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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Manzon, T. (2017). The Wisdom of Dionysus: Metaphysics in the early and late Nietzsche, with particular respect to The Birth of Tragedy. *Dialegethai*, 18. <https://mondodomani.org/dialegethai/tm01.htm>

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**The Wisdom of Dionysus: Metaphysics in the early and late  
Nietzsche, with particular respect to *The Birth of Tragedy***

## Introduction

Although the problem of the relationship between Nietzsche and metaphysics might seem to be a settled issue, this is in fact a quite complicated and fascinating problematic. The difficulty with this subject lies in the often unacknowledged ambiguity that the term 'metaphysics' exhibits in Nietzsche's writing, as this word assumes different nuances and connotations in different contexts. Therefore, if we can get past the usual rhetoric on the topic, we come to realize that Nietzsche addresses the topic of metaphysics in at least two distinct ways.

If we broadly understand metaphysics to be the inquiry concerning how reality is in itself, then we find in the work of Nietzsche two different levels of discourse regarding his opinion of metaphysics. On one level, we find the Nietzsche that we all know, the staunch opposer of metaphysics as Platonism who greatly influenced later thinkers such as Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Marion. However, on another level, there is a Nietzsche who is completely at ease in employing this term in a positive way. This, is particularly clear in the light of Nietzsche's first publication, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Heavily influenced by figures such as Schopenhauer and Wagner, in this text Nietzsche avails himself of the term metaphysics as much in a positive as in a negative fashion. Moreover, the later 'addenda' to the book, that is, the preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* and the remarks contained in *Ecce Homo*, allow us to trace some sort of continuity in Nietzsche's ambiguous attitude toward metaphysics between the early and the later stages of the development of his thought.

My argument is that that to assume an *a priori* opposition between Nietzschean philosophy and metaphysics is overly simplistic. On one hand, as evident in *The Birth of Tragedy*, at least in the early stages of his work Nietzsche was not specifically troubled by the idea of metaphysical investigation, namely the enquiry into the fundamental nature of reality. Rather, he was worried about the blindness of his culture, precisely because of the latter's failure to perceive art instead of science or morality as the proper source of metaphysics, lacking as a result a proper metaphysical understanding of reality. In other words, in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche's problem was not metaphysics as such, but rather the sort of metaphysics popular in his own times.

On the other hand, in the later stages of his philosophical career Nietzsche employs the term metaphysics mostly implying a negative judgment of what this term represents. However, I hold that this has more to do with Nietzsche's rebuttal of the influences of his youth along with some of their vocabulary, rather than with any shift in his thoughts or intentions. As I will argue, although Nietzsche came to refuse metaphysics as a term carrying any positive meaning, he still maintained the essence of the arguments we find in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and his later positions still find ground on what we might call a 'good practice' of metaphysics.

My essay will be divided into four sections and will develop as follows: in the first and second section, I shall analyze Nietzsche's understanding of metaphysics, in order to observe the positive employment of it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. To this effect, I shall explore this text's connection to Nietzsche's key intellectual influences. First, I shall address the impact of the Schopenhauerian view of the world on *The Birth of Tragedy*, in particular as regards the opposition between Apollo and Dionysus and the nature and goal of tragic art. Subsequently, I shall refer to the

influence of Richard Wagner's thought in order to explore the relationship between metaphysics and art as humanity's "true metaphysical activity".

In the third section, I shall consider how Nietzsche understands metaphysics in its varieties always to be the expression of an underlying existential attitude. In particular, I shall be focusing on the Socratic and the tragic way of life. By analyzing the opposition between these two attitudes toward existence I shall show how in addressing metaphysics Nietzsche is foremostly concerned with the values it may or may not convey, rather than with the question of its accuracy. Nietzsche condemns not metaphysics as morality because of its incorrectness, but because it promotes and grows out of the Socratic *ethos*.

In the fourth section, I shall examine the *addenda* to the original text of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Although Nietzsche refuses in part his *opera prima*, he recognizes it as containing the premises of his intellectual development. While metaphysics as a concept is employed by the mature Nietzsche mostly as indicating a negative, life-denying dimension, the search for Dionysian wisdom is reaffirmed as the constant goal of Nietzsche's philosophy both in its beginning and end. However, I argue that at the bottom this wisdom springs from the 'good' metaphysical knowledge of Will as the fundamental dimension of reality. Even if unnamed as such and understood under a somewhat different light, the essence of what constituted the artistic metaphysics promoted by *The Birth of Tragedy* survives in the late stages of Nietzsche's work, reaffirmed under the banner of Dionysus. Accordingly, it is possible to claim that a certain practice and positive understanding of metaphysics remains present all across Nietzsche's work.

## Which Metaphysics? (1)

The goal of the first two sections is that of exploring Nietzsche's conception of metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*, with an eye to the author's main intellectual influences. Famously, Nietzsche's first publication was influenced by a number of important figures belonging to the German cultural landscape and, unsurprisingly, the author's notion of metaphysics reflects the overall atmosphere of the text. In particular, we can trace the roots of Nietzsche's understanding of the subject back to the massive influence of two authors: Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner. Both of these thinkers were hugely important for the young Nietzsche, and their ideas concurred in shaping what the latter means and understands by metaphysics.

