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dissonance and illusion in nietzsche's early tragic philosophy

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> *If you could imagine dissonance assuming human form — and what else is man? — this dissonance would need, to be able to live, a magnificent illusion which would spread a veil of beauty over its own nature.*
>
> — Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §25

INTRODUCTION

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche contrasts the dying Socrates' cheerful

optimism with the pessimistic wisdom of the Dionysian satyr Silenus: what is best in life is "not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best for you is: to die soon."[1] Such is the opposition between "scientific optimism" (*BT* 18), which imbues life with rational meaning by linking theoretical knowledge with happiness, and Schopenhauerian pessimism, which denies the value of life. This article shows how Nietzsche overcomes this opposition in his image of a music-making Socrates (*musiktreibender Sokrates*), who symbolizes the affirmation of life as an aesthetic phenomenon. I argue that the explicit opposition between optimism and pessimism in *The Birth* conceals an implicit antagonism between teleological and antiteleological worldviews, which remains unresolved. This latter antagonism informs the pessimistic insight that Nietzsche's music-making Socrates transforms into aesthetic affirmation, embracing only an illusion whose subsequent demystification undermines the metaphysical solace that it provided. Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche accepts and even amplifies the dissonance of human existence, without succumbing to pessimistic resignation or subscribing to a metaphysical system. Such is the position that he calls tragic, presenting us with a juxtaposition of appearances deprived of any intelligible ground.

My interpretation breaks with the canonical conception of Nietzsche's early Schopenhauerianism that remains entrenched in the Anglophone scholarship.[2] I agree with recent commentators who, though in the minority, have firmly challenged the view that Nietzsche commits himself to Schopenhauer's metaphysics and pessimism in *The Birth*.[3] My reading nonetheless problematizes certain key conclusions shared by many of these commentators. For instance, Béatrice Han-Pile holds that Nietzsche sincerely endorses the ontological value of tragic myth,[4] while Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes interpret life's meaninglessness as the objective feature of reality that Nietzsche's aesthetic illusion protects against.[5] By contrast, I contend that Nietzsche treats any such truth about nature or life's meaning as a cultural fiction that emerges from the poetic staging of reality. Against the backdrop of the transcendental turn taken by Kant (*BT* 18–9), emphasizing the subjective basis of our knowledge about the world, Nietzsche's music-

making Socrates appears from the depths of our modern social imaginary.[6] This subjectivist stance further contrasts with a variety of naturalist and metaphysical positions ascribed to Nietzsche's later thought, which I do not focus on. However, I do engage Matthew Meyer's account of Nietzsche's supposed Heracliteanism, which endorses a "relational ontology of force"[7] within a naturalistic framework informed by modern physics. It adheres to a correspondence theory of truth that purports to access the world as it really is (pure force) beyond our anthropomorphic projections. Set against my reading, for Nietzsche this amounts to another thinly veiled metaphysics. While I hold that he stands by his subjectivist stance in the later writings as well, that argument requires a critical treatment of greater length.

This article divides into three main parts. The first section considers the Hellenic antagonism between teleological and antiteleological worldviews that informs Schopenhauer's pessimism, which Nietzsche challenges. In the second section, I argue that Nietzsche's early portraits of the pre-Socratics collapse the Platonic distinction between myth and metaphysics, leaving us only with appearances. I elaborate this in the third section, wherein Nietzsche's image of the music-making Socrates symbolizes the moment that scientific optimism wrecks upon pessimism and transforms into aesthetic affirmation, which as a cultural ideal is fraught with contradiction.

1. TELEOLOGICAL AND ANTITELEOLOGICAL WORLDVIEWS

The Birth distinguishes between three central philosophical positions: Socrates' optimism treats suffering as a logical problem to solve; Schopenhauer's pessimism renounces life's value due to suffering; and aesthetic affirmation embraces the necessity of suffering in a world devoid of rational laws. To understand Nietzsche's treatment of the scientific optimism that he associates with Socrates, I briefly outline its historical basis. Scientific optimism characterizes Plato's teleological account of nature wherein human life is purposively created for a rational end. One achieves happiness by grasping the final good that orients life. Virtue follows from the wisdom that comprehends the rational structure of the

universe. Encapsulating the metaphysical basis of such optimism is Plato's view that "[the cosmos] is a work of craft, modeled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom."[8] Socrates finds this teleological account lacking in Anaxagoras,[9] an account that grounds his final argument for the immortality of the soul.[10] On this view, death is a boon because it releases the immortal soul from the appetitive snares of the body. Socrates' final words concluding the *Phaedo* seem to characterize death as a doctor releasing her patient (the soul) into the divine realm of eternal goodness, the aim of theoretical knowledge. The soul and the cosmos reflect one another in their rational harmony, modelled after the transcendent Ideas that ground life's teleological orientation.

The philosophy of Democritus, to whom Nietzsche dedicates his philological studies from 1867–9,[11] starkly opposes this teleological worldview. Nietzsche's early lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* sum up Democritus's antiteleological view. The eternal flux of atoms in the void is governed by a "'*purposeless causality*, an *anagkē* [necessity] *without aims*,' conformable to the 'most rigorous lawlike behaviour, *only not according to rational laws*.'"[12] Such is the *vortex of being* that Nietzsche alludes to in the 1871 draft Forward for *The Birth*, concerning "the origin and purpose [*Ursprung und Ziel*] of the tragic work of art,"[13] a phrase that Nietzsche used as a draft title for the book.[14] In Nietzsche's 1873 manuscript *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, this "vortex" (*dinos*) corresponds to the cosmic "whirl" initiated by Anaxagoras's *nous*. Nietzsche divests himself of philological accuracy when he writes that Anaxagoras's *nous* is "far removed from a direct purposive end for all individual things,"[15] but "on the contrary, suggests that the order and efficiency of things are but the direct result of blind mechanical movement," originating out of the "irrational free random choosing that lies in the artist's depths."[16] This is the purported reason for Plato's criticism of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo*.[17] Taking creative liberties, Nietzsche reconciles what he deems the original free choice of Anaxagoras's *nous* with the blind necessity of Democritean flux, the former setting the latter in motion. Nietzsche retroactively projects Democritus's antiteleological worldview into his portrait of Anaxagoras.

Nature's primeval chaos is transformed by the random whirling motion initiated by *nous*, whose unconditioned freedom explains the transient configuration of the natural order in which human life chances to flourish. Nietzsche further links this conception of *physis* with Heraclitus's divine "game" of becoming ruled by *Dike* (*PTAG* 19), according to which one could, however perversely, interpret his famous fragment: "the fairest order in the world is a heap of random sweepings."[18] This antiteleological worldview informs Nietzsche's conception of *tragic knowledge* [*tragische Erkenntniss*] (*BT* 15) and which he finds in varying forms with Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, and Democritus.[19]

The contrast between teleological and antiteleological worldviews crucially frames Schopenhauer's pessimistic view that "nothing other can be stated as the purpose of our existence than cognizance of the fact that it would be better had we not existed."[20] This is because life amounts to suffering, and the cosmos lacks any rational aim that would justify it: "In fact the absence of all goals, of all boundaries, belongs to the essence of will in itself, which is an endless striving [*Streben*]."[21] While he posits the *will for life* (*Wille zum Leben*) as the teleological principle governing organismic behaviour, he denies that the cosmos has any final end, resulting in the "nullity and futility of the striving of phenomena in their entirety...The multiplicity of organizations, the ingenuity of the means by which each is adapted to its element and its prey, contrasts distinctly here with the absence of any tenable final purpose."[22] The will, an unquenchable drive for life, is altogether deluded about life's value. In light of such knowledge, Schopenhauer advocates the ascetic denial of the will and resignation to suffering as the path to salvation. Tragic art aesthetically provokes the philosophical pathos of pessimism (that it would be best never to have been born) by representing life's torment in its irrational fruitlessness. The wretched spectacle disposes us to renounce our desire for life by practising detachment.[23] While Schopenhauer's conception of a directionless cosmos aligns with an antiteleological worldview, his ascetic response to suffering imbues existence with a moral significance that Nietzsche paraphrases in his citation from Anaximander: "Where the source of things is,

to that place they must also pass away, according to necessity, for they must pay penance and be judged for their injustices, in accordance with time" (*PTAG* 4).

