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Author(s): Martha C. Nussbaum

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## The Transfigurations of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

If Schopenhauer . . . posited a general depression as the tragic condition, if he suggested to the Greeks (— who to his annoyance did not “resign themselves” —) that they had not attained the highest view of the world—that is *parti pris*, logic of a system, counterfeit of a systematizer: one of those dreadful counterfeits that ruined Schopenhauer’s whole psychology, step by step (— arbitrarily and violently, he misunderstood genius, art itself, morality, pagan religion, beauty, knowledge, and more or less everything).

— Nietzsche, *Will to Power* §851

Do you desire the most astonishing proof of how far the transfiguring power of intoxication can go? — “Love” is this proof: that which is called love in all the languages and silences of the world.

— Nietzsche, *Will to Power* §808<sup>1</sup>

### I

N IETZSCHE is wrong about Euripides. That judgment is the more or less inevitable starting point for any treatment by a classical scholar of Nietzsche’s relationship to the *Bacchae* and to Dionysus. For among the many hundreds of observations about ancient literature made by Nietzsche in the course of his unfortunately brief philosophical career, many of them deeply illuminating, the treatment of Euripides in *The Birth of Tragedy* is remarkable for its lack of insight. Here Nietzsche, usually so skeptical of received scholarly views, takes over completely uncritically the notion, current in his day, that Euripides is a “rationalist” and a precursor of Socratic intellectualism. By making tragedy a scene of reasoned dialectical debate, in which everything is clear, everything comprehensible to the inquiring and critical intellect, Euripides wrenched tragedy away—so Nietzsche argues—from its Dionysian origins, and from the sense of life’s mysteriousness, complexity, and moral

arbitrariness that Nietzsche associates with those origins, teaching instead that virtue is knowledge and that the world contains no mystery that reason cannot unravel. In this way, Nietzsche argues, he subverted the achievement of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and so effectively “killed” tragedy (*BT* §§11–12). This account of the role of reason and intellectual debate in Euripidean tragedy astonishes. For it is hard to believe that a reader as astute as Nietzsche could interpret works such as *Hippolytus* and *Medea* as defenses of the omnipotence of reason; and equally difficult to understand why he did not see that even the lengthy segments of dialectical argument that do figure in works such as *Troïades* usually serve to demonstrate the *impotence* of reason and justice, when face to face with irrational passions. (Hecuba wins the debate; but the practical victory goes to *eros* and to Helen.) Indeed, it is difficult to think of a single Euripidean play for which the Nietzschean interpretation is even *prima facie* plausible.

Where the *Bacchae* is concerned, Nietzsche compounds his error. For having made Euripides a rationalist for most of his career, he is forced to make of the *Bacchae*—in which even Nietzsche cannot fail to find acknowledgment of the power of irrational forces—a sudden *volte-face*, a deathbed conversion. This story too flies in the face of the evidence: not only the evidence of works such as *Hippolytus*, with its insistence on the divinity of erotic passion, and the *Helen*, its ode in praise of the Mountain Mother, but also the evidence of fragments (especially of the early *Curetes*) that show a continuous interest in ecstatic religion throughout Euripides’ career. Moreover, Nietzsche’s comparison of Euripides to Pentheus, driven mad by the vengeance of the god he has so persistently opposed (*BT* §12), is a somewhat unpromising avenue of approach to a work that displays, throughout, supreme poetic mastery and discipline.

But it is not the purpose of this paper to investigate these strange errors. They have been discussed often and effectively enough.<sup>2</sup> And I believe that, although they must be a starting point of an inquiry into Nietzsche’s portrait of Dionysus, they are in no sense the end of the story. For despite his peculiar relation to Euripides, Nietzsche’s account of the Dionysian—both in *The Birth of Tragedy* and in later writings—is itself remarkably illuminating, both to the philosopher concerned with the

structure and effects of passion and to the student of ancient tragedy. My purpose in this paper is to investigate that philosophical and historical contribution.

## II

This paper is, in effect, the second part of a two-part account of Nietzsche's relationship to Dionysus and to the *Bacchae*. For in a general introduction to a new translation of the *Bacchae* by C. K. Williams, which has recently appeared,<sup>3</sup> I discuss the relationship between Nietzsche's approach to ancient tragedy and Aristotle's, arguing that Aristotle's insistence on a firm distinction between character and fortune, and his insistence that the tragic emotions of pity and fear must take as their object a hero who remains good in character throughout misfortune, may not allow us to do justice to the portrait of human personality in a play such as the *Bacchae*, which depicts in a remarkable way the fluidity of the self, its susceptibility to mysterious transforming influences and inspirations. I argue that Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian provides a better avenue of approach to these elements in the play. Here, then, I would prefer to continue in a different way my exegesis and defense of Nietzsche, providing a more detailed account of the Dionysian, both in *The Birth of Tragedy* and in later works and fragments, and showing in more detail how Nietzsche's concepts and arguments do in fact offer a valuable perspective on ancient tragedy, and on the nature of the passions.

This defense will focus on two topics – closely interwoven, in that both are prominent aspects of Nietzsche's portrait of Dionysus and the Dionysian. I shall ask about the tragic hero's relationship to what is arbitrary and mysterious and unjust in life, and the related Nietzschean picture of tragic learning and the spectator. And I shall also investigate Nietzsche's remarkable account of the ways in which the intoxication of passion transfigures the self, producing a being who is fictional and yet also real, transformed and transforming, an object of art and an artist, "an ass in magnanimity and innocence" (WP §808), an actor, a god – in short, a lover.<sup>4</sup> This power of love, as he sees it, is the energy that generates all delicate and all noble art, all that goes beyond "the virtuoso croaking of shivering frogs, despairing in

their swamp" (WP §808). And perhaps it even influences the somewhat croaking authors of philosophical papers, when Dionysus is their theme.

But in order to understand how Nietzsche's account of the Dionysian and its transformations is related both to his understanding of the Greeks and to other more immediate German origins, we must bring another actor onto the scene. This is Schopenhauer, least likely of all philosophers to be described in the terms reserved by Nietzsche for the artist-lover — Schopenhauer, whose bleak and furious pessimism stands in a relation of enormous complexity to Nietzsche's language and arguments. Nietzsche was by training a philologist, not a philosopher. His knowledge of the important works of his own philosophical tradition — including the works of Kant and Hegel — is demonstrably thin and uneven. But there is one great exception. The works of Schopenhauer, read with passion from an early age, pervade his thought and choice of terms in the 1870s. It would not be misleading to say that at the time he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche was so steeped in Schopenhauer that he perceived whatever he perceived through the lens of Schopenhauerian distinctions and categories. Certainly it is hard to make sense of the concepts of the Apollinian and Dionysian, and many other insufficiently explained aspects of Nietzsche's argument in that cryptic work, without relating them to Schopenhauer's more explicit and extensive arguments.

This close relationship has frequently been mentioned. But its implications for the interpretation of *The Birth of Tragedy* and related texts have not been described, I believe, with sufficient complexity. For although Nietzsche often simply appropriates Schopenhauer's concepts and categories without much explanation, in such a way that the reader who is unacquainted with Schopenhauer will be at a loss to understand why a certain connection is made, or how one step follows on from the previous one, Nietzsche is also, by this time already, profoundly critical of much of Schopenhauer's account of both cognition and desire, and profoundly hostile to his normative "pessimism." Most of the basis for the explicit denunciation of Schopenhauer in later works such as *The Case of Wagner* and our epigraph (from 1888) is already firmly in place. But Nietzsche's strategy, in *The Birth*, is not, as later, to use direct argument or explicit polemic against his revered predecessor. Instead, he proceeds by stealth,

using Schopenhauer's very terms to undermine his distinctions and arguments, borrowing the surface of his language to subvert the core of his thought. The reader must, in this situation, proceed with the utmost deftness and care, becoming what Nietzsche none too modestly said any good reader of his text must be: "a monster of courage and curiosity; moreover supple, cunning, cautious; a born adventurer and discoverer."<sup>5</sup>

But for a reader of today, whether philosopher or literary scholar, courage and cunning are hardly sufficient, since even rudimentary knowledge of Schopenhauer's views is usually not to hand. Far too few accounts of Nietzsche's thought pause to give any exegesis of Schopenhauer's central notions and arguments — with the result that even the most attentive reader is not put in a position to grasp the origins of a term, the significance of a reference. This is especially unfortunate since Schopenhauer writes with a directness and simplicity none too common in the German philosophical tradition, so that it is not at all ludicrous, but actually quite feasible, to attempt to supply a clear and economical summary of the elements of his thought that most influenced Nietzsche's picture of Dionysus. This, before embarking on my exegesis and defense of Nietzsche, I shall undertake to do. The result, I think, will be a more adequate understanding not only of the language of *The Birth*, but also of Nietzsche's philosophical motivations for saying what he did about desire, and for defending love, sexual desire, and the body in the way in which he defended them.

