

ON THE DIONYSIAN IN NIETZSCHE: MONISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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One of the major arguments in the reception of Friedrich Nietzsche has centered around this question: was Nietzsche a forerunner of a sophisticated aestheticist Fascism or was he a link between enlightenment humanism and post-modernity? This paper intends to show why both sides of this argument are to a large extent right. However, its primary aim is to demonstrate that both of those opposing sides of Nietzsche derive from a common root which I should like to call the Dionysian.

To understand Nietzsche it is necessary to begin with Schopenhauer. For, as is well known, Nietzsche was deeply indebted to Schopenhauer and not only in his early period, but, despite the highly polemical turn that Nietzsche's later work took toward his one-time mentor throughout his thinking life. Nietzsche owed to Schopenhauer the foundation of his thought.

Schopenhauer saw what he called the Will as the motor and perennial substratum of all being. Everything and everyone is a manifestation of the Will. When considering Schopenhauer's notion of the Will it is clear that it has two faces – one looking backward toward theology and metaphysics, ultimately to anthropomorphic thinking – the very word “Will” as a human faculty or characteristic indicates it. Its other face looks forward toward a materialist positivism as the Will can be equated with a blind, unconscious directionless energy, incessantly dynamic, informing and causing all processes and all phenomena in the universe.

As is also well known, Schopenhauer views the Will and thus the universe negatively and the Will's inescapability therefore made him a pessimist who saw no ultimate hope for life and for being. For existence was inseparable from the Will and could be escaped only temporarily and in an illusionary way as in the dreams of Platonic ideas or in the visions of art that mistakenly seem to lend permanence and perfection to what are, after all, only representations by the all-embracing, all-producing and all-devouring Will. Schopenhauer saw the Will and with it all being pessimistically because it could never give lasting happiness or even contentment to individual beings. For the Will itself is incapable of contentment and the happiness of fulfillment. Forever seeking, forever wanting, desiring, yearning, the Will, because of the infinite lack at its core, incessantly creates ever new ever-changing representations in the vain hope of finding fulfillment. The Will can never be satisfied lastingly by any one of them but must continue to starve and to hunger after fulfillment without ever attaining it. In sentient individuations or embodiments of the Will this spells ever-renewed want, discontent and wretchedness. Even if the Will should by any chance find contentment, it can last only for a brief moment, for immediately disappointment, sickening satiety, and boredom set in and force the Will once more on its restless, never-ending search.

There is, however, in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, a moment, a passage where the Will itself, rather than its fleeting dreams and illusions which are its Platonic Ideas, appears in a positive, inspiring, almost consoling light. There, in glowing terms, Schopenhauer celebrates the oneness of the Will and thus the ultimate oneness and unity of all being. It was this one pantheistic passage that gave consolation to Thomas Buddenbrooks in Thomas Mann's novel, even though, living in a Schopenhauerian universe, he soon forgot it.

However, it provided more lasting consolation, and seminal inspiration to the young Nietzsche for whom it reappeared in a festive and religious form as cosmic unity in the dynamic life force embodied in the god Dionysus and celebrated in the drunken orgies, dances, and exuberance of his worshippers. Dionysus is both Will and Representation in one, conforming precisely to Schopenhauer's notion of the Will, forever active in its representations and the individuated phenomena of what appears to us as the world which through and in the Will is an interconnected whole. The fact that in Dionysos the Will appears to the drunken revelers in the form of an individuated image, an Apollonian dream image, signifies the ultimate unity of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. This unity of two apparently opposite principles carries the glad tidings of the eventual unity of all oppositions, the overcoming of all mutually hostile individuations in the single energy that constitutes the world. It is the union of universal energy and individuated form or shape which the Dionysian orgiastic dance triumphantly enacts by projecting as an individual image the force that binds all together. The Dionysian orgy, seed and fountainhead of Greek tragedy, thus acts as a supreme metaphysical consolation for the mindless randomness of the Will's sway.

For at the core of Greek tragedy, as Nietzsche sees it, is the chorus, representing the collective, the ultimate unity of all life. This gives rise to the dramatic characters as visionary embodiments, individuated representations of the unitary Will that resides in the undifferentiated choral group. Individuals rise, shine, and ultimately fall as the truthful representations of individuated life, subject to the eternal cycle of creation and destruction, of birth and death, in the eternal round, the eternal dance of being, the eternal return of the Will in the representations and individuations that are inseparable from it. These individuations are the subjects and sufferers of tragedy.

But tragedy as a form, a performance, transcends the tragic spectacle it shows. It transcends it in the chorus. For the chorus, representation of the collective life, the universal, the cosmic unity of being, survives the fall of individual heroes. The chorus has the last word and with it proclaims the consoling message of Dionysianism: “Life goes on. Individuals come and go, rise and fall, but being as a whole is everlasting. The individual dies, and that is tragic. But being goes on for ever and ever,” and therein lies the profound metaphysical consolation of tragedy. For Nietzsche it is the factor that transforms and reverses Schopenhauer’s pessimism into joyous and passionate affirmation of the Will. The underlying cause of that momentous turn from bleakness to joy is Nietzsche’s transforming what is an incidental thought in Schopenhauer, one bright passage in so much gloom, into the center of his own thought.

The Schopenhauerian structure remains, but its meaning, its message, is reversed. Instead of deploring the Will, we should celebrate and proclaim it in the message: Existence is justified and paradoxically by the very art form that confronts us with its sadness.

What enables Nietzsche to bring about that change is a reversal of Schopenhauer’s perspective. While Schopenhauer views existence from the perspective of the individual who must die without ever having been truly satisfied and fulfilled, Nietzsche, as in his interpretation of Greek tragedy, views the same existence from the perspective not of the individual, but of the whole that lasts and creates forever. That one-hundred-eighty degree shift in perspective transforms despair into triumphant celebration.

