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**The Roles of Agency and Contemplation in
Aesthetic and Ethical Dimensions of Ancient
Greek Tragedy, according to Late Nietzsche**

Abstract

In his later years, Nietzsche restores the privileged position he gave to tragic art in The Birth of Tragedy. A careful reading shows that, despite the strong opposition between them, the tragic spirit and Romantic pessimism have more than one thing in common, especially when one focuses less on the theoretical issues and more on the impact of each theme on the human psyche. This paper aims to answer two questions: (1) what is the element that can be a distinguishing feature in relation to the effects of each, and (2) how does this element operate differently in the tragic spirit and in romantic pessimism. To answer these questions, it is not enough to invoke Nietzsche's distinction between abundance and exhaustion. What is needed is a careful analysis of the complex role of action and contemplation in the particular kind of aesthetic experience on which ancient Greek tragedy is based.

Keywords

Friedrich Nietzsche, romantic pessimism, narcotic, stimulant, tragic knowledge, action, contemplation

It is known that in the last period of Nietzsche's intellectual development, art and the artist assume once again, as in the first, the role model for all fields of human experience, even as the key to the concept of will to power and the interpretative processes that it involves in an essential way. In this essay, I will focus on the *ethical valence* that art and artist acquire. That is to say, as an ethical model, but in a very specific manner: an ethic of life, an ethic of the joy of living.

Within the artistic forms, the late Nietzsche privileges one above all and does so precisely for its ethical valence and not for aesthetic criteria: beyond the music, the tragedy. Already in its first period, the tragedy, in its genuine Greek form, had the role of an existential model. At that time, tragedy along with music – a certain type of music, the Wagnerian musical drama – had been the genuine expression of the tragic artistic genre. Now, at the end of his philosophical journey, after developing such a radical and extensive critique of music that was then considered modern, from Brahms¹ to Wagner, through

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WA Zweite Nachschrift. I use the following English translations for Nietzsche's works: *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann, translated by Judith Norman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002; *On the genealogy of morality*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, translated by

Carol Diethe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004; *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley, translated by Judith Norman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005; *The gay science: with a prelude in German rhymes and an appendix of songs*, edited by Bernard Williams, translated



Liszt, and not even leaving Beethoven untouched,² Nietzsche is faced with the paradox of being no longer able to count on the artistic form that had been the companion and guide of his life. For what he now understands as “tragic art”, there is no longer any music and never has been. Even his appreciation for Bizet only figures in one episode, and he never quotes him when he talks about this artistic genre.³

In these final years, 1887–1888, of his life that Nietzsche considers, according to his own confession, the beginning of a new epoch,⁴ he even advances a hypothesis that would have sounded like blasphemy to his younger and less experienced ears: there cannot be a music for the tragic genre, because music belongs essentially to the vital pole, opposed to the tragic spirit: music is essentially romantic.⁵ The tragic and romantic spirit are at the same time, and paradoxically, the closest and most distant, the authentic antipodes in terms of vital sensitivity (hence the tremendous confusion that he himself committed in youth due to his lack of maturity).⁶

Therefore, Nietzsche is limited to outlining the characteristics of this tragic genre, focusing more on its valence for the general field of practical action and ignoring the question of the possibility of a tragic artistic genre in his time or in the future. Of course, for this task Nietzsche has at least one point of reference, a base: the ancient Greek tragedy, especially Aeschylus and Sophocles.⁷ Conserved without music or theatre, only text remote in time, but sufficiently preserved to be a model, or better still, serving to rebuild the tragic spirit that encourages these texts and to propose it as a model that is no longer aesthetic, but ethical.

It is a very similar movement, not to say parallel, to the one he had made in his youth; in this respect, there is no novelty. It may even seem like a return (as some scholars have insisted).⁸ However, Nietzsche returns, having left behind many changes and personal transformations, many conquests paid at a very high price. Therefore, the focus changes dramatically.⁹ In the first place, now the only genuine tragic form is Greek tragedy, and there has been no other one. In his early days, Nietzsche had approached ancient texts through the eyes of the enormous personality of Wagnerian art, which had led him to bring Wagner and Shakespeare together under the essence of the tragic. Now, none of them belongs to the genuine tragic form, not even Shakespeare,¹⁰ and therefore its literary greatness does not serve at all to investigate the essence of the tragic spirit. Moreover, it would only serve to deflect us and lead us to wrong conclusions, because those modern authors are the paradigm of the opposite of the tragic; they are the paradigm of decadence: the romanticism. We shall work then with this fundamental distinction between tragic spirit and romantic pessimism.¹¹

In the secondary literature, the works dedicated to this topic can be divided into two classes. Those which deal with the tragic spirit, in which tragedy usually occupies a collateral place, and are restricted to an ethical approach. And those dedicated to tragedy as an artistic genre, in particular that of Ancient Greece, which instead restrict their approach to questions of aesthetics. Little has been done to unite both aspects, except when both issues have been treated in GT, where it seems natural. Thus, most works have focused on this period, and when they have paid attention to later periods, have always been, either as a complement to GT,¹² or interpreting all subsequent reflexions, especially those that belong to the project surroundings of *The Will to power* (and related *Nachlass*), from the background of GT. On the other hand, nor

has much been done to attempt, for once, to study this epoch autonomously. This would allow us to discover the originality of the assembly, made in the last Nietzsche, between the ethical aspect and the aesthetic in the matter of tragedy. The present paper is not merely historiographical, but seeks to investigate the consistency (although not in a purely logical sense) of the model proposed by Nietzsche in order to deepen the meaning of his theses and their

by Josefine Nauckhoff; poems translated by Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. The translations of the *Posthumous* are based on the equivalent texts of *The Will to Power* (*The Will to Power*, a new translation by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, New York 1968), but I have made corrections based on KSA. For Nietzsche's works I use the standard abbreviations, established by the *Nietzsche-Studien* (W. de Gruyter, Berlin): AC (*Der Antichrist*); EH (*Ecce homo*); FW (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*); GD (*Götzen-Dämmerung*); GM (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*); GT (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*); JGB *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*); KSA (*Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari, W. de Gruyter, Berlin 31999; the abbreviation is followed by a Roman numeral that indicates the volume); KSB (*Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari, 8 vols., Berlin – New York – München, W. de Gruyter, 1986; the abbreviation is followed by a Roman numeral that indicates the volume); WA (*Der Fall Wagner*).

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Cf. Klaus Kropfing, "Beethoven in Nietzsche", *Cultura tedesca* 20 (2002), pp. 99–142.

3

Although in WA §2 he said "I do not know any other place where the tragic wit that is the essence of love expresses itself so strongly", Nietzsche never remembers Bizet in his final thoughts on tragic art. The actual value of Bizet for Nietzsche is questionable. Perhaps it was just an attack strategy against Wagner.

