

İÇİNDEKİLER

NIETZSCHE, TRUTH AND ART

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Abstract: In this paper, I attempt to explore certain aspects of Nietzsche's understanding of truth from a critical point of view. I try to show that Nietzsche from the beginning to the end works with an inspiration theory of art. Perhaps this constitutes the whole importance of artistic engagement with life, that is, the creative moment that art brings to human life via inspiration. Art frees an imaginative relationship with life and thereby makes aesthetic moment the principal one. But I raise several questions concerning the autonomy of artistic production which Nietzsche almost takes for granted. This supposition of autonomy is part of Nietzsche's dissociating art from truth following Kant. The indefensibility of this autonomy invites a reconsideration of art's relationship with truth, which, I believe, is constitutive of the function of all art. In this sense, I argue that exploring this relationship is something indispensable for a full appreciation of the place of art in human life. But this in turn requires that we understand imagination and inspiration first of all from the perspective of truth.

Key words: Nietzsche, truth, art, life, man, creativity, inspiration, imagination, autonomy.

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Özet: Bu makalede, Nietzsche'nin hakikat anlayışının kimi boyutlarını eleştirel bir bakış açısından inceliyorum. Baştan sona Nietzsche'nin sanata ilişkin olarak "esin" teorisi ile hareket ettiğini göstermeye çalışıyorum. Muhtemelen hayatla sanatkarane iştiğalin tüm önemini oluşturan şey bu, yani, sanatın esin yoluyla hayata getirdiği yaratıcı boyut. Sanat hayatla tahayyüsel bir ilişkiyi özgür kılıyor ve böylelikle estetik momenti aslileştiriyor. Ancak Nietzsche'nin neredeyse hiç sorgulamadan kabul ettiği sanatsal üretimin özerkliğine ilişkin kimi sorular ortaya atıyorum. Bu özerklik varsayımı Nietzsche'nin Kant'ı takip ederek sanat ve hakikat arasındaki bağları gözardı etmesinin bir parçası. Bu özerkliğin savunulamazlığı her türlü sanatın işlevi için esas olduğunu düşündüğüm hakikatle ilişkinin yeniden ele alınmasını davet ediyor. Bu anlamda, bu ilişkinin tahkik edilmesinin sanatın insan hayatındaki yerinin tam olarak takdir edilmesi noktasında hayati bir şey olduğunu ileri sürüyorum. Bu ise tahayyül ve esini en önce hakikatin perspektifinden anlamamızı gerekli kılıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Nietzsche, hakikat, sanat, hayat, insan, yaratıcılık, esin, tahayyül, özerklik.

Introduction

Nietzsche's interest in truth lies at the heart of his whole thought. In a crucial sense, he wanted to shake the Western man's experience and conception of truth, or rather, to destroy what he saw as obsession with truth. Even in the earliest writings (and perhaps, as we will see, most clearly there) we can observe such a goal as basic to his philosophy. He came to believe that (from the 1870s on) curing the Western culture, which he declared as his very mission, involved doing away with this preoccupation with truth, that is, with reason and metaphysics. Nietzsche also was quite self-conscious that his approach to truth would shatter the whole foundations of the meaning world of the Western individual. Once he wrote: "to make the individual *uncomfortable*, that is my task".¹ One way to understand why individual is put into target here is to see that individual himself was the most typical product of the dominance of truth (of reason and knowledge) in the Western culture; in a sense, sickness was individual himself. As he says in the *Zarathustra*: "First, peoples were creators; and only in later times, individuals".² But what was the cure? That is, how can we be saved from truth? As we shall see, this was Nietzsche's chief concern.

Basically, Nietzsche thought that artistic inspiration was the most fundamental event of the life and that it had not only nothing to do with truth, but also incompatible with the priority accorded to truth in the Western tradition, a truth which he takes for granted as objective description of things (say, correspondence between mind and entities). Artistic inspiration puts the man (as artist) into the most engaging mood of life and makes possible for him the highest enjoyment and disclosure of life. Nietzsche argued that art experienced in its deepest sense as the tragic activity of "playing" with life represented the overcoming of the primacy of truth itself that led the Western culture to nihilism. This invites a couple of questions which we need to closely examine: What was the precise character of the notion of truth which Nietzsche took to be definitive of the Western experience of things? What pathology did Nietzsche identify in it? What was essentially wrong with it? Also important in this connection is the question; what has been definitive for Nietzsche's philosophical decision about truth? If we can answer this question in any adequate way, it will bring us to

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, "*The Notes (1875)*" in **The Portable Nietzsche**, trans. W. Kaufmann New York: Penguin, 1976, p. 50 (italic Nietzsche's).

²Friedrich Nietzsche, **Thus Spoke Zarathustra**, trans. Adrian Del Caro Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 43.

the question; does Nietzsche's account do any justice not only to truth but to art, as well? Indeed, how much tenable is the opposition which Nietzsche finds between truth and art (as a life lived in the light of artistic inspiration)? Perhaps between inspiration and truth we can comprehend an essential proximity of origin which we can only experience once we have questioned the authority of the interpretation of truth as correspondence (which, in Nietzsche's case, amounts to a life lived under the guidance of reason and knowledge). In the following I attempt at carrying Nietzsche's step further which involves a dual task; both rejecting his fundamental position and preserving some crucial insights found in it concerning the vital role of "inspiration" for art as well as for truth, and, by implication, for being human.

Eternal Truths

Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, launches an attack on conceptual thinking, on its being raised to the principle of human life. One should, in passing, point out the fact that Nietzsche's rejection of conceptual thinking as the basis of life (thus philosophy itself, i.e., truth and knowledge as the supreme values to judge life) is quite consistent with his very style of writing which represents an intensely metaphoric and imaginative use of language, arguably never seen before Nietzsche in philosophy (perhaps with the sole exception of his archenemy, Plato). Such a metaphoric and imaginative use of language should serve as a reminder for us that Nietzsche is not interested in setting proofs for his claims, but in "suggestive gesturing" in which alone we can be led towards experiencing the truth of these claims aesthetically. This obvious fact about Nietzsche's style of writing and philosophizing is something we should bear in mind while treating the question of truth in Nietzsche's thought. If we can clarify sufficiently the main reasons behind Nietzsche's opposition to conceptual thinking, to the experience of truth that lies at the foundation of Western culture, we will gain a fundamental insight into the underlying motivations of his whole philosophical enterprise.

The primacy of concepts, Nietzsche argues, goes against the fundamental character of life, that it is a restless movement and flux, a creative struggle of vital instincts without beginning and end, goal and purpose. Behind Nietzsche's whole position one observes a Heraclitean experience of life. Thus concepts freeze what is flowing, fixates what is

temporary. When Plato fully worked out his vision of philosophy (as conceptual thinking), he invented a world of changeless, eternal, transcendent beings which correspond to nothing in reality but only to concepts we have of them. Such a world of being conceived by Plato stood in a deep conflict with life itself. This meant that the Western culture was founded upon a fundamental opposition between being and becoming, between concepts and life. Mind naturally tries to bring life to a standstill, to impose on life its own categories, whereby the common (the general) becomes the measure of everything. Concepts cannot experience the particularities of this world, the individual, the real, because a concept is by nature founded on an abstraction from the common (the similar) and therefore intellectual approach to world elevates the common to the status of principle.³ We see first in Plato (Socrates) that the centrality of the intellectual finds itself in alienation to life (this world). Such gaze lost in the beyond, in the eternal, in the world of being has its cost as a loss of the present, which is the living core of life itself. Here Nietzsche's criterion is based on an appeal to the plenitude of the present; what enables us to live life fully in the present is exactly what we should go after. He adds that this presupposes a creative engagement with the present. The centrality of the intellectual (concepts) is certainly just the opposite. For Nietzsche only an artistic relation to life can satisfy such criterion of creativity. When Nietzsche speaks of knowledge, reason and philosophy (to be sure, in a negative tone), he identifies as their very essence a drive alien and hostile to life, namely a drive to fix up things. Such a drive which is foundational for conceptual thinking is a drive to form copies (or mummies) of things by drawing them out of the living flow of life. As opposed to rationality which copies, art needs in each case to be original, to create something new: art cannot take things as they are in themselves. One can observe that Nietzsche should repudiate *mimesis* as the essential character of artistic activity, a view that was decisive for Plato's and Aristotle's conception of art. In both Plato and Aristotle, *theoria* is experienced as the highest, most fulfilling and creative activity of human being, whereas *tekhne* is imitative. The Greek art which Nietzsche considers creative *par excellence* and finds huge inspiration for his whole experience of what art is was something which arose from the tragic experience of life and which has been lost with the increasing rationalization (which Nietzsche associates with Socrates) coming to dominate the Greek

³ See, for instance, "On the Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" in **Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's**, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979.

culture as a whole. Put otherwise, Nietzsche believes that Greek artistic creativity has been lost with the loss of the tragic essence of life in the later Greek culture.

