

EIGHT

Friedrich Nietzsche

While neither explicitly focusing on the subject, nor producing a full text on aesthetic theory *per-se*, Nietzsche did have an extensive impact on the aesthetic production of the late nineteenth century.¹ Of his dispersed thoughts on aesthetics the most sustained appear in the first section of *The Birth of Tragedy or: Hellenism and Pessimism* (1872).² There he separates the two creative human impulses into the Apollonian and the Dionysian, dialectics of artistic and behavioral attitudes that he appropriates from Plutarch³ positioning them as polar ethics of creativity. Nietzsche adamantly maintains that the productive struggle between these two poles has not been mastered since the works of the ancient Greek tragedians, and, specifically, that of Sophocles.

For Nietzsche, the Apollonian impulse represents that which fulfills the artistic needs of the beautiful, and includes the “plastic arts” of form and the world of visual appearances. Like Kant, he divorces this artistic power from the intellect. The Dionysian, which Nietzsche ascribes most directly to music, represents that which is imageless, raw, deep, natural, and intoxicated. In the Dionysian state the subject disappears, and the artist is no longer an artist, but becomes a work of art; the aesthetic impulse is not only de-intellectualized but also de-humanized in favor of a primal mystical feeling of unity. In this state man does not see phenomena (as he does in the Apollonian), but sees behind them.

Independent of the temporal qualities of emotional recognition, Nietzsche’s contribution to aesthetic discourse is significant in that it

accepts as an axiom the presence of aesthetic faculty used to perceive the world of appearances. However, instead of positioning these faculties as oppositional to intellectual content, he maintains that they are more of an obstacle that obscures the presence of the deeper, more primal experience of the Dionysian annihilation of phenomena. Whereas a more common critique of the beauty and appearances is that they are overly subjective and obscure more meaningful content, the Nietzschean sentiment is the exact opposite—that such appearances do not obscure, or obliterate enough content, and therefore inhibit the viewer from experiencing the more powerful, primal sense of the Dionysian sublime.

The simultaneous pull of these two extremes produces a vast range of possible human aesthetic experiences. Although Nietzsche’s position shifted to some degree in his later writings, as in *Human, All Too Human*, his views were intentionally divorced from political associations or consequences, and were therefore not part of any larger moral equation, unlike those of many philosophers, including Plato.

From THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, transl. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19-24, 91, 115.

From Chapter 1

We will have achieved much for the discipline of aesthetics when we have arrived not only at the logical insight but also at the immediate certainty of the view that the continuing development of art is tied to the duality of the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*;⁴ just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, which are engaged in a continual struggle interrupted only by temporary periods of reconciliation. These names are borrowed from the Greeks who revealed the profound secret doctrines of their view of art to the discerning mind precisely not in concepts but rather in the insistently clear forms of their pantheon. To both of their artistic deities, Apollo² and Dionysus, is linked our knowledge that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition, in terms of origin and goals, between the Apollonian art of the sculptor and the imageless Dionysian art of music: these two very different drives run in parallel with one another, for the most part diverging openly with one another and continually stimulating each other to ever new and more powerful births, in order to perpetuate in themselves the struggle of that opposition only apparently bridged by the shared name of “art”; until finally, through a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic “will,”³ they appear coupled with one another and through this coupling at last give birth to a work of art which is as Dionysian as it is Apollonian—Attic tragedy.⁴ In order to acquaint ourselves more closely with both of these drives, let us think of them first of all as the opposed artistic worlds of *dream* and *intoxication*; the opposition between these physiological phenomena corresponds to that between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. According to Lucretius,⁵ it was in dreams that the magnificent forms of the gods first appeared before the souls of men, it was in dreams that the great sculptor first beheld the delightful anatomy of superhuman beings, and the Hellenic poet, if questioned about the

secret of poetic creation, would likewise have referred to dreams and given a similar explanation to that of Hans Sachs in *The Mastersingers*:

My friend, it is the task of the poet
To note dreams and interpret.
The truest delusion of man seems,
Believe me, revealed to him in dreams:
All the art of poetry and versification
Is nothing but the true dream-interpretation.⁶