After *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche hardly ever refers to the cosmic unity of being that the worshippers of Dionysus celebrated. On the surface it looks as though the idea had disappeared from his thinking. Yet throughout his work he declares himself a Dionysian, a follower of the god Dionysus. Together with Zarathustra, Dionysus remains the figure to

whom Nietzsche pledges his allegiance, the figure to whom he dedicates his thinking and around whom this thinking revolves. Through his recurring invocation of Dionysus Nietzsche proclaims that he has remained a loyal Dionysian even though he no longer discusses Dionysianism explicitly in his writing. Implicitly, however, Dionysianism remains the bedrock of his mature thinking as it has been in the work of his youth. It is the subtly implied foundation of his thought.

Dionysianism has two major constituents. One is the faith in the ultimate unity of existence. The other is the belief that this unity is not a static whole, a substance as in Spinoza's pantheism, but a dynamic energy, the mover of an eternal flux and change, the Heraclitean *panta rei*. Next to Schopenhauer Heraclitus is the philosopher with whom Nietzsche has the greatest affinity. The paradox that the eternal flux of things is at the same time the mark of their unity is seen in the metaphor of the sea which for Nietzsche, in contrast to Heraclitus' river, is always the same despite the incessant sequence of ever-different waves.

The duality of Nietzsche's favorite metaphors, namely the succession of waves in the sea, on the one hand, and flame, light, and fire, on the other, demonstrates this duality of his Dionysian thought in which the eternal movement of energy is wedded to the ultimate stasis of unity. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* proclaims this duality in its two primary ideas. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence of all things voices the unity of being in its temporal dimension or "ecstasy," to use Heidegger's term, and the message of the Overman voices the ever-self-transcending dynamic of a yearning and incessantly striving Will.

The doctrine of the eternal recurrence of all things, the eternal return and re-enactment of being's whole history, is first proclaimed in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* and repeated in *Zarathustra*. Subsequent passages in Nietzsche's work attest to his viewing this idea as a

cornerstone of his entire work. Cosmic unity is expressed in space in the orgiastic dance of the Dionysian festival. Its equivalent in terms of time is the Eternal Recurrence. Like the oneness of existence, the eternally repeated cycle of cosmic history stipulates that there is nothing beyond it. Being forms a circle closing in upon itself and including within it everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen in (for) all eternity. Nothing external to itself, nothing new and unprecedented is ever allowed to intrude upon it or emerge within it.

On first sight this is the most depressing view imaginable. For it totally excludes from the flux of being all notion of novelty, of surprise and discovery, of transcendence and thus of hope. It is indeed nothing but being and rules out infinite becoming, infinite growth from its purview of possibilities. It shuts the gate to the infinite and thus transforms the universe into a prison from which there can be no escape. I recall how on my first encounter of this thought my reaction to this idea was utter pessimism, infinite frustration, and suffocating disgust that the feeling of no exit produces.

That Nietzsche intended its effect in exactly that way is shown by his treating and evaluating the thought of the eternal return as man's supreme challenge. Only if man is able to face this ultimate negation of all hope and aspiration, only if he displays the heroism of affirming the ultimate limit to all existence can he prove his ethical mettle. For the hypothesis of the eternal return is first and foremost an ethical idea. It offers each individual the challenge to live his or her life in such a way that she would want to live it eternally. It is an exhortation to live a life that is worth being eternally repeated. It is Nietzsche's version of Kant's categorical imperative – live in such a way that you would wish everyone of your actions to become a universal law. The imperative implied in the eternal return is to live in such a way that you would wish your actual present life to last forever.

Actually, however, the message conveyed by the thought of the Eternal Return is much more than an ethical guide to finding justification for one's life. It is glad tidings of the eternity of one's being, the confirmation of life everlasting. What seemed like the greatest horror is actually the highest good, the vouchsafing of eternal existence not only for the whole, but for every individual in it. The doctrine of the Eternal Return is closer to the message of the Christian gospels – the promise of eternal life to each individual and thus much more than a challenge to ethics. It is ontological rather than merely moral. It too proclaims the jubilant message of the Dionysian festival. It is part of the same ecstatic affirmation not only of the oneness, but also the eternity of all being. Not only space but time too becomes a round dance in which all being participates.

However, there is a vast difference between the Christian message of immortality and the immortality of the Eternal Return. It is the difference between a dualistic and a monistic image of the world.

The other element of Nietzsche's Zarathustrian thought, structurally speaking its first theme – the Overman – is also a version of Dionysian holism. Already in *The Birth of Tragedy* Dionysianism is intimately bound up with a spectator's perspective. The tragic drama itself, in a primary sense, enacts the victory of the whole over the individual for the view of spectators in a theater. On the stage the continuation of life beyond the fall or death of the hero, who represents the individual, appears in the chorus surviving the individual and the extended chorus is the audience in the theater. Indeed the theatrical perspective presides over the origin of drama itself, in the epiphany experienced by the chorus of satyrs to whom the god Dionysus appears as, in a sense, the first individual. Nature, reaching consciousness in mankind, is the spectator of the emerging of the god, the Apollonian individual, from the ecstatic oneness of the Will. Dionysus, representing the oneness of existence, is experienced

as an individuated image appearing to dazed spectators – a relationship that is the germ of Greek tragic theater as a mimesis of human life.