The first appearance of the word metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy* (*BT* from here on) comes in the introduction, which bears the title *Foreword to Wagner*. In dedicating the book to his mentor, Nietzsche claims art to be the 'highest task' and the 'real metaphysical activity of this [human] life'<sup>1</sup>. Nietzsche begins *BT* describing metaphysics as an activity, and as being expressed most properly in art. In other words, art is the means through which we should lead the inquiry into reality as it in itself. I shall wait the next section to thoroughly explore the Wagnerian background of Nietzsche's first printed take on metaphysics. Before coming to that, I shall take a step back and instead examine Schopenhauer's role in this context. This is necessary, insofar as Schopenhauer was not only a major source of inspiration for Nietzsche but for Wagner as well, and they developed their understanding of art and metaphysics on the ground of and in contrast to Schopenhauer's positions. Thus, in order to fully appreciate how Nietzsche draws on Wagner in seeing art as a

metaphysical activity, first we have to understand how Schopenhauer's thought helps Nietzsche setting the discussion in *BT*.

The main aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy at work in *BT* is the division between phenomena or representations on one hand, and noumena or Will on the other. Roughly speaking, this distinction amounts to say that we can understand the world in two fashions. On one hand, we can see it as populated by individuals and composite objects, namely representations. On the other hand though, we can perceive the in-itself of phenomena, realizing that they are nothing but illusions, the result of the fragmentation of a deeper reality. That in-itself is the Will, an inhuman, undivided force, which is continually striving for its own affirmation<sup>2</sup>.

This latter concept is arguably the first formulation of what shall later be labeled 'Will to Power'. In this regard, we must not be led into temptation and read this noumenal will as some sort of essence, or unconditioned safe ground underlying reality. In our exploration of reality, to see Will as the heart of reality is not a haven where we can find rest<sup>3</sup>. As Martin Heidegger argues, according to Nietzsche chaos is what defines the global character of reality. This does not imply the casting of a negative judgment on reality as chaotic. Rather, chaos is the immense yawning gap on which reality rests, a void that can be filled with all sorts of possibilities<sup>4</sup>. Hence, Will cannot be a haven as it rests on no safer ground than anything else, floating in chaos with all its expressions. However, to know Will as the kernel of all representations means to be able to know what drives the world, what keeps on filling the emptiness of chaos.

This, is the metaphysical framework on which Nietzsche develops his analysis of tragedy in *BT*. The famous duality of Apollo and Dionysus itself, while

already mentioned by Bachofen and Wagner<sup>5</sup>, is in this case an elaboration of Schopenhauer's theories<sup>6</sup>, Accordingly, we find that Apollo is the symbol representing the *Principium Individuationis*, and thus the realms of singular and delineated objects<sup>7</sup>, By contrast, Dionysus embodies the Will, the god whose celebrations are the '[...] tearing asunder of the *Principium Individuationis* [...]'<sup>8</sup>.

One major aspect Nietzsche's account of this distinction between the Will and representations is the empirical fashion in which he these two dimensions. Apollo and Dionysus are not just some sort of abstract concepts. On the contrary, they represent metaphysical drives connected to and expressing the kernel of natural life itself<sup>9</sup>. Hence, Representations and Will are not just two ways of looking at the world as in Schopenhauer. In turn, they are two sorts of striving, one directed toward individuation and the other toward indistinction and primordial unity in the Will<sup>10</sup>. These strivings both have a metaphysical nature as they describe the essence of things, on one hand as they are individual and autonomous phenomena, and on the other hand as they are indistinct from one another by being expressions of the same reality. However, these two drives are at the same time 'empirical' insofar as they are actual powers rooted in nature and brought to the surface through human life.

The following passage from section 7 of *The Birth of Tragedy* is of great interest as it shows how this duality of Apollo/Dionysus relates to our inquiry:

The metaphysical consolation - with which, as I have already suggested here, all true tragedy leaves us - that life at the bottom of things, in spite of the passing of phenomena, remains indestructibly powerful and pleasurable, this consolation appears in embodied clarity in the chorus of satyrs, of creatures of nature who live on as it were ineradicably behind all



civilization and remain eternally the same in spite of the passing of generations and of the history of peoples<sup>11</sup>.

In this excerpt, we see once again how metaphysics is linked to and expressed in the context of artistic practice. Specifically, we see how metaphysical knowledge can produce a change in our attitude toward existence. To see and come to know the eternal Will that underlies all phenomena embodied in the tragic chorus, is something that consoles us. In spite of the inhumanity of Dionysus and Apollo's vacuity, the satyrs endure through time, showing us how phenomena endure eternally inasmuch as they are part of the undying Will. Hence, assuming Nietzsche's appreciation of Greek tragedy, it emerges from this passage how Nietzsche is not hostile to supplement the knowledge of life with some sort of metaphysics; at least, he is not hostile to this operation as such.

Crucially, we see here the natural character of metaphysics, or rather how in Nietzsche's account metaphysics does not stand opposed to what is natural. This, follows insofar as metaphysical insight is produced and embodied in art. However, tragic art is the birth child of the marriage between the two natural drives symbolized in Apollo and Dionysus. Thus, what at first might seem to be the unnatural *par excellence*, that is, the artifices and fictions of art, are instead a manifestation of nature's might<sup>12</sup>. Art, a defining human activity and the highest human task according to Nietzsche himself, does not tear us apart from nature, but rather is what let us see into nature's essence as this is art's essence too<sup>13</sup>. However, this does not mean that we have to stop thinking about metaphysics as the inquiry into what stands beyond nature.