4

Cf. "It seems to me that a kind of epoch has closed for me; a retrospective is more than ever in place." – KSB 1887, no. 951 (F. Overbeck, 12/11/87).

5

Cf. the crucial text of spring 1888 under the title: "'Music' – and the grand style": "the fact that music achieved its greatest ripeness and fullness as romanticism – once again as a movement of reaction against classicism." – KSA XIII 14[61].

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Cf. KSA XII 2[112, 114], and XIII 9[112].

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Although not explicitly repeated, Nietzsche maintains until the end the exclusion of Euripides from the Greek tragic spirit (cf. GT §11).

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Cf. James I. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus. An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy*, Stanford University Press, Stanford (CA) 2000.

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The main passages of this period, where the question of tragic spirit is dealt with, leaving aside the numerous insights about Wagner, are: the famous aphorisms of GD (*Die „Vernunft“ in der Philosophie* §6, *Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen* §24, and "Was ich den Alten verdanke" §5), and EH (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*). However, we find the most important material in the posthumous fragments. Apart from some first reflections (KSA XII 2[110, 111], XIII 10[144, 168]), the subject reappears intensively in spring 1888 in a series of notes dedicated to reconsider NT under the most recent developments of his thought. It is the notebook W II 5: KSA XIII 14[14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 33, 50, 89, 92, 119, 168, 169]. These reflections will be partially reworked or outlined in the following notes: KSA XIII 15[10], 16[77], 17[3, 9] y 24[1].

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Nietzsche's opposition to the aesthetics of Shakespeare's theatre (cf. JGB §224; EH *Warum ich so klug bin* §3; KSA XI 25[52, 497], 34[92], and XII 7[7], XIII 11[312]), it is not directed against the intrinsic artistic value of the work (as it happens with Wagner, and in the case of pure music, with Beethoven): there is nothing to discuss for Nietzsche. Rather, it is an opposition to the "vital consequences" of that aesthetic, which ultimately derive from its own "taste" (JGB §231) in the most physiological sense.

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On different types of pessimism in relation to the Greek tragedy, cf. Joshua F. Dienstag, "Tragedy, Pessimism, Nietzsche", *New Literary History* 35 (2004) 1, pp. 83–101.

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Cf. Michael Stephen Silk, Joseph Peter Stern, *Nietzsche on tragedy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981.

theoretical consequences. For this we must resort to external studies in the field of Nietzsche scholars, especially from classical philology, because they offer an assessment of that model from a critical distance.

I. Key Concepts of Late Nietzsche's Aesthetics

Nietzsche clearly sees the romantic pessimism expressed in Schopenhauer with the thesis that the essence of art is the denial of the will to live (*Wille zum Leben*).¹³ Faced with this pessimism, which establishes a purely negative relationship between life and art, Nietzsche defends the opposite view: the essence of art is to affirm life itself, in its own words, "Art is the great stimulus to life".¹⁴ How does this stimulant work? It acts by embellishing everything it touches, and this means that it acts by praising and glorifying. For this, the artist continually selects positive features of things, enhances them, and leaves aside or hides the features that we feel are "ugly". Embellishing, the art stimulates our desire to live even through the difficulties and all the negative elements that can be found in our lives.¹⁵ This explains why, throughout history, human beings have continuously created new artistic forms that respond to their new existential situations. To the extent that human beings changed along with their ways of living, they needed to feel once again the stimulating effect of art on their desire to live and to face the negative.

Now, if art bears an essential relationship with life, then aesthetic judgments do not properly express an objective quality of objects in themselves but of the subject that issues the judgement. "Nothing is beautiful, only people are beautiful", says Nietzsche.¹⁶ Of course, 'beauty' is always referred to an object that is valued, but properly does not express a state of the object, but of the subject that expresses the judgement. The fundamental thesis of his last epoch aesthetics is that the basis of the aesthetic judgement is physiological, and for that reason he speaks repeatedly, not of aesthetics, but of "Physiology of art".¹⁷

Take the case of the concept of "ugly". What state does a subject express when pronouncing the "ugly" judgement about something? A state of repulsion, even more a state of hatred towards that object. Now, what is properly hated is not the object itself, but the sensations it produces in us, sensations with a fundamental physiological dimension. We value something "ugly" because we feel that, in an inexplicable, instinctive way, its contemplation or contact weakens or distresses us:

"Physiologically, everything ugly weakens and depresses people."¹⁸

Moreover, "whenever someone is depressed, he is sensing the proximity of something 'ugly'".¹⁹

However, why do some sensations of objects weaken, depress, or frighten the spirit? For Nietzsche everything depends on an unconscious mechanism (which escapes our consciousness) in which memory intervenes. Certain sensations bring to memory, inexplicably for the subject, but no less surely, negative states of the human being: "decay, danger, deadly stupors".²⁰ They are elementary states of individual psychology that, for Nietzsche, have a direct physiological basis. In aesthetic judgement, rather than valuing an object, the individual values the state that an object produces in him, and does so not as an individual, but as a species. Because those states of decay, danger or impotence have been and are habitual states of the human species, with which

the individual is familiar from his origins, and from which he has always tried to flee:

“... the decline of their type. They hate from the deepest instinct of their species; this is a hatred full of shudders, caution, depth, farsightedness, – it is the most profound hatred there is. Art is *profound* for the sake of this hatred [...]”²¹

Therefore, Nietzsche’s thesis is that aesthetic valuations have their origin in the biological evolution of our species and its survival mechanisms.²² They are based on qualities that represent the degeneration of our species, qualities he basically divides into three groups: 1) exhaustion, heaviness, age, fatigue; 2) lack of freedom, as with cramps and paralysis; 3) all those senses (smells, colours, shapes...) that remind us of states or processes of disintegration and putrefaction.²³

II. Paradoxical Essence of Tragic Art

We have thus briefly sketched the key concepts of the late Nietzsche’s aesthetics in order to confront the specific case of the Greek tragedy. In tragic art, there is a phenomenon that, seen from these theses, is paradoxical.²⁴ For we have here an art that “presents a lot that is ugly, harsh, problematic [*fragwürdig*] in life”.²⁵ It uses as artistic material precisely the aesthetic element contrary to art: the ugly. How can this contradictory phenomenon be explained?

13

Cf. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, part I, book. III, §51, and part II, §37, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. A. Hübscher, Brockhaus, Wiesbaden 1972, vol. II, p. 299 and vol. III, p. 495. Julian Young makes a strong confrontation between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche aesthetics, in order to discuss the value of their respective pessimisms (*Nietzsche’s philosophy of art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 117–147). But this confrontation leads him to a bias of Nietzsche’s theses as a sophisticated form of evasion of reality. I believe this happens because he does not take into account the corresponding roles of contemplation and action (as I have tried in the present essay), and only focuses his attention on the contemplation, and his different way of functioning in both pessimisms.