Nietzsche associates each of these three philosophical positions with a different remedy for the experience of suffering. Socratic optimism locates the cause of suffering in ignorance, which rational understanding eliminates. This coincides with Plato's teleological interpretation of our moral perfectibility. In contrast, aesthetic affirmation embraces suffering as a natural necessity without any inherent moral meaning, following an antiteleological interpretation of nature. Finally, Schopenhauer's pessimism proposes the cure of ascetic self-denial as his moral response to life's senseless cruelty. Nietzsche's aesthetic affirmation of life emerges from the depths of Schopenhauer's pessimism, which espouses the wisdom of Silenus. Nietzsche appraises Schopenhauer's pessimism as a historical moment in Western philosophy. However, the existential question it confronts — *does existence have any meaning at all*?[24] — is hardly distinctive of modernity. The wisdom of Silenus already indicates the despairing attitude that would answer this question with a resounding No, though none of the ancient schools of philosophical thought, nor the aesthetic affirmation exemplified in tragic myth, advocate this type of pessimism.[25] What for Nietzsche makes Schopenhauer's pessimism distinctively modern is the way he envisions nature's purposeless monstrosity, deprived of Platonic harmony, as the dramatic backdrop for an extreme asceticism whose goal is moral enlightenment.

A dominant mood characterizes each of these three philosophical positions, be it optimism, pessimism, or the joy of aesthetic affirmation. Irrespective of how we might distinguish these particular moods, what informs each of them, what Nietzsche calls the *pathos of truth*, stems from the philosopher's belief in the absolute value of eternal truth and refers to the illusory conviction of having grasped it. In *Tragic Age*, Nietzsche is not interested in the conventional truth value of philosophy. He instead weaves a narrative about the cultural development of the value of truth understood as a social construct, since "the *belief in truth* [*Glaube an die Wahrheit*] is necessary for man. Truth appears as a

social need: through a metastasis it is then applied to everything that does not need it" (*WEN* 1872:19[175]).[26] In the next section, I advance my interpretation of Nietzsche's early portraits of the pre-Socratics. Breaking with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche understands philosophical activity to transform reality through the imagination in a way that affirms the appearance of its objective verity. At the root of philosophy lies the seduction of knowledge and the art of truth, that is, the power of deception seemingly stripped of poetic artifice.

2. THE PATHOS OF TRUTH

Nietzsche clearly formulates his challenge to pessimism in *Tragic Age*, which portrays Anaximander as a forerunner to Schopenhauer and Heraclitus as a forerunner to Nietzsche's tragic philosophy (*PTAG* 4–8). Nietzsche frames both portraits anachronistically within the context of Kantian philosophy.[27] In contrast to Schopenhauer's pessimistic characterization of Heraclitus as one who "bemoaned the eternal flow of things [*ewigen Fluß der Dinge*]."[28] Nietzsche consistently characterizes him as "the opposite of a pessimist because he does not deny away sorrows and irrationality,"[29] being one for whom existence "may only be grasped as an aesthetic phenomenon."[30] This is not a view that Schopenhauer endorses, since he embraces tragedy for its power to induce the ascetic renunciation of life. He opposes this type of experience to the *affirmation of the will for life* that he links with the worship of Dionysus.[31] Nietzsche's interpretation of tragedy as a glorification of Dionysian life-affirmation thus reverses Schopenhauer's evaluation of the art form. Given this contrast (broadly construed), it is becoming less controversial to claim that *The Birth* challenges both Schopenhauer's pessimism and his metaphysics, features that have commonly been attributed to this work.[32] Han-Pile, as well as Gemes and Sykes, have equated Nietzsche's metaphysics in *The Birth* with a life-affirming myth, whose illusory status poses a similar problem for each of them: how or why would one affirm an illusion that one recognizes as such?[33] I argue that Nietzsche intentionally poses this dilemma without resolving it, thereby provoking suspicion of the life-affirming myth that he rhetorically endorses. Not only is the metaphysical basis of Nietzsche's myth entirely fictional,

but his early tragic philosophy renders suspect the very notion of a true world existing in itself, thus opting for a fundamentally anti-metaphysical stance that challenges any assumptions we might have about the true nature of reality.

Throughout his early unpublished writings, Nietzsche consistently refers to the "anthropomorphic" character of our knowledge about the world,[34] emphasizing the questionable quality of our habitual sense of what is true, as concerns metaphysical or simply physical reality. He consistently denies our ability to access nature as it exists in itself, independently of human cognition. In his 1873 essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense", Nietzsche argues that no "real and universally valid [truth exists] apart from man."[35] He asks, "what then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms . . . truths are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions."[36] The significance of this view relates to Nietzsche's reading of F. A. Lange,[37] under whose influence he questions the existence of Kant's *Ding an sich*, which he understands to be imaginary. As early as 1866, Nietzsche cites the following passage from Lange in a letter to Carl von Gersdorff: "Thus the true essence of things — the thing-in-itself — is not only unknown to us; the concept of it is neither more nor less than the final product of an antithesis which is determined by our organization, an antithesis of which we do not know whether it has any meaning outside our experience or not."[38] This argument reformulates Kant's distinction between the phenomenal realm of appearances, conditioned in space and time, and the unconditioned ground of reality, posited by reason. Rather than a rational standard by which we judge existence, the antithesis between appearance and reality is rooted in our psychophysiological organization, which is itself a mere semblance, since, as Lange states, "our real organization is . . . as much unknown to us as real external things are. We continually have before us nothing but the product of both."[39] The language of semblance is problematic but unavoidable. Nietzsche assimilates this insight into a revised Kantianism. In his early notebooks he makes the radical claim that "all constructions of the world are anthropomorphisms; indeed, all sciences, if Kant is right." Of course, this is not Kant's conclusion. Nietzsche

skeptically infers that since we cannot substantiate this claim scientifically, "we must then say against Kant that, even if we agree with all his propositions, it still remains perfectly *possible* that the world is as it appears to us", which we cannot prove either, resulting in an aporia. Nietzsche concludes that "this whole position is useless. Nobody can live with this kind of skepticism. We must transcend this skepticism, we must *forget* it!" (*WEN* 1872:19[125]).[40] The true thing in itself need not exist at all but may be regarded as the result of a cognitive antithesis that structures the meaning of our experience, namely through a cultural process of aesthetic creation.

Meyer distinguishes what he calls Nietzsche's "skeptical" views in early essays like "Truth and Lie" and "On the Pathos of Truth" — where he purportedly "denies the possibility of knowledge on the grounds that the way we perceive the world and the way we conceptualize our basic sensations distort an inaccessible reality in the form of a thing-in-itself"[41] — from his supposed endorsement of Heraclitus's philosophy in *Tragic Age*, according to which "we have the real world of dynamic relations of force . . . and an apparent, commonsense world that *seems* to be populated with self-identical subjects and objects that exist and persist through time."[42] However, in §11 of *Tragic Age*, Nietzsche espouses the type of view that Meyer claims he has left behind.[43]

> [I]f the existence of things themselves cannot be proved, surely the inter-relationship of things, their so-called being or nonbeing, will advance us not a step . . . [W]e shall never reach beyond the wall of relations [that delimit our experience], to some sort of fabulous primal ground of things [*fabelhaften Urgrund der Dinge*]....It is absolutely impossible for a subject to see or have insight into something while leaving itself out of the picture, so impossible that knowing and being are the most opposite of all spheres.

Here Nietzsche denies both the possibility of knowing what exists in itself, as well as the objectivity of the *inter-relationship of things*, whose endless alteration is what Meyer takes to be "the fundamental 'stuffs' of the Heraclitean world",[44]

namely the "dynamic relations…[that] only exist insofar as they are continuously affecting something they are not, and therefore [which] are in a constant state of change or becoming."[45] We have no access to any such "real world". By implication, Nietzsche equates the Heraclitean play of force with a mere conceptual representation.[46] He furthermore discredits our ability to prove whether a world in itself exists at all, thereby breaking with both sets of views contrasted above in Meyer's periodization. Instead, following Lange, he seems to designate noumena as a limit concept,[47] for since the transcendental turn inaugurated by Kant, the "subjective concept" is "eternal [*ewig*]" (*PTAG* 11),[48] beyond which the realm of things themselves becomes a mythical *Urgrund*, the mere *appearance* of a world behind appearances.