I hold that in Nietzsche's account it is possible to understand this beyondness as a matter of positioning. Figuratively speaking, by looking at the tragic chorus we can contemplate for a moment the game that Will plays as something standing in front of us, that we can hold as a whole in the tragic representations and upon which we can reflect. In this we do metaphysics beyond nature, or rather from beyond nature, as we come to see it as a whole, in its internal struggle and dynamics. However, what is not possible to do in Nietzsche's account of metaphysics is to think that there is an absolute divide between the natural and the supernatural. As a spectator of a Greek tragedy, and as a metaphysical enquirer in general, I am still a natural creature and I am manifesting nature itself in meditating about nature beyond nature itself. The supernatural of metaphysics can be produced and sustained only in connection with the naturality of the forces which make it possible.

Tragic art, the product of the meeting of Apollo and Dionysus, is then able to grant us through the figure of the chorus a symbolical knowledge of the *Ur-eine*, the noumenal Schopenhauerian Will. This way, we come to see the fallaciousness of believing in self-standing representations, while at the same time we find consolation in learning about the true nature of our existential condition<sup>14</sup>. Crucially, as one would in fact expect from Nietzsche, the metaphysical consolation art provides us with is not described as some sort of 'life-denying delusion'. Rather, art's consolatory faculty is precisely the reason why Nietzsche held in such high esteem tragedy. Art, is '[...]' a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature, set alongside it for the purpose of overcoming it [...]'<sup>15</sup>. The key terms here are 'alongside' and 'overcoming': art is alongside nature and thus does not hide it from us, giving us the strength to overcome it rather than denying its mercilessness in continuously creating and destroying individual phenomena.

Tragedy might well be an illusion, nonetheless it is a good one insofar as it shows but at the same time filters the Schopenhauerian core of reality. If the individual was to be left on its own before the vision of the *Ur-eine*, it would be paralyzed by realizing how individuality is an illusory and frail condition. However, in this moment of danger art steps in, introducing its dynamics and symbols<sup>16</sup>. As mentioned in the excerpt above, the tragic chorus stands as what allows us to see the conjunction of Will and phenomena, and how the former endures indestructible beyond the caducity of the latter. This protection, this screen between us and the Will, is the only thing that allows us not just to bear life but also have an affirmative stance toward it on the ground of the metaphysical consolation it grants<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, we can see two distinct albeit related aspects of Nietzsche's account of metaphysics. On one hand, metaphysics is an activity, something we do as a consequence of our vital drives. In this regard, art can produce metaphysical knowledge, and thus is a metaphysical activity only insofar as it is an expression of what animates human life<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand, metaphysics is a supplement to our understanding, an insight into the nature of reality. Hence, art is not just what produces metaphysical knowledge among the members of the audience: art represents existence while highlighting what its real nature is. Art itself is metaphysics and metaphysical knowledge. These two perspectives are conjoined: we express ourselves in metaphysical activities on the ground of a metaphysical framework that we seek to explore, express, and alter<sup>19</sup>. What emerges is then a notion of metaphysics as a particular articulation of these two elements, that is, as Nietzsche find them expressed in Greek tragedy and to which he looks favourably.

## Which Metaphysics? (2)

In the previous section I determined that in the early stages of his work, Nietzsche's relationship with metaphysics is less conflictual than normally imagined. The evaluation he gives of metaphysics is ambiguous, and depends on which sort of metaphysics is the object of judgment. At least when it comes in the fashion of tragic art, the work of metaphysics even assumes a positive aspect. It is now important to dig deeper in Nietzsche's conception of tragic art. Given the picture of art as the true and foremost metaphysical activity, to explore Nietzsche's understanding of tragic art shall enable us to further elucidate his stance toward metaphysics in *BT*. As mentioned above, these claims concerning art draw on the Wagnerian ideas influencing *BT*. Thus, in order to explore this topic, I shall put Schopenhauer in the background, and instead consider the issue of Nietzsche's account of art and metaphysics from the angle of Wagner's influence on *BT*.

According to Wagner, true art is that which can bring together the arts of dance, tone, and poetry: this three collectively constitutes the 'Art-Work', the full expression of our artistic faculties. The latter are according to Wagner that which is the worthiest among human abilities, as they recapitulate and bring to expression our very essence. We can witness this kind of fully accomplished art in the Greek lyric and in its conscious completion, drama. Moreover, according to Wagner's own self-understanding, the meaning of his work is precisely that of reinstating the 'Art-Work' in modern times<sup>20</sup>. Attic tragedy and Wagnerian opera are then both examples of true art, as they bring forth the whole of humanity's essence as artistically expressed.

