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<http://www.skenejournal.it>

info@skenejournal.it

JAMES I. PORTER*

Nietzsche, Tragedy, and the Theory of Catharsis

Abstract

Nietzsche's view of catharsis has attracted some but not a great deal of attention. Part of the reason is that he rarely makes use of the term itself, whether in his *Birth of Tragedy* or elsewhere, and when he does he is rather dismissive, seemingly rejecting out of hand the Aristotelian-inspired theory of tragic catharsis in its ancient or modern (notably, classicizing) forms. Catharsis would appear to be an unrewarding area for understanding Nietzsche. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that *The Birth of Tragedy* appears to foreground Nietzsche's rejection of tragic catharsis in its classical form, and the book is surely very much about catharsis in this sense. As it happens, a closer look at both this work and a handful of later texts on tragedy in Nietzsche's writings suggests that catharsis theory is everywhere on his mind even where the term is not being mentioned, not least of all in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where it is fully operative in the form of pity or co-suffering (Mitleid[en]), identificatory fear and horror (Furcht, Schrecken), and redemptive discharge (Erlösung, Entladung). Nor is his view as clear-cut as his emphatic rejection of Aristotelian catharsis might appear to indicate. His view of catharsis is neither simple nor entirely uniform across his corpus. Nietzsche's understanding of catharsis proves to be much closer to the view he appears to reject, and much closer to classicism's reading of tragedy than one might suppose.

Rapiebant me spectacula theatra plena imaginibus miseriarum mearum et fomitibus ignis mei. Quid est, quod ibi homo vult dolere cum spectat luctuosa et tragica, quae tamen pati ipse nolle? Et tamen pati vult ex eis dolorem spectator et dolor ipse est voluptas eius. Quid est nisi miserabilis insania? Nam eo magis eis movetur quisque, quo minus a talibus affectibus sanus est, quamquam, cum ipse patitur, miseria, cum aliis compatitur, misericordia dici solet. . . . Et si calamitates illae hominum vel antiquae vel falsae sic agantur, ut qui spectat non doleat, abscedit inde fastidians et reprehendens; si autem doleat, manet intentus et gaudens lacrimat.

(Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.2.2)¹

Nietzsche's view of catharsis has attracted some but not a great deal of attention. Part of the reason is that he rarely makes use of the term itself, whether in his *Birth of Tragedy* (BT) or elsewhere, and when he does he is rather dismissive, seemingly rejecting out of hand the Aristotelian-inspired

* University of California, Berkeley – jipporter@berkeley.edu

¹ "I was captivated by theatrical shows. They were full of representations of my own

theory of tragic catharsis in its ancient or modern forms. Catharsis would appear to be an unrewarding area for understanding Nietzsche, and perhaps it is. Hence the sober verdict of Silk and Stern: “*BT* is not about *katharsis*” (1981: 415).² Nevertheless, it is undeniable that *The Birth of Tragedy* foregrounds Nietzsche’s rejection of tragic catharsis in its classical form, and the book is surely very much about catharsis in this sense. As it happens, a closer look at both this work and a handful of later texts on tragedy in Nietzsche’s writings suggests that catharsis theory is everywhere on his mind even where the term is not being mentioned. Nor is his view as clear-cut as his emphatic rejection of Aristotelian catharsis might appear to indicate. Indeed, his view of catharsis is neither simple nor entirely uniform across his corpus. A quick examination of the term’s occurrences and those of its congeners, “pity and fear”, will be an indispensable first step to a reconsideration of Nietzsche’s positions both early and late. The remarks that follow are intended to be no more than a preliminary attempt at approaching the question of Nietzsche’s views on catharsis in his various writings as well as a contribution to the current scholarly literature on the problem.

Pity, Fear, and Catharsis in Nietzsche’s Corpus

The word “catharsis” appears once in *The Birth of Tragedy*, close to the end of the treatise. The passage would seem to say everything one needs to know about Nietzsche’s attitude to the concept and the problem of tragic catharsis:

Noch nie, seit Aristoteles, ist eine Erklärung der tragischen Wirkung gegeben worden, aus der auf künstlerische Zustände, auf eine aesthetische Thätigkeit der Zuhörer geschlossen werden dürfte. Bald soll Mitleid und Furchtsamkeit durch die ernsten Vorgänge zu einer erleichternden Entladung gedrängt werden, bald sollen wir uns bei dem Sieg guter und edler Principien, bei der Aufopferung des Helden im Sinne einer sittlichen Weltbetrachtung erhoben und

miseries and fuelled my fire. Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure. What is this but amazing folly? For the more anyone is moved by these scenes, the less free he is from similar passions. Only, when he himself suffers, it is called misery; when he feels compassion for others, it is called mercy. . . . If the human calamities, whether in ancient histories or fictitious myths, are so presented that the theatre-goer is not caused pain, he walks out of the theatre disgusted and highly critical. But if he feels pain, he stays riveted in his seat enjoying himself” (Augustine 1992: 35-6).

² The literature on tragic catharsis in Nietzsche is not sizeable, but it does not dispute this verdict. See most recently Halliwell 2002: 330-3; Därmann 2005; Bartscherer 2007; Most 2009; Ugolini 2012.

begeistert fühlen; und so gewiss ich glaube, dass für zahlreiche Menschen gerade das und nur das die Wirkung der Tragödie ist, so deutlich ergibt sich daraus, dass diese alle, sammt ihren interpretirenden Aesthetikern, von der Tragödie als einer höchsten *Kunst* nichts erfahren haben. (BT §22, KSA 1: 142)

[Never since Aristotle has an explanation of the tragic effect been offered from which aesthetic states or an aesthetic activity of the listener could be inferred. Now the serious events are supposed to prompt pity and fear to discharge themselves in a way that relieves us; now we are supposed to feel elevated and inspired by the triumph of good and noble principles, at the sacrifice of the hero in the interest of a moral vision of the universe. I am sure that for countless men precisely this, and only this, is the effect of tragedy, but it plainly follows that all these men, together with their interpreting aestheticians, have had no experience of tragedy as a supreme *art*. (Nietzsche 1967: 132)]

Nietzsche's antipathy to a moralizing theory of tragedy, which he takes Aristotle's theory to be, is unmistakable. Evidently Aristotle was on the right track to the extent that he was keen to discover what in tragedy gives rise to "aesthetic states" or "aesthetic activity" in the audience (*ibid.*), or most generally, its aesthetic "effect" (Nietzsche 1967: 101; "Wirkung", BT §16, KSA 1: 104). And Nietzsche wants nothing more than to offer an explanation of tragedy that locates its effect not in the realm of morals but squarely in the realm of aesthetics, an ambition that he announces in the opening sentence of his essay: "We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive . . ." (*ibid.*: 33).³ Just what Nietzsche understands by "aesthetics" is another issue, and we will want to revisit this below. The notion that tragedy acts as a purgative that alleviates rather than intensifies one's aesthetic states is repellent to Nietzsche, whose essay from 1870 is designed to offer not merely a rejection of Aristotle but also a replacement to the Aristotelian argument (see Most 2009: 58). In opposing himself to the view that tragedy produces its greatest impact through catharsis, Nietzsche is opposing an entire tradition of tragic criticism that descended from Aristotle's understanding of the genre ("since Aristotle"), not least of all its later exponents from the modern era, whom Nietzsche labels "our aestheticians" (*ibid.*: 132; "unsere Aesthetiker", BT §22, KSA 1: 142), though the term is begrudgingly awarded them: it is a label they do not deserve given Nietzsche's revisionary definition of the aesthetic, and because they "never tire of characterizing the struggle of the hero with fate, the triumph of the moral world order, or the purgation of the emotions through tragedy, as the essence of the tragic"

³ BT §1, KSA 1: 25: "Wir werden viel für die aesthetische Wissenschaft gewonnen haben, wenn wir . . . zur unmittelbaren Sicherheit der Anschauung gekommen sind".

(ibid.).⁴ Catharsis is really no more than a short-hand for this morally redemptive and edifying reading of the tragic.

The penultimate chapter of *The Birth of Tragedy* reinforces this anti-Aristotelian bias without specifically invoking catharsis:

Worin liegt dann die aesthetische Lust, mit der wir auch jene Bilder an uns vorüberziehen lassen? Ich frage nach der aesthetischen Lust und weiss recht wohl, dass viele dieser Bilder ausserdem mitunter noch eine moralische Ergetzung, etwa unter der Form des Mitleids oder eines sittlichen Triumphes, erzeugen können. Wer die Wirkung des Tragischen aber allein aus diesen moralischen Quellen ableiten wollte, wie es freilich in der Aesthetik nur allzu lange üblich war, der mag nur nicht glauben, etwas für die Kunst damit gethan zu haben: die vor Allem Reinheit in ihrem Bereiche verlangen muss. Für die Erklärung des tragischen Mythos ist es gerade die erste Forderung, die ihm eigenthümliche Lust in der rein aesthetischen Sphäre zu suchen, ohne in das Gebiet des Mitleids, der Furcht, des Sittlich-Erhabenen überzugreifen. Wie kann das Hässliche und das Disharmonische, der Inhalt des tragischen Mythos, eine aesthetische Lust erregen? (BT §24, KSA 1: 152)

[In what then lies the aesthetic pleasure with which we let these images [of the suffering hero], too, pass before us? I asked about the aesthetic pleasure, though I know full well that many of these images also produce at times a moral delight, for example, under the form of pity or moral triumph. But those who would derive the effect of the tragic solely from these moral sources – which, to be sure, has been the custom in aesthetics all too long – should least of all believe that they have thus accomplished something for art, which above all must demand purity in its sphere. If you would explain the tragic myth, the first requirement is to seek the pleasure that is peculiar to it in the purely aesthetic sphere, without transgressing into the region of pity, fear, or the morally sublime. How can the ugly and the disharmonic, the content of the tragic myth, stimulate aesthetic pleasure? (Nietzsche 1967: 140-1; emphasis added)].

