

Art and Philosophy Reconciled :
Nietzsche's Apollonian in and after
The Birth of Tragedy

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Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) deliberates a mutual dependence between art and philosophy. He calls this mutual dependence “artists’ metaphysics”¹⁾ in *Attempt at a Self-Criticism* which was appended to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1881. This self-criticism was written in his middle period. But we can find such a thought already in his earlier writings. For example, in the *Fragments* group 19 written in 1872, he writes, “the philosopher shall recognize what is necessary, and the artist shall create it.”²⁾ So we can see that this conception remained unchanged in Nietzsche’s thought throughout his life.

But in the particular case of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), this mutual dependence was not achieved because of the strict distinction of the Apollonian from the Dionysian. This distinction entirely excludes intoxication (*Rausch*) from the Apollonian. The art without intoxication cannot fulfill an important role for philosophy. If the forming process of the Apollonian loses intoxication, it cannot be distinguished from the philosophical process of image thinking. The former creates appearance (*Schein*), the latter concept, but both start from experienced images. Since these images are the same, philosophy needs no art, but mere experience. This is inconsistent with his conception of art and philosophy. That is why he includes the Apollonian in the Dionysian in his later years.

1) *GT*, S. 17, trans. BT, p. 22. (See the last page for abbreviations)

2) *Nachlaß* 19 [23]

So, I show in this paper that, first, the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy* as its forming appearance is kept away from the Dionysian intoxication. Next, I examine the similarity of the process between the Apollonian creation and the conceptualization, because both begin with experienced images, and go on by the same functions. Then we will find the contradiction between the character of the Apollonian and the relation of art to philosophy. In conclusion, we see why Nietzsche gives the intoxicating character to the Apollonian in his later writings.

1. The Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*

In this section, I consider the distinction between the Dionysian impulse and the Apollonian one in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and then, the correspondence of these impulses with art. This consideration shows us that the Apollonian creation is based on the state of the contemplation (*Anschauung*) and that it has no intoxication.

1-1. The impulse of the Dionysian and of the Apollonian

When Nietzsche uses the word Dionysian, he presupposes the condition of intoxication or of self-forgetfulness. In such a condition, people are released from the principle of individuation (*principium individuationis*) and blend with all the other beings into an ultimate unity. He explains this event as follows. "Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man."³⁾ In this way, the contradiction and pain of individuals in existence (*Dasein*) are overcome through a fusion into the ultimate unity. This impulse toward dissolution of individuality is the Dionysian impulse. In contrast with this, the Apollonian is "the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*." This principle creates this world by drawing lines of demarcation. But, at the same time, this principle fixes the limit

3) *GT*, S. 29, trans. p. 37.

of life. It is in this context that the wise Silenus said to Greeks as the fact, "The best is not to be born, but the second best is to die."⁴⁾ Then, "Greeks knew the fear and horror of existence, but they concealed them."⁵⁾ The impulse to conceal the difficulties in living is the Apollonian. The Apollonian impulse to define the images necessary to living by intentionally neglecting the pain of life works in the similar way as in a dream. In the world represented in a dream, every given image is received perfectly and nothing unnecessary is there. Every relation is inevitably taken in causal terms. Like a dream, the Apollonian impulse tends to create the perfect images and the world of mere appearance. That is the concealment of the contradiction (Widerspruch) and suffering of life. But what this impulse creates needs to remain as mere appearance. "At this highest life of real dream, however, we have the vague feeling of mere appearance. When it is gone, the pathologic effect begins, in which dream does not refresh and the healing natural power of this condition disappears."⁶⁾ The Apollonian appearance cannot be separate from reality because it is a healing agency meant to approve of real life. The Apollonian appearance must be the veil that covers the real world. It cannot be a lone veil that hides nothing. Thus, appearance is based on the real world.

1-2. The Apollonian art in the state of contemplation

Like this, individual life is approved of in the Apollonian impulse to apotheosize individuation, whereas it is overcome in the Dionysian impulse to find the eternal life behind the present world. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, these two impulses correspond to the plastic arts and music, respectively. The reason why music indicates the ultimate unity is as follows. Representations that appear to explain music, such as 'the scene by the brook' or 'the merry gathering of rustics,' are not the imitated object of music but arise from music. These representations "can tell us nothing whatsoever concerning the Dionysian content of music." So, music is not representation of anything present, but presence itself. And such

4) *DW*, S. 560.

5) *Ibid.*, S. 560.

6) *Ibid.*, S. 553.

representations as have been mentioned above are mere appearances of the presence of music. Such music “presents itself as will”⁷⁾. (I translate this quotation, because Kaufmann translated the German word *Erscheinung* as appearance and *Schein* as mere appearance. But these two translated words are very confusing. So, I translate *Erscheinung* into presence.) In this way, music is not will itself, but presents itself as will and then shows us the ultimate unity in an aesthetic way, because “[...] unlike them [all other arts], it [music] is not a copy of the phenomenon, but an immediate copy of will itself.”⁸⁾ And this creation presupposes the intoxication that lets the artist fuse with will. Artist dives to will, and then he snatches music out of there. In contrast to music, the plastic arts imitate something present and are formed as beautiful images. In the brightness of Apollo, the images of the present world are shaped into beautiful images and are free from obscurity. And this brightness is the contemplation. The artist creates the plastic art in such a state in which he can consciously gaze on the images of something present.