One of the aspects of *BT* where we can see the impact of these ideas, is in the characterisation of the polarity of drives that comes to define the deep essence of Greek tragedy. Apollo and Dionysus each represents a number of art forms, plastic arts and music respectively<sup>21</sup>, and both of them need the other as a complement. In this respect, the underlying Will presented by Dionysiac music requires a 'semblance' in order to be expressed. Hence, the Greeks through plastic arts shaped an individuated image of the Will in the tragic chorus, thereby providing such a semblance. At the same time, the latter is just a deception since Will always remains one in many manifestations, in spite of the plurality of satyrs representing it in the tragic chorus. Accordingly, Apollo needs the presence of Dionysus, in order not to forget the illusory nature of representations, but Dionysus needs Apollo in order to be able to fully come to light<sup>22</sup>.

Just like in the case of Wagner's 'artistic trinity', the condition of perfect balance between the two deities is accomplished in the Greek world; specifically, it is reached with the development of Attic tragedy after passages through Homeric epic and Archilochean poetry<sup>23</sup>. Following Wagner, Nietzsche regards Greek tragedy as the highest form of art as it includes the presence of these two deities and thus of the whole galaxy of human artistic expressions. What Nietzsche gives in *BT* is his own personalized account of what the Art-Work is, as well as of its metaphysical significance. This, is made on the presupposition that our artistic faculties can express the nature of the essence of reality, and that they need to be brought together in order to obtain a picture of this reality which is also beneficial to us.

Thus, Nietzsche follows Wagner in assuming that the highest art is the result of the completion and balancing of all human's expressive capacities. Also, he agrees in seeing an example of this art in Greek tragedy. However, parallels and

common conclusions amount to more than this. In both thinkers we find an instance of the metaphysical empiricism discussed above: dance, tone, and poetry are not randomly selected by Wagner as the highest among arts. Instead, they represent the fruits of humanity's main three artistic faculties, with the latter term having a quite bodily meaning<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, Apollo and Dionysus are the symbolic forms of two vital drives, springing out of nature, and therefore human nature, itself<sup>25</sup>. For both the German authors then, metaphysics has a strong connection to nature, and no absolute divide can be traced between the natural and the super-natural.

This means, that in both cases the metaphysical import of art is not in opposition to or detached from life: on the contrary, tragic art presents us with the vision of the fullness of our being as artistically expressed<sup>26</sup>. As Wagner puts it, an artist can produce an Art-Work just by entering into 'open life'<sup>27</sup>. by embracing Will and thus the whole of life's multi-sidedness. Furthermore, art is not practiced for its own sake, but for life's sake itself, that is, in order to both express its nature as well as to allow us to preserve an affirmative stance toward it<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, the artistic life is a life conscious of and affirming its own nature.

Ultimately, this is the key to Nietzsche's understanding of metaphysics, namely what sort of life each singular metaphysics instantiates. This, as we shall see in the continuation of the paper, is what determines the ambiguity in Nietzsche's consideration of metaphysics, as well as what allows him to choose metaphysics as expressed in tragic art over other alternatives. What is at stake is not so much the accuracy or coherence of a metaphysical account of reality, but rather which sort of values, which sort of existence and attitude toward life are the basis and goal of a particular metaphysics. As Gianni Vattimo puts it, what matters to Nietzsche when it comes knowledge is not our notion's adequacy to a given structure. In turn, what

Nietzsche is concerned about, is the cohesive force and the ability to exist which underlie knowledge, that is, whether or not knowledge is supported and at the same time helps foster a life-affirming existential attitude<sup>29</sup>.

### **Whose Metaphysics?**

In the previous section we saw that, according to Wagner, true art comes as an expression of life at its fullest. Accordingly, this is possible only if certain conditions are met: not just any form-of-life is capable of producing true art, insofar as we do not necessarily express existence in its full potential<sup>30</sup>. In this, Wagner is influenced by Schopenhauer, especially as he conceives art as the product of our *Anschauungsvermögen*. This concept designates both the human drive to create art, as well as the intuitive faculty that allows us to grasp the metaphysical *Ur-eine*<sup>31</sup>. An existence capable of producing true art is one which cultivates and exercises this faculty. Nietzsche himself agrees with this view, although he eventually sides with Wagner *contra* Schopenhauer, as to how he develops his thought in conjunction to this view. He accepts the Schopenhauerian *Anschauung* as the source of metaphysical knowledge<sup>32</sup>. Nonetheless, he follows Wagner in denying Schopenhauer's ensuing pessimism, in turn seeking to develop an affirmative and artistic ethic<sup>33</sup>. In other words, both Wagner and Nietzsche oppose Schopenhauer's conclusion that to grasp will as the *Ur-eine* must necessarily result in a pessimistic worldview.

If true art must be supported and expressed by a certain kind of existence, and art is our true metaphysical activity, then the worthiness of our metaphysics is

not just a matter of conceptual accuracy. Our metaphysics is the framework of our form-of-life, and the truth of the former is dependant on the truth of the latter, where a higher level of truth equates to a fuller realization of life's capacities. We can tell who we are and which forces drive us by the art, and therefore the metaphysics, that we express through our form-of-life. Accordingly, any particular metaphysics ought to be judged according to the truth of the values it expresses, that is, the maxims that support the degree of existential realization we attained. Of course, Nietzsche places a tragic understanding of life as that expressing the most 'truthful' of values<sup>34</sup>. In other words, tragic metaphysics portrays life as an expression of the Will without flowing into pessimism as a result. However, such a metaphysics is possible only as a result of our existential inclination to seek and accept its truth<sup>35</sup>. Thus, tragic art can only be the expression of an individual who already lives out the highest of value, and has developed strong and affirmative character, which is aware of life's nature but willing to accept it.