Nietzsche never veered from this initial view. His later writings echo these early sentiments, less by adding new thoughts to them than by drawing out further implications of these earlier utterances about catharsis. The traits are predictable and hence easily summed up: the catharsis (purging) of the passions through pity “has a depressive effect” (“es wirkt depressiv”), it involves a “loss of strength” (“Einbusse an Kraft”), an enervation, a form of pessimism, it is Christian, a danger to life (“nothing is more dangerous”), indeed it is a “negation of life” (“Verneinung des Lebens”), a sign of cultural decline and decadence in the form of a cure for life’s travails and as a

⁴ BT §22, KSA 1: 142 “während sie nicht müde werden, den Kampf des Helden mit dem Schicksal, den Sieg der sittlichen Weltordnung oder eine durch die Tragödie bewirkte Entladung von Affecten als das eigentlich Tragische zu charakterisiren”.

useful way to discharge harmful pathologies “every once in a while” (“hier und da”), as Aristotle recommended (*The Anti-Christ* 7, Nietzsche 2005: 6-7; KSA 6: 172-4). A notebook entry from the same year, entitled *What is Tragic* (*Was ist Tragisch*), again takes Aristotle to task for promoting the two depressive affections, pity and fear, as the goal of tragedy, in place of the life-affirming “intoxication with life” (“Rausch am Leben”, 15[10], KSA 13: 410) that Nietzsche believes tragedy should produce. The Aristotelian route leads directly to “Christianity, nihilism, . . . physiological decadence” (“Christenthum, Nihilismus, . . . physiologische decadence”): if Aristotle were right, tragedy would be a “symptom of decline” (“ein Symptom des Verfalls”). The same note continues, now under the heading “Aristot[le]”: “Aristotle wanted to understand tragedy as a purgative of pity and terror – as a useful discharge of two excessively pent-up diseased affections” (“Aristoteles wollte die Tragödie als Purgativ von Mitleid und Schrecken betrachtet wissen, – als eine nützliche Entladung von zwei unmäßig aufgestauten krankhaften Affekten”, *ibid.*).⁵

Of course, there is a wrinkle in Nietzsche’s argument, which takes a strange twist back on itself. Tragedy *was* a symptom of decline. Mapping that decline is the thrust of *The Birth of Tragedy*. And pity and fear (or terror) are in fact for Nietzsche “diseased affections”, at least if we follow chapters 22 and 24 of this early text. Is Nietzsche, in 1872 and later in 1888, agreeing with Aristotle’s theory of tragedy and the tragic emotions at least to this extent – to the extent that Aristotle’s theory of tragedy maps out the psychology of fifth and fourth century Greeks and thus offers a valuable diagnosis of what Nietzsche takes to be tragedy’s final decline? This raises the question about the causes of tragedy’s decline in the late fifth century, and more importantly about the necessity of that historical event in Nietzsche’s mind. Because tragedy dies “by suicide” (“durch Selbstmord”) at the hands of Euripides (*BT* §11, Nietzsche 1967: 76; KSA 1: 75), and given the various other indications that tragedy, which is to say the whole of Greek tragic culture that produced the form, died of internal causes and not from external factors,⁶ it could be argued that Aristotle’s diagnosis was nothing other than objectively correct and true to the facts of his culture, if not to the essential nature of tragedy. This is not to suggest that Nietzsche would agree that tragedy *must* produce a degeneracy of the sort that took place in Athens. Quite the contrary. Greek

⁵ Similarly, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 3: 15: “The release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief, or should I say, at anaesthetizing on the part of the sufferer, his involuntary longed-for narcotic against pain of any kind” (“denn die Affekt-Entladung ist der grösste Erleichterungs- nämlich Betäubungs-Versuch des Leidenden, sein unwillkürlich begehrtes Narcoticum gegen Qual irgend welcher Art”, KSA 5: 374 = Nietzsche 2006: 93).

⁶ See Porter 2000a.

culture, he could hold, *misread* the potentials of tragedy, potentials that remain as valid today as they were when they failed to materialize in the fifth century and later, once catharsis became officially recognized as its *raison d'être*. These potentials include “an overflowing feeling of life and energy where even pain acts as a stimulus” (als eines überströmenden Lebens- und Kraftgefühls, innerhalb dessen selbst der Schmerz noch als Stimulans wirkt), which “gave me the key to the concept of the *tragic* feeling” (“gab mir den Schlüssel zum Begriff des *tragischen* Gefühls”) that leads “beyond pity and terror [and permits one] to *be* the eternal joy of becoming *oneself*” (“über Schrecken und Mitleid hinaus, die ewige Lust des Werdens *selbst zu sein*”) (*Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe the Ancients”, 5, Nietzsche 1990: 228, adapted; KSA 6: 160). This is the essence of tragedy, about which it would be wrong to say that it has no room for catharsis, pity, or fear, if it is merely the case that tragedy works through these same things in order to reach beyond them. And as we shall see momentarily, this is precisely the case on Nietzsche’s understanding of tragedy.

The problem remains how tragedy could skirt the encumbrances of pity and fear. In *Human, All Too Human* (1878) Nietzsche suggests that there is no real way to do so, and also possibly no need to do so. He again casts into doubt Aristotle’s analysis but remains more or less neutral on their value as emotions: “Are fear and pity really discharged by tragedy, as Aristotle has it?” (I, 212, Nietzsche 1996: 98).⁷ The two emotions are “not . . . [physiological] needs of definite organs that want to be relieved” (“sind nicht in diesem Sinne Bedürfnisse bestimmter Organe, welche erleichtert werden wollen”, *ibid.*). They are neither morally reprehensible nor pent-up and begging to be discharged. What *is* reprehensible, rather, is Aristotle’s view that this is what they are. Rejecting Aristotle’s diagnosis, Nietzsche rejects his psychology and rewrites the analysis from a more enlightened perspective. He continues:

Und auf die Dauer wird selbst jeder Trieb durch Uebung in seiner Befriedigung *gestärkt*, trotz jener periodischen Linderungen. Es wäre möglich, dass Mitleid und Furcht in jedem einzelnen Falle durch die Tragödie gemildert und entladen würden: trotzdem könnten sie im Ganzen durch die tragische Einwirkung überhaupt grösser werden. (KSA 2: 173)

[And in the long run a drive is, through practice in satisfying it, *intensified* (“gestärkt”: “strengthened”), its periodical alleviation notwithstanding. It is possible that in each individual instance fear and pity are mitigated and discharged: they could nonetheless grow greater as a whole through the tragic effect (“durch die tragische Einwirkung”) in general. (Nietzsche 1996: 98)]

⁷ KSA 2: 173: “Sollten Mitleid und Furcht wirklich, wie Aristoteles will, durch die Tragödie entladen werden?”.

And here the argument takes an unexpected turn. In defense of this revised view of the tragic emotions, which have now passed from being of neutral value to seemingly positive in value, Nietzsche calls to the stand Plato, “who could still be right when he says that through tragedy one becomes more fearful and emotional” (“behielte doch Recht, wenn er meint, dass man durch die Tragödie insgesamt ängstlicher und rührseliger werde”), and who believed that tragedy leads to a “degeneration” (“ausarten”) in the fiber of the audience and the communities they inhabit thanks to this “ever greater unbridledness and immoderation” (“immer grösserer Maass- und Zügellosigkeit”) (ibid., translation slightly adapted). Here, tragedy produces no catharsis in the sense of a moral purgation. On the contrary, tragedy is deemed to be morally harmful owing to the very intensification – the habitual rehearsal, the discharging and recharging – of pity and fear and other emotions that it brings about. Or so Plato felt, correctly diagnosing some of the emotional potentials of tragedy, Nietzsche says, while incorrectly labelling these potentials morally harmful. Aristotle’s later analysis of catharsis would respond to Plato, adopting some of his recommendations and rejecting other elements of his verdict – in effect demonstrating that tragic emotions are morally harmless if properly discharged, and to that extent they are beneficial to the psychic and moral health of the tragic spectator. Nietzsche would appear to be in partial agreement with both Plato and Aristotle while contesting aspects of both philosophers’ views of the tragic emotions and their value. Pity and fear are for Nietzsche undeniable elements of the tragic experience now, and together they lead to an intensification, not diminishment, of a subject’s susceptibility to the emotions generally. Is Nietzsche in favour of pity and fear after all?

Perhaps, then, Nietzsche’s thinking about catharsis is less clear-cut than it sometimes is thought to be. In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche again appears to rule out the relevance of pity and fear for the Greeks: “[O]n the whole they have done everything to counteract the elemental effect of images that arouse fear and pity – *for fear and pity were precisely what they [the Greeks] did not want*. With all due respect to Aristotle . . .” (§80, Nietzsche 2001: 80; adapted; emphasis in original).⁸ But if Nietzsche excludes pity and fear, he does so not on the grounds that these emotions are either debilitating or the sign of moral degeneracy, but on more peculiar grounds – namely, that the Greeks were not interested in producing deep (“elemental”) emotional effects (“in overwhelming the spectator with emotions”);⁹ instead

⁸ KSA 3: 436: “[J]a sie haben überhaupt Alles gethan, um der elementaren Wirkung furcht- und mitleiderweckender Bilder entgegenzuwirken: *sie wollten eben nicht Furcht und Mitleid*, – Aristoteles in Ehren und höchsten Ehren!”.

