundaries threatens the free play of the *agon*. In *Homer's Wettkampf* Nietzsche calls men and gods 'die zwei Mächte, die nie mit einander kämpfen dürfen' (KSA 1.7 87). He is not alone in this view. Writing on the power struggle in the *Antigone*, Reinhardt<sup>73</sup> writes: 'Hier steht nicht Recht gegen Recht, Idee gegen Idee, sondern das Göttliche, als Allumfassendes, mit dem das junge Mädchen sich in Einklang weiss, gegen das Menschliche als das beschränkte, Blinde, von sich selbst Gejagte, in sich selbst Verstellte und Verfälschte'. Such actions throw out the scales and upset the precarious balance of the world. Of course, these battles cannot be avoided – they form the very *raison d'être* for tragedy. Greek polytheism did not take the form of a quiet, passive pantheon; rather, the Greek world served as a stage upon which the gods could discharge their energies, often with humans as their prey. The proper tragic reader, following the 'Aryan' example that Nietzsche gives in section 9, will not be inclined to reason misfortune away, and the painful and irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the world will reveal itself as 'ein Durcheinander verschiedener Welten, z.B. einer göttlichen und einer menschlichen, von denen jede als Individuum im Recht ist, aber als einzelne neben einer andern für ihre Individuation zu leiden hat' (GT 9, KSA 1.70).

Thus in the clash between Prometheus and Zeus, justice or *dikē* is on the side of both of the adversaries. Even Prometheus himself admits that the theft of the fire was a transgression (line 265-7). Prometheus's theft, as the smith Hephaestus points out, 'went beyond what was just [*pera dikes*] (line 30). Consequently, Prometheus must pay the penalty [*diken*] for his transgression. However, Prometheus' theft of fire can also be seen as an act of kindness and generosity. Each side therefore claims the support of *dikē*. Prometheus does not deny that the punishment is justified, but holds that it is too severe, engendering a new injustice. Towards the end of the tragedy he even accuses Zeus of acting without *dike*: 'O holy mother mine, O Sky that circling brings light to all, you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly [*edikia*]' (line 1093).

Focussing on the titanic individual (Prometheus), it becomes apparent that

Bei dem heroischen Drange des Einzelnen ins Allgemeine, bei dem Versuche über den Bann der Individuation hinauszuschreiten und das eine Weltwesen

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<sup>73</sup> Reinhardt, J. *Sophocles*. Frankfurt: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976, p.87.

selbst sein zu wollen, erleidet er an sich den in den Dingen verborgenen Urwiderspruch d.h. er frevelt und leidet (GT 9, KSA 1.70).

In transgressing the limit of individuality, the just boundary determined by Apollo, the ethical deity, the titanic individual suffers not only the consequences of his transgression, but also the painful conclusion that the theft of the fire is both just *and* unjust, and *neither* merely just or unjust. Like the best deconstructivist, Prometheus undermines the limit he is transgressing, and therefore moves at the margins of justice. Aeschylus' interpretation of the Prometheus myth, insofar as it is the study of defiant individualism versus the unchangeable laws of the world, illustrates but does not exhaust the sublime terror of a world whose laws are beyond human comprehension. The double reading of the myth articulates the production of the painful and irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the world, a glance into the inside and terrors of nature.

Nietzsche continues his discussion of *Prometheus Bound* by drawing attention to the limit of the possibilities offered by the 'ethical' deity, Apollo: 'Wer jenen innersten Kern der Prometheussage versteht – nämlich die dem titanisch strebenden Individuum gebotene Nothwendigkeit des Frevels – der muss auch zugleich das Unapollinische dieser pessimistischen Vorstellung empfinden' (GT 9, KSA 1.70), that is to say, how Dionysian, or in Dennis King Keenan's<sup>74</sup> Levinassian terms, how *otherwise than ethical* is the basis for tragedy. Apollo, as Nietzsche reminds us, wants to grant repose to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them and calling upon them through the sacred laws of the world, with his demand for measure and limit. However, there is always a danger of an excess of the Apollinian, leading to intellectual coldness and sterility.

Damit aber bei dieser apollinischen Tendenz die Form nicht zu ägyptischer Steifigkeit und Kälte erstarre, damit nicht unter dem Bemühen, der einzelnen Welle ihre Bahn und ihr Bereich vorzuschreiben, die Bewegung des ganzen Sees ersterbe, zerstörte von Zeit zu Zeit wieder die hohe Fluth des Dionysischen alle jene kleinen Zirkel, in die der einseitig apollinische 'Wille' das Hellenenthum zu bannen suchte. Jene plötzlich anschwellende Fluth des Dionysischen nimmt dann die einzelnen kleinen Wellenberge der Individuen auf ihren Rücken, wie der Bruder des Prometheus, der Titan Atlas, die Erde. Dieser titanische Drang, gleichsam der Atlas aller Einzelnen zu werden und

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<sup>74</sup> Keenan King, D. 'Moving at the margin of justice: Nietzsche's reading of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*'. In: *The Fate of the New Nietzsche*. Ansell-Pearson, K. & Caygill, H. (eds) Aldershot: Avebury 2003.

sie mit breitem Rücken höher und höher, weiter und weiter zu tragen, ist das Gemeinsame zwischen dem Prometheuschen und dem Dionysischen. (GT 9, KSA 1. 70)

The Dionysian always interrupts. It not only transgresses the limit set by the Apollonian, but simultaneously interrupts the limit that allows a transgression to be defined as such. That is, the Dionysian reveals itself not purely as that which is *unjust*, but also as that which reveals the irresolvable undecidability of the ‘unjust’ and the ‘just’. As *Übermass*, the Dionysian *exceeds* the Apollonian demand for justice. However, the Dionysian does not simply oppose the Apollinian; it is not merely *apeiron* or the lack of boundaries. Instead, it proves that any *one* system of justice is never complete, never final, and so never really *just*. The Dionysian interrupts any firm position from which one can make evaluations of justice and injustice, while at the same time refusing to absolve one from the responsibility for making judgments and defining justice.

Tragedy is not simply the restoration of order; it is also the re-establishment of tenable standards according to which human conduct can be measured. Tragedy happens on the edge of a justice game; when a particular system or set of rules is no longer sufficient to provide a sensible framework for dealing with extreme events, tragedy happens, and its resolution is the inscription of a re-defined order. The *Oresteia* is the obvious example. After the dramatic conflicts between Apollo and the Furies, Orestes and the gods, past and present, male and female, old and young, the goddess Athena shows and embodies the breath and depth of the tragic vision of justice. She unites male and female, new and old. Although she is a young goddess and apparently opts for the male, she, unlike Apollo, shows great reverence for the old, and decides in favour of Orestes only when the fate of the *polis* is at stake. Not only does she bring warring parties together under a new order, she also institutes the Aeropagus, a human court, which is henceforth to be the institutionalized defender of justice. (This shift from divine to human justice anticipates the move from tragic to poetic justice that Nietzsche detects in the work of Euripides, which will be discussed in the next chapter.)

Tragedy is only possible in a cosmological order that can accommodate such shifts, and the interconnected cosmos of antiquity was far more flexible in this respect than the separatist cosmology described in the introduction to this chapter. The function of the ancient *ostrakon* was to eliminate those who were trying to be gods, to

be more than human, and who by attempting this feat upset the balance of the *agon* to such an extent that the game could no longer go on. The world can tolerate only so many gods. Even Oedipus, by breaking all the limits of human behaviour, becomes *too* wise, too different for life in Thebes. He has seen too much. But at the same time, after his clash with the divine, the gods disappear (at least explicitly so) and in *Oedipus at Colonus* we see the re-establishment of a *human* order, a space of friendship demarcated by Oedipus and Theseus.

It is of course possible to argue, in a Nietzschean vein, that Oedipus simply continues being a mask for Dionysus, representing the unthinkable wherever he goes, and Theseus, as first citizen of Athens, representing Apollonian reason and law, in this case the law of hospitality. There is no end to the mask on the Greek stage. If this is the case, we could argue that Apollo and Dionysus are *themselves* but Olympian masks for an even older deity, about whom only hints have so far been made. This deity is *Moirai*.

First mentioned by Nietzsche in *GT* 3, *Moirai* personifies the titanic, unknowable indifferent dimension of nature, ‘die titanischen Mächte der Natur, jene über allen Erkenntnissen erbarmungslos thronende *Moirai*’ (KSA 1.35). *Moirai* is a divinity beyond the divine, so indifferent to human life and so abstract in nature that she is very difficult to personify. Yet to think the Greek world without her is impossible. She exists prior to the Apollonian limit, which is a mere human or aesthetic creation. *Moirai* represents the *higher law* of the cosmic *agon* itself; humans may set limits to the *agon* in the theatre or the *agora*, but *Moirai* sets the limit to life itself, determines winners and losers on the battlefield, and even limits the role of Zeus himself. According to the higher law of the cosmic *agon*, both limit and excess, Apollo and Dionysus, are equally justified and equally necessary. *Moirai* personifies the free play of the entire cosmos, a game whose proportions are far beyond mortal comprehension.

Although the notion of the *agon* has been thoroughly examined and debated in recent literature,<sup>75</sup> these discussions have largely occurred in the arena of political

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<sup>75</sup> For example, Connolly, W.E. *Identity/Difference*. Minneapolis, 2002; Schrift, A.D. Nietzsche for Democracy? In Nietzsche-Studien 31, Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2002; and Acampora, C. Demos Agonistes Redux: Reflections on the Strait of Political Agonism. In: Nietzsche-Studien 32, Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003.



philosophy. However, as Siemens points out,<sup>76</sup> Nietzsche did not apply his extensive considerations of the *agon* to democracy specifically, but rather to matters of culture in general. Whereas the preservation of the *agon* is for Hannah Arendt an explicitly political endeavour, for Nietzsche this principle permeates everything, the writing of history and the creation of a flexible metaphysics and aesthetics, not just ethics. Because the *agon* describes the *character* of the world, the operation of justice and the principle that drives aesthetics, it cannot really be described as a new metaphysics. Although agonistic models prove extremely fruitful to political theorists, I argue that agonistic strife is ubiquitous in the Nietzschean *oeuvre*, and operates on aesthetic, metaphysical, epistemological and ethical planes. It cannot be limited to the political, and one would be at a loss trying to explain Nietzsche's conception of impersonal or disinterested justice without it. The concept appears again in the middle period, in *Morgenröte* 130, where Nietzsche explicitly links Moira with the sublime:

Die Griechen nannten diess Reich des Unberechenbaren und der erhabenen ewigen Bornirtheit Moira und stellten es als den Horizont um ihre Götter, über den sie weder hinauswirken, noch sehen können: mit jenem heimlichen Trotz gegen die Götter, welcher bei mehreren Völkern sich vorfindet, in der Gestalt, dass man sie zwar anbetet, aber einen letzten Trumpf gegen sie in der Hand behält, zum Beispiel wenn man als Inder oder Perser sie sich abhängig vom Opfer der Sterblichen denkt, sodass die Sterblichen schlimmsten Falls die Götter hungern und verhungern lassen können (KSA 3. 121).

It is Moira's indifference that necessitates the friendlier masks of Apollo and Dionysus. Moira is the name given to the terrible abyss against which humans have to protect themselves.

Like so many ambivalent concepts in the ancient world, she is sometimes presented as plural and sometimes as singular. Homer speaks of a single Moira, a mysterious power to which even the gods are subject, whose decisions are irrevocable. Other authors presents the concept of fate or eternal cosmic law in plural form, Quintus Smyrnaeus remarks for example that 'to the Moirae (Fates) the might of Zeus must bow; and by the Immortals' purpose all these things had come to pass, or by the Moirae's ordinance' (13.545). The Romans knew the Moirae as the Parcae or Fates. The Moirae were independent goddesses, directing at the helm of necessity and

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<sup>76</sup> Siemens, H. Nietzsche and Agonistic Politics: *A Review of Recent Literature*. In: Nietzsche-Studien 30, Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 2001.

watching that the fate assigned to every being by eternal laws took its course without obstruction. Zeus with all other gods and man had to submit to them. The Moirae assigned to the Erinyes, the powers who inflict punishment for evil deeds, their proper functions, and with them directed fate according to the laws of necessity. The decisions of the Fates cannot be altered, even by the gods. This makes the Moirai both so terrible and so wonderful.

The Moirae were portrayed in art and poetry as stern old women or sombre maidens. These women are often weavers; Clotho, the Spinner, spins the thread of life, Lachesis, the Dispenser of Lots, decides the span and assigns a destiny to each person, and Atropos, the Inexorable, carries the dread shears that cut the thread of life at the appointed time. The Fates apportion to each person at birth a share of good and evil, although people can increase the evil by their own folly. Addressing his old nurse Eurycleia, Odysseus declares that it was the *moira* of the gods, the suitors' own cruelty (*schetlia erga*), that tamed them: 'They maltreated everyone coming near them, whatever his status – and that, and their recklessness, brought them to their end' (*Odyssey* XXII 413-416). *Moirai* literally means 'a man's lot' or 'a man's share', the events that will come his way, good or bad. It is independent of the gods, an impersonal 'fate'. Nietzsche makes the following argument:

Das Wunderbarste an jenem Prometheusgedicht, das seinem Grundgedanken nach der eigentliche Hymnus der Unfrömmigkeit ist, ist aber der tiefe aeschyleische Zug nach Gerechtigkeit: das unermessliche Leid des kühnen 'Einzelnen' auf der einen Seite, und die göttliche Noth, ja Ahnung einer Götterdämmerung auf der andern, die zur Versöhnung, zum metaphysischen Einssein zwingende Macht jener beiden Leidenswelten – dies alles erinnert auf das Stärkste an den Mittelpunkt und Hauptsatz der aeschyleischen Weltbetrachtung, die über Göttern und Menschen die Moira als ewige Gerechtigkeit thronen sieht (GT 9, KSA 1.68).

The profoundly Aeschylean demand for justice necessitates the placement not only of the titanic individual – literally Prometheus, and figuratively the titanic Greek artist for whom he stands – but also of the divine Olympian world on the scales of justice. Justice demands a union of the two worlds in the name of an 'eternal justice' that stretches far beyond both the human world *and* the glittering Olympian veil that hides the dark depths of the world into which man is thrown. What Nietzsche calls 'the very first philosophical problem', the problem of fire, immediately produces a painful and irreconcilable paradox [*einen peinlichen unlösbare Widerspruch*]

between man and god, between the human and divine worlds. Nietzsche views Aeschylean justice as the ultimate justice game. It places the human world, in the form of the tragic individual, in conflict with the divine or Olympic world as a demonstration of the abstract, indifferent and distant principle that governs god and man alike. This justice transcends any human category of 'just' or 'unjust' and is at a level where this very dichotomy becomes almost meaningless:

Das Beste und Höchste, dessen die Menschheit theilhaftig werden kann, erringt sie durch einen Frevel und muss nun wieder seine Folgen dahinnehmen, nämlich die ganze Fluth von Leiden und von Kümernissen mit denen die beleidigten Himmlischen das edel emporstrebende Menschengeschlecht heimsuchen – müssen (GT 9, KSA 1.69).

With this sublime view of the active sin, the ethical basis of tragedy is established: 'die erhabene Ansicht von der activen Sünde als der eigentlich prometheischen Tugend' (*ibid*). Human evil is characterised by its *fruitfulness*. A tree is indeed known by its fruit, and if it is a healthy tree, it will be, if not Promethean, at least Dionysian. What is essential in the just individual is his feeling of increased abundance, of fullness. Like an overflowing cup, insists upon *giving*. But richness is not identical with the positive and the comfortable; Oedipus is richer at Colonus than in Thebes. Only after his suffering does he have wisdom enough to share with Theseus. There are two kinds of suffering. Nietzsche chastises the Romantics for not seizing the potential embedded in suffering, part of the richness of the world:

Jede Kunst, jede Philosophie darf als Heil- und Hülfsmittel im Dienste des wachsenden, kämpfenden Lebens angesehen werden: sie setzen immer Leiden und Leidende voraus. Aber es giebt zweierlei Leidende, einmal die an der Ueberfülle des Lebens Leidenden, welche eine dionysische Kunst wollen und ebenso eine tragische Ansicht und Einsicht in das Leben, – und sodann die an der Verarmung des Lebens Leidenden, die Ruhe, Stille, glattes Meer, Erlösung von sich durch die Kunst und Erkenntniss suchen, oder aber den Rausch, den Krampf, die Betäubung, den Wahnsinn. Dem Doppel-Bedürfnisse der Letzteren entspricht alle Romantik in Künsten und Erkenntnissen, ihnen entsprach (und entspricht) ebenso Schopenhauer als Richard Wagner, um jene berühmtesten und ausdrücklichsten Romantiker zu nennen, welche damals von mir missverstanden wurden – übrigens nicht zu ihrem Nachtheile, wie man mir in aller Billigkeit zugestehn darf. (FW, 370, KSA 3.619).