That same spectator's perspective on the potentiality of life, conceived now also in terms of evolutionary theory, dominates *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra, spectator of life in general and human life in particular, views it from the perspective of the whole spectacle, not from that of the individual. The individual's perspective, bitterly aware of its finiteness, imposes pessimism upon the mind. But the opposite holds for the spectator, Nietzsche-Zarathustra. By adopting the perspective upon the whole, the species, and seeing life from such an elevated, universal point of view, he discerns the potential of infinite hope, a hope couched in quasi-Darwinian language and idea. Benefiting from the already achieved advance, ascending evolution become conscious can now hope to safeguard, enhance, and accelerate itself, far beyond the height already reached to the towering summits where the Overman dwells. We shall then be in relation to man as man is in relation to ape.

But such an enormous, mind-boggling, and exhilarating ascent of the whole can come about only through overcoming, leaving behind, and indeed sacrificing the individual beings that together form the present age. The exhortation for the individual's self-sacrificing to hasten the coming of the Overman rings through the speeches of Zarathustra. One can easily see in it the major theme of the work.

What prompts this call for the upward movement of human life? Why not be satisfied with the perpetuation of life as it is? After all, the Dionysian chorus confirms only survival, not ascent. Zarathustra introduces this discontent with human life as it is, life in the present tense. So there enters here an additional factor – the self-transcendence of life. This is a second crucial element in Nietzsche's revision and reversal of Schopenhauer which, in addition to the holism implied in the Will, informs and underlies Nietzsche's entire thought.

This second element is Nietzsche's reinterpretation of the concept of the Will. Schopenhauer sees the will as wanting, desiring, grasping, as longing to possess. Nietzsche, by contrast, discerns the active, creative nature of the Will. Nietzsche proceeds from the insight that the energy that Schopenhauer calls the Will has brought forth and is bringing forth continually everything there is. To be sure, never satisfied, the Will also destroys whatever it creates. From the perspective of the individual, a perspective adopted by Schopenhauer, this inevitable destruction that every individuation and embodiment of the Will faces spells terror and despair. However, adopting the perspective of the whole, of the Will itself, as it were, Nietzsche sees the perennial, never ceasing recreation following all destruction. That never-resting energy that Nietzsche re-interprets as Schopenhauer's Will is creation first and last. It constantly forms, transforms, and re-forms all there has been, is, and forever will be in existence. Such a view entails infinite hope, hope beyond the ubiquitous destruction that likewise characterizes the world. For this vision of the world even destruction is a positive element. Destruction is only a gateway, a necessary precondition for not merely renewed, but enhanced creation, not destruction, but re-creation, surpassing previous creation, has the final word. In this constant cycle of creation, destruction, and re-creation the principle of self-transcendence, seen by Walter Kaufman as the most fundamental tenet of Nietzsche's thought, is implied. For destroying whatever it has created and then creating anew, the Will transcends whatever stage it had reached. It is death that makes the self-transcending quality of life possible. The perennial dissatisfaction, disappointment, and frustration which makes the Will abandon its creations ever and ever again, a cause of despair for Schopenhauer, spells out for Nietzsche the hope, indeed the command, of doing better next time, of ascending beyond any state previously attained.

Nietzsche's affirmative view of the Will as a force forever recreative, reinventing, heralds the principle of evolution.

The will, this all-creative energy that literally forms the universe, is embodied and individuated in man. And for Nietzsche-Zarathustra it is the task of man to will and to create beyond himself. The capacity for this task, the degree to which it is active in individuals, determines the rank each occupies in the dynamic scheme of the whole. It is the holistic perspective on life wedded to the gospel of ever-self-surpassing creativeness that emerges in Zarathustra's ideal of the Overman as the potential destiny of man. It is not merely the continuation of life celebrated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but the possibility of life's rising to ever greater heights that distinguishes Zarathustra's thought from that of the early Nietzsche.

The universal Will exists and manifests itself only in individuals. The aim of the celebrant of the Will, therefore, must be attainment of the utmost degree of creative power in individuals, not for their own sake, but as embodiments of the Will. Here the union between Apollonian and Dionysian becomes transparent. Even in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as I have already noted, what makes the protagonist's fall tragic is the height from which he falls. The greatness of the loss suffered by his passing stands in direct proportion to the joy of realizing that life is able to survive even a loss that tremendous. The highest possible development of the individual is thus by the same token the greatest possible self-assertion of life as a whole.

Nietzsche's heroic ideal of human life is ultimately a religious one. It is a kind of *imitatio Dei*, the imitation or rather the incarnation in the human individual of the Dionysian divinity, as which the Will appears. Nietzsche-Zarathustra's project for man is the latter's ever closer approximation to full embodiment of that divine energy that is the Will. It is the degree of that approximation that determines the vastly varying significance of individual

lives. The individual human being receives significance not from the mere fact of his existing but from the level life as a whole has attained in him.

The formulation of this view already appears in Nietzsche's early work with the revealing ending of its title, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Here history receives its meaning and importance only from the great individuals that have left their mark upon it. Nietzsche conveys that thought by his metaphor by which he defines history – calls from mountain top to mountain top with vast stretches of flatland between them. With this dismissal of the largest part of humanity from significance – later Nietzsche will call the vast majority of humankind “the superfluous” – he expresses (describes) the relationship of the individual to the whole of life. The individual attains value only from the height life as a whole has attained in him. The individual serves as a symptom of the state of human life as a whole. In and by himself the individual is meaningless.