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“Die Kunst ist das grosse Stimulans zum Leben.” – GD *Streifzüge* §24. Cf. KSA XIII 14[23] and 17[3]2.

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GD *Streifzüge* §9.

16

“Nichts ist schön, nur der Mensch ist schön.” – GD *Streifzüge* §20.

17

About the “Physiologie der Kunst”, cf. GM III §8; FW §7; KSA XII 6[26], 7[7]; XIII 15[13, 111], 16[89], 17[9].

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“Physiologisch nachgerechnet, schwächt und betrübt alles Hässliche den Menschen.” – GD *Streifzüge* §20.

19

Ibid.

20

Ibid.

21

Ibid.

22

One of the best analyses of this evolutionary approach can be found in John Richardson, *Nietzsche’s new Darwinism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, pp. 219–270.

23

GD *Streifzüge* §20.

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Cf. Amy Price, “Nietzsche and the paradox of tragedy”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38 (1998) 4, pp. 384–393, but to solve this paradox she focuses on the aesthetic aspect of tragedy, leaving aside the ethical aspects.

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GD *Streifzüge* §24.

Is it that tragic art goes against life, is its purpose precisely to take away the taste for life? Tragic art would be the greatest exception to the thesis we started with, according to which art is the great stimulant of life. It is the conclusion reached by Schopenhauer: tragedy teaches human beings resignation, the serene renunciation of happiness, hope, and ultimately the will to live.²⁶ Therefore, tragedy would be an art that denies itself: In it, the instincts of life would be destroyed by the instincts of art.

Because of this characteristic, for Nietzsche the tragic art is the touchstone of his physiology of art: where his thesis that art is the great stimulant of life is put to the test. The rest of his reflections will therefore be dedicated to demonstrating how, despite appearances, and in spite of Schopenhauer, tragic art is also affirmative. Moreover, it expresses an affirmation of life superior to any other artistic genre.

To advance in achieving this goal, let us examine Nietzsche's analysis of another solution to the enigma of tragic art: the Aristotelian solution, a solution that follows a parallel path to his own.²⁷ Aristotle also tries to show that tragedy, despite the appearance of its contents, is an affirmation of life. The main affects with which tragic art works are "fear" (*Schrecken*) and "compassion" (*Mitleiden*). These affects have a negative effect on the human being, a depressive effect (*deprimirenden Affekten*) on the life force of the individual. According to Aristotle, the objective of the tragedy is to purge us (*purgieren*) of those negative effects, to prevent them attaining an excessive predominance over the individual and the community.²⁸ And this discharge is achieved by exciting them to the maximum (*Erregung*) during the theatrical performance. Nietzsche opposes to the Aristotelian thesis of tragedy as a "purgative" (*Purgativ*), a finer analysis of human psychology. Fear and compassion are two affects with depressing effect on the human psyche, so that the habitual exposure to such affects eventually causes the opposite of what Aristotle says: the weakening of the psychic energy. More precisely, Nietzsche says that they produce three negative effects: affective disorganisation, weakening of the will, and discouragement (*desorganisirt, schwächt, entmuthigt*). The overexcitation of these affects produces indeed a discharge effect in the short term, but in the long term, the prolonged use of this therapy produces a progressive wear down of the psychic energy.²⁹ This conclusion fits in with what we had seen above when discussing the general lines of its aesthetics: the ugly produces a depressive effect on the human being, contrary to the effect of the beautiful. Furthermore, the "ugly" valuation means the rejection of that depressive effect suffered by the subject. But then, let us ask the question again, how can an artistic form, which is authentic art and, therefore, works as a stimulant for life using elements which produce an opposite effect, have a depressive effect? As Nietzsche says, the effect produced by tragic emotion on affectivity is so palpable that it can be measured with a "dynamometer":³⁰ the tragic emotion produces a tonic effect in the aesthetic subject, therefore it is a tonic (*Tonicum*),³¹ a kind of psychic medicine that produces a completely positive effect in what Nietzsche calls also the will to live.³² Paradoxically, the spectacle of tragedy, using the terrible and the suffering, does not take away the will to live, does not teach resignation and despair, but quite the opposite: increases in the individual the desire to live.

How can this happen? How can "the ugly" itself be a "tonic"? To unravel this enigma, perhaps we should start by asking other questions. We have concluded that tragedy intensifies the will to live, but what kind of life? Are not

there very different, and even contrary, forms of life? To the extent that for one, the other represents non-life, and even in some way a way to die in life? We have seen that the tragedy shows “many ugly, hard and problematic things of existence”. What are these things so difficult to accept by the human mind? We could synthesise it in the following two theses:

- 1) Pain is essential to human existence, to life, and therefore it is impossible to eliminate.
- 2) Human existence is globally devoid of meaning, it is a nonsense, an absurdity,³³ because no sense can save us from pain, no goal of a state of liberation from pain is attainable either in this life or in another non-material life, beyond death.

This way of thinking is what Nietzsche calls *tragic knowledge*.³⁴ As such it is opposed to any form of *optimism*: this believes in the possibility of freedom from pain, in this or another existence, and therefore endows human life with an absolute meaning that is the achievement of this liberation.³⁵

The tragic genre continually puts this pessimistic view of existence before our eyes. Now, does not Romantic and Schopenhauerian pessimism do that? Does it not continuously bring to the forefront the essential character of pain and the absurdity of existence? As we have seen, Nietzsche defends that tragedy does

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Ibid.

27

KSA XIII 15[10].

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John P. Anton, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Aristotle’s Theory of Tragic Emotions”, in: N. Georgopoulos (ed.), *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 1993, pp. 19–38) makes a study, from the field of classical philology, of Nietzsche’s interpretation of the Aristotelian theses on tragedy. It ends by showing that it is based on a misinterpretation of the Aristotelian texts, which Nietzsche shares with tradition. Aristotle did not mean that the tragedy had a purging effect, but: “my thesis is as follows: With the resolution of the dramatic play comes the clarification that brings the end into full view; at the same time the emotions converge to sustain our understanding and compassion. Contrary to what Nietzsche contends, Aristotle was on target. He brought to the foreground the intimacy between tragic emotions and rational insight needed to reveal the logos of a tragic mythos”. – Ibid., p. 28. Anyway, the most important is precisely how Aristotle has been received, as seen by Western mentality, and how that theory has impacted on it, rather than the ‘reality’ of historical Aristotle.

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KSA XIII 15[10].

30

GD *Streifzüge* §20.

31

The term appears in KSA XIII 15[10] and 17[9], and the quality of tonic, in reference to art in KSA XIII 14[119], and in AC §7, in polemic with Christianity.

