



## Nietzsche on Art and Life

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### CHAPTER

## 8 Attuned, Transcendent, and Transfigured: Nietzsche's Appropriation of Schopenhauer's Aesthetic Psychology

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### Abstract

One of Nietzsche's central contentions regarding the practical-existential import of art relates to his idea of aesthetic *transfiguration*, the capacity of art to alchemize the meaningless sufferings of mere natural 'existence' into the aesthetically magnificent struggle that is human 'life'. Like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer assessed 'art from the perspective of life'. As Schopenhauer is standardly read, however, his conception of aesthetic experience has little in common with that offered by Nietzsche. Against the standard reading, this chapter argues, Nietzsche's phenomenology of aesthetic experience—and in particular his idea that aesthetic transfiguration can invest human experience with positive value—is essentially continuous with Schopenhauer's own.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, art, aesthetic experience, transfiguration

**Subject:** Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art, Social and Political Philosophy, 19th-Century Philosophy

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With regard to all aesthetic values I now avail myself of this principal distinction: I ask in each... case 'is it hunger or is it superfluity which has here become creative?'

(GS, 370)

The mother of...the fine arts [is] superfluity and abundance. As their father,...genius, which is itself a kind of superfluity, that of the power of knowledge beyond the measure required for the service of the will.

(WWR, II, 410)

# 1 Schopenhauer's Legacy: The Problem of Existence

## 1.1

Certainly Schopenhauer, like Nietzsche, regarded 'art from the perspective of life'. 'Not merely philosophy but also the fine arts work at bottom towards the solution of the problem of existence', Schopenhauer observed. The significance of art resides in its ability to articulate and episodically to ameliorate that problem; hence 'the result of every...artistic apprehension of things is an expression more of the true nature of life and of existence, more an answer to the question, "What is life?". Every genuine and successful work of art answers this question in its own way' (WWR, II, 406). On this point, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are of one mind: the value of art lies not in 'l'art pour l'art', but in the answers it provides to the problem of existence. As Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are standardly read, however, the answers they find in art have little in common. Against that standard reading, I will argue here that Nietzsche's conception of aesthetic experience—and in particular his conception of aesthetic transfiguration—is essentially continuous with Schopenhauer's own. They differ, to be sure, in respect of the normative implications they draw from the nature of aesthetic experience. But while each finds a different moral in the story of art, the story *itself*—the story Nietzsche inherited from Schopenhauer—remains much the same.

## 1.2

Nietzsche's first published response to Schopenhauer in *The Birth of Tragedy* officially ignores the detail of the latter's aesthetic theory altogether. Instead, Nietzsche there attempts a synthesis of Schopenhauer's idealistic metaphysics with his own aesthetic model in which representation and Will (as Apollonian and Dionysian forces) are fused in the work of art. The result is not a notable success in either literary or philosophical terms: it is a disorderly confusion of inspired phenomenological observation and art criticism, weighed down by a ball-and-chain of second-hand metaphysics. As Nietzsche himself remarked in his 1886 Preface to the re-issue of *The Birth of Tragedy*:

Is it clear what task I first dared to touch with this book? How I regret now that in those days I still lacked the courage...to permit myself in every way an individual language of my own for such individual views and hazards—and that instead I tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas strange and new valuations which were basically at odds with Kant's and Schopenhauer's spirit and taste!

(BT, 'Attempt', 6)

Nietzsche also proposes in that Preface, however, that his first essay foreshadows his subsequent philosophical development in that it 'betrays a spirit who will fight at any risk whatever the *moral* interpretation and significance of existence' (BT, 'Attempt', 5). Already in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that is, he appreciated that from the standpoint of morality, 'life must continually and inevitably be in the wrong, because life is something essentially amoral' (BT, 'Attempt', 5). This 'moral perspective' (and the Christian tradition with which it is bound up) Nietzsche condemns as "'a will to negate life", a secret instinct of annihilation, a principle of decay, diminution, and slander...the danger of dangers' (BT, 'Attempt', 5), and he claims that his hostility to it was already evident in his first published work. This self-portrait of the 1886 Preface seems to me largely accurate; I do not intend to challenge Nietzsche's claim that *The Birth of Tragedy* contained the seeds of his later critique of traditional ethics.<sup>1</sup> But to what extent did Nietzsche's later thought really leave behind Schopenhauer's account of aesthetic experience, as he seems also to suppose?

Schopenhauer's aesthetics are presented in Book III of *The World as Will and Representation* as a theoretical prelude to his ethics; aesthetic experience, Schopenhauer claims, is a kind of finger-exercise preparing one for the ultimate metaphysical feat of transcending individuality, desire, and will. This is one sense in which all art 'works at bottom towards the solution of the problem of existence' (*WWR*, II, 406). At the same time, however, Schopenhauer, like Nietzsche, portrays art as a redemptive activity and a way of *resisting* the standard, pessimistic implications of evaluative nihilism—a reprieve from the bleak condition of *ein unendlich Streben*. How exactly is aesthetic experience supposed to do that? Schopenhauer's short answer to that question is that in such experience 'knowledge' (our cognitive faculty) 'tears itself free from the service of the will' (*WWR*, I, 178), liberating us from our usual preoccupation with practical ends and aims:

When...an external cause or inward disposition suddenly raises us out of the endless stream of willing, and snatches knowledge from the thralldom of the will, the attention is now no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from their relation to the will. Thus it considers things without interest, with subjectivity.

(*WWR*, I, 196)

Passages such as this have suggested to many readers that, for Schopenhauer, aesthetic experience is a purely cognitive, affect-free affair. This impression is reinforced by Schopenhauer's repeated allusions to the subject of aesthetic experience as a 'pure knowing subject'. In Books I and II of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer sharply distinguishes 'knowledge' as a wholly cognitive faculty from 'will', a wholly conative one, and with this reading in view it is hard to imagine how Nietzsche could *not* abandon Schopenhauer's aesthetic psychology. After all (and setting aside his 'scientific' middle period in *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak*) Nietzsche consistently presents aesthetic experience as an essentially passionate, life-affirming affair—as 'life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility' (*TI*, X, 5). Schopenhauer, by contrast, plainly does wish to locate aesthetic experience as a preparatory stage-post to the greater project of resignation, and he conceives of aesthetic experience as a vehicle of liberation from the will and desire in *some* sense or other. That experience is, for instance, cast as an intimation of 'how blessed must be the life of a man in whom the will is silenced not for a few moments...but for ever' (*WWR*, I, 390). Nothing, it seems, could be further from Nietzsche's conception of the aesthetic as a state in which 'a man enriches everything from out of his own abundance; what he sees, what he wills, he sees...overladen with power' (*TI*, X, 9). It is thus natural to suppose that Schopenhauer's aesthetic psychology must be as much at odds with Nietzsche's wider agenda as are his ethics. In particular, it seems reasonable to suppose that the account of aesthetic experience developed in Nietzsche's mature work (especially Part V of *The Gay Science*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *Ecce Homo*, and the notes assembled as *The Will to Power*) constitutes a radical departure from Schopenhauer's.

Nonetheless, I shall argue here that on closer inspection, one finds that Nietzsche's aesthetic phenomenology does not actually leave its Schopenhauerian origins far behind. In particular, Nietzsche owes to Schopenhauer the key features of what is arguably his most central aesthetic concept, viz., that of aesthetic *transfiguration*. The idea that aesthetic transfiguration can invest human experience with positive value—that despite its suffering, strife, and pointlessness life can be 'aesthetically justified'—is a thought already implicit in Schopenhauer's account of artistic activity. Nietzsche did not, I believe, achieve a significantly different conception of aesthetic experience from that he inherited from Schopenhauer. Yet that may turn out to be a virtue, not a failing, of his project.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Illustrating Transfiguration: Torquato Tasso

Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems...that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet.

(*TI*, X, 5)

### 2.1

Art is valued for its transformative powers, and in particular for its potential to transform human experience into something worth affirming. This is not a novel idea; theorists from Plato to the present day have recognized that, in the hands of a master, artistry can refashion what is otherwise ugly or banal into a thing of grandeur and beauty. The special genius of a Sophocles or a Dante or a Tolstoy is to take as materials the more painful and fearful aspects of our experience and to make of them something magnificent. As Nietzsche observed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, classical tragedies vividly exemplify this idealizing capacity of artistic activity, putting dreadful events and insalubrious characters into the service of some of the most noble and thrilling narratives of literary history. But while tragedy may provide a paradigm of transfiguration, the basic capacity is, for Nietzsche, a feature of *all* art that deserves the name. It is precisely because of its transfigurative power that art plays the vital role it does for Nietzsche: through art, we learn to see human experience for what it is, and yet to love and honour it—we learn to view life honestly, yet optimistically. But what exactly is transfiguration and how is it realized through the creation and experience of works of art?

Aesthetic transfiguration features in Nietzsche's work in two, related contexts: first, there is the transfiguration by the work of art of the material of which it treats—its content or subject. Secondly, there is self-transfiguration—the project by which we can exploit aesthetic strategies to transfigure ourselves, acting as artists in a broad sense of that term, recreating our own characters and destinies. These two are not, of course, unrelated; the latter kind of transfiguring relies on some of the same resources as the former, and works of art play an important causal role in Nietzsche's account of self-transfiguration. I am concerned here, in the first instance, with the first form of transfiguration: the way in which artworks effect a transfiguration of their target or content. That said, I begin, however, with a work that illustrates both: Goethe's dramatic masterpiece, *Torquato Tasso*.

### 2.2

Nietzsche described Goethe as 'the last German for whom [he felt] any reverence' (*TI*, X, 51), and Schopenhauer used Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* to illustrate his claim that artistic 'genius proper rests on the absolute strength and vigour of the intellect' (*WWR*, II, 283). On a biographical level, the composing of *Torquato Tasso* certainly required 'strength and vigour' of its author; during the years of its composition Goethe's personal circumstances paralleled in striking ways the difficult historical ones of its protagonist. Both were bound by financial pressures to the service of philistine noblemen; both occupied the ambivalent social space of the highly talented, yet low-born; both harboured amorous longings for hopelessly unattainable, aristocratic women; both struggled in their daily lives and their art to reconcile the contradictory demands of worldly ambitions and artistic ideals; and while each was valued by his benefactors for the prestige that he brought to the courts, neither could hope to be considered a true equal: Tasso was forever the indigent son of an inspired but failed chancer, and Goethe would always be a burgher's son. The ensuing conflicts, fears, and frustrations that marked Tasso's tragic life—and which very likely contributed to his eventual madness and early death—did not, however, defeat Goethe. He turned them into art, making of his own life a tale of transfiguration in which banal and luckless beginnings

eventually yield a triumphant and grand biography—a tale of bringing style, shape, purpose, and beauty to the hapless accidents of nature.