The horizon of human knowledge circumscribes our comprehension, or rather incomprehension, of nature. We cannot grasp nature from a nonhuman perspective. This is not a controversial thesis; indeed, it is that of an anthropological relativism that passes through Kant and leads to a variety of widely held contemporary views. Accordingly, Nietzsche's mythopoeic rhetoric requires no sincere ontological commitments. He urges us beyond skepticism toward a view that embraces the artistic shaping of the world of appearances, which he identifies as *tragic*.

> For the tragic philosopher the *image of existence* is completed by the fact that the metaphysical only appears in anthropomorphic form. He is not a *skeptic*. Here a concept must be *created*: for skepticism is not the goal….One must *want* even *illusion* — that is where the tragic lies (*WEN* 1872:19[35]).

The tragic philosopher takes part in a cultural process producing only illusions, that is, socially constructed truths. In *The Birth*, Nietzsche treats the Kantian notion of nature's unconditioned ground as one such mytho-metaphysical illusion, a primordial womb that births appearances. This anthropomorphic construction results from translating the human experience of finitude into a cosmic, metaphysical realm of becoming. While Nietzsche locates the derivation of metaphysics from the experience of dreaming,[49] as we shall see in the next

section, or from an evolutionary history of sensation,[50] he knows that these primeval processes immanently condition the consciousness that would feign to objectively understand them. We cannot therefore trace the metaphysical plane back to its mythless origin; no such origin exists.

We can thus begin to appreciate *The Birth*'s metaphysical will as a mythical appearance, a fabulation that exemplifies how "man imagines the existence of other things by analogy with his own existence, in other words anthropomorphically and in any event, with non-logical projection" (*PTAG* 11). The tragic conception of the cosmos that Nietzsche associates with Heraclitus is nothing but a mythopoeic projection, the work of an artist that epitomizes his intuitive vision of nature. Nietzsche links Heraclitus's philosophy with Attic tragedy in §24 of *The Birth*, "which reveals to us the playful construction [and destruction] of the world of individuality as an outpouring of primal pleasure and delight [characteristic of a child at play]," [51] and gives his most detailed version of it in *Tragic Age*. Here, the eternal "game" of Heraclitean becoming is a drama "of *law in becoming* and of *play in necessity*." [52] The coincidence of necessity and chance in this cosmic spectacle, "this greatest of all dramas" (*PTAG* 8), resembles the deception produced by the tragic poets.

> Aeschylean-Sophoclean tragedy used the most ingenious artistic means to place all the threads needed to understand events in the spectator's hands in the opening scenes and, to some extent, by chance. This feature demonstrates the value of the kind of noble artistry which masks, as it were, things which are formally *necessary*, so as to make them appear fortuitous (*BT* 12).[53]

The poet stages a series of events pregnant with symbolic meaning, whose inner necessity the audience intuits as if by chance. Only by this achievement does the drama appear spontaneously to provoke a tragic pathos without being recognized for the manipulation that it is. Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus's philosophy similarly represents the poetic staging of reality in this way. The paradoxical

combination of necessity and chance infuses Heraclitus' mythopoeic conception of the cosmos, wherein the haphazard contingencies of becoming harmonize with the eternal principle of divine justice, analogous to the unpredictable but strictly regulated play of a sporting competition. This feature of poetic narrative incarnates the psychological artifice of the imagination and implicitly mirrors the primal structure of belief through which human beings instinctively stage the meaning of their experience by projecting meaning into life and onto nature. The poet, like the philosopher, authors a seductive dreamworld, and "every human being is fully an artist when creating the worlds of dream" (*BT* 1).

In Nietzsche's 1872 essay "On the Pathos of Truth", Heraclitus flees into an imaginary world that he sees everywhere reflected in nature, delighting in the "truth" of the dreamworld that surrounds him. "The truth! The rapturous delusion of a god! What business of men is truth? And what was the 'truth' of Heraclitus? And where has it gone? A vanished dream, wiped from the faces of mankind, together with other dreams!"[54] What Nietzsche calls the *pathos of truth* is the philosopher's sublime feeling of beholding the primordial unity of nature and refers to the joy experienced in this fantastical state of illusion. Nietzsche undermines the distinction between the phenomenal world of appearances (*Erscheinungen*) and the unconditioned ground (*Urgrund*/*Untergrund*) of nature insofar as he identifies this philosophical comprehension of nature as rooted in the imagination. He repeats this insight throughout his early notebooks.

> *The description of the philosopher's nature.* He knows through creating poetry, and he creates poetry through knowing [*Er erkennt, indem er dichtet, und dichtet, indem er erkennt*]....Heraclitus can never become obsolete. It is poetic creation beyond the limits of experience, the continuation of the *mythical drive* [*mythischen Triebes*] . . . Overcoming knowledge through *mythopoeic forces* [*mythenbildende Kräfte*] (*WEN* 1872:19[62]).

This is why it is "very instructive when Heraclitus compares his language with Apollo and the sybil" (*WEN* 1872:19[99]), a point that concludes the discussion

of Heraclitus in §8 of *Tragic Age*. Nietzsche apprehends the desire for knowledge, culminating in the pathos of truth, as instinctively linked with the philosopher's artistically creative, mythopoeic capacity. Nietzsche's note, "About the lie", from the summer of 1872, describes Heraclitus's teaching as an "anthropomorphism" and considers the philosophical "pathos of truth" as having an "accidental origin". He understands Plato's noble lie in this context, which I touch on in the next section. The note concludes: "[we] return to culture in the fashion of *sects*; we try to roll back the immeasurable knowledge in the philosopher and to convince him again of the anthropomorphic nature of all knowledge [*dem Anthropomorphischen aller Erkenntniß*]" (*WEN* 1872:19[180]). Once we recognize the experience of arriving at the truth as sheer pathos, its illusory value presumably ceases to be a source of metaphysical consolation. Nietzsche affirms in a single impossible stroke both the pathos of truth and the demystification of truth as a seductive illusion. He builds this vacillation into his neologism *the pathos of truth*, communicating how truth is nothing but an illusion that we affirm as real. Nietzsche's vision of the tragic philosopher, who paradoxically affirms truth as an illusion, suggests that we cannot be freed from this irresolvable tension between appearance and reality.

Nietzsche's contrast between Anaximander and Heraclitus highlights opposing interpretations — pessimistic versus tragic — of an eternal justice that is entirely fictional. We find this same mytho-metaphysical phantasm in Schopenhauer's Kantian formulation of eternal justice as the "unification of freedom with necessity".[55] Nietzsche suffuses the modern insights of Kant and Schopenhauer with his unified presentation of the pre-Socratic philosophers, who form a dialectical harmony of dissonant voices. Together, the pre-Socratic philosophers embody the instinctual *agon* of a collective subjectivity as it undergoes a process of historical conditioning reflected in the development of scientific knowledge. The defining feature of this subjectivity is its self-contradiction. The identity of Heraclitus, whose tragic philosophy is presented as paradigmatic of the "Hellenic 'Will'",[56] exists at the level of an imaginary cultural representation. One cannot distinguish the man from the myth or myth from *logos*. Enter the music-making

Socrates. With Nietzsche's narrative about the pre-Socratics in mind, we can better understand the significance of this figure, who clinches the dialectical relationship between optimism and pessimism in *The Birth*.