32

“Wille zum Leben”, GD *Streifzüge* §20.

33

“Problematic and senseless in existence” (*Fragwürdigen und Unsinnigen des Daseins*, GM I 1), “the plaything of the absurd, of ‘nonsense’” (*Spielball des Unsinnigen, des „Ohne-Sinns“*, GM III 28), “senseless world” (*sinnlosen Welt*, KSA XII 9[60] and 9[73]).

34

KSA XIII 17[3]. Also “a tragic outlook and insight into life” (*tragische Ansicht und Einsicht in das Leben*, FW §370), “Tragic sense” (*tragischer Sinn*, KSA XIII 14[89]), or “tragic attitude” (*tragische Gesinnung*, KSA XIII 14[92]).

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Although Nietzsche ridicules the alternative optimism / pessimism, in the end, attending to this fundamental aspect (and taking of course all the terms’ ambiguity with which Nietzsche works as always), optimism is for him more ominous than romantic or moral pessimism: “I will have a major opportunity to demonstrate the unusually uncanny historical consequences of *optimism*, that excrescence of the *homines optimi*. Zarathustra, the first to comprehend that the optimist is just as decadent as the pessimist and perhaps more harmful.” – EH *Schicksal* §4.

it, like all art, to stimulate the will to live. While Schopenhauer's pessimism does it for the opposite: to teach resignation and despair, the detachment of this life, according to the *Phaedo* teachings (one of the favourite dialogues of Schopenhauer). However, how can we distinguish one form from the other? This is not a purely theoretical issue, but a practical one, of practical application. How do we know that "the sight of what is terrible and problematic"³⁶ in our existence is not going to lead to Schopenhauer pessimism? How can we be *sure* that it will stimulate the desire to live in the sense of the tragic spirit? Does not prolonged exposure to tragic emotion in the long run, of necessity, produce that erosion of vital energy, which Nietzsche himself sharply emphasises? The paradox of the tonic effect of tragedy, of which we spoke, is not a mere theoretical contradiction, but something much deeper: a practical contradiction, a contradiction in its psychological functioning.

To solve this problem, we have to introduce a fundamental premise of Nietzsche. Every question, both practical and theoretical, depends on a form of life, as a specific way of understanding and living life. To the point that there are no objective or universal or unconditional instances, that do not depend on a very specific life-form.³⁷ Therefore, the problem, in theory and in practice (life practice), resides in the "ambivalent phenomena", or in the sighting that all phenomena and ideas are *ambivalent*. That is, they never have a univocal sense. For Nietzsche, any thesis or idea, in addition to a meaning, has a "sense", so that the same thesis, having the same meaning, can acquire different or even opposite senses.³⁸ On what does the fact that the same thesis can acquire one or the other depend? It depends on the question "for what?" It depends on the subject or subjects that propose that thesis and what they intend to do with it, to wit on the life-form that is behind a thesis and the way in which that life-form works with it. Therefore, the same thesis can be working inside different life-forms and in different ways, and thus acquire different senses.

However, the variety of life-forms and functions that a thesis can fulfil in them is immeasurable. Is there any way to summarise this variety in a basic typology? It is impossible if we take into account only its qualities. But if we keep to its "intensity", it is possible to arrive at a typology that is both simple and useful. Nietzsche proposes that all life-forms can be classified into two basic types attending, not on their quality, but on their intensity. So, to measure its degree of intensity we look at the two extremes of the scale. On the one hand, at maximum intensity, there are life-forms characterised by their "overabundance"³⁹ or "over-flow"⁴⁰ of vital energies, which could be included under the concept of "excess". On the other hand, at minimum intensity, other life-forms are characterised by the opposite: by a "impoverishment"⁴¹ of their vital energies, and that nevertheless, even when exhausted, they need to continue to live.⁴² Focused from one type of life or another, the same phenomena and ideas acquire completely opposite senses.

Hence the pessimism. On the one hand, it can be a symptom of an exhausted life that only yearns to take revenge on life, to take revenge on itself and on the others, and for that it does no more than condemn, belittle, and ridicule every attempt by the human being to self-overcome, to fulfil themselves and also to find in this task a reason to exist, to continue living, a motive that within its exhaustion, gives it new strengths. For this reason, it will use the pessimistic theses, about the indelible character of pain and the nonsense of existence, to deliberately undermine and weaken the vital energies of the human being, to

“die in life”, as the *Phaedo* said. This is the hidden goal because the actual goal of the pessimism is:

“Wagner propagates exhaustion: and *that* is why weak and exhausted people were attracted to him.”³⁶

But, on the other hand, pessimism can be a symptom of just the opposite: of an overabundance, of an excess of vitality, to such an extent that the spectacle of the problematic and terrible character of existence is capable of being present, without reducing its vital energy. This excess of strength allows him to accept life even in the most terrible aspect, allows him to live without hiding the terrible and problematic, without *embellishing* life.⁴⁴

III. The Ethical-Practical Dimension of Tragedy: The Criterion of Action

Now we can return to the initial thesis about the physiological bases of aesthetic valuations, and examine a posthumous fragment of the autumn of 1887, which explains in detail and considerably explains the mentioned aphorism of GD.

“It is a question of *strength* (of an individual or of a people), WHETHER and WHERE the judgement ‘beautiful’ is applied. The feeling of plenitude, of *dammed-up strength* (which permits one to meet with courage and good-humor much that *makes the weakling shudder*) – the feeling of *power* applies the judgement ‘beautiful’ even to things and conditions that the instinct of impotence could only find *hateful* and ‘ugly’.”⁴⁵

We had seen that the ugly judgement expresses the individual’s state of hatred towards the degenerated qualities of his species, provoked by an object. Now,

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NW *Wir Antipoden*. Cf. “der den furchtbaren und fragwürdigen Charakter des Lebens sieht”. – KSA XIII 14[17]. I translate *fragwürdigen* as “problematic”, instead of “questionable”.

37

It is one of the central theses of his perspectivism, which, against Heidegger and other scholars, has nothing to do with an affirmation of subjectivity, cf. Steven D. Hales, Rex Welshon, *Nietzsche’s Perspectivism*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 2000.

38

For the particular meaning of “sense” in Nietzsche, I rely on Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Continuum, New York 1984, pp. 1–8.

39

“Ueberfülle des Lebens”, FW §370, EH *Die Geburt* §2, and Za §7; also “Überreichthum”, KSA XIII 14[119], WA *Epilog*.

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“Überfluss”: exuberance, plethora, synonymous of “over-abundance”, not mere “abundance”, cf. JGB §225, AC §52, EH *Also sprach Zarathustra*, § 6; NW *Wir antipoden*.

41

“Verarmung des Lebens”, GM *Vorrede* §3, KSA XIII 14[119].

42

FW §370.