### III

Like Kant, Schopenhauer<sup>6</sup> argues that our faculties of perception and thought do not and cannot grasp an intrinsic structure of the world as it is in itself, apart from the operations of mind. What we grasp we grasp under certain categories of mind, without the use of which nothing could be grasped. Kant repudiates the idealistic way of understanding his arguments, arguing, apparently, that it is not a mental entity, a fabrication of our own minds, that we grasp when we grasp a thing: it is the external world, *as demarcated by* the categories of mind that are necessary for the possibility of experience. He takes it, furthermore, that by showing these categories to be necessary for the possibil-

ity of experience, he has validated them and shown their objective reality. There is, for Kant, no stronger argument for the reality and objectivity of something than a transcendental argument showing that it is necessary for the possibility of experience and thought.

Schopenhauer, by contrast, took Kant's line of reasoning in an idealistic direction (at times interpreting Kant this way, at times explicitly criticizing him). What we experience in perception and thought is not, he argues, a world of things out there, things in themselves — even as shaped by the categories of mind. Instead, we grasp our own representations of things in perception and thought. Instead of looking out at the world through eyeglasses that structure it in a particular way, we are looking, so to speak, into mirror glasses that simply give us back what we ourselves are and have made up.<sup>7</sup> Even the distinction between subject and object, and the relation of cause and effect that links them, are our mental representations, growing out of our activity and existing only in it. (Schopenhauer insists that this position marks a difference between his views and those of “every philosophy ever attempted” [25].) Thus it is not even possible to speak of our grasp of things as “subjective,” since the very contrast between subject and object is something that we ourselves make; thus it cannot be used to characterize the contrast between what we make and what we do not. As for the linking relation of causality, it, too, exists “only in the understanding and for the understanding” (15). It is not, as Kant thought, objectively valid, and *a priori*. In short, the activity of the representing mind brings into being the entire world of things, and the relations that obtain between them (cf. 30).

From his readings in Indian philosophy, Schopenhauer borrows the metaphor of thinking as dreaming, and of its contents as a “web of *maya*” or illusion (17, 365). Our whole cognizing of the world, he insists, is like looking at a dream that we ourselves have made (365, cf. 98). We are dimly aware that we are dreaming, and we dream on. Citing Shakespeare, Plato, Sophocles, Pindar, and Calderon, as well as “the *Vedas* and *Puranas*,” he concludes: “Life and dreams are leaves of one and the same book . . . we find no distinct difference in their nature, and are forced to concede to the poets that life is a long dream” (17–18).

The special role of one's own body in the scheme of representation must now be mentioned. The body seems to be known to

the agent directly and immediately. And indeed, Schopenhauer concedes that it is “for us immediate object, in other words, that representation which forms the starting-point of the subject’s knowledge, since it itself with its immediately known changes precedes the application of the law of causality and thus furnishes this with its first data” (19). But it is most important to emphasize that representation, however immediate, is what a person’s body is. Our especially intimate perceptual connection with it does not suffice to place it outside the veil of *maya*. “For the purely knowing subject as such, this body is a representation like any other. . . . Its movements and actions are so far known to him in just the same way as the changes of all other aspects of perception” (99).<sup>8</sup>

But our experience of the world contains something else, something different. And here we arrive at the more obscure and tantalizing, but also more profoundly original, aspect of Schopenhauer’s thought. We have, says Schopenhauer, the feeling that this story of dreaming cannot be the entire story about our lives. “We ask whether this world is nothing more than representation. In that case, it would inevitably pass by us like an empty dream, or a ghostly vision, not worth our consideration” (98–99). We cannot get at this something more by looking at the world from without, so to speak: for this approach, characteristic of all conventional inquiry, confines us to representations. We get a hint about the further element, however, if we consider further our relation to our own body.

Our bodies are for us objects of sense-perception and thought. But there is another relation we have to them: for we move and act. There is a striving, desiring, straining something about us that does not coolly contemplate and represent, but surges and pushes. This kinetic and desiderative aspect of the person Schopenhauer calls will. (And indeed, like Nietzsche much later, he argues that will is present not only in human beings, but in all of nature.)<sup>9</sup> Will is inseparable from body: “Every true, genuine, immediate act of the will is also at once and directly a manifest act of the body” (101). The notion of will subsumes, and somehow connects, movement from place to place, all forms of desire, and the experience of pleasure and pain. It appears that will is a kinetic reaching-out or striving that explains all movement; the experience of willing is painful, and Schopenhauer seems to believe that its goal is some sort of plea-



sure or satisfaction (101). A being can relate to its own body either through will or in representation, depending on whether cognitive awareness or some need to act is dominant; and Schopenhauer depicts these two relations as revealing two aspects of a single entity: “What as representation of perception I call my body, I call my will in so far as I am conscious of it in an entirely different way comparable with no other” (102–3). (The difficulty of describing will seems to be connected, for Schopenhauer, with its complete lack of cognitive intelligence.) At times, he connects willing with the Kantian notion of the thing in itself, asserting that we have, in will, a kind of *a priori* relation to the body.

Schopenhauer seems to intend will to be closely connected with erotic needs and aims — though we must remember that willing as such involves no representation of any object, and thus erotic willing, found “in every blindly acting force of nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of man” (110) is erotic impulse or appetite more than object-directed desire. This erotic urge, he claims, propels all beings ceaselessly forward into movement and action, into the various forms of change and becoming that characterize the world of nature. It is, he insists, not a mysterious form of force that needs to be inferred from experience by complex argument, but, rather, something “known absolutely and immediately, and that so well that we know and understand what will is better than anything else” (111). (Indeed, he uses the concept of will to explain the concept of force, which he takes to be more elusive.) The claim that will is more familiar than anything else suggests that willing is not confined to erotic desire or appetite narrowly understood, but is a very general notion of striving and longing. Schopenhauer, however, does insist on its close connection with sexuality and reproduction — and, in his misogynistic writings, with woman as the source of unrest and disorder. (And indeed, when Schopenhauer speaks of what is most familiar, we must always bear in mind the obsessive and sexually tormented personality that is doing the asserting. What is most familiar to Schopenhauer might not be the same as what is most familiar to Kant, or to Plato’s Cephalus.)

It is important to notice that the will, in and of itself, is not an individual or a plurality of individuals. It contains in itself no principle of individuation (called by Schopenhauer by the Latin

term *principium individuationis* – 112–13 and elsewhere). It attains individuation only insofar as it is linked, in experience, with the representation of the body whose moving force it is. This is so, Schopenhauer explains, because in and of itself the striving that is will is not situated in time and space (which, for him, are forms of representation). But orientation in time and space is necessary for the demarcation of a thing as an individual. Therefore the body *qua* distinct individual is but “phenomenon.” On the other hand, Schopenhauer believes that the body’s shape and form, as it bounds itself off in space and time, shows forth clearly the nature of the will that inhabits and moves it, and gives its outside a form that one could predict by simply experiencing this will. In a remarkable passage (reminiscent of the passage in Aristotle’s *De Caelo* II.12, in which the projecting shapes of animal bodies are connected with their lower-than-godlike forms of life),<sup>10</sup> Schopenhauer asserts: “Teeth, gullet, and intestinal canal are objectified hunger; the genitals are objectified sexual impulse; grasping hands and nimble feet correspond to the more indirect strivings of the will which they represent” (108). Thus, though one cannot exactly perceive the will in itself, it would be correct to think that watching a body in motion, especially rapid nimble motion, was a way of understanding something about the nature of will – and the more so the more the body lacked a distinct personal identity. Plurality and countability do not concern the will – so we might say that the keenest insight into willing that we could gain through our representing senses might be gained by watching a chorus of intertwining dancing limbs, of grasping hands and nimble feet, overlapping in unclearly individuated groupings. And when we understand further that Schopenhauer holds music to be a representation of the kinetic aspects of willing, and, in effect, a mimesis of will in general, in all its forms (255 ff.), we understand that this group of dancing limbs should dance to music, and blend its own motion with the motion of the music. If, further, we wished to include and stress the connection of will with sexuality, we could, following Schopenhauer’s indications, make our dancing chorus a chorus of satyrs. This conclusion is drawn not by Schopenhauer, but by Nietzsche. Though in one way it is a brilliant application of Schopenhauerian thinking, we shall see to what un-Schopenhauerian ends he puts it.

