Nietzsche’s Evolving Dionysus: From a Dialectic of Tragedy to a Philosophy of Becoming

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Introduction

Out of all the philosophers of the 20th century, Nietzsche stands out through his influence and his originality. There was no other thinker in his day that so forcefully challenged prevailing customs and traditions in thought and everyday life. There was perhaps no other thinker in his time with such a startling influence on the modern world. Nietzsche possessed a tremendous scope. He was one of the first existentialists. He was also a philologist, a scholar of Ancient Greece, well versed in the Christian religion, and deeply knowledgeable about the current, philosophical thought of his day. Though recognized by many at first for his potential, his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) was met with great disdain. In a typical Nietzschean fashion, it stood out from the crowd. *The Birth of Tragedy* was a challenge against the popular philosophical idealism of his day (Anderson). In this work, Nietzsche began his investigation into the Dionysian and Apollonian conflicts in tragedy. Though he later loses a significant interest in Apollo, Nietzsche’s first book is still an intriguing insight into his thought on art and Greek life and Dionysus. It is necessary to begin with *The Birth of Tragedy* if one wishes to know better the Dionysian heart in Nietzsche’s work. It is my aim in this thesis to look at the evolution of Dionysus in Nietzsche’s thought. The Dionysian element of Nietzsche’s thinking was chosen for the significant influence it has on the philosopher’s ever-changing perspectives. In his last works, Nietzsche desires to do nothing less than recover the Dionysian in German life, and perhaps for the world itself. In order to know Nietzsche better through Dionysus, I first investigated a compelling and beautifully written work, *Dionysus at Large*, by Marcel Detienne on Dionysus’s role in Ancient Greek life, and how the Greeks saw and interacted with him. This Dionysus is not different from Nietzsche’s Dionysus. Nietzsche, always admiring the life of the pre-Socratic Greeks, stayed loyal to the nature of the original Dionysus in his work. His
Dionysus is therefore not something novel as it is unique in its place in a philosophical system. Nietzsche, being one of the most creative and ingenious philosophers of his time, and indeed after his time, resurrects the Dionysian from ancient Greek life in a way few other philosophers could ever imagine doing.

Chapter 1: Dionysus

From where does the Greek god Dionysus emerge? Dionysus does not appear in the way other Greek gods do. His appearance is not always (but often is) distinguished with planned feasts and punctuations of celebration. He can appear from nowhere, as if the geography of the vast world gives birth to him. His home is all home; his home is everywhere. The ancient Greeks notice him in surprise, because he comes out of all that is present and noticeable. If the other Greek gods arrive, embodying a presence in time (before arrival, during arrival, after arrival) Dionysus emerges out of an absence of time. He is an embodiment of earth, God, and self. He blends passively with the earth, but has the power of surprise. In *Dionysus at Large*, Marcel Detienne explores the implications of this appearance. To get to know Dionysus is a dive into a mysterious abyss. He promises pleasure, intoxication, madness, celebration and tragedy.

Dionysus is a strangeness and familiarity. Detienne begins his investigation of Dionysus with a story of madness. The three daughters of Proitos, king of Argolid refuse to honor Dionysus. Proitus asked a soothsayer named Melampous to cure the women, and when he did, purifying and pacifying them, he asked for a third of Proitos’s kingdom in return. The king wouldn’t budge, and the madness in the women worsened. The madness spread to all the women of the land. They vanished into the woods, killing their children (Detienne 3). Detienne describes this Dionysus “taking the form of a malady, attacking people by the masses” (3). Dionysus is contagious, like an epidemic. “Dionysian madness was a contagious as split blood defiling” (4).
But there is more to the meaning of epidemic in Greek legend. Detienne describes that “In Greek, the word ‘epidemic’ belongs to the vocabulary of theophany” (4). It is a word used to discuss gods. Here, epidemics are sacrifices to divine powers when the powers come into provinces, temples, feasts, or sacrifices. The gods welcome with hospitality by whole cities and individuals. The traveling gods are the ones welcomed with epidemics. They are gods of seasons, summoned by hymns. The worship is not just a type of reverence, but a form of hospitality.

Apollo is a traveler too, but stationed himself at temples between arrivals in cities. Apollo’s presence is ceremonial; he’s worshipped by the priests and believers, exalted and raised to the highest summits of greatness in splendor and glory (4-5). But if Apollo is epidemic, Dionysus equals him. Detienne describes Dionysus’s presence as action-oriented:

Dionysus was in essence the god who comes: he appears, he manifests himself, he makes his presence known. He was an itinerant epiphany; all geographies were arranged to suit his mobile activities. Present everywhere, he had no home. (5)

Dionysus’s nomadic existence makes him present and absent everywhere simultaneously. He comes from the “outside,” as a stranger, but he does appear. He is not wholly absent in the world, but his emergence requires that he comes from the outside as a stranger, not wholly present. It is impossible to tell whether he is coming or going, here or nowhere in sight. His strangeness is marked by his mode of making himself known to us. In the manner he lets himself known, he also lets himself be unknown (10). Detainee poetically sums up this double movement of Dionysus; an experience steeped in mystery, paradox, wholeness, and limitedness: “A mask rises from the depths of the sea; an unknown face appears in the midst of a marine space that is like another world” (8). Yet, this is another world which remains a world, a vision and space of possible experience, though foreign and mysterious. The foreignness of Dionysus is not meant to be left in the dark, but to be deciphered, an unknown power to be identified. It is a divinity other
from the rest of the Hellenic gods because it is a foreignness, yet not immune from the familiarity other Greek gods are capable of to their worshipper (10). The Greek word “xenos” translates to this double meaning of foreignness. This foreign is not a barbarian, or someone outside the Greek community, but “the citizen of a neighboring community” (9). Xenos is a space, a distance between two cities and their customs of sacrifice, assemblies, and tribunals.

Dionysus is Greek, but in the guise of a foreign. Despite his disguise, his people interact with him as a Greek (9). When Dionysus enters into Patras, a land ruled by a foreign deity, Artemis, Dionysus is also celebrated, but as a foreign demon. He becomes an idol carried in a foreign trunk by the king. Artemis, like Dionysus brought her worshippers to madness and violent, murderous conflict. Yet there were remedies to the god. The worshippers could seek to overcome the effects of their gods, if not the gods themselves. The madness and blood of Patras were cleansed periodically by the king and his close followers (9-10).

Dionysus is a stranger, but he is received by welcoming hosts who invite him in. Detienne writes that “he is always a stranger, a form to identify, a face to uncover, a mask that hides as much as it reveals” (10). Dionysus is welcomed though he must remain unknown. The hosts who welcome Dionysus is called the “proxenos” (10). They are the local citizens whose jobs are akin to our modern definition of diplomacy. Detienne describes their function as to “look after foreign interests in a Greek city-state” (10). Their work encompasses the establishment of relations to other foreigners, as well as to the gods. The proxenes went to consult oracles and celebrated in Panhellenic festivals, but were “never allowed to make sacrifices without the mediation of their patrons,” including Dionysus. (10-11). But yet Dionysus’s strangeness makes it difficult to recognize him. The Methymnians know whether or not to see him as a god or hero. Even the history of Dionysus makes his status as god a gray
matter. There is a rumor that he is Semele’s child and not as the true son of Zeus (12). “He is treated as the bastard of Zeus, forced to win recognition of himself in the world of men” (13). Sometimes he is persecuted by his torturers. However, he is not a martyr-god. When persecuted, he strikes back. He infects those who turn against him with madness, a proof of his power and godhead status (13). In Thebes, the Theban royal family, a people related to Dionysus, refused to recognize the evidence of his divinity. Even in his native territory he wears a mask, unknown to those closest to him. Dionysus afflicts the family with torment in response. Pentheus is murdered, Agave is defiled, and Kadmos is thrown into exile (17; 19). “The Dionysian parousia [appearance] attains its height when Strangeness turns up in its native soil” (17). The xenos of Dionysus, like the meaning of xenos itself, is a foreignness that is familiar and different.

“Dionysus affirms his ephiphanic nature as a god who continually alternates between presence and absence. He is always a stranger, a form to identify, a face to uncover” (10). Dionysus is even foreign in his native land, to those closest to him. “The closer his relation to those who mistake his identity, the more urgent his need is to be recognized and the more violent his epiphany” (18). His appearance can even be deadly. How much more extreme can a foreignness become? This foreignness is not only a foreignness of territory (whether he be home or away from home) nor a mere manner in which others perceive him, but it is a foreignness of his own history. The history of Dionysus reveals something about him, while also keeping him clothed in darkness and obscurity. His weakness is his strength; it is a change, mystery, becoming. There is no true Dionysus. His historical forces us to question his status as a god. Dionysus’s becoming always has the potential to slip into the horrors of madness, a madness that makes one a stranger to one’s self, a mirror to Dionysus. After all, Dionysus was also a god capable of becoming mad just like his worshippers. He once went mad when his stepmother, Hera, persecuted him. He is
Dionysus the nomad, the god, the bastard, the omnipotent, the revered, the hated. He is a nomad. His appearance and disappearance is something not only supernatural, but something rooted in his stained past. Dionysus is the human-god, but a god with power unlike any other. He is “a stranger within; the strangeness of his parousia is essential to his nature as a god without synonym” (19). The Greeks reserve a place for Dionysus in their souls. He is hated and loved by them, because of his strangeness.