Likewise, artistic transfiguration is the principal theme of *Torquato Tasso*. The Italian poet, Tasso, is portrayed as an inspired, idealistic genius, spiritually imprisoned by the wealthy and powerful Courts on whom he relies. His remarkable talents are both admired and exploited by his commercial masters; he is beholden to a world of political and social complexities in which his genius is misunderstood, and his social naiveté puts him utterly out of his depth. In Goethe's play, this hostile world is distilled in the figure of Antonio, a scheming Court advisor and politician who is the epitome of the Machiavellian Renaissance statesman, ever ready to justify the means by the end. Antonio is the ultimate usurer: he represents the 'real-world' forces of expediency and profit, in polar opposition to Tasso's ideal, poetic visions—forces that drive Tasso first to rage and then near to madness. In this detail, Goethe's art does not depart far from life: the historical Antonio in fact did much to undermine Tasso's favour with his principal benefactor (Duke Alphonso II), and Tasso was probably a victim of adult schizophrenia. He suffered psychotic and paranoid episodes from his late teens, and was subject to volatile and often bizarre outbursts which estranged him from his supporters and eventually contributed to his death.

p. 169 Goethe's drama becomes historically inventive, however, in the dynamic of reconciliation it develops between Tasso and Antonio, culminating in an enlightened moment of recognition in the final scene. That scene follows one of climactic conflict, in which Tasso is provoked to draw his sword on Antonio, a transgression ↪ for which he is banished from the Court, isolated and destitute. Antonio regrets his provocations and has second thoughts, as does the beneficent Duke; at the Duke's behest Antonio goes to Tasso to reason with and calm him. He recognizes that the grandeur of his Court needs Tasso's inspiration and genius, and that the poet cannot survive and flourish without the Court. At the play's dramatic culmination, Antonio takes Tasso's hand, and Tasso responds with a metaphorical acknowledgement of their mutual dependence, affection, and respect:

Oh, noble man! thou standest firm and calm,  
While I am like the tempest driven wave.  
But be not boastful of thy strength. Reflect!  
Nature, whose mighty power has fixed the rock,  
Gives to the wave its instability.  
She sends her storm, the passive wave is driven,  
And rolls and swells, and falls in billowy foam.  
Yet in this very wave the glorious sun  
Mirrors his splendor, and the quiet stars  
Upon its heaving bosom gently rest.  
Dimmed is the splendor, vanished is the calm!—  
In danger's hour I know myself no longer,  
Nor am I now ashamed of the confession.  
The helm is broken, and on every side  
The reeling vessel splits. The riven planks,  
Bursting asunder, yawn beneath my feet!  
Thus with my outstretched arms I cling to thee!  
So doth the shipwrecked mariner at last  
Cling to the rock whereon his vessel struck.

(Act V, v. 3434–53)

With this reconciliation of contradictory forces, Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* reveals itself as a drama of transfiguration on more than one level. In the narrative, Tasso and Antonio transform a destructive conflict

into a union of opposites, through their mutual recognition of the way in which each is necessary to the other; in Goethe's own life, the drama presciently charts the course of the author's psychological negotiation between the bitter facts of worldly survival and those of poetic transcendence. And on a third level, *Torquato Tasso* provides the spectator with his own opportunity for transformative thought, offering him a vision of a tragic life which ennobles and elevates it beyond its natural circumstances.

p. 170 'Life is *never* beautiful', Schopenhauer observed, 'but only in the pictures of it, namely in the transfiguring mirror of art or of poetry' (*WWR*, II, 345). Within Goethe's mirror, Tasso's life is no longer an arbitrary and pointless tale ↵ of suffering and distress. Given a coherent form and meaningful trajectory by Goethe's artistry, it now illustrates for us certain essential, timeless truths—certain universals—of human psychology. In Nietzsche's terms, life is 'idealized' by Goethe's art: both creator and spectator are implicated in a move of aesthetic transformation, in which natural circumstances that are morally abhorrent, incoherent, and personally distressing are made aesthetically intelligible. And we, being creatures that delight in understanding ourselves and our place in the universe, find that transfigured tale very beautiful indeed. How exactly does Goethe's drama bring all of that about? How exactly does this work—or any work of art—lead us to reconceive nature's grim offerings in terms that elicit our admiration and endorsement? As Nietzsche asked, 'What means have we for making things beautiful, attractive and desirable', given that 'they are never so in themselves' (*GS*, 299)? His answer is aesthetic transfiguration.

### 2.3

Nietzsche's account of the transformative power of art differs in detail from his earliest to his last works, but from start to finish it is what makes art 'the truly *metaphysical* activity of man' (*BT*, 'Attempt', 5, 22). A 'metaphysical activity' is, at the least, an activity affecting our metaphysical assumptions and beliefs—the highly general commitments in terms of which experience is both had and interpreted. In this sense, 'doing' metaphysics is not so much a matter of endorsing this or that belief as a matter of circumscribing, articulating, and revising the framework within which our beliefs arise. If creating and appreciating art, or at least good art, is such an activity, then one sense of what it means for art to be 'transfigurative' is clear enough: it is capable of altering the framework within which emerge certain of our beliefs, and specifically our evaluative beliefs.

What is less clear is just what that might mean in *psychological* terms. By what specific psychological operations does art effect fundamental changes in our evaluative framework? Consider Goethe's drama, for instance: how exactly does one's engagement with it work to reconfigure the way in which one conceives the tragedy of Tasso's troubled nature and his conflicted relationship to Antonio? Goethe provides us with no new facts of the case; neither does he romanticize the known facts, making them more palatable or less devastating for the protagonist. Yet *Torquato Tasso* vividly illustrates the paradox of tragedy, so-called: we find pleasure in engaging with Tasso's grim trajectory as Goethe tells it.

p. 171 On one level, we might think of aesthetic experience as providing an alternative framework of evaluative concepts and standards—*aesthetic* concepts and standards—in terms of which to assess human experience and its objects. This is surely part of what Nietzsche had in mind when he recommended that we 'view ↵ morality from the perspective of art' (*BT*, 'Attempt', 5). Aesthetic evaluation proceeds in largely different terms than moral evaluation; the values in which it deals move us 'beyond [the concepts and standards of] good and evil' to the values of, *inter alia*, beauty, originality, and authenticity—to the allure of created forms and the intensity and illumination of the experiences these afford. On another level, however, aesthetic experience provides a model of the phenomenology of one kind of transfiguration: the particular cognitive and affective conditions under which beautiful conceptions of human experience are constructed. So conceived, transfiguration may be characterized naturalistically, as a distinctive psychological process or complex of processes. In Sections 3 and 4 I will explore two such dimensions of transfiguration: what I call

‘attunement’ and ‘self-transcendence’. Both, I argue, are central to Nietzsche’s account of transfiguration, and both are directly inherited from Schopenhauer’s aesthetic psychology.

### 3 The Attunement Condition

In the mind of a man who is filled with his own aims, the world appears as a beautiful landscape appears on the plan of a battlefield.

(*WWR*, I, 145)

#### 3.1

We sometimes encounter works of art without attending to them properly, and even when we do so attend we may find that they fail to capture our interest or elicit a significant response. Contemporary audiences, for instance, are clearly less likely to be absorbed by Tasso’s difficulties or to resonate emotionally with the social intrigues which ensnare him than would have a struggling and impoverished poet in nineteenth-century Weimar. Great art can leave us cold. Such occasions are often mentioned as counterexamples to ‘aesthetic attitude’ theories, as evidence that even unequivocally great art can fail to elicit any distinctive form of psychological engagement. They are of no interest here, however, because they play no part in the positive phenomenologies of art offered by either Schopenhauer or Nietzsche: neither thinker has any interest in dispassionate, detached, or casual spectatorship. Their concern is with aesthetic creation and appreciation ‘proper’—namely, acts and experiences which are focused, fully attentive, and wholly involved. It may even be fair to say that these are the conditions under which an experience counts as an aesthetic one at all. Neither thinker offers an explicit argument for demarcating the territory of the aesthetic in this way, but it is clearly assumed by most of what each has to say. I, too, will assume it in my use of the term ‘aesthetic’: engaged aesthetic experience is what is here at stake. Aesthetic experience of other kinds, if such exists, is irrelevant.

So how does engaged aesthetic experience transfigure the psychology of the subject whose experience it is? Engaged experiences of works of art are often described as effecting a kind of *attunement* to the target of experience, in which the contents of the subject’s perceptual, affective, and cognitive states are largely determined by the focal object of attention: his consciousness is ‘filled’ with its target on all of these levels. This is a familiar feature of focused attunement to music, for instance, and of our experiences of dancing and moving to music. It can also occur, if less obviously, in response to a captivating novel or an arresting moment of poetry, and it is familiar enough too at the theatre and cinema. On such occasions one may be aptly described as immersed in the work, as oblivious to the world beyond it, or as ‘taken over’ by it. (Were it not so clumsy, a better term than ‘attunement’ might be ‘entrancement’, owing to its associations with hypnotic trances and states of consciousness that compromise the subject’s independent agency.)

More precisely, let us say that a subject is aesthetically attuned to a target, experiential object just when *an accurate and detailed phenomenology of his first-personal experience would make no or little mention of anything other than the object itself*. To put the same thought differently: a subject counts as attuned to a target object of attention just if there is little or nothing remaining to say about ‘what it is like’ for him to experience it, beyond itemizing the features of the object that occupy him. In aesthetic attunement, then, the distinction between the subject and the object is phenomenologically mitigated; the subject ceases (episodically) to be aware of himself as distinct from the object, and his ability to identify the content of his experience as distinct from its object is correspondingly diminished. So, for instance, if you are attuned to a performance of *Torquato Tasso* at the rapturous moment of recognition mentioned earlier, an accurate and detailed account of your first-personal psychological condition will not go far beyond being an accurate and detailed

description of the performance itself—the sights and sounds it presents, the emotions expressed, the thoughts articulated. Of course you may be subject to some responses that are elicited by, but not embodied in, the drama: you may feel pity for Tasso when what *he* expresses is not pity, but despair. But to feel that pity you must first sympathetically identify and track his despair; your elicited emotion is a second-order response to your first-order attunement to the aesthetic object.

### 3.2

p. 173 It is indisputable that Nietzsche took engaged aesthetic experience to be intense, impassioned, and cognitively captivating in something like this way. He often uses the term ‘*Rausch*’ to capture this aspect of aesthetic experience. ‘What’, he asks, characterizes ‘the psychology of the artist’? His answer is that ‘If there is to be art, any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological condition is indispensable—*Rausch*’ (TI, IX, 8). It may seem, however, that *Rausch* is a more specific or narrower concept than that of attunement. Certainly, Nietzsche’s use of ‘*Rausch*’ is, if not inconsistent, then at least highly variable in the connotations it carries in different textual contexts. That variability is reflected in the different translations offered for it. ‘*Rausch*’ is sometimes translated as ‘ecstasy’ or ‘rapture’; unfortunately, both terms carry various senses in different contexts, not all of which are appropriate. They may mean something like ‘intense joy’, in which case they sit uncomfortably as descriptions of profound attunement to the many ‘difficult’ works of art which Nietzsche identified as potential catalysts for *Rausch*—*Antigone* or *Hamlet*, or most of Wagner’s operas, for instance, as well as *Torquato Tasso*. The quasi-religious or spiritual sense of ‘ecstasy’ is somewhat better than rapture, perhaps, suggesting as it does a moving above or beyond one’s normal state of consciousness to a perspective that is affectively heightened and cognitively enlightened. But again, it implies perhaps too exclusive an association with purely positive emotions, such as elation or joy.