The greatest tragic truth that the Greeks showed on their stage was the terrible fact that *injustice* is often a more potent feature of human life than justice; it generates, stimulates, says and challenges more – as such, it makes more *world* come into being. Cosmic injustice makes *Übermenschlichkeit* possible.

If anything, it is the excess of *justice*, of a sickly, decadent and, above all, *poetic* sense of justice emanating from humanism and threatening to strangle Europe, which forms the target of the Nietzschean enterprise. This form of justice, has as its central aim the elimination of pain, inequality and misfortune of any possible kind, for the totality of humanity. This form of justice refuses to take the meaning of the classic Latin phrase *suum cuique triburere* seriously. A single action can have innumerable consequences. Excesses in one aspect of life can severely impair the fruitful functioning of the cosmological order, and may require sacrifice later in an unexpected quarter. What is ‘due’ to the individual is simply that which makes him a useful component in keeping the cosmic game going. Nietzschean justice promotes the maximum play of as many forces as the cosmos allows. A moment of justice reigns when the cosmological order has reached its full potential, when it has shown the *power* of the world in the most glorious way possible.

As we have seen, the compassion that spectators initially feel for their finite Apollonian heroes is in reality unreal and phenomenal. It brings the spectators in touch with a deeper reality, the lust which through tragic action can be felt in the identification with boundless Dionysian life. As Nietzsche says, ‘Er schaudert vor den Leiden, die den Helden treffen werden und ahnt doch bei ihnen eine höhere, viel übermächtigere Lust’ (*GT* 22, KSA 1.141). Also,

der Held, die höchste Willenserscheinung, wird zu unserer Lust verneint, weil er doch nur Erscheinung ist, und das ewige Leben des Willens durch seine Vernichtung nicht berührt wird. ‘Wir glauben an das ewige Leben’, so ruft die Tragödie; während die Musik die unmittelbare Idee dieses Lebens ist (*GT* 15, KSA 1. 108).

Individual pain and destruction are thus mere phenomena compared to the reality of supra-individual life. Tragic justice, a unique form of *inhuman* justice, can bear a great deal of violence.

In an earlier note, Nietzsche says, ‘das enge Ziel des Individuums wird geahnt als Mittel eines Weltplans. Seine Vernichtung eine Bürgschaft, daß der Weltplan von

ihm nach seinem Theil gefördert ist' (Aphorism 599, KSA 7.219). Whereas earlier Nietzschean readings tended to emphasize the actions of an active subject forming the world in its own image, poststructuralist readings tend to portray a *post-mortem* self intertwined in a network of forces beyond its control. As in Hegel, the individual fate is justified as part of the all-embracing order of the world. But unlike Hegel, however, Nietzsche does not end here. It will become clear that Nietzsche's self is *not* a surrendered self captured in the twilight zone of ethical passivity, as can be argued is true of the Levinassian post-mortem self. Rather, Nietzsche's is a worldly self whose freedom cannot be captured in stale debates on the (non)existence of the will. It is an *außermoralische* self that exists in a world that defies explanation in moral terms.

A moral interpretation of suffering is one that derives its meaning from the activity of *blaming*. Blaming makes sense only in a moral context, since it is the action of placing the responsibility for an action, or more broadly, for the condition of the world, upon a particular party. Although Nietzsche mainly targets Christianity for its otherworldliness, the utopian is much older. The Stoics were among the first to propose an ideal standard according to which man should live. The standard in the case of the Stoics was of course 'Nature'. But as much as Nietzsche admired the Stoics otherwise, he could not agree with them on this particular point.

Nature is far too measureless or, rather, the gap between the human *métron* and that of nature is too large to allow for practical ethical guidance. From the human perspective, nature is wasteful and indifferent, not *lawless* certainly, but simply operating by laws on a scale far beyond immediate human concerns and comprehension. The Stoics display their own unique version of *hubris* by desiring to live according to Nature. A part, however – for humans are but a part of nature – cannot hope to live by the standard of the whole. Nietzsche cuts them down to size:

'Gemäss der Natur' wollt ihr *leben*? Oh ihr edlen Stoiker, welche Betrügerei der Worte! Denkt euch ein Wesen, wie es die Natur ist, verschwenderisch ohne Maass, gleichgültig ohne Maass, ohne Absichten und Rücksichten, ohne Erbarmen und Gerechtigkeit, fruchtbar und öde und ungewiss zugleich, denkt euch die Indifferenz selbst als Macht – wie *könntet* ihr gemäss dieser Indifferenz leben? Leben – ist das nicht gerade ein Anders-sein-wollen, als diese Natur ist? Ist Leben nicht Abschätzen, Vorziehen, Ungerechtsein, Begrenzt-sein, Different-sein-wollen? Und gesetzt, euer Imperativ 'gemäss der Natur leben' bedeute im Grunde soviel als 'gemäss dem Leben leben' – wie könntet ihr's denn *nicht*? Wozu ein Princip aus dem machen, was ihr selbst seid und sein müsst? – In Wahrheit steht es ganz anders: indem ihr

entzückt den Kanon eures Gesetzes aus der Natur zu lesen vorgebt, wollt ihr etwas Umgekehrtes, ihr wunderlichen Schauspieler und Selbst-Betrüger! Euer Stolz will der Natur, sogar der Natur, eure Moral, euer Ideal vorschreiben und einverleiben, ihr verlangt, dass sie ‘der Stoa gemäss’ Natur sei. (*JGB* 9, KSA 5. 21).

The tendency to read ‘morality’ into nature, however, appears even in Heraclitus, whom the Stoics claim as their predecessor. Nietzsche criticizes him on the same basis as he attacks the Stoics. In a note from 1888 Nietzsche writes:

Seit Plato ist die Philosophie unter der Herrschaft der Moral. Auch bei seinen Vorgängern spielen moralische Interpretationen entscheidend hinein (bei Anaximander das Zu-Grunde gehn aller Dingen als Strafe für ihre Emancipation vom reinen Sein; bei Heraclit die Regelmässigkeit der Erscheinungen als Zeugniss für den sittlichrechtlichen Charakter des gesammten Werdens (Aphorism 11259, *NL*85-87, KSA 12.259).

Nietzsche’s interest in the Greeks is motivated by his career-long attempt to establish a way of thinking about ethics in which blame is no longer be the decisive factor. *Prometheus Bound* in particular, and tragedy in general, show that the world and its events *cannot be justified in moral terms*. Hence the allure of the pre-Socratic tragic world. Consider for example the following extract from Sophocles’ *Trachinae*:

Grief and joy come round to us all, as the Bear comes round in his circling paths (*strophades*). This I say since starry night does not abide with men nor calamity nor wealth (lines 129-133).

Man’s fortune is inserted into the circling of the stars. This is no anthropomorphic ‘wheel of fortune’ read into the stars. The ‘symbolic pattern’ of the stars is the primary bearer of significance, a significance which is not transferred to man but of which man is a constitutive part.

The Bear, in contrast to the anthropomorphic wheel of fortune, is a deep-toned reality, up there for all to see, a living power as were all stars to the Greeks, active in bringing seasons. The Bear’s movement relates prosperity symphonically to adversity, making neighbours of these opposites.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Jones, J. *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*. London: Hamondswheel, 1962, p.175.

The cosmic cycle of generation and destruction is not confined to the destruction of wealth, but refers to the reversal of calamity as well. We are confronted with a world that is frightfully but also liberatingly *removed* from the individual's fate. The movement of the cosmos is one of eternal returning, and human life is part of this movement, even if individual life is ended by the fact of mortality. A day can bring low all human things, and a day can lift them up again (*Ajax* 131-2). In one movement, the eternal return embraces the individual, the family, the polis, the earth and life itself.

The obvious question to raise at this point is whether it is possible for man to move in tune with the cosmic law of generation and destruction. The answer is of course no, because man is at once part of the cosmic order and radically opposed to it. The idea that divine order can be embraced is foreign to this world. It consists of an extended duality: On the one hand, man's movements are in accordance with cosmic law, and on the other, they are inevitably discordant with it. The fundamental problem is that, as the messenger reminds us, man is unable to know the nature of the established ordinances. Therefore he can inadvertently act counter to them and is destroyed in the process. Ironically, in his destruction he fulfils the demands of order. Divine order needs the chaos of boundary transgression in order to fulfil itself. Let us return once more to Sophocles:

But my fate is always circling on the shifting wheel of the god and alters its nature; like the face of the moon is never able to stay for two nights in one shape, but first comes issuing from the dim, and then grows with lovelier face waxing to the full, and when it appears at its comeliest, then forthwith it flows away and comes to nothingness (*medèn*). (*Fragmenta* 871R)

From the divine point of view, the eternal cycle moves through generation and destruction, in perfect divine order. Concrete things, like the moon and man, however, experience no such stability. When they are at the peak of their existence, they come to nothing. In tragedy, we are confronted with the simultaneousness of the divine and mortal points of view, and with the fact that these perspectives are irreconcilable. Only when man stops living is he able to adopt the divine perspective. This fact is among the reasons why, apart from never being born, the best thing is to die soon. What tragedy shows is that nature and man have their boundaries apportioned to them, which as finite things they are unable to stay within. We can only exist if we

partake in the power which has engendered us, if we keep sharing in the *deinotes* which has brought us into existence. Power is doubled then. On the one hand, it is divine, apportioning power, and on the other it is manifest in finite entities. This duality is the source of all tragic conflict. The powers concentrated in the finite entities (the tragic heroes) *prevent* them from accepting the boundaries set to them. A potent cosmos produces potent heroes. But in order for the cosmos to remain potent, heroes who become too great or threaten the established order must be destroyed. As Anaximander puts it, ‘things have to pay for their violations according to cosmic law’.

The significance of Anaximander does not end here, however. The full text of the Anaximander fragment as translated by Nietzsche reads as follows:

Woher die Dinge ihre Entstehung haben, dahin müssen sie auch zu Grunde gehen, nach der Nothwendigkeit; denn sie müssen Buße zahlen und für ihre Ungerechtigkeiten gerichtet werden, gemäß der Ordnung der Zeit (*PHG* KSA 1.818).

The fragment – and it is an open question whether we do justice to the phrase by calling it such – appears to echo the tragic view that there is a fundamental law of equivalence that renders justice possible. It is this law of equivalence that keeps the cosmos *moving*, and by so doing, keeps it alive. In his book on Anaximander, Charles Kahn asks a particularly perceptive question: ‘Did Anaximander envisage an even greater cycle, in which the appearance of this differentiated universe out of the Boundlessness would itself be periodically balanced by the return of all things, including the elements, back into their original source?’<sup>78</sup> Despite Heidegger’s attempt to do so, it is almost impossible to purge the fragment completely of themes of debt, punishment and penalty. This is not a problem, as long as these themes are not interpreted along moralistic lines. The debt in question belongs to the economy of atonement; it is not a moral one and there is no possibility of its final redemption. This means that Anaximander should be read in the same spirit in which (according to Nietzsche) he wrote:

wie der typische Philosoph eben schreiben wird, so lange ihm noch nicht durch befremdende Anforderungen die Unbefangenheit und die Naivetät geraubt sind: in großstilisirter Steinschrift, Satz für Satz Zeuge einer neuen

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<sup>78</sup> Kahn, C. *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*. New York: Columbia University Press 1960, p.185.



Erleuchtung und Ausdruck des Verweilens in erhabenen Contemplationen.  
(*Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* 4, KSA 1.818).

According to Nietzsche, this spirit is that of a pre-metaphysical innocence which refuses to hunt for a single source or cause to which one can ascribe the ‘injustice’ of contingency, tragedy and mortality.

In this context Nietzsche recalls an uneasy Schopenhauerian notion, namely the *harshness* of the gift:

Der rechte Maßstab zur Beurtheilung eines jeden Menschen ist, daß er eigentlich ein Wesen ist, welches gar nicht existiren sollte, sondern sein Dasein abbüßt durch vielgestaltetes Leiden und Tod: was kann man von einem solchen erwarten? Sind wir denn nicht alle zum Tode verurtheilte Sünder? Wir büßen unsre Geburt erstlich durch das Leben und zweitens durch das Sterben ab. (KSA 1. 818)

We can argue that culture as such has its origins in the desire to compensate for the unbidden but nevertheless bestowed gift of life. This gift is ambivalent, at first taken to be a grand example of generosity, but eventually proving to be almost unbearable. Nearly all cultures play out the theme of sacrifice eventually in their history: some literally, like the bloody human sacrifices in the ancient Mayan civilization, others by substitution, like the animal sacrifices of the Jews. Sacrifice is not for Nietzsche a problem if it is employed as a *measuring* or compensatory device – the sacrifice of Iphigenia, brutally unjust as it is, is also a liberating event, since without it the *agon* at Ilium would never have entered the history books, and would not have been immortalized by Homer. Christianity is at fault only for taking this to be a foundational concept: ‘Der christliche Glaube ist von Anbeginn Opferung: Opferung aller Freiheit, alles Stolzes, aller Selbstgewissheit des Geistes; zugleich Verknechtung und Selbst-Verhöhnung, Selbst-Verstümmelung’ (*JGB* 46, KSA 5.66). At the same time, however, Nietzsche constantly evaluates these compensatory strategies, and time after time it is the Greeks who, in his eyes, prove to be the most successful in justifying their own existence. They achieve this by facing the fact that humans are creatures with no real *right* to existence at all. An inability to do this leads to the fostering of a spirit of resentment, of hatred against the world and existence itself. Philosophy hitherto has been unable to deal with the *innocence* of the world, and has been pre-occupied with justifying formulae based upon suffering and punishment. But

explanations like these are always bound to disappoint, and so nihilism necessarily follows.

In a rare explicit moment, Nietzsche repeats this theme of cosmic indifference. The only thing that concerns justice is that the cosmic game and, by implication, life itself continue. Justice does not *carry* the scales, weighing crimes and misdemeanours like the Christian God or Dante's Minos, but in a certain sense *is* the scales themselves, as we see in a passage from *Notebook 5*, summer 1886 – autumn 1887:

Recht entsteht nur da, wo es Verträge giebt; damit es aber Verträge geben kann, muß ein gewisses Gleichgewicht von Macht da sein. Fehlt ein solches Gleichgewicht, stoßen zwei zu verschiedene Macht-Quanten auf einander, so greift das Stärkere über nach dem Schwächeren zu dessen fortgesetzter Schwächung, bis endlich Unterwerfung, Anpassung, Einordnung, Einverleibung eintritt: also mit dem Ende, daß aus Zwei Eins geworden ist. Damit Zwei zwei bleibt, ist wie gesagt ein Gleichgewicht nöthig: und deshalb geht alles Recht auf ein vorangehendes Wägen zurück. Es ist deshalb nicht gut zu heißen – denn es führt irre – wenn man die Gerechtigkeit mit einer Wage in der Hand darstellt: das richtige Gleichniß wäre, die Gerechtigkeit auf einer Wage stehen zu machen dergestalt, daß sie die beiden Schalen im Gleichgewicht hält. Man stellt aber die Gerechtigkeit falsch dar: man legt ihr auch falsche Worte in den Mund. Die Gerechtigkeit spricht nicht: 'jedem das Seine', sondern immer nur '*wie du mir, so ich dir*'. Daß zwei Mächte im Verhältniß zu einander dem rücksichtslosen Willen zur Macht einen Zaum anlegen und sich einander nicht nur als gleich lassen, sondern auch als gleich wollen, das ist der Anfang alles 'guten Willens' auf Erden. Ein Vertrag enthält nämlich nicht nur eine bloße Affirmation in Bezug auf ein bestehendes Quantum von Macht, sondern zugleich auch den Willen, dieses Quantum auf beiden Seiten als etwas Dauerndes zu affirmiren und somit bis zu einem gewissen Grade selbst aufrecht zu erhalten: – darin steckt, wie gesagt, ein Keim von allem 'guten Willen'. (Aphorism 11201, *NL* 85-87, *KSA* 12.221, *my italics*).