If Dionysus is not worshipped by the Greeks, he is ignored by them, even hatred. When Detienne describes the Iliad, he writes that Lykourgos, King of Edonians is “an enemy of the gods” (13). He is intensely adversarial, looking for a fight. “He hurls himself on the nurses of the raging Dionysus, disperses the thyrsus bearers, and pursues the frightened young god” (13). But Dionysus always responds, always acts. “Dionysus draws Lykourgos to the limits of his madness and turns the possessed man’s desire for violence and murder back against him” (13). The royal palace sinks from within, crumbling in a fit of rage analogous to the attack on the king’s own mind. The king raises his hatchet and attempts to strike down the vine brought by Dionysus, but Dionysus clouds his vision and the king hacks the limbs of his child instead. Dionysus puts him back in his original, reasonable state. Stricken by his demise, he turns all the land sterile. The Edonians seek the advice of the Delphic oracle, and are told to deliver him to the forests of Mount Pangaeus, a frozen land. The people leave him at a Dionysian oracle. The oracle speaks surrounded by her priests, like Apollo does at Delphi, and the king’s body is ripped into pieces by his wild horses. His existence transforms from one of power and rage, to destitute and reason, in a land where Dionysus reigns in solitude (13-14). Dionysus is strange, but does not remain silent when provoked. He is capable of providing pleasure as much as physical and mental torment. It is possible to know him, though the consequences of this intimacy can be dire. The
destruction of Dionysus is not simply an affliction from the god, but a confrontation with one’s self. Just as the pleasure requires us to welcome him, our madness in his presence is also wrought by our own rage. Redemption occurs. The duality of Dionysus is expressed by the two masks of him in Greek myth. “One mask is named Baccheus, carved in the wood of vinestocks, the other, known as the Mild, the Soothing, Meilichios, being fashioned from the trunk of a fig tree” (26). They two masks are cut of the same wood. This is the strangeness and familiarity of Dionysus. They are masks which never reveal the nature of this difference. Dionysus is never decipherable. He is both of the vine; organic, moist, lawless, but dual in nature. He is good and evil, mad and pure-the symbol of the fig. The fig is a perfect representation of Dionysus’s duality. It is a symbol beneath which lies no essential sign due to its paradox. He is the truth of untruth, the fall, and the redemption. Though the redemption of Dionysus is not everlasting. He offers no promises, no hopes.

If Dionysus is danger, he is also peace. His gift, wine, rivals even that of the grain given to man by Demeter, goddess of earth. In myth, the gift of the vine is first given by Dionysus to a man named Ikarios, a horticulturist. Dionysus is stopping for the night, taken in with Grecian hospitality. He leaves the gift of the vine-plant on the table, and reveals to Ikarios how to make the drink (29). Detienne writes, “It was a time for mediations: the vine to be planted; the technique of vine-growing the maturation of the fruit followed by the trampling of the grape and fermentation of the wine” (29). The fragrance enchanted Ikarios and his neighbors that “they sang the praises of the ‘wild mother’s fruit,’” the fruit of entanglement, growth, moisture (29). Drunken, out of control, they shouted that they’d been poisoned and murdered. The unknown is strange, a danger. The shroud of Dionysus’s veil proves once again its potential to erupt in mania. Ikarios’s friends beat him, and his ripped body gets thrown into a well. His daughter
Erigone hanged herself. The whole earth suffered sterility. The mortals were doomed to drink uncut wine, not yet knowing of the secret powers of Dionysus’s drink, and of the god present in it (29). It’d take another adventure to discover Dionysus once again.

There are multiple stories of the origin of wine. In one, wine is not just a creation by the divine, it is of the divine: a drop of divine blood lands on earth, and the vines, shoots, and tendrils of the plant grow. While traveling, Dionysus encounters the grapes. He sees the juice they hold, and recognizes it as the substance foretold in Rhea’s oracles. The origin of the drink is divine, but not necessarily a gift of power or grace. Like the Greek gods, and Dionysus himself, the drink is capable of fertility as well as destruction. The plant’s growth is moderated by nature. The ass graze it, and the gods watch over and keep it. Hemerides prunes the wild vine, moving them to the domestication of the vineyard, while Dasullios helps the vine grow and the leaves to multiply (33-34). Detienne writes, “Wine is a substance in which death is mixed with life magnified tenfold, in which burning fire alternates with a moistness that quenches thirst” (35). Wine is lethal or beautiful, “it is a remedy as a poison, a drug that either enables man to outdo himself or turns him into a brute, that introduces him to ecstasy or plunges him into bestiality” (35). Wine from Arcadia makes women fertile, wines and grapes from Achaia can cause an abortion. Even crunching grapes from this region can kill the unborn (34). But intoxication can give life too. Though wild, nature can be controlled, and its benefits can be nurtured. Indeed, Dionysus reserves the “royal right to domesticate wine” (36). At feasts in Amphikyton’s house, whom lived next to a temple of Dionysus, Dionysus pours wine into the krater, a vessel, and it becomes diluted. “The guests drink as much as they desire and remain ‘safe and sound’” (37). Wine is not only safe by dilution, but it civilizes. Dionysus becomes the “civilizing god” (37). An Athenian commented on the more astute side of Dionysus: “It was by drinking properly
mixed wine that men ceased to stand in a bent posture as they were compelled to do by neat wine” (37). Humanity’s stance began at the feasts of Amphikyton. It is the “Dionysus of the vertical, but also of correctness, rightness” (37). But Dionysus did not stay forever to feast in the house of Amphikyton. He moved throughout all of Hellas, establishing a new reputation as a god of health, vigor, and celebration. His plant became life-affirming, losing its touch of death, while Dionysus himself “shed his savagery,” taking the slip into a new costume, a new transformation, a new *appearance* into the life of the Greeks (39). Dionysus is no longer doomed to be the bastard of Thebes, but takes a role in the political elite of Athenian culture. The Athenian Dionysus is welcomed into better neighborhoods, to which he brought a reputation as a wise god, presiding over the economy of needs and pleasures” (38). In Athens, as opposed to Thebes and other places in his past, he is welcomed. Not with hostility but with grace. His political height reaches a peak when Anthesteria the queen, oversees all the traditional, secret sacrifices and ceremonies in the temple of Dionysus (38-39). Anthesteria even married Dionysus, while Amphikyton, “‘Dispenser of Health,’ donned the mask of sovereignty over Athens and all its territory” (39). Only female guests and Amphikyton’s priestesses were allowed to witness the ceremony. It was a ceremony forbidden to male eyes, a ceremony of a secret nature, a fertile mask of strangeness, like that of the Dionysian mask itself (39). Dionysus never lingers too long in a spot, his vines are “ephemeral” (40). They are sudden bursts, orgiastic miracles of the Dionysiac, creative impulse. The miracle of the vine occurred in Euboia, on Parnassos, at Aigai. Dionysus was disguised as the vine, spouting with virility, the vine a manifestation of Dionysus himself (40). “The leaves formed in the morning, full branches by noon, and wine in the evening” (40-41). The vines, unstoppable in growth like an invasive species, though natural to their environment, were at home from the rocky terrain of Euboia, to the hills of Parnassos.
Married women celebrated the wine, in the throngs of chorus and dance, Dionysus also made himself a new home in springs and fountains (41). But the wine had to be drunk from these sources, “on the spot, with its bouquet of epiphany,” or it would turn to water (41). The spring may be the most unique moment of Dionysian appearance, inseparable from their time and place, epiphanies of the god unlike any other. The wine here is its land, its geography, its own spring, its own home. When it leaves its home, it also disappears. The Dionysus of home, familiarity, health, vigor, and life is still the same Dionysus without a home. The hostile, vicious stranger is also a provider of his people. Is there even a true identifiable Dionysus? Most likely, no. In the coming pages I will look at the different appearances Dionysus takes, and what it means for this god to be indeed, without a home, yet always at home.

Strabo, the Celtic philosopher from Gaul, recounts a Dionysus radically different from the Hellenic Dionysus. In his notebooks he writes that Poisdonius tells us of an island inhabited by only married women. Not even their husbands can see the secrets of this island. These women are possessed by Dionysus, performing rites and sacrifices in his honor. According to custom, they take a day’s work to remove the roof of the island sanctuary and replace it. All women gather materials for the roof, sharing the same loads, but if anyone of them drops their bundle, their limbs are torn and paraded around the sanctuary by the other women. While holding up the limbs, they cry “evoe,” the Dionysian chant, until the fervor ends. Every time, at least a one or two are doomed to endure this peculiar punishment. There is no mistake, these women are in complete service to Dionysus. His commands their full devotion, even to the point of death. The demands are not only difficult, but odd. The roof must be taken down and put back up before sunset. Dropping the bundle is a simple mistake, but tradition requires that even the simplest of mistakes be met with the harshest of deaths (43-44). Apollo, the god of art, architecture and
beauty, could not be more different. Not only is the clearheaded Apollo distant from any possibility of madness, but his architecture is one of grandeur. Even at age four Apollo already erected marvelous temples and altars, never ceasing to improve the scope of his artistic capabilities. His foundations were wholly aesthetic, his roofs heavy. But his glory did not end in monuments. He founded two cities and spearheaded colonial expeditions (45). On the other hand, Dionysus is a “humble, suburban god” (45). He has been just fine staying the night in different humble abode amidst his travels. “He traveled from furnished room to furnished room, from simple house to modest sanctuary” (45). Though his temples were not as modest as the homes he stayed in, they still maintained an organic aesthetic. Thasos writes that his temples were naturalistic, little retiring nooks of “the open air, an open-air naos with an altar and cradle of vine branches; a fine lair, always green; and for the initiates a room in which to sing the evoe” (46). “It is hard to take this deliberate nomadic god seriously as an architect (46).