To begin to make clearer Schopenhauer's relationship to Dionysus, we should now attempt to ask what the experience of will, of life lived as will, is like, as he conceives it. First of all, we must insist that, *qua* will, the human being is not intelligent. It exercises neither perception nor thought. In fact, it is no different, *qua* will, from the other animals and from inanimate objects in nature. The urge or desire that moves the willing body is not itself a form of perceptual awareness, though of course it may be accompanied by such awareness. Second, the willing being is not artistic: it neither makes things up nor transforms itself. All that is on the side of representation. (And we shall later see that will does not even inspire creation, but serves, always, as a drain on the energies and attention of the creator.) Willing is brutish, unformed, undisciplined. Third, the willing being is not, as such, aware of itself as a being at all, or of other beings as the distinct beings they are. Again, as we have already said, all this belongs on the side of representation. In other words, the erotic urge itself does not represent to itself an object, or understand itself to be a distinct subject or seat of desire. It is a generalized urge to merge with what it cannot itself conceive or see. Finally, willing is closely connected with the experience of pain and deficiency. This connection we shall shortly investigate. Schopenhauer cannot precisely say that willing itself is painful, or involves a painful form of awareness, since he denies to will all perceptual awareness. But he will link it closely to the experience of pain in several ways. In short: will is an erotic life force that does not as such involve subjective experience. Thus the question what life feels like when lived as will must remain a peculiar question, as peculiar as the question what it is like to be a blade of grass. And we shall see that it is in this area that Nietzsche – defending the intelligence and the artistry of desire – will make some of his most profound criticisms of Schopenhauer, inspired (so I shall argue) by an admirable understanding of Dionysus.

#### IV

But Schopenhauer does not introduce the dichotomy between will and representation simply as an analysis of cognition and action. The analysis is accompanied by, and grounds, a norma-

tive view of life that is famously known as Schopenhauer's "pessimism." According to this view, willing is, for higher creatures at least, the source of endless suffering. We escape suffering only to the extent that we escape the bondage of willing; and it is good to cultivate those elements in human life that deliver us from that bondage, insofar as possible. Since it is here that Nietzsche will break most decisively with Schopenhauer, we need to pause to understand, as best we can, Schopenhauer's arguments for this extreme view concerning desire and striving, and the view of art that is inseparable from it.

Schopenhauer's denunciation of willing is eloquent and moving. But the arguments go by very quickly, and considerations of several different sorts are introduced in sequence, in such a way that it is left to the reader to figure out how many separate arguments there are, and how they are related to one another. Our analysis can focus on this central paragraph — which, as we shall see, both articulates the normative view and prepares the way for the related analysis of art:

All *willing* springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering. Fulfilment brings this to an end; yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied. Further, desiring lasts a long time, demands and requests go on to infinity; fulfilment is short and meted out sparingly. But even the final satisfaction itself is only apparent; the wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one; the former is a known delusion, the latter a delusion not as yet known. No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to a beggar, which relieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain lasting happiness or peace. Essentially, it is all the same whether we pursue or flee, fear harm or aspire to enjoyment; care for the constantly demanding will, no matter in what form, continually fills and moves consciousness; but without peace and calm, true well-being is absolutely impossible. Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing

water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus.

(196)

In this paragraph (whose ideas and examples show how deeply Schopenhauer was steeped in both Platonic and Hellenistic, as well as Eastern, thought,)<sup>11</sup> we seem to have at least four distinct arguments against the life of willing. First, willing seems inferior as a mode of existence (and will later be seen to be inferior to contemplation in particular) because its source is always in some felt lack or pain. (This is an argument repeatedly used by Plato in several dialogues to establish the inferiority of bodily appetite to the desires associated with thinking and contemplating.)<sup>12</sup> The idea seems to be that our desire for food and drink, for sexual gratification, and the other related objects of will, is not a pure positive desire brought into being by the beauty and value of the goal by itself: a being who had no painful hunger would have no reason to do something so odd as putting food into its mouth, and a being who did not experience sexual need and tension would never conceive the project of engaging in such an intrinsically peculiar activity. (And Schopenhauer's writings on women show just how peculiar, and indeed profoundly disgusting, he took the activity to be.) But this makes the activity, as Plato would put it, "impure" — contingent on a bad state of affairs, and not choice-worthy in itself. Second, the satisfaction of desire is never total, or completely effective: desires are always gratified piecemeal, so that the subject is always in a state of longing, even at the point of satisfying one of his many longings. Third, satisfaction is brief, desire long: the moment of fulfillment is "short and meted out sparingly," while "demands and requests go on to infinity." Again, we can understand this point most vividly if we think of the bodily desires, and especially sexual desire, as the central cases that Schopenhauer has in mind. (The reference to "demands and requests," especially, suggests that he is thinking of the effort one must go through to gain sexual satisfaction.) Fourth and finally, Schopenhauer argues that satisfaction is so unstable that it is an illusion to suppose that one has ever in fact actually been satisfied. The reference to the Danaids (used by both Plato in the *Gorgias* and Lucretius in Book III of his poem to make related points)<sup>13</sup> suggests that there is no stable resting point in desire,

even though we may delude ourselves into thinking that there is. For our longing is renewing itself even as we satisfy it.

From all of this, Schopenhauer draws the conclusion that true happiness, which he understands, in a manner influenced by both Epicurus and Indian thought, to mean a condition of freedom from pain and disturbance, is impossible so long as we go through life under the sway of will. And an avenue of escape is open to us: through the abstract and contemplative mode of attention characteristic (he believes) of our relationship to art.

Before we can understand this, however, we must add one further piece to the picture. We have said that the individual subject is aware of itself as individual only through the activity of representation: pure will, in and of itself, contains no awareness of individuation or of distinct subjecthood. We must now add that will, if not sufficient for individuation, seems, on the other hand, to be necessary for it. For Schopenhauer seems to hold that if we were not aware of the pains and desires that are ours as opposed to someone else's, and in general aware of the practical relation in which our body stands to a world of objects that may or may not fulfill its needs, we would not become aware of ourselves as distinct individuals marked off from other individuals. It is, apparently, only the disturbance occasioned by the greedy will that makes us focus on our distinct selves, rather than on the abstract and formal properties of that which surrounds us. And much the same is true of our awareness of other objects. When we are moving through the world as desiring agents, we are aware of the objects that surround us as (a) particulars, and (b) related in one or another way to our interests, helping or thwarting our desires. Although Schopenhauer is not fully explicit about how interest-relativity and particularity are related, it would appear that, as in the case of our own self-awareness, it is interest-relativity that prompts us to focus on objects in our context as particulars. For example, the reason why I might attend to a certain dog before me as a particular dog, rather than as exemplifying some abstract properties of doghood — or, even more abstractly, certain properties of form and color — would be that I am worrying about whether it is going to bite me. If I am liberated from that practical worry, I am free to contemplate the dog's abstract form. Again, to use what is always for Schopenhauer the central case, if I should get enmeshed in all the difficulties that follow from attending to a

certain human being as irreducibly particular, not exactly the same as any other — rather than having the more stable satisfactions yielded by contemplating him, or her, as an abstract form, the reason for this is likely to be desire. It is clear that for Schopenhauer particularity of attention also heightens and complicates desire; but I think what he means to say is that if I did not in the beginning have sexual impulses that have the problematic character he has described, I would never get started in the spiral of need and attention that is characteristic of erotic love in the first place. Nothing would call my attention down from its lofty contemplative heights to the concrete realities of my context. It is the pressure of need for an actual sexual object that drives attention downwards, although, once it is there, attention also creates further difficulties, binding me to the frustrating “demands and requests” characteristic of the life of particular love, as Schopenhauer knows it.

Now what art does, as Schopenhauer sees it, is to step in as a doctor for the attention, calling perception and thought back from the world of particulars to the contemplation of abstract and general forms. When we look at a painting or a statue, he argues, our attention to it has two properties: it is focused on the abstract, and it is without awareness of any relation the object may have to our own needs and interests.

Raised up by the power of the mind, we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things, and cease to follow under the guidance of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relation to our own will. Thus we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the what.