⁹ Ibid: “[A]uf Ueberwältigung der Zuschauer durch Affekte”.

they were keen on one thing only: “The Athenians went to the theatre *to hear pleasing speech!*”¹⁰ Such is the famous “profound superficiality” of Nietzsche’s Greeks, who, he claims, knew how to “stop at the surface, the fold, the skin, to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, and words” (“dazu thut Noth, tapfer bei der Oberfläche, der Falte, der Haut stehen zu bleiben, den Schein anzubeten, an Formen, an Töne, an Worte”) and in this way to dwell “in the whole Olympus of appearance” (“an den ganzen Olymp des Scheins) (*The Gay Science*, Preface, §4, Nietzsche 2001: 8; KSA 3: 352). Here, the rejection of catharsis and of pity and fear – by the Greeks themselves, not by Nietzsche – is a rejection of emotional intensity of all kinds, virtually a defense mechanism against nature (“a deviation from nature”, *ibid.* §80, Nietzsche 2001: 80; “Abweichung von der Natur”, KSA 3: 435) and a complete embracement of the niceties of “convention”. Catharsis, achieved through the build-up and discharging of pity and fear, threatens to ruffle the smooth and glassy surface of the Hellenic aesthetic experience. This is not an argument against Aristotle. It is a peculiar approach to the Greeks. Is Nietzsche even being serious? In a moment we will see that he is at the very least being *consistent* with himself and with his readings from *The Birth of Tragedy*.

One final text (out of many) will confirm the impression that Nietzsche’s approaches to catharsis are not always what they seem to be. The passage is from *Daybreak* (1881), from a section entitled “Tragedy and Music” (Book 3, 172):

– Männer in einer kriegerischen Grundverfassung des Gemüths, wie zum Beispiel die Griechen in der Zeit des Äschylus, sind *schwer zu rühren*, und wenn das Mitleiden einmal über ihre Härte siegt, so ergreift es sie wie ein Taumel und gleich einer “dämonischen Gewalt”, – sie fühlen sich dann unfrei und von einem religiösen Schauder erregt. *Hinterher haben sie ihre Bedenken gegen diesen Zustand*; so lange sie in ihm sind, geniessen sie das Entzücken des Ausser-sich-seins und des Wunderbaren, gemischt mit dem bittersten Wermuth des Leidens: es ist das so recht ein Getränk für Krieger, etwas Seltenes, Gefährliches und Bittersüßes, das Einem nicht leicht zu Theil wird. – An Seelen, die so das Mitleiden empfinden, wendet sich die Tragödie, an harte und kriegerische Seelen, welche man schwer besiegt, *sei es durch Furcht, sei es durch Mitleid*, welchen es aber nütze ist, von Zeit zu Zeit erweicht zu werden: aber was soll die Tragödie Denen, welche den “sympathischen Affectionen” offen stehen wie die Segel den Winden! (KSA 3: 152-3)

[Men whose disposition is fundamentally warlike, as for example the Greeks of the age of Aeschylus, are *hard to move*, and when pity does for once overbear their severity it seizes them like a frenzy, and as though a “demonic force”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: “Der Athener gieng in’s Theater, *um schöne Reden zu hören!*”

they then feel themselves under constraint and are excited by a shudder of religious awe. *Afterwards they have their doubts about this condition*; but for as long as they are in it they enjoy the delight of the miraculous and of being outside themselves, mixed with the bitterest wormwood of suffering: it is a draught appropriate to warriors, something rare, dangerous and bitter-sweet that does not easily fall to one's lot. It is to souls which experience pity like this that tragedy appeals, to hard and warlike souls which are difficult to conquer, *whether with fear or with pity*, but which find it useful to grow soft from time to time: but of what use is tragedy to those who are as open to the "sympathetic affections" as sails to the winds! (Nietzsche 1997: 104-5)]

Then comes a contrast with a later, gentler age, that of Plato and the philosophers, and a shift in attitudes:

Als die Athener weicher und empfindsamer geworden waren, zur Zeit Plato's, – ach, wie ferne waren sie noch von der Rührseligkeit unserer Gross- und Kleinstädter! – aber doch klagten schon die Philosophen über die *Schädlichkeit* der Tragödie. (KSA 3: 153)

[When the Athenians had grown softer and more sensitive, in the age of Plato – ah, but how far they still were from the emotionality of our urban dwellers! – the philosophers were already complaining of the *harmfulness* of tragedy. (Nietzsche 1997: 105)]

And finally a prospective glance to the imminent future:

Ein Zeitalter voller Gefahren, wie das eben beginnende, in welchem die Tapferkeit und Männlichkeit im Preise steigen, wird vielleicht allmählich die Seelen wieder so hart machen, dass tragische Dichter ihnen noththun: einstweilen aber waren diese ein Wenig *überflüssig*, – um das mildeste Wort zu gebrauchen. – So kommt vielleicht auch für die Musik noch einmal das bessere Zeitalter (gewiss wird es das *bösere* sein!), dann, wenn die Künstler sich mit ihr an streng persönliche, in sich harte, vom dunklen Ernste eigener Leidenschaft beherrschte Menschen zu wenden haben: aber was soll die Musik diesen heutigen allzubeweglichen, unausgewachsenen, halbpersönlichen, neugierigen und nach Allem lüsternen Seelchen des verschwindenden Zeitalters? (KSA 3: 153)

[An age full of danger such as is even now commencing, in which bravery and manliness become more valuable, will perhaps again gradually make souls so hard they will have need of tragic poets: in the meantime, these would be a little *superfluous* to put it as mildly as possible. For music, too, there may perhaps again come a better time (it will certainly be a *more evil* one!) when artists have to make it appeal to men strong in themselves, severe, dominated by the dark seriousness of their own passion: but of what use is music to the little souls of this vanishing age, souls too easily moved, undeveloped, half-selves, inquisitive, lusting after everything! (Nietzsche 1997: 105; emphasis added)]

Here we have what looks like a complete *volte-face* by Nietzsche in his views on the value of pity and fear as tragic emotions. No longer are these emotions decried as morally repugnant, nor are they tolerated as neutral if not in some way beneficial. Instead, pity and fear are the engines of tragic effect, and, as it turns out, of the same sort of effect that Nietzsche appeared to approve in *The Birth of Tragedy* (“the delight of the miraculous and of being outside themselves, mixed with the bitterest wormwood of suffering”, *Daybreak*, 3, 172, Nietzsche 1997: 104).¹¹ And yet the Greeks of the tragic age are being shown by Nietzsche not to seek out these emotional states but to resist them and even, in their aftermath, to be embarrassed by them and to entertain second thoughts and doubts about them. How is all of this to be explained? I believe that Nietzsche has an answer to the problem. But in order to see what this is, we must return to the earlier work on tragedy and his understanding of tragedy’s effects.

The Birth of Tragedy Revisited

For a quick précis of Nietzsche’s definition of the tragic effect we could do no worse than to consider a passage from *BT* §21:

Die Tragödie saugt den höchsten Musikorgasmus in sich hinein, so dass sie geradezu die Musik, bei den Griechen, wie bei uns, zur Vollendung bringt, stellt dann aber den tragischen Mythos und den tragischen Helden daneben, der dann, einem mächtigen Titanen gleich, die ganze dionysische Welt auf seinen Rücken nimmt und uns davon entlastet: während sie andererseits durch denselben tragischen Mythos, in der Person des tragischen Helden, von dem gierigen Drange nach diesem Dasein zu erlösen weiss . . . Die Tragödie stellt zwischen die universale Geltung ihrer Musik und den dionysisch empfänglichen Zuhörer ein erhabenes Gleichnis, den Mythos, und erweckt bei jenem den Schein, als ob die Musik nur ein höchstes Darstellungsmittel zur Belebung der plastischen Welt des Mythos sei. . . . Der Mythos schützt uns vor der Musik, wie er ihr andererseits erst die höchste Freiheit giebt. Dafür verleiht die Musik, als Gegengeschenk, dem tragischen Mythos eine so eindringliche und überzeugende metaphysische Bedeutsamkeit, wie sie Wort und Bild, ohne jene einzige Hülfe, nie zu erreichen vermögen; und insbesondere überkommt durch sie den tragischen Zuschauer gerade jenes sichere Vorgefühl einer höchsten Lust, zu der der Weg durch Untergang und Verneinung führt, so dass er zu hören meint, als ob der innerste Abgrund der Dinge zu ihm vernehmlich spräche. (*BT* §21; *KSA* 1: 134)

¹¹ *KSA* 3: 153: “das Entzücken des Ausser-sich-seins und des Wunderbaren, gemischt mit dem bittersten Wermut des Leidens”.