The nomadic quality of the god reflects itself in his architecture and the body represents the movement of Dionysus. Yet the movement is simple. We look back to the greatest movement for building his sanctuary: tripping. In fact, “The foot or leg is a key part of the Dionysian body” (46). Eurpides’ Bacchante sings the evoe and “leaps like a young mare. ‘She springs forward with a quick thrust of the leg’” (46). In 500 B.C., Pratinas, an expert on dancing, taught the choruses of satyrs in Athens the Bacchic step in homage to Dionysus. This step was a simple, quick forward movement of the foot. Dionysus, appears to Pentheus in front of his palace disguised as a foreigner (46). Dionysus demonstrates:

He [Dionysus] shows him how a bacchant must raise his right foot at the same time as he raises the thyrsus in his right hand… Dionysus is quite simply the god who jumps, who leaps (pedan) among the torches on the rocks of Delphi. He capers like a goat among the Bacchae of the night. (47)
With the movement of the foot the body jumps away from itself. The musicologist Aristoxenus from Tarento writes that between Locri and Reggio in southern Italy, the women experienced *ekstaseis*. While eating they heard a voice and jumped up, incapable of being held back from their bodily epiphanies. They vanished from the city. Once again, Dionysus invades the body, almost always unseen, but never without leaving a feeling. This movement of the leg goes back to the tradition of hopping, intoxicated, onto greased wineskin. They performed in front of amused spectators, testing their ability to move properly while under the influence. Detienne claims that this is a celebration in honor of the god who mixed wine with water. Though he introduced the maddening qualities of wine to man, he also showed man how to make the wine properly so that he could stand. He made man upright (47-48). Detienne writes that the “theologians at Athenaeus’ banquet maintained that the god of wine was truly *orthos*, ‘correct and insistent upon uprightness,’ provided the wine was properly mixed” (48). Dionysus redeemed the drunken man. The wine no longer made him unbalanced, plunging him to the ground on all fours like an animal. Instead it makes him upright, civilized, yet moving, and still filled with the same pleasures of stirring legs and lifted feet (48).

Though Dionysus brings man upright, he is never completely without mischief. In Aeschylus’ tragedy the roof of Lykourgos’ royal palace ‘shook with enthusiasm’ before it finally collapsed into a “frightful fin” as Edoni played the bacchant (52). In tales of the women who build roofs for Dionysus, one women trips over an obstruction and others’ legs get seized by a seizure of dance (51). Does Dionysus play a part in these mishaps? Is a part of him still that god of Thebes, where he caused madness and destruction? Detienne believes that though the Dionysus of Athens and of diluted wine helps his people make strides toward a greater, healthier civilization, the disturbed, mischievous Dionysus is never far behind. Indeed, his presence and
personality is never static. Detinne explains that on any day Dionysus could appear in his foreign form, “reverted back to his true self reminding anyone who might have forgotten that he was none other than the Stranger within, the god who could turn anyone he pleased into blood and fire” (53). Whether Dionysus appears as the god of moderate, lively festivities, or dire, drunken intoxication, he not only appears suddenly, but sometimes grandiosely. The Dionysian Parousia comes in the form of a spark; a quick rapture of spontaneity. His coming is the “automaton” as Detinne calls it, “a technical term of Dionysian epiphany” (53). In myth, Telephos’ feet become surrounded by vinestock “in the blink of an eye” (53). In the sanctuary at Andros “wine begins to flow ‘suddenly, by itself’” (53). Detinne writes that Dionysus “appears in a surge of natural energy” (53). The burst of Dionysian energy is “unintelligible” (54). There is nothing to make of random, surprising energy, besides that it is something impressive in and of itself. Dionysus cannot be explained as events usually are, by the cause. He must be reckoned with as a god detached from the mundane nature of normal reality. We already know that Dionysus cannot be pinpointed as a figure, that he defies all consistent characterization, but Dionysus as a force too belies expectation and understanding. What if we think of Dionysus not as a being, but as a return of becoming? What if we think of him as a force of change, evolution, power? In the city sanctuary of Eleans, the priestesses summoned their lord, crying, “‘Come, Lord Dionysus, into the pure temple of the Eleans, come with the Charites, leaping (thuon) on a bull’s clog’” (55). Dionysus came in the form of a raging bull, taking a single leap of epidemic power into the temple for the celebration of “bounding and spurting” (55). Here, his sweeping presence “took place in the company of the Charites, deities of light and mothers of luminous joy” (55). In possibly his ultimate expression, Dionysus spurts. Here the leap comes into the joyful spurt. We’ve never fully doubted Dionysus’ power, yet, we’ve seen his mischief on people
begin with the stumble. The life of the Dionysian evolves: The clumsy stumble becomes balanced, it perfects itself into a movement-a leap-and the leap transfigures into a fertile emission. The Dionysian evolves from a pathetic mishap of the body, to a joyful movement, to a physiological release of sexual prowess and boundless energy. In the same Elean ritual three caldrons were carried into the house of Dionysus outside of the city kept watch by male priests. The caldrons were empty, sealed and all entrances to the house blocked. The next day, making sure no sign of breaking in occurred, the priests opened the house. The caldrons were overflowing with boiling wine. Dionysus spurted, his liquid seeping through the soil, overflowing his house with the infectious drink (56). Deteinne writes that “His ejaculatory powers require the high paraousias of his Elean domain or his island of women” (56). Dionysus is not just the “‘dispenser of health.” His wine flows with infectious, blooming energy, lifting bodies into an affirmative force of life (56). Yet, as we’ve seen, it also boils, burning the punished into disintegration. No matter what, it always carries Dionysus with it, whether it be a force for generative enhancement, pleasure, or death.

A body of leaping and spurting, is not the only agitated fervor Dionysus inspires. The heart too dances. His force penetrates within the body too, hitting the subject in the most fragile, if not intimate of places. Dionysus is a god working on the whole body, inside, outside. “In the Corybantes, ‘leaping’ is revealed to be an essential ingredient of life itself…corybantic dance combines with the frenzy of a bacchic body” (57-58). Homer describes the instant when Andromache realizes Hector is dead: “‘She is like a maenad, with a ‘palpitating heart’” (57). The heart’s dance comes from fear, terror. The heart leaps to the “accompaniment of a clacking crotala” (57). The heart pounds the diaphragm, and the feeling reverberates to the body’s entrails. The heart’s feeling, coming from an internal abyss of terror, inspires ecstatic, viral
movement. Even infants have the instinct to jump, leap, cry. Without the ability to speak or move autonomously, the only way this excitement is soothed is through movement itself (57-58). Deteinne writes that “without this instinct neither rhythm or harmony would exist” (58). The instinct to jump never leaves us. Mothers, of all ages throughout history knew this. They rock their babies to a soft voice and soothing song, satisfying that innate desire for rhythm and harmony. This ‘agitation of the heart’ is calmed and relieved by an external movement taking control of what lies within (58). In dance, the heart quiets. Detienne explains that “the heart is so intimately associated with Dionysus;” it is created by and constantly drowned from its birth in the drink of life, streaming blood, the “principle of life itself, first and last in the biological order” (59-60). Deteinne, with Aristotle’s help, connects the nature of the heart with the phallus. Detienne claims that Aristotle, in his Treatise on the Movement of Animals, says that the heart “manifests its presence in spontaneous movements, in its own autochthonous vitality” (60). It controls itself, though erupts without notice. The phallus, also “abundantly present in the god’s parousia,” is separate from thought (60). It erects, the cartilage expanding and diminishing and the volume of air increases of decreases. “The biologist observes that it’s autonomy is even more visible when ‘the power of the sperm spurts from it like a kind of animal’” (60). The heart and phallic organs liberate themselves in private and public festivals in the “presence of the god who causes maenads to leap and unwatered wine to flow” (60). Dionysus breaks the chains of conscious restraint, to bring his worshippers beyond themselves, beyond the daily experience of moderation and autonomy. Dionysus’ spell is paradoxical. It liberates us, yet through a power that sets us free, and sometimes deranged. His feeling flows like blood, a gift of life so dangerous it’s often deadly. He infects the body; it then leaps, jump, palpitates, grows. These are gestures not of autonomy, but of force. Dionysus’ spell is paradoxical. It liberates us, yet through a power
that sets us free, and sometimes deranged. His feeling flows like blood, a gift of life so dangerous it’s often deadly. He poisons the body with an infection of itself, in a leap, jump, palpitation, growth; gestures not of autonomy, but of force. Detienne believes that Dionysian power is “not so much ‘power over others,’ but a ‘capacity that one possesses in oneself’” (61). It is a potency through its potentiality to effect its will onto the world, nature, and the body. Though it subdues the body, it also empowers it, at the expense of intellectual autonomy. Detienne writes that Hippocratic physicians who wrote the *Treatise on the Nature of the Child*, analogized the growth of a plant and a preborn child. The seed approaches the humors, synthesizes with them, and grows. The humor works on the sap, and the sap grows. The humor makes the sap fatten in the seed, it forms into a leaf and the leaf pushes the pod open. The sun boils the humor, it transforms to fruit and the fruit eats the sap. The soil is the ground for the fertility and power of the humor. The powerful liquid that Aristotle attributes to the heart and phallus, a Dionysian liquid, is analogous to the humor. Dionysus infects the earth in a swarm of vines, and likewise, the humor births its own shape of nature in fertile, vast invasions of plants (61). Dionysus does not blindly inseminate, he cultivates life. His power is the “spurtling of moist, subterranean life, that which crowns the scale of vital humors, in boiling blood and frothing wine” (62).

Dionysus is the god of action. Never still himself, he causes the world to move. His force causes his subjects to leap, spurt, jump, kill. He’s the force which tears bodies into bloody limbs, drowns the earth in wine, boils the blood, and unleashes bodies into manic frenzy. He oversees the growth of pleasure and destruction alike. As a foreigner, he is constantly removed from himself. As a traveler, he hides amongst the geography of Greece and the faces of strangers. He is distant to us by disguise, yet intimately close in the dance. His depths come from the intoxicating the surface of the earth, flowing within and outside our bodies. His insemination
unceasingly unleashes potential. It’s eventful; a creative, active force, lifting and plummeting spirits. Though unable to peer into his eyes, we confront the abyss and heavens, powered by the endowment of Dionysus. Dionysus shows us what a body is capable of becoming. First, he introduces himself as a creature flying out of the abyss, tormenting any last shred of tranquility into nothingness. Later Dionysus takes a new form, flying further into the heavens, revealing the secret glory of pleasure. However, as much as he flies he sinks. He does not sit nervously in neurosis. He becomes, and under his direction, we too become. We can take flight in his power, but we can also sink with him. His pleasure is a play over the abyss. In his reach for the heavens, the moderate Greek cautiously remembers what lies beneath.