But now, along with the elevation of art to the highest rank among human activities, indeed to be the ownmost self-assertion of life, imagination, too, gets a privileged position that had been denied to it in the Platonic hierarchy of human powers. Thus, as corollary to the rule of becoming, Nietzsche defends the supremacy of imagination and perception which consists in responding to the particular, the unique, the individual. By contrast, Nietzsche thinks, knowledge as hunting for the eternal truths in dead constructs, presupposes the correlation of conception and being. What follows obviously, a couple of crucial oppositions, those which Nietzsche sets between his own position and Plato's, illuminate Nietzsche's position very well; namely, becoming against being, appearance against reality, finitude against infinity, imagination against intellect, sensual against rational, passion against reason, art against truth, the particular and individual against universal (i.e. unique against common), image against concept, changing against constant, the present against eternal, tragic against sober, metaphor against proposition, body against spirit, earthly against otherworldly, power against morality, and so on. Such dichotomies are quite significant and revealing to understand the whole standpoint of Nietzsche's thought. But it also, as will be examined, invites us to view Nietzsche's position as the inversion of Plato's, where one wonders, with Heidegger, whether Nietzsche really overcomes Platonic tradition, for an inversion is always bound by the parameters of what is inverted.

Nietzsche's critique of Western understanding of truth is, at bottom, a critique of philosopher's fondness for concepts and propositions as tools to capture eternal truths. He portrays the man of intellect as someone who is caught ensnared in the steel net of concepts while attempting to throw it over all reality. Targeting at Plato (or Socrates) Nietzsche argues that truth is a drive against time and therefore against life: the cost is a paralysis one's best instincts (i.e. artistic powers) suffer. He presents the philosopher as the perfect case of being blinded by such a drive against life. So Nietzsche's critique of Western understanding of truth means also Nietzsche's critique of philosophy and philosopher. Indeed, Nietzsche implies that we owe the hegemony of such truth in the Western culture principally to the central role played by philosophy in the origination and formation of this culture in ancient Greece which,

however, terminated the tragic and creative spirit of the latter. Western culture as we know it arose precisely with the degeneration of tragic Greek world. The main cause of this phenomenon is philosophy itself as rational conceptual thinking which consisted in a denial of life in its true character. As Nietzsche notes in the article “On the Pathos of Truth” (1872):

Their journey towards immortality is more difficult and impeded than any other, and yet no one can be more confident than the philosopher that he will reach his goal. Because the philosopher knows not where to stand, if not on the extended wings of all ages. For it is the nature of philosophical reflection to disregard the present and momentary. He possesses the truth; let the wheel of time roll where it will, it will never be able to escape from the truth.⁴

Philosopher constructs the world into a timeless framework, in terms of a “universal schema,” that is, as an all-comprehensive framing from which nothing can escape. This Nietzsche occasionally likens to a spider’s spinning its web over air⁵ where “web” is a metaphor for “rational thought”. He makes the same point in notes taken in 1887: “*Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme which we cannot throw off*”.⁶ We should read this remark together with the above quotation. Now Nietzsche’s speaking of rational thought as a particular kind of “interpretation” is quite important here. This implies that, despite everything, it remains an interpretation, that is, it does not rise upon absolute foundations. An interpretation often proceeds with provisional and exploratory steps; this means a new step frequently comes as the overcoming of the earlier and is superseded when a look from a different angle becomes more revealing. Besides interpretation looks at things inevitably from a standpoint which remains to a large measure hidden or obscure to the interpreter himself. A certain degree of opacity, therefore, remains the steering ground of interpretation. In short, philosophy as rational thought is interpretive and therefore finite and perspective-bound, just as all other interpretations. Science, too, in this sense, is a kind of interpretation, thus an activity marked by subjective interests and finitude.⁷ This is roughly Nietzsche’s

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, “*On the Pathos of Truth*” in **Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s**, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979, p. 63.

⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, “*On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*”, in **Philosophy and Truth**, p. 85.

⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Will to Power**, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale New York: Vintage Books, 1968, #522 (italic Nietzsche’s).

⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, **Beyond Good and Evil** (1886), trans. and ed. W. Kaufmann, **Basic Writings of Nietzsche** (1968), p. 211.

perspectivism. Even though the spider spins an effective web which does good job in trapping the preys, the web is on the air and is there only till the next strong wind.

Thus, Nietzsche finds passion for truth as something poisonous to a fulfilling human existence, since he thinks that it works against life, that is, against meeting up to the present and the momentary. This passion for truth characterizes the philosopher who prefers living in a conceptual and abstract world over living in the real, earthly life. He misses the present and the momentary in favor of a constructed eternal, of the permanent which Nietzsche tells in the *Zarathustra* as merely “a parable.”⁸ Nietzsche’s attack on Socrates, the archetype of theoretical man, revolves around the latter’s devotion to eternal truths which, he believes, actually masks a hatred against life, a slave morality, a spirit of revenge.⁹ Dwelling in the dead, bloodless world of being, these “great sages”¹⁰ look at everything in this life of change and movement with suspicion, become an enemy of anything shining with joy and energy, “adopt a negative attitude towards life”¹¹: “nothing real escaped their grasp alive”.¹² With the end of the tragic age, philosophy turned into dialectics as the decisive, the original form of conceptual thought, or philosophy as we know it. Nietzsche argues that it is at bottom an expression of the spirit of revenge, a hatred of the strong, intelligence turned against life. In the person of a dialectician, the control of intellect had to work fiercely against the spontaneity of what is natural, the passions and the instincts. In the war between the natural and the intellectual, the victory of the latter (with Socrates) meant, for Nietzsche, nothing but “decadence”. In other words, the primacy of the intellectual in the Western tradition led to “decadence” (i.e. deterioration of the instincts of life). This decadence showed itself in Socrates, in “the hypertrophy of [his] logical faculty”¹³ with questions springing from this special cunning in a distinctively un-Greek way, which is called the allure of dialectics. In ancient Greece, this illusory allure and charm of philosophy (as conceptual clarification, dialectics) has attracted the elite and captivated them, “a noble taste is thus vanquished”.¹⁴ So, truth which philosophy or dialectic thus invented grew from out of “the spirit of revenge”

⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, **Thus Spoke Zarathustra**, p. 238.

⁹ See **Twilight of the Idols**, “*The Problem of Socrates*” in **The Portable Nietzsche**, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann New York: Penguin, 1976.