This symptomatological view of human life permeates Nietzsche's later work. It explains the medical perspective Nietzsche frequently adopts. Many times Nietzsche speaks as a physician and calls for a medicinal approach to human life, not to save and cure individual lives, but to protect, nurture, and advance the best in order to raise the level of the whole. Insofar as the sick, the malformed, the degenerate and pathological pose a threat of infection to the small minority in whom the whole of life has reached a high and rare level of development radical measures have to be taken to safeguard the latter's health, self-confidence, and further growth. The mentality of the sick and degenerate must be prevented from darkening the horizon of the top of mankind. Protecting the latter from the poisons that rise from below is the supreme task of the physician-philosopher. From his perspective individual lives relate to the whole of life as an organ relates to the organism. The physician's task is not to cultivate and preserve each organ, but to care for the health and life of the

whole body. If need be, the physician is obligated to cut out hopelessly diseased organs if the organism as a whole is to be saved and insured the best possible health and well-being.

This perspective explains Nietzsche's relentless war against compassion. Compassion for an individual organ at the expense of the whole organism is an offense to medical art, a dereliction of the physician's duty. Likewise compassion with sick and inferior individuals who might infect and enfeeble the most promising and most powerful embodiments of life would amount to malpractice of the physician-philosopher who is called upon to care for the whole of life. The physician's perspective merges in Nietzsche with the aesthetic perspective, the point of view of the spectator of the drama that is the ascent and development of human life. I shall return to this theme later on.

In the later Nietzsche the Will is called will to power. Will to power is a far cry from desire to dominate and oppress others. Will to power is the will to create. To be sure, the Will seeks domination. However, for Nietzsche domination is a dynamic force. It is the urge to shape, to work upon, to transform. It is never a merely static holding in bondage and cannot be equated with either mere acquisitiveness or egocentric vanity. Exercising the will to power is above all happiness in the exercise itself as well as a means to create beyond itself. The will to power as the urge to reshape the world is Nietzsche's version of what Freud was to call the pleasure principle. For Nietzsche sexual desire, as the desire to procreate, is only part of the will to create. Thus life owes its being to the ecstatic pleasure of the Will as incessant creator.

The will to power is also the driving motor of all exploration, all searching and curiosity, which for Nietzsche is akin to and ultimately one with the drive to penetrate and conquer. To conquer for Nietzsche is to discover as well as to take apart in order to restructure, to be satisfied with things as they are. Will to power is the principle of

progressive change, of growth, of all heightening and ascending not only in man, but in being itself. It is possibility beckoning to become reality. Tireless advance and never-ending hope are built into the will as will to power.

The Will is distributed among human beings in sharply varying degrees. A privileged few are endowed with a large and powerful Will but the majority of mankind, the “herd,” as Nietzsche calls it, is endowed with a relatively modest quantity of Will. The pronounced variations in the quantity of Will present in individuals establishes a “natural,” that is, nature-imposed hierarchy among human beings. Those with a bountiful Will are natural leaders and the rest should, if healthy nature has its way, follow them. For Nature itself requires aristocracies as the optimal order of societies.

What vitiates this natural order of things is the tendency of the Will in physically and especially emotionally sick human beings to degenerate, in other words, to turn from an outward-bound, creative and structuring energy into a merely reactive one, into will that does not desire and act by and for itself, that is creatively, but merely re-acts as envy and resentment of another’s will and being. From a creative force it degenerates into a negative dependency on another and germinates into hidden and masked rebellion that cannot afford to come out into the open. Instead it is twisted into a latent hunger for revenge against the better off. A twisted, sickly, and merely destructive Will Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*.

Thus weakness and sickness become vice even as strength and healthy are virtues in the sense of ancient and Renaissance *virtu*, a brimming over of virile energy, a constant overflow seeking for outlets. Zarathustra compares such “virtue”, which is indeed identical with virtual power, to the power of the sun that makes the sun the unintended source of life. It is a “virtue” that by its explosive “brimming over,” its gigantic energy, cannot help but be giving and bestowing. It is not at all like Christian virtue because in Nietzsche’s view the

latter is not an end in itself, but a hankering after earthly and above all heavenly reward. For Nietzsche the cessation of willing is death. It is the end of all becoming, of movement, of change. The fear of entropy, of the ultimate transformation of all binding and constructing energy into dissolution and chaos, haunted the second half of the nineteenth century. It haunted Nietzsche to a horrifying degree. The terror of a cessation of the Will, of the end of all growth, envisioned by Zarathustra in the "Last Men," is responsible for the at times quasi-hysterical tone of Nietzsche's diatribes against Christianity and the modern cult of compassion it engendered as well as against Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism, and against the leveling tendencies of modernity with its creed of equality, democracy, socialism, and anarchism, ultimately revealing their true face in the despair of nihilism. Modernity so conceived spells the coming to the end of art, of culture, of civilized life which for Nietzsche can last and flourish only if built upon the natural hierarchy established by the degree and kind of Will working in human individuals and determining their ability to contribute to the health and flowering of the whole.

Motivated by his anxious and profound concern for the whole, which is his perspective on cultural, social, and biological life, Nietzsche has to look for and advocate something akin to the eugenic movement the beginnings of which were contemporary with his work. It was to come to full pernicious fruition in the Fascist and National Socialist movements after him. A prominent feature of Nietzsche's eugenic thought is his repeated stress on the necessity of extending principles of breeding from animal species to humans. Breeding for Nietzsche, however, is not to be seen in racial but in terms of the life of the whole species. In other words, life as a whole is to be promoted, not an ideal of racial "purity." Breeding is to serve physiological-biological and cultural, not racial purposes. Individuals and types dangerous to the well-being of humanity as a whole ought to be

rendered harmless, if not eliminated altogether, in order to protect and enhance the will to live and procreate in those most promising for the future of the species. Much more important than physical elimination for Nietzsche is socio-cultural redirection of values, so that those who have the healthy of the species in mind come to dominate and guide society. Playing on the word *Leid* (suffering) contained in *Mitleid*, the German word for compassion, Nietzsche seeks to show that compassion only adds to the amount of suffering in the world. Firstly, the compassionate inflicts suffering on himself and thus adds his own suffering to the suffering that aroused his pity in the first place, and, secondly, the compassionate increases the suffering of the unfortunate by adding humiliation to it. The worst harm wrought by compassion, Nietzsche holds, comes of course from its attempt to prolong lives that impede the well-being of the whole of life. To be truly compassionate you have to be pitiless.