Chapter 2: Apollo and Dionysus

At this point we are well aware of the mystery of Dionysus. He is a shape shifter, sometimes a demon, a bearer of death and a giver of life. He knows no home. He is a god of the new, barely settling into different places before he moves on again. The same goes with his body. He takes on different shapes and varying disguises. He lacks a clear self. However, his power is unquestionable. Does it come from within? It comes more from his relation to nature. His power always exists in relation to something, something within him and something outside him. His ability to affect, to touch, to destroy, and to make the outside into something new is his potentiality. He is the god of potentiality, and change. However, his affects in the world reveal little about him. His actions are not circumscribed to the circumference and being of his own soul or his self. His actions reveal something about the world instead, or even more so, make something of the world.

In Nietzsche’s later works, Dionysus takes a shape similar to the Dionysus described in Greek legend. He constantly moves, mysterious and indefinable, but yet we know he is a definite
force of life of destruction. He grounds the chaos of existence. If we are to come closer to some
form of the truth, then we must look at Dionysus. Understanding this “nature” of Dionysus helps
us, but not in terms of self-actualization. Confronting the tragic, the abyss, and Dionysus is a way
of coming to terms with chaos. It is not ours to make truths that exist in the “outside,” above
nature. We must fight, live, and dance with what we are dealt. This dance is not about
understanding through truth, but through creation. Nietzsche does not ask “What we can find out
that is true,” as much he asks “What can we create?” One of Nietzsche’s central doctrines, the
will to power, is not a universal. It is a doctrine of power, or to put in other terms, creation.
Creation is not universal. It is a force of the new. Nietzsche does not observe as much as he
wonders. The great shadows that linger in his thought are the shadows of the future. How will
nature’s tendency to recreate itself change the future? He is perhaps a philosopher of the future
more than he is a philosopher of the past. What can the body make true? Bodies are not meant to
understand truth, as much as they are to make truth. Nietzsche speaks to the radicals, the
skeptics, and what he calls the “higher” thinkers who are willing to embrace constant becoming
with vitality. However, in Nietzsche’s first major book, The Birth of Tragedy, his thinking is
significantly different. Nietzsche focuses on Apollo as much, if not more than Dionysus. In all of
his works after this, he does not think of Apollo as a crucial element for his philosophy. In his
later works, especially in the posthumous Will to Power, he continues to bring up Dionysus. In
the second section of this paper I will explain how Dionysus himself becomes in Nietzsche’s
evolving thought. In this, the first section, I will focus where Nietzsche started his philosophical
investigation of existence. Being a scholar of Greek classicism, Nietzsche looked at the dramatic
phenomena of ancient (pre-Socratic) Greek tragedy to forge the beginnings of his philosophy. He
particularly looks at the opposition and coupling of Apollo and Dionysus. This first work of
Nietzsche is somewhat peculiar only because Apollo is a god of beauty and of shape, form, and identity. Apollo stands in utter contrast to Dionysus. Yet, he is a crucial point of interest in Nietzsche’s early thinking. In the following, we will explore the origins and conclusions of this interest. Moreover, we will explore the horizons of Nietzsche’s early thought. Where does he take us, and where does he leave us?

The dialectic which takes between Apollo and Dionysus is intricate. Nietzsche writes that they “run parallel to each other” and that they “continually incite each other to new and more powerful births, which perpetuate an antagonism, only superficially reconciled by the common term “Art.” Through the “metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic will, they appear coupled with each other, and through this coupling eventually generate the art-product, equally Dionysian and Apollonian, or Attic tragedy” (Nietzsche Birth of Tragedy 1). In order to give us a concrete understanding of these ‘two tendencies” Nietzsche asks us to imagine them as analogous to “separate art-worlds of dreams and drunkenness.” We will come back to the interactions and conflicts between these two worlds, but for the moment, let us focus on Apollo before we get to Apollo in relation to Dionysus. Nietzsche explains that this Apollonian dream comes to the observer as an “immediate apprehension of form. The aesthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to life as the philosopher does to the reality of existence…these pictures afford him an interpretation of life, and it is by these processes that he trains himself for life.” It is not just the light and pleasurable pictures which appear to the dreamer. The dark, the “gloomy, the troubled and sad” also appear to the dreamer. “The whole Divine Comedy of life, and the Inferno also pass before him, not like mere shadows on the wall-for in these scenes he lives and suffers- and yet not without that fleeting sensation of appearance.” Nietzsche exclaims, “Perhaps many will, like myself, recall that amid the dangers and terror of dream-life they would at times, cry
out in self-encouragement, and not without success, ‘It is only a dream! I will dream on!’ (2). This restraint is the crucial element of Apollonian dream. The dream can take us to the darkness, but it does not overstep its bounds. It does not throw us into the abyss. In Apollo there is a “delicate boundary, which the dream-picture must not overstep-lest it act pathologically.” In other words, lest it act like Dionysus. “We must keep in mind that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that philosophical calm of the sculptor god [Apollo].” The eye of Apollo is “sunlike, as befits his origin; even when his glance is angry and distempered, the sacredness of his beautiful appearance must still be there” (3).

Though this beauty be a beauty of form, and hence for Nietzsche, an artificiality, this form is an aesthetically admirable creation of man. It helps him distill the tragic chaos of the world through form. It may make us weep and feel, but it does not destroy the body. Apollo does not kill the us, nor does he take the us to our highest heights. Apollo’s images are just dreams. Images are not perspectives of the eye; they are creations of the artist. In contrast to Apollonian, the Dionysian is not man’s separation from nature. Through Apollo we can only get a glimpse of nature through the image, and thus avoid a complete immersion into its environment. Through Dionysus man becomes “reconciled with nature.” Nietzsche writes that “under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but Nature which has becomes estranged, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man” (4). This is a contact with nature, not a contemplation with it. “Freely earth proffers her gifts, and peacefully the beasts of prey approach from the desert and mountain” (4). There is even a sort of universality in Dionysus, but not a universal concept of truth. Rather, the Dionysian is a universal immersion of man. It is a universal type of Dionysian experience, though modified from man to man, due to the subjectivity of experiences. “Now with the gospel
of the universal harmony, each one feels not only united, reconciled, blended with his neighbor, but as one with him.” With this unity comes a revelation of the blissful, Dionysian, grounding of the world. “He feels as if the veil of Maya has been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in the tatters before the mysterious Primordial Unity.” Man is enraptured by “song and dance, he has forgotten how to speak” (4). Man feels like a god, in “enchantment, ecstasy.” He feels like the gods he envisioned in his dreams. “He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself the highest gratification of the Primordial Unity” (4). This is the “artistic energy” of the Dionysian “without the mediation of the human artist… the essence of nature is now to be expressed symbolically; we need a new world of symbols; for once the entire symbolism of the body is called into play” (7). The dance of the whole body, “forcing every member into rhythmic movement,” is a symbol of the Dionysian. Nietzsche explains that this Dionysian influence must have been something novel and shocking to the Apollonian Greek. “The astonishment was all the more greater the more it was mingled with the shuddering suspicion that all this was actually not very alien to him.” Inside the Greek was the sense that there was a closeness to this intoxication, this harmonic bliss with raw, fertile, nature. There was only a chasm between him and this nature. “It was only his Apollonian consciousness which, like a veil, hid this Dionysian world from his vision” (7). “At bottom, however, the chasm was never bridged over,” yet there was a reconciliation between the Apollonian and Dionysian. “This reconciliation is the most important moment in the history of the Greek cult.” Born out of it were revolutions and new ways of life (6).

Given the complexities of these two gods and their complicated influence on the Greeks, how are we to go about understanding the pre-Socratic Greek? What sort of storm brewed in the
soul, what joy made them dance, what made them weep? What motivated them to engage with the dramatic form of tragedy, of all things? Nietzsche writes that “to understand this, it becomes necessary to level the artistic structure of the Apollonian culture, as it were, stone by stone, till the foundations on which it rests become visible” (7). To get to the bedrock, grounding Dionysian chaos, we must take down each stone of the Apollonian temple. To understand Apollo, Nietzsche first asks, a question: “What terrific need was it that could produce such an illustrious company of Olympian beings?” (8) In short, “why was Apollo necessary?” What inner movement led to the great Greek admiration of this still, stoic god? “He who approaches these Olympians with another religion in his heart, seeking among them for moral elevation, even for sanctity, will soon be forced to turn back on them, discouraged and disappointed.” There is nothing in the Olympian company that even hints of “asceticism, spirituality, or duty. We hear nothing but the accents of an exuberant, triumphant life, in which all things, whether good or bad, are deified” (8). What “magic potion” made life so enjoyable for these men, that wherever they turned they saw nothing but beauty, a gleaming, sweet admiration of their own existence? What made, their eyes, wherever they turned, “behold the smile of Helen, the ideal picture of theist own existence, ‘floating in sweet sensuality?’” (8). Nietzsche alludes to a Greek legend in which King Midas hunts a long while for Silenus, “the companion to Dionysus.” When he finally catches him, the king asks “what is the best and most desirable of all things for man.” The trapped and “immobile” was silent, “until at last urged by the king, he gave a shrill laugh” and exclaimed:

“‘Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do ye compel me to tell what it were most expedient for you not to hear? What is best is all beyond your reach forever: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you-is quickly to die.’”
After recounting the tale, Nietzsche asks how the Olympian deities have a connection to this “folk-wisdom” and then answers this for us (8). “It is as if the Olympian magic mountain had opened before us and revealed its roots to us. The Greek feels and knows the horror of existence,” but he “endures the terror” by putting between himself and life this “radiant dream-birth of the Olympians.” The Greeks “overcame” the sordid stories of Greek gods and the bloody, rough, dangerous, experiences of their own lives through the “Olympian middle world of art.” At the least the horror was “veiled and withdrawn from sight.” The Greek gods were not creations out of joy, luxury, boredom, or muse, but of “direct necessity to live.” Apollo bestowed a higher glory of beauty amidst the trodden life of the Greeks, a people whom Nietzsche calls “so sensitive, so vehement in their desires, so singularly constituted for suffering. “Thus do gods justify the life of man, in that they themselves live it-the only satisfactory Theodicy!” (9) No longer does the will strive against itself, bemoan itself and the desires of itself, but it “longs so vehemently for existence that the Homeric man feels himself so completely at one with it, that lamentation itself becomes a song of praise.” Indeed, the movement into praise and bliss that Apollo makes possible for the Greeks cannot be understated. Apollonian form, image, and grace makes life beautiful so that life may be lived. If such elegant gods live this life, then humans can. But also a part of this Olympian admiration is a connection to nature. No longer is nature held in disdain for its cruelty, but it is celebrated just as life is. The celebration of life makes the celebration of nature necessary. Nature gives life, existence throws us into nature. This is Homeric Greek, the naïve artist, whom connects himself to nature. Nietzsche claims that this “oneness of nature,” this “harmony which is contemplated with such longing by modern man must be necessarily found at the gate of every culture.” It is a “condition resulting naturally, as if inevitably.” In this type of art there are the “highest effects of Apollonian culture which has
always to overthrow some Titanic empire and slay monsters.” The Homeric naiveté is a “victory of Apollonian illusion.” Nature even “employs” this illusion to “achieve her own ends,” survival (9). Nature survives through our desperate reach for the illusion of phantasm. This represents not only the victory of Apollo, but of nature herself.

We have looked at the “shield” of Apollo: the aesthetic that justifies existence by representing it in a comprehensible, digestible form. But what are the qualities of Dionysus that make him so dark? What is it about this god that defies reality, representation, and the sanity of everyday life? And why is Apollo so necessary in the response to Dionysus? Nietzsche claims that the Dionysian state hint at something in the core of existence:

In the Dionysian state, with is annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence there is contained a lethargic element, in which are submerged all past personal experiences. It is this gulf of oblivion that separates the world of everyday from the world of Dionysian reality (23).

The consciousness of this “everyday reality” makes us feel nauseated and repulsive. The need to negate the will becomes strong. Interestingly, Nietzsche compares this “Dionysian man to Hamlet. “Both have penetrated into the true nature of things,-they have perceived, but it is irksome for them to act; for their action cannot change the eternal nature of things.” “Time it is out of joint” and it is ridiculous to think that we ourselves can do anything about something completely out of our control. This is when man realizes the “absurdity of existence.” In the face of this potentially harmful revelation, we “require the veil of illusion. Knowledge kills action, action requires the veil of illusion. This is the lesson of Hamlet.” It is here, when the “will is most imperiled, that art approaches, as a redeeming and healing enchantress.” Art can “transform these horrible reflections” of the pointlessness of existence “into representations with which man may live.” This is sublimity; “art conquists the awful’ (23). Face to face with the abyss, the
grounding chaotic, differentiation of existence, truth is acknowledged as a farce, the self is an illusion, the only constant chaos itself. The “melancholy” of abyssal knowledge is “veiled, or at least withdrawn from view, by means of the artistic middle world of the Olympians.” The Greeks created their Gods and the stories of Gods in order to live. Although bleak, Nietzsche believes that the revelry and abyssal nature of the Dionysian was not itself terrible. The Greeks knew that an unfettered and unending embrace of the Dionysian could result in catastrophe and madness—the likes of what we saw in the Greek legends of Dionysus. There is no doubt that Nietzsche held this chaotic abyss, especially exemplified by the confrontation with tragedy, in high esteem, but the Dionysian elements had to be held in moderation through a dialectic of the two powers. Only through a synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus could the Greeks achieve sublimation to a higher form, a higher perfection of existence. Sustainment is not possible with complete chaos.

Nietzsche himself believed that because the barbarism of other cultures didn’t heed closely to the moderation of revelry, they never reached the perfection of the Greeks (20). Because the Greeks had Apollo to counter the terror of Dionysus they were protected from an overflow of destructive violence. The shield drew a limit to prevent the “pathological” from seeping in and infecting the illusion. The shields of semblance crafted a beauty to digest the chaotic world: “his [Apollo’s] image (Bild) must include that measured limitation (maßvolle Begrenzung), that freedom from wilder impulses, that wise calm of the image-making god” (16).

Now that we have a thorough understanding of Apollo’s purpose in Greek tragedy and life, we will try to get to a better understanding of the mysterious Dionysus. There is no doubt that this seemingly indefinable god requires more explanations and analysis. To better understand this movement of the pre-Socratic Greek into the Dionysian state, Nietzsche compares his being to that of the satyr. Nietzsche claims that what the Greek saw in his satyr was
“nature as yet unchanged by knowledge, maintaining impregnable barriers to culture.” This satyr is not some “primitive caveman,” but nothing less than the “archetype of man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense emotions, the ecstatic reveler enraptured by the proximity of his god.” As the satyr, man suffers the same sufferings the gods go through. Man comes to a wisdom that goes to the very heart of nature and achieves a “sexual omnipotence of nature, which the Greek was wont to contemplate with reverence and wonder… the satyr is sublime and godlike.”

As the satyr, man throws off the “illusions of culture” from his view. “The bearded satyr revealed himself, shouting joyfully to his god. Next to this lighthearted, perhaps maniacal satyr, the man of culture “shrinks to a specious caricature.” Nietzsche compares his beliefs to a fellow German philosopher Schiller, claiming that tragic art begins when “the chorus exists as a living bulwark against the onslaught of reality, because it portrays existence more truthfully, perfectly than the cultured man who ordinarily considers himself as the sole reality.” Nietzsche believes that the cultured man and his “falsehoods of cultures,” are truths analogues to “things-in-themselves,” which are the truths he believes are bungled and botched. There are no things-in-themselves.

“The idyllic shepherd of modern man is but a copy of the sum of the culture-illusions which he calls nature; the Dionysian Greek desires truth and nature in their most potent form-and so he sees himself metamorphosed into the satyr.” Tragedy is the “perpetual dissolution of phenomena.” In contrast, the illusions of culture, illusions which value grace, peace, stability do not seek to come closer to the nature of world as it is. These are Apollonian illusions, not Dionysian revelations. The satyr chorus is the “self-mirroring of the Dionysian man.” Nietzsche explains this phenomena of Greek tragedy by alluding to the architecture of the dramatic stage itself:

In the theaters the terraced structure of the theatron rising in concentric arc enabled everyone to overlook, in an actual sense, the entire world of culture around him, and in an over-
abundance of contemplation to imagine himself one of the chorus…the satyr chorus is above all
a vision of the Dionysian throng, just as the world stage, in turn, is a vision of the satyr chorus.
(25)

The Dionysian man is “de-individuated.” The barriers of the individual break down into a
oneness with nature and the Dionysian throng. This is the “process of the dramatic proto-
phenomenon…to act as if you had possession of another body and another character.” At this
point, tragedy begins. The individual enters into an “alien nature.” He is enraptured to a degree,
though the metamorphosis does not take him to the otherworld, but rather to the lowest depths of
this world. Form is disbanded, and likewise the structures of life too. The self and its usual
perceptions of categories and individuality are thrown into a chaos of multiplicity and
interconnection. “The dithyrambic chorus is a chorus of transformed beings, whose civic past
and social position are totally disbanded.” Identity is lost, but that does not mean that there is not
a difference. There must be a difference with the destruction of identity. Yet there must be
similarity with this destruction. The line between difference and sameness is blurred. All seems
to link to everything. Nature exists as is, void of representation. Finally, in the Dionysian throng
“the Dionysian man sees himself as a satyr, and as a satyr he in run beholds the god, that is in
his transformation he sees a new vision outside him as the Apollonian consummation of his own
state” (26). The dialectic between Apollo and Dionysus, “after many long and precursory
struggles, finds glorious consummation in this child,” that is Attic tragedy. The dialectic between
Apollo and Dionysus reaches synthesis. “With this new vision the drama completes itself” (27).