43

WA §5, “Exhausted people” (*Erschöpften*), also in AC §2, EH *Warum ich so weise bin* §6, GD *Moral als Widernatur* §5, *Die vier grossen Irrthümer* §2. “Exhaustion” also in WA *Vorwort*, GD *Das Problem des Sokrates* §1, GD *Was den Deutschen abgeht* §6, AC §§11, 20, 22, EH *Warum ich so weise bin* §1.

44

The fundamental text that deals with this analysis is FW §370 (“What is romanticism?”). This analysis returns in its last years, see KSA XIII 14[25]). In KSA XII 2[111] he recognizes that in youth he had completely failed to interpret this ambivalence, which is both great and subtle. On the pessimism of force, apart from the texts on tragic spirit, cf. KSA XIII 10[3, 21], 11[38, 415].

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KSA XII 10[168].

this feeling of rejection (or its opposite, the feeling of attraction) depends on the power feeling of the subject itself, so it varies from one individual to another. For what the individual hates in all the signs that remind him of degeneration is, in short, the *state of impotence* of the human being. All the qualities of the ugly (decomposition, awkwardness, old age, etc.) that we had seen are summarised in signs of the human being's incapacity to act and to do. We had said that art embellishes life to stimulate our desire to live, but now, Nietzsche adds, it is a matter of strength how much should be done, how much should be beautified, and its problematic and ugly character hidden, to be able to live. With this new thesis, the subject acquires a much more active role. Before, we saw that the aesthetic valuations of the ugly express the repulsion of the subject towards everything that represents a degeneration of the species. Now Nietzsche adds, the subject is not limited to receiving or passively assuming those dangers or signs, just to hold it. But it is also capable of overcoming them, taking advantage, and benefitting, even from the most harmful and most negative things. Therefore, the aesthetic judgement is a function of the agency, not of the contemplation by the subject:

“The nose for what we could still barely deal with if it confronted us in the flesh – as danger, problem or temptation – determines even our aesthetic Yes. (‘That is beautiful’ is an *affirmation*.)”⁴⁶

The beautiful and the ugly now express, in a more profound way, different states of the subject but in terms of his acting, and not merely in terms of his contemplation: what the individual can do with it and, in general, with a work of art, and not merely what he feels and thinks when contemplating it.⁴⁷

Reinterpreted from this new perspective, if the “ugly” judgement designates the state of impotence, what does its opposite, the “beautiful” judgement, mean? The “state of victory”: the awareness of being able to overcome obstacles and difficulties. Here is one of the keys of the tragic spirit: to prefer things that from a more normal point of view are shown as terrible. Correspondingly, what is the tragic emotion? What state is the tragic artist trying to communicate?

“Doesn't he show his fearlessness in the face of the fearful and questionable? – This in itself is a highly desirable state; anyone who knows it will pay it the highest honours. He communicates it, he *has* to communicate it, provided he is an artist, a genius of communication. The courage and freedom of affect in the face of a powerful enemy, in the face of a sublime hardship, in the face of a horrible problem, – this *victorious* state [*siegreiche Zustand*] is what the tragic artist selects, what he glories.”⁴⁸

The tragic emotion not only expresses a victorious state, but it is the glorification of the feeling of victory. This presupposes that the tragic emotion is directed at what there is of the warrior in our soul, of the fighter against the difficulties no matter how big they are. It is aimed at what Nietzsche calls ‘the heroic man’:

“The martial [*Kriegerische*: warlike] aspects of our soul celebrate their saturnalia in the face of tragedy; anyone who is used to suffering, anyone who goes looking for suffering, the *heroic* man praises his existence through tragedy, – the tragedian raises the drink of sweetest cruelty to him alone.”⁴⁹

With his art, the tragic artist does not extol pain and nonsense in themselves, as romantic pessimism believes, but, through them, his own capacity to face and overcome all pain and all nonsense of life.

However, does not Nietzsche's conclusion seem somewhat paradoxical? Does not it seem to explain a paradox with yet another paradox? How can we infer that tragic art expresses a spirit of victory, in the face of its subjects? What victory spirit is there in the view of the sinking of the greatest heroes, such as Oedipus Rex, conqueror of the Sphinx, Ajax, the bravest warrior after Achilles, Agamemnon, king of kings, and so on? How can you experience courage in the face of the terrible, the certainty of being able to overcome it, if what is strongly represented is just the opposite: the triumph of the frightfulness of one's existence and the inevitable defeat of the human being even in its maximum accomplishments?

As we have seen, in the Nietzschean conception of sense, the same theses and ideas, the same phenomena, can have opposite senses, and this is the case with pessimism theses: they can be the product of a pessimism of force, or the product of a romantic pessimism, a pessimism of the weak and exhausted. The artist behind the Greek tragedy (the only time this has occurred in history) expressed in those works the "pessimism of the force" proper to the ancient Greek mentality, before Socrates and Plato. But the problem is that those same Greek texts can be reinterpreted in the sense of romantic pessimism, that is, from the life-forms of weakness and exhaustion, thus giving the same texts and themes a sense completely opposite to the original:

"Supposing, on the other hand, that *the weak* desire to enjoy an art that is not meant for them; what would they do to make *tragedy* palatable for themselves? They would interpret *their own value feelings* into it."⁵⁰

Here lies the reason for the inability of the scholars and philosophers of his time to discover the tragic mentality behind these texts. The problem is that Western people have become accustomed to seeing the Greek tragedy through subsequent European drama. In this way, they have interpreted these ancient texts according to romantic pessimism. This is the reason why their tragic character is misunderstood, and it is the feeling of victory that lies behind them which has been ignored.

Then, how do the life-forms of exhaustion manage to do this? How do they manage to reinterpret and enjoy artistic forms that are the embodiment of their antipodes? In the note of autumn 1887, Nietzsche explains that they do so by introducing their own feelings of value (*Werthgefühle*) and the theories that support them, which can be mainly: the final "triumph of the moral world-order"; "the doctrine of the 'worthlessness of existence'"; "the invitation to 'resignation'"; and "the half-medicinal, half-moral discharges of affects à la Aristotle".⁵¹

In this way, tragic art, which is an art of the terrible, can also be appreciated as a stimulant for the weak life-forms. It can serve to excite the nerves and obtain a sensation of energy and vitality in individuals over whom prevail,

46
Ibid.

47
I have analysed this conception of artist and art in "El arte como el único contramovimiento del nihilismo", in: Carlos Roldán-López, *Cultivarse a sí mismo como obra de arte. Estética de la existencia en el filósofo artista de Nietzsche*, Ediciones Cumbres, Madrid 2018, pp. 9–32.

