

Examine Nietzsche's
statement in the birth
of tragedy that it is
only as an *art*...

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Examine Nietzsche's statement in *The Birth of Tragedy* that it is only as an 'Aesthetic Phenomenon' that existence can be 'justified' to eternity.

According to the qualities of 'eternity' and 'existence' that Nietzsche and Schopenhauer prescribe; it is by definition that something can only be justified in the phenomenal world: the world of 'existence'. Although this statement describes existence justifying itself to eternity, *The Birth of Tragedy* tends to illustrate the inverse: eternity justifying itself appearing through existence.

However the movement between the states of the 'physical' and 'virtual' is not directional in the empirically spatiotemporal manner that Schopenhauer takes on. Unlike transcendentalist ideas, what Nietzsche depicts is an apparent duality born in the fusion of the mind's twofold reality that has knowledge and perception only of existence. Aesthetic phenomenon offers us "delight in semblance" and simultaneously offers a greater, metaphysical delight in "the destruction of the visible world of semblance" (BT: 24).

The requirement that a phenomenon must be 'aesthetic' is universal in the sense that there is no requirement as to what an 'aesthetic' thing is.

Supposedly it can be anything phenomenal "even the ugly and disharmonious is an artistic game which the will, in the eternal fullness of its delight, plays with itself." (BT: 24) Clearly there are degrees of 'aesthetic' quality that render more delight, but the delight is equally achievable in the interpretation as it is in the 'phenomenon' that is acting as a trigger.

Maybe it is more appropriately imagined that 'eternity' justifies itself in the phenomenal: because the 'justification' takes place when an object awakens
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a sense of the 'eternal', so it is really a matter of seduction, and how effectively this 'aesthetic phenomenon' allows the noumenal to thrust itself upon the perceiver. But to say that this takes place wholly on account of how 'aesthetic' the phenomenon is, would be to ignore how easily the perceiver is seduced, or how he perceives all together.

It is clear that different people find beauty in different things. It is also clear that some may find beauty in nothing, as with meditation. But that brings into question whether we can really have a 'nothing' in human experience, for even the most isolated and detached human experience cannot be fully impartial to the world of experience. The point however; is that although 'aesthetic phenomenon' is a necessity; it is the openness and imagination of the perceiver that allows the object to justify existence to the eternal.

For beauty can exist in everything, but only on occasion do we see beauty to such high intensity that it awakens a recognisable feeling of the 'eternal'.

For Nietzsche, art is a more powerful form of 'aesthetic phenomenon', than naturally occurring beauty; the human is more familiar with art, often because it relates more to qualities in the realm of human experience, be it situational or emotional. This familiarity lures the perceiver into a greater degree of belief, acting as a catalyst to the erosion of self identity, as they more easily forget the self, and become overwhelmed by the 'will'.

Nietzsche places 'attic tragedy' at the peak of this process, as he mentions the audience become the play, and the combination of two separate art forms allows the birth of a new less physically obsessed, and more

enchanting work of art. The degree, to which the audience can recreate the moment that the artist felt in creating the piece, depends partly on the artist's ability to transfigure the feeling into an 'aesthetic phenomenon', but also on the audience's ability to empathise (hence humanistic art is more effective).

This 'empathy' or 'mitleiden', requires the demolition of the concept of the 'individual' and the rise of the innate primordial unity, in order for this eternal intensity, that Schopenhauer, quite carelessly called the 'will', to overtake. It is because art is a reproduction of the eternal in a phenomenal form that Nietzsche believes "we are far from truly being the creators of that world of art" (BT: 5), the artist is merely the mediator of the eternal, who engages in procreation. The world that art 'represents' itself in is impartial to the world it came from.

The description of the divine impregnating the humanly to beget a great 'art' generates a dualistic concept, that implies a transcendence from the noumenal into the phenomenal: "the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the Apolline and the Dionysiac in much the same way as reproduction depends on there being two sexes" (BT: 1) whereas a sexual co-existence involves two opposites, that are of the same substance, Nietzsche is presenting a relation with the being and the immortal.