(178, cf. 198)

Schopenhauer has in mind, it seems, the enormous difference between the way in which one attends to a painting or statue of a beautiful person, and the way in which one attends to such a person in the context of desire and action. In the latter case, one is filled with painful yearning and longing, with “demands and requests,” with anxious questions about when and how our satisfaction will be achieved. In this process the “what” of the object (as Proust so brilliantly and repeatedly demonstrates) more or less disappears, in the sense that its formal and struc-

tural properties come into focus only in relation to our own greedy desires. When, on the other hand, one contemplates a painting or statue of a beautiful person, one is “raised up” above all this, and encouraged to attend to pure general qualities of form and shape, quite apart from their relation to the will. It is only in this contemplative mode that we can be said to understand the object. Furthermore, Schopenhauer continues, we lose in the process the painful awareness of our own individuality and subjectivity that characterize daily life. We forget about our selfish needs, and are able to “lose ourselves” in the object, becoming “a clear mirror of the object” (178), a bare subject of cognition without any properties but those of receptive attention. This forgetfulness of self Schopenhauer finds extremely valuable, not only because it liberates the individual subject from its pain and suffering, but also because, by diminishing selfishness, it promotes sympathy and other desirable social attitudes.

Thus the aesthetic attitude liberates, so long as we are caught up in it; when aesthetic experiences cease, we are again at the mercy of our greed:

The storm of passions, the pressure of desire and fear, and all the miseries of willing are then at once calmed and appeased in marvellous way. For at the moment when, torn from the will, we have given ourselves up to pure, will-less knowing, we have stepped into another world, so to speak, where everything that moves our will, and thus violently agitates us, no longer exists. This liberation of knowledge lifts us as wholly and completely above all this as do sleep and dreams. Happiness and unhappiness have vanished; we are no longer the individual; that is forgotten; we are only pure subject of knowledge. We are only that one eye of the world which looks out from all knowing creatures, but which in man alone can be wholly free from serving the will. In this way, all difference of individuality disappears so completely that it is all the same whether the perceiving eye belongs to a mighty monarch or to a stricken beggar; for beyond that boundary neither happiness nor misery is taken with us. There always lies so near to us a realm in which we have escaped entirely from all our affliction; but who has the strength to remain in it for long? As soon as any relation to our will, to our person, even of those objects



of pure contemplation, again enters consciousness, the magic is at an end. We fall back into knowledge governed by the principle of sufficient reason; we now no longer know the Idea, but the individual thing, the link of a chain to which we also belong, and we are again abandoned to all our woe.

(197–98)

The aesthetic attitude, in short, is unstable. Our attention to the aesthetic object is rarely pure and complete for long. (And this is all the more so since Schopenhauer's examples are usually examples of contemplation of nature, to which we bear, as well, many practical relations.) But in its rare moments of success we understand the true function of the aesthetic in human life: "namely the deliverance of knowledge from the service of the will, the forgetting of oneself as individual, and the enhancement of consciousness to the pure, will-less, timeless subject of knowing that is independent of all relations" (199).

Tragedy, in Schopenhauer's view, is an especially valuable art form because, in addition to nourishing the aesthetic attitude, as do all forms of art, it reminds us, by its content, of the many motives we have for turning toward art, and away from the will. It is thus peculiarly self-reinforcing. For tragedy represents (in a general form, fit for contemplation) all the sufferings to which human beings are prone if they live the life of will and desire. Agreeing closely with the picture of tragedy's function that we get in a Stoic such as Epictetus (who defines tragedy as "what happens when chance events befall fools"), Schopenhauer holds that the sufferings of tragedy are the sufferings of mankind, insofar as it lives the life of desire. And, like Epictetus again, who urged a detached and contemplative spectatorship that would discover in tragedy further motives for living a life of Stoic detachment,<sup>14</sup> Schopenhauer argues that good tragic spectatorship leads, very effectively, to a renunciation of will and desire:<sup>15</sup>

For the whole of our discussion, it is very significant and worth noting that the purpose of this highest poetical achievement is the description of the terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery

of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and the innocent are all here presented to us; and here is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the world and of existence. . . . The *motives* that were previously so powerful now lose their force, and instead of them, the 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 whole will-to-live itself. . . . Only a dull, insipid, optimistic, Protestant-rationalistic, or really Jewish view of the world will make the demand for poetic justice, and find its own satisfaction in that of the demand. The true sense of the tragedy is the deeper insight that what the hero atones for is not his own particular sins, but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself:

Pues el delito mayor  
Del hombre es haber nacido.

("For man's greatest offence  
Is that he has been born,")

as Calderon (*La Vida es Sueno*) frankly expresses it.

I have quoted this passage at length not only to establish Schopenhauer's account of the function of tragedy; and not only in order to illustrate the extreme vehemence, and even violence, with which he denounces his more optimistic opponents; but also in order to give evidence of the Christian and even Catholic origins of Schopenhauer's loathing for the will, and of the account of tragedy that expresses it. Here, more clearly than elsewhere, he frankly concedes that a view of original guilt or sin, connected with our bodily existence and its sexual origins and strivings, underlies his account of what tragedy teaches. And it is no surprise to find him turning to Calderon, whose tragedy is steeped in these Catholic views, for expression of the fundamental "guilt" that, as he sees it, all beings bear. Tragedy shows not only suffering, but also *atonement*. And the atonement is for an offense, *delito*, connected with birth itself.

Schopenhauerian pessimism is an odd amalgam of Hellenistic, Christian, and Eastern influences, but its conclusion, here, is clear: the body and its urges are bad, are both guilty and delu-

sive; and nature as a whole, becoming as a whole, is infected with that guilt and those delusions. Through art, and especially tragic art, we comprehend these facts in a general way. The experience of spectatorship, which already, in its cognitive structure, exemplifies detachment from will, gives us, through this comprehension, new motives to reject and blame life as both evil and false.

Schopenhauer's relationship to Euripides' Dionysus now begins to look very complex. On the one hand, his account of experience captures very well the fluidity of identity that is central not only to Euripides' play but, very likely, to the experience of the participant in Dionysian religion as well.<sup>16</sup> The desiring subject is not a stable substance, but a part of nature in continual motion; individuation and boundaries are temporary, factitious. Using this view, with its emphasis on the dreamlike qualities of representation, one can well start to explain the transformations of the Dionysus of the *Bacchae*, as he appears to his followers as now a human, now a bull – and the equally surprising transformations of his followers, as they now flow toward unity with the burgeoning erotic life of nature, now become aware of their bodies, and the bodies of others, as distinct individuals. (We could, for example, usefully think of Agave's recognition of Pentheus as a transition from will accompanied by only minimal representation to the clarity of distinct representation, detached to some extent<sup>17</sup> from will.)

On the other hand, there is much in Schopenhauer that does not fit well with Euripides' play or, indeed, with anything in ancient Greek tragedy. His emphasis on the lack of intelligence and artistry in appetite fits badly with the *Bacchae*'s depiction of Dionysus, and the sexual and natural forces he embodies, as powerfully artistic, as authors of sudden, subtle transformations closely related to the transformations involved in theater itself. If Dionysus, god of intoxication and sexual energy, is (in Schopenhauer's terms) will, he is also a playwright, a stage director, a most subtle and versatile actor.<sup>18</sup> The desires he arouses are neither unintelligent nor lacking in their own sort of order. Nor is the pessimistic condemnation of all sexuality and all becoming – especially insofar as it rests on a notion of original sin – at all at home in the world of the *Bacchae*, or the ancient world generally. Dionysus is cruel, excessive, amoral. And the play shows human Dionysian energies to be both glorious and terri-

ble, transfiguring and pitiless, fertile and fatal. It does not, however, in any way condemn the body as evil or conception and birth as filthy. The cruelty and arbitrariness of life are seen as inseparable from its mysterious richness.<sup>19</sup> The strangeness of this conjunction is neither condemned nor praised, but simply presented. And insofar as a simpler and more condemning attitude toward sexuality is present in the play—in Pentheus' pronouncements about the activities of Dionysian women—it is shown to be both defective in its narrowness and linked to the repression of the very energies it condemns. In general—although usually I shrink from such generalizations—I think we can say confidently that the notion of original sin, as it figures (for example) in the tragedies of Calderon, is altogether foreign to Greek tragedy and to ancient Greek thought.

Finally, Schopenhauer's account of tragic spectatorship, closely tied to the recognition of guilt and emphasizing detachment and resignation as goals, is very hard indeed to link with anything that could have gone on in the ancient theater. The Dionysian festivals, whatever they were, were not celebrations of renunciation of the will to live.<sup>20</sup> As I have suggested, if Schopenhauer's view of the spectator is close to anything in the ancient world it is to the radical reconstruction of spectatorship that we see in Stoic accounts of the function and meaning of tragedy, which had considerable influence on the Christian tragedians dear to Schopenhauer's heart.

We shall now see that Nietzsche, while availing himself of Schopenhauer's terms of analysis, develops in a positive way exactly those aspects of Schopenhauer's thought that I have said to be genuinely promising as avenues of approach to ancient tragedy in general, the *Bacchae's* Dionysus in particular. He uses them, however, to construct a complex subversion of the core of Schopenhauer's normative view, and to produce an account of the tragic universe and tragic spectatorship that might with real justice be called (as he calls them) Dionysian.