Another common translation of ‘*Rausch*’ is ‘intoxication’, which likewise carries more and less appropriate connotations; there is something right in its suggestion of a state in which free agency is compromised (as in drunkenness), and also in the idea that one has been overpowered by something affecting all levels of thought, feeling, and perception. As Nietzsche comments, ‘art appears in man like a force of nature and disposes of him *whether he will or no*’ (WP, 798, my emphasis). But the idea that the subject of *Rausch* is thereby cognitively impaired, or that he necessarily views the world in a distorted and defective manner, is not consistent with Nietzsche’s typical use of the term. That dimension of ‘intoxication’ sits very uneasily with the role of *Rausch* as offering profound insight and attunement to the true nature of things, and this is a role Nietzsche repeatedly mentions—from the closing sections of *The Birth of Tragedy* to *The Will to Power*. Finally, ‘*Rausch*’ has been translated as ‘frenzy’, which again succeeds in some contexts (such as Nietzsche’s references to sexual *Rausch*) but fails in others, particularly if one regards *Rausch* as closely connected with the joyous attitude of life-affirmation described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In the penultimate section of that work, for instance, the condition of passionate attunement is inextricably bound up with an attitude of life-affirmation: ‘[A]ll joy wants the eternity of all things, wants honey, wants dregs, wants drunken midnight, wants tombs, wants tomb-tears’ comfort, wants gilded evening glow’.

p. 174 We should thus be wary of forcing upon ‘*Rausch*’ a single, highly determinate interpretation. While ‘*Rausch*’ may refer, in any particular textual appearance, only to a certain species of attunement, attunement is common to them all: it is the species to which belong the many different conditions that Nietzsche names with the term. It is Nietzsche’s ‘indispensable physiological condition’ of all aesthetic activity.<sup>3</sup> Art affords us infinitely many and varied occasions for entrancement, rapture, joy, ecstasy, intoxication, and the rest; in all of them, however, one’s consciousness is fully attuned to the experiential target such that both the content and character of one’s experience are determined by it.

The protagonist of *Torquato Tasso* illustrates this phenomenon well: Tasso—representing the artistic psychology—is largely defined and distinguished by his capacity for profound attunement to his aesthetic



targets in such a way that he no longer functions as a free, deliberative agent but is, as it were, at the mercy of the experiences that are delivered to him. This loss of self-conscious agency is the source of his worldly troubles, but it is also the well-spring of his artistic creativity and insight. The ambitious Antonio, by contrast, never loses himself in this way: his intellect and imagination remain firmly harnessed to his practical, personal aims. As Schopenhauer observes,

In the contrast between Tasso and Antonio, Goethe has given us an illustration of the opposition in which...two entirely different kinds of capacity...stand to each other. The frequently observed kinship of [artistic] genius with madness rests chiefly on that very separation of intellect from the will, essential to genius yet contrary to nature.

(*WWR*, II, 387)

Schopenhauer's reference to Goethe's drama is no mere aside; he takes *Torquato Tasso* to vividly illustrate his own account of how intense attunement transfigures the subject of aesthetic experience. When aesthetically engaged with some object, Schopenhauer says, we

relinquish the ordinary way of considering things, and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason...we no longer consider the where, the when, the why and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*. ...[We] ...devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We lose ourselves entirely in this object...we forget our individuality, our will...so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one.

(*WWR*, I, 178)

p. 175 Schopenhauer here calls attention to three aspects of the attuned consciousness. First, it is a state in which the subject ceases to consider how the target is causally or conceptually related to other things (regarding it 'outside' of the principle of sufficient reason). Secondly, it is a state in which the character and content of the subject's first-personal experience is wholly determined by the target. And finally, in this state the subject ceases to be aware of himself as distinct from the object—he is no longer a subject of self-conscious thought nor (accordingly) self-directed agency. These features likewise characterize Nietzschean *Rausch* insofar as the usual ways of locating oneself in terms of spatial, temporal, and causal relations give way to, as Nietzsche once put it, a 'mysterious primal Oneness' with the object of aesthetic attention (*BT*, 17).

Are there not, however, other features of Schopenhauerian attunement which have no place in Nietzsche's account—namely, tranquillity and disinterestedness?

### 3.3

The importance Nietzsche assigns to emotion and desire in *Rausch* is often thought to radically distinguish it from the 'contemplative' aesthetic condition allegedly envisaged by Schopenhauer. Christopher Janaway claims, for instance, that 'Schopenhauer...posits an out-of-the-ordinary state, a mind whose consciousness is temporarily cleared of the will, of all desire, emotion, and felt need' (Janaway, 2009, 56). Likewise, Julian Young takes it as given that 'in Schopenhauer's account the aesthetic state is a condition of pure passivity... a cessation of all...activity' in which 'the mind becomes...a reflecting *tabula rasa*' (Young, 1992, 122). Taking much the same view, Aaron Ridley tells us that 'what is fundamentally wrong' with Schopenhauer's aesthetics is 'the misconstruction of the engagement with beauty as residing in a quite particular form of

passivity', whereas for Nietzsche, 'that engagement is not only essentially active and wilful, but, indeed,... derives from 'an erotic whirl' (Ridley 2002: 121). And even Came—in some respects an apologist for Schopenhauer's aesthetics—remarks that 'complete will-lessness' is, for Schopenhauer, a 'necessary condition of genuine aesthetic pleasure' (Came, 2009, 94). In short, there seems to be a consensus that Schopenhauerian attunement and Nietzschean *Rausch* differ greatly in respect of the role taken in each by affective states.

p. 176 The role of affect or emotion in Schopenhauer's aesthetic psychology is, however, more complicated and nuanced than this consensus would suggest. Schopenhauer, it is true, was clearly eager to forge a connection between aesthetic experience on the one hand, and his endorsement of evaluative nihilism and prescription for asceticism on the other. He clearly wants to maintain that aesthetic experience in *some way* prepares one for a wholesale resignation of ↪ the will. Books III and IV of *The World as Will and Representation* both repeatedly emphasize the former as a temporary exercise paving the way for the latter (although Schopenhauer admits that actual artists and spectators—or 'beholders', as he prefers—seldom make the transition). For instance, he famously refers to aesthetic experience as a 'Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing' (*WWR*, I, 196), and comments that it offers us a glimpse of 'how blessed must be the life of a man in whom the will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but for ever' (*WWR*, I, 390). Are such remarks, however, part of his *psychology* of aesthetic experience? Or are they rather a *metaphysical interpretation* of it, pointing ahead to the metaethics and normative prescriptions of Book IV?

It is one thing to describe an experience type; it is another to try to justify its power and significance. Schopenhauer's association of aesthetic experience with resignation is an exercise of the latter, not the former, kind. It is a *use* to which he hopes to enlist his aesthetic psychology, not a part of that psychology itself. Moreover, there is nothing in his account of aesthetic experience that *entails* the later ethical prescriptions—although Schopenhauer himself often seems unaware of that fact. Indeed, he elides altogether the quite pronounced tension between his aesthetic psychology and the ascetic denial of the will he aims to recommend.

In sum, there is a crucial difference between the will-lessness prescribed in Book IV and the aesthetic attunement of Book III, a difference that is overlooked by both the standard, 'consensus' reading of Schopenhauer and by Schopenhauer himself: aesthetic experience displays an intensely active and emotion-imbued phenomenology, even by Schopenhauer's own account. I will explain.

Contrary to the consensus reading, to be 'liberated from the will' in Schopenhauerian aesthetic experience is decidedly not to become inactive or 'will-less' in every way. Schopenhauer writes,

What is called the awakening of [artistic] genius, the hour of inspiration, the moment of rapture or exaltation [which] is nothing but the intellect's becoming free, when, relieved for a while from its service under the will, *it does not sink into inactivity of apathy but is active...entirely alone and of its own accord.*

(*WWR*, II, 380, my emphasis)

p. 177 As this passage indicates, aesthetic experience is not a state of complete 'passivity'. Rather, the subject is liberated only from a particular species of will, leaving behind or transcending a certain ordinary *species* of activity, viz., the fulfilment of individual and egocentric aims and desires. One is freed from the will only in the sense that one becomes indifferent to the ordinary, local ambitions and projects that occupy the 'merely practical man', and moved to attend to things without ↪ regard to their utility. In effecting this move, one's intellect and imagination are anything but passive; rather they are freed *for* a different, exceptionally intense, mode of creative activity.

Moreover, such activity is required of both spectator (or beholder) and artist. ‘This ability’, says Schopenhauer, ‘must be inherent in all men in a...degree, as otherwise they would be just as incapable of enjoying works of art as of producing them’ (*WWR*, I, 194). Although it is manifested to a ‘higher degree’ in the latter, they do not differ in kind. ‘We must...assume as existing in all men that power...of divesting themselves for a moment of their personality’, Schopenhauer writes,

unless indeed there are some who are not capable of any aesthetic pleasure at all. The man of genius excels them only in the far higher degree and more continuous duration of this kind of knowledge...aesthetic pleasure is essentially one and the same whether it be called forth by a work of art, or directly by the contemplation of nature and life.

(*WWR*, I, 195)

I noted earlier that Schopenhauer is often portrayed (e.g., by Ridley and Janaway) as conceiving of aesthetic experience solely from a ‘passive, spectatorial’ standpoint. This not only overlooks entirely the many painstaking pages Schopenhauer devotes to describing the psychology of the ‘genius’ (creative artist), but the fact that the beholder’s experience is simply a less emphatic version of the same experience type. The psychology of the beholder as much as that of the artist is distinguished not by passivity but by a consciousness that is ‘energetically active without being spurred on by the will’ (*WWR*, II, 381). In ordinary, non-aesthetic experience, by contrast, one is

immersed in the whirl and tumult of life...his intellect is filled with the things and events of life.

(*WWR*, II, 381)

For example, we regard houses, ships, machines and the like with the idea of their purpose and their suitability therefore; human beings with the idea of their relation to us...and... according to their position and vocation, perhaps judging their fitness for it, and so on.... In most cases and as a rule, everyone is abandoned to this method of consideration.