Of course, this means that different characters can lead to different metaphysics, grounded on metaphysical activities other than art. Once more, this is asserted in particular in Nietzsche's own considerations in the beginning of *BT*: the moment Nietzsche enthrones art, he does that at the expense of (the philosophical, scientific discussion of) morality, implicitly understood as a lesser form of metaphysical activity<sup>36</sup>. A systematic overlooking of the significance of the opposition between art and morality is what has generated the absolute dichotomy between Nietzschean philosophy and metaphysics. The forgetfulness of Nietzsche's positive opinion of metaphysics as art, eventually resulted in the conflation of morality with metaphysics, privileging an impoverished understanding of the latter term<sup>37</sup>.



Morality, later in *BT* to be coupled with science, is indeed metaphysics just as art is, apart from the crucial fact that it is pursued and sustained by a form of existence very different from the tragic and artistic one. Notoriously, Nietzsche labels this approach to life as 'Socratism' after its creator and prime practitioner. Nietzsche's issue with Socratism is that its offspring is a metaphysics which aims to be all-encompassing in its explanation of reality, but which cannot express what life truly is because of its premises.

In this regard, Socratism as a metaphysics is an attempt to develop a purely rational strategy for dealing with life's painful and irrational side. However, this task is accomplished through exclusion, as existence is addressed only in respect to what intelligible there is in it. Accordingly, the Socratic thinker excludes the irrational and the unreasonable refusing to acknowledge it as a necessary part of existence. Morality-science as a metaphysical activity operates on the ground of the principle that [...] knowledge is virtue; sin is the result of ignorance; the virtuous man is the happy man[...]<sup>38</sup>. Accordingly, the goal of this attitude toward existence is '[...]' to make existence appear intelligible and so justified [...]<sup>39</sup>, to redeem existence from its apparent meaninglessness and imperscrutability.

This implies that the Socratic principle is grounded on the premise that everything is in principle intelligible. If something was not understandable, the foundations of the happiness of the Socratic person would be eroded and destroyed. A force like Will that cannot be reduced to any standard of human rationality would put into question the truthfulness of the otherwise reasonable picture of the universe he holds dear. In so doing Socratism ends up just hiding but not overcoming pain, as it prevents himself to see and deal with the Will as the heart of reality<sup>40</sup>. Following

Pasqualotto, we might see the danger posed by Socratism as that of simplification: reality is reduced in its richness in order to fit some conceptual prejudice. Furthermore, this process of simplification does not affect just the 'objective world'. To see that everything is an expression of the Will includes gaining an insight in our own subjectivity as one of these manifestations. Subsequently, to impoverish our understanding of the world by excluding Will from our sight means to impoverish our understanding of ourselves as well<sup>41</sup>.

Subsequently, the self-imposed metaphysical blindness of the Socratic individual results in the killing of tragedy as he accuses it of being nothing but an illusion. In his view Apollo and Dionysus are nothing but the faces of an obscurantist mythology: they hide the truth of life's rationality with their unreasonableness. In this though, Socratism fails to recognize that tragedy is a somewhat honest illusion. As mentioned above, tragic art neither denies pain nor hides the truth about existence, but rather presents it in the shape of the satyrs of Greek tragedy. Thus, tragedy does not block us from seeing the truth, but rather allows us to live on in spite of knowing it. Tragedy is then an illusory symbolization, which through its stories and characters gives us insight in the metaphysics of reality as well as an interpretation of it<sup>42</sup>. On the contrary, the Socratic person acts on the optimistic assumption of the explicability of everything, according to the moral presupposition that it is possible to make sense of every aspect of life. This way, the Socratic enquirer creates the worst of mystifications: a metaphysics which is metaphysically blind. In other words, Socratism endeavours to explain pain, trying to rationalize Will and not acknowledging its irreducibility to human standards. As there is no place for unreasonableness<sup>43</sup> in the moral-scientific and Socratic view of life, there is no room for the Will<sup>44</sup>: as a result, life's nature is falsified and covered.

Once more, Socratism as metaphysics is metaphysically unaware, and this makes morality, Socratism's defining metaphysical activity, deficient. In this respect, morality and Socratism are the expressions of a vital drive analogous to those which give birth to the figures of Apollo and Dionysus, as they are both connected to the metaphysical inquiry into the nature of things. Still, the Socratic worldview fails in seeing its dependency and connections to these drives, and thus fails to see its connection to life and its irrational kernel<sup>45</sup>. According to Nietzsche, this mindset is the result of a pathology, as it gives too much merit to appearances while it excludes the Will from its view, making the former absolute and arranging them in a rational but insincere way. Socratism is then made of the same substance of the drives which inspire tragedy insofar as it is an expression of life, but, in both a literal and a metaphysical sense, it is the result of a sick form of this substance – it presents a metaphysical view of reality, just like art, but at the same time causes life to retreat within the safe walls of reasonableness, as by contrast art pushes the person to transcend them<sup>46</sup>.