This should not be read as a straightforward defence of the law of *talion*. This passage is descriptive, not prescriptive. Unlike other modern lawgivers like Kant, Nietzsche does not demand that every individual take up the position of Justice herself. The law of *talion* that operates on a cosmic scale is a disinterested principle and as such does not flow from a spirit of revenge. Only humans – indeed those who are *too* human – can feel the need for revenge.

In this passage, reminiscent of Deleuze, Nietzsche describes the free play of the forces that make up the will to power. The 'tit for tat' phrase refers to the human inability to isolate an individual element and call it good, since as soon as a certain element threatens the cosmic *agon* by being overprivileged, the world rebalances

itself again. Justice has as her sole interest maintaining that *Gleichgewicht* without which no civilization, indeed no form of life, can flourish. The cosmic game is so complex that no ‘root cause’ or *archē* can be isolated. It is difficult, almost impossible, to live with this kind of madness. From the human perspective, Justice is indeed ‘madness’.

Der Geist der Rache: meine Freunde, das war bisher der Menschen bestes Nachdenken; und wo Leid war, da sollte immer Strafe sein.

‘Strafe nämlich, so heisst sich die Rache selber: mit einem Lügenwort heuchelt sie sich ein gutes Gewissen.

Und weil im Wollenden selber Leid ist, darob dass es nicht zurück wollen kann, – also sollte Wollen selber und alles Leben – Strafe sein!

Und nun wälzte sich Wolke auf Wolke über den Geist: bis endlich der Wahnsinn predigte “Alles vergeht, darum ist Alles Werth zu vergehn!”

“Und diess ist selber Gerechtigkeit, jenes Gesetz der Zeit, dass sie ihre Kinder fressen muss”: also predigte der Wahnsinn (Z II: 20, KSA 4.180).

Every attempt to demarcate a field of human justice that will at least be in *proportion* to limited human life fails when confronted by this distant, ultimate law, laconically captured in the French proverb ‘Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse’. Philosophy, as we have seen in the introduction, is a unique compensatory strategy in an unjust world. But sometimes only madness can answer questions on which philosophy remains mute. Madness is the only response possible to the debt initiated by the first attempt to locate the *archē*. For no redemption from the condition of universal indebtedness is possible, unless by the death or destruction of the tragic debtor. When Euripides lost his sense of divine madness and started to produce tragic *discourse* instead of tragedy, a dangerous, final illusion entered on the Greek stage, namely the possibility of reconciling cosmic justice with human justice. Naturally, dialectic and the hope for obtaining ‘truth’ followed, and in the wake of the *failure* of this enterprise, cynicism and eventually *ressentiment* followed.

## 6. A Final Detour through the Ancient World

But the anti-tragic ethic does not emanate from Hellenic reason alone. Before we turn to the death of the tragic consciousness in chapter 2, let us briefly consider the other great source of inspiration for what we today call the Western mind. The experience of violence, death and suffering may be universal, but the voicing of the experience of

horror beyond human control in tragic terms is not. The tragic vision of man is distinctly Hellenic. It is alien to the other major source of Western intellectual life, namely the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The history of Israel is long and complex, but the Jewish vision of the world is not a tragic one, the book of Job notwithstanding. This black fable, which stands on the periphery of the Judaic tradition, is always cited as an instance of tragic vision, yet it ends on an optimistic note:

So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses.

Even if the positive resolution of Job's tragedy was added to the original story by a later hand, this does not outweigh the fact that an orthodox hand had to assert the claims of justice against those of tragedy before the book was included in the sacred canon. God makes good the disaster wreaked upon the servant, who has been compensated for his agonies.

But where there is compensation for injustice, there is justice, not tragedy. According to George Steiner in *The Death of Tragedy*<sup>79</sup> this sense for justice is the pride of the Judaic tradition. Even when Job protests against the suffering of the innocent, God answers by 'pulling rank', saying, for example, 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?' (*Job* 38:4). Jehovah may not be as playful as Zeus, but He is just, even in His fury. The balance of reward or retribution seems frightfully out of kilter, and the proceedings of God can be almost unendurably slow, but over time, there can be no doubt that God stands in a fundamentally just relationship to man. This also affects the style of the Jewish writers:

Im jüdischen 'alten Testament', dem Buche von der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit, giebt es Menschen, Dinge und Reden in einem so grossen Stile, dass das griechische und indische Schriftenthum ihm nichts zur Seite zu stellen hat (*JGB* 52).

Not only does God and his noblest creatures, his chosen ones, stand in a just relationship with each other, but the ways of God are also 'rational'. The Judaic spirit is almost as vehement as Plato in maintaining the order of the universe and man's

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<sup>79</sup> Steiner, G. *The Death of Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

place in it are accessible to reason. The ways of the Lord can be neither absurd nor wanton, and they can be apprehended when the Lord's commands are followed. In this respect, Marxism retains something Jewish in its insistence on Justice and Reason. Marx thoroughly repudiates the notion of tragedy. 'Necessity', he states, 'is blind only insofar it is not understood'.<sup>80</sup> Tragedy, however, arises from precisely the *opposite* assertion; necessity is blind and incomprehensible and can rob man of his eyes, be it in Thebes (Oedipus) or Gaza. There is a crucial distinction between the Fall of the City in the *Iliad* and the destruction of Jericho or Jerusalem. These latter disasters are merely passing instants in the rational design of God's plan. The city's walls will rise again either on earth or in heaven, when the souls of men are restored to grace. Nietzsche appreciates this vision:

Im jüdischen "alten Testament", dem Buche von der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit, giebt es Menschen, Dinge und Reden in einem so grossen Stile, dass das griechische und indische Schriftenthum ihm nichts zur Seite zu stellen hat. Man steht mit Schrecken und Ehrfurcht vor diesen ungeheuren Überbleibseln dessen, was der Mensch einstmals war, und wird dabei über das alte Asien und sein vorgeschobenes Halbinselchen Europa, das durchaus gegen Asien den 'Fortschritt des Menschen' bedeuten möchte, seine traurigen Gedanken haben. Freilich: wer selbst nur ein dünnes zahmes Hausthier ist und nur Hausthier-Bedürfnisse kennt (gleich unsren Gebildeten von heute, die Christen des 'ebildeten' Christenthums hinzugenommen – ), der hat unter jenen Ruinen weder sich zu verwundern, noch gar sich zu betrüben – der Geschmack am alten Testament ist ein Prüfstein in Hinsicht auf 'Gross' und Klein' –: vielleicht, dass er das neue Testament, das Buch von der Gnade, immer noch eher nach seinem Herzen findet (in ihm ist viel von dem rechten zärtlichen dumpfen Betbrüder- und Kleinen-Seelen-Geruch). Dieses neue Testament, eine Art Rokoko des Geschmacks in jedem Betrachte, mit dem alten Testament zu Einem Buche zusammengeleimt zu haben, als 'Bibel', als 'das Buch an sich': das ist vielleicht die grösste Verwegenheit und 'Sünde wider den Geist' welche das litterarische Europa auf dem Gewissen hat. (*JGB* 52, KSA 5.72).

The fall of Troy remains the first tragic metaphor in Western literature. Its fall is final because it is brought about by fierce godly sport and the wanton, mysterious choice of destiny. The Greeks do of course make attempts to throw the light of reason upon the shadowlands that man inhabits. Fate is given a name, and the gods are brought down to human level. But the Homeric warrior knows that he can neither comprehend nor control destiny. Ajax is destroyed for a mere breach of military etiquette. Patroclus,

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted by Steiner, G, in *The Death of Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Achilles and his noble adversary Hector are slain, while the vile Thersites sails safely for home. Calls for justice are met by the mute clamour of the sea.

The modes in which the histories of the respective traditions are recorded also differ. The wars of the Old Testament are not tragic. The Israelites will carry the day if they have observed God's will and ordinance. They will be destroyed if they have broken the divine covenant or if their kings have fallen into idolatry. By contrast, the Peloponnesian wars are tragic. Behind them are fatal misjudgements, obscure fatalities and divine withdrawal, for which neither tragedian nor historian can offer a truly satisfactory account. The word of the prophet or priest nearly always disappoints. The tragic poets assert that the forces that shape or destroy destiny lie outside the governance of reason or justice. Even worse, though, are the demonic energies that prey upon the soul from the outside, turn reason into madness and poison human judgement so that even righteous men wreak havoc upon themselves and those they love. Homeric man knew that virtue is no guarantee of divine protection. The valiant Hector knows in his *phren* ('soul') that the gods have abandoned him (*Iliad* 13: 55). Or to put in terms of the tragic design drawn by Thucydides, Eteocles knows that he will perish at the seventh gate of Thebes, but continues nevertheless.

We are already past the care of gods.  
For them our death is the admirable offering.  
Why then delay, fawning upon our doom?

Nietzsche is no mere preserver. But for a world that deserves the name of justice, it is necessary to preserve *something* of this spirit. To be just is not merely to be active or passive, but to be *tragic*. But if Nietzsche is to be believed, Euripides and Socrates poisoned Justice by trying to be *too* just. However, like Eros, she did not die, but persisted in some degenerate form.

## CHAPTER 2: THE FAILURE OF ART

*I may assert eternal Providence  
And justify the ways of God to Men.  
John Milton *Paradise Lost* I.22  
Malt does more than Milton can  
To justify God's ways to Man.  
A. E. Houseman *Bredon Hill*  
There they call me by another name.  
Aslan in *The Last Battle* by C. S. Lewis.  
The time is out of joint.  
Hamlet, I.ii. 188.*

### 1. From Sublime to Poetic Justice

‘Art itself’, writes Joseph Conrad in his most Nietzschean vein, ‘may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible world’.<sup>81</sup> But when art fails at this, the result is metaphysics. Metaphysics is the graveyard of art that has forgotten to be art, taking its own ossified concepts for granted and denying the long process of formation behind its current usage.

An apt rejoinder to Conrad would be that it takes the highest kind of art to render the highest kind of justice in a world filled with misery and pain. The only form of art equal to the task is, as we have seen, tragic art. If Heidegger traced the remains of metaphysics in Nietzsche, Nietzsche traced its beginnings to Euripides.

Tragic art is more than just Apollo, or Apollo understood as the principle of intelligibility. And so was the principle of justice as it unfolded itself in pre-Euripidean drama. In contrast to Hannah Arendt, Nietzsche protests against the traditional translation of *drāma* as action. Ancient drama, Nietzsche notes in *The Case of Wagner*, cared far more about great scenes of *pathos* than about action. The word *drām* or *dran*, as it appears in some forms, is of Doric origin, and means either ‘event’ or ‘history’, both words in the hieratic sense. The oldest dramas always presented the legend of a region, the sacred history of a cult, and had connotations of ‘immersion’. In other words, the oldest dramas referred to a ‘happening’ rather than a deed, to the experience of being overcome rather than the act of overcoming.

Tragic art could only survive as long as it was understood in this way and did not attempt to clarify, rationalize or explain. It eventually did make this attempt, of

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<sup>81</sup> Graham Greene, *Collected Essays*. London: Botley Head, 1969.

course, and as art came down in the world, so did justice. Tragedy became dialectic, and sublime or cosmological justice became *poetic*, regrettably not in the Heideggerian sense of the word.

Nietzsche illustrates this antithesis in his famous contrast between Dionysus and the Crucified. The latter embodies the universalist moral law of always refraining from harming others, along with the redemptive promise that the present world is imperfect and temporary, a stage rehearsal for the better one following just beyond. This is a future-orientated solution which justifies suffering in terms of its role as a means to a higher and less painful end-state which is not yet present. The older solution, embodied by Dionysus, maintains that suffering is justified simply because it is a necessary aspect of the world. If the present world is to be valued just as it is, then suffering must also be seen in a fundamentally positive light. In what can be regarded as the more extended version of his ‘final’ remark from *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes the following:

Dionysos gegen den ‘Gekreuzigten’: da habt ihr den Gegensatz. Es ist nicht eine Differenz hinsichtlich des Martyriums,– nur hat dasselbe einen anderen Sinn. Das Leben selbst, seine ewige Fruchtbarkeit und Wiederkehr bedingt die Qual, die Zerstörung, den Willen zur Vernichtung...im anderen Fall gilt das Leiden, der ‘Gekreuzigte als der Unschuldige’, als Einwand gegen dieses Leben, als Formel seiner Verurtheilung. Man erräth: das Problem ist das vom Sinn des Leidens: ob ein christlicher Sinn, ob ein tragischer Sinn... Im ersten Falle soll es der Weg sein zu einem seligen Sein, im letzteren gilt das Sein als selig genug, um ein Ungeheures von Leid noch zu rechtfertigen. Der tragische Mensch bejaht noch das herbste Leiden: er ist stark, voll, vergöttlichend genug dazu. Der christliche verneint noch das glücklichste Los auf Erden: er ist schwach, arm, enterbt genug, um in jeder Form noch am Leben zu leiden... der Gott am Kreuz ist ein Fluch auf Leben, ein Fingerzeig, sich von ihm zu erlösen der in Stücke geschnittene Dionysos ist eine Verheißung ins Leben: es wird ewig wieder geboren und aus der Zerstörung heimkommen. (Aphorism 12242, KSA 13. 265).

With this, Nietzsche refuses any reach towards the transcendent. In contrast to the Christian and especially the utopian tradition (the word quite correctly denotes ‘no place’), Nietzsche thinks of the fundamental law of life not in terms of self-preservation, but as a process of enhancing life, of self-overcoming and enhancing power. As we shall see, this notion informs both his morality, an extra-moral thinking beyond good and evil, and his politics, which flows from his affirmation of a ‘grand totality of the whole’ with the ultimate aim of creating the most potent culture through



the richest individuals. Through his affirmation of the whole, Nietzsche invites us to think of life beyond the metaphysical absolutes of fixed moral ideas or absolute moral judgement. *Die Geburt der Tragödie* represents an immature expression of a philosophy of art which is subsequently reformulated in various ways, yet always guided by the recurrent theme of preserving both scepticism and a belief in normativity, ‘die Lehre vom Gesetz im Werden und vom Spiel in der Nothwendigkeit’ (PGH 8, KSA 1.835).

Under the Nietzschean gaze the world of political and moral institutions is presented as a sphere of necessary illusion, a kind of self-composition of collective life, which, in order to come into being at all, must symbolize itself, ritualize and subordinate itself to values. This forms the Apollonian backbone of culture. In contrast to the Kantian position, Nietzsche’s view sees the normative sphere of laws, morals, mores and conventions flow from life’s compulsion towards art, not from the autonomy of a universal law of morals or *Sitten*. In order to appear valid, it merely adopts the guise of universality and autonomy. To succumb completely to the Dionysian, to remain immersed is to lose all individuation, all will and remembrance of personal ends, and to be swallowed in an oblivion that destroys all action. Apollo must give form and measure (*peras*) and become the ground for differentiation and individuation, because the possibility of difference is not a cosmic given: difference rests upon Art, not Nature. As we shall see in chapter three, this plays an important role in Nietzsche’s conception of interpretation.