(*WWR*, II, 372)

For Schopenhauer, then, it is the individual’s freedom to ‘follow its own laws’, no longer enslaved by his practical aims, that sets apart the aesthetic consciousness—*not* passivity or the absence of emotional engagement. ‘On this point hinges’, Schopenhauer says, ‘the difference between the capacity for *deeds* and that for *works*’ (*WWR*, II, 387). He remarks:

All great theoretical achievements...are brought about by their author directing all the forces of his mind to one point. He causes them to be united at this point and concentrates them so vigorously, firmly, and exclusively, that all the rest of the world vanishes for him, and his object for him fills all reality. It is just this great and powerful concentration, forming one of the privileges of [artistic] genius...even in the case of the objects and events of...everyday life. Brought under such a focus, these are then magnified to such monstrous proportions that they appear like the flea that... assumes the stature of the elephant. The result of this is that, by trifles, highly gifted individuals are sometimes thrown into emotions of the most varied kind. To others such emotions are incomprehensible, for they see these individuals reduced to grief, joy, care, fear, anger and so on by things that would leave the ordinary man quite unruffled. *Therefore genius lacks coolness or soberness, which consists simply in our seeing in things nothing more than actually belongs to them...in respect of our possible aims; hence no cool or sober man can be a genius. With [this]...is also associated... the vehemence and passionateness of willing, which is likewise a condition of genius.*

(*WWR*, II, 389; my emphasis)

Later in the same passage, Schopenhauer refers again to Goethe's Tasso as an exemplar of the aesthetic psychology, that is, of a psychology capable of intense emotion combined with an indifference to the aims of the personal, egocentric will—the liberation from the (individual) will which makes aesthetic vision possible:

From all this very readily arise that extravagance of disposition, that vehemence of the emotions, that quick change of mood under prevailing melancholy which Goethe has presented to us in *Tasso*. What reasonableness, quiet composure, comprehensive survey, complete certainty and regularity of conduct are shown by the well-equipped normal man in comparison with the now dreamy and brooding absorption and now passionate excitement of the genius, whose inner affliction is the womb of immortal works!...The train of thought of the intellect which is detached from its maternal soil, the will, and which only periodically returns thereto, will soon differ in every way from that of the normal intellect which still cleaves to its stem.

(*WWR*, II, 389–90)

First-personal aesthetic experience, then, is far from being dispassionate and passively receptive. Rather, the subject's psyche is freed from its usual, dreary servitude to the individual's practical aims and purposes, and redirected to a different mode of activity: 'If, by way of exception, it happens that we experience a momentary enhancement of the intensity of our intuitive intelligence, we see things with entirely different eyes', Schopenhauer observes, for we then consider things 'without any personal participation in them', leaving the intellect (and imagination) to 'freely follow its own laws, and as pure subject mirrors the objective world, yet from its impulse is in the highest state of tension and activity, goaded by no willing' (*WWR*, II, 373; my emphasis).

p. 179 One may, of course, question the very intelligibility of the account of aesthetic experience emerging from these passages. Exactly how, for example, can one be in the 'highest state of tension and activity', while 'goaded by no willing'? If we interpret the 'silencing of the will' to which Schopenhauer alludes in this context as entailing either passivity or absence of affect, then his position is truly incoherent. It makes good sense, however, if by 'will-lessness' Schopenhauer is referring only to a liberation from the usual tyranny of those desires, aims, and purposes given to the individual *independently* of his experience of the target object. The word 'will' here can mean only the individual will—the pursuit by the individual of the satisfaction of his own independently given desires.

This circumscription of the meaning of Schopenhauer's terminology, it must be said, is not explicitly acknowledged in Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*. Worse yet, it is not consistent with Schopenhauer's account of the term 'will' earlier, in Book II. There, the term is assigned two other senses: a metaphysical one (referring to the inchoate, noumenal essence of all that is), and a wide, psychological one, in which *every* act—however trivial—and *every* motivationally characterized mental state, including all emotions and 'calm passions', are affections of the will. The fact remains that neither of these senses is consistent with how Schopenhauer uses the terms in Book III, or in the Supplemental Essays of Volume II spelling out in detail the character of aesthetic experience. So what is to be sacrificed, one may wonder: the overall coherence of Schopenhauer's grand system or the local credibility of his aesthetic phenomenology? In general, Schopenhauer was less a master of systemic coherence than of phenomenological insight. Perhaps, given the wider confusions and inconsistencies in his overall metaphysics, we may give up on the former without too much regret.

### 3.4

I have argued that Schopenhauer's notion of aesthetic attunement, by his own account, involves a 'silencing of the will' only in a very specific and limited sense of that phrase: it is not all modes of willing but only, as it

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were, egocentric willing that is dissipated in aesthetic experience. Unfortunately, his commitment in Books I and II to a dichotomy of ‘will’ and ‘intellect’ leaves him with few resources to articulate this point. Having signed up to their ‘complete independence’, as he puts it, he finds it difficult to articulate the ways in which emotion, cognition, and imagination work together in Book III. When he says, for instance, that one becomes a ‘pure knowing subject’ in aesthetic experience, this would seem to exclude any active contribution by one’s will to the existence and nature of the thing experienced. But Schopenhauer himself explicitly denies this: aesthetic engagement, as he describes it, is not a condition of ‘passive ↪ receptivity’, but an intensely active and creative one marked by affective arousal, imagination, and creative activity. The aesthetic subject, it is true, is freed from a certain pedestrian kind of servitude to his usual practical, pedestrian ends and aims. But that is only the beginning, not the end, of the story.

Consistent with this, the more detailed Supplementary Essays of Volume II reveal that Schopenhauer—like Nietzsche after him—is less interested in the psychology of spectatorship than in the perspective of the artist. Both, I noted earlier, require active and creative engagement. Schopenhauer insists that, ‘Everyone who reads the poem or contemplates the work of art must of course contribute from his own resources’, and he further reminds us that

[This] cooperation of the beholder, required for the enjoyment of a work of art, rests partly on the fact that every work of art can act only through the medium of the imagination. It must therefore excite the imagination, which can never be left out of the question and remain inactive. This is a condition of aesthetic effect, and therefore a fundamental law of all the fine arts.

(*WWR*, II, 407, my emphasis)

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The beholder’s and the artist’s psychologies differ only in degree, not in kind: both must be capable of *active* attunement, just as in Nietzschean *Rausch*. Moreover, Schopenhauer’s *paradigm* of aesthetic experience is, like Nietzsche’s, the experience of the creative artist, not the spectator. The psychology of the spectator is simply a diminished version of the ‘rapture’ of creative ‘genius’, and even then spectatorship interests Schopenhauer only insofar as it is that of the engaged ‘connoisseur’.<sup>4</sup> What distinguishes the ‘ordinary man’ from the artistic Genius (and his engaged, connoisseurial counterpart) is *not* an absence of affect and emotion in the former, but the fact that he, unlike the serious artist or the enlightened connoisseur, is imprisoned by the drive to pursue satisfaction of his given desires; he is a slave to his practical aims and personal ambitions, condemned to value the world around him in purely instrumental terms. The creative genius/connoisseur, by contrast, is naturally disposed to perceive and respond to the world as a thing of *intrinsic* interest, beauty, and wonder. He is transported out of himself and his merely personal sphere of concerns and ambitions by the allure and intrigue of the world he inhabits—‘whether he will it or no’, as Nietzsche said. But he does not thereby become a mere intellect—a vehicle for ‘the mere *concept*...which can be...communicated coldly and dispassionately by words’ (*WWR*, II, 408–9). Schopenhauer has nothing but ↪ disdain for ‘merely’ intellectual works of art in which ‘we see the distinct, limited, cold dispassionate concept glimmer and finally appear’. Such works (as in, for example, allegories) rightly elicit our ‘disgust and indignation, for we see ourselves deceived and cheated of our interest and attention’ (*WWR*, II, 409). Aesthetic creativity, although the child of a special ‘intuitive intellect’, does not convey dispassionate thought. It is rather a matter of affectively charged inspiration:

In the lyrical poem proper, the mere song, in which the deeply felt mood of the present and the impression of the surroundings flow forth as if involuntarily in words, whose metre and rhyme are realized automatically...all these...have the great merit of being the purer work of the rapture of the moment, of the inspiration, of the free impulse of genius, without any admixture of deliberation and reflection. They are therefore delightful and enjoyable through and through.

(*WWR*, II, 409)

So it seems that Schopenhauer's 'pure knowing subject' of aesthetic experience, enjoying his 'sabbath' from all willing, is not quite as such phrases suggest nor as so often portrayed. Rather than a passive, spectatorial, intellect he is given over to 'the spontaneous inspiration, of the...free impulse of genius' without 'deliberation and reflection', and only thus does he enjoy the special delight of the aesthetic 'free moment of rapture'. The seeds of Nietzsche's *Rausch*—and the affirmative delight in existence to which it gives rise—are evidently already alive in Schopenhauer's phenomenology. Indeed, they are fully conceived, waiting only to be transplanted to an arena of values in which they are able to flourish.

## 4 Disinterested Self-Transcendence and Aesthetic Delight

### 4.1

The active and affectively charged character of aesthetic attunement lies at the heart of Schopenhauer's account. But attunement is not achieved without cost, and in Schopenhauer the price to be paid is the elimination of the subject's personal, extra-aesthetic concerns, aims, and desires. The aesthetic subject transcends whatever local, instrumental interests he may have taken in the object: he becomes, in a word, *disinterested*. Disinterestedness is a species of self-transcendence: on Schopenhauer's view, the attuned subject transcends his ordinary, instrumental attitudes and valuations towards some object of attention. Rather than assessing it with a view to its personal usefulness, as means to his independently given ends, his attitude is one of 'reflective disengagement from all considerations of utility, which considers only what the object is "in itself"' (Came, 2009, 95). He may, of course, take a second-order interest in the pleasure that such a state delivers, but the first-order state itself is one of impersonal enjoyment of the object for its own sake, not as a means to some extrinsic end. It is this, in fact, which connects the experience of the beautiful to that of the sublime. Both are active and impassioned conditions, but they are also disinterested: the subject leaves behind his personal wants, desires, and ambitions. Disinterested self-transcendence thus goes hand-in-hand with attunement, as I have described it: the first-personal phenomenology of any artist-beholder genuinely immersed in his *object* of attention will feature only, or almost only, those cognitive and affective states that are internal to his experience of it—that represent and respond to the object itself.

This is not, of course, a novel idea. 'Self-transcendent disinterestedness' so characterized, is another label for what theorists now sometimes call the 'aesthetic attitude'. As Jerome Stolnitz defines it, the aesthetic attitude is a 'way of directing and controlling our perception' when we attend to something; it is 'disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone' (Stolnitz, 1989, 25). As he elaborates this claim, it becomes clear that 'disinterested' means 'with no ulterior purpose'; 'sympathetic' means 'accepting the object on its own terms to appreciate it' (ibid.).<sup>5</sup> On one level, the idea that there exists a distinctive aesthetic phenomenology of this kind is unremarkable in the context of Schopenhauer's account, explicitly committed as it is to a significant mitigation of the experienced distinction between subject and object. In the context of Nietzsche's aesthetic psychology, however, the situation is more complicated, not least because Nietzsche values aesthetic experience as an incentive to the will—as a way of arousing our passions and imagination in a creative, productive, life-affirming way. Can disinterested self-transcendence of this sort really have any place in Nietzsche's aesthetic solution to the 'problem of existence'?<sup>6</sup>

### 4.2

Nietzsche himself denied that aesthetic experience is disinterested, and excoriated the part he thinks it plays in Schopenhauer's aesthetics. However, at the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*, he had found a place for

something very much like disinterestedness within the Apollonian realm of beautiful illusions. He refers there to cases in which the spectator is mindful of the fact that even the most captivating work of art is an illusion, 'mere appearance' (*BT*, 7); the spectator thereby remains at a remove from the spectacle it presents, engaging with the universals of the work on one level, while on another never forgetting that it is a fiction:

p. 184

It is not only the agreeable and friendly images that he experiences as something universally intelligible....[T]he whole divine comedy of life, including the inferno, also pass before him, not like mere shadows on a wall—for he lives and suffers with these scenes—and yet not without that fleeting sensation of illusion. And perhaps many will, like myself, recall how amid the dangers and terrors of dreams they have occasionally said to themselves in self-encouragement... 'It is a dream! I will dream on!'