In some respect, we can see here one of the seeds of Nietzsche's later intuitions, and I believe there is no harm in employing them to elucidate this point. For example, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (from here on BGE), morality is described as a perspective which produces a narrowing of one's own horizon. Morality, far from telling the truth about the world, is simply an expression of good faith toward the moral view of a particular group. Therefore, all that moralists do is in fact to argue in favour of a perspective which is grounded on their own prejudice and seeks secretly to confirm them<sup>47</sup>.

It is clear then, how different persons can live by different and competing metaphysics. It is also clear why according to Nietzsche the assessment of different

metaphysical frameworks cannot be led on the ground of their accuracy. Such thing is impossible insofar as to be a Socratist implies a world-view which simply excludes that of tragedy, insofar as their presuppositions and values are alien to one another. The tragic and the theoretic perspectives on life are then bound to be conflictual. Such a battle can come to an end only when science is eventually shown in its futility and blindness<sup>48</sup>, something that according to Nietzsche happened with the thought of Kant and Schopenhauer<sup>49</sup>.

Therefore, different metaphysics must be scrutinized in terms of the existential attitude they represent, and whose sustenance they promote. Hence, in the context of *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche's supposed absolute opposition to metaphysics can only be accepted with a number of qualifications. Rather, we can accept that he was ready to embrace and to oppose metaphysics each time according to what metaphysics represented in that context. I shall now move to Nietzsche's later self-criticism of his first work. We will then see what he makes of metaphysics by that time.

### **The Wisdom of Dionysus**

I shall now turn my attention to Nietzsche's retrospective comments on *BT*. Specifically, I shall focus on the preface to the second edition of *BT*, as well as on the pages from *Ecce Homo* concerning Nietzsche's first book. Once again, it is significant to observe the meaning of the word metaphysics in these contexts. The term metaphysics occurs four times in the preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1886 under the title *An Attempt at Self-Criticism*. On each occasion, Nietzsche employs the expression 'artistic metaphysics', and seems to

understand this according to a definition of metaphysics consistent with the one we find in the text's main body.

Let us consider the first instance in particular. Here, we find a reference to an artistic metaphysics, presumably implying that the young Nietzsche's understanding of the essence of things was influenced by art and his conception of it. This metaphysics, lies in the background of the author's attempt of explaining science '[...] through the optic of the artist, and art through the optic of life'<sup>50</sup>. Hence, even at this late stage does Nietzsche understand his earlier work as being concerned with metaphysics.

The other three instances in which this term is employed all express a similar notion. In the first of these, Nietzsche discusses the vision of Will as the ground of being in terms of the product of an artistic metaphysics. While the latter may now in retrospect seem idle and arbitrary, Nietzsche nonetheless hails it as the beginning of a quest for a 'pessimism beyond good and evil'<sup>51</sup>. Crucially for our inquiry, what Nietzsche criticizes of his younger self is his own immaturity, and not his engagement with metaphysics. Along the same line, metaphysics is referenced two more times in the last section of the preface, where Nietzsche is busy discharging himself from an accusation of Romanticism.

Notably, even though the word metaphysics is here employed according to the same meaning as before, we find the return of the axiological ambiguity of this term. While in the previous passage Nietzsche acknowledged in his early metaphysics the ground of his later thought, now he repels his youthful ideas because of their link to the consoling effect of Attic tragedy. Nietzsche seems to have come to the point of refusing firmly any idea of metaphysical consolation. In other

words, he now rejects the idea that while we need to know the truth concerning reality, we also need to be 'sheltered' from it in order not to be crushed by the discovery of Will as the kernel of reality. Accordingly, his whole artistic metaphysics is now very expressively '[...] sent to the devil [...]', together with the whole idea of Apollo consoling us and making existence bearable: Zarathustra laughs as the procession passes by<sup>52</sup>.

We see how the preface follows the same lines of thought of the original text, though applying the same reasoning to different targets. In other words, it is now the idea of tragic consolation which seems to be inadequate when it comes to convey a true life-affirming attitude. If *The Birth of Tragedy* preached against the self-sufficiency of phenomena in order to institute a 'non-idolatrous' cult of Apollo by exposing Will as the ground of nature<sup>53</sup>, Nietzsche now thinks this position to be not just under-developed, but philosophically deluded as well. This is particularly evident in the *Ecce Homo*'s passages devoted to the duality of Apollo and Dionysus. Here Nietzsche openly attacks this concept as a crypto-Hegelian idea ruling over the course of history. Moreover, he brands the same with the here clearly negative label of metaphysics<sup>54</sup>. Thus, as of 1888 and just before his eventual psychological collapse, we can see how Nietzsche chastised some of his own early positions in the same way he did with 'Socratism'. These too are now nothing but expressions of dogmatic and one-sided blindness, and thus obstacles to the necessary self-overcoming of humanity. However, we might ask how these criticisms square with the appreciative comments about *BT* that we mentioned above, and in general with the positive employment of the term metaphysics on Nietzsche's part.