¹⁰**Twilight of the Idols**, p. 473.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 479.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 475.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, section 5.

against what is noble, the highest instincts of life. This sort of approach to the philosopher is indeed implicit, and at times quite explicit, in Nietzsche's treatment of Socrates and the Greek philosophers.¹⁵ Knowledge and truth appear as parts of a rationalist optimism, associated with Socratic wisdom, which is the almost necessary shape of philosophy as the practice of conceptual thought. The Socratic wisdom (which is, in *The Zarathustra's* words, "wake in order to sleep well"¹⁶) is opposed to the "the wisdom of Silenus"¹⁷ which consists in openness to the abyss of life. Perhaps, philosophy has a special magic of its own working against life: "In this teacher [read Socrates] nothing less than magic resides, and not in vain did youths sit at the feet of this preacher of virtue".¹⁸ Nietzsche adumbrates this in "On Science", which is found in the final part of the *Zarathustra*, where "the conscientious man" attacks "the magician" (read the philosopher in this case) who lures the free spirits:

Thus sang the magician; and all who were together went unwittingly, like birds, into the net of his cunning and melancholy rapture. Only the conscientious of spirit was not captured; he snatched the harp away from the magician and cried: "Air! Let in the good air! Let Zarathustra in! You make this cave sultry and poisonous, you wicked old magician!

You seduce us, you faker, you fine one, to unknown desires and wildernesses. And watch out when such as you start making speeches and fuss about truth!

Woe to all free spirits who are not on their guard for such magicians! Their freedom is done for: you teach and tempt us back into prisons –

--you old melancholy devil, out of your lament rings a bird call; you resemble those who secretly incite sexual desires with their praise of chastity!¹⁹

Truth and prison! The truth that Nietzsche finds authoritative for the Western tradition, for its making sense of the world is the truth of concepts according to which all vital reality (*Leben*) that surrounds us is grounded in and through consciousness. Life itself, meanwhile,

¹⁵ See especially the texts: *Twilight of the Idols*, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, "Philosophy in Hard Times", "The Struggle between Science and Wisdom" (the latter two texts are in the *Philosophy and Truth*).

¹⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 19.

¹⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 22-23. This wisdom is likewise the wisdom of Schopenhauer who identifies all reality as evil and truth as dismal.

¹⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

becomes an external world for the subject who strives to represent it *sub specie aeternitatis*, an external world yet not attainable, thus remaining forever something external. An introverted reflection on capturing and securing the ultimate grounds of things (eternal truths), on bringing life to a lifeless constancy has given rise to an absent-mindedness, a blindness to the here and now. Nietzsche contends that the philosopher is from the very beginning characterized by this absent-mindedness (remember the tale of Thales). Philosopher is the first-prisoner of this prison he himself built, who is henceforth unable to exit it, to respond to life in its directness and particularity. We have to discover ourselves as aesthetic subjects even in dealing with truth and see that in the origin we always find man, and find him as artist and everything else as his fiction, illusion, and creation. This dream for eternal truths whose framework is grounded in a consciousness-based relation to the world has ended up in a prison, in a self-annihilation, in a suffering in a closed-box. Socratic wisdom has ended up in the Cartesian universe of modern mind.²⁰

This would be man's faith if he were nothing but a knowing animal; the truth would drive him to despair and destruction: the truth that he is eternally condemned to untruth. But all that is proper for man is belief in attainable truth, in the illusion which draws near to man and inspires him with confidence. Does he not actually live *by means of* continual process of deception? Does nature not conceal most things from him, even the nearest things-- his own body, for example, of which he has only a deceptive "consciousness"? He is locked within this consciousness, and nature threw away the key. Oh the fatal curiosity of the philosopher, who longs, just once, to peer out and down through a crack in the chamber of consciousness.²¹

In fact, each word here, the penultimate paragraph of "On the Pathos of Truth", needs careful examination. That man is a being of illusion, that consciousness does not make life any clearer, but rather it is the darkest self-concealment of nature to man, that truth is not the most important thing in life are to be noted first. What matters for man, instead, is fittingness to life, which Nietzsche more precisely understands as fittingness for art, that is, a creative participation in the challenge of life. A life devoted to truth, truth being the ultimate value is but a miserable life, a dull one comparable to death, hence Plato's indication in the *Phaedo*, namely philosophy as practicing death. This is the rule of death, of nothingness, of nihilism.

²⁰ Cf. "Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" in **Philosophy and Truth**.

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Pathos of Truth," p. 65.

Philosopher started by opposing being (concepts) to becoming (life) and ended up imprisoned in the chamber of consciousness. Becoming is not just a dull flux, but an unending creative struggle of life which produces something new in each case. There is no stable order to things to be abstracted by reason. There are no enduring self-same entities and likewise no eternal truths; as indicated, the permanent is merely parable. Nietzsche, in fact, affirms the willfulness behind the scientific enterprise of Western humanity, but denounces its tendency to view the world in terms of time-free truths. Truths as truths about life do change as life changes: ““change” belongs to the essence, therefore also temporality”.²² We need to rule out truth altogether if we cannot ascribe any degree of stability to things. So, truth does not make sense if we do not ascribe some degree of stability to things. Accordingly, each proposition aspires to be an eternally valid representation of things, to grasp the eternally unchanging. This commitment to truth (say “Socratic wisdom”) rests on freezing things in time which is, again, “ill-will against time”, that is, “spirit of revenge”.²³ Rather, one needs to respond to life in its own terms, that is, tragically, creatively, artistically, instinctually. The tragic element in art is crucial for the life-affirming function of art precisely because the tragic is open to the abyss and darkness of life. We are genuinely in life when we are artistically involved in its dark, uncertain play, i.e. when we respond to it by playing, by the artistic play of imagination. Artist makes the world into an object before the playing of his imaginative powers, a material of this playing since solely by means of this creative suspension of the world done by the artist the world gets all the worth it can ever get. The world in Nietzsche’s sense turns into material before artistic activity and gets its form and reality in a work of art that artist brings to presence. But this is, too, only transient. And most importantly, as an artist I live and create in a world of dream and imagination, and do not care about its concrete reality.

As indicated, Nietzsche wants to raise a playing relationship with life to the status of principle, hence the importance of “illusion” and “delusion” (from *ludo*, play) that turn into creative forces in the artistic production. Playing as a necessary suspension of the everyday, of reality, of a conceptual interest in the world, renders the world into a playground, an aesthetic phenomenon, chiefly by way of freeing imagination. Heraclitus is reported to have said; “Aeon is a child playing draughts; the kingdom belongs to a child”. Nietzsche pays a

²²Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Will to Power**, #1064.

²³Friedrich Nietzsche, **Thus Spoke Zarathustra**, p. 111.

special attention to this metaphor of child.²⁴ Children are marked by a peculiar freedom to follow their instincts and by a peculiar love as well as need for playing. In another fragment, Heraclitus likens the deity to a child, the deity which governs becoming, world destruction and generation. "...the rule is in the child" "the world is the game child plays". The ground of the earth is like a child; ruleless, free, imaginative, instinctual, wild, pitiless, and also forgetful. It is artist who is connected with this ground of the earth in the most intimate way, i.e. through "playing with seriousness".²⁵ "In this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits" the rule of the temporal, i.e., "coming to be and passing away, generation and destruction without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence".²⁶ It was just this "playing" character of the aesthetical which Kierkegaard, with motivations quite opposed to Nietzsche, finds poisonous to the seriousness of human existence debasing it into a sphere of playing. This seriousness, Nietzsche would insist, stems from attaching to things a value, which is not our own creation. There the voice of truth speaks and declares me a bounded being, and thus a responsible being. Nietzsche is reluctant to subject human aesthetic freedom to any independent or intrinsic measure. It ends up negating ourselves and life.

Even though Nietzsche preserves the Schopenhaurian (and thus Kantian) background of his thought in metaphysical and epistemological respects, he later vehemently resists Schopenhauer's pessimism. In his attempt at a self-critique which he added later to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche intimates that Schopenhauer does not abandon an engagement for the search of truth and is still very much under the sway of "the pathos of truth", even if such truth he confesses to be a dismal truth, a truth of the evil at the heart of the world. As suggested, Nietzsche finds this commitment to truth as something responsible for a deep alienation to life. Accordingly, while Schopenhauer consults asceticism as the only viable option to cope with the evilness of reality, of primal energy (*Wille*), Nietzsche, on the contrary, wants to leave this pessimism behind by saying "yes" to this tragic essence of life through artistic self-assertion which introduces the dimension of creativity and thus satisfaction to life. He sees asceticism as part of a Christian search for the transcendent truths, as part of Christian experience of truth, of Christian negation of life. Nietzsche in "On Truth

²⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 114.

²⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truths and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," p. 91.

²⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. M. Cowan Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1962, p. 62.

and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”, seems to believe that this Platonic-Christian understanding constitutes the foundation of modern science as well, which thus grows out of a deep alienation to life in return for dead truth in which one “exchanges honey for ashes”.²⁷ Now, the artist will need to determine truth, that is, his own concrete truth in the face of life, in his each new creation. Neither truths nor values are there as ready-made enough to render the world a meaningful place in itself. Instead, it is only we who can give meaning to the world, to our lives and for this we need the authentic creativity which belongs to art alone. Crucial is the assertion that metaphysics becomes legitimate only as art and art is metaphysics proper. Art; “the highest task, the true metaphysical activity of this life”.²⁸ Nietzsche interprets the essence of this metaphysical activity as the only source of truths and values (or better, truth only as value in the service of life) is “will to power”. “Will to power” is, in fact, the highest instinct of life now raised to the status of principle, which stipulates that life shall not be in the service of truth, but just the reverse. The world thus appears not as the instantiation of eternal truths but as an aesthetic sphere, before the man as artist, thus as a world to be created and re-created by the willful artistic venture. One should notice here the striking parallel to Fichte’s understanding of the world not as a world of static facts, but exclusively as a stage for the ethical subject’s creative moral activity, for the ethical subject’s moral (which really means ontological) self-creation or self-definition, with the key difference that in Nietzsche the aesthetical moment replaces (and cancels) the ethical one. To be sure, Fichte’s position can be traced back to the idea which Kant explicates in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (but actually has its real foundation in the notion of subjectivity articulated in the first critique), namely the idea that moral norms have their ground in the autonomy of the subject which makes him a self-legislative power. In Nietzsche, this self-legislation turns into an unconditioned will to create new values and, correspondingly, the transcendental subject turns into the aesthetical subject.

Commitment to truth misses the fact that we are animals more interested in illusion, lie, deception and self-deception than in the truth of things, and even when we think that we seek after truth. Thus, he can say that art is recovery from truth: “We possess art lest we

²⁷ Thanks to Karsten Harries who stated this expression in a personal conversation. Note, also, that in Nietzsche’s writings both honey and ash are important metaphors.

²⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Birth of Tragedy**, p. 14.

perish of the truth".²⁹ In fact, ultimate truth about our universe is something we would never like to know; it is utter emptiness and meaninglessness. And there is art precisely because we ourselves should grant meaning to our lives by means of artistic creativity. We cannot evade nihilism in so far as we take the world as a static totality of entities and structures which reason and sciences presuppose. We must add the dimension of subjective creativity to our encounter with life as a determinative force, which is, to repeat, possible nowhere but in art. Art, unlike reason, does not produce static, timeless truths, but temporary creative experiences which give us satisfaction, which make world a more bearable place. In point of fact, what matters for us is not abstract truths, but more and more satisfaction from life, a life lived to its full. A kind of hedonism through art seems to be a chief element of Nietzsche's thought which is fundamentally what urges him to put the dominance of truth (in the Western culture) into question.

To recapitulate, what conceptual thinking is to being, art is to becoming. Fixating the flux of becoming, giving an order to this original chaos, this will is truth. Truth represents a conceptual relation to life which aims at bringing constancy to it by means of the universal laws, or of ultimate propositions, where art gives expression to life as moment, not as a timeless order. As opposed to reason and knowledge, art is aware of the fact that movement and change remains ultimate, that the rule of the time is invincible. The will to eternal truths thus is an ill-will against time, that is, against the present and the moment. While seeking eternity through ultimate principles, truth (presupposed as a countenance towards life in terms of rational thought) loses life found only in the present and the moment. Nietzsche interprets this will for fixation as something morbid and essentially destructive for human life, something nihilistic. This he detects in a special sort of obsession for meditation on being which he finds at the very foundation of the Western culture. Art keeps itself in a tragic openness to the ever new surprises of becoming, ever new coming of things from out of nature. Like Heidegger who views art as the presentation of the earth, Nietzsche construes art as the release of the natural, understood quite broadly including human beings (whereas Western tradition, generally speaking, rests on situating man outside nature). Being, by contrast, is a dead construct, a representation of life in abstract, bloodless structures. Only in the temporariness of becoming, life is restored to its fundamental liveliness. God as the

²⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Will to Power**, #822.

pinnacle of being dimension, of the intelligible world which grounds the Western culture as a whole is dead, because such a god has no place in the ceaseless self-denying and self-transcending renewal of becoming. Godhead can accept nothing new touch his essence, while life is a creative movement, which means, first of all, self-creativity, that is, self-overcoming, self-surpassing in the newer, in the higher. In this scheme of things, we might say, god is posited, first of all, as the freezing principle of the world (i.e., as the metaphysical ground of being). Note also that the god which Nietzsche rejects sounds very much an artifice of platonic premises. This is not the god that gives direction and meaning to the world of pious person.

In Nietzsche's view truth represents an unnatural, an illegitimate intervention in life, a distracting pause: "all our organs of knowledge and our senses are developed only with regard to the conditions of preservation and growth,"³⁰ that is, conditions of preservation and growth of life. If values are not such conditions, they are nothing. Life requires and is based on an imaginative struggle, which is art. So to speak, our cognitive powers are designed in such a way that we may become artists, rather than scientists or intellectuals.³¹ They are fulfilled only in their artistic employment and execution which have their own rules and standards. Nietzsche thus comes to ask; if we have art, why need truth? He claims that we do not need truth in itself, but only as instrument for life, i.e. for art. This quasi-pragmatic understanding of truth goes together with another (somewhat normative) assertion that the only legitimate form of truth must be the product of artist's playing with his objects. That is, the only legitimate room recognized for an engagement with truth is an artistic one, in which artist creates truth in the service of life, in the service of will to power. If in each case truth is decided only with respect to life, this means that truth is truth only on the basis of its useful perspective into life. Every truth presupposes such a perspective without ever being independent of it. Truth is perspectival, not absolute. It is not valid in and of itself; without its relation to or perspective into life, truth *is not*. In other words, truth is the "value" (in the sense of use and function) of such perspective for life. Everything here hinges on this "perspectivism," which is yet, on a philosophical plane, something suicidal. Let me now present my critical observations concerning Nietzsche's approach to truth.

³⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Will to Power**, #505.

³¹Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Will to Power**, #496.

Platonism Inversed

To be sure, artistic creation of truth is, by nature, not done with concepts and representations and the outcome is not propositions and generalities. For Nietzsche, it is a creative and imaginative playing with the ultimate potentials of the world for the self-assertion of will and life, which comes to its highest expression in the person of the artist. It is also evident that Nietzsche takes art as the self-assertion of will in the highest sense. And will is the inner essence of life. In Nietzsche's writings, such a decision concerning the nature of art goes unquestioned. It would be no exaggeration to say that artist, with his overly subjectivistic mission, appears as a godlike figure (*Übermensch*), and indeed art appears to fill the gap left with the death of God.