(*BT*, 7)

Nietzsche here acknowledges, *inter alia*, two important features of engaged aesthetic experience. First, the spectator's suspension of disbelief permits him safely to engage emotionally with the work—to 'live and suffer' with the scenes it presents to him—and to do so with intensity and passion. At the same time—and this is the second feature—the spectator retains a protective distance from what he witnesses: he never entirely identifies his own circumstances, desires, and concerns with those of the spectacle. This does not mean that he responds to it dispassionately, without feeling, of course. If we are properly engaged with a (worthwhile) work of art, we respond to the 'universally intelligible' images of 'the serious, the troubled, the sad, the gloomy' by experiencing them first-personally—albeit not as we would in ordinary, day-to-day life. In ordinary life, such circumstances demand that we *act*; we are not left to appreciate them 'free of interest', for our own welfare directly depends on what we *do* in response to them. In aesthetic experience, by contrast, we are able to regard them—and engage with them—without our vision being clouded by Schopenhauerian 'pressures on the will', or demands for practical action. Nonetheless, the subject experiences their *motivating force*, as it were—their emotional and other affective qualities—on their own, independent of their usual relation to intention and action. (This requires a certain self-restraint, of course: small children, for instance, often fail to divorce powerful cinematic images from real life, and so pathologically transport the fear and excitement they evoke into their everyday beliefs and expectations.) Hence Nietzsche remarks later in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

[W]e must also include in our image of Apollo that delicate boundary which the dream image must not overstep lest it have a pathological effect (in which case mere appearance would deceive us as if it were crude reality). We must keep in mind that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god.

(*BT*, 15, 16)

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Even in *The Birth of Tragedy*, however, this image of 'freedom from the wilder emotions' sits uneasily with the picture of Dionysian *Rausch* that the essay finally endorses. And when we move on to Nietzsche's mature conception of aesthetic experience, the image of Apollo—and with it the positive role of disinterested aesthetic distance—is notably transformed. Whereas *The Birth of Tragedy* characterizes the Apollonian in terms of comforting 'dreams' and tranquilizing 'illusions', which cover reality with a 'beautiful veil', the Apollonian later becomes just one way in which aesthetic *Rausch* is manifested or realized (specifically in visual aesthetic experience, which 'excites the eye so that it gains the power of vision' (*TI*, IX, 10)). It is *Rausch* itself—formerly Dionysian *Rausch*—that becomes for Nietzsche the indispensable, necessary condition of aesthetic experience:

If there is to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological condition is indispensable: *Rausch*. *Rausch* must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine; else there is no art. All kinds of *Rausch*, however diversely conditioned, have the strength to accomplish this; above all, the *Rausch* of sexual excitement...Also the *Rausch* that follows all great cravings, all strong affects; the *Rausch* of feasts, contests, feats of daring, victory, all extreme movement; the *Rausch* of cruelty; the *Rausch* in destruction; the *Rausch* under certain meteorological influences, as for example the *Rausch* of spring; or under the influence of narcotics; and finally the *Rausch* of an overcharged and swollen will.<sup>7</sup>

(*TI*, IX, 8)

In itself, this passage (and others like it) do not tell at all against the idea that aesthetic experience is disinterested. All that they imply is that there are many causal sources of *Rausch* or attunement, taking many different targets, and that some of those sources are classic instances of ‘desire-driven’ immersion. Nothing follows about the specific source of the *Rausch* that is involved in ‘aesthetic doing and seeing’. It may or may not be desire-driven. For instance, it may be (as Schopenhauer claims) that we value aesthetic experience in part because of the pleasure associated with our release from ordinary, practical desires: hence we develop a passionate desire for the aesthetic reprieve from desires of other kinds, as well as a positive desire for the ‘delight in the mere knowledge of perception as such, in contrast to the will’ (*WWR*, I, 200).

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More importantly, the fact that some desire—of this or any other kind—*causally motivates* attuned aesthetic experience is neither here nor there as regards the *content* of that experience. The close association of states of *Rausch* with intense desire in other contexts, and even the fact that aesthetic *Rausch* may have its causal origins in this or that desire or instinctual drive, does not tell against the thesis that the latter involves a disinterested self-transcendence. Nietzsche himself comments on the mechanism by which such passions are transformed in aesthetic experience—namely, by sublimation. I will say a bit more about that mechanism shortly; for the moment, it is noteworthy that the causal sources of *Rausch* mentioned in this passage are just the sort of nature-given drives (sexual desire, competitiveness, cruelty) which are paradigmatic candidates for Freudian sublimation, and the satisfaction of such drives is often associated with states of ‘abandon’ in which the usual condition of rational, self-interested agency no longer obtains. In many cases, we do not so much possess these drives as are possessed by them, and there is a clear sense in which they overpower rather than promote our capacity for independent, self-interested agency—our ability to think and act on objects instrumentally.

### 4.3

Disinterested self-transcendence may yet, then, characterize Nietzschean states of *Rausch*. That is, aesthetically motivated *Rausch* could involve a ‘disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of’ an object ‘for its own sake alone’, whatever its causal source. Nonetheless, Nietzsche himself flatly denies that possibility and ridicules the very notion of aesthetic disinterestedness as it is used by both Kant and Schopenhauer. In Kant, Nietzsche says that the association of the aesthetic with the disinterested arises out of ‘a lack of any refined first-hand experience [of the beautiful]’ and ‘reposes in the shape of a fat worm of error’:

‘That is beautiful’, said Kant, ‘which gives us pleasure *without interest*’. Without interest! Compare with this definition one framed by a genuine ‘spectator’ and artist—Stendhal, who once called the beautiful *une promesse de bonheur*. At any rate he *rejected* and repudiated the one point about the aesthetic condition which Kant had stressed: *désintéressement*. Who is right, Kant or Stendhal?

(*GM*, III, 6)



In response to this question Nietzsche turns to Schopenhauer and the latter's association of aesthetic experience with asceticism—the ideal of resigning the claims of the will:

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[Schopenhauer] never wearied of glorifying *this* liberation from the 'will' as the great merit and utility of the aesthetic condition.... Schopenhauer described *one* effect of the beautiful, its ability to calm the will—but is it even a regular effect? Stendhal, a...more happily constituted nature than Schopenhauer, emphasized...a different effect: 'the beautiful *promises* happiness'—to him the fact seems to be precisely the *arousal of the will* ('of interest') through the beautiful. And could one not finally urge against ↪ Schopenhauer himself that he was quite wrong in thinking himself a Kantian in this matter...that he, too, was pleased by the beautiful from an 'interested' viewpoint, even from the very strongest, most personal interest: that of a tortured man who gains release from his torture?

(GM, III, 6)

Two allegations are made here against Schopenhauer. The first is that Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory incorrectly characterizes 'the aesthetic condition' as a dispassionate state in which the will is tranquilized and becalmed; the second allegation is that Schopenhauer himself does *not* regard the beautiful 'disinterestedly', since he enlists it in the service of 'the very strongest, most personal interest', namely, to find relief from the restless suffering and strivings of the will.

What is one to make of these scathing remarks? The first thing to note is that they make use of and conflate two very different notions of disinterestedness. Nietzsche first identifies disinterestedness with an absence of passion or affect or will, and identifies its (putative) opposite—interestedness—with Stendhal's 'arousal of the will'. He then, however, fixes on a different distinction altogether—namely, whether or not one appreciates 'the beautiful' instrumentally, as a mere means to the end of being freed from the torturous 'penal servitude of volition'. By conflating these two senses of 'disinterested', Nietzsche also conflates two different objections to Schopenhauer's views. The first objection is that Schopenhauer wrongly characterizes aesthetic experience as passive and dispassionate; the second is that Schopenhauer *himself* valued aesthetic experience in instrumental, 'interested' terms, as a means to the satisfaction of some very personal—and extra-aesthetic—interest or aim.

Neither objection hits a legitimate mark. The first trades on an almost embarrassingly crude confusion, viz., supposing that 'disinterested' means 'dispassionate and *uninterested*'. While one might excuse this confusion in a reading of Kant's account of disinterestedness (although there too it would be misplaced), we have seen that it finds no target whatever in Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer, 'disinterested' simply does not mean 'dispassionate' in the sense of an absence feeling or motivation. Nietzsche's muddle on this score merits little comment.

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What of his second objection, with its imputation of hypocrisy to Schopenhauer? This too, misses the mark, and for two reasons. First, Schopenhauer himself insisted that aesthetic experience both affords and is motivated by the pleasures we take in it, and these are not confined to the negative pleasure of release from suffering (the pleasure of 'a tortured man who gains release from his torture'). The state of aesthetic perception is also one which 'makes us feel positively happy' in itself, from the 'immediate, unreflective, yet also inexpressible pleasure that is excited in us by the impression of colours' to the 'beneficent, soothing and exalting' effect of the full moon in a night sky (WWR, II, 375). ↪ There is, furthermore, the pleasure arising from the understanding that art affords, from the clarity of the ideas we achieve through it, as when

a symphony of Beethoven presents us...with the most vehement conflict which is transformed in a moment into the most beautiful harmony....a true and complete picture of the nature of the world, which rolls on in the boundless confusion of innumerable forms....all the human passions and

emotions speak from this symphony: joy, grief, love, hatred, terror, hope and so on in innumerable shades.

(*WWR*, II, 450)

It may be that, as Nietzsche says, the beautiful does not *promise* happiness for Schopenhauer as it does for Stendhal. Rather, the perception of the beautiful effectively *is* happiness, for creatures like us—and a happiness in which we have the keenest interest. That this is so tells not at all against the claim that aesthetic experience itself is disinterested in Schopenhauer's technical use of that term. For his point is that *within* engaged, attuned aesthetic encounters we cease to pursue our personal, independently given desires and ambitions; that the *having* of such experience interests us is another matter altogether.

Thus Nietzsche's second objection seems also to rest on a confusion—namely, supposing that an experience which itself is 'disinterested' is also of no interest or importance. Art was of exceptional importance to Schopenhauer, and he believes it to be equally important for almost all of us. His reasons for so thinking, moreover, were reasons not far removed from those that lead Nietzsche to dignify it as the 'truly metaphysical activity' (*BT*, 'Attempt', 5) of man: it transfigures the human condition as given to us by nature and reworks it into a thing of beauty.