## V

Nietzsche's Apollo and Dionysus are, up to a point, simply Representation and Will in Greek costume. The reader of *The Birth of Tragedy* who has not read Schopenhauer is likely to be puz-

zled by Nietzsche's rapid introduction of these two fundamental "drives" or "tendencies" in human nature, and by the hasty manner in which one of these is linked with cognitive activity, but also with dreaming, with visual art, and with the awareness of general forms, the other with movement and sexuality, with intoxication, with the awareness of particularity, with the absence of a clear individuation of the self. All this is far easier to understand if we see the opening section as a *précis* of familiar Schopenhauerian notions, accepted as accurate accounts of universal tendencies and therefore transposed back into antiquity. And Nietzsche's failure to give arguments connecting the different features of his gods becomes comprehensible when we realize that these connections, as argued for by Schopenhauer, would have seemed second nature to most members of his audience, given the enormous popularity of Schopenhauer's work; and they would easily have been able to supply the missing arguments for linking intoxication with loss of the *principium individuationis*, dreaming with awareness of the abstract and the general. (We can also begin to understand the irritation that Wilamowitz experienced, seeing controversial modern categories taken as an unquestioned starting point for the interpretation of classical antiquity.) Even the veil of *maya* makes its appearance in Nietzsche's portrait of Apollo, though it is clear that at this date Schopenhauer would have been Nietzsche's only source for Indian thought. Up to a point, then, Nietzsche presents himself as an uncritical acolyte of Schopenhauerian metaphysics.

But a fundamental difference also makes itself felt from very near the beginning. Nietzsche later criticizes Schopenhauer far more explicitly than he does in this work (see for example *The Case of Wagner*, *Twilight of the Idols* IX, "Skirmishes," WP §851, cited as epigraph here). And in his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," added to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, he criticizes himself for the obscurity introduced by his uncritical use, in the original text, of certain Schopenhauerian terms that did not really fit his argument. But — as he also states in that remarkably insightful brief discussion — his fundamental opposition to Schopenhauer was already present in the work, though not in either a polemical or an especially obvious form.

That opposition emerges almost immediately, as Nietzsche presents both the Dionysian and the Apollinian as both "tenden-

cies" and "drives" (*Tendenzen; Triebe*) in human nature; also as "impulses," as "energies that are satisfied."<sup>21</sup> In other words – a point Nietzsche was to make and remake throughout his career – cognitive activity is itself thoroughly practical, and can only be explained as answering to a practical need. Apollinian activity is not detached and coolly contemplative, but a response to an urgent human need, namely, the need to demarcate an intrinsically unordered world, making it intelligible for ourselves. What Nietzsche was to argue in detail against traditional epistemology in works from "On Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense" (1873) to *Beyond Good and Evil* and the fragments of his last years, is here already in essence: all our cognitive activity, including logical reasoning, including the abstracting and generalizing tendencies, are profoundly practical – ways in which we try to master the world and to make ourselves secure in it.<sup>22</sup> (Generalizing, for example, will be treated as a kind of fiction-making, an equating of what, in perception, is not exactly equal; and this fiction-making is essential for making our way around in the world, for the practical possibilities of expectation and prediction. It is a kind of unscrupulousness with the evidence of perception without which our species could not have survived: for if each new beast had been viewed as an irreducibly distinct individual, rather than as member of a kind, past experience of danger could not have helped to avert present calamity.)<sup>23</sup> The metaphor of Apollinian activity as dreaming now takes on a subtly un-Schopenhauerian sense. For, instead of simply expressing the idealism inherent in Schopenhauer's account of representation, it now makes (without explicit commitment to idealism, and in a way perfectly compatible with Nietzsche's later, more Kantian view)<sup>24</sup> the further point that this activity often succeeds only through self-deception: having effected an ordering, we convince ourselves that it is really the way the world is.

On the other side, the Dionysian, while itself a drive demanding satisfaction, is not unintelligent, not devoid of cognitive activity. The Dionysian experience, as described in §1, is an experience of "enchantment," of "charm," of "ecstasy" – of a heightened awareness of freedom, harmony, and unity. Finally, it is the experience of being made, oneself, "a work of art" by the subtly crafting power of desire. Both drives equally are now, at the opening of §2, called "art impulses," and "artistic energies

which burst forth from nature herself.” For Schopenhauer, art could make (in music) a representation of will, but this was a far cry from will itself, which could never be, or make, art. Nietzsche’s view of sensuality is more complex. His satyrs are themselves most subtle artists, his sexual energy is disciplined as well as joyful; and we are not far from the exuberant playful celebration of the body’s wit and intelligence that we find in the Preface to *Ecce Homo*, with its playful reference to Ovid: “*Nitimidur in vetitum*,’ under this sign my philosophy will conquer one day.” Toward his era’s own “forbidden,” in defiance of both Christian and Schopenhauerian views of the badness of the sensual and the erotic, he strives, in 1872 already, in the name of the artistry of Dionysus.

If both Apollo and Dionysus are need-inspired, worldly, and practical, and if these are nature’s two art impulses, it is not difficult to see that Nietzsche is also giving a picture of *art* very different from the one familiar in the Kantian tradition, and developed in his own way by Schopenhauer. In the Kantian tradition, our interest in and response to the beautiful is altogether separate from our practical interests. Aesthetic attention to an item in nature, or to a made work of art, is distinct from practical attention, since aesthetic attention simply contemplates the object for its beauty (or its other aesthetic properties), and refuses to ask what role the object might play in the agent’s particular life. To return to our earlier example, aesthetic attention to a dog who stands before me is attention to its formal properties of shape and color, combined, perhaps, with the kinetic formal properties that it exhibits in movement. If I am attending to the dog as a creature who may or may not bite me, that is interested practical attention, and is altogether distinct from, and even subversive of, the aesthetic. Schopenhauer, as we have seen, develops this idea, though in his own peculiar way. On the one hand, he insists on the detachment of aesthetic contemplation from practical need and interest, and, indeed, sees the main purpose of art in its ability to free the spectator from practical interest. On the other hand, as that description betrays, he finds a function for art in the spectator’s life – and, indeed, is even willing to say that its “purpose” is something that it does for human lives, namely, to encourage in every spectator the denial and renunciation of life.

From *The Birth of Tragedy* on through his latest works, Nietzsche consistently opposed this picture of the arts, denying that we can understand the role that works of art play in human lives, or even adequately explain our particular judgments of beauty and ugliness, without connecting these to human practical needs – and needs that are directed toward living and affirming life, rather than toward resignation and denial. This direction of thought is evident enough in *The Birth of Tragedy*, from the moment when, introducing Apollo, Nietzsche speaks of “the arts generally, which make life possible and worth living” (§1). As we shall shortly see, his account of the tragic spectator develops this picture further. And the “Self-Criticism” of 1886 asserts that the purpose of the book as a whole, “this audacious book,” was “to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life” (SC §2) – a purpose that surely does make the book “audacious,” in terms of contemporary German views of art and the aesthetic. This audacious purpose was developed without an explicit assault on Kant or on Schopenhauer. And indeed Nietzsche in 1886 criticizes himself for having “tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas strange and new valuations which were basically at odds with Kant’s and Schopenhauer’s spirit and taste” (SC §6). But we cannot mistake the sharpness of the break with Kant and Schopenhauer signaled by a passage in §5 of the work, where Nietzsche criticizes the idea that art should be contemplative and detached, dedicated to the silencing of desire:

... we know the subjective artist only as the poor artist, and throughout the entire range of art we demand first of all the conquest of the subjective, redemption from the “ego,” and the silencing of individual will and desire; indeed, we find it impossible to believe in any truly artistic production, however insignificant, if it is without objectivity, without pure contemplation devoid of interest.

This reference to the central aesthetic notions of both Schopenhauer and Kant is, evidently, prelude to Nietzsche’s own very different account of things, according to which art, and the artist, are deeply involved in the exploration of, and the response to, human need.



In *The Birth of Tragedy*, then, in connection with his portrayal of both Apollo and Dionysus as passionate, interested, and needy elements of the personality, Nietzsche begins to develop what will become a major theme in his work: the idea that art does not exist apart from life, in detachment from or even in opposition to its concerns. Art, indeed, is not for art's sake, but for life's sake. As he puts the point in *Twilight of the Idols* – in a context in which he also speaks of Dionysus and the Dionysian:

Nothing is more conditional – or, let us say, narrower – than our feeling for beauty. Whoever would think of it apart from man's joy in man would immediately lose any foothold. . . . Art for art's sake – a worm chasing its own tail. . . . A psychologist, on the other hand, asks: what does all art *do*? does it not praise? glorify? choose? prefer?