[Tragedy absorbs the highest ecstasies of music. . . . The tragic hero, placed beside this music, takes the whole Dionysian world upon his back and thus *relieves us of this burden* (“uns davon entlastet”) . . . Tragedy knows how to redeem us from the greedy thirst for this existence, and with an admonishing gesture it reminds us of another existence and a higher pleasure [predicated on the destruction, not triumph, of the tragic hero]. . . . Between the universal validity of its music and the listener, receptive in his Dionysian state, tragedy places a sublime parable, the myth, and *deceives* the listener into feeling that the music is merely the highest means to bring life into the vivid world of myth . . . The myth protects us against the music, while on the other hand it alone gives music the highest freedom. In return, music imparts to the tragic myth an intense and *convincing* metaphysical significance that word and image without this singular help could never have attained. And above all, it is through music that the tragic spectator is overcome by an assured premonition of a highest pleasure attained through destruction and negation, so he *feels as if* the innermost abyss of things spoke to him perceptibly (or: “audibly and clearly”: “vernehmlich”). (Nietzsche 1967: 125-6; slightly adapted; emphasis added)]

So far so good. The Dionysian “Urgrund” of existence, transmitted through music (the most immediate representation of this metaphysical region) is filtered through the screen of Apolline appearances: art, through its forms, shapes, and myths, gives the spectator access to this subterranean ground while also protecting her from its otherwise destructive power.¹² The expe-

¹² Just to be clear: music is an Apolline phenomenon; it is a representation of the metaphysical Will. This might appear controversial, but it is what Nietzsche says. “Music . . . had been known previously [prior to the emergence of the Dionysian] as an Apolline art, . . . the wave beat of rhythm, whose formative power was developed for the representation of Apolline states” (BT §2, Nietzsche 1967: 40); (“Wenn die Musik scheinbar bereits als eine apollinische Kunst bekannt war, so war sie dies doch nur . . . als Wellenschlag des Rhythmus, dessen bildnerische Kraft zur Darstellung apollinischer Zustände entwickelt wurde”) (BT §2 = KSA 1: 33). One of those states happens to be the Dionysian (see Porter 2000a, *passim*, esp. 151-3 and e.g. 212, n. 27). Music not only represents will, but it also *appears as will* (§6, Nietzsche 1967: 55; “*sie erscheint als Wille*”, KSA 1: 50), that is, *as Dionysian*. (§6, KSA 1: 50 = Nietzsche 1967: 55). Hence, a good part of its aesthetic character and aesthetic effect – its power and capacity for pain – is owing to the way music appears to be what it is not. Its value is that of a mediated (apparent) immediacy. Musical phenomena are appearances that do not seem to be appearances. Apolline appearances properly speaking, that is, of a more obvious stamp, do not present themselves as Dionysian will but rather as appearances pure and simple: they appear *as appearance* (they are “*der Schein des Scheins*”, BT §4, Nietzsche 1967: 45 = KSA 1: 39); they frankly state what they are. Insulated by one further degree from metaphysical reality, they offer themselves up as a protection against the painful perception, or intuition, of that reality (again, see Porter 2000a). That music is on the side of the aesthetic and the Apolline ought to be uncontroversial: music requires form (notes, rhythm, harmony, aural imaging – a Kantian view, cf. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

rience is vicarious, overwhelming (as the intrusion of the Real can only ever be) yet safe (at stake, after all, is not my existential condition but that of the mythical and now tragic hero). It is aesthetic (“for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*”).¹³ It is pleasurable and painful (“primordial joy [is] experienced even in pain”).¹⁴ It is a form of the sublime, as we shall see in a moment.

But there is one further ingredient to add to the picture, and Nietzsche comes to this a page or so later in the same section of *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he insists on the absolute necessity of the Apolline principle to the aesthetic experience of tragedy. As “purely Dionysian beings” (“als rein dionysische Wesen”) our apprehension of the Urgrund of reality would be too direct and too destructive, nor would it be an aesthetic experience, but only an “unaesthetic” (“unaesthetische”) Dionysian experience.¹⁵ A screen is needed to shelter our gaze. “Here the tragic myth and the tragic hero intervene”,¹⁶ which is to say the Apolline element, which allows tragedy to have any aesthetic impact at all. The experience is both disruptive and healing at one and the same time: “here the Apolline power erupts to restore the almost shattered individual with the healing balm of blissful illusion”.¹⁷ And here one further element intervenes: pity, or if one prefers, co-suffering. “However powerfully pity (“das Mitleiden”) affects us, it nevertheless saves us in a way from the primordial suffering (“Urleiden”) of the world, just as the symbolic image of the myth saves us from the immediate perception of the highest world. The glorious Apolline illusion makes it appear as if even the tone world confronted us as a sculpted world . . . Thus the Apolline tears

§14). That music appears without appearing to be an appearance is part of the Apolline deception that makes music what it is. (See below on deception). In other words, music’s appearances (their “reverberation of” and as “image”, *BT* §5, Nietzsche 1967: 50; *KSA* 1: 44) are controlled by the Apolline, in the guise of not being this. “The glorious Apolline illusion makes it appear as if even the tone world confronted us as a sculpted world” (§21, Nietzsche 1967: 28; “Durch jene herrliche apollinische Täuschung dünkt es uns, als ob uns selbst das Tonreich wie eine plastische Welt gegenüberträte”, *KSA* 1: 137). All three arts (verbal, musical, plastic/sculptural) align on the same side of the aesthetic equation for Nietzsche.

¹³ *BT* §5, Nietzsche 1967: 52; “nur als ästhetisches Phänomen das Dasein der Welt gerechtfertigt ist” (*KSA* 1: 17).

¹⁴ *BT* §24, Nietzsche 1967: 141; “mit seiner selbst am Schmerz percipirten Urlust”, (*KSA* 1: 152).

¹⁵ *BT* §5, Nietzsche 1967: 52; *KSA* 1: 47. See below.

¹⁶ *BT* §21, Nietzsche 1967: 127; “Hier drängt sich . . . der tragische Mythos und der tragische Held” (*KSA* 1: 136).

¹⁷ *Ibid*: “Hier bricht jedoch die *apollinische* Kraft, auf Wiederherstellung des fast zersprengten Individuums gerichtet, mit dem Heilbalsam einer wonnevollen Täuschung hervor”.

us out of the Dionysian universality and lets us find delight in individuals; it attaches our pity to them ("fesselt . . . unsere Mitleidserregung").¹⁸

Here one has to pause. Pity? The concept, about to be castigated by Nietzsche in the next section (quoted above), is here taken fully on board, not as an accessory to the tragic effect, but as its motor. True, Nietzsche's primary concern in his critique of cathartic readings is the sentimentalizing and moralizing spin that they give to the discharge (release, purgation, and refinement) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear. Could it be that Nietzsche accepts the value of these emotions but not their interpretation by Aristotle and his later followers, as was suggested above? The answer is both yes and no. Nietzsche does not exactly endorse the tragic process that he is describing. He is giving it a different kind of valence, if not value, from the one that Aristotle and others in his wake would read into tragedy. In a word, to Aristotle's *moral* defense of catharsis, itself aimed against Plato's indictment of the tragic emotions, Nietzsche opposes a *metaphysical* reading of catharsis, one that he ultimately casts in a critical light.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the constituent emotions of catharsis are central to tragedy even on Nietzsche's complex view of it. Indeed, "breathless pity and fear" (*BT* §12, Nietzsche 1967: 84; "das athemlose Mitleiden und Mitfürchten", *KSA* 1: 86) have been consistently at the heart of his own exposition of tragic effect all along. No tragedy in its pre-Euripidean form can perform its job without the involvement of these two emotions, which is to say the antagonistic involvement of fear (or shuddering terror, "Schaudern") and the identification with the pain at the core of existence ("das Mitleiden" with "Urleid").²⁰

¹⁸ *BT* §21, Nietzsche 1967: 128; "So gewaltig auch das Mitleiden in uns hineingreift, in einem gewissen Sinne rettet uns doch das Mitleiden vor dem Urleiden der Welt, wie das Gleichnisbild des Mythos uns vor dem unmittelbaren Anschauen der höchsten Weltidee, . . . Durch jene herrliche apollinische Täuschung dünkt es uns, als ob uns selbst das Tonreich wie eine plastische Welt gegenüberträte. . . . So entreisst uns das Apollinische der dionysischen Allgemeinheit und entzückt uns für die Individuen; an diese fesselt es unsre Mitleidserregung . . ." (*KSA* 1: 136-7).

¹⁹ That Nietzsche treats Greek tragic metaphysics as an illusion – less a transfiguration of reality than a defense *against* reality – is the thesis of Porter (2000a). Briefly, Nietzsche's position is that Dionysian metaphysics is a redemptive illusion that the Greeks never had the courage to expose for what it is. But what is more, the Dionysian is for Nietzsche a component of modern classicism that classicism systematically disavows. Whether ancient Greeks can be isolated from their modern comprehension is a question that Nietzsche's double-edged critique renders into an inescapable problem, and it is one that remains valid for us even today.

²⁰ This is everywhere in evidence, for instance in §8 (Nietzsche 1967: 61; *KSA* 1: 63), where the chorus share Dionysus' terrifying wisdom and his suffering ("als der mitleidende ist er [sc. Dionysus] zugleich der weise, aus dem Herzen der Welt die Wahrheit verkündende"); or in §22 (Nietzsche 1967: 131 = *KSA* 1: 141): the Greek tragic

Consider how tragedy emerges in the prototypical satyr chorus, which identifies with the primordial unity of being (“das Ur-Eine”). This is the primal scene of the birth of tragedy. It turns on a series of identifications – of a Dionysian reveler who, ecstatic and enraptured, “sees himself as a satyr, *and as a satyr, in turn, he sees the god*” (BT §8, Nietzsche 1967: 64; emphasis in original),²¹ all of this under the auspices of Apolline projection and illusion (appearances). Such is “the *dramatic* proto-phenomenon” (“das *dramatische* Urphänomen”), in which the self is ecstatically pushed outside herself and absorbed into another, “as if one had actually entered into another body, another character” (ibid.: 64).²² Why the satyr? “The satyr was the archetype of man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense emotions, the ecstatic reveler, . . . the sympathetic [lit., “co-suffering”] companion (“mitleidender Genosse”) in whom the suffering of the god is repeated” (ibid.: 61)²³ and so on. The experience is intensely pleasurable and painful, it is erotic, and it is sublime. “The satyr was something sublime and divine” (“Der Satyr war etwas Erhabenes und Göttliches”), and permitted a vision that could be taken in “with sublime satisfaction” (“in erhabener Befriedigung”) (ibid.). The experience – the “phenomenon” – spreads like a contagion, “epidemicly” (“epidemisch”), from individual to individual, as each partakes in the same appearances (ibid.). Reality and the effects it emits appear to this primal chorus “in several successive discharges” (“in mehreren aufeinanderfolgenden Entladungen”) (ibid.). Pity (in the form of “Mitleid” – call it compassion, co-suffering, or identificatory *pathos*) and fear (the “terrifying wisdom”, “die schreckliche Weisheit”, or “insight” of the Dionysian and its “effects” (§4, ibid.: 45, trans. adapted; KSA 1: 39), which is always an identificatory fear, “Mitfürchten”, mediated by the tragic vision), are the “breathless” (“atemlose”) drivers in this process, along with the mix of pain and pleasure that they accompany, all brought together under the auspices of Apolline mediation: “with this new vision the drama is complete” (BT §8, ibid.: 64).²⁴

Nietzsche is preserving the structure of the tragic emotions as these are analyzed by Aristotle, while giving them a new metaphysical and culturally

spectator “shudders at the sufferings (“schaudert vor den Leiden”) which will befall the hero” – where the distinction between pity and fear is moot, as is the pleasure (“Lust”) that is derived from, or supervenes upon, the experience.