We have looked at how Dionysus and Apollo act and respond to each other. We know
that Apollo is the mediating force of Dionysus. But how does Dionysus exactly intoxicate? We
know that Dionysus brings us to the abyss, but how is this done? What captivates a human to this
point, what drives a human to this edge? Music. I mentioned the satyr chorus earlier as
Nietzsche’s embodiment of the Dionysian in Greek tragedy, and now we will investigate the
nature and effects of the music of the chorus itself. The music of the Dionysian will does not have a universal effect on the Greeks, if by universal we mean it excites an identical will that is the same across all individuals. Because we must appreciate Nietzsche’s avoidance from universals, we must resist terming the unified will as a property, but rather an emergence into a specific movement (Nietzsche’s Metaphysics 2). The unified will is not something that remains constant throughout time. It is not predictable based on an essence, but rather it is a movement by the Greeks into a physiological state, complete with brain, body, limbs. It does not persist, save that the only persistence of the unified will is its power, its potentiality to change destroy, and affect. In this manner, the will of the unified Greeks is clearly under influence of the Dionysian. Nietzsche writes that under the influence of the Dionysian, all forms and individuations break down. Slaves become rulers, rulers become slaves, and the familial unity disbands, the drives of sexual desires spreading themselves throughout the rest of the Greek land, in complete denial of restraint in the name of formality or Apollonian images (Nietzsche Birth of Tragedy 18). Dionysus roams throughout the land, seeking points of interest and potentiality. In contrast, Apollo places himself in grand architectural palaces for the purpose of cultivating a way of life persistent in time. The image, since it is not an intoxication or feeling, is represented to the subject. It reflects life, if only as much as it can, but in this way it can do even more. It recreates life. Since Apollonian qualities are not of life themselves, they give birth to new forms of life, and thus are new potentialities themselves, like the Dionysian. However, once the image comes into emergence it stays, while the Dionysian roams. It does not seek new points, but rests satisfactorily in its existence, its final representation of life. The reflection does not rebirth, it births itself and influences the subject to new forms of inspiration, new contemplations. It is not a product itself that is capable of its own force, like the Dionysian body, though the image
excites new forces, forces of imagination, idea, and imagination. It works with the Dionysian because it distills the abyss into something comprehensible and digestible. The tragic drama of the Greeks, something inherently Apollonian (if the chorus is excluded) because it is a drama, not life itself, confronts the world, but it does so in a way that does not directly touch. Rather, it contemplates it. The drama as a formal piece, structured and representative, is this sense has a deep affinity with the image. Both are born of the same god.

Though the Dionysian gives color to the Apollonian and vice versa, we should not underestimate the antagonism between the two forces. More than anything else, Apollo is the god of the image, and Dionysus the god of music. These are not simple analogies. These gods do in fact rule these domains of life, and the way they give these gifts to the Greeks, and the ways in which the Greeks accept them, translate into ways of life for the Greeks. Thus we should not think of the Greeks as becoming what they are from the ideas and abstraction, but neither from their material conditions. Rather they become from power, from the effects of Gods and the way they communicated and interpreted their Gods. The ancient Greeks did not interact with life with a single points of contact. They did not deduce only from the mind, and neither from only their surroundings and circumstance. In the ancient pre-Socratic Greeks, Nietzsche did not see any commitment to a form of life, but rather the living of life itself, the emergence of new possibilities through what he admired most in their nature, their openness to possibility. Nietzsche saw Apollo and Dionysus as most representative of this approach to life through possibility. He admired their betrayal of nature, their aesthetic impulse imbued under the influence of Apollo. This was their ability to create images out of nature, but not of nature. Their Apollonian aesthetic was not a science, not interpretation, but above all else, creation. These creations had the capability of demonstrating the horrific and the beautiful, but always under the
gaze of the contemplative image, a persistent picture, something formed, sculpted, and functional.

At this point, I think it will be useful to distinguish between the Apollonian and the Dionysian further, based on their potentialities. The Dionysian seeks out new points of experience to immerse itself in its own capability. When we looked at the Dionysian in Greek legend, we clearly saw this. The Dionysian force experiments not only with its ability to effect nature, but to shape it. Dionysus was infamous for causing madness and intoxication. Dionysus is a god of bliss and pleasure alike. What is most important to remember about the Dionysian modes of experimentation, is that when the terms “pleasure,” “bliss,” “madness” are used, they are not used as terms to diagnose Dionysian qualities or natures. Dionysus, a stranger, refuses to be diagnosed. Rather, these terms explain how Dionysus experiments with the body, something incapable of being translated into any (Apollonian) language. For languages are reminiscent of the image, in the attempt to bring memories of experience into a point of stasis and into an arbitrary comprehension. For everything starts with the body—the nerve stimuli, but the experience is abstracted further and further as it progresses into thought, awareness, and reflection. (Nietzsche “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” 256). It is not even fair to call this experimentation a language of its own, as it is commonly done. For Dionysus, the body is not a language. It is a point of contact, a place for potentiality, a place for limitless possibility, though the body only takes up so much space. For Dionysus, the body can do so much on its own, and in contact with nature. For Apollo, nature is to be studied. We can see how these two gods together represent so much for Nietzsche: Dionysus makes possible new forms of nature, Apollo distills the results of these contacts, these Dionysian events in nature into the image, so that it may be studied and comprehended. However, as Nietzsche knows himself, this distillation
is only so accurate, for the body alone is only capable of knowing nature, and in fact, being its own nature. The “tragic” dilemma we may call this, is that as Apollo continues to study and put into perspective the Dionysian events of life and of nature, but not any one of these events can be relieved by the body. Complete immersion, on the scale of knowing others and knowing the nature of oneself, is impossible. Nature, (which includes the self) is impossible to know on a physiological level or otherwise, because it constantly changes. Dionysus infected his victims with madness because they did not demonstrate their true appreciation for a god who could change (Detienne 17). The ancient Greeks were in a habit of giving more attention to the gods who cultivated an existence, or more precisely, an image. Thus, Dionysus showed them what type of change is capable in their own bodies, infecting them with the disease of madness. But perhaps it would be a mistake to say that Dionysus made them mad, rather he invited them into his home forever? They were doomed to be “trapped” in the fluidity of Dionyiac change and potentiality, causing unending madness. Dionysus exacted revenge on those who dwelt under the excessive influence of Apollo. However, we should be careful not to assume that this revenge was cynical. For Dionysus, it might have been charitable. It might have been a way to show the ancient Greeks what is possible, a way to offer an entrance out of neurosis and habit. In fact, his gift of the vine was exactly this: a gift of intoxication, because intoxication offered, if only for a moment, a new way of knowing life. It would be a mistake to call these new points of knowledge something “lower” or “base.” For Dionysus, these opinions would reek of Apollonian instinct. Instead, precisely because they do come from the body, are these new points of knowledge all the greater, all the more open to a power not understood before. The ideas of the abstract offer new points of discovery, but can only do so void of feeling. Rather, Dionysus wants us to see the reverse: how is the abstract reversed, complicated, even mystified under intoxication. What
makes the abstract, and lower on the rung-the image-and still lower than that, language, possible? For Nietzsche, the possibility comes from nothing else than the body.

In his later works, Nietzsche pays more attention the implications of the body, its drives, and its motivations. However, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche remains focused on the Apollonian restraint on Greek culture. Remember how we earlier discussed that Nietzsche thought this the secret to Greek excellence in comparison to other civilizations. The Dionysian festivals of the Greeks were restrained as opposed to other societies. The Spector of Apollo never fully abandoned his post. The Greeks knew that if the body explored its own possibilities to “extremes,” the body would destroy itself. In Nietzsche’s early thought, what made the latter possible was because of Apollo’s restraint on the body. Moreover, these Apollonian images of the Greeks, which evolved into works of art, architecture, and an overall taste for beauty, kept the Greeks striving towards an excellence which made life into a work of art, something distant from itself, but paradoxically enriching itself in the form of a new creation. For if the body only lived for itself, how much could be possible in life besides “the brute?” If the body was kept so close to itself, if it only strived for itself, then life becomes nasty. No doubt for Nietzsche, this was the case throughout history. But what drove him towards the pre-Socratic Greeks was their ability to distance the body from itself without an exclusive recourse to reason. Marianne Cowan writes in an introduction to Nietzsche’s *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, that “the paradox is resolved in Nietzsche's over-all view of the philosopher as mediator between the equal spiritual dangers of boundedness and boundlessness” (Cowan Introduction to *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* 12). Science may look at myth, such as the Attic tragedies, as lies, but art can look at them as products of culture and creativity (12). The pre-Socratic Greeks justified their existence not according to objective truths, but as “aesthetic phenomenon”
Nietzsche was not against science because it ended up as an empirical venture. For the latter attempts to describe “what is,” and there is nothing wrong with “what is.” However, Nietzsche stayed away from essences, universals, and summations of what all parts of existence are, and what they mean morally. In existence, we cannot conclude that there is a single part in isolation, or an identity of anything:

Heraclitus too was unjust to the senses, which lie neither in the way the Eleatics believe nor as he believed – they do not lie at all. It is what we make of their evidence that first introduces a lie into it, for example the lie of unity, the lie of materiality, of substance, of duration…. ‘Reason’ is the cause of our falsification of the evidence of the senses. In so far as the senses show becoming, passing away, change, they do not lie…. But Heraclitus will always be right in this, that being is an empty fiction. The ‘apparent’ world is the only one: the ‘real’ world has only been lyingly added…(Nietzsche Twilight of the Idols 35)

The senses are reliable because they come out of perspective. Feeling, sight, and relation to the outside world are necessarily subjective. Significantly, Nietzsche is working against the theory of Immanuel Kant. This theory claims that there an objective reality (to paraphrase, a truth) in the outside world. In other words, a grounding for a priori truth does exist. We simply cannot know the nature of this (noumenal) world because the conditions of our knowledge limit us (“Immanuel Kant”). For Nietzsche, the idea of a priori knowledge and the truth in the noumenal world is a disgrace (Nietzsche Beyond Good and Evil 3-4; 12-13). Existence does not hide itself. All is “plurality and change” (35). Yet the intrigue lies in the Nietzsche’s complicated relationships with truth and ontology. If existence is out there, shouldn’t there an ontological grounding for the nature or truth of this existence? No. For Nietzsche, truth is certainly there, but there are many truths for existence. Ontologies, beings, are ghosts thought into the writings of naïve, wishful philosophers. Perspectivism imbues everything. How can everything then be summed up by one explanation, whether it be an explanation of dialectics, ontology, identities? There is nothing out there, save what is out there. The aesthetic justification
that Nietzsche turns to early on is not a moral imperative or a universal law for all of nature. It is not nationalistic, political or reasonable. It is instead the strive towards contemplation, towards satisfaction, towards the admirable gaze at oneself and existence. For the early Nietzsche, constantly wrestling with the Dionysian was not sustainable. The subject is torn from itself, his existence is fragmented, differentiated. The subject, existence is torn from itself. It is unable to come to terms with itself, because the only terms which existence can grapple with constantly revert back to this fragmentation. It is a trap of Dionysian madness: a trap of possibility, void of resolution, conclusion, truth. That is why immersion into Apollonian realm of illusion is needed. The Apollonian subject does not escape from this. Rather, he surmounts new heights on the tops of these difficulties, coming to terms with them not through the raw, Dionysian existence, but through the Apollonian beauty; a beauty that molds sculpture from the dirt of the earth.