(IX, "Skirmishes," §§19–20, §24)

In the early sections of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche has, then, while relying on Schopenhauer, subverted his views in three crucial ways: by insisting on seeing representation as a response to need; by portraying desire and the erotic as intelligent, artistic forces; and by portraying art as having a practical function. And with our references to a repudiation of resignation, and to man's joy in man, we now arrive at the fourth and most fundamental break with Schopenhauer: Nietzsche's complete rejection of the normative ethics of pessimism, in favor of a view that urges us to take joy in life, in the body, in becoming – even, and especially, in face of the recognition that the world is chaotic and cruel. But at this point we must turn to Nietzsche's account of tragedy itself, and of the tragic spectator. For it is in this connection that he breaks with pessimism – in the name of Dionysus.

## VI

"How differently Dionysus spoke to me! How far removed I was from all this resignationism!" (SC §6). So Nietzsche retrospectively describes his early work's rejection of Schopenhauer's analysis of tragedy. Since he here apologizes, and rightly so, for the obscurity of the way in which this goal was pursued in *The*

*Birth of Tragedy* itself, charging himself with having “spoiled Dionysian premonitions with Schopenhauerian formulations” (SC §6), it seems prudent for us to begin our own analysis with two later and clearer passages in which he describes the function of art in terms that make clear the very un-Schopenhauerian nature of his normative view. In a fragment that probably dates from either 1886 or 1887–88,<sup>25</sup> and is a draft for a new preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche explains that that work portrays the world of nature as “false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning” (WP §853). This being the case, life is made worth living, made joyful and made human, only by art — that is to say, in the largest sense, by the human being’s power to create an order in the midst of disorder, to make up a meaning where nature herself does not supply one. In the creative activity (associated by Nietzsche not only with the arts narrowly understood, but also with love, religion, ethics, science — all being seen as forms of creative story-making), we find the source of what is in truth wonderful and joyful in life. And if we can learn to value that activity, and find our own meaning in it, rather than looking for an external meaning in god or in nature, we can then love ourselves, and love life. Art is thus the great anti-pessimistic form of life, the great alternative to denial and resignation:

Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life.

Art as the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, anti-nihilist *par excellence* . . .

Art as the *redemption of the man of action* — of those who not only see the terrifying and questionable character of existence but live it, want to live it, the tragic-warlike man, the hero . . .

Art as the *redemption of the sufferer* — as the way to states in which suffering is willed, transfigured, deified, where suffering is a form of great delight. . . . A highest state of affirmation of existence is conceived from which the highest degree of pain cannot be excluded: the *tragic-Dionysian* state.

(WP §853)

In this passage, the “tragic-Dionysian state” is a state in which one takes delight in *oneself* and one’s own activity, rather than, as so frequently happens in a religious or post-religious age, searching for a meaning from without. Dionysus gives us our example, so to speak: following him, we delight in the play of appearance, the gestures of theater; we delight in making it all up, as we do, as we must.

Although this passage is from a preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, and although it makes reference to Dionysus, it tells us little about the role of the arts narrowly understood, and of tragic art in particular, in Nietzsche’s view of human affirmation. It uses the notion of art in a broad sense; and though we suspect that the affirmation of creation that is problematic in the case of science, religion, and love may well be easier to achieve in the fine arts, thus making the fine arts a kind of paradigm of a stance toward the world that one could then try to achieve in the rest of one’s life, Nietzsche does not make that connection explicit. He does so elsewhere, however, nowhere more plainly than in a passage from *The Gay Science* (1882), entitled “Our Ultimate Gratitude to Art”:

If we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science — the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation — would be utterly unbearable. *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the *good* will to appearance. . . . As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be *able* to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon.

(GS §107)

Nietzsche’s view is, then, not the simple inversion of Schopenhauer’s. For he agrees with Schopenhauer that what an honest gaze discovers in the world is arbitrariness and the absence of any intrinsic meaning.<sup>26</sup> But he disagrees about the consequences of this discovery for humanity’s view of itself. Schopenhauer’s human being, noticing that his positing of an order in

things is negated by the experience of life, becomes nauseated with life, and with himself for having lived a delusion. Nietzsche's human being, noticing these same things about the world, is filled with Dionysian joy and pride in his own artistry. For if there is no intrinsic order in things, how wonderful, then – and indeed, how much more wonderful – that one should have managed to invent so many beautiful stories, to forge so many daring conceptual schemes, to dance so many daring and improbable dances. The absence of a designing god leads to a heightened joy in the artistic possibilities of man.

But this response, as *The Gay Science* argues, requires the arts. For Nietzsche believes that if we had no example of a human activity in which fiction-making is loved for its own sake, and correspondence to an antecedently existing external order is not the chief value, we would not be able to respond affirmatively to the collapse of our search for external religious and metaphysical meanings. The arts show us that we can have order and discipline and meaning and logic from within ourselves: we do not have to choose between belief in god and empty chaos.<sup>27</sup> Centuries of Christian teaching have left us with so little self-respect for our bodies and their desires that we are convinced that anything we ourselves make up must be disorderly and perhaps even evil. The arts tell us that this is not so; they enable us to take pride in ourselves, and the work of our bodies.<sup>28</sup> And this means that art can be, for its spectators, a guide and a paradigm, showing something far more general about how all of life can be confronted.

And it is in this context that we must understand the significance of the claim that “as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us” – Nietzsche's version of *The Birth of Tragedy*'s famous dictum that “it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified” (§5, §24). Usually, the remark is taken to imply some sort of amoral aestheticizing of existence, a playful overturning of all moral and political categories in the name of detached aesthetic values. We have already seen that Nietzsche actively scorns the detachment of the aesthetic from the practical, and ridicules the notion of art for art's sake: so it is in the context of his own view of the aesthetic, which is deeply practical, that we ought to interpret these remarks – though this has too seldom been observed. *The Gay Science* tells us plainly what, in that context, they mean. Exis-

tence is bearable for us in the face of the collapse of other-worldly faith only if we can get ourselves to regard our lives, with pride, as our own creations: to regard them, that is, as we now regard works of fine art. *The Birth of Tragedy* adds a further twist:<sup>29</sup> in this way and no other, we find life *justified*: that is, having abandoned all attempts to find extra-human justification for existence, we can find the only justification we ever shall find in our very own selves, and our own creative activity. But Nietzsche insists that this is a kind of justification, and, even, *eternal* justification (looking far ahead, perhaps, to the idea of the eternal recurrence, which involves asking whether one wills one's actions to be the way the world will be for all eternity). None of this involves restricting the evaluation of life to the aesthetic sphere, as distinct from the ethical or social: as we have seen, Nietzsche repudiates that separation as offering a reductive view of the aesthetic. Nor does it involve any preference for free undisciplined play over order and structure: for it is Nietzsche's view, repeatedly asserted, that art teaches us, perhaps above all, a love for order and discipline, the hatred of "*laissez aller*" (esp. *Beyond Good and Evil*, §188). It does mean that we have criteria enough for the justification of our lives in the praising, glorifying, and choosing that are characteristic of great art, as Nietzsche describes it. And it means too, of course, that art will play in human life exactly the opposite role from the role it plays for Schopenhauer. For instead of giving the human being a clue to a way in which life might be despised and the body repudiated, it gives the human being a clue as to a way (or, indeed, many different ways) in which life might be embraced, and the body seen as a sphere of joy.

If we now return to *The Birth of Tragedy* equipped with this general picture, we can see that — beneath its obscuring use of Schopenhauer's language of "metaphysical comfort" — it is actually telling this very story, portraying "Dionysian tragedy" as a source, for its spectator, of an affirmation of human life in the face of the recognition that existence is not intrinsically meaningful or good. Tragedy, Nietzsche announces (agreeing, so far, with Schopenhauer), shows its spectator "the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature," so that he is "in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will" (§7). The energies that Nietzsche associates with Dionysus reveal to the spectator — apparently, as he later

states, through a process of sympathetic identification with the hero — the “horror or absurdity of existence” (§7). For the hero embodies in his person the inexorable clash between human aspirations and their natural/divine limits (§9): his demand for justice in an unjust universe entails terrible suffering. The spectator witnesses this suffering; and this produces a temporary suspension of the motives for continued action. The spectator now resembles Hamlet:<sup>30</sup>

... both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; further action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint.

(§7)

In other words, the spectator has reached the state of the Schopenhauerian spectator, or is on the verge of it. But it is not in this condition that tragedy leaves him.

