

Ode to Joy and Terror

In order to wager a familial line crossing through the aesthetics of Schiller, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche lets examine the philosophical background that leads to these three different positions in their original relationship to the Platonic rift between reason (nous) and art/imagination (techne/poiesis). Briefly, Schiller sees the nexus between reason and imagination as a means for an evolution in humanity towards freedom. Schopenhauer sees the power of art as a means for temporarily alleviating the suffering coming from the Will; his idealization of art comes out of a radicalization of Kantian *disinterestedness* securing the “*pure knowing subject.*” (36) Nietzsche sees the powers of art cynically as delusions we *need* in order to go on living, our means of getting by are a series of artistic stratagems: “The human being is an architectural genius who is far superior to the bee, the latter builds with wax she gathers from nature, while the human being builds with the far more delicate material of concepts which he must first manufacture from himself.”¹

Schiller twists out of Plato whereas the *Spieltriebe* is a conciliatory force between reason (form) and nature (sense), moving us to a state of “higher” order, a *Republic* founded on art. Schopenhauer sees art as a beneficial distraction, inverting Plato’s ethical position towards art. Nietzsche embraces *art as truth*: Art overrides knowledge from the first moment when “clever animals invented cognition.”² For Nietzsche there is no fundamental ground we can reclaim prior to *invention*. The act of veiling the terrible dimension of the Will is undesirable in the case of “superior” tragic art where pain and pleasure co-exist in an excessive mode of truth, a chiasmic unity of drives: “All the sublime drives of their character [the Greeks] were revealed in this

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, edited by Raymond Geuss. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 147.

² *Ibid.*, 141.

idealization of orgy.”³ Nietzsche’s position is that of the artist whereas being able to visualize the process behind the work is equally as important, if not more, than the work.

What is this Oedipal relationship to “big boy” Plato? Fundamentally, for Plato one must choose between art and reason for the sake of the well-ordered soul: Being enthralled by art will corrupt the power of reason, which should be the governing faculty in the virtuous male (not female). The “godlike” guardians are the most virtuous and must train others to be so through the proper use of *imitation*. At first Plato sketches an ideal use of art for the edification of young boys through poetry and music by upholding the imitation of noble character, the Gods must always appear to be impeccable and strong, never weak or fickle. Perhaps in this initial phase Plato comes close to Schiller’s aesthetic education model as the young should be trained in music and dance to give grace to their souls. By Book X of the Republic Socrates decides it is best to ban art from the ideal community on the basis that art is unsafe and hence furthest from the truth. Art is considered pedagogically harmful because it stimulates the lower appetites of children and women that feed the lowest part of the soul whilst the “manly” soul ought to remain faithful to the “calculating and rational principle.”⁴

While Plato begins with the ideal “soviet” state in order to discover the make-up of the just individual Schiller begins with the “beautiful soul” as an ideal harmony of the drives in the individual and moves up to the Beautiful as the fulfillment of freedom for the community. In my view, Schiller’s ideal is “capitalist” in the sense of the fulfillment of the individual will be the basis for the coming-community.⁵ The task of the individual is at the same time the task of culture at large: “Thus its business is twofold: first, to secure the sense faculty from the encroachments of freedom [i.e. Plato’s *Laws*], secondly, to secure the personality against the power of sensation. The former it achieves by the cultivation of the capacity for feeling, the latter

³ Ibid., 121.

⁴ Plato. *Republic*. Translated with an Introduction by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 2004. 259.

⁵ As an interesting fact, the United States has the most public libraries per capita worldwide.

by the cultivation of the capacity for reason.”⁶ The aesthetic State is conciliatory dimension that allows for the *spontaneous* interaction of reason and sense, individual and collective: “The aesthetic State alone can make it [society] actual, since it carries out the will of the whole through the nature of the individual [...] only the perception of the Beautiful makes something whole of him, because both his natures must accord with it.”⁷

Going back to the hypothetical familial thread between the three modern philosophers, Schiller introduces the *form* drive and *sense* drive, which relate, in part, to Schopenhauer’s *Idea* and *Will* and Nietzsche’s Apollonian *semblance* and Dionysian *pain/pleasure*. Schiller’s main innovation is the emphasis on a third term of reconciliation the *play* drive: “This play impulse would aim at the extinction of time in time and the reconciliation of becoming with absolute being, of variation with identity. The sense impulse wants to be determined, to receive its object; the form impulse wants to determine for itself, to produce its object; so the play impulse will endeavor to receive as it would itself have produced, and to produce as the sense aspires to receive.”⁸

The third term does not exist explicitly in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche although their analogous synthetic idea is found in the exploration of music as copy of the Will and Greek tragedy as the simultaneous expression of Apollo and Dionysus. Schopenhauer says: “So music is by no means a copy of the ideas, but the copy of the will itself, whose objectivity the Ideas are.”⁹ For Nietzsche: “In tragedy the singing and dancing is no longer the instinctive intoxication of nature; no longer is the Dionysiacally excited mass of the chorus the popular mass which has

⁶ Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, In a Series of Letters*. Translated by Reginald Snell. Dover, 2004. 69.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁹ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Idea: abridged in one volume*. Ed. D. Berman, trans. J. Berman. London: Everyman, 1995. 164.

been seized unconsciously by the drive of spring. Truth is now symbolized, it makes use of semblance, it therefore can and must also use the arts of semblance.”¹⁰

In conclusion, a line can be drawn between the binary of drives in the three philosophers although when analyzed more deeply many discrepancies are revealed. For example, Schiller’s apotheosis is not factual but *ideal*, and only possible as such, the jubilant dream of a decadent (as Nietzsche would say); what Nietzsche highlights in his post-Hellenic reconciliation is a veil “more transparent than beauty” as the dimension of Dionysian terror shows through *der schöne Schein* (beautiful semblance).¹¹ The untimely Nietzsche introduces *probability*, an ironic distancing that indicates the uncertain relationship to Apollonian restructuring of the Dionysian drive as it evolves through time. The new artist comes when time is out of joint: “He does not strive after beautiful semblance, he does not strive after semblance, not after truth, but after *probability*.”¹²

It is this temporal remainder as *probability* that separates Nietzsche from Schopenhauer’s moment of suspension through art and Schiller’s *telos* of the Beautiful. For Schopenhauer there is a *pause* in the ecstatic moment when the Will is sublimated through the aesthetic experience when the subject is “taken out of the stream of time and all other relations.”¹³ (120) Schiller, working out of the *prejudice* of philosophy (atemporal idealization), imagines an educational progression towards a harmonic, and fundamentally timeless state.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, edited by Raymond Geuss. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Idea: abridged in one volume*. Ed. D. Berman, trans. J. Berman. London: Everyman, 1995. 120.

Works Cited

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