According to Peter Sloterdijk,<sup>82</sup> the Apollonian signifies nothing other than the necessity of imprinting upon the amorphous, chaotic compulsion of Dionysian forces a controlling form, which is ruled by the laws of moderation, individuality and self-limitation. The Enlightenment dream of justice belongs here, a dream of homeostasis or equilibrium born out of unbearably unjust conditions. But homeostasis is always bound to fail: if the Apollonian force of transfiguration subdues the Dionysian life foundation of pleasure and pain, this primitive vigour always rises again. Nietzsche writes the following of the Dionysian form of deification:

Unter dem Zauber des Dionysischen schließt sich nicht nur der Bund zwischen Mensch und Mensch wieder zusammen: auch die entfremdete,

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<sup>82</sup> Sloterdijk, P. *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche’s Materialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.81.

feindliche oder unterjochte Natur feiert wieder ihr Versöhnungsfest mit ihrem verlorenen Sohne, dem Menschen. Freiwillig beut die Erde ihre Gaben, und friedfertig nahen die Raubthiere der Felsen und der Wüste. Mit Blumen und Kränzen ist der Wagen des Dionysos überschüttet: unter seinem Joche schreiten Panther und Tiger. Man verwandele das Beethoven'sche Jubellied der "Freude" in ein Gemälde und bleibe mit seiner Einbildungskraft nicht zurück, wenn die Millionen schauervoll in den Staub sinken: so kann man sich dem Dionysischen nähern. Jetzt ist der Slave freier Mann, jetzt zerbrechen alle die starren, feindseligen Abgrenzungen, die Noth, Willkür oder 'freche Mode' zwischen den Menschen festgesetzt haben. Jetzt, bei dem Evangelium der Weltenharmonie, fühlt sich Jeder mit seinem Nächsten nicht nur vereinigt, versöhnt, verschmolzen, sondern eins, als ob der Schleier der Maja zerrissen wäre und nur noch in Fetzen vor dem geheimnissvollen Ur-Einen herumflatterte (*GT 1, KSA 1.30*).

Tragedy arises from the spirit of music, from the tragic chorus, to be precise. The original chorus is a satyr-chorus, composed of votaries of Dionysus, reminders of the original primordial force that leads back to 'nature'. The chorus of natural beings embodies the 'metaphysical consolation' that every tragedy leaves behind, that life, at its base, despite all changes of appearance, is indestructibly powerful and pleasurable. Later, this metaphysical consolation proper to tragic culture is similarly characterized as the recognition of 'der metaphysische Trost, dass unter dem Wirbel der Erscheinungen das ewige Leben unzerstörbar weiterfließt' (*GT 18, KSA 1.115*). As we have seen, the tragic joy in the destruction of the individual can only be understood 'from the spirit of music' which expresses 'das ewige Leben jenseits aller Erscheinung' (*GT 16, KSA 1.108*). The eternal life is untouched by the life or death of the hero, the highest appearance of the will. Tragedy affirms belief in eternal life, though life in its immense totality rather than necessarily the life of the individual, and music is the ultimate expression of this idea. Music affirms ceaseless change as eternally creative:

'Wir glauben an das ewige Leben', so ruft die Tragödie; während die Musik die unmittelbare Idee dieses Lebens ist. Ein ganz verschiednes Ziel hat die Kunst des Plastikers: hier überwindet Apollo das Leiden des Individuums durch die leuchtende Verherrlichung der Ewigkeit der Erscheinung, hier siegt die Schönheit über das dem Leben inhärende Leiden, der Schmerz wird in einem gewissen Sinne aus den Zügen der Natur hinweggelogen. In der dionysischen Kunst und in deren tragischer Symbolik redet uns dieselbe Natur mit ihrer wahren, unverstellten Stimme an: Seid wie ich bin! Unter dem unaufhörlichen Wechsel der Erscheinungen die ewig schöpferische, ewig zum Dasein zwingende, an diesem Erscheinungswechsel sich ewig befriedigende Urmutter!' (*GT 16, KSA 1.108*).

The ‘spirit of music’ that animates tragedy is the ‘greed for existence’ and the accompanying pleasure in existence that animates primordial being itself. Under the spell of such artwork we are united with an *immeasurable*, primordial pleasure in existence and at one with the indestructibility and eternity of this pleasure: ‘wir werden von dem wüthenden Stachel dieser Qualen in dem selben Augenblicke durchbohrt, wo wir gleichsam mit der unermesslichen URLust am Dasein eingeworden sind und wo wir die Unzerstörbarkeit und Ewigkeit dieser Lust in Dionysischer Entzückung ahnen’ (GT 17, KSA 1.109). However, even in music, the most Dionysian of the arts there has to be something which remains stable, namely the score. Similarly, even in a work of a typically Apollonian type of art like sculpture, there has to be something that changes. If sculpture were not subject to change, and therefore purely Apollonian, it would have to remain the same forever – like a Platonic form. However, due to the change in the world – due to Dionysus – even every sculpture has to fade away eventually. But is music indeed the most flowing of the arts? Poetry could also be considered as permanently flowing and changing because it too needs to be read or performed, just as music needs to be played. However, what makes music slightly more Dionysian is that music uses tones, whereas poetry is made out of words, and words have a higher degree of order and of abstraction than tones. The higher the degree of abstraction, the closer something is to the *principio individuationis* which is opposed to the Dionysian unity. Therefore, music is a more Dionysian type of art than poetry, and there is no other type of art which is more Dionysian than *musikē*.

The fact that the contradiction and pain which is present in the original Dionysian unity is very skillfully employed by proper music is the second reason why Nietzsche links music with Dionysus. Dissonances that are painful to the human ear represent contradictions with respect to the tonal system, in the same way as consonances correspond to the tonal system. The dissonances Nietzsche had in mind were the ones from the prelude to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* that was first performed in Munich in 1865. This prelude is one of the most decisive pieces for the development of 20th century music. At this point in the history of composition, the process of the dissolution of tonality is at a crucial stage, and it would eventually lead to the compositional order of Schönberg. Since with this piece Wagner distances himself from the principle of the tonal order, and embraces the dissonances, and Nietzsche regards Wagner’s music – at this stage at least – as the highest kind of

music, Nietzsche has good reasons for linking proper music to Dionysus. But that is not all. Dissonance plays as important a role as harmony in justifying the world:

Musik und tragischer Mythos sind in gleicher Weise Ausdruck der dionysischen Befähigung eines Volkes und von einander untrennbar. Beide entstammen einem Kunstbereiche, das jenseits des Apollinischen liegt; beide verklären eine Region, in deren Lustaccorden die Dissonanz eben so wie das schreckliche Weltbild reizvoll verklingt; beide spielen mit dem Stachel der Unlust, ihren überaus mächtigen Zauberkünsten vertrauend; beide rechtfertigen durch dieses Spiel die Existenz selbst der 'schlechtesten Welt' (GT 25, KSA 1.154).

Here the concept of the sublime proves useful. The tragic is a privileged locus of understanding, where the usual categories of knowledge are pushed to their limits and then revealed for what they are, namely schematic forms of representation. In Schiller, Kant and Schopenhauer this knowledge can be disclosed only when the sensory aspects of human existence are stretched to the limit, usually through the inability of the imagination to provide an intuition adequate to the specific concept. All three thinkers reveal an aspect that exceeds sensuous finitude, an aspect that exceeds the phenomenal world. This seems to offer a solution to Schiller and Schopenhauer: Schiller, of course sees art as both reconstructing the divided and alienated subject of modernity and functioning as the medium through which man can express his freedom. Perhaps more importantly for our purpose, Schopenhauer sees art as a matter of coming to terms with the meaningless suffering at the heart of all phenomenal existence. Assiduously avoiding the Christian impulse to impose meaning upon suffering, for example through the concept of original sin, Schopenhauer empties the concept of the sublime of the kind of Enlightenment moralizing one still finds in Schiller and Kant. These two thinkers were of course important in raising the sublime above mere affectivity, but Schopenhauer occupies a pivotal position as mediator between the Romantics and idealism on the one hand and Nietzsche on the other. For Schopenhauer, aesthetic experience, and the sublime in particular, produces a state of insight into the illusionary nature of the phenomenal world dominated by the principle of sufficient reason or *principium individuationis* and the will to live. Aesthetic experience reveals the autonomous self for what it is, a self-objectification of the Will and not much besides. For Schopenhauer 'the individual is only phenomenon, exists only for knowledge involved in the principle of

sufficient reason'.<sup>83</sup> The dissolution of individuality that occurs in aesthetic contemplation, where through the dynamic sublime one can savour the prospect of one's own distinction, shows that the fear of suffering and death are illusionary too, since death is merely a reversal to one's own true, subjectless state. Contrary to Kant and Schiller, Schopenhauer shows sublimity as presenting the spectator with an actual threat to his continued existence: 'With the sublime, the state of pure knowing is obtained first of all by a violent and conscious tearing away from the relations of the same object to the will which are recognized as unfavorable, by a free exaltation'.<sup>84</sup> This state of pure knowledge can be obtained either through the dynamic sublime (being confronted by a hostile spectacle) or the mathematical sublime (something truly great).

Like Schiller, Schopenhauer sees tragedy as the genre that best demonstrates the sublime as the mimesis of human catastrophe. In Schopenhauer's scheme this is an epiphenomenon of the Will itself in its blind, purposeless striving. 'Tragedy is the description of the terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind... It is the antagonism of the Will with itself'.<sup>85</sup> The insidious wickedness, the depths of misery which are the objects of tragic mimesis serve for Schopenhauer to tear away at the veil of Maya, to expose the deceptive truth of the principle of individuation: 'the motives that were previously so powerful now lose their force, and instead of them, complete knowledge of the real nature of the world, acting as a quieter of the will, produces resignation, the giving up not merely of life, but of the will-to-live itself'.<sup>86</sup> This is why, importantly, it is for Schopenhauer impossible to demand poetic justice. To demand this is to restrict oneself to the concerns of the phenomenal world, to assume that the individual soul of the tragic hero deserves justice. Tragedy renders such claims obsolete. Schopenhauer is keen to eliminate any notion of the self as substance, thereby engendering the ultimate paradox of tragedy that gives consolation to the spectator by providing the dissolution of the ego in the form of a grand spectacle. In the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer moves on to a more idealist form of the sublime without the moral undertones still present in Kant and Schiller. In the section

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<sup>83</sup> Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Vol I, New York: Dover, 1958, p. 275.

<sup>84</sup> Schopenhauer, A, *ibid.* p. 202.

<sup>85</sup> Schopenhauer, A, *ibid.* p. 252.

<sup>86</sup> Schopenhauer, A, *ibid.* p. 253.

on poetry in this volume, he remarks that it is precisely in this way that ‘we become aware that there is still left in us something different that we cannot possibly know positively, only negatively, as that which does not will life’.<sup>87</sup> Whereas the concept of the sublime had hitherto involved moments of negation as well as affirmation, Schopenhauer now rejects any form of affirmation of the subject, including a dialectical form. Nietzsche’s *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is an attempt to answer both the naïve metaphysics of the tradition emanating from Kant, Schiller and Burke, and the nihilism of Schopenhauer.

Even the most conservative reading of Nietzsche will reveal a modified concept of the sublime. Such claims for its action as revealing the real ‘essence’ of the world, tearing asunder the veil of Maya, or disclosing the immortal super-sensuous self have no place in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*; ‘sie riecht anstössig Hegelisch’ (*EH*, ‘die Geburt der Tragödie’, 1 KSA 6.318). Already in the early text, there is a refusal to accept any metaphysical notions of essence or distinctions between essence and appearance, essential or existential. Even this offensively Hegelian world is one where individuals are caught in a snare of representations, a semiotic universe with no intrinsic meaningfulness to be discovered once an imaginary veil is ripped off. For the veil is all that there is. This realization is apparent in *GT 7*, where Nietzsche shows through the myth of Silenius that the truth of existence cannot be conveyed directly, but has to be mediated in the form of a myth, as the Dionysian Hamlet also knew: ‘In diesem Sinne hat der dionysische Mensch Aehnlichkeit mit Hamlet: beide haben einmal einen wahren Blick in das Wesen der Dinge gethan, sie haben erkannt, und es eckelt sie zu handeln; denn ihre Handlung kann nichts am ewigen Wesen der Dinge ändern, sie empfinden es als lächerlich oder schmachvoll, dass ihnen zugemuthet wird, die Welt, die aus den Fugen ist, wieder einzurichten’ (*GT 7*, KSA 1.57).

The sublime in Nietzsche is clearly not a means of overcoming the limitation of human embodiment through the disclosure of a metaphysical super-sensuous truth underlying all phenomenal existence. The function of the sublime is to dispel the aura of representation. Like Dionysus, Apollo too, is capable of embodying his own particular kind of abundance, the abundance of the surface.

Um dies zu begreifen, müssen wir jenes kunstvolle Gebäude der apollinischen Cultur gleichsam Stein um Stein abtragen, bis wir die Fundamente erblicken,

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<sup>87</sup> Schopenhauer, A. *The World as Will and Representation*. New York: Dover Vol II, 1958, p. 433.

auf die es begründet ist. Hier gewahren wir nun zuerst die herrlichen olympischen Göttergestalten, die auf den Giebeln dieses Gebäudes stehen, und deren Thaten in weithin leuchtenden Reliefs dargestellt seine Friese zieren. Wer, mit einer anderen Religion im Herzen, an diese Olympier herantritt und nun nach sittlicher Höhe, ja Heiligkeit, nach unleiblicher Vergeistigung, nach erbarmungsvollen Liebesblicken bei ihnen sucht, der wird unmuthig und enttäuscht ihnen bald den Rücken kehren müssen. Hier erinnert nichts an Askese, Geistigkeit und Pflicht: hier redet nur ein üppiges, ja triumphirendes Dasein zu uns, in dem alles Vorhandene vergöttlicht ist, gleichviel ob es gut oder böse ist. Und so mag der Beschauer recht betroffen vor diesem phantastischen Ueberschwang des Lebens stehn, um sich zu fragen, mit welchem Zaubertrank im Leibe diese übermüthigen Menschen das Leben genossen haben mögen, dass, wohin sie sehen, Helena, das ‘in süsser Sinnlichkeit schwebende’ Idealbild ihrer eignen Existenz, ihnen entgegenlacht. (GT 3, KSA 1. 35).

In ‘Genesis and Genealogy’<sup>88</sup> the deconstructivist critic Paul de Man attacks the Platonic paradox he detects in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. At the heart of the essay is the Apollo-Dionysos opposition and the rhetoric Nietzsche employs to illustrate this contrast. Nietzsche supposedly brings a ‘negative valorisation’ to the Apollonian category of representation, but at the same time employs Apollonian rhetoric in order to make present the Dionysian insight that purportedly *exceeds* Apollonian representation in prose. According to de Man, the authority with which Nietzsche writes about tragedy clashes with his claim that textual representation is a form of illusion. If this problem seems familiar, it is because it echoes the Platonic conundrum of having to employ aesthetic devices such as dramatic monologue and metaphor in order to make clear his objections against the arts. Neither Nietzsche nor the early Plato wrote in the treatise style favoured by most philosophers. In fact, Plato borrowed from the stage at least as much as Nietzsche borrows from the poets. Both found it necessary to use a form of writing that has literary merits in order to convey philosophical ideas.

But then, Nietzsche already describes a historical phenomenon, gone forever, and is fully aware that he can but describe an ancient illusion with the aid of a modern one. Against Paul de Man it is possible to argue that the purpose of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is precisely to make a case for accepting that being, the world, existence, reality, truth, or whatever metaphysical epithet one chooses – even justice – can never appear *as such*. It is the refusal to come to terms with this onto-theological condition

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<sup>88</sup> De Man, P. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, pp.79-102.

that lies at the heart of the metaphysical project and its *need* for justice. Apollo's true function, then, is measure and illusion, not illumination. The term 'Apollonian' has two meanings, neither of which refers to undiluted 'representation'. The first gestures to the impulse to construct meaning, the second to a kind of false naturalization of the human activity of representing. In this sense, representation fails to acknowledge its status as such, masquerading as reality instead. Because there is ultimately nothing to represent, every representation is a *misrepresentation*. What is more, unless he stands forever locked in creative tension with Dionysus in a dialogue that never ends, Apollo loses his stimulating power and becomes merely theoretical. The sublime becomes merely representational. Nietzsche's complaint is that his culture was both too Dionysian and too Apollonian because the link between them had been severed. Dionysus without Apollo becomes romantic, baroque and eventually chaotic; Apollo without Dionysus loses his divine power of illusion and becomes the penetrating gaze of theory. According to Nietzsche, modern Apollo can no longer be associated either with life-enhancing illusion or with aesthetic form, but should rather be regarded as the light of theoretical learning seeking to open up every single domain of human experience, trying to create order through *nous* or understanding. Undiluted Apollonianism in this sense is irredeemably hostile to art. The philosophical expression of this hostility is Platonism. 'Plato almost always speaks only ironically of the creative force of the poet, insofar it is not conscious insight'. For Nietzsche, conscious insight is not the poet's *forte*. On the contrary, poetry demands that the poet become 'unconscious and bereft of understanding' (*GT* 12). It is no accident that the first poet, Homer, is traditionally depicted as being blind.