Nietzsche's morality of strength and the Will derives from an aesthetic perspective in which the beautiful, the stimulating, the admirable, and the delighting are supreme values. The early Nietzsche proclaimed: "The world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon." It is for the sake of the spectator, for his delight and admiration that the world attains significance. The Will creates to enjoy. As literal embodiments of the Will human beings too create and thereby increase, refine, and intensify the joy which life should be and potentially is.

The aesthetic merges in Nietzsche with a certain kind of ethics or morality. Nietzsche's view of what life should be aims for the joy and happiness of others as well as the self. It seeks to further the cause of those who are capable of happiness. But their kind of happiness is only a by-product, an accompanying condition of willing and creating, or achieving, and of giving birth.

Happiness for Nietzsche is not free of pain. It is certainly not comfort, rest, and peace. Pain is inseparable from joy even as the sadness over the death of the tragic hero coalesces with the joy of life outlasting death. Pain is the loss of the Apollonian individual, striving, laboring, struggling, and ultimately failing. The joys of renewal and hope are reserved for the Dionysian community, the dancing and frolicking satyrs that evolved first into the chorus and then, internalized, into the spectators of tragic drama.

Nietzsche's eugenic ideal too arises from a spectator's perspective on the whole of life. The goal of Zarathustrian ethics is helping greatness to be achieved. Above happiness, and inseparable from it, it is greatness that Zarathustra-Nietzsche fervently seeks. Like the mountain top towering over the valleys of the humdrum mass, greatness marks the acme of desirability.

Greatness, however, is ultimately not a moral but an aesthetic notion. For it signifies an object of admiration, and admiration resides not in the actor, the subject of morality, but in the spectator. It is from his emphasis on admiration as the province of the spectator and not the actor that Nietzsche fiercely condemns the ego as locus and object of vanity. If self-directed, admiration loses what admiration is destined to be – an emotion exclusively other-directed. Admiration might be called the first and last commandment of Nietzsche's morality (as distinguished from ethics). This morality is an aesthetic one – for better, but also for worse.

Aestheticist morality which seeks to make life itself an object of admiration results from the perspective of the whole rather than the necessarily limited perspective of the individual. Traditional morality by contrast aims to regulate the behavior of individuals toward each other and empathizes with each individual, prescribing and guiding emotions and actions which affect other individuals. A moral being treats the other like the self as a

subject. Admiration by contrast views the other as its object or target. Thus it adopts a fundamentally aesthetic attitude toward the other. Significantly in this context Nietzsche often couples greatness with beauty, thus underlining the aestheticist nature of his discourse.

The main reason why admiration is an aesthetic rather than a moral category is its contemplative nature. Unlike morality it does not pertain to the realm of action. By making a human being an object of admiration we make him or her akin to a work of art. We behave and function as viewers, respectively listeners, as spectators or as audience, rather than, as in the moral realm, as actors or judges of action.

Nietzsche finds inspiration in the wish to increase the possibility of admiration both of individuals and the whole of humanity. The feelings and expectations of a spectator guided him toward both. Spectacle is a leading metaphor in Nietzsche's discourse. Frequently he discusses historical and socio-cultural constellations in terms of the spectacle they would provide for divine viewers. By approaching human life in terms of its theatrical and dramatic quality Nietzsche evaluates periods, societies, and cultures as either colorful, exciting, astonishing, and admirable or as drab, unremarkable, tedious in their ordinances, or comically entertaining. Not only the whole of human life, but life as such, nature, the cosmos, unfold for Nietzsche as an enormous spectacle. We can steer its artistic quality toward as yet unimaginable success, or toward mediocrity, or ultimate failure. Even the ancient morality of "good" versus "bad," which Nietzsche longs to substitute for the Judeo-Christian morality of "good" versus "evil," is not one of moral but aesthetic opposites. A drama or a statue cannot be called "evil," but only "bad," in other words, poor, poorly done even as the lowly and common members of the "herd" were for the ancient Greeks not "evil," but merely "bad" in the basically aesthetic sense of "poorly done," badly fashioned.

They were considered unfortunate, the way we speak of an artist's unfortunate, that is, botched, creations.

Nietzsche conceives of his task as helping to make the spectacle of human existence as interesting and as admirable as possible. His thinking was to help transform human life from the dull and drab show to which it had deteriorated as a result of the victory first of Judeo-Christian and then modern democratic slave morality, into a provocative, breathtaking, and sublime show, one worthy to entertain gods.

A striking corroborative example is Nietzsche's conflicting evaluation of the Jewish contribution to history. Nietzsche's attitude towards Jews and Judaism sometimes borders on the discourse of anti-Semitism, although, in sharp contrast to most anti-Semites, he accuses the Jews mainly for having given birth to Judaism's traditional enemy and persecutor – Christianity. But, again and again, Nietzsche emphasizes that it was Judaism from which the perennial villain of his polemics –Christendom– arose. Nietzsche castigates the Jewish people for having initiated the “slave revolt” in moral values, for having reversed the aristocratic morality of “good” versus “bad” into the morality of “good” versus “evil,” which was to give the masters a bad conscience. The Jews were the inventors of the morbid and pernicious notion of sin and the guilt-ridden neurosis deriving from it, which has blighted the psychic health of the West.