Chapter 3: Nietzsche and Dionysus

In Human, All Too Human, Nietzsche writes of the wanderer, “who does not keep himself attached to any individual thing.” He has no goal, “for that does not exist.” Within himself something else wanders, “something that finds pleasure in change and ephemerality.” He reaches the gate of a city to rest in, towards which the desert led up until then. The solemnness of the city takes a hold on the wanderer, and it becomes like a second desert upon the desert of his heart. “When the morning rises, glowing like a god of wrath,” the faces of those in the city may reveal “more desert, insecurity, filth, deceit, than there are outside the gates. The day is almost worse than the night” (Nietzsche Human, All Too Human 302). But then come the “rapturous mornings of other regions and days, when already with the dawning day…there are the gifts of all those free spirits.” These free spirits roam the mountains and wood, “who, like him, are wanderers and philosophers, in their own joyful, meditative way…they seek the philosophy of
the morning” (HH 303). Human, All Too Human represents the beginning of a Nietzsche turn. Nietzsche abandoned the Apollonian and Dionysian dialectic of the past. In fact, when years later he wrote an “Attempt at Self-Criticism” in regards to The Birth of Tragedy, calling it badly written, clumsy, embarrassing” (The Birth of Tragedy 5). Nietzsche writes that in this book, Dionysus “stammered in a strange tongue” and that “he ought to have sung.” He writes “what a pity it is that I did not write what I had to say at the time as a poet; perhaps I could’ve done it! (6). For Dionysus cannot speak in a language, his expression is physiological, a feeling, something that only poetry can come closer to, if language must be used in the attempt to reach the Dionysian. Poetry, in a suspension of grammar, convention, and logic itself, is more expressive of the Dionysian, and indeed, life itself, than the formulaic, system of language. But Nietzsche’s pursuit of poetry means more than the attempt to go off the grid, the grid of language, terminologies, systems philosophies, cognitive thought, comprehensibility. Rather it is to deny that there is a grid in nature that holds existence together, that can explain it. Nietzsche does not ask us to escape, precisely because there is nothing to escape from. Because Nietzsche is consistent, he admits that if he is to deny exclamatory grids and systems of thought, he is doomed to deny a truth or an explanation for anything. It is this conclusion, this end of logic that is the ultimate paradox, not simply a contradiction (Hales 835).

So much for Nietzsche’s denial of explanations. But how does all this translate into the philosophy of the morning in Human, All Too Human? Is not the philosophy of the morning something that sounds more positive, and thus, more explanatory, more truthful? Is not the morning the revelation? No, the morning is horizon. Nietzsche’s philosophy is not a philosophy of ends, neither of beginnings. It is a philosophy of horizons, turns of thought, exclamations, the interesting. In the collapse of truth, what else is there to come in contact with besides the
interesting? The wanderer does not enter into the gates of a promised land, but of a city. The city is a newness, a place with the potential to be either devastating or elevating, peaceful or conflictual. They are lands with other wanderers, others in solitude, “who see the swarms of the muses dancing past them in the mist of mountains.” The wanderer “walks silently beneath the trees in the equanimity of his morning soul. Nothing but good and bright things are thrown out to him from the treetops and the hidden depths of foliage” (303). The wanderer does not look for a truth within or outside himself. Instead, the muses dance, they do not sit there fixed in order to be dissected. The wanderer does not make a habit out of looking for something in its depths, he is open to the treetops as well. He finds that if he searches beneath something long enough, he will find himself coming to the top of another surface, another horizon which requires exploration. The wander is emblematic of Dionysus, especially as the god continues to evolve in Nietzsche’s work. Rather than representing what a human is, or even is capable of, Dionysus represents the inflections of existence, the different colors it takes. No movement is completely predictable or a replica of the next.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche takes a historical approach towards the problem of modern man. The work is more anthropological, if one must call it that, but Nietzsche looks within and outside the fields of science, anthropology, philosophy, and literature. There is no doubt that *The Genealogy* attempts to excavate the evolution of morality, and it does so through examining the beginnings of practices in societies. And though it concerns the study of morality, Nietzsche maintains any form, type of morality is born out of the human body. Moral expressions include the sentiments “I ought, thou shalt” (*Nietzsche Genealogy of Morals* 221) In a way this conclusion is anthropological, in a way it is also biological, physiological. The latter is the something close to the heart of what Nietzsche is after in
existence itself, the heart of Dionysus. At the beginning of the second essay in *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes “The breeding of an animal that can promise-is not this just that very paradox of a task which nature has set herself in regard to man?” (211). What has occurred in nature to make this animal, this forgetful, bodily force to commit itself to a promise? How has nature, in its drive for self-reservation, commitment to survival and accumulating resources, made this animal remember itself in relation to its duties, in fact, to all of the outside world besides itself!? Nietzsche writes that it is debt alone which made all this possible. Debt has made this animal into a responsible being. Humanity is now responsible for his relation towards others, and moreover, for *himself*. Humanity has created a sense of itself, a memory of who they are from their obligations towards the outside world. Humanity can only promise and hold good on his promises only if it first has a relation to itself. Man must remember who he is. Man has been made to promise, so thus he becomes man. From now on “he could guarantee himself a *future*” (212). This is the beginning of responsibility towards his debt, the beginning of his conscience. Man is now “permanently present,” he can now “say yes to himself” (213-214). I also add that with this, man can also say no to himself and yes and no to others. Man is no longer animal, man is consensual to himself and others. The animal experiences; sees, takes, grazes, and man promises. Nietzsche calls this movement into what man became (namely into man) a movement into the system of living, “a system of mnemonics.” “Something burnt in so as to remain in his memory: only that which never stops *hurting* remains in his memory” (214). This is when the past creeps onto this animal, until it gives birth into something inside his soul, a conscience.

With obligations looming, man must prepare for the future. He must take the necessary steps to fulfill the promises of the past, knotting a bond into time, his own *body* the knot of this dire thread. His body is left in the present, dangling, with constant obligations to make, to
produce, to move, in order to meet this obligation. The animal was always on the move, coming into contacts with various points, saturating the burns and pains of the body in the relief it can find from nature (the relief of constant survival) but man is on the move for something he anticipates, and for others who anticipate him. Because Nietzsche does not believe in truths, man emerges into existence. Man was not born man, and neither the animal born animal. There are no spatial knots in time providing us with clear truths, rather, the body has been strangled and choked into this knot in the hopes of making promises come true, and in the hope of making truths necessary. Out of the promise, the body becomes a mnemonic: Out of the animal’s act of promising, his body becomes a promise, and out of this body a man who promises (212-213). Then comes not only the hopes that the man will fulfill his promises to us, but that man will fulfill its promise, whatever these promises may be for man in the epochs of history. Nietzsche writes that “Whenever man thinks it necessary to make for himself a memory, he never accomplishes it without blood, tortures, and sacrifice” (214). Nietzsche is not writing allegorically here. For Nietzsche, promises are tied directly to the commitment this animal makes with their body. The body, as it is wound ever more tight, strangled ever more close in the knot of time, realizes ever more the strong obligation it has to those promises. The body must move, but not for itself. And if the promise is broken, the debts are paid back through the body: torture, the cutting off of limbs, death. If man’s promise is allegorical, it has become allegorical through the body. And all promises, those of salvation, freedom, equality, even Kant’s socially binding moral contract, his “categorical imperative,” must pass through the body first, and its commitment to survival in this life or in the next. Nietzsche exclaims, “How much blood and cruelty is the foundation for all good things!” (215).
Though Nietzsche admits that until now man’s fate is to be a promiser, he looks to the
day when a new man will emerge, the man who forgets. For Nietzsche, bad conscience is man’s
feeling that he “ought,” the state of consciousness completely contrary to forgetfulness. But this
“ought” “originates from the very material idea that he ‘owes’” (215). The ought which has come
from the owe is a bad conscience because it is not rooted in real world obligations (232).
Nietzsche’s project is completed when the body is excavated of all that has been imprinted on it,
and after the end of this project, the body is left with itself alone. Bad conscience is ripped out
with the finality and of a triumph. This is the movement to the Dionysian. It is the “yes” of life,
the “yes,” of the body’s potential and power. What is left with the body besides its capacity to
do? Not only can it fulfill short term desires, but how does it fulfill long term desires? Man
should not forget his immediate promises, but neither should he be defined by them. Because
promises have tied knots into existence, especially knots of language; syntax, semantics, logic,
metaphysics, truth, the human is a far cry from forgetfulness. (Hales 12). How can the human
forget? If man knows that these promises mean nothing more than his obligation to others, to
society, to his debt, than he knows so much about the origin of truth. Once he has excavated his
body, and all the languages, racisms, hates, structures, and truths that have been imprinted onto
his body, can man learn to live a life with new possibilities? Not a new life, but a life of the new?
Nietzsche believes so. And this is nothing less than the life of the Dionysian.