The beautiful appearance of the worlds of dream, in whose creation every man is a consummate artist, is the precondition of all plastic art, even, as we shall see, of an important half of poetry. We take pleasure in the direct understanding of form, all shapes speak to us, there is nothing indifferent or superfluous. And yet even in the most intense life of this dream-reality, the sense of its status as *appearance* still shimmers through: this at least is my experience, for whose frequency, even normality, I could adduce much evidence, including the sayings of the poets. The philosophical man even senses that under this reality in which we live and exist, there lies hidden a second and completely different reality, and that this surface reality is therefore also an appearance. Schopenhauer designates precisely the gift of occasionally seeing men and all things as mere phantoms or dream-images⁷ as the distinctive characteristic of the capacity for philosophy.⁸ So the artistically sensitive man responds to the reality of the dream in the same way as the philosopher responds to the reality of existence; he pays close attention and derives pleasure from it: for out of these images he interprets life for himself, in these events he trains himself for life. He experiences not only the agreeable and friendly images with that universal understanding; but also the serious, the gloomy, the sad, the dark aspects of life, the sudden

inhibitions, the teasing of chance, the fearful expectations. In short the whole “divine comedy” of life, including the Inferno,⁹ passes before him, not only as a game of shadows—since he participates in the life and suffering of these scenes—yet also not without that fleeting sense of their status as appearance. And perhaps many will remember, as I do, calling out to themselves in encouragement amid the dangers and terrors of the dream, not without success: “This is a dream! I want to dream on!” I have likewise heard of people who were able to extend the causal sequence of one and the same dream over three consecutive nights and more: facts which clearly prove that our innermost being, the substratum common to us all, experiences the dream with profound pleasure and joyful necessity.

The Greeks have likewise expressed this joyful necessity of the dream experience in their Apollo: Apollo, as the god of all plastic energies is at the same time the god of prophecy. He, who according to the etymological root of his name is the “one who appears shining,”¹⁰ the deity of light, is also master of the beautiful appearance of the inner world of the imagination. The higher truth, the perfection of these states in contrast to the only partial comprehensibility of everyday reality, the deep consciousness of nature as it heals and helps in sleep and dream is at the same time the symbolic analogue of the capacity for prophecy and of the arts as a whole, which make life possible and worth living. But our image of Apollo must include that delicate and indispensable line which the dream image may not overstep if it is not to have pathological effects, otherwise appearance would deceive us as clumsy reality; that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder impulses, that calm wisdom of the image-creating god. His eye must “shine like the sun,”¹¹ in accordance with his origins; even when it rages and looks displeased, it remains consecrated by the beauty of appearance. And so what Schopenhauer says about man caught in the veil of Maya¹² might apply to Apollo in an

excentric sense—*World as Will and Representation*, I: “As a sailor sits in a small boat in a boundless raging sea, surrounded on all sides by heaving mountainous waves, trusting to his frail vessel; so does the individual man sit calmly in the middle of a world of torment, trusting to the *principium individuationis*.”¹³ In fact, it might be said of Apollo that in him the unshaken trust in that *principium* and the calm repose of the man caught up in it has found its most sublime expression, and Apollo might even be described as the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis*, through whose gestures and looks all the pleasure and wisdom and beauty of “appearance” speak to us.

In the same passage, Schopenhauer has depicted the tremendous *horror* which grips man when he suddenly loses his way among the cognitive forms of the phenomenal world, as the principle of reason¹⁴ in any of its forms appears to break down. When we add to this horror the blissful rapture which rises up from the innermost depths of man, even of nature, as a result of the very same collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the essence of the *Dionysian*, with which we will become best acquainted through the analogy of *intoxication*. Either under the influence of the narcotic drink of which all original men and peoples sing in hymns, or in the approach of spring which forcefully and pleasurable courses through the whole of nature, those Dionysian impulses awaken, which in their heightened forms cause the subjective to dwindle to complete self-oblivion. In mediaeval Germany, too, increasingly large throngs of singing and dancing people surged from place to place under the influence of the same Dionysian force: in these St John’s and St Vitus’s dancers¹⁵ we recognize again the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks, with their prehistory in Asia Minor, stretching all the way back to Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaean.¹⁶ There are men who from lack of experience or from stupidity turn away in contempt and pity from such

phenomena as they would from “folk diseases”¹⁷ with a greater sense of their own good health: but these poor men do not suspect how cadaverous and ghostly their “health” looks, compared to the glowing life of Dionysian enthusiasts which roars past them.