But it seems he places this sense of superiority not in the aspects themselves, rather due to the difficulty of escaping worldly attributes and the natural inclination to view what is beyond us as greater than what we are or

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possess. He compares our awareness of our artistic significance to that “ which painted soldiers have of the battle depicted on the same canvas” (BT: 5) reiterating the impossibility of viewing artistic creation from both angles as player and spectator alike.

Within the realm of existence, aesthetic delight serves the purpose of awakening that dormant innocence which provides openness to the primal spirit. This instinct put to sleep by our ‘ view’ of the world that quantifies things; a cognition we naturally take on, as the phenomenal world becomes more apparent and through childhood we develop a new paradigm that becomes less aware of the qualitative. This becoming of the individual is characterised by experience, and traded with innocence.

For Nietzsche ‘ Aesthetic phenomenon’ is necessary to create delight which awakens our dormant self, by detaching us from our conscious understanding, and giving way to a higher delight. Nietzsche describes this battle between the innocent and experienced lenses as a trend not only in the life of the individual but also in culture and its cultivation. The cryptic relationship between Apollo and Dionysus parallels the trend in most cultures to become more like Apollo, and forget their wilder innate counterpart whose characteristics are often mistaken for hedonism.

Eruptions of the Dionysian culture are evident in the Romantic period and during the ‘ free love’ period in the 1960’s, both characterised by the use of drugs to liberate one from the sense of identity. These periods, unlike the Greek period, remained movements rather than revolutions, as the use of

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drugs, unlike the use of art was damaging to the economical requirement for a revolution. The Dionysiac's disregard for conventional barriers, such as the sexual, arise from the ability to be intimate and empathise with any being more than the Apollonian can hope to achieve with even one.

This is due to the Apollonian's failure to 'empathise' as Schopenhauer would say, because they are too enthralled with the manifest of their 'will' in its represented form to see that the 'will' is universal; "whenever this breakdown of the principium individuationis occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the Dionysiac" (BT: 1) one who has no sense of self.

Nietzsche's vision of Dionysian art resolves the question Aristotle asks about the 'tragic effect': "Why is it that we voluntarily subject ourselves to depictions of the terrible in life? Schopenhauer called 'tragedy' the highest art form in which we surrender to the 'feeling of the sublime'. As Nietzsche describes, our horror is replaced by a 'metaphysical comfort' where the terrible dissolves our vision of beauty in the Apollonian form; that is designed to protect us and secure our drive to live, this 'veil of Maya' is removed and "We really are for a brief moment, the primordial being itself". It is because our Apollonian view of the world cannot remove its inherent characteristics, that the sublime is regarded by Schopenhauer as higher than beauty, and why for Nietzsche, the Dionysian aspect is more fundamental.

Islamic Poet Khalil Gibran explains "The veil that clouds your eyes shall be lifted by the hands that wove it," these ideas raise the question as to whether 'Aesthetic Phenomenon' is justifying the world to eternity, or revealing eternity to the world, as 'Aesthetic Delight' propels the interpreter,

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detaching him from the phenomenal. Nietzsche; contra Schopenhauer, believes that the 'terrible' is not single handedly a higher form of art, as the Apolline realm is needed as the vehicle that humans understand, to transit one into the eternal.

Hence for Nietzsche, 'attic tragedy' is the supreme art form that allows the Dionysian to impregnate the Apollonian; traversing the line between intoxication and dream, and being reborn in the world of the individual. Unlike music, which is a 'mirror' image of the Dionysian, a direct reflection from one world into the other, tragedy captivates the audience with Apollonian dreamlike images, through which the Dionysian chorus "Discharges itself", dissolving the apparent dichotomy from a world of semblance, and unleashing the eternal.

For Nietzsche the duality between Dionysus and Apollo is only a psychological one and his liking to the dominant organic notion of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* is possibly a result of his youth, and desire to escape the overly Apollonian culture he endured and despised. Heidegger offers an interpretation of Nietzsche's use of the word 'Chaos' that differs to those non-Greek translations whose etymology of the term, reduce it to words like 'primordial' that do not capture the meaning which echoed in its use in mythic tradition. Heidegger's classical reading of the word imbues an idea of "that which yawns, the gaping out of itself. Applied to Nietzsche's aesthetics, this would trivialise the role of the phenomenal which essentially repeats itself through time, in waves, a result of procreation that facilitates the reversal into the non-human, which is simultaneously the same effect as

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the eternal 'gaping out of itself'. The two dimensional effect is really of the same thing, and for Nietzsche has no direction or duration in the empirical senses of space and time; a concept better felt than imagined due to our impartiality, hence the difficulty Nietzsche mentions in describing notions such as the 'eternal return'.