3. THE MUSIC-MAKING SOCRATES

Nietzsche overcomes the opposition between optimism and pessimism in the synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian elaborated in the second half of *The Birth* (*BT* 16–25). This discussion takes as its point of departure the figure of a music-making Socrates (*BT* 14–5), whose appearance marks the culmination of the first half of the book.[57] Nietzsche illuminates the transformation of optimistic theoretical knowledge into pessimistic resignation within the mythological framework of the two artistic drives (*Kunsttriebe*), the Dionysian and the Apollonian, whose coupling manifests an aesthetic affirmation of life. Passionate intoxication, moral transgression, and orgiastic loss of self characterize the Dionysian, while dream-like imagination, moral self-awareness, and the principle of individuation characterize the Apollonian. In physiological terms, the Dionysian expresses the form-dissolving, procreative instinct sublimated into music, and the Apollonian expresses the form-giving, imaginative instinct sublimated into the plastic arts. Metaphysically speaking, the Apollonian and the Dionysian together represent the duality of phenomenal appearances and their primordial ground, of will and representation (*Vorstellung*).[58] Nietzsche opposes the synthesis of these two deified instincts in Attic tragedy to Socratism, which he holds responsible for the degeneration of tragic art. However, this opposition is caught within a circularity insofar as Nietzsche will ultimately argue that Socratic optimism leads to pessimism, whose dialectical sublation, like that of Dionysus and Apollo, manifests life's aesthetic affirmation, as I will show.

The surface of Nietzsche's narrative is deceptive. While the Socratism that opposes tragic art clearly infects Plato's metaphysical idealism, Nietzsche nonetheless uses the Platonic distinction between reality and appearance, between "the 'idea' as opposed to the 'idol,' or copied image [*Abbild*]," in describing the synthesis

of Dionysus and Apollo. Dionysus, "entangled in the net of the individual will," represents the Platonic Idea of being, the metaphysical reality that the Apollonian "idol" — the individuated image of the tragic hero on stage — conceals as the mask of Dionysus (*BT* 10). To a certain degree, this reflects Schopenhauer's metaphysics, which combines the Kantian *Ding an sich*, designated by the will, with Plato's Ideas,[59] through which the will phenomenally objectivizes itself.[60] In Schopenhauer's account of tragic drama, the hero, as a phenomenal figure, is an image of the Idea of humanity, a representation of its collective suffering.[61] By contrast, music represents reality beyond the realm of universal Ideas, as a copy of the noumenal will prior to its objectivization. "Thus music is in no way, like the other arts, an image [*Abbild*] of Ideas, but *an image of the very will* [*Abbild des Willens selbst*] of which Ideas are also the objectivization [*Objektität*]."[62] Nietzsche's synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian thus overcomes Schopenhauer's aesthetic distinction between the Idea of humanity embodied by the tragic hero and the will represented in music, combining the two in a single art.[63] Tragic myth offers us a presentiment of the end of individuation in the return of phenomena to the primordial unity (*das Ur-Eine*), represented by the hero's Dionysian self-destruction. In *The Birth*, the role of the chorus's musical accompaniment to the drama highlights what Nietzsche envisions in the destruction of the tragic hero, namely the Platonic Idea's absorption into the noumenal will prior to its objectivization.

To complicate things further, James I. Porter notes that beneath this Platonic terminology lies a materialist, physiological reduction, indicated by Nietzsche's allusion to Lucretius, who states that "it was in dream that the magnificent figures of the gods first appeared before the souls of men" (*BT* 1).[64] Nietzsche's insight in §5 of *Human, All Too Human* illuminates the connection he sees between Lucretius's atomism and Plato's metaphysics.

> In the ages of raw, primordial culture, people believed that in dreams they came to know a *second real world*; here is the origin of all metaphysics. Without dreams, there would have been no reason to divide the world.

> The separation into soul and body is also connected to the oldest view of dreams, just like the assumption that the soul can appear in bodily form, hence the origin of all belief in ghosts, and probably also the belief in gods. "The dead live on; for they appear to the living in dreams": that was the conclusion one previously drew, throughout millennia.[65]

When read continuously with §1 of *The Birth*, this passage highlights the Dionysian realm as that "second real world" that results from the Apollonian experience of dreaming, as the deceptive appearance of a metaphysical Beyond (*Jenseits*) that imbues empirical reality with the uncanny quality of mere semblance. That "the soul can appear in bodily form" is the primal religious *belief* that Nietzsche describes in his Platonic analysis of Attic tragedy in §10 of *The Birth*, concerning the appearance of the tragic hero as an embodiment of Dionysus. The drama reflects how the experience of empirical reality itself mirrors the quality peculiar to dream consciousness — the *semblance of semblance* [*Schein des Scheins*] (*BT* 4). Bearing this in mind, let us turn back to Lucretius, for whom the soul is a rarefied body of very fine particles. On this view, the appearances of the gods are phantasms: psychical projections of atomic simulacra.[66] Nietzsche finds the metaphysical distinction between reality and appearance to originate from the power of dreaming. We project the difference between waking and dreaming states into phenomenal existence, which then appears as an illusion concealing a world beyond the empirical one. He assumes that this distinction is inescapable, for it is rooted in the psychophysiological organization of human perception. Insofar as our conception of the "real" is bound up with the obscure physiology of dreaming, the veracity of the distinction between appearance and reality is sublated (*aufgehoben*): both demolished and preserved.[67] As the ineliminable basis of subjective representation, it arises from the experience of dreaming and is itself nothing but a dream.[68]

In passages such as §10 of *The Birth*, in which Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, establishes a Platonic interpretation of tragic myth, the distinction between myth and metaphysics is likewise sublated. We must wonder whether tragic myth

signifies the aesthetic materialization of Platonic metaphysics, or whether Platonic metaphysics signifies an abstract, theoretical reduction of tragic myth. Elsewhere in *The Birth*, Plato's rationalism opposes tragic myth and his metaphysics heralds the optimism of Socratic science. In Nietzsche's aesthetics, Plato's opposition between poetry and philosophy oscillates in a process of ambivalent self-inversion. On the one hand, Platonic metaphysics designates a logical theory, while on the other a religious myth; on the one hand, the optimism of Socratic dialectic characterizes it, while on the other it characterizes Attic tragedy.

For Nietzsche, Plato's division between *logos* and *mythos* demonstrates how these two spheres arise inseparably together.

> The theoretical genius pushes for the unleashing of artistic-mystical drives in two ways: on the one hand through its sheer existence, which demands its immortal twin, like one colour the other, in accordance with a certain allopathy of nature; on the other hand through the abrupt transformation of science into art every time its limits are reached (*WEN* 1870:7[125]).

He criticizes Plato's hierarchical judgement that privileges *logos*. Plato provides rational justifications for the employment of *mythos*, understood as a useful means of moral[69] and civic instruction, in subordination to philosophy. We see this most notably in his discussion of the noble lie in his *Republic*,[70] wherein he later banishes the tragic poets from his perfect state.[71] The thesis of Nietzsche's unpublished essay "The Greek State" (1872)[72] is that Plato's noble lie is a sign of his innate artistic strength, which, had his nobility not been corrupted by Socrates, would have been put into the service of the aesthetic, rather than merely intellectual, flourishing of culture. One can understand why Nietzsche considers Plato's noble lie as a sign of his native artistic strength, for it is a manipulation whose effect resembles the one produced by the tragic poet, transforming human artifice into something that appears by turns fortuitous, natural, or divinely ordained. For Plato, the poet's *mythos* supposedly operates far below the lucid heights from which the philosopher employs it. According to Nietzsche, Plato dismisses the

mythos of the tragic poet because it originates unconsciously out of his creative instinct. This is attested in "what Sophocles said about Aeschylus, namely that he did the right thing, although he did it unconsciously." Plato, by contrast,

> is usually being ironical when he speaks of the poet's creative ability, except when it takes the form of conscious insight, and he equates it with the gift of soothsaying and interpreting dreams; the poet, he says, is unable to compose poetry until he has lost consciousness and reason no longer dwells in him. (*BT* 12)

Nietzsche reverses Plato's evaluation of the tragic poet by implicating the philosopher in the art of dream interpretation and hence as one who is no less subject to unconsciously creative forces:

> A person with artistic sensibility relates to the reality of dream in the same way as a philosopher relates to the reality of existence: he attends to it closely and with pleasure, using these images to interpret life, and practising for life with the help of these events....We take pleasure in dreaming, understanding its figures without mediation; all forms speak to us; nothing is indifferent or unnecessary. Yet even while this dream-reality is most alive, we nevertheless retain a pervasive sense that it is *semblance* [*Scheins*] (*BT* 1).