## 5 Transfiguration and Self-Overcoming

Nature, artistically considered, is no model. It exaggerates, it distorts, it leaves gaps. Nature is chance.

(*TI*, IX, 7)

[T]he genuine artist...surpasses nature...[He] understands nature's half-spoken words. He expresses clearly what she merely stammers. He impresses on the hard marble the beauty of the form which nature failed to achieve in a thousand attempts, and he places it before her, exclaiming as it were, 'This is what you desired to say!'

(*WWR*, I, 45)

### 5.1

p. 189 I have argued that Nietzsche raises no cogent objections to Schopenhauer's claim that aesthetic experience is inherently disinterested. His two main criticisms—that aesthetic experience is active and passionate in nature, and that it is an experience type which we value for extra-aesthetic reasons—both turn on conflation regarding what it *is*, in Schopenhauer's view, for us to regard an object 'free of interest'. Even if Nietzsche's confused remarks finally tell us nothing about the merits of the disinterestedness thesis, however, they are instructive in what they reveal about Nietzsche's own view of aesthetic transfiguration. In particular, they illuminate Nietzsche's contempt for the notion of '*l'art pour l'art*', and his insistence on valuing art 'from the perspective of life'—that is, valuing it above all for its capacity to transfigure not just this or that object of experience, but to transfigure the general framework of experience. (It is in this sense, recall, that art is a *metaphysical* activity.) This capacity is realized, according to Nietzsche, when the target of aesthetic experience—the aesthetic object, so to speak—is nothing other than the experiencing subject himself. Somewhat ironically, an attitude very much like disinterested self-transcendence plays a central and indispensable role in Nietzsche's psychology at this point. To see this, one must turn to the second level of transfiguration I mentioned earlier: the aesthetic transfiguration of the subject's conception of himself and of his life.

In Nietzsche's mature work, a driving force behind his high regard for art and artistic creativity is the existential goal of *amor fati*: the love of what fate has given, the endorsement of what is, just as it is.<sup>8</sup> The essence of the attitude of *amor fati* is that one no longer wills that one's life and one's self were other than they are: it is a refusal to condemn what blind nature has made of us and for us, combined with a recognition of one's own ability to 're-form' how we experience and how we evaluate life, and thereby to create a new identity for ourselves. The role of artistry in achieving this attitude is not to obscure or veil the less palatable aspects of experience (as it perhaps was in *The Birth Tragedy*). In Nietzsche's mature work, its role is rather to present reality in a transfigured form which reshapes our thoughts about it and the evaluative attitudes with which we respond to it:

A psychologist...asks: what does all art do? Does it not praise? Glorify? Choose? Prefer? With all this it strengthens or weakens certain valuations. Is this merely a 'moreover'? an accident? Something in which the artist's instinct has no share? Or is it not the very presupposition of the artist's ability? Does his basic instinct aim at art, or rather at the sense of art, at life? At a desirability of life? Art is the great stimuli to life: how could one understand it as purposeless, as aimless, as *l'art pour l'art*?

(TI, IX, 24)

p. 190 Put less dramatically, to regard the world aesthetically is to regard it, like the artist, creatively and affirmatively. Doing that, we find that art enables us both to understand reality more deeply and to value it. For Nietzsche, as for Schopenhauer, art affords the former—the deeper understanding—in part by eliciting our fully attuned attention to its objects, such that the one is absorbed by or immersed in them to such an extent that the contents of one's consciousness can only be identified in relation to them. As Julian Young remarks, 'in the aesthetic state [the] normal categories of experience are suspended, thereby enabling us to become alive to usually unnoticed aspects and construals of objects: in Nietzschean language, the object undergoes 'transfiguration' (Young, 1992, 124). Art affords the latter—the positive re-evaluation—in part by suspending our standard, habitual (and largely instrumental) evaluative attitudes, and inviting us instead to enjoy its objects independently of their everyday utility. Artistically conceived objects are objects more coherent and intelligible art illuminates their necessary or essential or defining features; it lends them drama, intensity, and a sense of significance; it makes them *interesting* in themselves. Moreover, it does this in perceptual modes that excite our imaginations, emotions, and other psycho-physiological responses, thereby intensifying our visceral sense of being alive.

In all of this, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche agree. But Nietzsche further proposes that the subject *himself* can be the ultimate work of art—or can be for those possessing the strength of the true artist:

Only artists, and especially those of the theatre, have given men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each man *is* himself, experiences himself, desires himself; only they have taught us to esteem the hero that is concealed in everyday characters; only they have taught us the art of viewing ourselves as heroes—from a distance and, as it were, simplified and transfigured.

(GS, 78)

This is the transfigurative project of 'self-overcoming', of becoming who one (truly) is and, in the process, becoming 'one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*' (GS, 276). It is arguably Nietzsche's most important and original contribution to the aesthetic psychology he inherited from Schopenhauer. Yet, as this passage reveals, the project depends critically on the Schopenhauerian resource of 'distanced' self-transcendence.

## 5.2

p. 191

Nietzsche's proposed project of self-overcoming is the highest aspiration and application of our capacity for aesthetic transfiguration. Self-overcoming is, *inter alia*, a matter of 'giving style' to one's character—an art 'practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weakness of the nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and even weakness delight the eye' (GS, 290). Put most simply, it is a project of self-creation, in which one stands back from one's character—one's given desires, dispositions, ambitions, values—rather as the painter stands back from his easel. Like the artist, one uses this distance to decide how one shall organize, arrange, and manipulate them according to an artistic vision. As early on as *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche recognizes the importance of gaining authority over one's desires and impulses—with a view not to eliminating them, but to *mastering* them so that one may choose how they are realized and what will develop from them:

The man who has overcome his passions has entered into possession of the most fertile ground; like the colonist who has mastered the forests and swamps. To sow the seeds of good spiritual works in the soil of the subdued passion is then the immediate urgent task. The overcoming itself is only a *means*, not a goal; if it is not so viewed, all kinds of weeds and devilish nonsense will quickly spring up in this rich soil now unoccupied, and soon there will be more rank confusion than there ever was before.

(HH, 'Wanderer', 53)

While he does not mention Schopenhauer here by name, Nietzsche is surely pointing an accusing finger at him as one who mistakes the means for the goal—who supposes that transcending one's desires and aims and interests is an end in itself. The accusation does not actually hit its mark with respect to the place of self-transcendence in Schopenhauer's *aesthetic* psychology. However, what matters here is that Nietzsche recognizes a distinction between these two ways of valuing self-transcendence, and clearly recognizes its instrumental value. Earlier in the same text he has observed that when the 'philosophical blindworms speak of the *terrible character* of the passions' they fail to acknowledge the responsibility each of us has for mastering and transforming them, making of them something one can endorse:

Through...a lack of self-observation and observation of those who are to be brought up, it is you yourselves who first allowed the passions to develop into such monsters that you are overcome by fear at the word 'passion'! It was up to you, and is up to us, to *take from* the passions their terrible character and thus prevent their becoming devastating torrents.—One should not inflate one's oversight into eternal fatalities; let us rather work honestly together on the task of transforming the passions of mankind one and all into joys.

(HH, 'Wanderer', 83)

p. 192

In Nietzsche's next book, *Daybreak*, he again uses the metaphor of organic cultivation to describe mastery of one's will, reminding us that 'One can dispose of one's drives like a garden and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis' (D, 560). Both passages describe part of what is required for self-overcoming: the redirecting or sublimating of one's 'willings' so that they are creatively transformed 'into all joys' and 'beautiful fruit'. In Schopenhauerian aesthetic experience, likewise, the will is neither eliminated nor abandoned; rather, it is liberated from its usual bonds to the individual's interests and redirected to the 'intensely active' task of attunement or, in the genius, artistic creation.

Nietzsche later takes this move of self-transcendence an important step further, characterizing artistic activity as the vehicle of self-overcoming *par excellence*—a vehicle by which we not only transform our drives into the creation of aesthetic objects (as in Schopenhauer) but transform *ourselves* into such objects. In Book V of *The Gay Science* this further step becomes explicit:

*What one should learn from artists.* What means have we for making things beautiful, attractive and desirable, when they are not so?—and I suppose they are never so in themselves! We have here something to learn from physicians, when, for example, they dilute what is bitter or put wine and sugar into their mixing bowl; but we have still more to learn from artists, who, in fact are continually concerned in devising such inventions and artifices. To withdraw from things until one no longer sees much of them, until one has even to see things into them *in order to see them at all*—or to view them from the side, and as in a frame—or to look at them through colored glasses, or in the light of the sunset—or to furnish them with a surface or skin which is not fully transparent: we should learn all that from artists, and moreover be wiser than they. For this fine power of theirs usually ceases with them where art ceases and life begins; *we*, however, want to be the poets of our lives, and first of all in the smallest and most commonplace matters.

(GS, 299)

The project of being ‘poets of our lives’—making our own, individual lives ‘beautiful, attractive and desirable’—is the proper goal of artistic activity for Nietzsche. But it depends entirely on our ability to transcend our given, individual natures, to master our passions in their given, natural forms, just as artists must master their personal materials and subject matter (whatever ‘terrible monsters’ it contains). ‘Nature is chance’, Nietzsche remarks, but art can transfigure such monsters into objects sufficiently magnificent and far reaching to immerse the spectator’s attention and command his admiration and endorsement. Classical Greek tragedies rose to this task in a particularly vivid manner: they reconceived their inherited myths of destruction and chaos so that they no longer tell mere tales of this or that individual’s regrettable misfortunes, of this or that unhappy event. These particulars are aesthetically transformed into universals: the great tragedies dramatize necessary dynamics and rhythms of human experience such that even suffering and conflict become part of what is intriguing, magnificent, and beautiful in life. Thus Nietzsche’s novel insight, and the move that takes his aesthetic psychology beyond Schopenhauer’s, is to see that, far from provoking resignation, such art invites one to immerse oneself in its images, and that immersion in turn moves one to transcend the individual point of view even in relation to oneself. Even one’s own sufferings and conflicts, that is, are revealed to be a part of the great drama of existence:

The psychology of the orgiastic as an overflowing feeling of life and strength where even pain still has the effect of a stimulus, gave me the key to the concept of tragic feeling...Tragedy is so far from proving anything about the pessimism of the Hellenes, in Schopenhauer’s sense, that it may, on the contrary, be considered its decisive repudiation and counter-instance. Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself to a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge—Aristotle understood it that way—but in order to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity—that joy which included even the joy in destroying. And herewith I again touch that point from which I once went forth: *The Birth of Tragedy* was my first reevaluation of all values.