To what extent then, does Nietzsche see the Dionysian and the eternal as relevant to one another, and separate from the Apollonian and phenomenal? If aesthetic delight leads the path from the phenomenal to the noumenal then at what point and to what degree do these dualistic entities that fit that divide the 'physical' from the 'virtual' relate to each other as properties? Nietzsche claims that attic tragedy is the art form which bonds the Dionysian with the Apollonian, the unison of opposition.

He also differs from Kant and Schopenhauer on the nature of the duality between the noumenal and phenomenal, somewhat paradoxically, he accepts the superficial claim, but when digging into the root of the two spheres, becomes constrained by the possibility of analysing such a void, as Paul de Man claims; the reader is "condemned" to an "apparently endless process of deconstruction".

This assessment is unfair on Nietzsche's attempt to find a 'good' answer and thus sacrificing a degree of clarity that is expected in describing something that language cannot describe: "language, as the organ and symbol of phenomena, can never, under any circumstances, externalize the innermost depths of music... the heart of the primordial unity," (BT: 5) his passage

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summarises the futility of all phenomena in relating to the eternal, but the need for phenomena to create art as a birth giver to the eternal, whereby language is a weaker tool than music and tragic myth.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche constantly reiterates the predominant nature of the Dionysiac that “ shows itself, in comparison with the Apolline, to be the eternal and original power” (BT: 25). Although not entirely in keeping with Kant and Schopenhauer’s duality, he still bastardises the Apollonian state, highlighting the separateness of the two art forms.

This must mean that there is a significant point where the border between states is crossed, in order to form the attic tragedy, and similarly must mean there is a point where the justification of the world to the eternal takes place. But Nietzsche offers no explanation, possibly because these dualities are only a manifestation, that grows as naivety is replaced by experience, and the dream state that verges on the state of intoxication succumbs to a newer ‘ physical’ reality.

But Nietzsche holds that these two artistic domains are “ required to unfold their energies in strict, reciprocal proportion” so that one can only be “ permitted to enter an individual’s consciousness as can be overcome, in its turn, by the [other]” (BT: 25), if such is the case, then either Nietzsche believes these drives truly are the essence of a strict duality, or that they are too rigidly laid into the mindset to be abstracted from and comprehended as a whole.

However, if the latter is the case, then the justification of the world to eternity is a human matter, a question of interpretation, where being superhuman is being eternal, and 'aesthetic phenomenon' plays no role. In later writings such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he begins to point in this direction: "the human is something that must be overcome", for existence is to some degree a sense understood by the being, but if one can go beyond the being, then one can go beyond world that requires justifying to eternity.

His notion of 'eternal return' which suggests that the world repeats itself is more ambiguous on the nature of eternity and its relation to the phenomenal. Contra Schopenhauer; Nietzsche's spatiotemporal relation to the world is not one of distance in space, or places in time, rather one of duration, where the movement between the 'physical and 'virtual' reality is unmeasured, and possibly non-existent as the removal of these relations change the way in which existence and the eternal can relate to one another.

Walter Arnold Kaufmann asserts that Nietzsche's conception of the 'will to power' is "perhaps just as much the heir of Apollo as it is that of Dionysus"; his suggestion for a monist interpretation comes from Nietzsche's idea that "quantitative degrees of power might be the measure of value". Clearly Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* is unsure or unfinished on the nature of the duality between existence and the eternal, and where its root ends.

But certainly, the matter of existence being justified to eternity is a matter of being itself, and the reception of the eternal is integral, where the 'aesthetic phenomenon' is just the key. The impartiality of the consciousness with the

eternal requires such a key to open this door, but evidently there is a degree to which the mind can feel the eternal, and to say that only an 'aesthetic phenomenon' can achieve this is to say that the door can only be opened from one side. Bibliography

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