For Nietzsche, poetic narrative mimics the deception of dreams, a deception that also infects the philosopher's waking perception of reality, imbuing it with metaphysical significance.

Precisely this insight marks the transition from Socratic to tragic culture, from scientific optimism to aesthetic affirmation. Nietzsche contextualizes his critique of Socratic optimism with the modern innovations of Kant and Schopenhauer that herald its tragic counterpart.

> The hardest-fought victory of all was won by the enormous courage and

> wisdom of *Kant* and *Schopenhauer*, a victory over the optimism which lies hidden in the nature of logic and which in turn is the hidden foundation of our culture. Whereas this optimism once believed in our ability to grasp and solve, with the help of the seemingly reliable *aeternae veritates*, all puzzles of the universe, and treated time, space, and causality as entirely unconditional laws of the most general validity, Kant showed that these things actually only served to raise mere appearance, the work of maya, to the status of the sole true and supreme reality and to put this in the place of the innermost and true essence of things, thereby making it impossible to understand this essence — putting the dreamer even more deeply to sleep, as Schopenhauer put it [*World as Will and Representation*, I, p.498]. This insight marks the beginning of a culture which I now dare to describe as tragic culture. Its most important feature lies in putting wisdom in place of science as the highest goal (*BT* 18).

This passage provides the modern context for Nietzsche's vision of the rebirth of tragic culture, whose "symbol" is the music-making Socrates (*BT* 17), representing the value of "putting wisdom in the place of science as the highest goal," namely, "the metaphysical solace [*Trost*] that eternal life flows on [*weiterfliesst*] indestructibly beneath the turmoil of appearances [*Wirbel der Erscheinungen*]" (*BT* 18). But how can this type of Dionysian wisdom remain convincing as a culture's *highest goal*, given that the above passage dismisses as an optimistic delusion our desire to penetrate beyond the realm of appearances, leaving us without any access to "the innermost and true essence of things"? Dionysian wisdom thereby reduces to the comfort of an illusion, though one that undermines itself in being recognized as such and thus ceases to be comforting. Gemes and Sykes claim that tragic art protects us from life's objective meaninglessness by virtue of an illusion.[73] This widespread view finds support in Nietzsche's portrait of Hamlet, whose insight into the "true essence of things . . . prompts [him] to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence wherever he looks." While this insight poses the "danger of longing to deny the will as the Buddhist does" (*BT* 7), it is itself delusional,

since "it is an arrogant delusion to believe that we can penetrate to the innermost essence of things" (*BT* 18).[74] Hence, the *highest goal* of culture turns out to be no less illusory than the ateleological cosmic meaninglessness that it is supposed to redeem us from, whose antagonism equates to the juxtaposition of mythical appearances beyond which lies an incomprehensible void.[75]

Nietzsche's early tragic philosophy confronts the abyss of nature, its impenetrability. In the above passage from §18 of *The Birth*, we see that his engagement with Schopenhauer's pessimism withholds any dogmatic assertion about the true nature of reality. Whereas Schopenhauer denies the value of life by virtue of an ascetic wisdom that transcends it, the satyr Silenus calls into question the value of the pessimistic wisdom that he conveys to the humans who entrap him. "'Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear?'" In Nietzsche's account of Silenus' story, the satyr rebukes his human captors, who receive the truth that their possessive lust for it deserves — with "shrill laughter", he ironically punishes their assault, rather than communicating something unconditional.[76] Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche pursues the satyr's wisdom as something inherently questionable, since he accepts that suffering taints knowledge, spoils its pretension to truth, and deprives it of the salvific power that he appears to reinvest in art. In *The Birth*, Silenus' "piece of popular wisdom" entwines the "ecstatic vision" of the Olympian gods that it mythopoetically propagates (*BT* 3). Likewise, Nietzsche's tragic philosopher confronts nature's unfathomable abyss only to transform it into a metaphysical unity, an imaginary instance of aesthetic reconciliation whereby "all that is real is dissolved in semblance, and behind it the unified *nature of the Will* manifests itself, completely cloaked in the glory of wisdom and truth and blinding radiance. *Illusion, delusion at its peak*."[77] Such is the process by which the music-making Socrates transforms the optimistic pursuit of truth that leads to pessimism into the aesthetic affirmation of life, which reaches its peak in a blinding, "mystical sense of oneness" (*BT* 2). This pathos negates nature's unfathomability in the illusion of grasping its real

essence "with the certainty of something directly apprehended [*Anschauung*]" (*BT* 1).

The music-making Socrates symbolically embodies the aesthetic sublation of optimism and pessimism that coincides in what Nietzsche calls *tragic knowledge*, which is discovered when optimistic science, led on by the "sublime metaphysical illusion [*Wahn*]" that existence can not only be rationally comprehended but also corrected, reaches its limit and ends in an abyss, for "logic now curls up around these limits and bites its own tail." At this point, art or myth emerges to remedy science, whose optimism leads through pessimism to aesthetic affirmation. The sublime metaphysical illusion of scientific optimism, which drives science onward in its pursuit of truth, leads scientific knowledge to the point at which "it must transform itself into *art* [*in Kunst umschlagen muss*]*; which is actually, given this mechanism, what it has been aiming at all along*" (*BT* 15). Within the framework of a dialectical sublation of opposites, Nietzsche envisions "the *most illustrious opposition* to the tragic world view, by which I mean science, optimistic to its deepest core, with its ancestor Socrates at the head of it" (*BT* 16), leading through pessimism to the very tragic knowledge it opposes.[78] Tragic myth thereby "leads the world of appearances to its limits where it negates itself and seeks to flee back into the one, true reality; at which point it seems to sing…its metaphysical swan-song" (*BT* 22). The language harks back to Nietzsche's image of the music-making Socrates and alludes to the metaphysical swan song sung by the dying Socrates in the *Phaedo*.[79] While in Plato the limits of the world of appearances give way to a vision of the good beyond being (*epekeina tes ousias*)[80] — a metaphysics of morality — tragic myth undermines this morality in an amoral, life-affirming moment of aesthetic rapture (*Rausch*). This moment coincides with the destruction of the tragic hero on stage, through which the spectators feel themselves united with the noumenal realm beneath appearances, a mere imaginary projection. In *Tragic Age*, Nietzsche describes this experience as "the mystic absorption into *one* all-sufficing ecstatic state of mind [*das mystische Versenktsein in eine allgenügende entzückende Vorstellung*] which is the enigma and vexation of ordinary minds" (*PTAG* 11). In

Kantian terms, Dionysian rapture takes place at the limit of human experience, at "the spot where the occupied space (namely, experience) touches the void (that of which we can know nothing, namely *noumena*)."[81] In a moment of purest bliss, the mind empties into the void of its own subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

Situated within the neo-Kantian tradition of anthropological relativism, Nietzsche's early tragic philosophy designates noumena as a limit concept constricting our knowledge about the world. Following Lange, he finds the metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality to be inextricable from human experience insofar as this cognitive antithesis stems from our psychophysiological organization. This is not to say, with Kant, that beyond the limit of scientific knowledge lies the speculative sphere of metaphysics. Rather, this limit already functions as a dubious metaphysical marker beyond which our cultural ideals amount to mythical constructions. Implicating the value of truth itself as a social construct, what makes Nietzsche's anthropological relativism still controversial today is its radically subjectivist character. Human subjectivity is collectively constituted by a mythical horizon that we cannot transcend. However, the myth of its transcendence persists for science, which attempts to grasp the objective truth about nature. Nietzsche links this myth with Plato's image of the dying Socrates, whose cheerful optimism deifies the scientific quest for theoretical knowledge, and which he contrasts with his own image of a music-making Socrates. Modeled after the ancient figure of a tragic hero, the music-making Socrates symbolizes life's aesthetic affirmation, raising it to the level of a modern cultural ideal. Nietzsche dramatizes how the mythical horizon of human experience, as the sociocultural lens through which we interpret nature, no longer delimits scientific knowledge but tragically infects it, thereby collapsing Plato's distinction between *mythos* and *logos*. The type of mystical-artistic affirmation that accompanies this insight involves a manipulation of our desire for knowledge whose limit collapses into an impenetrable void, producing ephemeral intoxication. Once one comes to recognize the illusory basis of such an experience, life's inevitable, irresolvable

tensions remain.