(TI, X, 5)

Nietzsche found this passage important enough to quote it at length in *Ecce Homo*, and it is not difficult to see why: it highlights two key aspects of aesthetic transfiguration. First, it emphasizes the capacity of art to transfigure its objects, even where, as in tragedy, those objects are the terror and destruction that marks human experience; aesthetically transfigured, ‘even pain still has the effect of a stimulus’, and the work of art manifests a joy which includes ‘even the joy in destroying’. Secondly, the passage makes explicit the transfigurative effect this has on the psychology of the subject ‘orgiastically’ attuned to such art—namely, that one becomes ‘oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity’.

p. 194

The conjunction suggested here of both *union* with and *transcendence* of ‘terror and pity’ is as central to Nietzsche’s thought as it was to Schopenhauer’s. On the one hand, the subject is transfigured by being unified with that which produces or manifests terror and destruction—the ‘inexhaustibility’ of life, and the perseverance of the will to life ‘even in its strangest and hardest problems’. On the other hand, and at the same time, one transcends or moves ‘*beyond* terror and pity’ in that one no longer assesses them in relation to one’s individual aims and purposes. This is not, critically, a matter of being purified of or eliminating these responses. Rather, one transcends one’s (ordinary, nature-given) perspective of a self-interested, individual agent concerned with the fulfilment of his local, personal, practical aims. From that perspective the tragic dimensions of life can only be feared and condemned, and never affirmed. The aesthetically transfigured agent, however, moves beyond this negative valuation of life and ‘interested’ evaluation of the experiences it offers. No longer identifying himself as a particular being located in a particular space at a particular time, he recognizes himself as an instantiation of universals that transcend individuality, space, and time: he is a manifestation of the eternal cycle of birth, becoming, and destruction. By facilitating such self-transcendence, art can transfigure not only its objects (what it represents or expresses) but also its subjects—those who create it and those to whom their creations are communicated:

We must appeal to the artists themselves. What does the tragic artist communicate of himself? Is it not precisely that state *without* fear in the face of the fearful and questionable that he is showing? This state itself is a great *desideratum*; whoever knows it honours it with the greatest honours....He communicates it—*must* communicate it, provided he is an artist, a genius....Courage and freedom of feeling before a powerful enemy, before a sublime calamity, before a problem that arouses dread—this triumphant state is what the tragic artist chooses, what he glorifies.

(*TI*, IX, 24)

Nietzsche’s reference to the sublime in this context is telling. The experience of the sublime is a paradigmatic case of disinterested self-transcendence: it occurs precisely when one is confronted with a circumstance that would ordinarily inspire terror and profound aversion. Experienced as sublime, however, that same circumstance, as Schopenhauer observes, ‘raises us above the will and its interest, and put us in such a mood that we find pleasure in the sight of what directly opposes the will’ (*WWR*, II, 433). In *Twilight of the Idols* (and thereafter) our capacity for such self-transcendence is the beating heart of Nietzsche’s notion of aesthetic transfiguration, and of the spirit of *amor fati* it generates. Through it, art is ‘*the redemption of the sufferer*—as the way to states in which suffering is willed, transfigured, deified, where suffering is a form of great delight’ (*WP*, 53).

Schopenhauer likewise regarded aesthetic experience as transfigurative and redemptive, and offered a strikingly similar psychological account of why it is so. He drew very different implications from that phenomenon, of course, and in particular inferred a very different prescription for how best to address the ‘problem of existence’. He notoriously avers, for instance, that:

What gives to everything tragic, whatever the form in which it appears, the characteristic tendency to the sublime, is the dawning of the knowledge that the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them.

(*WWR*, II, 433–4).

p. 195

Nietzsche’s insight was to hold fast to what is internal to Schopenhauer’s psychology of aesthetic experience itself: by respecting its intrinsic experiential character—including the ‘intense activity’, the ‘pleasure’ and ‘delight’ that Schopenhauer insisted it could afford—Nietzsche found in it the formula for *amor fati*, rather than resignation.

### 5.3

Or did he? Against this conclusion, Julian Young argues that Nietzsche's project of aesthetic redemption is ultimately a failure—an exercise in 'escapist inauthenticity' (Young, 1992, 147). Young, unlike many scholars, recognizes the affinity of Nietzsche's mature conception of aesthetic experience with Schopenhauer's own. He concludes, however, that the kind of self-transcendence to which this commits Nietzsche is incompatible with his project of life-affirmation, and represents a betrayal of the courageous vision expressed in the doctrine of eternal recurrence as it appears in Nietzsche's earlier work. Young interprets that doctrine (correctly, in my view) as a litmus test of one's preparedness to endorse all that life has to offer:

In *The Gay Science* and in *Zarathustra*...that which—if I am a non-convalescent, fully healthy, Dionysian *Übermensch*—I will is the eternal recurrence of *my* life: the totality of the deeds and experiences which constitutes my exact life as an individual being

(Young, 1992, 138).

However, the kind of affirmation one finds later on (for instance, in *TI*, X, 5) Young complains, is of a quite different order. There, he objects, Nietzsche endorses a 'transcendence of individuality' in which 'one identifies not with any of the individuals who are vulnerable to pain and death', and becomes

'oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror'; one loses one's identity as an individual and identifies instead with 'the will to life rejoicing over *its* own exhaustibility'... The tragic effect, in short, is as it was in both *The Birth of Tragedy* and in Schopenhauer's account of tragedy, identified as the feeling of the *sublime*. As in *The Birth*, what tragedy does for life is to bring one the 'metaphysical comfort' of feeling oneself to be at one with the 'primal unity' or, as Nietzsche says, 'the will to life'.

(Young, 1992, 137)

By my own account, Nietzsche's later work does indeed hold fast to some key ingredients of Schopenhauer's aesthetic psychology, while drawing out of them radically different implications and ethical prescriptions. For Young, however, this move (in *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Will to Power*) is a cowardly *retreat* from Nietzsche's original ambition of life-affirmation. Specifically, he accuses Nietzsche of abandoning the hard task of affirming one's own, *individual* existence, and indulging instead in an identification with a 'trans-individual' being:

The fate I love [in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*] is the fate I experience as an individual *within* the world of becoming and pain. Such love and affirmation, if I achieve it, manifests *genuine* courage, for...then I face the world 'honestly': I acknowledge its horrors and terrors, I acknowledge that pain and ultimately death are part of *my* inexorable lot. What, however, Dionysian man as conceived in *Twilight of the Idols* wills to recur is just *life*.... The only sense it makes to speak of him willing his own return is if he identifies himself with a trans-individual entity that lives on in his children and in the human species.

(Young, 1992, 138)

This characterization of Nietzsche's position in *Twilight of the Idols* effectively presents art as a vehicle for abdicating, rather than affirming, one's individual identity and the experiences that have shaped it. Worse yet, Young's account has Nietzsche resurrecting an identity in terms not far from the traditional notion of God ('a trans-individual entity that lives on in his children'). If correct, this verdict is a damning one indeed.

Young's target, I aver, misses its target rather widely. In particular, it trades on a critical elision which, we saw earlier, also misled Schopenhauer: it elides the crucial distinction between the *phenomenology* of aesthetic experience, on the one hand, and, on the other, the *evaluative implications* of that experience. Failing to distinguish these two dimensions of Nietzsche's account, Young supposes that if Schopenhauerian self-transcendence contributes to the former, it must inevitably compromise Nietzsche's 'antipodal' account of the latter. Let us briefly consider each in turn once more.

We saw earlier that Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, recognizes the transcendence of individuality as an ineliminable condition of the kind of engaged, aesthetic experience that concerns him; only when we view a thing non-instrumentally are we free to recognize it as it is 'in itself', our vision unclouded by our usual concerns with personal, practical utilities. This much must be contributed by the *subject* of aesthetic activity, whether in the person of artist or beholder. This subjective transformation works in concert with the distinctive ways in which such activity transforms the *objects* on which it is targeted. Nietzsche—following a long theoretical tradition before him—holds that art penetrates beyond the contingencies of ordinary perception to reveal what is truly *necessary* in its object. This is what Nietzsche (rather idiosyncratically) calls artistic 'idealizing':

Out of this feeling one lends to things, one *forces* them to accept from, one violates them—this process is called *idealizing*. Let us get rid of a prejudice here: idealizing does not consist, as is commonly held, in subtracting or discounting the petty and inconsequential. What is decisive is rather a tremendous drive to bring out the principle traits, so that the others disappear in the process.

(*TI*, IX, 8)

p. 197 Recall now that Nietzsche characterizes his project of *amor fati* as precisely demanding that he 'learn more and more to see as beautiful *what is necessary in things*' (*GS*, 276, my emphasis). The connection with artistry is clear: it is the activity best placed to present 'what is necessary in things'. (As Aristotle famously expressed the point, well-formed works present timeless 'universals' through artistically conceived particulars.) This is something that does not occur naturally—without artistic reconstruction. As things are presented in nature they are chaotic and formless: 'Nature, artistically considered, is no model. It exaggerates, it distorts, it leaves gaps. Nature is *chance*' (*TI*, IX, 7). The model for the psychology of seeing 'what is necessary in things' is rather the artist's creative idealizing—a matter of bringing out 'the principle traits' or universals:

A born psychologist instinctively guards against seeing for the sake of seeing; the same applies to the born painter. He never works 'from nature'—he leaves it to his instinct, his *camera obscura*, to sift and strain 'nature', the 'case', the 'experience'....He is conscious only of the *universal*, the conclusion, the outcome: he knows nothing of that arbitrary abstraction from the individual case.

(*TI*, IX, 7)

Goethe's *Tasso* offers a vivid illustration of this aspect of aesthetic transfiguration. In its final epiphanic recognition scene, Tasso's artistry permits him to transcend his personal fears and his hostility towards Antonio, revealing how profoundly and inescapably each man's character and actions are bound up with the other's. Tasso offers a series of poetic images of their relationship: he is, first, a wave made to sparkle when it sprays against the rocks, then a wave-tossed ship breaking against them, and finally the shipwrecked sailor clinging to one of these rocks to survive. Antonio is, by turns, the rock that both creates and destroys Tasso; he is an inescapable force of nature with which Tasso must contend and on which he ultimately depends. In these images, the identity of each man is shaped by the dynamics of their conflict. Bringing out 'what is necessary' in a thing is a matter of illuminating the features that make it the very thing that it is,



and this requires in turn that one transcend the point of view of personal, instrumental interests. This is just what Goethe's 'idealization' of his protagonist's suffering achieves: an artistic reforming of nature's chance events, revealing the ways in which we exist not only as contingent particulars, but also as instantiations of necessary universals. Moreover, the insights afforded Tasso in his self-transcendent reverie scarcely allow him to *escape* his relationship with Antonio. To the contrary, they require him to see it as necessary and inescapable, and this is a fact in which he has the greatest personal interest; indeed, his future survival as an individual and as an artist turn on it entirely.

p. 198 Young's interpretation of Nietzschean transcendence as cowardly escapism fails entirely to appreciate these dynamics of artistic idealization. Attunement to a work of art (including the work of one's own life, as in Tasso's case) does require disinterested, self-transcendence in order to effect the 'idealizing' of what is otherwise an arbitrary and senseless sequence of natural events. But that is not the end of the story for Nietzsche, any more than it is for Tasso. For Nietzsche, the evaluative *consequences* of this sort of aesthetic insight likewise reintroduce the interested, individual subject. Indeed, that subject re-emerges with a vengeance as the *Übermensch*, that ultimate artist who is prepared to take on the task of creating his values from the ground up. Such transformed valuations are, Nietzsche insists, art's ultimate *raison d'être*. (Hence art ultimately is to be viewed 'from the perspective of life'.) Art, not nature, is the proper paradigm for the psychologist—and for each of us—because it shows us what artistic reconstruction is capable of doing, *viz.*, realigning our evaluative dispositions at the deepest level, proposing novel and creative ways of framing human experience. Thus realigned, we discover that it is necessarily painful, but also painfully *beautiful*. 'Only in this way', Nietzsche writes,

can we deal with some base details in ourselves. Without this art we would be nothing but foreground and live entirely in the spell of that perspective which makes what is closest at hand and most vulgar appear as if it were vast, and reality itself.