## 2. The Abdicated Playwright

*First of all, you (Euripides) dress your kings in rags to  
make them piteous to the people.*

Aristophanes, *Ranae*

*Reason can wrestle terror, and overthrow it at last.*

Euripides

The honour of formally expressing the change that effected the death of tragedy belongs to Euripides of course, who, with a few stylistic changes and a carefully introduced scepticism, changed the face of tragedy and the public conception of



cosmic justice forever. While Aeschylus and Sophocles also weighed the gods and found them wanting, Euripides destroyed his contemporaries' ability to be cheerful and creative in the face of cosmic indifference. Before Euripides, Greek theatre knew only *actors*, and distinguished only between those on the stage and those in the audience. Those in the audience may not have had speaking roles, but through the use of music and poetic rhythm they were drawn into the play until they experienced a loss of self similar to that engrossing the enraptured actors. Even the role between the creative artist and her audience broke down: 'jetzt ist er zugleich Subject und Object, zugleich Dichter, Schauspieler und Zuschauer' (*GT* 5, KSA 1.47).

This is why tragedy cannot be thought of without music. As mentioned above, tragedy arose out of the tragic chorus of satyrs, votaries of Dionysus, remainders of an originary, primordial nature. This chorus of 'natural beings' embodies the 'metaphysical comfort' every tragedy leaves behind – that life is at bottom, despite appearances to the contrary, powerful and an infinite source of joy. Nietzsche characterizes the metaphysical comfort proper to tragedy as the recognition that 'beneath the whirl of appearances eternal life flows on indestructibly'. The tragic joy in the destruction of the individual can only be understood from the 'spirit of music' which expresses eternal life beyond all appearance and despite all destruction. The eternal life is untouched by the destruction of the hero, the highest expression of the will. Tragedy affirms belief in eternal life while music is the 'immediate' idea of this life. Music affirms ceaseless change as the 'eternally creative'. The spirit of music that animates tragedy is 'the greed for existence and pleasure in existence that animates the primordial being itself. Under the spell of this art we are united with the immeasurable, primordial pleasure in existence' and imitate the *indestructibility* and eternity of pleasure. As such, it is an affirmation of the sublime totality of being: without purpose, *sans raison*.

It appears, however that man cannot bear the distance of the gods for very long, and if bowdlerization was the answer to Shakespeare's indifferent boyish divinities ('Like flies to wanton boys we are/They swat us as they please'), it was not long before even the robust, playful Greeks found it harder and harder to live in a beautiful but bewildering and ultimately unjust world. Eventually, even they began to *demand* justice.

Man vergegenwärtige sich nur die Konsequenzen der sokratischen Sätze: ‘Tugend ist Wissen; es wird nur gesündigt aus Unwissenheit; der Tugendhafte ist der Glückliche’: in diesen drei Grundformen des Optimismus liegt der Tod der Tragödie. Denn jetzt muss der tugendhafte Held Dialektiker sein, jetzt muss zwischen Tugend und Wissen, Glaube und Moral ein notwendiger sichtbarer Verband sein, jetzt ist die transscendentale Gerechtigkeitslösung des Aeschylus zu dem flachen und frechen Princip der ‘*poetischen Gerechtigkeit*’ mit seinem üblichen *deus ex machina* erniedrigt. (GT 16, KSA 1.95, my emphasis).

Tragedy was killed by the two villains Euripides and Socrates, and they almost finished Justice off as well. She, like Eros, was given poison to drink, and like him, did not die of it, but remained living in a certain *reduced* way, first by becoming poetic and comprehensible and second, as we shall see in the next chapter, by becoming moral.

Writing in 1712, the critic John Dennis complains of Shakespeare’s tragedies that

the good and the bad perish promiscuously... there can be none or very weak instruction in them: for such promiscuous events call the government of providence into question, and by skeptics (*sic*) and libertines are resolved into chance.<sup>89</sup>

Dennis defends here what has come to be called ‘poetic justice’, a clear separation of the goats and the sheep, a comfortable system in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished (and are easily distinguished from each other). If this is not exactly what Fiction means, it is what Justice should be. Samuel Johnson, writing about the death of Cordelia at the end of *King Lear*, holds that ‘since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded that the observation of justice makes a play worse’.<sup>90</sup>

This ‘English’ morality (which is of course not limited to the English) is the apotheosis of a long developed anti-worldly ethos that bluntly refuses to acknowledge the gap between human experience and the independent operation of the world, the world as a realm distinct from and indifferent to the human subject, which realm

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<sup>89</sup> Dennis, J. quoted by Poole, A. in *Tragedy: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 117.

<sup>90</sup> Boswell, J. *Life of Johnson*. G. Birbeck Hills (ed.) London: Dent’s Everyman’s Library Vol. 5, p. 36. Small wonder that Nahum Tate’s bowdlerized version, which ends with Cordelia living and happily married to Edgar, held the English stage almost until the end of the nineteenth century.

Nietzsche re-thinks as the eternal recurrence. There is a certain small-mindedness, characteristic of the humanist subject at his most petty, to the notion that the world was made to *fit* man and that it is merely a question of bringing man into harmony with a given worldly order.

Denn jetzt muss der tugendhafte Held Dialektiker sein, jetzt muss zwischen Tugend und Wissen, Glaube und Moral ein nothwendiger sichtbarer Verband sein, jetzt ist die transscendentale Gerechtigkeitslösung des Aeschylus zu dem flachen und frechen Princip der ‘poetischen Gerechtigkeit’ mit seinem Üblichen *deus ex machina* erniedrigt. (*Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie*, KSA 1. 632).

Furthermore, these humanists tend to forget that it is their own participation in the world that makes experience of a *world* possible, the ‘Fiktion einer Welt, welche unseren Wünschen entspricht, psychologische Kunstgriffe und Interpretationen, um alles, was wir ehren und als angenehm empfinden, mit dieser wahren Welt zu verknüpfen’ (Aphorism 11393, NL 85-88 KSA 12.366). Already in his lectures at Basel on Greek tragedy in 1870, Nietzsche contends that the justice of even Sophocles and Aeschylus is poetic and consequently has nothing to do with their tragedy. Later, in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, as we have seen, Nietzsche maintains that Aeschylus’s eternal or transcendental justice represents one of the most important features of the zenith of Greek tragedy, which Nietzsche explicitly dissociates from ‘dem flachen und frechen Princip der ‘poetischen Gerechtigkeit’ (*GT* 14, KSA 1.95) which accompany the moralistic interpretation of tragic art.

As Stevens<sup>91</sup> comments, however, it is not at this stage of Nietzsche’s career all that easy to distinguish between Aeschylean justice and retributive or punitive justice according to which a figure like Prometheus, for example, is seen to have been punished for stealing from the gods. *Poetische Gerechtigkeit*, after all, is sometimes called *ausgleichende Gerechtigkeit*, which is also the commonly accepted version of Aristotle’s *justitia commutativa*. Although Prometheus’ crime is excess, which is more of an aesthetic transgression than a moral crime, it would still be possible to read his crime of theft in moral terms.

Later, in *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* (1876), Nietzsche is better equipped to employ the Heraclitian worldview in an a-moralistic,

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<sup>91</sup> Stevens, J. *Nietzsche and Heidegger on Justice and Truth*. In: *Nietzsche Studien* Band 16 1987, Berlin: W. de Gruyter, p. 235.

artistic metaphors. The concept of eternal justice is here clearly the struggle of conflicting *Urqualitäten* which are all eternally justified, and every victory and every defeat equally *gerechtfertigt* in innocent cosmic play. Let us briefly restate the notion of eternal or cosmological justice with a succinct quote from this text:

Ein Werden und Vergehen, ein Bauen und Zerstören, ohne jede moralische Zurechnung, in ewig gleicher Unschuld, hat in dieser Welt allein das Spiel des Künstlers und des Kindes. Und so, wie das Kind und der Künstler spielt, spielt das ewig lebendige Feuer, baut auf und zerstört, in Unschuld – und dieses Spiel spielt der Aeon mit sich. Sich verwandelnd in Wasser und Erde thürmt er, wie ein Kind Sandhaufen am Meere, thürmt auf und zertrümmert; von Zeit zu Zeit fängt er das Spiel von Neuem an.

.....

So schaut nur der ästhetische Mensch die Welt an, der an dem Künstler und an dem Entstehen des Kunstwerks erfahren hat, wie der Streit der Vielheit doch in sich Gesetz und Recht tragen kann, wie der Künstler beschaulich über und wirkend in dem Kunstwerk steht, wie Nothwendigkeit und Spiel, Widerstreit und Harmonie sich zur Zeugung des Kunstwerkes paaren müssen (*PHG 7*, KSA 1.831).

If the modern world is plagued by nihilism, this is because the modern subject attempts to measure the world according to categories that refer to an entirely fictitious world, and insist upon treating this as final truth. The problem is not measuring the world according to fictitious standards, for nothing else is possible, but rather that man has hitherto failed to take advantage of this fact. Not only has he failed to recognize the enormous potential that a perspectivist existence offers to the truly creative human, but he has also insisted upon restricting experience to *one* fictitious interpretation. Adding insult to injury is the modernist tendency (epitomized by Johnson) to read even fiction, the last domain of freedom, according to the rigid, fossilized standards of a bourgeois morality without ever acknowledging the creative element or the history involved in establishing what he calls ‘justice’. The will to truth and the desire for a ‘safe’ moral system are thieves that rob man of ‘der ganzen wundervollen Ungewissheit und Vieldeutigkeit des Daseins’ (*FW 2*, KSA 3.373) which allow the possibility of new creation. Nietzsche’s genealogies expose a subject too frightened within the flux of becoming to create, hopelessly dependent upon the will to truth.

Der Mensch sucht ‘die Wahrheit’: eine Welt, die nicht sich widerspricht, nicht täuscht, nicht wechselt, eine wahre Welt – eine Welt, in der man nicht

leidet: Widerspruch, Täuschung, Wechsel – Ursachen des Leidens! Er zweifelt nicht, daß es eine Welt, wie sie sein soll, giebt; er möchte zu ihr sich den Weg suchen.

[...]

Was für eine Art Menschen reflektirt so? Eine unproductive leidende Art; eine lebensmüde Art. Dächten wir uns die entgegengesetzte Art Mensch, so hätte sie den Glauben an das Seiende nicht nöthig: mehr noch, sie würde es verachten, als todt, langweilig, indifferent. Der Glaube, daß die Welt, die sein sollte, ist, wirklich existirt, ist ein Glaube der Unproduktiven, die nicht eine Welt schaffen wollen, wie sie sein soll. Sie setzen sie als vorhanden, sie suchen nach Mitteln und Wegen, um zu ihr zu gelangen. – ‘Wille zu Wahrheit’ – als Ohnmacht des Willens zum Schaffen (Aphorism 11391, *NL* 85-87, KSA 12.365).

In Nietzsche’s opinion, the fatal error was the introduction of reason and dialectics which distorted Justice; like tragedy, this ancient lady came down in the world, first in the sense of losing a privileged position, of becoming ordinary, and second, in becoming part of the human world, as something that can be discovered, attained and captured in human law. Poetic justice, which is ordinarily taken to be the ‘purest’ kind of justice, the version of justice that aims to give everyone *exactly* what he deserves, is very dangerous, for it implies that the world can be measured by human measures and controlled by human power. In Heideggerian terms, it is thinking of Being purely in terms of beings, and the human being at that. Poetic justice is already the denial of perspective and the beginning of faith in metaphysics, for it implies an underlying order, a hidden standard with which the world has to be brought into accord.

Nun steht freilich neben dieser vereinzeltten Erkenntniss, als einem Excess der Ehrlichkeit, wenn nicht des Uebermuthes, eine tief sinnige Wahnvorstellung, welche zuerst in der Person des Sokrates zur Welt kam, jener unerschütterliche Glaube, dass das Denken, an dem Leitfaden der Causalität, bis in die tiefsten Abgründe des Seins reiche, und dass das Denken das Sein nicht nur zu erkennen, sondern sogar zu *corrigiren* im Stande sei (*GT* 15, KSA 1.99).

Until genealogy arrived on the philosophical scene, philosophers have secretly regarded themselves as code-breakers rather than creators, and their task as uncovering the elusive rational order beneath all chaos. Finding the blueprint to life would naturally enable us to finally control the uncontrollable, and that, of course, is bourgeois or slave heaven:

In allem Ernste: die Unschuld der Denker hat etwas Rührendes und Ehrfurcht Einflössendes, welche ihnen erlaubt, sich auch heute noch vor das Bewusstsein hinzustellen, mit der Bitte, dass es ihnen ehrliche Antworten gebe: zum Beispiel ob es 'real' sei, und warum es eigentlich die äussere Welt sich so entschlossen vom Halse halte, und was dergleichen Fragen mehr sind. Der Glaube an 'unmittelbare Gewissheiten' ist eine moralische Naivetät, welche uns Philosophen Ehre macht: aber – wir sollen nun einmal nicht 'nur moralische' Menschen sein! (*JGB* 34, KSA 5.52).

This is why Nietzsche in several places calls hope the most dangerous virtue. Hope takes away the necessity for real courage and reduces justice and along with it the scope and magnitude of the world. The stage is set for the second step, the arrival of Christianity, which knows only charity, not justice. Aphorism 934, KSA 7.402, reads:

[...] agon vielleicht das 'Wägen'. Der Wagen und die Wage ist doch wohl von gleichem Stamme? Der Neid ist viel stärker bei den Griechen ausgeprägt: Plato, Pindar. Der Begriff der Gerechtigkeit viel wichtiger als bei uns: das Christenthum kennt ja keine Gerechtigkeit.

According to Nietzsche, Euripides carved out an identity as the last tragic poet, the poet who questioned the justification of the justifying Dionysian myth under whose auspices he began his career:

Euripides selbst hat am Abend seines Lebens die Frage nach dem Werth und der Bedeutung dieser Tendenz in einem Mythos seinen Zeitgenossen auf das Nachdrücklichste vorgelegt. Darf überhaupt das Dionysische bestehn? Ist es nicht mit Gewalt aus dem hellenischen Boden auszurotten? (*GT* 12, KSA 1.82).

Euripides, unlike Aeschylus and Sophocles, never held a political or religious office nor took part in a military operation as an Athenian soldier. He was far more detached from public life, and this had a decided influence on the more domestic as well as the pessimistic nature of his work. Whereas Sophocles<sup>92</sup>, even during the crises during the final stages of the Peloponnesian War, never lost faith in either Athens or its sense of justice, Euripides suffuses his later work with pessimism.