The world's metaphysical *Untergrund*, the unconditioned ground of phenomenal appearances, not only cannot be grasped, but is produced fictively by the subject's very attempt to do so. This is to say that metaphysical inquiry produces a conviction of the inaccessible object that it pursues. In seeking out the cause of consciousness, one finally confronts the constitutive limit of subjectivity beyond which no cause can be found other than the consciousness of appearances one seeks to explain. The skeptical, demystifying tendency of critical theoretical inquiry at this point turns against and consumes itself, biting its own tail, for the mythopoeic instinct against which philosophy fights finally infects its own intellectual grasp of objective reality. In place of religious myth, metaphysicians posited a realm of being in order to explain the realm of ephemeral becoming, which they considered illusory, whereas Nietzsche treats the contradiction between being and becoming as no less imaginary than the myth that metaphysics was supposed to replace. He suffuses *The Birth* with this contradiction at the heart of appearances, whose aesthetic manipulation produces the pathos of mystical transcendence, a phantasmal representation that one comes to recognize as such. However, when we appreciate the deceptive quality of all metaphysics and discard the dichotomous understanding of reality in terms of phenomena and noumena, we are not thereby freed from illusion, for such dichotomous thinking (and such deception) ineluctably structures the meaning of human experience and imbues it with value. The solution is not to try futilely to overcome this contradiction — exciting an unquenchable thirst for Dionysian intoxication — but to learn the tragic necessity of coming to live with it. Since we cannot get beyond the play of appearances, Nietzsche's early tragic philosophy leaves us with the dissonance of human existence that it only amplifies.

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NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), §3. Hereafter, I refer to this book parenthetically as BT, using section numbers. For the German text of Nietzsche's writings, I rely on Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe, 15 vols., ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988).
2. For recent proponents of the Schopenhauerian view, see Aaron Ridley, "Nietzsche on Tragedy." The Monist 102 (2019): 316–30; Dylan Jaggard, "Dionysus versus Dionysus," in Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition, ed. Paul Bishop (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 260–75. Biographers locate Nietzsche's break with Schopenhauer around 1876, several years after The Birth. E.g., Ronald Hayman, Nietzsche: A Critical Life (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 195; Rüdiger Safranski, Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 135, 157; Julian Young, Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 221, 242–3; Sue Prideaux, I am synamite! A Life of Nietzsche (New York: Random House, 2018), 157, 172. Lou Salomé, Nietzsche, trans. Siegfried Mandel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 73, 135, inaugurates this enduring judgement in her 1894 philosophical biography. Scholars consistently date the emergence of Nietzsche's mature, anti-metaphysical position sometime after The Birth, regardless of whether that work is considered to be Schopenhauerian. But to a large extent it still is. Nadeem J. Z. Hussain, "Nietzsche's Positivism." European Journal of Philosophy 12, no. 3 (2004), 364–5, n. 98, treats the Schopenhauerian assumption as undisputed. This indicates the significant weight of its canonicity, which continues to prevail. E.g. Paul Franco, Nietzsche's Enlightenment: The Free-Spirit Trilogy of the Middle Period (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1–12; Matthew H. Meyer, Reading Nietzsche Through the Ancients (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 13, 20, 36, 39, 268; Maudemarie Clark, Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), ch. 13; Paolo D'Iorio, Nietzsche's Journey to Sorrento: Genesis of the Philosophy of the Free Spirit, trans. Sylvia Gorelick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 49; Laurence Lampert, What A Philosopher Is: Becoming Nietzsche (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 15, n. 17.
3. E.g., James I. Porter, The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); James I. Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Béatrice Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in The Birth of Tragedy." European Journal of Philosophy 14, no. 3 (2006): 373–403; Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes, "Nietzsche's Illusion," in Nietzsche on Art and Life, ed. Daniel Came (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 80–106. Many scholars now acknowledge the evidence of Nietzsche's early rejection of Schopenhauer's metaphysics in his unpublished manuscript "On Schopenhauer" (1867–8), on which see Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 57–73. Alternatively, Henry Staten, "The Birth of Tragedy Reconstructed." Studies in Romanticism 29, no. 1 (1990): 17–9, n. 12, and Young, Philosophical Biography, 89–95, argue that Nietzsche's early Schopenhauerian position only posits the will as "the most universal form of appearance" (Writings from the Early Notebooks, trans. Ladislaus Löb [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 54) that the true thing in itself transcends as Absolute Presence. Clark, Ethics and Politics, 251, makes a similar argument. But in §3 of "On Schopenhauer," Nietzsche critiques the very notion of a Ding an sich, in Kant no less than in Schopenhauer (Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Schopenhauer," in Writings from the Early Notebooks, trans. Ladislaus Löb, 1–8 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 6).
4. Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 380–2, 386, 390, 395–96. As do e.g. Douglas Burnham and Martin Jesinghausen, Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy: A Reader's Guide (New York: Continuum,

2010), 45; Paul Raimond Daniels, Nietzsche and The Birth of Tragedy (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3, 50, 70.

5. Gemes and Sykes, "Nietzsche's Illusion," 81, 85, 104. This view is ubiquitous. E.g., M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, Nietzsche on Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 351–2, 380; Burnham and Jesinghausen, Birth of Tragedy, 52, 70–1; Daniels, Birth of Tragedy, 21, 42–3, 81; Clark, Ethics and Politics, ch. 11; Daniel Came, "The Themes of Affirmation and Illusion in the Birth of Tragedy and Beyond," in The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche, ed. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 209–16; Ivan Soll, "Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's 'Great Teacher' and 'Antipode,'" in The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche, ed. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 163–76; Andrew Huddleston, "Nietzsche on Nihilism: A Unifying Thread." Philosophers' Imprint 19, no. 11 (2019): 6.

6. My reading contrasts with many commentators who, building on Walter Kaufmann, "Nietzsche's Admiration for Socrates." Journal of the History of Ideas 9, no. 4 (1948): 476, interpret the music-making Socrates as a self-portrait. E.g., Silk and Stern, Nietzsche on Tragedy, 193, read him as "the archetype of what Nietzsche himself aspires to be." Sarah Kofman, Socrates: Fictions of a Philosopher, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1998), ch. 4, reads Nietzsche's Socrates as his "double." Martha K. Woodruff, "The Music-Making Socrates: Plato and Nietzsche Revisited, Philosophy and Tragedy Rejoined." International Studies in Philosophy 34, no. 3 (2002): 82, reads him as Nietzsche's "alter-ego." For further discussions of this figure, see e.g. Catherine H. Zuckert, Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), ch. 1; Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 88–119; Bruce Ellis Benson, Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 166–70; Daniels, Birth of Tragedy, 141–7.

7. Meyer, Reading Nietzsche, 6 n. 23

8. Plato, Timaeus, in Plato: Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 29a. All references to Plato's dialogues are from this volume and use the Stephanus numbers.

9. In Friedrich Nietzsche, The Pre-Platonic Philosophers, trans. Greg Whitlock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), his lecture on Socrates remarks that "Socrates never came to know physics, since that which Plato narrates concerning the studies of Anaxagoras at Phaedo and so on is certainly only Plato's own historical development" (143–4). He then characterizes Socrates as "the first philosopher of life (Lebensphilosoph)" (145). Nietzsche's discussions of ancient philosophy are consistently anachronistic, projecting the philosophical landscape of nineteenth-century German philosophy back into classical antiquity. In contrast to the above passage, The Birth clearly links Socrates with the broad development of science and a form of Enlightenment optimism.

10. Plato, Phaedo, 96a–106e.

11. See Porter, Philology of the Future, ch. 2.

12. Translated with italics by Porter, Philology of the Future, 108.

13. Nietzsche, Early Notebooks, 78. Hereafter, I refer to this book parenthetically as WEN. I cite all unpublished notes by year, followed by notebook and section numbers. E.g., WEN 1871:11[1].

14. More exactly, "The Origin and End of Tragedy [Ursprung und Zeil der Tragödie]." See Silk and Stern, Nietzsche and Tragedy, 51–3.