According to Gregory Moore's reading of Nietzsche, Apollo and Dionysus symbolically represent two 'cosmic forces'<sup>55</sup> which anticipate the vision of a broader

Will to Power operating in nature<sup>56</sup>. In this respect, both the early and the late Nietzsche are consistent in seeing a *Bildungstrieb* as the intertwining of the *principium individuationis* and of the underlying unity and continuous shattering of its products. This *Trieb* operates in the cosmos and shapes life toward higher forms of individuation, as well as in characterizing this drive as artistic in nature<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, in both stages we find the same idea: art, that is, the force which leads us into forging our metaphysical framework, is also something which grows out of the very essence of life. At no stage of the development of Nietzsche's thought we find a discontinuity between life and metaphysics. What changes is the fact that Nietzsche comes to consider his earlier accounts as insufficient in order to serve his criticism of Socratism. He feels that some aspects of the ideas found in *BT* were dangerously close to Socratism themselves. In particular, the notion of a metaphysical consolation was in fact just another way of justifying the world in the face of its irrationality. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche moves against himself the same accusation that in the past he moved against his contemporaries in general, namely that of being excessively prone to simplification<sup>58</sup>. Just as 'Socratism' was unaware of its artistic roots, the interplay between Apollo and Dionysus was first developed with a blind eye to the Will to Power.

That being said, I argue that we should understand Nietzsche's partial rebuttal of *The Birth of Tragedy* as a development of his former positions about metaphysics, rather than a *tout court* aggression. For sure his idiosyncrasies with the term have grown over the years: at this stage, metaphysics simply tends to be employed just in a negative way, often describing what falls into the cauldron of Platonic-Christian *Ressentiment*. Nonetheless, we should not let a shift in terms of vocabulary mislead us. Once more, the problem for Nietzsche is not metaphysics as such, but the values

embodied by a particular metaphysics. This finds evidence in that, while Nietzsche rejects the metaphysics underlying the duality of Apollo and Dionysus, in his late philosophy art still enjoys a crucial role. However, art is now kept in high esteem because of its ability to teach us the courage of *Amor Fati*, and not for its consolatory capacities<sup>59</sup>. As Vattimo underlines commenting Nietzsche's posthumous fragments, art is now where we see the 'inside overflowing into the outside', the strength of Dionysus disrupting continuously each form in which life attempts to crystallize itself<sup>60</sup>. Thus *Amor Fati*, the expression of our resolve to make this Dionysian abundance of strength the ground of our stance toward life, is the product of a healthy metaphysical understanding of life's nature, namely the one we can get from art. A Socratic thinker has no use for *Amor Fati*, as he explains pain and negativity away, developing a metaphysics of blindness.

Therefore, the role of art does not change over time, in terms of its contribution to Nietzsche's project of criticism of modern culture and revaluation of values. What changes is rather the understanding of art's content what in the late stages of his work Nietzsche calls the 'Wisdom of Dionysus', an expression he already employs in *BT*<sup>61</sup>. However, now this wisdom is not a source of consolation anymore, but rather of an attitude pushing toward the affirmative overcoming of oneself<sup>62</sup>. This wisdom, flows from a proper metaphysical understanding of life, which is now finally unbounded by any suspect metaphysical duality. Hence, I hold that it is not too daring to see in this wisdom a new 'unblinded metaphysics' that the author resorts to herald in his 1880's writings, and which also springs from the Will, now conceived as Will-to-Power. If now the tension of Apollo and Dionysus falls in the field of 'Socratism', we can still see in the satyrs' chorus an anticipation of Nietzsche's later themes as he himself acknowledges toward the end of the *Attempt*



to *Self-Criticism*<sup>63</sup>. Simply, the affirmation of existence now takes place without any reference to some metaphysical framework smelling of Socrates or even Hegel, but rather in the drive of the Will to Power<sup>64</sup>.

## Conclusion

I have argued how, through an examination of some of Nietzsche's early and late works, it is possible to question the assumption that he was completely opposed to metaphysics. As a conclusion, although my inquiry has been somewhat brief and covered but a small part of Nietzsche's work relevant to the present topic, I would now point out some aspects underlying the evolution of Nietzsche's thought.

On one hand, we see that in the late stages of his work Nietzsche came to refuse some of his youthful positions on topics such as the nature of art. As a result of this, he sees his early positive tones regarding metaphysics with an eye of suspicion. Consequently, Nietzsche comes to refusing any notion of metaphysical consolation as a positive status produced by tragedy. Nonetheless, if the tension between Apollo and Dionysus falls into the background, nonetheless the spirit of the latter lives on in Zarathustra. The god of tragedy, who still represents the metaphysical insight into the tumultuous essence of life, carves the path for Nietzsche's late reflections.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche acknowledges how his first book initiated his criticism of Socratism, as well as his quest for reviving 'Dionysian wisdom'. The latter concept is then retroactively projected and rooted into *BT*, therefore establishing a connection between the early and the late Nietzsche's Dionysus. Dionysian Wisdom results in *Amor Fati*, the *Stimmung* of the late Nietzsche's ethic of self-overcoming, but by tracing this connection to *BT*, Nietzsche clearly sees the source of this feeling

in the same *Ur-eine* of *BT*. Thus, *Amor Fati* comes from our consciousness of Will as the essence of reality, in this substituting the earlier metaphysical consolation. This means that art and its god remain the privileged source of metaphysical knowledge, as well as the only proper inspirer of a life-affirming attitude<sup>65</sup>.