In this way, we can understand that a prior condition for the Apollonian creation is contemplation, not intoxication. And an artist without intoxication can only see images of the present world. But if the Apollonian creation is based on those images, we cannot distinguish art from philosophy, because the philosopher creates concepts from images of the present world. So, in the next section, I examine the similarity of these two processes, i.e. creating appearance and concept, taking Nietzsche’s *Fragments* Group 19 written in 1872 as the main source.

2. The artistic force

In this section, I examine the artistic force (*die künstlerische Kraft*). This force has two functions: imagination and selection. And what is more, this force

7) *GT*. S. 50, trans. p. 55.

8) *GT*. S. 103, trans. p. 100.

works in two processes, which lead to appearance or concept. These processes begin with experienced images. If this is true, we will see the matter as follows. If a philosopher creates concept from experienced images, the Apollonian appearance is something which philosophy can do without. Hence, mutual dependence of art and philosophy would become unnecessary.

2-1. The creation of the Apollonian appearance

Nietzsche supposes that an image is, at first, what is reflected in the eyes as a mirror image (Spiegelbild). No image exists prior to reflection in the eyes. "Every form belongs to the subject. It is capture of surfaces by the mirror. We must get rid of all qualities."⁹⁾ This mirror sorts out images, as our eyes perceive a certain range of frequency of light rays. Furthermore, this mirror may reflect images as we want. After all, the first image is given through this selectivity. And art begins here. This is confirmed by the following remark in the *Fragments*: "Every art is based on the mirror of the eyes."¹⁰⁾

Yet, Nietzsche thinks that the visual images with which all art begins remain incorrect. "Art is based on incorrectness of sight."¹¹⁾ The artistic force processes this incorrectness to create perfect beautiful images, namely appearance. Nietzsche puts it like this.

There is a force in us, which enables us to intensively grasp the *major* characteristics of mirror images, and again a force, which accentuates an equal rhythm in spite of its factual incorrectness. This must be an *artistic* force, because it *creates* [es schafft]. Its principal device is *omission, overseeing and mishearing*.¹²⁾

He talks here not only of mirror images, but also of rhythms as something incorrect. "Art is also based on the incorrectness by ear in rhythm, temperament,

9) *Nachlaß* 19 [140]

10) *Ibid.*, 19 [144]

11) *Ibid.*, 19 [66]

12) *Ibid.*, 19 [67]

etc."¹³⁾ Rhythm is something Apollonian for Nietzsche, as the following quotation shows: "If music is an Apollonian art as well, it is so only in respect of rhythm."¹⁴⁾ Nietzsche talks here not about music but only about rhythm. So, this artistic force is of Apollonian character.

This artistic force accentuates some major characteristics and excludes others. According to my interpretation, these two functions constitute the Apollonian plastic force. This interpretation rests on the fact that these functions are similar to the Apollonian impulse, which conceals the suffering in life and beautifies this world. Furthermore, here is another function. That is selection. What is accentuated or excluded must be selected. Nietzsche regards this function as Apollonian, because dream is for him "the selective exclusion of images in the eyes."¹⁵⁾ Thus, the process of creating the Apollonian appearance is as follows: 1. The images are captured in the mirror of the eyes. 2. The major characteristics are selected from these mirror images. These selected characteristics are accentuated by exclusion of what is unnecessary. The Apollonian beautiful appearance is created in this way.

2-2. The image thinking (Bilderdenken)

We can find another kind of creation in his writings, which is similar to the process of creating the Apollonian appearance. That is the image thinking (das Bilderdenken). And this process also begins at experienced images. Nietzsche thinks that experienced images are accumulated in our brain, and then they are used in the image thinking.

When man thinks, he must already have through imagination [die Phantasie] what he asks for—then reflection can judge it. This [what he asks for] affects our reflection because reflection compares it with usual and frequently tested series [of experienced images].

13) Ibid., 19 [66]

14) *DW*, S. 557.

15) *Nachlaß* 19 [81]

What is particularly “logic” in the image thinking?

Sober people need little imagination, and *have* little.

Anyway, it is something *artistic* that produces this form. Something emerges from it in memory : *this form emphasizes memory*, thereby strengthening it.

Thinking is emphasizing.

Emphasis derives from such series of images in the brain as are richer than thinking can exhaust : intellect quickly selects similar images : the selected one produces many images again : but intellect quickly selects an image from among produced images and so on.

Conscious thinking is only a selection from imageries. It is a long way to abstraction.