The next question to ask: “What emerges out of the man who acts? If the promises,
obligations, and duties bind the tamed man to something, what comes of the untamed man?
Nietzsche knows that man has been fated to what he is until now—that is a man of promises—and
because he avoids identities, dialectics, dualisms, and fixations, Nietzsche does not argue that
man become “animal” in contrast to the “human” man. Moreover, even if he tried, man cannot
emerge into something he once was, for he is doomed to the fate he now inherits. He may even recognize that there is indeed something clever about the breeding of an animal who promises. He does not dismiss the evolution of thought, of history, of modern man as nothing, but there is no meaning in it. And man’s need to find meaning in it is misplaced. Many will not be able to come to terms with this. Most will ignore the dangerous beckoning of Dionysus, and cling safely to the different faiths, truths, and namely, to the belief in that pernicious thing outside our bodies, nagging on them, eating away at them, truth itself. But for those whom Nietzsche writes to, he asks them to investigate what is possible. Once man is aware of the fragility of these promises, of these fictitious truths of existence, what will he come to know? Once man unties the knot of his body, once he breaks free of that delicate position in which he hangs over the abyss by the ends of time, what will become of him? And more significantly, what will come of his body? The answer is by no means simple, nor complicated. The answer is that we cannot know the answer to any of these questions. Though we can in no way be ancient Grecians, in his earlier works, Nietzsche sees the Greek tragedy as a model. The ancient Grecian knew of the abyss, they looked into it, and the abyss stared back at them. From this stare came the inspiration for beauty. But Nietzsche moved away from the dialectic of the Apollonian and Dionysian. In his later thought, Nietzsche wants to recover the Dionysian. Existence becomes dangerous. Nietzsche is aware of this. He writes, “Even the fact that Dionysus is a philosopher and that, consequently, even gods philosophize, seems to me like something new and not without its dangers” (Nietzsche Beyond Good and Evil 176). The danger is the horizon at which curious eyes peer. It is the spiral of movement, thought, existence. It is the body’s confrontation with what it does not know, with what is unfamiliar, strange, beyond expectation, beyond planning. This is the interesting. It is not the search for limits or a newness relative to “normality,” but is the body beyond good and evil;
its eyes naked, unclothed, seeing out of the “everyday veil of truth, memory, identity.” The interesting is the body itself, and of what is possible for it to do, see, make. If need be, the body can even conquer itself in the present and overcome itself from the past.

For Nietzsche, awareness of the paradox is a form of vulnerability, a Dionysian openness to what lies beyond identification. The paradox, the “nuance” lies beyond good and evil. The nuance lies in the thoughts of those who can laugh at existence with a new witticism, a new interpretation, a new riddle solved, if only for a moment. Nietzsche writes of those cultures that have more powers at their disposal, particular the tendencies of aristocratic cultures, are a “hothouse for the luxury cultivation of the exception, the experiment, of danger, of the nuance” (The Will to Power 492). The nuance is a look into something beyond, yet something which still lies within existence. This is the danger of the horizons. The horizons lie beyond, they are questionable, mysterious, many times even uncomfortable, but yet so close to home. They lie within the body, within the bodies of others, and within nature. But these mysterious are not outside existence, they a part of it. This is precisely the problem of mystery: it is beyond, but within. Those horizons of danger, interest, and intrigue are Dionysian moments. What can curiosity do for those who seek to come into contact with them (but never understand, grasp, or know them)? In fact, creations are affirmative, something emergent of the active, creative, vigorous force of Dionysus. “I say unto you: one must still have chaos within oneself to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves. (Nietzsche 17 Thus Spach Zarathustra). Everyone is born out of nothingness. But the creative individuals grasp this and make fun of it. They experiment with that is given to them. They are to whom Zarathustra calls, whom the god Dionysus touches. The Dionysian reaches for new truths from the “treetops” and the “depths of hidden foliage” alike (Nietzsche Human, All Too Human 303). The nuance
can be found, but it quickly slips out of the hand of those who discover it. Nevertheless, the wanderer (most likely an absurd human being), continues to grasp for new riddles, because he is by nature a searcher. He is Dionysian. He is homeless, unknown to himself and others, coming into and out of existence. The Dionysian body is that of nature itself, a flux of change, yet a change not of entities themselves, but of static entities quickly emerging into and out of existence. The Dionysian force may be familiar, but only for a short while. Those who fool themselves into familiarity are often disappointed. The influx of change and chaos is a force calling everyone and no one.

The Dionysian is the force of an ever changing nature, always up for new strands of interpretation and new methods of interaction, new modes of existence and existing for itself. Nietzsche contrasts between those of bad conscience (the reactive), and the active man. He writes, “To sanctify revenge under the name of justice and thus with the rehabilitation of revenge to reinstate general and collectively all the reactive emotions” (Nietzsche On the Genealogy of Morals 224). The Dionysian body acts in the affirmation of life, an affirmation never rooted in anxious, neurotic memory. Rather, the memory of the Dionysian body is a memory that is aware of itself as merely that-a promise to itself and others, a promise that is nothing more than an action. Nietzsche explains:

“the active man, the attacking, aggressive man is always a hundred degrees nearer to justice than the man who merely reacts; he certainly has no need to adopt the tactics, necessary in the case of the reacting man, of making false and biased valuations of his objects. It is, in point of fact, for this reason that the aggressive man has at all times enjoyed the stronger, bolder, more aristocratic, and also freer outlook, the better conscience.” (225)

Creation is affirmed, beauty still sought for, but we ask not what creation can be thought of out of thin air, outside the gravity of life, but within the chaos, the suffering, and the
differentiation? He does not come to hasty, general conclusions on existence, neither does he
presuppose objects or things-in-themselves. “The biggest fable of all is knowledge. One would
like to know what things-in-themselves are; but behold, there are no things-in-themselves!”
(Nietzsche The Will to Power 301). Nietzsche writes that the “Dionysus ideal” is the “the
perspective of all organic functions, all the strongest instincts of life: the force in all life that
wills error.” For what comes before thought? Error. “Error is the precondition of thought.
“Before there is "thought" there must have been ‘invention’, the construction of identical cases,
of the appearance of sameness, is more primitive than the knowledge of sameness.” (293). The
perspective of all the organic functions is the perspective of constant flux, change, chaos. This
lies beyond man, but within existence. Man is vanquished in the flux of chaos, as well as truth.
But existence remains ever the same. Thought is built from the observation of nature in order to
imprint a static pattern upon it, but perspective is subjective, always on the border of something
new. Static perspectives are an oxymoron. Perspectives are vulnerable, open to fluidity. Error is
the precondition of thought. What is perspective besides error? It does not see truth. But this is
the wonderful naivety of perspective. This is the child. Can one not become a child again? “The
maturity of man—that means, to have reacquired the seriousness that one had as a child at play.
(Nietzsche Beyond Good and Evil 62). To play within existence is to see possibility everywhere,
but to take this possibility as serious as nothing. A child’s mind leaves room for imagination, for
thing to emerge out of nothing. For nothing presupposes possibility. Creation comes out of the
abyss. Creation is the means to the end of affirmation. Negation is reactive, it is inherently
uncreative (Deleuze). According to Nietzschean critic and French philosopher Jacques Derrrida,
affirmation is what lives on in Nietzsche’s eternal return (Malabou). Inherent in this affirmation
is the process of selection. Catherine Malabou writes in “The Eternal Return and the Phantom of
Difference,” that Giles Deleuze, a Nietzsche scholar and contemporary of Derrida, believes that “the eternal return, contrary to what its name indicates, is a principle of selection that, one could say, automatically sorts between that which returns—or deserves to return—and that which does not” (2). The selective process of the eternal return is necessary; life is necessarily this way. If life does not affirm itself, if it does not adapt, it dies. Creation ties into the paradox of the “outside and the inside” I wrote on earlier. Nietzsche is the philosopher of the new, but the new remains possible. The novel is Dionysian potentiality. The new is even bound to occur. The new is nature itself.

The Dionysian de-individuation in existence, is ultimately the inherent connection between subject and object, the subject as object. “Essence, the essential nature, is something perspective and already presupposes a multiplicity” (Nietzsche The Will to Power 301). The subject, no matter how it tries to form the object, label it, and separate it from himself in his will to power, is doomed to be within the object. Thus, later Nietzsche would ultimately call the Apollonian instincts something emergent out of Dionysus, not instincts wholly separate. The Apollonian must find itself within the multiplicity, it cannot escape it, it is an illusion born out of chaos. But Nietzsche does not dismiss all illusions. He dismisses the search for truth, illusions like religion and Socratic philosophy. Are logic and reason invalid? Of course not. They are sensible but from what do they come from? It comes from chaos, the ground of differentiation. The creation of art, and perhaps even more significant, an artistic way of life, is so much more an admirable feat. It is to dance within chaos, above it, beneath it. The dance of Dionysus is the dance of different perspectives. How else can one approach chaos? The dance is never something fragmented, it is a motion striving for its own perfection, its own desirability. It reaches for the desirable within and outside itself. Extremes are often reactionary, vulgar. Nietzsche believes in
form, but he does not believe it reaches for a truth. The wise dance within their limits, they take measure into account. On Wagner, Nietzsche claims, “an error that what Wagner created was a form:—it was formlessness” (440). The impulse to reach for extremes are for the reactionaries who presuppose a center, and act counter to it. This is a reactive impulse. There is no room for nuance in this! Nietzsche writes that his “Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, (is) my "beyond good and evil" (550). His Dionysian world is meaningless, unless there is a sensation of joyfulness for those who take delight in conquering pain. His “Dionysian world is without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself (550). Existence simply is. Existence cannot be anything but beyond good and evil, it is only good to itself, for itself, and by itself. Existence preserves itself. Affirmation makes the preservation of existence possible, and becoming makes affirmation itself possible (Malabou 2). Giles Deleuze writes that “Eternal return is the universal being of becoming” (Deleuze 103). Eternal return, Nietzsche’s infamous ring, does not come back to the same, but it constantly comes back to the new. Nietzsche gives a dire revelation to those who seek something to hold onto; something static and eternal:

Do you want a name for this world? A solution for its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides! (550).

The power lies in becoming. The power lies in in Dionysus.
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