48
GD *Streifzüge* §24.

49
Ibid.
50
KSA XII 10[168].

51
KSA XII 10[168].

normally, a state of actual exhaustion: “the *art of the terrifying*, in so far as it excites the nerves, can be esteemed by the weak and exhausted as a stimulus”.⁵² However, it is only an appearance of vitality, it is only momentary excitement, albeit very intense, but not real. We must distinguish between the proper effects of a stimulant⁵³ and a narcotic.⁵⁴ With respect to the feeling of power, Nietzsche distinguishes between the ‘real’ increase, insofar as it supposes an effective increase in the ability to act (stimulant), and the ‘apparent’ increase (narcotic), because the feeling does not correspond to any real increase in that capacity. Therefore, the art of the terrible changes its sense completely, since it is then transformed from stimulant to narcotic.

But if that way of using tragic art, which is that of the narcotic, ultimately serves a certain way of life to continue living, despite the terrible and nonsense of existence, will it not be justified from his same criterion of life? The decisive criterion for Nietzsche is always life, but the stimulant and the narcotic work in a completely different way. The narcotic works as a means of escape from reality, in a state of mind completely removed from it, by which the psyche finds relief. That is to say, with the narcotic the individual constructs a parallel reality in which to take refuge, and therefore, instead of acting, he limits himself to *contemplating* his parallel constructed reality. The stimulant, on the other hand, encourages the individual to *act more* in *this* reality. While the narcotic tends to block the action, the stimulant prompts and expands it.⁵⁵

IV. Tragic Hero vs. Romantic Hero

Now, we can move forward to the argument of this essay. Remember the spirit of victory. What the aesthetic judgement expresses is the premonition of what we are capable of doing in the face of difficulties, of our capacity to overcome them, in short, our ability to do and act. The decisive criterion for Nietzsche then is agency, formulated in this way: does a given artistic form incite the individual to act, or, on the contrary, to contemplate? To do new things, or to contemplate things already done and given? In the first case, we are faced with the expression of excess of vitality, and in the second case, its exhaustion. Even so, a further objection can be raised: does not romantic pessimism often incite action, such as rebellion in the face of unjust social conditions? Indeed, it can also incite action, but the difference would be that this action ultimately seeks to annul itself, seeks to annul the action.⁵⁶

We have seen that the tragic spirit is a sublimation of the heroic spirit, but the heroic spirit must be understood according to that famous statement of EH:

“I have no memory of ever having made an effort, – you will not detect any trace of *struggle* in my life, I am the opposite of a heroic nature. To ‘will’ anything, to ‘strive’ after anything, to have a ‘goal’, a ‘wish’ in mind – I have never experienced this.”⁵⁷

We must connect this text with all the extensive criticism Nietzsche develops against the romantic concept of the “hero”. For once again we are faced with an “ambivalent phenomenon”, which can adopt two opposite senses.

He whom we might call the “romantic hero”⁵⁸ faces the negative of existence, and even wants the negative, but does so in order to overcome it, in the sense of reaching with his effort and sacrifice a future state that supposes liberation from the negative. Ultimately, in Nietzsche’s terms, what moves him is *the need, the absolute will for a final solution*, or at least, the hope for a future solution:

“This type of *artists’ pessimism* [*Künstler-Pessimismus*] is precisely the OPPOSITE of that *religio-moral pessimism* [*moralisch-religiösen Pessimismus*] that suffers from the ‘corruption’ of man and the riddle of existence. This by all means craves a solution, or at least a hope for a solution... The suffering, desperate, self-mistrustful, in a word the sick, have at all times had need of entrancing *visions* to endure life.”⁵⁹

Therefore, through his figure of the hero, romanticism also encourages action, an action often of a superhuman dimension, but with the absolutely contradictory goal of ultimately eliminating the need for action and reaching a final solution where it is no longer necessary. It does not matter that this final solution is proposed only as an unattainable ideal to which we must aim and approach: it will always be an action that seeks to achieve a situation of nullifying the action, and thus just a condition of pure contemplation of a given reality. In this way, the hero’s own ideal functions properly as a narcotic for the decadent life-forms.

On the other hand, the Nietzschean ‘tragic hero’ faces the terrible realisation that there is no final solution; moreover, that no final solution is desirable.⁶⁰ Nietzsche develops this approach through what he calls the “The psychology of the orgiastic” (*Psychologie des Orgiasmus*), which is the key to understanding the spirit of ancient tragedy. The term “orgiastic” refers to “an overflowing [*überströmenden*] feeling of life and strength where even pain acts as a stimulus”.⁶¹ This excess of vitality manifests itself as a tendency completely turned towards the future, to the creation of new ideas and things which justify the pain of the life:

“... all becoming and growth, everything that guarantees the future involves pain [...]. There has to be an eternal ‘agony of the woman in labour’ so that there can be an eternal joy of creation, so that the will to live can eternally affirm itself. The word ‘Dionysus’ means all of this: I do not know any higher symbolism than this *Greek* symbolism of the Dionysian. It gives religious expression to the most profound instinct of life, directed towards the future of life, the eternity of life, – the pathway to life, procreation, as the holy path [...]”⁶²

52

Ibid.

53

“*Stimulans*”, GD *Streifzüge* §24.

54

“*Narcotica*”, KSA XII 9[172].

55

The concept of narcotic is key to understanding his critique of Christianity and his diagnosis of Western civilization nihilism, cf. GD *Was den Deutschen abgeht* §2. “*Narcotica*” also in KSA XII 2[113], 9[170], XIII 15[32], 23[4].

56

Perhaps it resides precisely in this essential confrontation between the tragic and the romantic heroes, that the statement that Nietzschean conception was only possible in the context of the Christian cultural (not ancient Greek) tradition becomes plausible: “The ‘tragic sense’ of life is a modern, indeed a neo-Christian invention, with Nietzsche being its chief prophet and preacher.” – J. Anton,

“Nietzsche’s Critique of Aristotle’s Theory of Tragic Emotions”, p. 34.

57

EH “Warum ich so klug bin” §9.

58

Nietzsche does not use the expression as such, but it is implicit in many texts, cf. especially in his criticism of Carlyle (GD *Streifzüge* §12), and in KSA XII 2[113], on the background of opposition between Dionysian and romantic man.

59

KSA XII 10[168].

60

KSA XII 10[168].

61

GD *Was ich den Alten verdanke* §5.

62

GD *Was ich den Alten verdanke* §4.