²¹ KSA 1: 62: “[S]ieht sich der dionysische Schwärmer als Satyr *und als Satyr wiederum schaut er den Gott*”.

²² KSA 1: 61: “[A]ls ob man wirklich in einen andern Leib, in einen andern Charakter eingegangen wäre”.

²³ KSA 1: 58: “[E]s war das Urbild des Menschen, der Ausdruck seiner höchsten und stärksten Regungen, als begeisterter Schwärmer, . . . als mitleidender Genosse, in dem sich das Leiden des Gottes wiederholt”.

²⁴ KSA 1: 62: “Mit dieser neuen Vision ist das Drama vollständig”.

critical spin, and to be sure a heightened intensity.²⁵ The mechanism of pity (in the form of co-suffering) and fear (bordering on horror) is complicated, as we've seen. Release is certainly part of the process: there is a release from the self (*BT* §5), a release through and in appearances (§§ 4, 5, 12). "Erlösung" is the operative term in both cases, and it carries a strong sense of redemption.²⁶ Purgation is probably not the best account of this process, because the feelings of pleasure and pain persist, albeit in a transfigured form, and the emotions that attend to these feelings, pity and fear, are not *per se* morally harmful emotions worthy of expulsion in Nietzsche's account. They are, rather, useful and possibly inevitable ways of producing a contact with the Real that remains brutally overwhelming, but that allows a certain distance and aesthetic delight in the experience. As Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science* passage mentioned above, a part not yet quoted, tragedy satisfies in us "a need that we cannot satisfy in reality" ("ein Bedürfniss . . . welches wir aus der Wirklichkeit nicht befriedigen können"): "it delights us now when the tragic hero still finds words, reasons, eloquent gestures, and an altogether radiant spirit where life approaches the abyss and a real human being would usually lose his head and certainly his fine language" (*The Gay Science* §80, Nietzsche 2001: 80).²⁷ And so, tragedy indulges our fantasies of vicarious reality, a need that satisfies "a metaphysical need" ("metaphys. Bedürfniß").²⁸

²⁵ Horror, or rather terror, is ruled out by Aristotle as a tragic emotion: unlike fear (*phobos*), terror (*to deinon*) drives out pity (*Rhetoric* 3.8, 1386a21-2). Nietzsche's idea of fear is allied with both terror and horror (Schrecken, Grausamkeit, etc.). But Nietzsche may not have seen any significant difference on this score, at least to judge from later evidence, e.g. 15[10], 1888 (*KSA* 13: 410), quoted above: "Aristotle wanted to understand tragedy as a purgative of pity and terror ("Aristoteles wollte die Tragödie als Purgativ von Mitleid und Schrecken betrachtet wissen"), though he knew full well that the object of his own idea of tragic fear was differently conceived from anything that Aristotle would have intended.

²⁶ Kaufmann renders "Erlösung" as "release" in the first case and "redemption" in the latter cases. Note that release from the self is staged as a redemptive fusion with the One, not as a release/redemption in and through appearances. It seems, then, that we can speak of both two kinds of release/redemption: a Dionysian kind and an Apolline kind. These are juxtaposed in §8: "not Apolline redemption through mere appearance, but, on the contrary, the shattering of the individual and his fusion with primal being" ("nicht die apollinische Erlösung im Scheine, sondern im Gegenteil das Zerschneiden des Individuums und sein Einswerden mit dem Ursein", *KSA* 1: 62). These are, however, two styles of appearance – the first appearing as appearance, the second appearing as non-appearance.

²⁷ *KSA* 3: 435: "[E]s entzückt uns jetzt, wenn der tragische Held da noch Worte, Gründe, beredete Gebärden und im Ganzen eine helle Geistigkeit findet, wo das Leben sich den Abgründen nähert, und der wirkliche Mensch meistens den Kopf und gewiss die schöne Sprache verliert".

²⁸ *Encyclopedia of Philology* (1871, cf. *KGW* 2.3: 416, n. 37; quotation and translation in Porter 2000a: 103). See *The Gay Science* §151 (*KSA* 3: 494). In *BT* this need expresses

It defends us *from* “the elemental of images that arouse fear and compassion – for pity and fear were precisely what they [the Greeks] did not want” (*The Gay Science*, *ibid.*).²⁹

Did not want, yet could not do without. Fear and pity are innate responses to this contact with the Real. They are the filters through which this contact can only ever be had. But they must also vanish in the experience, in a kind of sublimation (if not exactly purging), or else redemption. This is part of the illusion (the “deception”) that tragedy brings about, the logic of which runs: I don’t have to (really) suffer fear myself so long as someone else can suffer for me on the plane of the imaginary. I need only be absorbed in the *image* of suffering and can “believe” (§§ 7, 16) or rather *make believe* that I am experiencing the true reality of the One. Hence, Nietzsche writes, in such glimpses of imaginary contact, “we are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence; the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena now appear *necessary* to us” (§17, Nietzsche 1967: 104; emphasis added).³⁰ Pain is converted into delight and joy. We take a “metaphysical comfort” (“metaphysischer Trost”) in our condition, which gives us the prospect of “the indestructibility and eternity of this [primordial] joy in existence. *In spite of fear and pity*, we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the *one* living being, with whose creative joy we are united” (§17, *ibid.*: 105).³¹ In other words, the *aesthetic* pleasure we take in the destruction of the tragic hero translates the pain of existence into the reassurance that, when all is said and done, life goes on; it *surges* on, indestructibly and comfortingly. We, after all, are the palpable proof, we who are alive at the end of the play. We survive, as itself in the “metaphysical comfort” (“der metaphysische Trost”, §§ 7, 17; KSA 1: 21, 22, 109) of the painful ground of reality that is made to appear “as necessary” (“wie nothwendig”, §17, KSA 1: 109). Note that “reality” here – understood as the abyssal Dionysian metaphysical reality – masks another, more intolerable reality, which is the true source of human pain and anguish (Nietzsche calls it “nausea” and “absurdity” – §7, Nietzsche 1967: 60; KSA 1: 57 –, namely the prospect of the world stripped bare of all metaphysical comforts and indeed of all metaphysical constructions *tout court*, which is to say, the human, all-too-human world that, as Nietzsche never ceases to remind us, we ourselves inhabit. Whence, too, the conflicting “doubts” of *Daybreak* 3, §172, quoted earlier. See Porter 2000a.

²⁹ KSA 3: 436: “[U]m der elementaren Wirkung furcht- und mitleiderweckender Bilder entgegenzuwirken: *sie wollten eben nicht Furcht und Mitleid*”.

³⁰ KSA 1: 109: “Wir sind wirklich in kurzen Augenblicken das Urwesen selbst und fühlen dessen unbändige Daseinsgier und Daseinslust; der Kampf, die Qual, die Vernichtung der Erscheinungen dünkt uns jetzt wie notwendig”.

³¹ KSA 1: 109-10: “[D]ie Unzerstörbarkeit und Ewigkeit dieser Lust. . . . Trotz Furcht und Mitleid sind wir die Glücklich-Lebendigen, nicht als Individuen, sondern als das *eine* Lebendige, mit dessen Zeugungslust wir verschmolzen sind”.

it were, the deluges of pity and fear, which are the controversial source of tragic pleasure, as they always were since Aristotle (if not earlier).³² Tragedy achieves its effects “in spite of fear and pity” (“trotz Furcht und Mitleid”) but also *only through* fear and pity.³³ Without these two affections no tragedy can be properly speaking tragic. Euripides’ emblematic failure lies in the fact that he failed to produce these emotions. The fine balance between the Apolline and Dionysian poles was ruined: each became a shriveled representative of its former self. In place of Apolline contemplation, Euripides installed logical, paradoxical thoughts; in place of Dionysian ecstasies, he offered up “fiery affects” (“feurige Affekte”), which is to say crude naturalistic passions that stood in no relation either to the existentially threatening wisdom of the Silenus or to its sublimation through appearances (§§ 12, 14). The link between the two artistic principles was accordingly ruptured, as was the essential tie to tragic pity and fear. “The Euripidean hero . . . must defend his actions with arguments and counterarguments and in the process often risks the loss of our tragic pity” (§14, *ibid.*: 81).³⁴ In this climate of cool optimism, fear and pity were banished. And here tragedy came to an end.