Under the spell of the Dionysian it is not only the bond between man and man which is re-established; nature in its estranged, hostile, or subjugated forms also celebrates its reconciliation with its prodigal son,¹⁸ man. The earth voluntarily gives up its spoils while the predators of cliffs and desert approach meekly. The chariot of Dionysus overflows with flowers and wreaths: beneath its yoke tread the panther and the tiger.¹⁹ If one were to allow one’s imagination free rein in transforming Beethoven’s “Hymn to Joy”²⁰ into a painting, particularly the moment when the multitudes kneel down awestruck in the dust:²¹ then one might come close to an idea of the Dionysian. Now the slave is a free man, now all the inflexible and hostile divisions which necessity, caprice, or “impudent fashion”²² have established between men collapse. Now, with the gospel of world-harmony, each man feels himself not only reunified, reconciled, reincorporated, and merged with his neighbor, but genuinely one, as if the veil of Maya had been rent and only its shreds still fluttered in front of the mysterious original Unity.²³ In song and dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher communal nature: he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is well on the way to dancing himself aloft into the heights. His gestures communicate an entranced state. Just as now the animals speak and the earth gives forth milk and honey,²⁴ something supernatural sounds forth from him: he feels himself as god, now he himself strides forth as enraptured and uplifted as he saw the gods stride forth in dreams. Man is no longer an artist; he has become a work of art: the artistic force of the whole of nature, to the most intense blissful satisfaction of the original Unity, reveals itself here in the shudder of intoxication. Here the

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From Chapter 2

Until now we have considered the Apollonian and its opposite, the Dionysian, as artistic powers, which burst forth from nature itself, *without the mediation of the human artist*, and in which their artistic drives at first satisfy themselves directly: first as the image-world of the dream, whose perfection is wholly unconnected to the intellectual level of artistic education of the individual, and then as intoxicated reality, which again pays no heed to the individual, and even seeks to annihilate the individual and to redeem him through a mystical feeling of unity. In relation to these direct artistic states of nature every artist is an “imitator,” that is, either Apollonian dream-artist or Dionysian artist of intoxication, or finally—as for example in Greek tragedy—simultaneously artist of dream and intoxication: such as we have to imagine him as he stands alone to one side of the infatuated choruses before sinking to his knees in Dionysian drunkenness and mystical self-abandonment and as, through the effect of the Apollonian dream, his own state, that is, his unity with the innermost ground of the world, is revealed to him *in an allegorical dream-image*.²⁷

From Chapter 17

Dionysian art too wants to convince us of the eternal joy of existence: only we should seek this joy not in phenomena but behind phenomena. We should recognize how everything which comes into being must be prepared for a painful demise, we are forced to peer into the terrors of individual existence—without turning to stone: a metaphysical consolation tears us momentarily out of the bustle of changing shapes. For a few short moments we really are the original essence itself and feel its unbridled craving for existence and joy in existence; the struggle, the agony, the annihilation of phenomena now seem necessary to us, in the context of the excess of countless forms of existence which crowd and push their way into life, of the overwhelming fertility of the world-will; we are pierced by the raging thorn of these agonies in the same moment as we have become one as it were with the immeasurable original joy in existence and as we sense the indestructibility and eternity of this pleasure in Dionysian rapture. In spite of fear and compassion, we are the fortunate living beings, not as individuals, but as a *single* living being, with whose joy in creation we are fused.

From HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN

Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human, transl. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 104-5 {aphorism 149}.

The slow arrow of beauty. The most noble kind of beauty is that which does not carry us away suddenly, whose attacks are not violent or intoxicating (this kind easily awakens disgust), but rather the kind of beauty which infiltrates slowly, which we carry along with us almost unnoticed, and meet up with again in dreams; finally, after it has for a long time lain modestly in our heart, it takes complete possession of us, filling our eyes with tears, our hearts with longing.

What do we long for when we see beauty? To be beautiful. We think much happiness must be connected with it. But that is an error.

NOTES

[1.](#) *the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian:* the two competing and complementary forces at work in Greek culture which Nietzsche associates with the figures of two Greek deities.

Dionysus: the son of Zeus and Semele, Daughter of Cadmus, King of Thebes. Induced by Zeus' jealous wife Hera to implore her lover to visit her in the divine form, Semele was consumed by the lightning which surrounds the god. Zeus rescued Dionysus from the ashes of his mother and carried him in his own thigh, from which he was later born. Hera continued to pursue him and as an adult he was persecuted by many who refused to recognize his divinity but eventually managed to extend his influence into Asia. Dionysus was traditionally the god of wine and tragedy, and his worship associated with intoxication and loss of identity, sometimes leading to sexual excess and violence. He is frequently represented in the animal form, as half-goat. According to myth, only women were permitted to participate in the celebration of secret Dionysian rites. For Nietzsche, Dionysus is, together with Apollo, the Greek god who *represents* one of the two competing and complementary tendencies within Greek culture. While Apollo embodies the limits and achievement of form and individual identity, Dionysus represents the profound spiritual insights acquired through loss of identity in religious ecstasy. (D. S., transl.)