15. Nietzsche, Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 98.

16. Friedrich Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 1998), §19. Hereafter, I refer to this book parenthetically as PTAG, using section numbers.

17. Nietzsche, Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 98.
18. Charles H. Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), fr. CXXV (D. 124), 85.
19. This view reflects the antiteleological insight dominating much of modern biology, elucidated by Jacques Monod, Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Knopf, 1971). "Randomness caught on the wing, preserved, reproduced by the machinery of invariance and thus converted into order, rule, necessity. A totally blind process can by definition lead to anything; it can even lead to vision itself" (98). "Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution: this central concept of modern biology is no longer one among other possible or even conceivable hypotheses. It is today the sole conceivable hypothesis, the only one that squares with observed and tested fact" (112–3). Organic life emerges as a result of pure chance and evolves accordingly along an irreversible course through which it establishes necessity. Thus conceived, Nietzsche's pre-Socratic antiteleological thinker projects this general law, holding strictly within the biosphere, into the cosmos.
20. Arthur Schopenhauer, World as Will and Presentation, 2 Vols., trans. Richard E. Aquila (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2:674. For the German text, I rely on Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, ungekürzte Ausg., ed. Alexander Ulfig (Köln: Parkland, 2000).
21. Schopenhauer, Will and Presentation, 1:208.
22. Ibid., 2:404.
23. Ibid., 2:488–91.
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, trans. Josefine Nauckoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §357. Nietzsche evokes this existential crisis in his portrait of Hamlet (BT 7).
25. E.g., Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," in Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings, 2nd ed., trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), §126–7, explicitly rejects antinatalism. "Much worse is he who says that it is good not to be born, 'but when born to pass through the gates of Hades as quickly as possible.' For if he really believes what he says, why doesn't he leave life? For it is easy for him to do, if he has firmly decided to do it. But if he is joking, he is wasting his time among men who won't welcome it."
26. Zuckert, Postmodern Platos, 16, sums up Nietzsche's early reading of the pre-Socratics. "The philosopher does not so much lose himself in contemplating the cosmos, as he finds his own distinctive identity as the sum or abbreviation of the whole. Taken in themselves, all philosophic 'truths' or doctrines constitute errors; they merely represent one man's vision or experience of his own existence. They are true only of and for him." Rather than emphasizing this type of individualism, I stress the cultural, collective dimension of value-creation.
27. We have already seen how Nietzsche links Anaximander with Schopenhauer's pessimism, a context in which he also references Kant's Ding an sich (PTAG 4). Nietzsche then mobilizes (without endorsing) Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will in his characterization of Heraclitean Becoming (PTAG 5), opposing this to pessimism.
28. Schopenhauer, Will and Presentation, 1:36.
29. Nietzsche, Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 74.
30. Ibid., 70.
31. Schopenhauer, Will and Presentation, 1:327.
32. E.g., Julian Young, Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch. 2, argues that Nietzsche rearticulates Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will and

remains committed to a pessimistic vision of life, albeit from an artistic rather than ascetic perspective. Martha Nussbaum exemplifies the type of anti-pessimistic reading that Young generally challenges. Emphasizing the value of aesthetic self-creation, Nussbaum still holds that Nietzsche endorses a version of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will. See Nussbaum, "The Transfigurations of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Dionysus," in Nietzsche, Philosophy, and the Arts, ed. Salim Kemal, Ivan Gaskell, and Daniel Conway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36–69.

33. Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 395–6; Gemes, "Nietzsche's Illusion," 103.

34. See WEN 1872:19[35, 37, 115–6, 125, 134, 180, 236–7, 248].

35. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," in Writings from the Early Notebooks, trans. Ladislaus Löb, 253–64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 259.

36. Ibid., 257. He articulates a similar view in §109 of Gay Science. "The total character of the world . . . is for all eternity chaos, not in the sense of a lack of necessity but a lack of order, organization, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever else our aesthetic anthropomorphisms are called." The ordered, unified whole beheld by the philosopher originates from the rational, moral, and aesthetic qualities of human experience that we project onto nature. Pace Meyer, Reading Nietzsche, 203, this passage does not attribute an ontological character to chaos but defines it in privative terms as the mere negation of an anthropomorphic order. The universe does not lack necessity by virtue of its sheer existence (Nietzsche is no solipsist).

37. See Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 9–16.

38. Friedrich Nietzsche, Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Christopher Middleton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 18. He cites Friedrich Albert Lange, Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart (Iserlohn: J. Baedeker, 1866), 268. Nietzsche paraphrases the same insight eleven years later. As regards "the opposition between 'thing in itself' and appearance . . . we 'know' far too little to even be entitled to make that distinction" (Nietzsche, Gay Science, §354).

39. Nietzsche, Selected Letters, 18. He cites Lange, Geschichte des Materialismus, 493.

40. Nietzsche links skepticism with the emergence of tragic knowledge. "We do not know the true nature of a single causality. Absolute skepticism: the necessity of art and illusion" (WEN 1872:19[21]).

41. Meyer, Reading Nietzsche, 40.

42. Ibid., 48.

43. Meyer implausibly introduces a series of extremely abrupt shifts into Nietzsche's early thinking, from The Birth's metaphysics through skepticism to Heracliteanism in the span of one year, only to remain roughly consistent over the next fifteen. He argues that Nietzsche follows Heraclitus, who denies any deception of the senses because they evince the truth about becoming, from Tragic Age onwards. Meyer later qualifies Nietzsche's position: the senses do falsify reality by serving vital evolutionary needs (ibid., 242). Meyer fails to note that this holds true for all organisms. The evolutionary standpoint undermines his thesis that language and logic are primarily responsible for such falsification, whose biological basis conditions the evolution of our species-specific perceptual apparatus from which our capacity for language and logic emerges. But more importantly, Nietzsche contradicts Meyer on several counts, first by committing Heraclitus to a position that entails the deception of the senses insofar as they make "things look permanent and unified," and then by stating that "the senses do not lie the way the Eleatics thought they did, or the way Heraclitus thought they did, — they do not lie at all" (Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, in The Anti-Christ, Ecco Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings, trans. Judith

Norman [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 167). That is, they reveal a world of appearances existing relative to us —though precisely not in Meyer's ontologically heightened sense — and we are nothing other than our interpretations.
44. Meyer, Reading Nietzsche, 35.
45. Ibid., 37.
46. Nietzsche's formulation of the "inter-relationship of things, their so-called being or non-being ['Sein' und 'Nitchtsein']," refers to the conceptual relativity of becoming, which "nowhere . . . touch[es] upon absolute truth" (PTAG 11). Pace Meyer, Reading Nietzsche, 126–7, Nietzsche's argument parallels Lange's critique of dynamic force, based on the thesis that "we cannot get beyond the circle of experience [Kreis der Erfahrung]" (Friedrich Albert Lange, History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance, 2nd ed., 3 Vols., trans. Ernest Chester Thomas [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925; Routledge, 2003], 2:365; Geschichte des Materialismus, 376). Lange cites Helmholtz's characterization of pure force — what "must be (dasein), and yet again not be [nicht dasein]" — to clarify how its postulation results from a "necessary act of imagination [eine nothwendige Dichtung]" (Lange, History of Materialism, 2:392; Geschichte des Materialismus, 379–80).
47. In the first edition of his History of Materialism, Lange sees himself moving beyond Kant by undermining the concept of the thing in itself as a causal ground standing behind the phenomena. Lange implicates the thing in itself as a concept already caught within the realm of phenomenal representation and therefore as yet another appearance. He modifies this position in the second edition. "Whatever we announced as a correction of the system is, in fact, exactly Kant's own view; the 'thing-in-itself' is a mere idea of limit" (Lange, History of Materialism, 2:216). Cf. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, unabridged ed., trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), A258–59/B315.
48. Meyer, Reading Nietzsche, 43, 129, refers us to Nietzsche's use of von Baer's scientific investigation to illustrate Heraclitean flux as evidence of his commitment to this position. However, Nietzsche's discussion only demonstrates the relative perceptual quality of time for human beings, which could be used to defend a Parmenidean conception of Being as much as a Heraclitean conception of Becoming. "[I]f we could think of the indefinitely fastest — while still of course human — perception, then all motion would cease, and everything would be eternally fixed . . . For the indefinitely fastest perception stops all Becoming, because we always mean only human perception," while at a slower rate, everything would "vanish in the superhaste of events and would be devoured by the wild storm of Becoming" (Nietzsche, Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 62; emphases added). In this context, von Baer's study demonstrates how our perception of duration constitutes a subjective continuum between Parmenidean Being and Heraclitean Becoming if taken to extreme hypothetical limits, neither of which is objectively true given that their contradiction exists only for human beings.
49. Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human (I), trans. Gary Handwerck (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), §5.
50. Ibid., §18. We can trace this back to his early notebooks. See e.g., WEN 1872:19[84, 118, 146, 149, 156, 159, 161, 165–66, 209–10].
51. For this reason, Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 380–82, similarly to Meyer, associates Nietzsche's metaphysics with Heraclitus's; though formulated as a myth, it symbolically corresponds to a real ontological ground (380–2, 386, 390, 395–6). This "metaphysical assumption" (400, n. 32) remains problematic for Han-Pile, given Nietzsche's early critical stance toward metaphysics (396). He purportedly resolves the problem only from 1882 onwards (402, n. 55). But