(GS, 78)

Tasso's epiphany aptly illustrates this transcendence of the 'foreground'. He is an artist throughout, but only at the epiphanic moment of self-transcendence does he realize his greatest work of art: himself. Always a professional master of transfiguration, Tasso becomes more than that when he creatively transfigures *himself*. This is, to be sure, a matter of moving from mere artistry to metaphysics. But is it also, as Young suggests, an abdication of his personal, individual, and highly particular circumstances? It is more natural, surely, to understand it as a revelation of who Tasso truly is in relation to Antonio, and of the ways in which the sufferings inflicted by the latter figure among the 'necessities' of his own nature. Tasso's personal failings represent, on the one hand, a familiar and common reality, yet he is also an artist in Nietzsche's sense: he transports his circumstances out of the realm of nature and reconfigures them into a coherent work of universal significance. As such, he constitutes a psychological vindication of Nietzsche's claim that an attitude of *amor fati* is *consistent* with a courageous realism about what human experience does and does not have to offer. Both attuned and transfiguring, Tasso manifests Nietzsche's real advance over Schopenhauer's aesthetic psychology: the possibility of affirming, rather than condemning, 'the future promised and hallowed in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond all death and change...' (TI, X, 4).

p. 199

I aver that my diagnosis of the Schopenhauerian nature of Nietzsche's aesthetic phenomenology does not, despite Young's allegations, spell disaster for the wider project of a positive re-evaluation of human experience. Indeed, if the account I have developed here is accurate, *both* Schopenhauer and Nietzsche emerge as offering powerful strategies for resisting a 'moral interpretation' of life. Schopenhauer identified attunement, transcendence, and transfiguration as the key strategies for such resistance—strategies which survive intact in Nietzsche's aesthetics from start to finish. Nietzsche, for his part, turned those strategies to a new end—namely, our aesthetic reevaluation of our own natures. The inspiring theory of value and bold

worldview that resulted was the culmination of a joint project that neither philosopher could have achieved on his own.

I have tried along the way to show, too, that Schopenhauer's role in this achievement has not been properly appreciated. This is no doubt due in part to Nietzsche's tendency to advertise his best appropriations as his own creations, a tendency owed in turn to his need to cultivate a view of himself as wholly self-formed, autonomous, and original. But we need not endorse that conceit; neither need we deny to Nietzsche what he genuinely achieved. His relationship with Schopenhauer's thought was more entangled, unstable, and conflicted than is often recognized, yet most readers will agree that it yielded an undeniably prescient and transformative turn in the history of the theory of value. Perhaps the best summation and assessment of their remarkable dynamic is to be found not in scholarly analyses at all, but in Goethe's poetic vision:

*Two men they are, who therefore are opposed,  
I've felt it long, because by Nature cast  
In moulds so opposite, that she the twain  
Could never weld into a single man.*  
Goethe, *Torquato Tasso*, Act III, Scene 2 (1704–7)

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## Notes

- 1 Julian Young (1992) dismisses the 1886 Preface as a self-deluding and inauthentic revision of personal history and an early manifestation of Nietzsche's descent into madness. This reading is both tendentious and contrary to best evidence. I am content to take Nietzsche at his word here; the Preface, in fact, seems to me one of Nietzsche's more sober and straightforward evaluations of the significance and genealogy of this own thought.
- 2 This claim will seem implausible if one assumes that Schopenhauer's aesthetics are conceptually inseparable from his ethics of resignation. That assumption is ubiquitous in Schopenhauer scholarship, and typically frames interpretations of Nietzsche's work as well. It is, for instance, a key premise of Young's argument that Nietzsche's project of life-affirmation is a failure, never managing to transcend Schopenhauer's view of art as 'an intimation of, a pointer towards, the "correct" stance to life and the world, asceticism: the denial of the will and the world' (Young, 1992, 118). A rather different picture emerges, however, if one distinguishes Schopenhauer's metaphysical speculations (and their ethical implications) from his phenomenological descriptions. That seems to me a wise move to make in any case, for Schopenhauer did not excel as a metaphysician. Indeed, his metaphysics arguably constitute an uneasy mix of Kant, Spinoza, and eastern religion that seldom rises above the level of speculative theology. In his philosophy of art, by contrast, Schopenhauer offers subtle and profound descriptions of human psychology, requiring no support from the metaphysical constructs and ethical prescriptions which frame them. Like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer excelled at articulating phenomena in which the affective and cognitive dimensions of experience interact in complex ways—as occurs aesthetic and moral experience. Of course, he himself wove these phenomenologies into metaphysical tapestries, and that fabric is not always easy to disentangle. But no blame attaches to being revisionist in respect of work which benefits from revising: to find what is of value in Schopenhauer's phenomenology of aesthetic experience one should distinguish his worthwhile psychological observations from the speculative uses to which he put them.
- 3 Nietzsche sometimes explicitly articulates *Rausch* in such terms; as Daniel Came has remarked, Nietzsche 'quite clearly conceives of [*Rausch*]...as entailing both a dissolution of self-consciousness and a (phenomenological, if not metaphysical) falling away of spatial and temporal awareness' (Came, 2009, 99). Came in fact offers the phrase 'such intoxication' in place of the bracketed '*Rausch*', having opted for that translation of the term.
- 4 This point is easily passed over in Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*, although even there the artist/genius, rather than the spectator, provides for Schopenhauer the paradigm of aesthetic experience. In the Supplementary Essays of Volume II, however, the central role of the creative genius as the model and pinnacle of that experience-type is unambiguous.
- 5 Stolnitz proceeds to argue that the entire subject matter of aesthetics should be demarcated by this distinctive way of attending to an object. That is, he proposes that aesthetic experience 'is the total experience had while this attitude is being taken; and that the "aesthetic object" is the object toward which this attitude is adopted; and that "aesthetic value" is the value of this experience of its object' (1989, 25). Eliseo Vivas (1955) offers a characterization in similar terms, saying that the aesthetic attitude is 'an experience of rapt attention which involves the intransitive apprehension of an object's immanent meanings and values in their full presentational immediacy'. The key terms to note in Vivas's attempt are 'intransitive' and 'immediate'. The first indicates that the experiencing subject is not motivated by a further aim or purpose (he is not 'interested in' the object for this or that end, but just interested, full stop). The second indicates attention to the thing as presented in its own distinctive form, not as falling under this or that concept. This agenda can appear quite extravagant in its global and reductive ambitions. Little stands to be gained by attempting to define a complex cluster of concepts related to art and aesthetics in terms of some one distinctive psychological stance or state of mind. Even if we confine ourselves to works of art, it is doubtful that there is any one such distinctive state of mind as may be induced by or adopted towards any and all particular artworks or kinds of art: we are unlikely to find a single state of mind that characterizes our proper attention to, one and all, a performance of some Schubert Lieder, a view of a field of tulips, the latest Tarantino film, and a Fra Angelica painting. Indeed, the suggestion that there is some state common to our proper attention to each is nothing short of preposterous, and George Dickie (1964) has declared that the

'myth' of the aesthetic attitude is 'no longer useful and in fact misleads aesthetic theory'. Dickie argues that there are no identifiable psychological states or conditions that are distinctive of the 'proper attention' to artworks. Rather, there is simply: (1) attending with different kinds of motive (for instance, listening to a piece of music in order to pass a music theory test, or to relax, or to relieve boredom, or to enjoy the sounds); and (2) attending more and less closely (from absent-mindedly noting the music in the background to giving it one's full cognitive focus). On this view, disinterestedness does not mark any 'perceptual distinction', only motivational and attentional ones (Dickie, 1964, 58). Dickie fails to appreciate, however, that the motivational and attentional differences *cause* perceptual ones: under 'aesthetic' conditions, what one perceives and cognizes may be different in kind.

- 6 Ridley dismisses this possibility out of hand on the ground that Nietzsche's conception of aesthetic experience (or at least the developed conception that emerges in, for instance, *Twilight of the Idols*) targets art from the standpoint of the artist rather than the spectator, so emphasizing the prominence of 'will' (where that is some combination of affective intensity and creative drive). It is true that Nietzsche often argues that the standpoint of the artist has been overlooked by the philosophical tradition: '[T]he experiences of *artists*' he writes, 'are "more interesting", and Pygmalion was in any event *not* necessarily an "unaesthetic man"' (*GM*, III, 6).

But this explanation misses the mark for at least two reasons. First, it is clear that Nietzsche's doubts about Schopenhauerian disinterestedness extend to the experience of the spectator; he is equally adamant that '*all* beauty incites to procreation—that precisely this is the *proprium* of its effect, from the most sensual regions up into the most spiritual' (*TI*, IX, 22). He says further that 'the effect of works of art is to excite *the state that creates art*' (*TI*, IX, 21), and that art generally manifests 'the will to live, life's form of exuberance' (*WP*, 821). As Julian Young says, '[T]here is, in short, a psychological condition that is uniquely identifiable as "*the aesthetic state*" a state that is common to the creator of art and the "genuine" spectator. The question of its nature constitutes "*the aesthetic problem*"' (Young, 1992, 26). Ridley overlooks altogether the extent to which Nietzsche repeatedly concerns himself with the aesthetic experience of the spectator rather than the artist from the beginning of his work to its end. Finally, and most significantly, this too-simple answer overlooks the fact that, despite Nietzsche's protests against Schopenhauerian disinterestedness, Schopenhauer too conceived of aesthetic experience from the perspective of the artist-genius, and regarded the experience of the 'beholder' as a diminished form of the same experience-type.

- 7 In *The Will to Power*, *Rausch* is more specifically associated with the manifestation of instinctual and specifically sexual energy, commenting, for instance, that 'without a certain overheating of the sexual system a Raphael is unthinkable' (*WP*, 800), and that 'the demand for art and beauty is an indirect demand for the ecstasies of sexuality' (*WP*, 805). These latter remarks seem to be speculations about a common causal source of the energy that finds expression in aesthetic rapture, rather than an attempt to characterize its phenomenological nature, however. It would, I think, be a mistake to reductively interpret *Rausch* as a direct manifestation of sexual feeling.

- 8 I have in mind especially *Twilight of the Idols*, Part IV of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *The Will to Power*. The pre-eminent objective of *amor fati* also features in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, although these texts do not so directly address the role of art in achieving it.