It is also important to remember that Nietzsche (following Schopenhauer) thinks that in our search for truths there is a dark element. We are never self-transparent. Reason is but a plaything before the dark forces which prevail in us and which form our reality. These forces are animal in nature. They can be given full release in the artist's Dionysiac struggle. Indeed, they can be made creative through this struggle. Where Schopenhauer argues that they are the source of all suffering and misery in the human life and therefore we need asceticism to play them down, Nietzsche wants to affirm our animal reality as the source of all of our vital instincts, which, he believes, are put to work in the artistic struggle. A truth-seeking life has to clash with our bodily nature, with our sensuality which would disrupt its proper functioning in various ways. Thus we see in Plato's *Phaedo*, for instance, that truth requires that reason and soul be freed from the obscuring and confusing intervention of the body to accomplish the supreme clarity that truth demands. To put it bluntly, a suppressed body /animal is the cost we pay for abstract truths. And body is a dark world. For Plato, our access to eternal truths involves purification from our animal side that fetters us, given that my reality is my soul precisely in contradistinction to my body. Search for truth (i.e., philosophy) becomes a continuous war against body. Nietzsche, by contrast, argues (in line with Schopenhauer) that my reality is simply my body. Nevertheless, one should notice that Nietzsche does not reject Plato's basic conviction (at least, as presented in the *Phaedo*) that body is a dark world. Rather, on this very Platonic basis, Nietzsche comes to think that man, in its reality, is a dark (and tragic) being and so is all life. Why not embracing body (this abysmal core of life)

instead of suppressing it? In almost all aspects of Nietzsche's thought one can discover his inversion of Platonism. The same thing we see, as indicated, in the case of the opposition between art and truth (philosophy), too.

Precisely here we reach the crux of Nietzsche's thought, i.e., as inversed Platonism. This issue invites several questions which might help us better make sense of Nietzsche's experience of truth. First we might wonder; how much is it philosophically desirable to be just an inversion? Plato considers soul to be the true essence of man as opposed to body, with the presupposition that there is a clear-cut dichotomy between soul and body. Plato conceives of being in contradistinction to change and becoming. And so is with the cases of reality and appearance, philosophy and art, rationality and sensuality etc. In all these cases, to the extent that one aims at a mere inversion, one is inevitably kept from questioning the basic presupposition, namely the question whether the dichotomies posited here are really justifiable. In this case, one simply affirms the presuppositions that constitute the ground of Plato's thinking, which is to say that one moves in the same ground of basic presuppositions as Plato, which, in turn, makes it difficult to identify any "essential" difference.

Second, Nietzsche categorically rejects Plato's views concerning soul, its immortality, eternal truths, primacy of reason and so on. And his position is admittedly founded upon this rejection. But, to be sure, Plato has not just propounded these ideas arbitrarily, but rather he strove to develop them with good arguments; he gives reasons, which one might reject but this, too, requires in turn to be done with good reasons. Nietzsche does not seem to be altogether clear about these "reasons". In a crucial sense, however, he takes the results of modern natural sciences as conclusive proofs against Plato's arguments (especially in his middle period, 1880s, which is sometimes dubbed as his "positivist" period).³² Whether sciences do really provide the grounds for such refutation is not clear at all. But is Nietzsche really justified to regard sciences as the basis of his rejection, given that he attacks sciences fiercely as the activity of objectifying reason, as devaluing life, as inhibiting our imaginative

³² For a useful account of the evolution of Nietzsche's thought towards a positivistic stance in **Beyond Good and Evil** and later, see M. Clark, **Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

powers? Are not the sciences the offsprings of Socratic optimism of reason which Nietzsche attacks?³³

Third, Nietzsche's argument always runs the risk of being self-undermining. Nihilism and perspectivism are noted as two serious obstacles for the inner consistency of his approach.³⁴ Sometimes Nietzsche exhibits an eliminativist attitude towards truth and other times argues in a way that gives the impression that he only wants to minimize the role of truth in human life. In the former sense, when he speaks of truth as untruth, truth as meaningless and empty universe, truth as dismal (unless it is transformed aesthetically), truth as deception, illusion and lie, this poses a threat to his own position as well, since Nietzsche with this thesis maintains a claim to truth (not to mention the necessity that he would need to defend this position with reason and argument). Hence, a sort of "liar's paradox" seems to be inherent in Nietzsche's approach to truth, which he comes face to face in the second part of the *Zarathustra*, in the section titled "On Poets". Nietzsche, in the section "Upon the Blessed Isles," had denounced poets vehemently declaring "and the poets lie too much".³⁵ Upon the disciple's insistence why Zarathustra said so, he reacts wildly expressing that Zarathustra is not interested in the question "why" and, least of all, in consistency. Since Zarathustra values, above all else, self-overcoming, he looks with a creative eye to the moment and does not feel bounded by what he said previously. He adds "Zarathustra, too, is a poet".³⁶ But the real difficulty here is that Zarathustra (or Nietzsche) values lying, for he finds that the artistic consists in lying and deception, in creating "illusions." How can he defend "lying" in response to the disciple's question? Would not he need an appeal to truth for a defense? Worse is the very fact that lying always proves itself to be parasitical on truths. We all need truth, and more than anyone else the liars!

I also believe that Nietzsche's understanding of art is (at best) high-flown. But in fact this exaggerated mission placed on art proves to be a burden too heavy for it, a burden which threatens to disintegrate it and thereby obscures its real importance for our life. Above all,

³³ See *The Birth of Tragedy*, sec. 15.

³⁴ For this issue, see Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, expanded edition and Walter Kaufmann, *Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950.

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 66.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

how can a profoundly dismal world be converted into a positive realm of experience? He would answer; only in and through artistic transfiguration, which is, put in Arthur Danto's words, a "transfiguration of the commonplace". But what justifies us to first assume that things are simply commonplace prior to the artist's touch? Obviously, only with this assumption artist's touch becomes something godlike. Nietzsche exaggerates and misplaces the potentials of art when he speaks of it, as though it were in possession of a magic touch (or king Midas' touch) on an essentially evil reality. Rather, one might argue that art would lose all its ground and inspiration if it did not arise first from a response to a beauty before which the artist transcends herself. Taking inspiration as an essential dimension of the art-work makes any appeal to the powers of the artist insufficient, and thereby the emphasis on the capacity of the artist to transfigure reality problematic. In this sense, artist is not, as Nietzsche argues, the one who imposes his subjectivity upon the world, rules upon the flowing, creates forms upon the material, thus not the perfect case of will to power. This means that the powers of the artist (say, the subjective side) cannot exhaust the creation of the work of art; inspiration is indispensable to all creativity, which forces us to think receptivity as fundamental to artist's labour. There always remains a crucial (dark and indeterminate) dimension to the creation of the work of art which the artist cannot condition, which escapes artist's mastery, which thus demands us to view the artist in terms of neediness or dependency. "Will to power" is in a sense nothing but a confession of this powerlessness on the part of artist, much like the *eros* of Plato's *Symposium*, for it arises from a fundamental lack that characterizes all aspects of being human. The so-called "artistic powers" are perhaps best understood as forms of receptivity, which in turn underlie the tragic place of the artist in the process of the arising of the work. This implies that genuine artist produces out of passion, i.e. out of essential poverty which grounds his "receptivity".

As a consequence, Nietzsche wants to overcome the primacy of truth by restoring it to the truth of organism, to un-truth. And it is art which is capable of and charged with this mission of driving truth away from life. We need to ask, however; can art dispense with truth where even illusion and illusion-making depend on truth? Perhaps, one can get a clue, among others, from the fact that artist always needs naming his work. The act of naming not only presupposes a prior understanding, a projection of the work, but it also attests to the artist transcending the whole process of production. Only so far as the artist is able to "name" his

work, he can maintain a genuine relation to his work, he is able to stand on the path of artistic creativity, he is able to keep his horizon open. What gets expressed in naming is the horizon, the meta-physical which always oversees and is constantly enacted in the very process of bringing about the work. Name remains a sign, a reminder for the memory of this meta-physical event. What makes it meta-physical is precisely the fact that a certain revelation of truth takes place here.