Nietzsche himself characterizes this type of ontological correspondence as a mere "metaphysical assumption [Annahme]" (BT 4). See Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 55, 78–9.
52. Meyer's Heraclitean reading of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy resonates with Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 23–9, and many others. Further evidence from The Birth attests that Nietzsche interprets Heraclitean ontology as a metaphysical fiction. Discussing Aeschylus's conception of eternal justice, he writes that "the artist's delight in Becoming, the serenity of artistic creation in defiance of all catastrophes, is merely a bright image of clouds and sky reflected in a dark sea of sadness" (BT 9). Such is the "metaphysical solace that eternal life flows on [weiterfliesst] beneath the turmoil of appearances" (emphasis added). This delusion, whose formulation troublingly collapses the "greedy Will" into the very "illusion" that it "spread[s] over things" (BT 18), applies no less to Schopenhauer than to Heraclitus.
53. See Peter J. Euben, The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 111–2, n. 45, for what I read as Sophoclean examples of the "ingenious artistic means" that Nietzsche describes.
54. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Pathos of Truth," in Writings from the Early Notebooks, trans. Ladislaus Löb, 248–52 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 251.
55. Schopenhauer, Will and Presentation, 1:339.
56. Nietzsche employs this term, with "Will" set off in scare quotes, throughout both his unpublished essay "The Dionysiac World View" (1870) and The Birth (§§1, 3). He describes Heraclitus's philosophy as "welling up from the purest strings of Hellenism" (PTAG 5).
57. Kaufmann, "Admiration for Socrates," 474, and Daniels, Birth of Tragedy, 153, note that the original manuscript ended with Nietzsche's discussion of Socrates in BT 15, to which the second half was later added. Scholars consistently divide the book into two halves. E.g., Silk and Stern, Nietzsche on Tragedy, ch. 4; Burnham and Jesinghausen, Birth of Tragedy, 12–13, 93, 102, 117, 134, 136; Daniels, Birth of Tragedy, 4, 6.
58. James I. Porter, "Nietzsche, Tragedy, and the Theory of Catharsis," SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies 2, no. 1 (2016): 211, clarifies the significance of their artistic synthesis, whose nuance is often misrepresented. "The Dionysian 'Urgrund' of existence, transmitted through music (the most immediate representation of this metaphysical region) is filtered through the screen of Apolline appearances: art, through its forms, shapes, and myths, gives the spectator access to this subterranean ground while also protecting her from its otherwise destructive power." He argues that the sublime, intoxicating effect of music is what characterizes the Dionysian, an effect produced by means of a refined Apollonian deception whereby music, as a representation of the primordial will, appears to grant us access to this "one, true reality" (BT 22), without actually doing so. Though Staten, "Tragedy Reconstructed," 13–20, agrees with Porter concerning the Apollonian status of music, he still interprets the Dionysian as the transcendent ground of reality, whereas for Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 99, this in itself is an Apollonian illusion.
59. See Young, Philosophy of Art, 33, 43; Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 97. Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 375, fails to account for this passage, holding that "there is no indication that [Nietzsche] wants to take up Schopenhauer's revival of Platonism."
60. Schopenhauer, Will and Presentation, 1:170.
61. Ibid., 1:302–3.
62. Ibid., 1:308.
63. See Young, Philosophy of Art, 46.
64. Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 36–7.

65. See ibid., 18.
66. See ibid., 36–47, for Porter's analysis of The Birth's atomistic subtext.
67. Nietzsche plays with this polysemous term (BT 4, 7), which means to demolish, to preserve, and to raise up.
68. For Porter, Nietzsche's representation of Attic tragedy displays the ineliminable quality of metaphysical thinking. The metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality derives from an oneiric consciousness that infects waking consciousness. In this way metaphysical thinking is inextricable from human perception and is not reducible to the linguistic or rhetorical structures of cognition. Hence, "there is a profound paradox in having to register one's belief in the inescapable necessity of metaphysical assumptions that by themselves inspire absolutely no belief" (ibid., 20). Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," concludes that Porter's reading is "of little philosophical interest" (390) based on a superficial misinterpretation of his position. She erroneously claims that he follows De Man (389) when he is consistently critical of De Man's reading, which reduces the above paradox of representation to a "linguistic and rhetorical" dissonance within Nietzsche's text, whereas for Porter it is anthropological (Invention of Dionysus, 189 n. 3. See also pp. 79–80, 176–7, n. 31).
69. E.g., Plato, Phaedo, 107c–115a; Plato, Republic, 377a–d.
70. Plato, Republic, 413d–5d.
71. Ibid., 605b.
72. Nietzsche intended to include this in his first book. He gifted it to Cosima Wagner in the Christmas of 1872. See Martin A. Ruehl's discussion of this essay in "Politeia 1871: Young Nietzsche on the Greek State," in Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition, ed. Paul Bishop (Boydell & Brewer: 2013), 79–97. He dates the beginning of Nietzsche's rupture with Wagner back to 1872 and clarifies its political dimension.
73. Gemes and Sykes, "Nietzsche's Illusion," 81, 85, 104.
74. Nietzsche follows Lange, History of Materialism, 2:218; Geschichte des Materialismus, 268, who states that "we find everywhere nothing but the usual empirical opposition between appearances and existence [sc., the true essence of things]. What at this stage of consideration is existence, appears again at another, in relation to a deeper concealed existence, as appearance." See Porter, Invention of Dionysus, 13–4, 84–6.
75. The "turmoil of appearances [dem Wirbel der Erscheinungen]" (BT 18) parallels the "vortex of being [Wirbel des Seins]" (WEN 1871:11[1]), implicating the latter as another appearance.
76. I thus interpret the satyr's wisdom in The Birth is an ironical reprimand, whereas for Katie Brennan, "The Wisdom of Silenus: Suffering in The Birth of Tragedy." The Journal of Nietzsche Studies 19, no. 2 (2018): 186–7, it sincerely corresponds to a fundamental truth about suffering. Christopher Janaway, "Beauty is False, Truth Ugly: Nietzsche on Art and Life," in Nietzsche on Art and Life, ed. Daniel Came (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39–56, likewise takes this is to be the truth that tragedy ultimately imparts in The Birth.
77. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Dionysiac World View," in The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings, trans. Ronald Speirs, 117–38 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), §3.
78. The antithesis between the optimistic Socrates's anti-Dionysianism and the music-making Socrates's Dionysianism collapses. Porter argues that "Socrates cannot embody the fusion of these radically opposed impulses and neither would it suit Nietzsche's purposes to allow their differences simply to collapse into a convenient (if still troubling) identity. What Socrates can only embody is, rather, the impossibility of keeping these two stories straight" (Invention of Dionysus, 91). But he goes on to say that Socrates instances "the collapse of structural opposites

(of structure pure and simple)" (119). While Porter's vacillating formulations follow an obscure dialectic, my reading avoids their opacity by identifying the collapse of structural opposites with mystical-artistic rapture.
79. Plato, Phaedo, 84e-85b.
80. Plato, Republic, 509b.
81. Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 103.