Insofar as he continues to reflect upon the Dionysian drive, Nietzsche is definitively a metaphysical thinker, although he promotes a style of metaphysics in contrast to what he considers to be the Socratic or Christian-Platonic one. Hence, even at the end of his career, Nietzsche's criticisms were not aimed at some abstract notion of metaphysics. Rather, his attacks were aimed at the cultural forms which presented an obstacle to our appraisal of Dionysian wisdom, namely the understanding of Will as pervading and giving birth to reality.

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- <sup>1</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 17-8.  
<sup>2</sup> Soll 2013: 167-9.  
<sup>3</sup> Pasqualotto 1998: 40-1.  
<sup>4</sup> Pasqualotto 1998: 50.  
<sup>5</sup> Behler 1997: 337-8.  
<sup>6</sup> Daniels 2014: 3.  
<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 31.  
<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 25.  
<sup>9</sup> Douglas and Jesinghausen 2010: 45.  
<sup>10</sup> Deleuze 2006: 11.  
<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 45.  
<sup>12</sup> Pasqualotto 1998: 177-8.  
<sup>13</sup> Pasqualotto 1998: 178.  
<sup>14</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen 2010: 105-6.  
<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 127-8.  
<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 46-7.  
<sup>17</sup> Came 2013: 216.  
<sup>18</sup> Pasqualotto 1998: 177.  
<sup>19</sup> Denham 2014: 171.  
<sup>20</sup> Wagner 1892b: 95.  
<sup>21</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen 2010: 47-8.  
<sup>22</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen 2010: 58-9.  
<sup>23</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen 2010: 61-5.  
<sup>24</sup> Wagner 1892b: 96.  
<sup>25</sup> Daniels 2014: 50.  
<sup>26</sup> Heidegger 1984: 29.  
<sup>27</sup> Wagner 1892a: 26.  
<sup>28</sup> Nussbaum 1991: 98.  
<sup>29</sup> Vattimo 2000: 90.  
<sup>30</sup> Wagner 1892b: 70.  
<sup>31</sup> Wagner 1892a: 28.  
<sup>32</sup> Schopenhauer 1969: 182.  
<sup>33</sup> Soll 2013: 164.  
<sup>34</sup> Moore 2002: 14.  
<sup>35</sup> Daniels 2014: 3-5.  
<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 8, 17-8.

<sup>37</sup> We could also argue that the understanding of metaphysics as art is multilayered. Nietzsche acknowledges in pre-tragic art the workings of the same drives animating the creations of Eschilus. Hence, there could be different versions of art as metaphysics, of course with tragedy standing at the top, in line with the Wagnerian understanding of the subject.

- <sup>38</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 78.  
<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 80.  
<sup>40</sup> Daniel 2014: 5.  
<sup>41</sup> Pasqualotto, 1998: 24.  
<sup>42</sup> Han-Pile 2006: 395.  
<sup>43</sup> According to the Socratic standards of what reasonableness is.  
<sup>44</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen 2010: 84.  
<sup>45</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen 2010: 101.  
<sup>46</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen 2010: 41.  
<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche 2002: 75-9.  
<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 93.  
<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 98-9.  
<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 5.

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<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 8.

<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche 2000: 11-2.

<sup>53</sup> Mulhall 2014: 125.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche 1911: 69.

<sup>55</sup> Although I agree with Moore's choice of words, we must not lose sight of how this expression must be tempered by what written above concerning the conditionality of the drives and the concept of Will.

<sup>56</sup> Moore 2002: 95-6.

<sup>57</sup> Moore 2002: 91.

<sup>58</sup> 'O sancta simplicitas! What a strange simplification and falsification people live in! The wonders never cease, for those who devote their eyes to such wondering. How we have made everything around us so bright and easy and free and simple! [...] How we have known from the start to hold on to our ignorance in order to enjoy a barely comprehensible freedom, thoughtlessness, recklessness, bravery, and joy in life; to delight in life itself ! And, until now, science could arise only on this solidified, granite foundation of ignorance, the will to know rising up on the foundation of a much more powerful will, the will to not know, to uncertainty, to untruth!' Nietzsche 2002: 25.

<sup>59</sup> Came 2013: 217-8.

<sup>60</sup> Vattimo, 1980: 112-21.

<sup>61</sup> '[...] The tragic myth is to be understood only as a transformation of the wisdom of Dionysus into images through the artistic means of Apollo;[...]' Nietzsche 2000: 118.

<sup>62</sup> Denham 2014: 190-191.

<sup>63</sup> '[...] here, perhaps, for the first time that a pessimism "beyond good and evil" announces itself, here that "perversity of mind" gets a chance to speak and formulate itself- [...]'. Nietzsche 2000: 8.

<sup>64</sup> Han-Pile 2006: 388.

<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, in this light it might be possible to claim with Derrida that the tension between *Trieb* and *Struktur*, that is, between Dionysus and Apollo, is in fact something internal to Dionysus himself (Derrida, 1967: 36) In this sense, although Apollo disappears from Nietzsche's radar in his late works, his duality with Dionysus survives as a struggle inside Dionysus as the symbol of the Will to Power. To see and accept this struggle is to adopt *Amor Fati* as one's orientation in life.