What now takes place, according to Nietzsche’s account (as best I can make it out) is that the elements of the drama that Nietzsche has associated with Dionysus — the sheer exuberant energy of the choral music and dance — supply to the spectator an example of order asserted in the face of disorder, of an artistic making that does not depend on any external order in nature, and (through the idea that the chorus was originally composed of satyrs) of the joy and fertility of the body, asserted in the face of its vulnerability to suffering. Seeing how Dionysus and the energies he represents transform the world, the spectator is seduced back into life, brought to affirm life, and his own cognitive order-making activity, by the very erotic and bodily energies that were, for Schopenhauer, the best reasons to get away from life. “Art saves him — and, through art — life.” Art is “a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live.”

This artistic process requires, Nietzsche stresses, a highly complex interweaving of the “Apollinian” and “Dionysian” capacities — both in the drama itself and in the spectator’s reaction to it. At the end of §7, the satyr chorus is called “the saving

deed of Greek art,” and the satyrs are made the “Dionysian companions” of the audience, who are now said to “permit themselves to be represented by such satyrs” (§8), and are themselves called “Dionysian men” (§8). In the chorus, Nietzsche insists, and by their vicarious identification with the chorus, the spectators see something true of themselves as natural bodily beings. To the “painfully broken vision of Dionysian man” these satyrs appear – not as the civilized dress-up shepherds of effete pastoral (§8), but as “a symbol of the sexual omnipotence of nature.” This is not, however, he stresses, the sexuality of “a mere ape” (§8) – but something “sublime and divine . . . unconcealed and vigorously magnificent.” The spectator can view this image of his own sexual being with “sublime satisfaction.” Thus, as Dionysian, the spectator views the Dionysian image of himself, seeing his own body as something sophisticated, orderly and splendid, partaking itself of the human capabilities for artistry that have been associated with Apollo.

And shortly we are told that the Dionysian chorus – and the spectators through the chorus create themselves, without ever ceasing to be satyrs and hence Dionysian – the Apollinian vision of the tragic hero. The “Dionysian reveler sees himself as a satyr, *and as a satyr, in turn, he sees the god*, which means that in his metamorphosis he beholds another vision outside himself, as the Apollinian complement of his own state” (§8). Thus the Dionysian dancers, far from being noncognitive Schopenhauerian animals, are actually dreamers. They become the cognitive avenue through which the entire order of the dramatic action is dreamed or viewed. And who is the central object of this dream? The suffering hero, as we have said. But we have now been told that this hero is none other than Dionysus the god: “the real stage hero and center of the vision” (§8), Dionysus, appearing “in a variety of forms, in the mask of a fighting hero, . . . an erring, striving, suffering individual” (§10). Thus the spectators’ shuddering before the hero’s anguish becomes their affirmation of the joyous rebirth and the versatile artistry of the god.

In short, the achievement of Greek tragedy, according to Nietzsche, was, first of all, to confront its spectator directly with the fact that there is just one world, the world we live in, the chancy arbitrary but also rich and beautiful world of nature. It is not redeemed by any “beyond”; nor is it given even the sort of *negative* meaning, in relation to a beyond, that it is given in

Christian tragedy. Nietzsche throughout his life finds it amazing that the Greeks should have been able to confront so truthfully the nature of life, without flight into religion of the world-denigrating resignationist sort. He finds an explanation for this unique courage of affirmation in the structure of tragic art. Tragedy shows that the world is chancy and arbitrary. But then, by showing how life beautifully asserts itself in the face of a meaningless universe, by showing the joy and splendor of human making in a world of becoming — and by being, itself, an example of joyful making — it gives its spectator a way of confronting not only the painful events of the drama, but also the pains and uncertainties of life, personal and communal — a way that involves human self-respect and self-reliance, rather than guilt or resignation. Instead of giving up his will to live, the spectator, intoxicated by Dionysus, becomes a work of art, and an artist.

## VII

The achievements of *The Birth of Tragedy* are, thus, both substantial and preparatory. Already Nietzsche breaks with the essence of Schopenhauerian thinking; and he offers the beginning of an account of tragic theater that is radically at odds with Schopenhauer's. But at the same time much more work clearly remains to be done in developing these anti-Schopenhauerian lines of argument — as is already clear from the fact that I have had to refer ahead so frequently in order to clarify central ideas, and sometimes even in order to state them fully. Each of the four subversions of Schopenhauer that I have discussed here recurs, in fact, as a central theme in Nietzsche's later philosophical thought. The connection of cognitive activity with human needs — already elaborately developed in the 1873 essay "On Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense," is also a major theme of *The Gay Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and many later fragments. The intelligence and artistry of the body and bodily desire are discussed in *Gay Science*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and, above all, *Zarathustra*. The connection between art and human need, as we have seen, is the subject of frequent later discussion. And finally, the central project of Nietzsche's mature thought is the attempt to work out in detail an alternative to Schopenhauerian pessimism and resignation as a response to the



discovery that the universe has no intrinsic purpose. The project begun in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which the example of Dionysian art “saves” humanity from nausea, is continued in Zarathustra’s attempt to free humanity from disgust with itself, and from the need for a beyond, and to return humans to love of themselves and of the world of becoming, now seen as “innocent” rather than as flawed by original guilt. In the 1886 “Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche announces that the real message of his early work is not one that we should associate with the “metaphysical comfort” delivered by the otherworldly longings of the Christian romanticism of *Faust*. Instead, his work teaches “the art of *this-worldly* comfort,” pointing directly ahead to “that Dionysian monster who bears the name of Zarathustra” (§7).

But instead of trying to follow these further elaborations of Nietzsche’s Dionysian view of life, which would clearly require a book, I want instead to conclude this paper by examining closely just one later passage, in which Nietzsche’s mature account of Dionysian intoxication is developed with particular clarity and beauty, bringing together succinctly all the criticisms of Schopenhauerian pessimism that we have described. Written in the spring of 1888, it is an account of the Dionysian power of intoxication, and the relation of this power to artistic creation:

Do you desire the most astonishing proof of how far the transfiguring power of intoxication can go? — “Love” is this proof: that which is called love in all the languages and silences of the world. In this case, intoxication has done with reality to such a degree that in the consciousness of the lover the cause of it is extinguished and something else seems to have taken its place — a vibration and glittering of all the magic mirrors of Circe —

Here it makes no difference whether one is man or animal; even less whether one has spirit, goodness, integrity. If one is subtle, one is fooled subtly; if one is coarse, one is fooled coarsely; but love, and even the love of God, the saintly love of “redeemed souls,” remains the same in its roots: a fever that has good reason to transfigure itself, an intoxication that does well to lie about itself — And in any case, one lies well when one loves, about oneself and to oneself: one seems to oneself transfigured, stronger, richer, more perfect, one *is* more perfect — Here we discover *art* as

an organic function: we discover it in the most angelic instinct, “love”; we discover it as the greatest stimulus of life — art thus sublimely expedient even when it lies —

But we should do wrong if we stopped with its power to lie: it does more than merely imagine; it even transposes values. And it is not only that it transposes the *feeling* of values: the lover *is* more valuable, is stronger. In animals this condition produces new weapons, pigments, colors, and forms; above all, new movements, new rhythms, new love calls and seductions. It is no different with man. His whole economy is richer than before, more powerful, more *complete* than in those who do not love. The lover becomes a squanderer: he is rich enough for it. Now he dares, becomes an adventurer, becomes an ass in magnanimity and innocence; he believes in God again, he believes in virtue, because he believes in love; and on the other hand, this happy idiot grows wings and new capabilities, and even the door of art is opened to him. If we subtracted all traces of this intestinal fever from lyricism in sound and word, what would be left of lyrical poetry and music? — *L’art pour l’art* perhaps: the virtuoso croaking of shivering frogs, despairing in their swamp — All the rest was created by love —

(WP §808)

In this highly complex passage we see what we could well call Nietzsche’s final praise of Dionysus, and of the energies of *eros*<sup>31</sup> and intoxication with which Nietzsche has associated his name. It is Nietzsche’s version of Plato’s praise of madness in the *Phaedrus* — and it clearly alludes to the *Phaedrus*, both in its references to the lover’s growing wings and in its insistence on love’s magnanimity. We see, splendidly expressed, Nietzsche’s counter-view to the Schopenhauerian view of erotic desire. Instead of being an unintelligent force of bondage and constraint, dooming its subject to a life of delusion, Nietzsche’s *eros* is a clever and subtle artist (or rather, as he appropriately qualifies the claim, it is as subtle as the lover is); it transforms its subject into a being who seems stronger, richer, deeper. But these semblances are also realities: for the artistry of human desire makes the human being into a work of art. Love’s magic is illusion, in the sense that it corresponds to no preexisting reality in the order of things. And yet it is its own this-worldly reality, and its fiction-

making makes fictions that are gloriously there. Nietzsche adds, as elsewhere, that this intoxication of the erotic is a great motive to the affirmation of life in general.