Yet, even in accusing the Jews, Nietzsche pays them the supreme compliment of having genius, even if that genius has been misused for poisoning life on earth with self-loathing. Finally, despite his condemnation, Nietzsche praises and eulogizes the Jews and their spiritual offspring for having made human life infinitely more “interesting” than it had ever been before. Because of the Jews' and then the Christians' invention of God as a judge of hidden motivations human life has become deepened, multi-layered, multi-dimensional.

The enormous inner tensions and conflicts, and with them the psychological subtleties which the ever-looming possibility of sin and its attendant guilt feelings produced has made the human psyche a dramatic spectacle worthy to entertain an audience of discriminating gods. It is ultimately to the Jews that the human world owes this enormous enrichment and expansion of its inner space and depth. Modern man owes the Jews the highest admiration for an achievement unique in the annals of human life.

As I mentioned before, the invention of “sin” has made human life decisively more “interesting.” “Interesting” is a cognitive, also an aesthetic, category, but definitely not an ethical one. For it does not pertain to the perspective of the actor, the moral agent on the stage of human life to which all morality relates. Interest arises in the spectator who judges what he views as either interesting or dull. “Interesting” is an effect upon a spectator, not upon someone who is forced to act. Naturally acting human beings, moral agents, can be “interesting” not to themselves while facing action, but to those who watch and reflect upon them. Individuals as well as actions and events can be called interesting only as objects of contemplative thought, in the broadest sense aesthetic phenomena.

With that I will return to Nietzsche’s saying “The world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.” That is, the world is justified from the point of view of a spectator who might feel called upon to judge what is shown to or performed for her. The spectator judges what she observes as either acceptable, that is, justified, or unacceptable, that is, unjustified. As Kant has indicated in his *Critique of Judgment*, which is devoted to aesthetics, the essence of the aesthetic is taste, which manifests itself as judgment that can be either praise or critique and rejection, and frequently of course a mixture of the two. Justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon is itself an aesthetic judgment and only by

implication a possibly moral one, insofar as it might imply that the world is not justified in any other way, as, for instance, by an arena of moral values.

The world for Nietzsche is an aesthetic phenomenon in two senses – one active and the other passive. In the active sense, it is aesthetic as the arena of creativeness; in the passive sense, it stages performances for spectators. In Schopenhauer's terms, the former is the world as Will, as the creative energy of the universe, in Nietzsche's term, the Dionysian. The latter is the world as Representation, in Nietzsche's term the Apollonian, as contemplation, observation, and judgment of what the Will has created and creates. The theater reflects and embodies this split in the division between actors and spectators.

In all his thinking Nietzsche takes the view of the spectator/judge of the performance that is human life and history. He demands of it the greatest possible complexity, the creation of suspense and the excitement that accompanies admiration. His philosophy seeks to promote conditions most favorable to producing admiration. In a sense he takes the position of a god, but one who not only watches from Olympian heights, but also struggles to produce ever more masterful performances of life on earth, but who is also mortally afraid that instead the dramatic spectacle might fizzle out and amount to nothing in the end.

Consideration of Nietzsche's dual view of the Jews leads us to a further element of his holistic (monistic) thinking by which this thinking opens up toward a humanist liberalism, the word understood in its broadest sense. It stands in sharp contrast to what I have discussed so far.

What Nietzsche combats is dogmatism, intellectual absolutism of any kind. Herein lays his affinity to post-modernity. He finds several, or at least two, sides to any question and not infrequently affirms opposite positions simultaneously. Far from banishing self-

contradictoriness from the precincts of his thought, he advocates it and finds total self-consistency pernicious simplification.

This view is built into the notion of the Dionysian Will itself. Like God in late medieval thought the Will is too tremendous to be equated with any single – and thus limited – perspective. True to its infinity it contains in Nicholas Cusanus' term, the *coincidenta oppositorum*, the co-existence of opposite qualities and attributes. The *coincidenta oppositorum*, or self-contradictoriness of all possible assertions about the whole of being, informs the very manner and structure of Nietzsche's thinking. It is a thinking, not only profoundly dialectical, but also transcending the self-limitations of logical concepts, the necessary one-sidedness of signifiers.

A supreme example of the coincidence of opposites is the Will itself. In the idea of the Will, that all-embracing, all-informing, and ever-moving energy, mutually exclusive notions – exclusive in terms of logical definitions – are united and together constitute the Will. As I have shown, what Schopenhauer and Nietzsche after him saw as the Will binds creation and its opposite, destruction, inseparably together. At times Nietzsche seems to celebrate destruction to enhance the significance of ever-renewed creation. Without its opposite, Nietzsche's thought emphasizes, there cannot be creation. The absence of the coincidence of opposites entails nothingness. Destruction for Nietzsche is only the other side of creation and vice-versa. The two, so fundamentally contradictory in the individual's experience, from the view of the whole are only two phases of a unitary process.

The same *coincidenta oppositorum* at the heart of being can be found again in Nietzsche's view of Greek tragedy which is for him a reenactment of the whole of being. As I already remarked upon, the Apollonian individual is only apparently the opposite of the Dionysian whole. Actually it is only the temporary result of the Dionysian activity. The

destruction of the individual in tragedy seems an absolute end, thus tragic, in our colloquial and misleading meaning of sad. This view is inexact because it is partial. Through the chorus, consisting originally of dancing satyrs, the dance of being continues. In Nietzsche's affirmative view of the Will life always outlives death. From the perspective of the whole of being, Apollonian individual and Dionysian chorus are one. Seen in the totality in which they belong they are two manifestations of a single whole – life. Life unites individual and collective, dramatic character and choral group. From this view the apparent opposites are, in the Hegelian sense of the word, *aufgehoben*, repealed as two phases of the all-inclusive whole of being.