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<sup>92</sup> Although Sophocles gives a hint of scepticism in his *Philoctetes*, he left a lasting memorial to his native city in the form of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

For Euripides, the old tragic gods are too far removed from human cares, and their standard of measuring human virtue and vice inhuman. From now on they would be *human*, or not exist at all. The world of Aeschylus and Sophocles was a world that only made sense to heroes, who were often regarded as half-divine due to their ability to play a game according to rules set by divinities. These playwrights catered for an audience who could live with the blatant injustices of the world. Euripides shifts the subject matter of tragedy away from the exalted heroic theme of the wisdom of reconciling oneself to incomprehensibility and the inability of mortals to understand the grandeur and indifference of eternal cosmic law, and accepting this fact as a necessary precondition for a flourishing artistic culture. Instead he turns to topics seated within the comfort of the human framework; commonplace civil affairs and the mishaps and common entanglements of ordinary citizens. Homeric heroes are brought *down*: ‘Odysseus, der typische Hellene der älteren Kunst, sank jetzt unter den Händen der neueren Dichter zur Figur des Graeculus herab, der von jetzt ab als gutmüthig-verschmitzter Haussclave im Mittelpunkte des dramatischen Interesses steht’ (GT 11, KSA 1.76). And so too, are Sophoclean ones. The superhuman status of Sophocles’ Heracles in *The Trachinian Women* predisposes the audience to be indifferent to his suffering; his Euripidean counterpart, by contrast, is portrayed from the outset as a ‘family man’, not an aloof, superhuman demigod. If anything, Euripides’ Heracles lacks *sōphrōsyne*; he is one of antiquity’s most emotional and loquacious heroes:

Come children, follow your father into the house. You are happier now to be going in than you were when you first came out, aren’t you? But take courage, and don’t let those tears fall from your eyes any longer. Dear wife, pull yourself together, stop trembling, and let go of my robes, all of you! For I have no wings and do not wish to flee from those whom I love. Ha! They will not let me go, but cling more tightly to my clothes! You really were on a razor’s edge, weren’t you, little ones? Well, I’ll take these little boats myself and lead them by the hand. Like a big ship I’ll tow them. I’ll not neglect my children. The affairs of mortals are the same in this respect: everyone, no matter what his standing, loves his child. In wealth, it is true, people are different: some have it, others do not. Yet they all love their children (lines 622-633).

In the highly entertaining verbal exchange between Euripides and Aeschylus in Act II of Aristophanes’ *The Frogs*, the populist Euripides accuses Aeschylus of writing ‘great galumphing phrases, fearsome things with crests and shaggy eyebrows. Magnificent! Nobody knew what they meant, of course’. Aeschylus ‘goes in for high-

flowing Olympian language, instead of talking like a human being'. Tragedy, Euripides complains, was in a terrible state when he inherited it, 'swollen' with high diction. It was he who got her weight down, putting her on a diet of finely chopped logic and a special decoction of dialectics. Everyone in his plays is always hard at work, talking. In an almost Brechtian fashion, he boasts that the public have learnt from him to think and question, 'Why is this so? What do we mean by this?' Dionysus, who is in on the quarrel, sardonically and with withering bathos concurs that no Athenian can come home these days without asking, 'What do you mean by biting the head of that sprat?', or, 'Where is yesterday's garlic?'

The dramas of Euripides are overrun by Everymen. Instead of portraying the grand and bold traits of tragic heroes, he depicts ordinary humans with that 'peinliche Treue, die auch die mislungenen Linien der Natur gewissenhaft wiedergiebt' (GT 11, KSA 1.76). His taste for the mundane triumphs over the taste for the rare; Euripides is already *democratic* in the worst possible sense of the word. Interest in the infinite variety of human corruption replaces fascination with human perfectability. In Nietzsche's interpretation, Euripides' dramas address the daily concerns of the common citizen and endorse the value of her business, public affairs and lack of pretension to cultivation.

The *Ion* can stand as typical example. The story is similar to that of *Oedipus Rex*. Creusa, daughter of the Athenian king Erechtheus, is seduced by Apollo. She becomes pregnant and conceals the pregnancy from her father. Soon after giving birth to her son she exposes him in the same cave in which he was conceived. Thinking that the child is doomed, she placed next to him, as a burial gift, the jewellery of the Erechtheids. But, as Hermes recounts, Apollo instructs him to take the little boy to the temple of Delphi, where he is raised by the Pythia. Years later Creusa, now having married a respectable Athenian, is reconciled with Ion, with Athena appearing as a *deus ex machina* to corroborate her story.

The figure of Apollo has puzzled many interpreters. Did Euripides intend to depict a god without 'character' whose conduct is as reprehensible as any human's? The debate continues. But whatever the purpose of Euripides' ungodly gods, they made the New Comedy possible: 'und wenn jetzt überhaupt noch von 'griechischer Heiterkeit' die Rede sein darf, so ist es die Heiterkeit des Slaven, der nichts Schweres zu verantworten, nichts Grosses zu erstreben, nichts Vergangenes oder Zukünftiges höher zu schätzen weiss als das Gegenwärtige' (GT 11, KSA 1.78). In his



1983 lectures on *parrhesia*<sup>93</sup>, Michel Foucault detects something similar. In *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles depicts the shift in responsibility for truth-telling from the gods to human beings, but he meets both groups halfway, allowing the two parties to share the burden. Sophocles' slaves must confirm a truth that Apollo has already spoken. Euripides' *Ion*, by contrast, places the responsibility for truth-telling firmly in the hands of the Athenian citizens. Although the goddess Athena confirms Creusa's story, the representative of divinity is Apollo, who is discredited as a rapist, liar and coward.<sup>94</sup> This tragedy no longer depicts a powerful human being who is punished for failing to heed the truth spoken by a god; instead Ion becomes a victim because a guilty god fails to speak the truth: *Dieu, j'accuse*.

The expanded horizon that Euripides' tragedy helped to bring about results in a drastic narrowing of a sense of human nobility. Even without formal knowledge of Nietzsche's views on the three great tragedians of antiquity, it is possible to experience something similar to Nietzsche's 'metaphysical joy' in the progressive annihilation of great characters like Clytemmestra, Prometheus and the Orestes of the *Oresteia*:

Die metaphysische Freude am Tragischen ist eine Uebersetzung der instinctiv unbewussten dionysischen Weisheit in die Sprache des Bildes: der Held, die höchste Willenserscheinung, wird zu unserer Lust verneint, weil er doch nur Erscheinung ist, und das ewige Leben des Willens durch seine Vernichtung nicht berührt wird. 'Wir glauben an das ewige Leben', so ruft die Tragödie; während die Musik die unmittelbare Idee dieses Lebens ist (GT 16, 1.108).

In the *Oresteia* in particular, a tension is discernable between the annihilation of individuals and the assertion of an abysmal, indestructible cosmic order which encompasses human life. At the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the audience perceives and feels the truth that the hero in *Oedipus Colonus* (line 393) discovers about himself: 'Just when I am no longer, am I then a man?' As Oedipus reaches the abyss of human nothingness he asserts that authentic human existence lies in the human ability to experience that abyss *in vivo*. Because of this experience, a strange confidence arises in Oedipus, a genuine cheerfulness.

There is nothing of this sort in Euripides. His tragedies demonstrate a life that is brutal to mortals and gods, who if they exist, only make matters worse. Apollo is a

<sup>93</sup> Foucault, M. *Fearless Speech*. (edited by Pearson, J.) New York: Semiotext(e), 2001.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

seducer who fails in his paternal duties (*Ion*) and makes inhuman demands (*Alcestis*). Hera and Aphrodite in their jealousy leave destruction of mortals in their wake (*Heracles*; *Hyppolytus*) and Zeus ignores the woes of the vanquished (*Hecuba*). Figures like these were ripe for Platonic censure.

Therefore, Nietzsche argues, if the gods were to survive *pace* Euripides, it would be in humanized, i.e. *moral* terms. Martha Nussbaum writes that for a Greek to attend one of Euripides' plays was for him to 'engage in a communal process of inquiry, reflection and feeling with respect to important civic and personal ends'.<sup>95</sup> Euripides not only makes his deities almost unnecessary, but also far closer to human types than the grand deities of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Euripidean tragedy can be described as a domestication of the gods; the playwright *demand*s their descent from Olympus to the *polis*. God became man centuries before Christ, according to Nietzsche. Euripides, he says, could no longer bear the distance between gods and men that made tragedy possible. All the gods begin to share in Hermes' status; at best they are messengers representing new principles of clarity and fairness, often introducing a play in the form of a prologue, and at worst, they are superfluous.

The one god who remains in Euripides' work is Socrates, the personification of the theoretical man. He influenced Euripides such that, according to Nietzsche, Euripides no longer just created tragedies unconsciously as Aeschylus did but rather dedicated himself to the analytic *study* of tragedy before he wrote his own tragedies. He had to understand what the older tragedians were doing, to be conscious of the order of the tragedies and from this develop a tragic blueprint which he could follow. In this sense, Euripidean tragedies are Socratic. According to Socrates, the virtuous man needs knowledge to be virtuous and, according to Nietzsche, Euripides applies an analogous principle to his tragedies. Something has to be understandable to be beautiful, and existence comprehensible in order to be justified:

[...]und deshalb ist das Bild des sterbenden Sokrates als des durch Wissen und Gründe der Todesfurcht enthobenen Menschen das Wappenschild, das über dem Eingangsthor der Wissenschaft einen Jeden an deren Bestimmung erinnert, nämlich das Dasein als begreiflich und damit als gerechtfertigt erscheinen zu machen (GT 15, KSA 1.99).

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<sup>95</sup> Nussbaum, M. *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 79.

Nietzsche refers to this attitude as ‘aesthetic Socratism’, Euripides’ desire to establish Apollonian beauty by means of Socratic reason. Before Euripides, tragedy was always linked to insight into the Dionysian original unity. Euripides brought about the death of tragedy because proper tragedy needs a Dionysian grounding, that is, it has to be based on the insight that the world is self-contradictory, that it is permanently changing, and that in the end humans do not receive any further reward for all the pain they have to bear during their lives. All these aspects are absent from Euripidean tragedies. Euripides replaces the great synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus with a collaboration between Apollo and Socrates, through which the Socratic element masters Apollo’s illusions. This Socratic-Alexandrian culture, according to Nietzsche, reigned unchallenged until the nineteenth century, revealing itself for example in the importance of typical traditional operas before Wagner.

According to Foucault<sup>96</sup>, Euripides is the first to use the word *parrhesia*. In his work it does not denote ‘free speech’ in the modern liberal sense of the word so much as the attitude or mode that a speaker is supposed to adopt when speaking the truth, that is, a temporary abandoning of deliberate ambiguity and irony. In his *Orestes*, Foucault contrasts the ‘good’ *parrhesia* of the honest citizen with the bad *parrhesia* of the demagogue.<sup>97</sup> The first significant modification of the political construal of this term can be found in Plato’s representation of the Socratic dialectic. Instead of opposing human truth-telling to divine truth-telling or, as in the case of the *Ion*, the lack thereof, or opposing political wisdom to political flattery, as in the *Orestes*, Socrates opposes the philosophical quest for truth to the false rhetoric of the Sophists. In tracing the genealogy of these practices from the Hellenistic period to early Christianity and beyond, Foucault implicitly reworks Nietzsche’s idea that the modern practices of truth seeking have their roots in Euripides and Socrates.

The point is not that the theoretical attitude towards the world is not born out of an artistic drive. Rather, Nietzsche holds that the artistic drive behind the theoretical impulse is weak and impotent, a withered and dry leaf growing upon what was once life’s golden tree. This is because Euripides and Socrates refused their status as *artists* and failed to make the most of their artistic possibilities. The question of justice is ultimately one of becoming the most that one can be, which is what it means to be faithful to the will to power.

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<sup>96</sup> Foucault, *ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>97</sup> Foucault, *ibid.* p. 74.

By avoiding life's harshness, by glossing it over with the weak illusion of poetic justice, Euripides begins to raise the inhumane hope for a justice to come (but might never arrive), a purified world stripped of its negativity. Art is now truly beyond the world, and art that is not part of the world anymore can no longer reconcile humanity to the world. Tragedy in this form *is* corrupting. In a remarkable and often ignored section of *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, Nietzsche wonders whether Plato may not have had a point after all, when he charged that

man durch die Tragödie insgesamt ängstlicher und rührseliger werde. Der tragische Dichter selbst würde dann nothwendig eine düstere, furchtvolle Weltbetrachtung und eine weiche, reizbare, thränensüchtige Seele bekommen, desgleichen würde es zu Plato's Meinung stimmen, wenn die tragischen Dichter und ebenso die ganzen Stadtgemeinden, welche sich besonders an ihnen ergötzen, zu immer grösserer Maass- und Zügellosigkeit ausarten (*MA* 212), *KSA* 2.173).

Nietzsche sides even more decisively with Plato in *Morgenröte*, suggesting that the philosophers in the age of Plato had good reason to complain of the harmfulness of tragedy once the Athenians had lost the 'warrior hardness' of the age of Aeschelus and had become 'soft' and 'sensitive' as a consequence of the refinements of urbanization, and presumably, democratization:

Ein Zeitalter voller Gefahren, wie das eben beginnende, in welchem die Tapferkeit und Männlichkeit im Preise steigen, wird vielleicht allmählich die Seelen wieder so hart machen, dass tragische Dichter ihnen noth thun: einstweilen aber waren diese ein Wenig überflüssig, – um das mildeste Wort zu gebrauchen. – So kommt vielleicht auch für die Musik noch einmal das bessere Zeitalter (gewiss wird es das böserere sein!), darin, wenn die Künstler sich mit ihr an streng persönliche, in sich harte, vom dunklen Ernste eigener Leidenschaft beherrschte Menschen zu wenden haben: aber was soll die Musik diesen heutigen allzubeweglichen, unausgewachsenen, halbpersönlichen, neugierigen und nach Allem lüsternen Seelchen des verschwindenden Zeitalters? (*M* 172, *KSA* 3.152).

A world so receptive of the chaos beyond its borders is a world neither capable of producing, nor able to appreciate the potential of tragedy. This is when art becomes decadent and fails to fulfill its primary function, which is to demarcate and justify.

*Die Ernährung des modernen Menschen.* – Er versteht Vieles, ja fast Alles zu verdauen, – es ist seine Art Ehrgeiz: aber er würde höherer Ordnung sein,

wenn er diess gerade nicht verstünde; *homo pamphagus* ist nicht die feinste Species. Wir leben zwischen einer Vergangenheit, die einen verrückteren und eigensinnigeren Geschmack hatte, als wir, und einer Zukunft, die vielleicht einen gewählteren haben wird, – wir leben zu sehr in der Mitte (*M* 171, *KSA* 3.152).

This is an instance of reactive nihilism, the pessimism of the weak, those who cling to the ideal of a transcendent unchanging truth and who condemn all existence for failing to meet that expectation. The sense of mourning at the loss of such certain truths is accompanied by the conviction of the worthlessness of all existence, since it cannot be justified by some authority. This *ressentiment* can express itself in a variety of ways, even in the work of those characterized by superabundance, such as the Romantics and Epicurus:

Das Verlangen nach Zerstörung, Wechsel, Werden kann der Ausdruck der übervollen, zukunftschwangeren Kraft sein (mein terminus ist dafür, wie man weiss, das Wort ‘dionysisch’), aber es kann auch der Hass des Missrathenen, Entbehrenden, Schlechtweggekommenen sein, der zerstört, zerstören muss, weil ihn das Bestehende, ja alles Bestehn, alles Sein selbst empört und aufreizt – man sehe sich, um diesen Affekt zu verstehn, unsre Anarchisten aus der Nähe an (*FW* 370, *KSA* 3.622).

Although he does not explicitly mention him, the same could be said for Euripides. There is a tendency in reactive nihilism to turn its energies against cultural order and tradition – Nietzsche regarded the anarchist movement as a contemporary example. As early as 1873 Nietzsche criticized ‘Bakunin der im Haß gegen die Gegenwart, die Geschichte und die Vergangenheit vernichten will. Nun wäre um alle Vergangenheit zu tilgen freilich nöthig, die Menschen zu vertilgen: aber er will nur die bisherige Bildung, das ganze geistige Weiterleben, vernichten’ (Aphorism 1414, *KSA* 7.26). This form of confusion is often accompanied by extreme self-absorption, with the emphasis on ‘introspection at any price’. This self-absorption as we shall see in chapter four, is an integral part of the birth of asceticism that he outlines in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. It is a dangerous cultural phenomenon because it represents a turning of energies, specifically the will to power, against themselves, rather than directing them outwards in a nobler fashion. Above all, it is a form of neurosis that signifies the inability to bear pain, the root of the *need* for justice.