It may sound paradoxical that Nietzsche should place so much emphasis on fear and pity in *The Birth of Tragedy*, indeed that he should develop the whole of his theory of tragedy around these two central notions, only to conclude, in the final chapters, that pity and fear and their catharsis are an Aristotelian and then a modern misdescription of the tragic experience. But this is not in fact what he says. The Aristotelian line on tragedy misdescribes the tragic experience not because it enlists pity and fear in a catharsis of tragic emotions, but *because it misdescribes the nature and function of tragic pity and fear*. This is clearly what Nietzsche means when, in the final section quoted earlier, he restates the fundamental puzzle that tragedy poses as an aesthetic problem: where does aesthetic pleasure lie in a genre that is devoted to the sufferings of a hero? Or, more pointedly, “how can the ugly and the disharmonic, the content of the tragic myth, stimulate aesthetic pleasure?” (§24, *ibid.*: 140).³⁵ Against the current, prevailing norm that looks for an an-

³² The prehistory of Aristotle’s theory would take us back to Homer, Sophocles, Gorgias, and Plato but this is not the place to develop this line of inquiry, which has been discussed in the past (Halliwell 1986: 170 with n. 3), but see n. 49 below.

³³ See §21, Nietzsche 1967: 28 quoted earlier: “*However powerfully pity affects us, it nevertheless saves us in a way from the primordial suffering (Urleiden) of the world*” (KSA 1: 136-7: “So gewaltig auch das Mitleiden in uns hineingreift, in einem gewissen Sinne rettet uns doch das Mitleiden vor dem Urleiden der Welt”).

³⁴ KSA 1: 94: “. . . des euripideischen Helden, der durch Grund und Gegengrund seine Handlungen vertheidigen muss und dadurch so oft in Gefahr geräth, unser tragisches Mitleiden einzubüßen”.

³⁵ KSA 1: 152: “Wie kann das Hässliche und das Disharmonische, der Inhalt des tragi-

swer in the sphere of morals (“moral delight, for example, under the form of pity or moral triumph”, *ibid.*),³⁶ Nietzsche insists on locating the proper pleasure of tragedy, “the pleasure that is peculiar to it” (*ibid.*),³⁷ in a “purely aesthetic sphere, without transgressing into the region of pity, fear, or the morally sublime” (*ibid.*: 141).³⁸

Nietzsche is contesting an entire suite of concepts, from the aesthetic understood in the most general of terms to its components in the area of tragedy (pity and fear) and finally the sublime. To the extent that any of these suppress or erase “the ugly and the disharmonic” (“das Hässliche und das Disharmonische”), and more generally “the unaesthetic” (the domain of the will, “das an sich Unaesthetische”, or “the unaesthetic in itself”, §6, *ibid.*: 52; *KSA* 1: 50), Nietzsche will have nothing to do with them. But simply because he names these elements in the Aristotelian account is hardly an indication that he wishes to eliminate them from his own revised account of tragedy. To an aesthetics that refuses to encompass the unaesthetic (“aesthetic Socratism”, “aesthetischen Sokratismus” premised on logic, intelligibility, superficiality, and optimism, §12, *ibid.*: 83; *KSA* 1, 85), he opposes an aesthetics in which both elements, the aesthetic and the unaesthetic, “are wonderfully mingled with one another” (“wundersam durch einander gemischt”) (§ 5, *ibid.*: 52; *KSA* 1: 47) – albeit now in “a purely aesthetic sphere” (“in der rein ästhetischen Sphäre”). To a conception of pity and fear based on moral sentiments, he opposes pity and fear based on pre-moral identification with a metaphysically potent reality (or its image). To the morally sublime he opposes an amoral sublime. To a cathartic purging of surplus affections he opposes a different kind of release, a redemptive discharging (“Erlösung”, “Entladung”) of these same affections. To the idea that tragedy exists “for our [moral] betterment and education” (*KSA* 1: 47: “unsrer Besserung und Bildung wegen) he opposes “the immense impact of the image, the concept, the ethical teaching and the sympathetic emotion [with which] the Apolline tears man from his orgiastic self-annihilation”³⁹ and protects him from its dangers (§21, *ibid.*: 128). The differences from the post-Aristotelian interpretation of tragic catharsis are significant, but also less dramatic than they might at first appear. In a number of respects, Nietzsche’s Greeks, for all their flirtation with tragic metaphysics, fit rather neatly into the familiar

schen Mythos, eine ästhetische Lust erregen?”.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: “[E]ine moralische Ergetzung, etwa unter der Form des Mitleides oder eines sittlichen Triumphes”.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: “[D]ie ihm eigentümliche Lust”.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: “[I]n der rein ästhetischen Sphäre . . . ohne in das Gebiet des Mitleids, der Furcht, des Sittlich-Erhabenen überzugreifen”.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 137: “Mit der ungeheuren Wucht des Bildes, des Begriffs, der ethischen Lehre, der sympathischen Erregung reisst das Apollinische den Menschen aus seiner orgiastischen Selbstvernichtung empor”.

classical and classicizing paradigm by which they were grasped in the age of Humboldt and Goethe.⁴⁰ Dionysus and the realm he represents are redeemed by Apollo. Indeed, the Dionysian seems to be the *product* of Apollo, which is to say, Apollo's way of redeeming *himself* and the conceptual order that *he* represents:

Vor allem galt es jene Ekelgedanken über das Entsetzliche und das Absurde des Daseins in Vorstellungen umzuwandeln, mit denen sich leben lässt: diese sind das *Erhabene* als die künstlerische *Bändigung* des Entsetzlichen und das *Lächerliche* als die künstlerische *Entladung* vom Ekel des Absurden. Diese beiden mit einander verflochtenen Elemente werden zu einem Kunstwerk vereint, das den Rausch nachahmt, das mit dem Rausche spielt. (*Die dionysische Weltanschauung*, 1870, §3, KSA 1: 567; emphasis added)

[What mattered above all was to transform those repulsive thoughts about the terrible and absurd aspects of existence into representations with which it was possible to live; these representations are the *sublime*, whereby the terrible [viz., the unaesthetic] is *tamed* by artistic means, and the *comical*, whereby disgust at absurdity is *discharged* by artistic means. These two interwoven elements are unified in a work of art which imitates and plays with intoxication.] (*The Dionysiac World View*, Nietzsche 1999: 130; emphasis added)⁴¹

⁴⁰ See BT §22 (ibid.: 132): “The pathological discharge, the catharsis of Aristotle, of which philologists are not sure whether it should be included among medical or moral phenomena, recalls a remarkable notion of Goethe’s. ‘Without a lively pathological interest,’ he says, ‘I, too, have never yet succeeded in elaborating a tragic situation of any kind, and hence I have rather avoided than sought it. Can it perhaps have been yet another merit of the ancients that the deepest pathos was with them merely aesthetic play, while with us the truth of nature must cooperate in order to produce such a work?’ We can now answer this profound final question in the affirmative . . .” (KSA 1: 142: “Jene pathologische Entladung, die Katharsis des Aristoteles, von der die Philologen nicht recht wissen, ob sie unter die medicinischen oder die moralischen Phänomene zu rechnen sei, erinnert an eine merkwürdige Ahnung Goethe’s. ‘Ohne ein lebhaftes pathologisches Interesse’, sagt er, ‘ist es auch mir niemals gelungen, irgend eine tragische Situation zu bearbeiten, und ich habe sie daher lieber vermieden als aufgesucht. Sollte es wohl auch einer von den Vorzügen der Alten gewesen sein, dass das höchste Pathetische auch nur aesthetisches Spiel bei ihnen gewesen wäre, da bei uns die Naturwahrheit mitwirken muss, um ein solches Werk hervorzubringen?’ Diese so tief sinnige letzte Frage dürfen wir jetzt, nach unseren herrlichen Erfahrungen, bejahen . . .”).

⁴¹ The text is the ancestor to BT §7, ibid.: 60: “Here, when the danger to his [i.e., Hamlet’s, the “Dionysian man’s”] will is greatest, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the *sublime*, as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity.” (KSA 1: 57: “Hier, in dieser höchsten Gefahr des Willens, naht sich, als

Redemption, ethical salvation, the plastic image, aesthetic pleasure, beauty and sublimity⁴², all wrung from a catharsis of pity and fear, pain, and suffering, are the hallmarks of Greek tragedy even for Nietzsche. Nietzsche has not overthrown classicism. He has merely redescribed it. Nor is his account terribly original, at least in its most general contours.⁴³

Is catharsis an *Apolline* principle, as Silk and Stern suggest?⁴⁴ There is much to say in favor of this reading – for starters, the fact that Apollo does control access to the Dionysian, as I pointed out above, and then the evidence of a relevant precedent in a work that Nietzsche surely consulted, Karl Otfried Müller’s commentary on the *Eumenides* from 1833⁴⁵ – even if their idea stems from a dissatisfaction with Nietzsche’s apparent inconsistency. Unhappy with this account, because it leaves out the role of the Dionysian, Silk and Stern find Nietzsche’s allegiances “confused” (Silk and Stern

rettende, heilkundige Zauberin, die *Kunst*; sie allein vermag jene Ekelgedanken über das Entsetzliche oder Absurde des Daseins in Vorstellungen umzubiegen, mit denen sich leben lässt: diese sind das *Erhabene* als die künstlerische Bändigung des Entsetzlichen und das *Komische* als die künstlerische Entladung vom Ekel des Absurden”).

⁴² Readers instinctively identify Apollo with the realm of beauty alone, as *BT* §3 (ibid.: 44; *KSA* 1: 37) might suggest: “the beauty of mere appearance”, etc., but in fact sublimity and beauty are mutually imbricated, both in classicism (e.g. “sublime beauty”, “erhabene Schönheit” in Winckelmann, *Denkmale der Kunst des Altertums* (1767) §144 in Winckelmann 1825-1829: 7: 211; similarly, Winckelmann 1985 [1755]: 37 and Winckelmann 1972: 149) and for Nietzsche. See *BT* §21, “Thus the Apolline tears us out of the Dionysian universality and lets us find delight in individuals; it attaches our pity to them, and by means of them it satisfies *our sense of beauty which longs for great and sublime forms*” (ibid.: 128; trans. slightly adapted) (*KSA* 1: 137: “So entreisst uns das Apollinische der dionysischen Allgemeinheit und entzückt uns für die Individuen; an diese fesselt es unsre Mitleidserregung, durch diese befriedigt es den nach grossen und erhabenen Formen lechzenden Schönheitssinn”).