The ultimate identity of Apollonian individual and Dionysian chorus shows itself in the strict proportionality of their relationship. The greater the individual, the more powerfully alive and Will-possessed he is, the greater, and thus more tragic, will be his fall. Tragedy requires pre-eminent heroes. Yet the more tragic his fall, the more powerful will be the re-assertion of life through and in the chorus. It is the greatness of the individual, and consequently the all more shattering witnessing of his fall, that enhances and magnifies all the more powerfully the transcending greatness of life in surmounting even the most momentous loss. In tragedy the proportionality and the intimacy between death and life, individual and whole, makes its appearance.

This view of tragedy, developed in his youth, illuminates the apparent paradox in Nietzsche's later writings – that the passionate proponent of a radical individualism could by the same token also be the advocate of evaluating all individuals in terms of their contribution to the glory of the whole of life.

There is no dichotomy here between individualism and holism. The two are different sides of the same. The enhancement of individuals enhances the whole itself and, obversely,

mediocrity and degeneracy of individuals reduces and demeans the whole. Dialectical, apparent, or real self-contradictoriness dominates Nietzsche's interpretation of the nature of being, and above all of human-being, and his formulation of the values that are to shape and to guide it. However, we have to distinguish dialectical from mere self-contradiction. In the dialectical thought that Nietzsche inherits from Hegel, but minus Hegel's teleological basis, scorned by Nietzsche, qualities and attitudes in history emerge from their opposites. The dialectical relationship of opposites, like life-threatening sickness and higher health emerging from it, marks Nietzsche's thinking. However, there is also abundant evidence, in Nietzsche's work, of sheer non-dialectical self-contradiction. To give one outstanding example, I will return once more to the notion of the Eternal Return and its relationship to the notion of a Will of presumably infinite creativeness.

Earlier I discussed the Eternal Return of all things and events as the temporal expression of Nietzsche's Dionysian view of the ultimate oneness of things. This oneness must be perceived as a recurring of all events in time, since oneness excludes anything beyond and outside itself. It can exist only as a finite universe closed (shut) in upon itself. Yet the notion of the Will as unbounded and infinite creativeness has to be thought of as eternally creating the new, the unprecedented, which cannot be contained in a finite universe like the one marked by the Eternal Return. In a universe of Eternal Return there can ultimately be nothing new, nothing that has not been before. This temporal structure sets an absolute barrier to the creation of the unprecedented, the totally and absolutely new. Thus the Eternal Return limits the all-creative (ever-creative) Will to creating only those things that had already been created infinitely many times before, but does not allow it to create something without previous incarnation in the eternal circle of time. Nietzsche nowhere

shows his awareness of this contradiction in his thought. Thus self-contradiction is affirmed by him not only explicitly. It underlies his entire thought implicitly.

How can we come to terms with it without accusing Nietzsche of negligent or fuzzy thinking? The answer lies in the extension of self-contradictoriness into the nature of being itself. The eternally creative Will and the exclusion of all new creation in the Eternal Return present in their union the unresolvable paradox inherent in being. Being does not allow itself to being limited to any one position which would impose boundaries on (upon) it. In his self-contradictions Nietzsche shows the impossibility of restricting being to the structures of logical thought which excludes paradox from consideration. However, the self-contradictoriness of being as presented explicitly and implicitly in Nietzsche's thought (thinking) anticipates theories of modern physics and cosmology in which being appears contradictory, transcending concept-based logic when, for instance, it presents ultimate units of matter as wave and as particle simultaneously - an impossibility not only for conceptual thinking, but even for our perceptual experience. Paradox is built into Dionysian holism because of the latter's all-inclusiveness, which has to transcend the limitations imposed by conceptual language.

Most of Nietzsche's self-contradictions are ultimately traceable to the contradiction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Thus Nietzsche's well-known elitism and pro-aristocratic bias is an Apollonian element radically contradicting the orgiastic oneness of the Dionysian. In the Dionysian dance Nietzsche projects a classless community that knows no barriers of rank. Yet in the sociology of his later writings Nietzsche consistently upholds the desirability of an aristocratic ethics of *Distanz* by which the well-born and superior separate themselves, not only from the masses, but even from each other. Keeping empty space around oneself is here the highest commandment. Nietzsche's predilection for severe

discrimination is closely linked to Apollonian individualism. In his *Herrenmoral* individuality is expanded into extreme differentiation between social classes, castes, peoples, and races, race frequently serving as the basis of social, class, and caste distinctions as in the ancient Hindu caste system, which Nietzsche admired as an exemplary social order.

Nietzsche's frequently exhibited bias against modernity and its compassionate and egalitarian social consciousness, however, does not bar opposite tendencies from his work. Important passages can be found in Nietzsche's writings quite critical of the exclusionary bias of aristocratic cultures and sympathetic toward modernity. In such passages Nietzsche identifies himself with modernity by the use of the personal pronoun "we" when speaking of modernity. In a passage in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche praises the openness of "us moderns" (modernity) to alien cultures and value systems. The passage in question closely links historicism to the liberal readiness of modernity to empathize with the cultural other and open itself to all of humanity. Here Nietzsche takes the side of both liberal modernity and historicism, thereby sharply contradicting one of his most famous books, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Now, I will examine more closely Nietzsche's reversal of his usual bias against historicism and modernity since it has crucial bearing on his Dionysianism and on his advocacy of what he understands as "justice."

Nietzsche lays great stress upon justice. However, as is to be expected, he by no means understands justice as equality of all before the law, or due process, or anything remotely akin to equal treatment of all. Justice for him is giving everyone and everything his or its due. That is, to be just is to guard against one-sidedness, against exaggeration, against absolutizing particular viewpoints. By ruling them out Nietzschean justice rules out fanaticism.