### 3. Plato's trauma and the problem of Socrates

'However, I believe Plato was sick'.

Plato in *Phaedo* 59b10.

It is possible to summarize Nietzsche's lifelong engagement with Plato and Socrates with a single word: *disappointment* – that Socrates' 'ear infection' or his *daemon* (*MA* I: 126) did not make him sing, and that Plato abandoned his role as tragic lawgiver and became the scribe of a dialectician. Both could have been so much *more* if Socrates could sing and Plato had courage. Socrates' death in 399 B.C. would single-handedly end tragedy in its ancient form forever (although it was already ailing for a long time) That Athens could condemn her wisest, noblest and most just citizen to the hemlock, was enough to make Plato despair of worldly justice. *Fortuna, j'accuse*. Henceforth he would describe the domain of worldly virtue in terms of shadow, darkness and confusion and advise those looking for wisdom to search for it in the bright heavens of the Eternal Ideas. The watered-down version of tragedy after Euripides could at this stage no longer truly reconcile man to the fragility of his existence. The gods, once able to shield man from the terrors of his existence, and act as grand vehicles for expressing the sheer *gratitude* towards existence, were no longer enough.

Das, was an der Religiosität der alten Griechen staunen macht, ist die unbändige Fülle von Dankbarkeit, welche sie ausströmt: – es ist eine sehr vornehme Art Mensch, welche so vor der Natur und vor dem Leben steht! – Später, als der Pöbel in Griechenland zum Übergewicht kommt, überwuchert die Furcht auch in der Religion; und das Christenthum. Bereitetet sich vor (*JGB* 49, KSA 5.70).

According to Martha Nussbaum,<sup>98</sup> the main motivation for Plato's philosophical project is to achieve release from the contingencies of Fortune. Plato sought to articulate a self-sufficient and abiding sense of human worth immune from the vagaries<sup>99</sup> of chance and change, or to paraphrase Nussbaum, he wanted a goodness without fragility. The appeal of this project to the Athenians should be obvious. After

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<sup>98</sup> Nussbaum, M. *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

<sup>99</sup> The very word 'vagary' has a negative connotation. It comes from the Latin *vagarus*, from which the English 'vagabond' derives, i.e. someone who disrupts the established order of things with hostile acts.

the disastrous outcome of the Peloponnesian War, the generation in which the *Republic* was written was one in which the thoroughness and discipline of Sparta prevailed. Critias, leader of the defeated Athenian oligarchy, advocated the abandonment of democracy on the score of its inefficiency during war, and secretly lauded the aristocratic government of Sparta. Critias was a pupil of Socrates and an uncle of Plato, and it is likely that he impressed upon the young Plato the importance of devotion to duty and the difference the right *skill* could bring to the outcome of conflict, be it military or rhetorical. Not long before the Academy was opened, a professional soldier, Iphicrates, had astonished the world by showing what a body of light-armed, professionally trained troops could do even against the heavy infantry of Sparta. Professional oratory started at roughly the same time with the school of Isocrates. What Plato rightly perceived is that the question of training is much more than a military or rhetorical issue: behind the need to train lies the question of what to teach and what to train men to do. The striking thing in Plato is the coupling of training with investigation, or professional standards of skill with scientific standards of knowledge. The basis for locating the locus of value unaffected by the ways of the world is the security of reason and the eradication of all that is subject to the fleetingness of human desire. The most important strategy in Plato's endeavor consists of establishing a series of distinctions such as soul/body, material/immaterial, eternal/changing, appearance/reality, thereby inaugurating the 'Grundglaube der Metaphysiker', *der Glaube an die Gegensätze der Werthe* (JGB 2, KSA 5.16). By thinking ultimate reality in oppositional terms, the metaphysical tradition hopes to define a space in which all that is worthwhile about being human is insulated from the caprice<sup>100</sup> of Fortune. This space should be no means with confused with the healthy, robust *innocence* that characterizes the tragic outlook. Whereas the comfort zone of morality selects only the features of life that it finds acceptable and deems them real, tragic art reconciles man to what Abbé d'Aubignac called the domain of the domain of disorder and anxiety: 'c'est là où règnent le désordre et l'inquiétude'. The old world of action and glory was of course precariously balanced upon the knife-edge of Fortune, and as Charles Taylor states, 'Plato's work should be seen as an important contribution to a long-developing process whereby an ethic of reason and reflection

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<sup>100</sup> Even the word 'caprice' has tragic associations: it is related to the Italian *capra* 'goat' – the goat, in contrast to the sheep being the 'uncontrollable' animal – hence the name 'tragedy' or goatsong.

gains dominance over one of action'.<sup>101</sup> But first Plato had to domesticate the unruly old gods of polytheistic Athens. To this end, Plato devised an ultimate standard that could be imposed upon the time-bound changeable world from a point beyond all time and change – and beyond all pain. Against the shining Olympian pantheon Plato introduced the notion of a 'theological god' in the *Republic* (379a). This god is an attempt to transcend all tensions and potential for conflict and contradiction inherent in Greek polytheism, for the sake of a unitary principle of meaning and measurement. Against the Nietzschean charge that his 'cure' for the fragility of mortal life constitutes a nihilistic withdrawal from the world, destroying the very thing it sought to conserve, Plato would reply that a firm sense of reality was maintained precisely by liberating human perceptions from the constraints of appearance. Genuine reality (*to ontos on*) is only that constituted by changelessness and order. The appearance of things, characterized by change is a deceit, and real reality is apprehended only in as much as one is able to see beyond the appearance of things.

Nietzsche's criticism of the philosophical tradition of Judeo-Christianity – philosophy half-dead at the top – is not limited to its teleology and anti-worldly character. For Nietzsche it is impossible to separate style and content: to develop a new style is to justify the world entirely. Again, one could reiterate Nietzsche's attitude towards the Platonic/Socratic dialogue: he was *disappointed* that it was not more dramatic. He complains first of all that the dialectic is rude trickery:

Mit Sokrates schlägt der griechische Geschmack zu Gunsten der Dialektik um: was geschieht da eigentlich? Vor Allem wird damit ein vornehmer Geschmack besiegt; der Pöbel kommt mit der Dialektik obenauf. Vor Sokrates lehnte man in der guten Gesellschaft die dialektischen Manieren ab: sie galten als schlechte Manieren, sie stellten bloss. Man warnte die Jugend vor ihnen (*GD* 6, KSA 6.69).

Dialectics possesses no robust illusionary capacity and is merely a weapon that enables the weak and the silly to triumph over their superiors.

Auch misstraute man allem solchen Präsentiren seiner Gründe. Honnette Dinge tragen, wie honnette Menschen, ihre Gründe nicht so in der Hand. Es ist unanständig, alle fünf Finger zeigen. Was sich erst beweisen lassen muss, ist wenig werth. Überall, wo noch die Autorität zur guten Sitte gehört, wo man nicht 'begründet', sondern befiehlt, ist der Dialektiker eine Art

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<sup>101</sup> Taylor, C. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 117.



Hanswurst: man lacht über ihn, man nimmt ihn nicht ernst. – Sokrates war der Hanswurst, der sich ernst nehmen machte: was geschah da eigentlich? – (*GD* 6, KSA 6.70).

Dialectic is demonstration by conquest, Socrates a sophist in disguise. Dialectic is the alchemist's activity, hoping to arrive at a pure kernel, stripped of everything polluting and superfluous. Like Sherlock Holmes' method of elimination ('How often have I said to you, my dear Watson, that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?'), dialectic conceals as much as it reveals: anything that results as 'truth' from an exercise in dialectics, begs for genealogical analysis. Socrates' contemporaries were justly suspicious of a person who so openhandedly showed his ground.

The second line of criticism is against Plato's ill-discipline: whoever wants to be a lawgiver, must possess a sense of measure and style himself; being merely a stylistic melting-pot will not do the trick. Plato's style is anti-Hellenic: his dialogues subsume every art form, except tragedy: epic, lyric, satire and all the other comic forms.

Wenn die Tragödie alle früheren Kunstgattungen in sich aufgesaugt hatte, so darf dasselbe wiederum in einem excentrischen Sinne vom platonischen Dialoge gelten, der, durch Mischung aller vorhandenen Stile und Formen erzeugt, zwischen Erzählung, Lyrik, Drama, zwischen Prosa und Poesie in der Mitte schwebt und damit auch das strenge ältere Gesetz der einheitlichen sprachlichen Form durchbrochen hat (*GT* 14, KSA 1.93).

Tragedy, however stands no chance: Socratic optimism overwhelmed Plato and the tragedians are expelled from the dialogues as much as they are banned from Plato's ideal city. From now on, man has to *hunt* – through tools like the dialectic – for a meaningful existence. Plato began to obfuscate the ancient valuing of the world, a flattening of the philosophical cosmos ensues and a programmatic naïveté about the nature of the world would ensue. Until these naïve ideals could no longer bear the burden of *enf* And so too, are Sophoclean ones raming meaning, and nihilism would ensue.

The other great Socratic virtue, namely irony, is also for Nietzsche a form of decadence. Irony, it goes without saying, accompanies all philosophers: 'Alles Menschliche verdient in Hinsicht auf seine Entstehung die ironische Betrachtung: deshalb ist die Ironie in der Welt so überflüssig' (*MA* 252, KSA 2.209). To make it

the main characteristic of one's discourse renders that discourse impotent: 'Die Gewöhnung an Ironie, ebenso wie die an Sarkasmus, verdirbt übrigens den Charakter, sie verleiht allmählich die Eigenschaft einer schadenfrohen Ueberlegenheit: man ist zuletzt einem bissigen Hunde gleich, der noch das Lachen gelernt hat, ausser dem Beissen' (*MA* 372, *KSA* 2.260). The ironist no longer knows how to curse and scold (*JGB* 212) and therefore is no longer able to make judgements on quality. Irony was the mode of expression of men of 'fatigued instinct', the shoulder-shrugging strategy of the old gadfly who tried to find truth rather than to found it:

Zur Zeit des Sokrates, unter lauter Menschen des ermüdeten Instinktes, unter konservativen Altathenern, welche sich gehen liessen – 'zum Glück', wie sie sagten, zum Vergnügen, wie sie thaten – und die dabei immer noch die alten prunkvollen Worte in den Mund nahmen, auf die ihnen ihr Leben längst kein Recht mehr gab, war vielleicht Ironie zur Grösse der Seele nöthig, jene sokratische boshafte Sicherheit des alten Arztes und Pöbelmanns, welcher schonungslos in's eigne Fleisch schnitt, wie in's Fleisch und Herz des 'Vornehmen', mit einem Blick, welcher verständlich genug sprach: 'verstellt euch vor mir nicht! Hier – sind wir gleich!' (*JGB* 212, *KSA* 5.147).

Tragic art differs from dialectic in that it does not try to overcome tension and contradiction; that is tragedy's highest wisdom. Art *overcomes* nature, it does not imitate it. Even the most anti-metaphysical philosopher might fall into the trap of assuming that there is in fact something called 'Being', or 'Nature' that it can penetrate at least to some extent, the tragic artist by contrast, never even makes this assumption. For the tragic artist, by contrast, there need not necessarily be an underlying substratum: instead, myth is superimposed over mystery or formless nothingness. The artist uses a web of language to cover ultimately – nothing. The ultimate impasse of the rationalistic drive is that it purports to find itself without limits, for all supposed limits are of human origin, born out of a distinct culture, rooted in *indigenous* myth. (See *GT* 23). Naturally, it does not take long before the rationalist drive runs itself aground upon *aporia*, and becomes art.

Dieser erhabene metaphysische Wahn ist als Instinct der Wissenschaft beigegeben und führt sie immer und immer wieder zu ihren Grenzen, an denen sie in Kunst umschlagen muss: auf welche es eigentlich, bei diesem Mechanismus, abgesehn (*GT* 15, *KSA* 1.99).

This is why Nietzsche is convinced that the Socrates presented in the Platonic writings has a definitely positive, preservative, rather than a negative or destructive effect. If anything, Socratic rationality appears to play the same role with respect to the development of tragic civilization as forgetfulness plays in preventing man from being paralyzed by the excess of history in the second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung*. It also stimulates the lust for life – or rather, it *preserves* it:

Denn dächte man sich einmal diese ganze unbezifferbare Summe von Kraft, die für jene Welttendenz verbraucht worden ist, nicht im Dienste des Erkennens, sondern auf die praktischen d.h. egoistischen Ziele der Individuen und Völker verwendet, so wäre wahrscheinlich in allgemeinen Vernichtungskämpfen und fortdauernden Völkerwanderungen die instinctive Lust zum Leben so abgeschwächt, dass, bei der Gewohnheit des Selbstmordes, der Einzelne vielleicht den letzten Rest von Pflichtgefühl empfinden müsste, wenn er, wie der Bewohner der Fidschi-Inseln, als Sohn seine Eltern, als Freund seinen Freund erdrosselt: ein praktischer Pessimismus, der selbst eine grausenhafte Ethik des Völkermordes aus Mitleid erzeugen könnte – der übrigens überall in der Welt vorhanden ist und vorhanden war, wo nicht die Kunst in irgend welchen Formen, besonders als Religion und Wissenschaft, zum Heilmittel und zur Abwehr jenes Pesthauchs erschienen ist (*GT 15*).

It must be mentioned at this stage that, with or without Socrates, a decadence had already fallen over Athens. The Sophists had already spread self-consciousness and the *need* for justification throughout Athens and the old, 'instinctual' aristocrats had already been torn apart by conflicting impulses that could not be harmonized by normal agonal play. With their instincts in chaos, it became necessary to find a new basis for spiritual unity. Rather than to be tyrannized by anarchy, they accepted a new tyrant, Reason. In an atmosphere where no one was master over himself, Socrates, despite the kicking of his own plebeian instincts, who were in control, due to the tyrannical development of Reason. What followed was an understanding that any concession to instinct, the spontaneous and the unconscious, could lead *downward*. To avoid chaos it was necessary for self-conscious Reason to suppress *un-selfconscious* instinct. All of life had to be brought into the blinding light of day: the rational *gaze* – to use a Foucaultian expression – travelled inwards for the first time. This was the price for self-preservation. But Reason cannot justify itself *rationally*: it is dependent on fictional constructs to begin its operations:

Plato hielt es für notwendig, dass die erste Generation seiner neuen Gesellschaft (im vollkommenen Staate) mit der Hülfe einer kräftigen *Nothlüge* erzogen werde; (*UM II*, KSA 1.327).

Plato sees a link between the lie and poetry because he is, despite his best intentions, both a liar and a poet. This is Nietzsche's major complaint against him; rather than the charge most Nietzsche interpreters say he levels at Plato, namely that the sage invents another world, Nietzsche complains that he hides the *creative* dimension of his philosophy. 'Imagine', writes the young philologist, 'that the writings of Plato had been lost, that philosophy begins with Aristotle; we would not be at all able to imagine the ancient philosopher who was at the same time an artist'.<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche does not think that Plato himself believed his doctrines:

Plato: ein großer Cagliostro<sup>103</sup>, – man denke, wie ihn Epicur beurtheilte; wie ihn Timon, der Freund Pyrrhos beurtheilte - Steht vielleicht die Rechtschaffenheit Platos außer Zweifel?... Aber wir wissen zum Mindesten, daß er als absolute Wahrheit gelehrt wissen wollte, was nicht einmal bedingt ihm als Wahrheit galt: nämlich die Sonderexistenz und Sonder-Unsterblichkeit der 'Seelen' (Aphorism 12269, *NL* 85-87 KSA 13.293).

Plato is well aware of the subversive character of his activity. He therefore teaches what is necessary in order to keep philosophy alive, lest it go the same route as Socrates. Thus, to challenge such a firmly established order as the Athenian establishment of Plato's time, he had to be, or at least *appear* to be, a little mad; otherwise he could be condemned as downright wicked. Nietzsche thinks that Plato has given us a splendid description of how the philosophical thinker must within every existing society count as the paragon of all wickedness. Despite his adherence to custom, he was a true subversive, the antithesis of the moral man. Substitute the name 'Plato' with 'Nietzsche' and the reader will find that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Plato, in a fashion very similar to Nietzsche, adopted an artistic cloak to make the radical nature of his activity more palatable. In a world defined by its moral rules, style becomes the inevitable cloak for the cultural critic.