⁴³ Nietzsche’s proximity to classicism is not well understood. See Porter 2000b, ch.’s 4 and 5 for an initial discussion.

⁴⁴ Silk and Stern 1981: 271: “The ‘shudders’” experienced by the spectator “can only be Apolline shudders, just as the terror . . . must be Apolline terror. Pity and fear, then, belong to the Apolline, which we had taken to be the sphere of the aesthetic in the Kantian-Schopenhauerian sense of disinterested contemplation”.

⁴⁵ See n. 12 above. And see Müller 1833: 147: “The real purifier, however, remains . . . Phoebus Apollo, the god of light, who teaches how to overcome the terrors of the dark world and nature through heroic battle or apotropaic rites” (“Der eigentliche Reimiger aber bleibt . . . Phöbos-Apollon, der helle Gott, der die Schrecknisse der dunklen Welt und Natur durch heldenmüthigen Kampf oder averruncirende Gebräuche überwinden lehrt”). Hence, one of his nicknames, *Katharsios*, “the Purifier” or “the cathartic god”. Catharsis – whether Apolline or Dionysian (see ibid.: “the Dionysian catharsis”; “die *Dionysische Katharsis*”, also ibid., 191-2) – is a leitmotif in Müller’s commentary, and an important if not well recognized predecessor to Bernays and to Nietzsche both (Porter 2015: 36).

1981: 271). His allegiances are confusing, but they are not confused. They are, moreover, consistent with his other remarks on catharsis from later on in his career, for instance in *Daybreak*, where, as we saw, the Greeks of the tragic age are shown to be reluctant witnesses to their own susceptibility to cathartic discharge, or in the notes to *We Philologists* from 1875, not quoted above, where cathartic discharge is said to be a necessity and a “Grundgesetz” (a constitutional principle or law) of the Greek nature (5 [147], KSA 8: 79). The Greek nature, Nietzsche explains in the same entry, “is not disavowed, it is merely *brought into a state of orderliness* – it is confined to certain cults and days. This is the source of all liberality in antiquity; a controlled discharge of the natural forces was sought out, not their destruction and negation”⁴⁶. This release had to be moderated “lest it kill everything”. The entry from 1875 (5 [146]) sums up quite fairly Nietzsche’s view of cathartic release among the Greeks. Periodic release was an event that had two sides, both positive and negative, each side moderating but also enhancing the other. Achieving this control was very much an Apolline affair, a matter of balance rather than imbalance, and a delicate one at that. It would be a mistake to assume that the productive forces of the Greeks existed outside of their periodic discharge. Quite the contrary, the regulation of these timed releases produced the energies that were being brought into the Greek world and its culture, causing each new release to be enhanced by the last, in a controlled rhythm of restriction and discharge. Tragic catharsis was merely one aspect of this defining physiognomy of the Greeks. But it was also their most recognizable aspect, at least in the modern era.

The structure of the tragic experience as this was shaped in the wake of Aristotle down into the nineteenth century remains fundamentally recognizable in Nietzsche’s revision and adaptation of it, and it is at times disturbingly close to what it would replace. Indeed, the very way in which Nietzsche poses the puzzle of tragedy as an aesthetic problem – the problem of how pain can stimulate aesthetic pleasure – is an inheritance of this tradition. The potency and value of each of the operative terms and concepts have changed and have been assigned new roles in *The Birth of Tragedy*. And yet, for all the changes, we can in no way claim that pity and fear are more potent or more dangerous for Nietzsche than they were for Aristotle. They rage through the spectator, but ultimately leave her relieved and “happy”: “In spite of fear and pity, we are the happy living beings . . .” (*BT* §17, Nietzsche 1967: 105).⁴⁷ They are, ultimately, *aesthetic* states, and their net effect is one

⁴⁶ KSA 8: 79: “[W]ird nicht weggeleugnet, sondern nur *ingeordnet*, auf bestimmte Culte und Tage beschränkt. Dies ist die Wurzel aller Freisinnigkeit des Alterthums; man suchte für die Naturkräfte eine mässige Entladung, nicht eine Vernichtung und Verneinung”.

⁴⁷ KSA 1: 109: “Trotz Furcht und Mitleid sind wir die glücklich-Lebendigen”.

of pleasure, not pain.⁴⁸

There is much that is in fact conventional and inherited in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In a very real sense Nietzsche is rejoining the ancient line of inquiry into tragedy's complicated relation to the emotions, which perhaps are better included under a broader set of terms, for example "terror" or "shuddering", "painful desire", and "identification" with another's suffering ("co-suffering"), all of which are in play in Aristotle and in Aristotle's predecessors (for example Gorgias).⁴⁹ These are "the highest and most intense emotions" that the tragic performance excites, channels, and discharges. "Wonder" is everywhere abundant, as are beauty and sublimity, insofar as we can count these as emotions.⁵⁰ Excitement and discharge are the poles between which these various states unfold, and not only for the ancients but also in modern classicism. Naming as they do both the mechanism and the physiology of

⁴⁸ A point nicely confirmed by Lacoue-Labarthe 1993: 105.

⁴⁹ See Gorgias, *Helen* §9 (*DK* 82B11, 9): ἤς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσήλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολὺδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθήης, ἐπ' ἄλλοτριῶν τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίας καὶ δυσπραγίας ἰδιὸν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἡ ψυχὴ. "To its listeners poetry brings a fearful shuddering, a tearful pity, and a grieving desire, while through its words the soul feels its own feelings (lit.: "suffers/experiences a suffering/experience of its own") for good and bad fortune in the affairs and lives of others" (trans. Gagarin and Woodruff 1995: 192). And see Halliwell 2002: 231: "Nietzsche was only too well aware that pity was regarded by the Greeks as central to the experience of tragedy" and *ibid.*, n. 64 (on Gorgias).

⁵⁰ *BT* §4, Nietzsche 1967: 45-6: "At the same time, however, we encounter Apollo as the deification of the *principium individuationis* in which alone the eternally attained goal of the primordial unity, its release and redemption through semblance, comes about; with sublime gestures he shows us that the whole world of agony is needed in order to compel the individual to generate the releasing and redemptive vision and then, lost in contemplation of that vision, to sit calmly in his rocking boat in the midst of the sea" (*KSA* 1: 39-40: "Apollo aber tritt uns wiederum als die Vergöttlichung des principii individuationis entgegen, in dem allein das ewig erreichte Ziel des Ur-Einen, seine Erlösung durch den Schein, sich vollzieht: er zeigt uns, mit erhabenen Gebärden, wie die ganze Welt der Qual nöthig ist, damit durch sie der Einzelne zur Erzeugung der erlösenden Vision gedrängt werde und dann, ins Anschauen derselben versunken, ruhig auf seinem schwankenden Kahne, inmitten des Meeres, sitze"); *BT* §20, *ibid.*: 98: "Tragedy is seated amid this excess of life, in the midst of this superabundance of life, suffering, and delight, *in sublime ecstasy*, listening to a distant, melancholy singing which tells of the Mothers of Being, whose names are delusion, will, woe" (*KSA* 1: 132 "Die Tragödie sitzt inmitten dieses Ueberflusses an Leben, Leid und Lust, in erhabener Entzückung, sie horcht einem fernen schwermüthigen Gesange - er erzählt von den Müttern des Seins, deren Namen lauten: Wahn, Wille, Wehe"). See "the sublime, whereby the terrible is tamed by artistic means" (*The Dionysiac World View*, §3), quoted above. Note too that sublimity is epicene: it belongs to both Apolline and Dionysian states - because these are ultimately one.

the process, these last two terms, excitement and discharge, could be said to characterize the underlying pathology of the tragic effect (“Wirkung”) in its classical and its classicizing forms.⁵¹

With this last term (“Wirkung”), Nietzsche’s theory of tragedy recalls the one predecessor who is most thought to have been the target of that theory, Jacob Bernays, whose essay from 1857, *Outlines of Aristotle’s Lost Work on the Effect of Tragedy (Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie)* dominated the problem in Classics circles at the time and even into the present. Bernays’ implied presence in *The Birth of Tragedy* has been detected in the past based on Nietzsche’s use of the term “Entladung” (“discharge”), possibly as a translation of *katharsis*. It’s not clear how one might reconstruct Bernays’ theory based on this one term, even if we could claim that Nietzsche’s displacement of “discharge” is one more example of his revision of a *status quo* position, on a par with the revisions pointed out above.⁵² The problem is that Nietzsche is not in fact opposing Bernays’ theory. He is absorbing it into his own. (A notebook entry from 1869-70 already suggests as much: “Perhaps starting out from the Aristotelian definition. (Bernays)”.⁵³ This was Bernays’ own impression as well, or so it would appear from a letter written by Nietzsche to Rohde in 1872 in which it is said that Bernays was reportedly complaining that Nietzsche had borrowed the gist of his own ideas, having merely “greatly exaggerated” (“stark übertrieben”) them.⁵⁴

Proof that Nietzsche is backing and not refuting Bernays is to be found in any number of concepts and terms that are not normally associated with Bernays, though they come right out of his playbook and then find their way into Nietzsche’s own discussions of catharsis. Although Bernays is mostly remembered today for his apparent reduction of catharsis to a medical form of purgation of harmful emotions, above all those emotions that are brought to the surface by pity and fear in tragedy, this is not in fact what Bernays’ theory is about. He reads catharsis as involving a positive heightening and expansion, and not a removal, let alone normalization, of emotional and psy-

⁵¹ Cf. *BT* §3: “[D]ie höchste Wirkung der apollinischen Cultur” (*KSA* 1: 37); §12: “[D]ie tragische Wirkung” (*KSA* 1: 83); §22: “[D]ie Wirkung der Tragödie” (*KSA* 1: 142); etc. See also Nietzsche’s remark about Goethe in §22 (*KSA* 1: 142-3), quoted earlier.