Art, taken by itself, is not enough to respond adequately to the meta-physical event of being from which it springs. It cannot provide, on its own, a horizon for itself, since a horizon is, by necessity, something meta-physical. Accordingly, art cannot subsist in itself, cannot be a point of departure for itself. If artist were not at the same time related to the meta-physical event of truth, art would not be possible. In this way, a different sort of thinking already realizes in art, a sort of thinking not conveyable in terms of propositions. But this sort of thinking to be possible, it is already necessary that artist is situated in the experiential context of a historical tradition, that is, in a meta-physical relation to the world which comes before and bears its stamp on the productions of the artist and on the character of his work. This point, if justified, puts the autonomy of artistic creation into question, an autonomy which Nietzsche suggests is the sole and the highest sense of autonomy available to us human beings. Only a revolution in the meta-physical relation to the world, a revolution in the horizon, brings a revolution in the artistic activity too, but not the other way around. Therefore, a true artist cannot stop asking himself, in some way or another, the basic questions of thinking, basic questions which we as human beings cannot evade. The answers artist in some way get and have about them, i.e. his innermost convictions, work somehow in the background of his own work. Likewise he might look to philosophers or religions for the possible answers. Thinking lies always in the background of an artistic activity and as such functions as a hidden force in its movement; artist interprets things! Althusser speaks of the spontaneous philosophy of the scientist. Similarly, one may also speak of the spontaneous meta-physics of the artist. However, just as science needs operating on the basis of some basic shared background assumptions (Kuhn calls it “paradigm”, Heidegger, though in a different light, “world”) which it, as long as it remains a science, is not capable of questioning, so does art need such a world of meaning (or, as Benjamin takes it, an “aura”) to start with. But this is not saying that such a world delimits artist’s imagination.

It follows that, contra Nietzsche, art cannot replace thinking, but remains, directly or indirectly, dependent on it; artist needs meta-physics. In consequence, Nietzsche's two closely interconnected tacit assumptions prove to be question-begging: (1) art is immune from nihilism. Conversely, in fact, art, too, can degenerate into nihilism and serve for its purposes (which is actually the case with much of the modern art). Nietzsche is aware of this when he, in his latest writings, severely criticizes Wagner's late music as nihilistic.³⁷ (2) Art is immune from thinking and, as such, self-sufficient. Conversely, in art an intuitive sort of thinking is at work, a thinking which art inherits from the broader meta-physical context and tradition within which alone what it accomplishes makes sense and becomes possible. Yet every creative human activity, as a disclosure of truth, moves in the same imaginative ground which is the openness constituting human essence and stands in need of being inspired, i.e., stands beyond. This transcendence which shows itself in the imaginative character of our way of being is constitutive of artistic production.

Truth as objectivity versus truth as event, and the Kantian Baggage

Against the truth of objective representation of beings in propositions, which Nietzsche presupposes as the only sense of truth, we now might come to an awareness of truth in its original sense, namely truth as the event, the creative occurrence that opens the world in a radically new and striking light. This opening of things and world in the human imagination is foundational and definitive for art and most visible there. It is not reducible to an object-oriented engagement with the world that is basically a copying one (representational and technical), that is, one which works with things and manipulate them under an already-set light. By contrast, art as a site of primordial truth is essentially creative. To be art in the genuine sense, it must be "original"; it must, in each case, discover the world in a new light and bring this to expression and embodiment. The artist experiences this event of truth as "inspiration" which exerts impact on the way he views the world (or sometimes transforms his vision into the world). It happens as a discovery and introduction of a new angle into the inexhaustible depth of being (or life). But inspiration is possible only owing to the

³⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, in **The Portable Nietzsche**, ed. and trans. W. Kaufmann New York: Penguin Books, 1974, pp. 661-683. See also Jonathan R. Cohen, "*Nietzsche's Musical Conception of Time*" in **Nietzsche on Time and History**, ed. M. Dries (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 305-307.

imaginative ground of our being. Averroes, in his commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, construes Aristotle's view of imagination (*phantasia*, *takhayyul*) as the culmination of all functions of *psukhe/ nafs* which is itself the form of an organic body.³⁸ It is the ultimate link to the divine activity which is the source of inspiration in human life. Basing on Avicenna, al-Ghazali interprets this imaginative dimension of human existence as a "niche of lights".³⁹ Through it we are, so to speak, raised above beings and granted a vision into these same beings as a whole. In this sense, I would suggest that inspiration can be considered as the actualization of this imaginative ground (this niche of opening), and work of art, in particular, its "realization", i.e. getting an embodiment in things. Imagination plays so central a role in Ibn al-Arabi's theosophic thought that William Chittick calls it "metaphysics of imagination".⁴⁰ For Ibn al-Arabi, man is essentially a locus for the manifestation of the divine (*Hakk*), a locus which is fundamentally imaginative, while cosmos is the site of divine creativity. Man as an imaginative locus, as a "niche of lights", becomes both the site of this divine creativity and, at the same time, the beholder of its manifestation in beings. It is against this background that I find noteworthy Nietzsche's emphasis on the priority of a different relation to the world.

With Nietzsche, however, we come to a different dimension; Nietzsche may well help us experience the artistic core of this creativity. Art reveals the fact that at the very heart of our relatedness to truth we are claimed by a creative artistic occurrence as those to stand *before* it, receive it and respond to it. This means that we need uniting thinking with a sensitivity characteristic of art, an imperative which, yet, in turn, requires that we leave Nietzsche behind. Through the demands of truth, art now becomes something bounded, and so does the freedom of imagination. This boundedness means a disciplining necessary for the fruition of its best potentials.⁴¹ An appraisal of the original kinship between art and truth, between

³⁸ See Averroes, **Long Commentary on Aristotles' De Anima**, trans. Richard Taylor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

³⁹ The expression is the subject of Al-Ghazali's renowned treatise by the same name, which interprets our relatedness to truth and being (to *Hakk*, a Qur'anic word, which means at once God, Truth and Being) in the Islamic context. See **The Niche of Lights/Mishkat al-Anwar**, ed. and trans. David Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998). See also my article, "al-Ghazali and the Question of Man", *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 30 (2013), 25-57.

⁴⁰ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: SUNY, 1989).

⁴¹ Thus Kant is ceratinly right when he defends the boundedness of art and imagination against a pure freedom which would surrender it to chaos and delusion. See, *The Critique of Judgement*, § 43, § 50.

imagination and thinking also requires that our mission as human beings is one of discovering meanings, not inventing them, a discovery for which man's imaginative openness is a precondition. In other words, man is put here in the service of truth and thereby actually in a transformed relation to things and to nature. Being in the service of truth does not mean, however, being a mental ego, a subject. Al-Ghazali's word, "niche of lights" (*mishkat al anwar*), I find suggestive here. According to this, man is a niche opened in nature, a niche where nature comes to meaning in terms of its artist-creator. But, interestingly enough, Nietzsche seems to be willing, in the *Birth of Tragedy*, to accept an artist God's "hidden meanings" in nature, nature now experienced as a realm of artistic creation.⁴²

We are also, it seems, in the vicinity of Heidegger's thought; he asserts that imagination is an occurrence of *Lichtung* itself.⁴³ Our freedom is not separable from the fact that beings are open to us through the imaginative ground of our being. Thus only free beings can experience inspiration, the event of truth, which is also to say that without freedom truth cannot find any space: freedom is the very space of truth. I take Heidegger's expression, "the truth of Being", in the sense of opening-up which opens the world and the things to us in the first place, a revelation for which man is a niche, a "niche of lights." Truth, in the primordial sense, is what determines the frame of ontological significations of a historical world as a shared background context which assigns meaning to everything we say and do. We are born into a historical world, a space of meaning, and appropriate it as imaginative beings in our activities, whereby we simply maintain our relatedness to truth. But imagination in the service of truth forces us to think of it as something destabilizing, for it also means a propensity to go beyond the given, that is, beyond the usual boundaries of *Lichtung*. That is one of the reasons why Plato in the 10th book of the *Republic* is suspicious of imagination. Both freedom and creativity would not be appreciated well without considering this phenomenon.

Accordingly, when Nietzsche opposes truth and art, he, in so doing, not only fails to understand our relation to truth, but also, inescapably, to the phenomenon of art itself which is not separable from truth. But this is tantamount to distorting the true character of both art and truth. He makes it an area of fulfillment of aesthetic hedonism, of self-assertion of will to

⁴²Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 8.