It is on the basis of this orgiastic state that the tragic hero considers “pleasure counts as being more *primaeval* than pain: pain only as conditioned, as a consequence of the will to pleasure (of the will to become, grow, shape, that is, to create: in *creation* [*Schaffen*], however, destruction [*Zerstören*] is included).⁶³ The tragic hero encourages action, aware that only one possibility will always be attainable: to continue acting. Do not contemplate what has already been done, be it of any kind, but do new things. It encourages an action that ultimately only seeks to increase its capacity for action: to be able to do more and better. We can see it condensed in this aphorism:

“Saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems; the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types – that is what I called Dionysian, that is the bridge I found to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* to escape horror and pity, not to cleanse yourself of a dangerous affect by violent discharge – as Aristotle thought – but rather, over and above all horror and pity, so that *you yourself may be* the eternal joy in becoming.”⁶⁴

V. Conclusion: The Complex Relationships between Contemplation and Action

To conclude, we cannot reduce the aesthetic-ethical function of the tragedy to the level of practical action. In other words, the old tragedy has a fundamental ethical dimension for Nietzsche, but this must ultimately be founded on its aesthetic dimension. Therefore, somehow in this model the aesthetic contemplation must have a crucial function but in a very different way than in romantic pessimism.

On the one hand, the tragic hero’s capacity of action makes it possible to reverse any situation, and turn a negative or harmful event into a positive or beneficial one. Thus, Nietzsche’s characterization of Goethe in GD, after the aphorisms devoted to tragic art, and before those devoted to the psychology of the orgiastic, can be understood as a global characterization of the tragic man:

“... a person who is tolerant out of strength and not weakness because he knows how to take advantage of things that would destroy an average nature; a person lacking all prohibitions except for *weakness*, whether it is called a vice or a virtue [...]”⁶⁵

This capacity is mainly achieved by inserting the negative event into a long chain of causes and consequences, made up of many actions and events within the changing circumstances. In turn, this is possible only by the capacity to foresee the long chain of subsequent consequences of an action or event (which is largely a matter of value, not mere capacity for knowledge):

“The *profundity of the tragic artist* lies in this: that his aesthetic instinct surveys the more remote consequences: that he does not halt short-sightedly at what is closest at hand, that he affirms the *large-scale economy* which justifies the *terrifying, the evil, the problematic* – and more than merely justifies them.”⁶⁶

We have thus a *first contemplative moment*, which in the Greek tragedy we can find expressed especially in the roles of oracles (e.g. Delphos in *Oedipus Rex*) or prophets (e.g. Tiresias).

On the other hand, the overabundance of energy of the orgiastic state derives from an effective overcapacity of action (it is not merely an image, without cause), which consists of reversing the sense of an event. In addition, if it is an overabundance, then it is the capacity of facing *all* chance events. Therefore,

this overcapacity allows the individual to invert the usual relation with the field of fortuitous (the chance, the uncertain, the sudden):

“Indeed, a state is possible in which the sense of security and belief in law and calculability enter consciousness in the form of *satiety* – while the *delight* in *chance*, the *uncertain* and *sudden* becomes titillating.

Let us dwell a moment on this symptom of *highest* culture – I call it the *pessimism of strength* [*Pessimismus der Stärke*].

Man *no longer* needs a ‘justification of ills’; ‘justification’ is precisely what he abhors: he enjoys ills *pur, cru*; he finds *senseless ills* the most interesting. If he formerly had need of a god, he now takes delight in a world disorder without God, a world of chance, to whose essence belong the terrible, the ambiguous, the seductive [*das Furchtbare, das Zweideutige, das Verführerische*].”⁶⁷

In the tragic state, the mind no longer cognitively reduces the field of chance (because fortuitous events cause a negative impact on it) to seek refuge in the regular, the certain, and the predictable. It no longer restricts itself as much as possible to a contemplation of the regular order of reality. On the contrary, due to its overcapacity to reverse the sense of events, the mind actively searches and pursues fortuitous and unpredictable events. Then we have a *second contemplative moment*: the mind thus enjoys contemplating the terrible possibility of fortuitous destructive events (the terrible side of existence), before, after and during the action, because it is in that contemplation that it enjoys its very overcapacity of action.

63

KSA XIII 17[3]3. Perhaps this state of overcoming the terrible of existence may end up looking very little ‘tragic’, even closer to comedy. This is the conclusion reached by Porter (James I. Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy”, in: Rebecca Bushnell (ed.), *A Companion to Tragedy*, Wiley-Blackwell, Williston 2008, pp. 68–87, here pp. 15–18) in his critical assessment of Nietzsche’s interpretation of tragedy. Think of Nietzsche’s appreciation of Aristophanes and his granting for an Aristophanean view of life (“for the most spiritually carnivalesque laughter and high spirits, for the transcendental heights of the highest inanity and Aristophanean world mockery” – JGB §223). However, remember that the representations of the tragedies trilogies in ancient Greece ended with a Satyr play, of which only fragments are preserved. From this point of view the following sentence is enlightening: “Around the hero everything turns into tragedy; around the demigod everything turns into a satyr play.” – JGB §150.

64

GD *Was ich den Alten verdanke* §5. Some months after I submitted this paper, Claire Kirwin (“Beyond the Birth: middle and late Nietzsche on the value of tragedy”, *Inquiry* 66 (2003) 7, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2164051>) published an article with a similar approach to mine. But I have four main points of disagreement. First, as usual, her approach is too much inclined towards the point of view of the recipients (the

“spectators”) in the tragedy. Mine, more in keeping with Nietzsche’s thought, reclaims the point of view of the agent and the action. Second, by proposing the criterion of the action itself, I am able to better determine the meaning that corresponds to Kirwin’s “regenerative force”. Third, I take into account the central and complex role of contemplation for action. And fourth, all this means that the “transformative possibilities” lie not so much in a change in “the audience” or “the way of seeing”, but that what is needed is a change in the action itself and the way it works.

65

The same theses can be found developed in the following note: “... he enjoys the taste of what is wholesome for him / his pleasure in anything ceases when the bounds of the wholesome are crossed / he divines the remedies for partial injuries; he has illnesses as great stimulantia of his life / he knows how to exploit ill chances / he grows stronger through the accidents that threaten to destroy him / he instinctively gathers from all that he sees, hears, experiences, what advances his main concern – he follows a principle of *selection* – he allows much to fan through.” – KSA XIII 15[39].

66

KSA XII 10[168].

67

KSA XII 10[21].