As complex and multivocal as the tragedy it claims to reject, the *Republic* has been read variously as positing an ideal utopia, as a critique of idealism, a blueprint

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<sup>102</sup> Quoted by Oliver Berrichon-Sedeyen in *Introduction à l'étude des dialogues de Platon*. Conbas: Eclat, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> An impostor or charlatan, after Count Alessandro di Cagliostro (1743- 1795), really Guiseppe Balsamo.

for totalitarian ideology, a comedy and a tragedy. According to Euben,<sup>104</sup> Plato invented political philosophy to compensate for the failure of tragedy to educate its citizen audience. The failure was evident in the factionalism that made Athens into many cities rather than one. Philosophy thus had to turn away from existing cities to find another audience, or rather, another *kind* of audience. For the audience were now not conceived of as a whole, but as individual souls whose moral self-ordering is a prerequisite for political re-constitution.

The *Republic* is pervaded by the theme of ‘bringing hidden things to the ‘light’.<sup>105</sup> Socrates begins his famous narrative by recounting a visit to Piraeus to see (*theasthai*) an inaugural festival of the goddess Bendis. This journey to see the sights and Socrates’ assessment of the spectacle invoke and transform an earlier meaning of the word *theory* and the vocation of the *theōros*. Originally, the *theōros* was an official envoy sent to a strange and unfamiliar land to report back on the sacred events he had witnessed. Later, the word was used for the city’s representatives at tragic performances. But Socrates’ journey to Piraeus, Athens’s port and democratic stronghold does not conclude with his appraisal of the procession, nor is much time devoted to the festival itself. He quickly proceeds to describe the theoretical vision the *Republic* itself proposes. The initial journey, then, serves as a pretext for the prisoner’s journey out of the cave and into the light – a journey that culminates in the upward ascent of the philosopher to the Good and the Just. In accordance with most of the Greek tragedies, sight serves as a trope for knowledge. With the main character of *Oedipus Tyrannos* it shares a certain impatience with the constraints of tradition, an insistence on exposing unitary patterns behind the phenomenal world. Yet the *Republic* transforms the emphasis in a way that Oedipus only dreamt of and in a way Sophocles probably feared to depict. Where Oedipus only sought to master his own destiny (and paid the most severe price imaginable for this), Plato would re-imagine an entire world in order to master the destiny of mankind. Plato is not a founder like Virgil – he does not ‘found Athens anew’ – but creates an entirely new city that does not resemble his current city - or any real city - in the slightest.

Other than Aristotle’s more ‘political’ notion of friendship, in Plato’s utopia, rulers and the ruled are steered by the same hand of divine intelligence towards their own well-being, and so ‘become alike and friendly’ (*Rep.* 9.950c). Here (in Plato’s

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<sup>104</sup> Euben, P. J. *Athenian Democracy and Political Theory*. New York: SUNY Press, 1999.

<sup>105</sup> Rocco, M. *Ten Themes in Plato’s Republic*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981, p.101.

ideal republic) friendship depends on a coincidence of interests. Plato maintains a Higher Reality, open to the participation by the select few, and the merely sensible stands in the way. The metaphysical continuities between Plato and for example Augustine and the entire metaphysical tradition of subjectivity that followed, seem so obvious, that it is often forgotten that the dichotomy of inner/outer, commonly held to be the foundation of Western metaphysics, inaugurated by Plato, in fact only makes a marginal appearance in his *oeuvre*. The only examples that come to mind are in 401d of the *Republic*, where Socrates, in a rare tragic mood lauds music as the most sovereign art, because its rhythm and harmony find their way into the innermost soul – eis *entos tes psyches* – and take a hold there, and at 44d where Socrates says that true justice is not just about external actions that affect other people (*peri ton exo*), but also about that what lies within and concerns oneself (*peri ton entos*).

The most important artistic duty established by the tragedians and continued by their dialectical heir is that of legislator. But legislation is not limited to the world or one's artistic material. For Plato, as well as for Nietzsche – who would take this notion to its most radical extreme – to be a legislator not only involves the creation of a unique world, but also self-legislation. To become aware of this need is the first and essential step on the way to *Übermenschlichkeit*. Nietzsche was able to appreciate this trait even in his non-tragic predecessors: Socrates advocates a strict, even tyrannical rule of reason, because he found himself in need of it, for he was under threat of being overwhelmed by his body. When the physiognomist had revealed to Socrates who he was – a cave of bad appetites – he divised a tyrant that was more than a match to his body. Nietzsche writes in the *Nachlass* of 1888:

Das Problem des Sokrates.

Die beiden Gegensätze: die tragische Gesinnung - gemessen an dem die sokratische Gesinnung, Gesetz des Lebens : in wiefern die sokratische Gesinnung ein Phänomen der *décadence* is : in wiefern aber noch eine starke Gesundheit und Kraft im ganzen Habitus, in der Dialektik und Tüchtigkeit, Straffheit des wissenschaftlichen Menschen sich zeigt ( — die Gesundheit des Plebejers dessen Bosheit, esprit frondeur dessen Scharfsinn dessen Canaille au fond im Zaum gehalten durch die Klugheit: 'häßlich' Verhäßlichung: die Selbstverhöhnung:

die dialektische Dürre die Klugheit als Tyrann gegen 'den Tyrannen' (den Instinkt) es ist alles übertrieben, excentrisch, Carikatur an Sokrates, ein buffo, mit den Instinkten Voltaires im Leibe — er entdeckt eine neue Art Agon — (Aphorism 12245, *NL87-89*, KSA 13.268).

Any form of excess must be countered with an adversary. That is why Nietzsche is more than any other thinker the *respector of adversaries*. No domain of human life is in greater need of control by an adversarial force than the instincts. Without such a force there is a mere decadent excess which is bound to lose its richness and vitality. Nietzsche is willing to admit that, in a certain sense, Socrates paid homage to the spirit of the agon.

Nietzsche adds that:

genau im Widerstreben gegen die Sinnenfälligkeit bestand der Zauber der platonischen Denkweise, welche eine vornehme Denkweise war, – vielleicht unter Menschen, die sich sogar stärkerer und anspruchsvollerer Sinne erfreuten, als unsre Zeitgenossen sie haben, aber welche einen höheren Triumph darin zu finden wussten, über diese Sinne Herr zu bleiben: und dies mittels blasser kalter grauer Begriffs-Netze, die sie über den bunten Sinnen-Wirbel – den Sinnen-Pöbel, wie Plato sagte – warfen (*JGB* 14, KSA 5.28).

Plato's major philosophical flaw is not the attempt to bring order to his own life or that of others, but rather denying his own status as artistic legislator. And he was a legislator – one that succeeded in changing the flow of history forever:

Der platonische Dialog war gleichsam der Kahn, auf dem sich die schiffbrüchige ältere Poesie sammt allen ihren Kindern rettete: auf einen engen Raum zusammengedrängt und dem einen Steuermann Sokrates ängstlich unterthänig führen sie jetzt in eine neue Welt hinein, die an dem phantastischen Bilde dieses Aufzugs sich nie satt sehen konnte (*GT* 14, KSA 1.94).

If he *disguised* his legislative dimension and embraced his role as artist, the ultimately nihilistic division between poet/artist and philosopher may never have occurred. But to *deny* one's status as artist-legislator is one of the most nihilistic acts possible. From his earliest unpublished manuscripts to his last writings, Nietzsche consistently presents legislation, or the declaration of the highest values, as the real function of the philosopher. There is a comprehensive kind of thought that gathers together, assigns value to and orders all existing knowledge of the world: *Genuine* philosophers, however, are commanders and legislators. Nietzsche adds the following: philosophers alone determine the 'whither' and 'wherefore', what is useful and what constitutes utility for men. Plato was such a philosopher. He did not merely dissimulate; he

deceived' himself when he convinced himself that 'the good' as *he* desired it was what a man named Plato had chanced to discover on his way ('Plato, als er sich überredete, das Gute, wie er es wollte, sei nicht das Gute Platos, sondern das Gute an sich, der ewige Schatz, den nur irgend ein Mensch Namens Plato auf seinem Wege gefunden habe!') (Aphorism 10490, *NL* 84-85, KSA 11.611).

It is of course entirely possible that Plato did *not* deceive himself. Few creators are completely unaware of their own tyrannical power:

Die eigentlichen Philosophen *aber sind Befehlende und Gesetzgeber*, sie sagen: so *soll* es sein! sie bestimmen erst das Wohin und Wozu des Menschen und verfügen dabei über die Vorarbeit der philosophischen Arbeiter, jener Überwältiger der Vergangenheit. Diese zweite Art von Philosophen geräth selten; und in der That ist ihre Lage und Gefahr ungeheuer. Wie oft haben sie sich absichtlich die Augen zugebunden, um nur den schmalen Saum nicht sehen zu müssen, der sie vom Abgrund und Absturz trennt: zum Beispiel Plato, als er sich überredete, das Gute, wie er es wollte, sei nicht das Gute Platos, sondern das Gute an sich, der ewige Schatz, den nur irgend ein Mensch Namens Plato auf seinem Wege gefunden habe! In viel größeren Formen waltet dieser selbe Wille zur Blindheit bei den Religions-Stiftern: ihr 'du sollst' darf durchaus ihren Ohren nicht klingen wie 'ich will' – nur als dem Befehle eines Gottes wagen sie ihrer Aufgabe nachzukommen, nur als 'Eingebung' ist ihre Gesetzgebung der Werthe eine *tragbare* Bürde, unter der ihr Gewissen *nicht* zerbricht (Aphorism 10490, *NL* 84-85, KSA 11.611).

There is a second complaint too. As we have seen, it is not that Plato did not legislate – Plato and Socrates hold a fascination for Nietzsche in that they show what a philosopher standing between eternities can accomplish – namely the transformation of art, to name but one:

Wirklich hat für die ganze Nachwelt Plato das Vorbild einer neuen Kunstform gegeben, das Vorbild des Roman's: der als die unendlich gesteigerte aesopische Fabel zu bezeichnen ist, in der die Poesie in einer ähnlichen Rangordnung zur dialektischen Philosophie lebt, wie viele Jahrhunderte hindurch dieselbe Philosophie zur Theologie: nämlich als ancilla. Dies war die neue Stellung der Poesie, in die sie Plato unter dem Drucke des dämonischen Sokrates drängte (*GT* 14, KSA 1.94).

The greatest objection to be raised against both Plato and Socrates is that they sought to legislate but *once*. That is to say, they sought the highest Good and the purest form of the Just in order to deliver themselves from having to found it over and over again in the uncontrollable world of the Athenian public domain. By locating, or rather



devising a method for locating the true world behind the physical, Socrates and Plato hoped to be the lawmakers that would end lawmaking forever.

Als es mit der besten Zeit Griechenlands vorbei war, kamen die Moral-Philosophen: von Sokrates an nämlich sind alle griechischen Philosophen zuerst und im tiefsten Grunde Moral-Philosophen. Das heißt: sie suchen das Glück – schlimm, daß sie es suchen mußten! Philosophie: das ist von Sokrates an jene höchste Form der Klugheit, welche sich nicht vergreift beim persönlichen Glück. Haben sie wohl viel davon gehabt? Wenn ich denke, daß der Gott Platos ohne Lust und Schmerz ist und der höchste Weise sich ihm nähert: so ist das ein persönliches Urtheil: Plato empfand das volle Gleichgültigsein als seine größte Wohlthat: sie wurde ihm wohl selten genug zu Theil! (Aphorism 8755, KSA 11.16).

According to Nietzsche, because of his pathological hatred for life, Socrates spun for himself the illusion that Reason could ‘cure’ the human condition, only to see towards the end of his life that his Reason was chimerical, and that life was irredeemable. Having destroyed the legitimacy of the instinctive bases for values, in the end, Socrates’ Rationalist faith collapsed. Therein, however, he resurrected Tragedy, if only for a moment. Theoretical man who followed in his wake, however, alienated from a sense of the Dionysian, has no such luck. Bound to a mode of thinking that is by definition hostile to tradition, theoretical man merely lives off the accumulated capital of those in the past who have paid the price for becoming artists – the *Dionysiokolakes*. They have become rooted and traditional. Theoretical man then spends his time by demonstrating the paradoxes and ‘falsities’ of his inherited traditions, thereby engendering nihilism among a people who can no longer see the stamp of eternity upon their existence:

In diesen Strom des Zeitlosen aber tauchte sich eben so der Staat wie die Kunst, um in ihm vor der Last und der Gier des Augenblicks Ruhe zu finden. Und gerade nur so viel ist ein Volk – wie übrigens auch ein Mensch – werth, als es auf seine Erlebnisse den Stempel des Ewigen zu drücken vermag: denn damit ist es gleichsam entweltlicht und zeigt seine unbewusste innerliche Ueberzeugung von der Relativität der Zeit und von der wahren, d.h. der metaphysischen Bedeutung des Lebens (GT 23 KSA1.148).

This is nihilism. This is injustice. This is what has to be avoided at all costs: a *meagre* existence, a condition where strength can no longer discharge itself as strength, a condition where man stands, strangely and perversely enough, *over and against* the

world, apparently rationally self-sufficient. In this condition, judgement, the greatest human asset and the gateway to genuine freedom, becomes superfluous. To recover from this condition stands at the heart of Nietzsche's project. His aim is nothing short of *linking man again to eternity*, i.e. to make *tragic* man possible again.

Das Jasagen zum leben selbst noch in seinen fremdesten und härtesten Problemen; der Wille zum Leben im Opfer seiner höchsten Typen der eignen Unerschöpflichkeit frohwerdend – das nannte ich dionysisch, das verstand ich als Brücke zur Psychologie des tragischen Dichters. Nicht um von Schrecken und Mitleiden loszukommen, nicht um sich von einem gefährlichen Affekt durch eine vehemente Entladung zu reinigen – so missverstand es Aristoteles: sondern um, über Schrecken und Mitleiden hinaus, die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein, jene Lust, die auch noch die Lust am Vernichten in sich schliesst... (EH, GT 3, KSA 6.312).

Nietzsche asserts that the attempt to exorcise the tragic, that is, all mystery, pain, suffering, and contradiction from consciousness is ultimately to destroy the ground for the sense of being linked to eternity, which is part of the rootedness which makes life possible. The twin effort of reason and the dialectic destroys this rootedness. Socrates preferred the most wakeful, self-conscious existence, whereas for Nietzsche life in the twilight of unconsciously created illusion can prove more fruitful, and hence more *just*. This life is honest about its need for limits and measure. What Socrates set in motion was a process that destroyed the basis for *distinctions* like those between the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, in favour of the universal pursuit of the easy and the comfortable. According to this reading, Socrates' real vice was that he was a utilitarian who refused to accept limits. By contrast, Nietzsche is arguing for the *unity* of life: life and culture understood as 'Einheit des künstlerische Stils in allen Lebensäusserungen eines Volkes' (UB II, KSA 1.274). Modern culture, the product of theoretical man, is for Nietzsche not a real culture, a culture that does justice to the possibility that is man, but only a kind of knowledge *about* culture. Knowledge is consumed with neither hunger nor desire for it, it no longer acts as a means for transforming the external world, but remains concealed within the bland chaos of an inner world, the source of bad consciousness, which man with curious pride calls his *subjectivity*. In the next chapter we trace how the need for justice drove man further inward. This perverse Apollonianism – it is a distortion of the original Apollonian impulse – was in desperate need of a Dionysian antidote. As I will show in the next chapters, the power of the artist to *legislate*, to impose order

upon a multiplicity of possible perspectives and to breathe new life where previous patterns have stagnated, became the function of what Nietzsche eventually came to call Dionysus, the post-Socratic artist newly born out of the rabble of metaphysics.