⁴³ M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of the Event*, trans. R. Roycewicz and D. Vallega-Neu
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 247.

power, and thereby turns it into a means for the gratification and sublimation of our (supposed) subjective powers. In this way, he becomes a representative of modern approach to art which takes work of art merely as an aesthetic object and takes it away from its source in the disclosure of things, in truth.⁴⁴

Art as a special domain of truth can teach us that the disclosure of things comes not so much through detached reflection but as inspired experience in which all subject-object dichotomy vanishes and in which we come to “the fore” with our essential receptivity, and not as actor subjects. What matters is that we come to this “fore” more and more adequately, i.e. receptively. Hence to such “fore” of the world we are related in the first place with the “peculiar activity” of imagination as the free site where inspiration takes place. Objectifying reason can get only a dim light of it which it needs for its attempt to inspect entities more and more closely, for the fact that inspiration is not something masterable. It seems that imagination first and foremost has the world as a meaningful context of images, as a unity, for we can relate to something possible (or impossible) only through an imaginative leap. Leaped is the here and now. Sciences, too, in their own ways are based on imaginative practices. I think Ibn al-Arabi puts this very strikingly:

Were it not for the trace of imagination, rational thinkers would not be able to “suppose the impossible” when seeking a proof for something. For if the impossible did not receive existence in some presence, it could not be supposed or presumed.⁴⁵

Training in a specific discipline, or even in a specific practical activity, always involves refining in imagination. A refined imagination is certainly the spearhead of thinking. Mathematical intuition, too, has an indispensable imaginative component. Here imagination proves crucial in exploring the possibilities of space. Perhaps we observe here more concretely its intimate ties with space, thus with the original opacity of things (which we can see in Plato’s discussion of *khora* in the *Timaeus* and in Aristotle’s concept *hyle*). It is this original opacity of things which is the presupposition of imagination, and by the same token,

⁴⁴ I would agree with Heidegger when he contends that setting out to overcome the nihilism of the Western culture, Nietzsche’s thought, ironically, ends up becoming its climax. See especially Heidegger’s essay “Nietzsche’s Word: “God is Dead”” in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya (The Meccan Revelations)* Cairo; 1911, 4 volumes, vol. II, p. 312.4. Quoted in William Chittick, **The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination** Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 124 (Chittick’s translation).

of all art and thinking. By its very capacity to carry us beyond the familiar domain of experience into the uncharted one, imagination is key to the human freedom and to the originality in all human productions. In this sense, imagination is all about disclosing possibilities concealed to the familiar, the structured realm of experience and practices. This implies that, so far as being human is concerned our relation to the unfamiliar is as important as our initial engagement with the familiar. If so, imagination cannot be confined, as Heidegger supposes, to the activity of *Lichtung* (as indicated above) as the field of familiarity and disclosedness. Man, in turn, should be interpreted as always overstepping the boundaries of *Lichtung*, if man's essence as openness (*das Freie, das Da-sein*) is characteristically an imaginative openness.

Imagination links understanding to the non-object, the non-present, the non-entity, the impossible, thereby reveals that it does not function as self-enclosed machinery exhausted by its relation to objects, but as transcending. Inspiration is the moment in which this transcending "eventuates". Then, inspiration represents more primordial instance of truth of which sciences, for instance, in their "routine" activities as object-oriented engagement seem deprived.⁴⁶ Inspiration, furthermore, is the essential principle (*arkhe*) not only in all sorts of arts from poetry to architecture, but also in all genuinely human activities especially including philosophy. It is in art, perhaps, that the phenomenon of inspiration becomes most concrete and visible. Inspiration is the re-revolutionary moment in our relatedness to truth.

Being a rapture from the ordinary, inspiration brings the extra-ordinary to our space of meaning. Here imagination as our basic worldliness is the material basis of inspiration. One might put this in the following way; an inspiration is, as it were, a flash happening in the sky of imagination. Our making sense of things is imaginative (or, what is the same, "metaphoric") at the most basic level, which is to say, to be possible it must transcend these things. Metaphors are the wings of imaginative dealing with space whereby we make some sense of things. But, as Nietzsche observes, the predominance of objectifying relation to the world, of obsession for fixation and calculation of things impair our imaginative abilities for inspiration, so to speak, trim our wings. Nietzsche saw this nihilism, but wrongly associated it with the domination of truth in the Western culture, presupposing that truth is simply a

⁴⁶ But, as opposed to these routine activities ("normal science" as Kuhn calls it), paradigmatic change or revolution in science, too, involves inspiration.

conceptual relation to the world. Concepts even depend on the disclosure of things but can never meet up to it. Thinking starts only with this inability of concepts; the disclosure of things discloses their impenetrability rather than a clearly delineated world. Truth leaves us in wonder in a mysterious world and powerless before its unfathomable depth. From this wonder and powerlessness alike, the venture of art as well as thinking were born as belonging to one another. The inspired moment is a lightning which grants a momentary revelation to us in this insuperable night of the world. Presumably, robbed of this relation to truth anchored in the memory of creative, inspired moment, human beings would turn into ordinary mammals.

In this regard, a brief discussion of Kant would be illuminating. In point of fact, Nietzsche's thesis that the ground of our relation to the world and to life is at bottom imaginative/ "metaphorical"⁴⁷ has some obscure origins in Kant. The crux of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, one might well argue, is the idea of "figurative synthesis" carried out by our imaginative capacity whereby we temporally relate to the world of phenomena. For it is only through the unique mediating function of imagination (namely, transcending the present) that sensibility and understanding, as two quite different spheres, can get and work together. Our imaginative capacity, then, according to Kant, is what keeps the whole cognitive machinery going on in a harmonious functioning.⁴⁸ In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant comes to see the full activity of our imaginative capacity at work in the creativity of artist, and supremely in the genius through whom nature gives the rule to art (§ 46). Additionally, if J. Knellner is right, even Kant's practical and theoretical philosophy "are mediated and in this sense only, 'united'" by "a freely reflecting imagination".⁴⁹ Then, one might wonder whether this does not imply that imagination has a crucial role in Kant's whole project, by bridging the theoretical and the practical. However, such a creative character that Kant ascribes, I believe rightly, to imagination is something that threatens Kant's whole epistemological standpoint. Marta

⁴⁷ Nietzsche notes in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (pp. 88-89): "The drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself. This drive is not truly vanquished and scarcely subdued by the fact that a regular and rigid new world is constructed as its prison from its own ephemeral products, the concepts. It seeks a new realm and another channel for its activity, and it finds this in *myth* and in *art* generally."

⁴⁸ Kant also speaks of an "unknown root" by which he most probably means imagination: "There are two stems of human knowledge, namely sensibility and understanding, which perhaps spring from a common but to us unknown, root." *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), (A15/B29).

⁴⁹ Jane Knellner, *Kant and the Power of Imagination* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.16.

Helfer points out⁵⁰ that it results in a sort of breakdown in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, from which Kant flees by strangely asserting that “imaginative synthesis is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul”.⁵¹ One might well doubt whether imagination has any real place in the whole machinery of subjective powers man is supposed to command. Imagination perhaps is something not to be approached in epistemological terms. This means that it cannot be explained adequately by any cognitive mechanism *present* in us, rather its “freedom” from any mechanism or law should be seen essential for its peculiar functioning, that is, its bringing about “what surpasses nature.”⁵² To surpass nature implies that it, in each case, takes leave from the real, an issue which Kant discusses, in the *Critique of Judgment*, as the basis of “disinterestedness” of aesthetic reflection. By taking leave from the real, from the present, imagination also functions as the root or source of our knowledge of the real (that is, of the phenomenal world).⁵³ It cannot be explained, thus, by reference to its object relatedness, for it is basically pre-reflective and involves a relation to non-presence. Where can we locate imagination within a framework of objective principles of knowledge? On the contrary, imagination provides us with a remarkable clue to the effect that human being is essentially not a subject, but a receptive openness and such receptivity happens not at the level of sensible intuition but primarily at the level of imagination which first keeps the world open.