We can find this second contemplative moment expressed not in any particular but in the whole of the tragic representation. It explains why on several occasions Nietzsche insists critically, against Wagner and the European theatre, on distinguishing the ancient meaning of tragedy as drama, and the modern one as a theatrical action:

“It has been a real misfortune for aesthetics that people always translate the word ‘drama’ as ‘plot’ [*Handlung*]. Wagner is not the only one to make this mistake; everyone does it; even philologists who should know better. Classical drama had *scenes of great pathos* in mind – it specifically excluded the plot (which it placed *before* the beginning or *behind* the scenes).”⁶⁸

Therefore, in a structural way, the Greek tragedy includes a double contemplative moment, whose ultimate aim is not to stop the action (as in romantic pessimism), but the inverse one. Nevertheless, that double moment is included insofar as the tragedy is spectacle (drama), and not mere theatrical action. So, introducing the double contemplative moment into life will mean moving on to focus on life itself, one’s own and another’s, as a *spectacle* (*Schauspiel*):

“Measuring the world not according to our most personal accompanying feelings, but *as if* it were a spectacle and *we belonged to the spectacle!*”⁶⁹

Finally, seeing life as a spectacle is only possible if a point of view external to the action itself is introduced. To understand this, we remember what Giorgio Colli said: “Nietzsche conceives the tragedy as a spectacle that shows life itself as a spectacle”.⁷⁰ And especially what Colli said about the ancient Greek individual: “he is dominated by the sense of detachment, of being always outside of what he does”.⁷¹ Therefore, concluding, what the Greek tragedy *as drama* finally reveals to us, in its “scenes of great pathos”,⁷² is the need to act with the ultimate goal of favouring and increasing the action itself, but to do so from an external point of view that is always beyond one’s actions.⁷³

68

WA §9 remark. In Wagner, the plot is theatrical action insofar as it is reduced to a mere gesture: “He begins by thinking of a scene that will have an absolutely certain effect, a real *actio* with an *haut-relief* of gestures, a scene that will *knock people over*.” – Ibid. A thesis confirmed by the musicological authority of Carl Dahlhaus (*Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, pp. 115–116). From this and other passages it is clear that by *Handlung* Nietzsche properly indicates “action”, rather than “plot”.

69

KSA XI 25[97]. As usual, the term “spectacle” (*Schauspiel*) appears in Nietzsche texts with an ambivalent sense, a negative (especially in his criticism of the comedian, *Schauspieler* – *Schauspielerei*, in modern art and in life), and a positive sense. It is important not to overlook the latter. Nietzsche speaks sometimes of “the great overall spectacle of life [*großen Gesamt-Schauspiel des Lebens*]” (KSA XIII 16[40]), or also: “Man as a *spectacle*: that is the HISTORICAL SENSE.” – KSA XI 34[180].

70

Giorgio Colli, *Su Nietzsche*, Adelphi, Milano 1980, pp. 28–29.

71

G. Colli, *La natura ama nascondersi*, Adelphi, Milano, p. 28.

72

“Das antike Drama hatte grosse *Pathoszenen* im Auge” (WA §9 remark), literally: “Classical drama had *scenes of great pathos* before the eyes.” – The contemplative moment of the spectacle is key to ancient Greek tragedy.

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I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments, which helped to improve the paper.

Marco Parmeggiani

**Uloga djelovanja i kontemplacije u estetičkoj i etičkoj
dimenziji starogrčke tragedije, po mišljenju kasnog Nietzschea**

Sažetak

U svojim kasnijim godinama, Nietzsche tragičkoj umjetnosti vraća privilegirani položaj koji joj je dao u Rođenju tragedije. Pažljivo čitanje pokazuje da, unatoč snažnoj suprotnosti između njih, tragički duh i romantičarski pesimizam imaju više od jedne zajedničke stvari, osobito kada se manje usredotočimo na teorijska pitanja, a više na utjecaj svake teme na ljudsku psihu. Ovaj članak ima za cilj odgovoriti na dva pitanja: (1) koji je element koji može biti razlikovna značajka u odnosu na učinke svakog od njih, te (2) kako taj element različito djeluje u tragičkom duhu i romantičnom pesimizmu. Da bismo odgovorili na ova pitanja, nije dovoljno pozvati se na Nietzscheovu razliku između obilja i iscrpljenosti. Potrebna je pažljiva analiza složene uloge radnje i kontemplacije u određenoj vrsti estetskog iskustva na kojem se temelji starogrčka tragedija.

Ključne riječi

Friedrich Nietzsche, romantički pesimizam, narkotik, stimulant, tragičko znanje, radnja, kontemplacija

Marco Parmeggiani

**Die Rolle des Handelns und der Kontemplation in
der ästhetischen und ethischen Dimension der altgriechischen
Tragödie, nach der Sicht des späten Nietzsche**

Zusammenfassung

In seinen späten Jahren, gibt Nietzsche der tragischen Kunst ihre privilegierte Stellung zurück, die er ihr in der Geburt der Tragödie gegeben hat. Ein sorgfältiges Lesen zeigt, dass der tragische Geist und der romantizistischer Pessimismus, trotz ihrem starken Gegensatz, mehr als Eines gemeinsam haben, besonders, wenn man sich weniger auf die theoretischen Fragen, und mehr auf den Einfluss jedes Themas auf die menschliche Psyche, fokussiert. Das Ziel dieses Artikels ist zwei Fragen zu beantworten: (1) was ist das Element, das in Bezug auf deren jegliche Auswirkungen ein Unterscheidungsmerkmal sein kann, und (2) auf welche Art und Weise unterscheidet sich das Wirken des Elements im tragischen Geiste und romantizistischen Pessimismus. Um diese Fragen zu beantworten, genügt es nicht, an Nietzsches Unterscheidung zwischen Fülle und Erschöpfung zu appellieren. Man benötigt eine sorgfältige Analyse der komplexen Rolle des Handelns und der Kontemplation in der bestimmten Art ästhetischer Erfahrung, auf der die altgriechische Tragödie basiert.

Schlüsselwörter

Friedrich Nietzsche, romantizistischer Pessimismus, narkotisch, Stimulans, tragisches Wissen, Handeln, Kontemplation

Marco Parmeggiani

**Le rôle de l'action et de la contemplation
dans les dimensions esthétiques et éthiques de
la tragédie grecque ancienne selon le dernier Nietzsche**

Résumé

Dans ses dernières années, Nietzsche rétablit la position privilégiée qu'il a accordée à l'art tragique dans La naissance de la tragédie. Une lecture attentive montre, en dépit de leur forte opposition, que l'esprit tragique et le pessimisme romantique ont plus d'un point en commun, en particulier lorsque l'on se concentre moins sur les questions théoriques, et davantage sur

l'impact que les thèmes ont sur la psyché humaine. Le présent article s'attache à répondre à ces deux questions : (1) quel est l'élément qui peut être le trait distinctif par rapport aux effets produits par chacun d'eux, et (2) comment cet élément opère-t-il différemment dans l'esprit tragique et dans le pessimisme romantique ? Afin de répondre à ces questions, il n'est pas suffisant d'invoquer la distinction que Nietzsche établit entre l'abondance et l'épuisement. Une analyse attentive du rôle complexe de l'action et de la contemplation est nécessaire au sein de la forme particulière de l'expérience esthétique sur laquelle la tragédie grecque ancienne se fonde.

Mots-clés

Friedrich Nietzsche, pessimisme romantique, narcotique, stimulant, connaissance tragique, action contemplation