⁵² Därmann 2005: 127-34 claims that Nietzsche borrowed and radically revised the meaning of Bernays’ central term, “Entladung”. Cf. Most 2009: 62: “One might even go so far as to maintain that the principle and foundational idea of Nietzsche’s book could only have arisen out of Bernays’ concept of Entladung and is only intelligible against this background”. Further, Ugolini 2012: 94-5.

⁵³ “Vielleicht von der aristotelischen Definition auszugehn. (Bernays.)”. Cf. 3[38], *KSA* 7: 71.

⁵⁴ Letter to Erwin Rohde, 7 December, 1872 (*KSB* 4: 97).

chological potentials “that takes in every kind of affection in the soul” (Bernays 1857: 138, 143, 171, 176). To be sure, motional heightening was an element of every major treatment of catharsis from Lessing onward. What sets Bernays’ theory apart are two related considerations: first, he understands “discharge” not as a purgation and quieting of emotions, or as the elimination of undesirable quantities of affect, but as a form of excitation (“Sollicitation”) and release (“Entladung”) of inner states, both physical and psychological, that lie dormant, waiting to be expressed, and which are, moreover, at once admirable and desirable to maintain and even to nurture; secondly, he uncouples catharsis from tragedy so as to arrive at a larger theory of emotional response, one that is not morbidly pathological, but is rather a kind of pathology in the most general sense of the term – in the sense of involving the *pathē*, understood as “predominantly psychological affections” (“vorwiegend psychologische Affectionen”, Bernays 1857: 161). The ultimate thrust of Bernays’ analysis is thus, surprisingly, psychological, not medical or somatic. An anthropology of the Greeks is invoked to explain the Greeks’ susceptibility to *ekstasis*: their Oriental traits, their proneness to excitation (“Erregbarkeit”), their comparative lack of self-control, their cognitive immaturity, which is to say their lack of a firmly formed self-consciousness (ibid.: 175), all of which enabled the Greeks to step outside themselves and to be susceptible to rapturous and ecstatic states of mind (“das Aussersichsein”) in a way that is no longer quite possible in the modern world. The fundamental processes remain psychologically valid today;⁵⁵ they simply transpire along more domesticated routes – typically secular ones – and hence are no longer taken for “holy and divine” (“für heilig und göttlich”) states of mind (ibid.).

Thus, Bernays’ theory is less a specific consideration of tragic catharsis than it is a general investigation into the most vital affections known to mankind, all of which derive, he claims, from a universal, primordial affection (“Urpathos”) that is built directly into the human capacity for sensation and that resonates with “the lively power of movement in the universe at large” (“Die im Weltall rege Kraft der Bewegung”, ibid.: 179).⁵⁶ The result of

⁵⁵ “Catharsis emerges as a broadly conceived universal, one that is congenial to both ancient and modern poetry” (“ . . . eine weitsinnige, mit antiker wie moderner Poesie befreundete Universalität an der Katharsis heraustritt”, Bernays 1857: 175).

⁵⁶ The phrase is repeated by Yorck von Wartenburg (1866: 22): “[D]en im Weltall regen Kräften der Bewegung anheimgegebenen Menschen”. Yorck captures some of the essentials and much of the language of Bernays’ theory, which he mostly accepts, and combines these with a view of the orgiastic religious cult of Dionysus, which is only briefly touched on by Bernays (1857: 169, 175, 179), but which would have been of obvious interest to Nietzsche. The connection with Yorck has been well examined. See most recently Agell 2006: 162-70. Nevertheless, Yorck follows the purification line on catharsis (“So ist durch Erregung von Leid und Schrecken eine Reinigung von diesen

this affection is twofold. First, every contact with sensation is ecstatic at its core: “All forms of *pathos* [affection] are essentially ecstatic; in all of them a person is put outside of himself” (“alle Arten von Pathos sind wesentlich ekstatisch; durch sie alle wird der Mensch ausser sich gesetzt”, *ibid.*: 176). Every affection, because it contains an ecstatic element, also contains a hedonic element, however painful the object that elicits it may appear to be (*ibid.*: 178). There is a pleasure to this return, which Bernays calls an assuagement (“Erleichterung”, “Beschwichtigung”) of the original and painful disturbance (143, 176). The effects of discharge persist as a feeling of painful – pleasurable release (rather than relief); and there is a pleasure to be found in the very sources of pain. Bernays is at once basing his theory on Aristotle while also elaborating freely on his view of pleasure and pain. Pleasure, Bernays says, “depends upon a sudden disturbance (“eine plötzliche Erschütterung” [“jarring, convulsing”]) and [a] restoration of psychic equilibrium (“Gleichgewicht”)” (*ibid.*: 178), and the process occurs whenever a force within the soul (or mind) “erupts for brief moments in pleasurable shuddering” (“für Augenblicke in lustvolles Schaudern ausbreche”, *ibid.*: 184). The attractions such a theory of sensation would have held for Nietzsche are obvious. But there is a second consequence of Bernays’ theory, which would have made it even more irresistible to Nietzsche.

According to Bernays, ecstatic catharsis at the level of sensation brings with it a larger, quasi-religious component. Catharsis brings about a universalization of the self as the self expands (“erweitert”) in two distinct ways: first, through *ek-stasis* (by being “placed outside itself”, “ausser sich gesetzt”, *ibid.*: 176), and then by an identification with the whole of humanity (“die ganze Menschheit”, *ibid.*: 182). Ecstasy is an “excitation of universal human affections” (“Erregung universal menschlicher Affecte”), which are experienced at the deepest level, that of “the primordial form of the universally human character” (“Urform des allgemein menschlichen Charakters”), which is to say, that of an “Urpathos” (*ibid.*: 179, 181). In tragedy, this last stage is achieved by reaching out to others through identification *via* pity, and then by “recogniz[ing] [one’s] position vis-à-vis the universe” (“sich seine Stellung zum All . . . in der blossen Anschauung vergegenwärtigt”, *ibid.*: 184) as the self “stands face to face with the frightfully sublime laws of the universe and its . . . incomprehensible power” (“es sich den furchtbar erhabenen Gesetzen des Alls und ihrer die Menschheit umfassenden unbegreiflichen

Affekten herbeigeführt”, 1866: 22 [“In this way, pain and terror are purged through the excitation of these [same] affections”]), which Nietzsche, following Bernays, rejects. True to form, Nietzsche draws freely on a whole host of antecedents in the German tradition, including Karl Otfried Müller (quoted above), in order to produce a uniquely original product of his own.

Macht von Angesicht zu Angesicht gegenüberstelle”, *ibid.*: 182). This vision of the universe, which is in principle available to all forms of cathartic ecstasy, produces not fear (φοβείσθαι) but trembling (or shuddering: *Schauer*, φρίττειν) and shock (*Erschütterung*), and then releases pleasure (“Lust”) (*ibid.*). In the last analysis, Bernays’ theory of *katharsis* is a theory of the ecstatic sublime. It is a theory of the ecstatic powers of life itself, which is to say, a theory that discovers a life-affirming ecstasy in the sublime experience of existence itself. All of this defines what is a truly cathartic experience for Bernays, which for him is neither “moral” nor “medical” (*BT* §22, Nietzsche 1967: 132 = *KSA* I: 142), but is rather at once the physiological, psychological, and metaphysical effect of what it is to be a sensate human creature.⁵⁷

Nietzsche’s theory of catharsis is likewise a theory of the sublime that captures everything that Bernays’ theory seeks to capture: the ecstasy that is caused by one’s being exposed to the mysteries of nature and the universe, the primordial qualities of *pathos* in its “Ur-form”, the fear and trembling but also pleasure and release that the experience brings, the healing, life-affirming ingredients of this potential, and finally the culturally specific factors that shape the experience, which, to be sure, is not an everyday experience (any more than it was for Bernays). Rather, is an everyday *potential*, one that we both crave and fear to undergo. Nietzsche once worshipped Bernays as “the most brilliant representative of a philology of the future” (“den glänzendsten Vertreter einer Philologie der Zukunft”), most certainly on the basis of the latter’s work on catharsis.⁵⁸ *The Birth of Tragedy* pays homage to this judgment, and then moves on from there. Nietzsche has become what Bernays had presaged – a philologist of the future.⁵⁹

Abbreviations

DK Diels, Hermann and Walther Kranz (eds) (1951-2), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Berlin: Weidmann.

KGW Colli, Giorgio and Mazzino Montinari (eds) (1967-), *Friedrich Nietzsche*.

⁵⁷ And not a strangely pathological human being. That Bernays’ theory is neither medical nor moral is a fact that we can be sure Nietzsche would have recognized, just as some of Bernays’s best contemporary readers did. See Porter 2015 for details. The reference in *BT* §22 would in that case be a concession to popular outraged misreadings of Bernays and, additionally, a way of camouflaging his real debt to this great predecessor in classics.

⁵⁸ Letter to Paul Deussen, 2 June 1868 (*KSB* 2: 284). For the suggestion, see Porter 2014: 46, n. 10.

⁵⁹ Thanks to Gherardo Ugolini for the invitation to contribute to this journal issue and for encouraging comments on this essay.

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