Finally, in what is surely the passage's most shocking claim, from the point of view of traditional German aesthetics — art is not only not pure of practical interest, it is actually the outgrowth of a profoundly erotic interest. And, furthermore, it is well that this should be so, Nietzsche insists. For (echoing here the argument of the *Phaedrus*) he argues that art without this transfiguring power would be something mean and bare, something cold, stingy, and cramped. All in art that is magical, that is vibration and glitter, that is intoxication and adventure, that is lyrical and generous — all this is created by love.

Nietzsche here completes his attack on Schopenhauerian pessimism, praising the madness of *eros*. I think it should be plain by now that his account of the Dionysian lacks all the features that, as I argued, make Schopenhauer's view an unpromising avenue of approach to Dionysus, to the *Bacchae*, and to ancient tragedy in general. Elsewhere I have argued that Nietzsche's general approach makes more sense of at least one play (Sophocles' *Antigone*) than do the approaches of his German rivals.<sup>32</sup> And I shall clearly not be able to carry out in detail the task of examining Euripides' *Bacchae* in connection with the Nietzschean account of Dionysus that I have tried to set out here. But I think it has emerged, even without an explicit and detailed comparison, that Nietzsche's account of Dionysus, of *eros*, and of the affirmation of life contains profound insight into the nature of tragic art in an age that lacks the disfiguring self-hatred caused by a notion of original sin. His account of the goodness and generosity of madness owes more, perhaps, to the *Phaedrus* than to Euripides' harsher portrait of the Dionysian. But in his picture of a power that transforms and transfigures, producing a new artistry of rhythm and movement, a new resourcefulness of language, a new theater in which the self, fluid and unafraid, both creates and affirms itself — he has, I believe, come closer than any other Western philosopher to capturing — or perhaps we should rather say to revealing — the power that the Greeks encountered and praised under the name of Dionysus.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

1. All translations of Nietzsche are from versions by Walter Kaufmann.
2. See especially Albert Heinrichs, "The Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides," *GRBS* 27 (1986) pp. 369–97.
3. *The Bacchae of Euripides*, trans. C. K. Williams (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), with Introduction by M. Nussbaum.
4. As we shall later see, Nietzsche is talking far more about *eros* than about romantic love as conceived by his contemporaries; and the entire passage bears a close resemblance to the praise of the lover, and love's madness, in Plato's *Phaedrus* (see below, §VII).
5. *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," §3.
6. All references to Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* are to the translation (title *The World as Will and Representation*) by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1958). Page numbers are cited from that edition.
7. This analogy, however, is not perfect: for it suggests that there is some way the world is outside of our cognitive ordering, and that it would in principle be possible to have access to that intrinsic ordering.
8. Here I do not discuss Schopenhauer's complex views about the relationship between perception and thought.
9. Schopenhauer dramatically states: "Spinoza says that if a stone projected through the air had consciousness, it would imagine it was flying of its own will. I add merely that the stone would be right" (126).
10. See the discussion of this and related passages in Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 373–74.
11. References to passages in which S. alludes directly to Hellenistic thought. On the Hellenistic views in question, see Nussbaum, "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions," *Apeiron* 20 (1987) pp. 129–75; on Plato, see Nussbaum, *Fragility*, ch. 5.
12. See Nussbaum, *Fragility*, ch. 5.
13. Plato, *Gorgias*, 493A; Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III.1003–10.
14. See Nussbaum, "Poetry and the Passions: Two Stoic Views," forthcoming in *Passions & Perceptions*, ed. J. Brunschwig and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
15. See Nussbaum, *Fragility*, ch. 3.
16. See my "Introduction" to the Williams translation of the *Bacchae* for an interpretative argument, and references to the literature.
17. Only to some extent, however: for it is most important that she sees Pentheus as a particular individual, and becomes aware of the dead body's relation to her own interests.
18. See Helene Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca and London: 1985) and Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton 1982).
19. See my "Introduction" for an argument to this conclusion.
20. On the difficulties this poses for the Stoics in defending the tragic poets as sources of wisdom, see Nussbaum, "Poetry and the Passions."
21. *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1. On the interpretation of *BT*, see the detailed commentary by M. S. Silk and J. Stern, *Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy* (Cambridge ).

22. Schopenhauer writes that "Logic is . . . without practical use" (46). Contrast Nietzsche's treatment of logic in "On Truth and Lying," *The Gay Science* §111 ("Origins of the logical"), *Beyond Good and Evil* Part I, etc.

23. For these arguments see especially "On Truth and Lying," and *The Gay Science* §110.

24. See here John J. Wilcox, *Truth and Value in Nietzsche* (University of Michigan Press, 1974). There appear to be three stages in Nietzsche's thinking with respect to the Kantian thing-in-itself. In the first stage he speaks of "the unknowable X of the Thing-in-itself" ("On Truth and Lying"), strongly suggesting that there is some way reality is beyond our perceiving and conceiving, and that we can refer to it, at least to say that we can't know it. In a second stage, he concludes that since we have no access to any such independent reality, we are not entitled to say anything about it, and it has nothing to do with our investigations of the world. In a final stage, represented by the late fragments, he concludes that if we really lack all access to a mind-independent reality, we are not even entitled to speak, as Kant does, of "things-in-themselves": for the only meaning "thing" could possibly have in any human language is a thoroughly human meaning. He concludes that the notion of "thing-in-itself" is a contradiction in terms. (Here his position seems close to the anti-skeptical internal realism of Hilary Putnam.)

25. See Kaufmann's discussion of dating in a footnote to his translation. His argument for dating the fragment to 1886, rather than 1887–88, seems to me unconvincing.

26. Strictly speaking, a consistent Nietzschean is not entitled to say anything one way or another about how the world is outside of experience: so if we take these remarks (and related remarks in later works) to be about "things in themselves" they will be incompatible with Nietzsche's mature position. It seems best to take many such statements as referring to the world as we interpret it in our perceptual experience; and many of Nietzsche's contrasts between the order we make and the chaos we experience are best understood as contrasts between perception and concepts. This is especially clear in "On Truth and Lying": but if we follow its lead, we can give a consistent reading to many otherwise puzzling passages.

27. It is very important to understand how many constraints Nietzsche thinks there are on such artistic making: see, for example, "On Truth and Lying," *The Gay Science* §110–111, etc. Compare Nelson Goodman, "Worlds, Works, Words," in *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978).

28. This belief in the high potential of art for human affirmation leads Nietzsche to be especially contemptuous of distinguished artists who submit to the authority of convention and/or religion on these matters. His scathing treatment of the otherworldliness of the ending of *Faust* (*Zarathustra*, "On the Poets,") is closely connected to his denunciation of poets as valets of the reigning morality, in *Genealogy of Morals*, III. And in *The Case of Wagner* he explains Wagner's development as the capitulation of an originally free spirit to the combined pressure of Christianity and Schopenhauer; he tells the reader that the *Ring* was originally supposed to end with Brünnhilde singing a song "in honor of free love, putting off the world with the hope for a socialist utopia in which 'all turns out well' — but now gets something else to do. She has to study Schopenhauer first;

she has to transpose the fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation* into verse. *Wagner was redeemed.*" (§4)

29. Kaufmann, in a footnote, says that "bearable" is different from "justified" – and one could hardly deny that this is so. But I think he is wrong to draw from this difference the conclusion that Nietzsche intends a strong contrast between the two ideas, and has actually changed his attitude between the two works. The general point made by the two remarks seems very much the same: for in Nietzsche's view the search for a justification for existence is motivated by the need to make life bearable.

30. Again, this suggests some sort of identification with the hero.

31. "Love" throughout is *eros* – except when Nietzsche mentions the "angelic" variety of love – only to point out that its real roots are erotic.

32. See Nussbaum, *Fragility*, ch. 3, on Hegel and Schopenhauer.

33. This paper was originally presented at a conference on Dionysus in Blacksburg, Virginia; I withdrew it from the volume of Proceedings not because of any disagreement with the editors, but because limits of length imposed by the publisher would have required the deletion of my discussion of Schopenhauer. I would like to thank Tom Carpenter and Chris Faraone very much indeed for the occasion they gave me to write the paper and for their warm support and advice; for other valuable discussions of the issues I am indebted to Stephen Halliwell.