1) The force that produces many images 2) The force that selects similar images and emphasizes.¹⁶⁾

For example, in the case of the question, “what is a leaf?” we do not make this word convey “the single quite and indeed individualized original experience,”¹⁷⁾ but make it convey an image that is “formed through optional renunciation of individual differences or through a forgetfulness of distinctions.”¹⁸⁾ This image is created through the following process. It begins first to select similar images from experienced images in the brain. And next, many fictitious variations are made from these selected images by imagination. Then an image that has common and important characteristics is selected from these variations. Thereby, a word is given to this image and this unity becomes a concept. This process is named the image thinking. Here are imaginations and selections. And when we glance at the above quotation, we can understand that selection is the same operation as emphasis and renunciation. In this operation, small characteristics are renounced and major ones are emphasized, as Nietzsche says, “also in the image thinking, Darwinism is right : stronger images devour weaker ones.”¹⁹⁾ This thinking

16) Ibid., 19 [78]

17) *WL*, S. 879.

18) Ibid., S. 880.

19) *Nachlaß* 19 [87]

finally reaches an image. And when this image is carried by a word, it becomes a concept. Nietzsche expresses this conclusion as follows: "Word includes only one image, and this becomes a concept."²⁰⁾

Like this, we can see that the image thinking is creation from the images that we already have. Moreover, Nietzsche calls this process also something artistic, when he describes, "Artistic force operates in two ways, as a creative force and as a selective force."²¹⁾ The image thinking creates typical images that can be adapted to every experienced image. These typical images are created through imagination. This imagination is a very creative force. On the other hand, we also need the selective force for choosing the most typical image out of many fictitious images. These two functions are working also in the process to create the Apollonian appearance. Therefore, the process that creates appearances from sensory excitations and the process that abstracts a concept from images are based on the same artistic force (fig. 1). That is the Apollonian. Consequently, what the artistic force creates is not only appearances, but also concepts. And these processes are the same.

3. Conclusion

Now, we can see that two processes of the artistic force are based on the experienced images. But if art must create what is recognized by philosophy, this creation is based on something unrecognizable, for example, will. Of course, music presents itself as will. But this creation becomes possible through intoxication, whereas the Apollonian creation in *The Birth of Tragedy* has no intoxication. So, it cannot create anything important for philosophy. This is the contradiction of early Nietzsche. As far as the Apollonian art is art, it must create what presents itself as will, because will is the most important thing for philosophy. But the Apollonian without intoxication can never create it.

20) Ibid., 19 [67]

21) Ibid., 19 [79]

Maybe, Nietzsche seems to have been aware of this already in early years, because he observed that a “sober man (der nüchterne Mensch)”²²⁾ has little intoxication. This means that imagination needs intoxication. Imagination in the image thinking works for the fictitious images, whereas in creating appearance, it works at the mirror of the eyes (fig. 2). As the result the eyes have intoxication if imagination works there. In this way the Apollonian artist can look into will and the Apollonian work presents itself as will. Nietzsche describes such a kind of intoxication as “the intoxication of the eyes,”²³⁾ in *Twilight of the Idols* (1888). Therefore, incorporation of the part of the Apollonian into the Dionysian is necessary to assure mutual dependence of art and philosophy.

Fig. 1 : The operations of the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy* and of the creation of concept

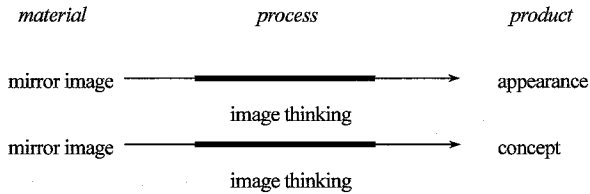
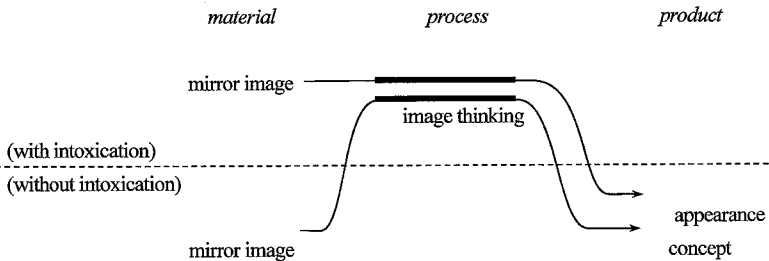


Fig. 2 : The operations of the Apollonian in *Twilight of the Idols* and the difference from the creation of concept



22) Ibid., 19 [78]

23) *GD*, Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen 10, S. 117.

Abbreviations :

KSA Kritische Studienausgabe, Verlag de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1967ff.

DW Die dionysische Weltanschauung (1870), KSA 1, 553-577.

GD Götzen-Dämmerung (1888), KSA 6, 57-161.

GT Die Geburt der Tragödie (1872), KSA 1, 9-156.

WL Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn (1873), KSA 1, 875-890.

Nachlaß 19 Nachlaß Sommer 1872-Anfang 1873 19, KSA 7, 417-520.

English Translation

BW Basic Writings of Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Random House, 2000),

BT The Birth of Tragedy, BW. pp. 1-144.