[2.](#) *Apollo:* Apollo, god of light, prophecy, and medicine, whose attributes are the lyre and the bow,

TEN Henri Bergson

Between the text from his most famous work, Creative Evolution [1907], and a brief selection from his earlier essay, Introduction to Metaphysics (1903), Henri Bergson, who in 1927 received a Nobel Prize in Literature, conceptually intertwines the human functions of aesthetic understanding, perception, instinct, intuition, and intelligence into a more holistic understanding of the nature of knowledge. Bergson asserts that we can study a particular object in one of two ways. We can metaphysically “go around it,” as with scientific observation or we can “go into it,” as with intuition.⁴ This position combines the accepted observation-based tactics of scientific rationalism with the possibility of additional information being gathered through less tangible, aesthetic forms of perception.

Intuition, for Bergson, is a more refined manifestation of human instinct and relies on the sympathetically Kantian notion of disinterestedness for its realization. He then combines his concept of intuition with man's aesthetic faculty to form what he labels “aesthetic intuition.” While Bergson offers no concrete definition of aesthetic intuition, he does allude to its outcome as the production of feeling—and that such feeling is critical toward the production of true knowledge. Bergson is unique in this proposition that aesthetic perception, therefore, is fundamental to obtaining true knowledge.

In Bergson's earlier Introduction to Metaphysics he provides a specific

spatial example, through a description of Paris, of how such intuition and intelligence need be combined to produce working conceptual knowledge of space. For Bergson, intuition, as an aesthetically tinged and disinterested refinement of raw human instinct, exists as the equally contributing counterpoint to raw scientific intelligence—both of which are required for one to possess true knowledge about any space or object of contemplation.

From CREATIVE EVOLUTION

Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, transl. Arthur Mitchell (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 176-79.

Instinct is sympathy. If this sympathy could extend its object and also reflect upon itself, it would give us the key to vital operations—just as intelligence, developed and disciplined guides us into matter. For—we cannot too often repeat it—intelligence and instinct are turned in opposite directions, the former towards inert matter, the latter towards life. Intelligence, by means of science, which is its work, will deliver up to us more and more completely the secret of physical operations; of life it brings us, and moreover only claims to bring us, a translation in terms of inertia. It goes all round life, taking from outside the greatest possible number of views of it, drawing it into itself instead of entering into it. But it is to the very inwardness of life that *intuition* leads us—by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely.

That an effort of this kind is not impossible, is proved by the existence in man of an aesthetic faculty along with normal perception. Our eye perceives the features of the living being, merely as assembled, not as mutually organized. The intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance, escapes it. This intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model. It is true that this aesthetic intuition, like external perception, only attains the individual. But we can conceive an inquiry turned in the same direction as art, which would take life *in general* for its object, just as

physical science, in following to the end the direction pointed out by external perception, prolongs the individual facts into general laws. No doubt this philosophy will never obtain a knowledge of its object comparable to that which science has of its own. Intelligence remains the luminous nucleus around which instinct, even enlarged and purified into intuition, forms only a vague nebulousness. But, in default of knowledge properly so called, reserved to pure intelligence, intuition may enable us to grasp what it is that intelligence fails to give us, and indicate the means of supplementing it. On the one hand, it will utilize the mechanism of intelligence itself to show how intellectual molds cease to be strictly applicable; and on the other hand, by its own work, it will suggest to us the vague feeling, if nothing more, of what must take the place of intellectual molds. Thus, intuition may bring the intellect to recognize that life does not quite go into the category of the many nor yet into that of the one; that neither mechanical causality nor finality can give a sufficient interpretation of the vital process. Then, by the sympathetic communication which it establishes between us and the rest of the living, by the expansion of our consciousness which it brings about, it introduces us into life's own domain, which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation. But, though it thereby transcends intelligence, it is from intelligence that has come the push that has made it rise to the point it has reached. Without intelligence, it would have remained in the form of instinct, riveted to the special object of its practical interest, and turned outward by it into movements of locomotion.

How theory of knowledge must take account of these two faculties, intellect and intuition, and how also, for want of establishing a sufficiently clear distinction between them, it becomes involved in inextricable difficulties, creating phantoms of ideas to which there cling phantoms of problems, we shall endeavor to show a little further on. We shall see that the problem of knowledge, from this point of view, is one with the

metaphysical problem, and that both one and the other depend upon experience. On the one hand, indeed, if intelligence is charged with matter and instinct with life, we must squeeze them both in order to get the double essence from them; metaphysics is therefore dependent upon theory of knowledge. But, on the other hand, if consciousness has thus split up into intuition and intelligence, it is because of the need it had to apply itself to matter at the same time as it had to follow the stream of life. The double form of consciousness is then due to the double form of the real, and theory of knowledge must be dependent upon metaphysics. In fact, each of these two lines of thought leads to the other; they form a circle, and there can be no other center to the circle but the empirical study of evolution. It is only in seeing consciousness run through matter, lose itself there and find itself there again, divide and reconstitute itself, that we shall form an idea of the mutual opposition of the two terms, as also, perhaps, of their common origin. But, on the other hand, by dwelling on this opposition of the two elements and on this identity of origin, perhaps we shall bring out more clearly the meaning of evolution itself.

From INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS

Henri Bergson, An Introduction to Metaphysics, ed. J. Mullarkey and M. Kolkman, transl. T. E. Hulme (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15-18.

It is incontestable that every physical state, simply because it belongs to a person, reflects the whole of a personality. Every feeling, however simple it may be, contains virtually within it the whole past and present of the being experiencing it, and, consequently, can only be separated and constituted into a “state” by an effort of abstraction or of analysis. But it is no less incontestable that without this effort of abstraction or analysis there would be no possible development of the science of psychology. What, then, exactly, is the operation by which a psychologist detaches a mental state in order to erect it into a more or less independent entity? He begins by neglecting that special coloring of the personality which cannot be expressed in known and common terms. Then he endeavors to isolate, in the person already thus simplified, some aspect which lends itself to an interesting inquiry. If he is considering inclination, for example, he will neglect the inexpressible shade which colors it, and which makes the inclination mine and not yours; he will fix his attention on the movement by which our personality *leans towards* a certain object: he will isolate this attitude, and it is this special aspect of the personality, this snapshot of the mobility of the inner life, this “diagram” [*schéma*] of concrete inclination, that he will erect into an independent fact. There is in this something very like what an artist passing through Paris does when he makes, for example, a sketch of a tower of Notre Dame. The tower is inseparably... united to the building, which is itself no less inseparably united to the ground, to its surroundings, to the whole of Paris, and so on. It is first

necessary to detach it from all these; only one aspect of the whole is noted, that formed by the tower of Notre Dame. Moreover, the special form of this tower is due to the grouping of the stones of which it is composed; but the artist does not concern himself with these stones, he notes only the silhouette of the tower. For the real and internal organization of the thing he substitutes, then, an external and schematic representation. So that, on the whole, his sketch corresponds to an observation of the object from a certain point of view and to the choice of a certain means of representation. But exactly the same thing holds true of the operation by which the psychologist extracts a single mental state from the whole personality. This isolated psychical state is hardly anything but a sketch, the commencement of an artificial reconstruction; it is the whole considered under a certain elementary aspect in which we are specially interested and which we have carefully noted. It is not a part, but an element. It has not been obtained by a natural dismemberment, but by analysis.

Now beneath all the sketches he has made at Paris the visitor will probably, by way of memento, write the word "Paris." And as he has really seen Paris, he will be able, with the help of the original intuition he had of the whole, to place his sketches therein, and so join them up together. But there is no way of performing the inverse operation; it is impossible, even with an infinite number of accurate sketches, and even with the word "Paris" which indicates that they must be combined together, to get back to an intuition that one has never had, and to give oneself an impression of what Paris is like if one has never seen it. This is because we are not dealing here with real *parts*, but with mere *NOTES* of the total impression. To take a still more striking example, where the notation is more completely symbolic, suppose that I am shown, mixed together at random, the letters which make up a poem I am ignorant of. If the letters were *parts* of the poem, I could attempt to reconstitute the poem with them by

trying the different possible arrangements, as a child does with the pieces of a Chinese puzzle. But I should never for a moment think of attempting such a thing in this case, because the letters are not *component parts*, but only *partial expressions*, which is...quite a different thing. That is why, if I know the poem, I at once put each of the letters in its proper place and join them up without difficulty by a continuous connection, while the inverse operation is impossible. Even when I believe I am actually attempting this inverse operation, even when I put the letters end to end, I begin by thinking of some plausible meaning. I thereby give myself an intuition, and from this intuition I attempt to redescend to the elementary symbols which would reconstitute its expression. The very idea of reconstituting a thing by operations practiced on symbolic elements alone implies such an absurdity that it would never occur to any one if they recollected that they were not dealing with fragments of the thing, but only, as it were, with fragments of its symbol.

Such is, however, the undertaking of the philosophers who try to reconstruct personality with physical states, whether they confine themselves to those states alone, or whether they add a kind of thread for the purpose of joining the states together. Both empiricists and rationalists are victims of the same fallacy. Both of them mistake *partial notations* for *real facts*, thus confusing the point of view of analysis and of intuition, of science and metaphysics.

NOTE

[1.](#) Albert Einstein, a near contemporary of Bergson's, offers a sympathetic observation in his famous adage: The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift. (M.F.G.)