To a considerable degree, Nietzsche's idea of justice informs the structure and style of his writing. Having just presented and extolled one point of view, Nietzsche quite often brings up an "on the other hand," a qualification and even a counter-argument, to the one he has just advanced. Sometimes this characteristic switch of view is prefaced by a phrase warning against exaggerating the preceding argument. Thus justice is a balancing of particular perspectives in order to do justice to the whole.

Nietzsche pursues justice of that kind not only in immediate sequence of individual passages. He brings mutually contradictory points of view into texts separated from each other by long periods of time, bringing a contrary perspective to bear on a position once held. I will exemplify that by discussing the above-mentioned modification of Nietzsche's views on historicism, modernity, and pre-modern aristocratic societies. In his early essay *The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* Nietzsche castigates historicism, the study of history for the sake of merely knowing and understanding the past, for being inhibitive of and inimical to life in the present. Such study is harmful because it fosters a purely contemplative and passively receptive mentality which inhibits action that would contribute to history in the making. Since life can be enhanced only by will translated into action, *l'histoire pour l'histoire* wastes and paralyzes energies that should be used to shape contemporary life and its future. This action-oriented view of life must be highly critical of pure disinterested, so-called "objective" scholarship serving knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

However, there is a further, even more potent, reason for Nietzsche's condemnation of the historicism cultivated at the German universities of his time. Historicism, as traced back to Herder and eighteenth century pre-Romanticism, aims for historical empathy, the empathetic re-experience (experience) of past cultures and historical periods from within

themselves. It seeks to foster the emotional participation of the student of history in the thinking and feeling of the past. That, in Nietzsche's view, means to disconnect oneself from one's own contemporary life, its problems and tasks, by living in the minds of bygone ages. The terrible danger of this immersion in the past, Nietzsche holds, is the loss of one's personality, the weakening of the self that *has to exist* (live) in the present toward the future. It is a loss of personhood for which slipping into past lives cannot compensate, since the assumption of lives of alien worlds can never amount to more than masquerading. An authentic existence is one faced with choices among possible actions preparing a future still to be made. One might call Nietzsche's position an Apollonian existentialism. With the forfeiting of a genuine existence through the masquerade of historicism, life in the present, the only life we have, loses its significance. In that Nietzsche saw the curse of historicism and with it of modernity. Human life in modernity is in danger of turning into an internalized museum. Historicism is critiqued by Nietzsche from both a Dionysian and an Apollonian perspective. It stands condemned for the diminution of the vital energy, the creative Will in us, and for the loss of individual personhood, the uniqueness of one's self. However, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche contradicts his earlier critique of historicism and modernity, highlighting their decisive advantages for life. He now sees modernity, as characterized by historicism - today we might call it post-modernity - as openness to and curiosity about the cultural other as embodied in *all* - and I should emphasize the word "all" - in all forms and styles of life no matter how alien to our own. Nietzsche employs the word *uberall* (everywhere) to indicate the universality or totality of the will to explore and thus to appropriate and incorporate which manifests itself in the boundless curiosity of "us," the people of modernity. He points to the whole of life that we "moderns," in contrast to aristocratic cultures of the past, seek to penetrate. Here modernity, through its historicism,

touches upon and evokes echoes of the Dionysian. The modern sensibility seeks, if not a union with, at least an approximation to, the whole of being.

At the same time, Nietzsche casts a critical look at aristocratic cultures he normally glorifies. He points out their provincialism, their self-restriction, their suspicion and rejection of anything outside their narrow horizon, anything alien and unaccustomed. He points out how the aristocratic society of seventeenth-century France was unable to find access to Homer, how it considered him barbaric and revolting. The absence of historical sense with its opening toward the strange, the other, is what Nietzsche finds lacking in aristocracies. It is their shut-off horizon he deplors.

It is quite obvious that Nietzsche links modernity in its historicist and ethnographic inclinations to the Dionysian, the closed horizon of the pre-modern noble insistence on distance from the other – whether the historical or ethnic and cultural other – to the Apollonian.

I have discussed this relationship in some detail to highlight the deliberate self-contradictions in Nietzsche's thought. Many others can be cited, such as his above-mentioned mixed attitude toward the Jews, his view of women and the feminine, and so on. With his self-contradictions he aims at *justice* toward the richness and variety of the whole of life. He sees in the historicist empathy of modernity, to the denunciation of which he had previously devoted an entire book, a variant of the Dionysian cult of transforming the self into the other with whom it seeks to merge. It is prefigured in the satyr's slipping into other skins, other hearts, other souls. Here it is important to keep in mind the dramatic actor's descent from Dionysos' retinue. On the other hand, Nietzsche implicitly detects in the rigid insistence on strict boundaries around one's group – an extension of one's self – the underlying fear of the ever-menacing loss of selfhood that haunts the Apollonian individual.

Such unheroic anxiety contradicts the code of courage animating the sharply profiled hero of noble cultures. Nietzsche shows him compromised by his fear of mingling with the other.

Anxiety coupled with heroism – another striking example of the *coincidenta oppositorum* marking Nietzsche's thought. It is a striking illustration of Nietzsche's understanding of "justice." Justice for Nietzsche means to partake in all sides of an issue, in illuminating opposites that together make a whole. Justice in Nietzsche's sense is thus akin to irony – uniting two opposite meanings in a single statement – and that Nietzsche is a master of irony is generally recognized. In my reflection, Nietzsche's irony is the supreme trope in which Dionysian holism expresses itself. It is also important to remember that it was the Dionysian satyr who bestowed his name to the genre that carried irony to its biting extreme in satire.