In so far as Kant cannot account successfully for the imaginative character of our relation to the world or refrains from that in favor of an epistemological world-picture based on an understanding of man in terms of pure subjectivity (transcendental “I”), he is condemned to operate with an empty notion of man. Most regrettable is the emptiness of this “I” as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy complain, an emptiness which lies at the heart of Kantian epistemology:

As a result, all that remains of the subject is the “I” as an “empty form” ... that “accompanies my representations.” This is so because the form of time, which is the “form of

⁵⁰ Marta Helfer, **The Retreat of Representation: the Concept of *Darstellung* in the German Critical Discourse** Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 10.

⁵¹ Kant also writes of imagination: “blind but indispensable function of the soul without which we would have no knowledge but of which we are scarcely ever conscious” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A78/ B103).

⁵² Immanuel Kant, **Critique of Judgment**, trans. J. C. Meredith Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 143 (revised edition).

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, **Critique of Pure Reason** (A15/ B29).

the internal sense” permits no substantial presentation. As is well known, the Kantian “cogito” is empty.⁵⁴

Hence Kant somehow sees the centrality of imagination for human beings in its creative, nature-surpassing (or object-transcending) function, but shies away from taking the necessary step of fully accommodating this in his thought, for that would, I suppose, lead to an overhaul in his philosophical project.⁵⁵ This is again evident in the following remarks: “That the affinity of appearances ... and so experience itself, should only be possible by means of this transcendental function of imagination, is indeed strange, but is nonetheless an obvious consequence of the proceeding argument”.⁵⁶ Accordingly, he later suppressed these insights by making imagination subordinate to the theoretical faculty (understanding, or what is the same, to “taste” in the *Critique of Judgment*), that is, by interpreting it in terms of subjectivity. We can also clearly see Kant tie imagination to inspiration, and assign a central place to the latter in the aesthetic experience (that is, in the disinterested pleasure of the subject, as delineated in the same work, *Critique of Judgment*), but he nevertheless fails to think them beyond a self-contained ego.

Final Considerations

Nietzsche, from the beginning of his philosophical life to the very end, operates with the centrality of inspiration for art and for all creativity (including philosophy), thus, we can assume, for truth as well. This becomes most evident when he, in the *Ecce Homo*, declares inspiration ultimate ground of all creative works.⁵⁷ “A thought”, writes Nietzsche, “lights up in a flash, with necessity, without hesitation as to its form.” And he adds “I never had any choice”.⁵⁸ In the same book, Nietzsche describes the way the idea of “eternal recurrence” and

⁵⁴ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, **The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism**, trans. P. Barnard and C. Lester Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 30.

⁵⁵ As Heidegger asks “Does not the *Critique of Pure Reason* deprive itself of its own theme if pure reason is transformed into transcendental imagination? Does not this laying of the foundation lead to an abyss?” **Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics**, trans. J. Churchhill Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962, p. 173. See the entire 3rd section (pp. 131- 201).

⁵⁶ Immanuel Kant, **Critique of Pure Reason** (A 123).

⁵⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols**, trans. Judith Norman Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 126.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

the *Zarathustra* came to him.⁵⁹ But quite early, already in the *Birth of Tragedy*, one can see that the whole background of the book is informed by an urge to regain the inspiration to life as a fundamental (i.e. creative) factor. He, in the opening part of the *Birth of Tragedy*, highly esteems and even sanctifies our imaginative capacities as enabling us a creative engagement with life. It is in this spirit that he emphasizes the role of dreams and intoxication in human life, and is after the Dionysiac meaning of the world. In a sense, the transfiguration of the commonplace is the gift of the inspired moment. But reason and knowledge, as in the case of Western tradition, and with modernity in particular, blunts our imaginative powers and leaves us handicapped before the challenge of life. Nietzsche opposes to truth because he identifies it with representational truth, with the truth presupposed by objectifying reason. In this sense, he can say “Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live”.⁶⁰ Truth is reduced here to a survival value; it is evaluated, as Heidegger puts it, as “a necessary value but not the highest one”.⁶¹ As Nietzsche sees quite acutely and affirms, to take truth as merely something instrumental (for life), or contingent on “will to power” (say, a matter of strategy for the interests of “will to power”⁶²), is to downplay it. In that case, it does not have its own justification independently in itself, but in the will to power as the highest and defining expression of life. Art is the principal area for the execution of this will to power and as such it is a vital “kind of cult of the untrue”⁶³ without which “the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness ... would be utterly unbearable”.⁶⁴ Art makes it into an aesthetic phenomenon and thereby something “bearable for us”. For that reason “only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified”.⁶⁵ In keeping with this, an unconditional devotion to truth is what Nietzsche takes to be nihilism itself; it “stands in a hostile and destructive relationship to the world”.⁶⁶

But once again we should be reminded that devotion to truth here is construed as commitment to objectivity. One can, by contrast, make a case that objectifying reason does

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, #493.

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche III: Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. D.F. Krell New York: Harper & Row, 1982, p. 56

⁶² As he notes quite simply; “The criterion of truth resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power”, *The Will to Power*, #534.

⁶³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 163.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 72, 152.

⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” p. 92.

not exhaust all possibilities of thinking; it is in fact the poorest manifestation of our relatedness to truth. By the same token, the motivation of thinking cannot be measured by the ideals of science. What calls for thinking is not something I can determine; rather its claim is precisely to determine me in my being. It comes from without as something entirely alien to the world of objects, much like an artist inspired by a vision. Thinking finds itself first through this alien call, through its dislocating touch, as something responsible. Thinking is then enacting this responsibility, that is, the responsibility for truth, which therefore lies beneath all senses of responsibility including the responsibility of the artist which finds expression in and as a work of art.

Likewise any attack on truth has an ominous character; it is self-defeating. We depend on truth not only in lying, in making semblances, in making propositions but also in all doing and acting. Nietzsche is, one might suppose, aware of that. His real attack is instead targeting at the dominance and primacy of truth in life. He defends the subordination of truth to art: all values of life must be determined by artistic will and creativity, by a “cult of the untrue”. But this, too, does not make any difference. Truth is not something we can play with; it is something we, human beings, depend, at the very core of our being, even when struggling against it. Likewise illusions cannot guide life and art cannot serve for self-deception. But this requires that we take up thinking in the service of truth. It seems to me that Nietzsche’s demand actually aims at severing truth from thinking. It is precisely in this sense that truth is rendered something “subordinate”, because only with the primacy of thinking in relation to truth, truth can gain a principal position in life. Truth demands reflection. In reflection we appropriate our relatedness to truth. In so far as this relatedness to truth is our essence, we cannot dispense with it without also losing our human essence. In the soil of truth alone can art grow, that is, as its edification. Art and thinking in this sense are inseparable; they are both servants of truth. They both stand towards truth, i.e., stand in need of being illuminated by truth.

Therefore, Nietzsche’s attempt at opposing art to truth and seeing the former as an antidote to the latter seems to me wholly unconvincing; “we have art lest we perish of the truth”. Without first experiencing beauty and wonder of things artist can never set out to produce any work. A mute and meaningless world of beings would preclude all possibility of

art. It is in this sense that “aesthetic justification of world” begs question. If we want to place art into the center of human life, truth is not excluded but simply reasserted as something claiming us, viz.as that which is the pre-condition of our wondering and questioning; it clandestinely feeds and provokes all endeavors of reflection without never coming to intelligibility fully. This lacuna of truth characterizing the neediness of human being and the concomitant “restlessness” on his part gives rise to thinking and likewise to art as interlocked fields of our essential relatedness to truth. As Plato suggests in the *Symposium*, we, as essentially needy beings and as beings pregnant with truth, can “give birth” only in the presence of the beautiful.

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