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Aesthetics and Religion: Nietzsche and Freud on the Value of Illusions

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AESTHETICS AND RELIGION: NIETZSCHE AND FREUD ON THE VALUE OF
ILLUSIONS

A Thesis

by

CARLOS CALDERON

Submitted to Texas A&M International University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2019

Major Subject: English

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Approved as to style and content by:

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetics and Religion: Nietzsche and Freud on the Value of Illusions (August 2019)

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This work will examine the psychological function of religious belief, particularly their capacity to provide guidance and relief from the aspects of existence that prove troublesome. Religions, a culturally instituted set of traditions and practices, have played a significant role in shaping the development of civilization. The collective organization of individuals and the shared acceptance of values has made possible the formation of large and complex social arrangements, making existence for the human species a more bearable enterprise. Interested in the lives of the ancient Greeks, the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, sought to apprehend the mystery of their deities as products of aesthetic invention. With their worldly outlook preserved in the projection of these cosmic fantasies, Nietzsche sought to resurrect the philosophy of pessimistic strength that sustained the lives of the Greeks, believing that a vital life force lay concealed in their mythology. The myths and rituals pertaining to the god Dionysus were capable of inducing powerful sublime experiences, as the mythic hero symbolized the struggle to transcend the painful ordeals of existence. While Nietzsche's analysis lay the groundwork for the psychological origins of these myths, the psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, developed a more systematized way of investigating the phenomena of religious belief, applying the principles of scientific analysis to the methodology of his theories. Though Freud believed that religious belief was symptomatic of a kind of mental neurosis, he contended that these myths or illusions played a pragmatic

function in spurring the progression of civilization, as religious ideas imposed strict moral restraints on their adherents, thus making coexistence possible. While faith in religious ideas have waned with the scrutiny of scientific analysis, the works of Nietzsche and Freud have suggested that life for humans can only be made meaningful and comprehensible when life is experienced as an aesthetic phenomenon. In other words, life is made meaningful when apprehended through the lens of human interests and desires, which have been projected into the abstract constellation of religious phenomena that structure almost all cultures and societies.

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INTRODUCTION

The experience of transcendence compels strong feelings of mystery, instilling a sense of otherworldliness and awe in those individuals who have broken through to this transformed state. The desire for a reality beyond the conventions of everyday life, free from the contaminants that desacralize the world, has spurred religious and philosophic contemplation on the nature and meaning of existence. For many, the power of this sublime state has substantiated the belief in an immaterial reality, giving way to the formation of many religions and cults, which attempt to interpret and make sense of these strong feelings. Religious beliefs and practices thus rely upon an aesthetic component to materialize the power of their sentiments.

My thesis will explore the extent to which religious feeling is intertwined with the capacity for aesthetic invention. The religious sentiment, from the perspective of Freudian and Nietzschean theory, appears to be rooted in the same service of promoting and enhancing the experience of human life. While the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche predate the works of Sigmund Freud by a few decades, there are a number of similarities between their ideas, particularly their recognition that humans are a product of nature and subject to biological impulses that dictate the course of their motivations and actions. Comparing the two thinkers, who each develop their own theories regarding the origins and purpose of religious ideation, will illumine the extent to which religious phenomena and aesthetic invention are faculties of the human psyche, both serving a vital function to enhance and strengthen the human species.

This thesis follows the style of *Arizona Quarterly*.

In Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), the philosopher boldly declares that life can only be justified when experienced as an aesthetic phenomenon. Believing that the arts lay hold over the meaning of existence, Nietzsche set upon the task of exploring the forces that gave rise to the divine fantasies that comprised the spiritual life of the ancient Greeks, inventions that he believed to be the construction of great poets and artists. To articulate the depth of his thought, Nietzsche constructed a metaphysics of art, which consisted of an artistic dialectic of opposing aesthetic instincts. Apollo, representative of order and formalism, dueled and comingled with Dionysus, representative of the emotionally potent substance found in both music and dance. Together, these artistic forces produced the religious narratives of the ancient Greeks, including their reenactment in dramatic form.

While these forces pertain to aesthetic faculties, they also connote psychological dispositions inherent in human development. Apollo, god of sculpture and fantasy, also symbolizes the development of human consciousness, a state of awareness that facilitates the experience of an independent and autonomous self that is free to impose its will upon the world. Consciousness proves burdensome for the individual as he or she comes to recognize the perils of existence. The confrontation with the thought of mortality and the inevitability of death leads to the apprehension of suffering, constituting the perennial fact of existence. The awareness of these predicaments has deeply disturbed and perplexed the human mind, and attempts to make sense of the meaning of suffering has fueled religious and philosophic meditation concerning the value existence.

Metaphysical anxieties and fears have influenced the production of religious narratives, which are cosmic explanations for the nature of reality that have attempted to provide guidance when coming to terms with existence. Of particular interest for Nietzsche

was the means the ancient Greeks employed to confront the experience of suffering.

Believing them to be a culture of vitality and strength, Nietzsche looked in awe at their religious myths, which depicted terrifying and often cruel happenings to heroic and virtuous figures, a reminder of the absurdity and horror of existence. Willing to confront the most despairing of life's moments on the stage, Nietzsche believed that underlying the creation of these tragic myths was a wellspring of power and psychological health that sustained the lives of the Greeks, denoting a character of pessimistic strength that could boldly confront the challenges of existence.

The curse of individuation, the development of conscious self-awareness and the apprehension of suffering, is, in part, overcome by the transcendent experience induced by the Dionysian myth. The myth of Dionysus embodies the emotive substance unearthed from the depths of the human psyche, which acts as a restorative antidote to the pains suffered during life. Nietzsche suggests that aesthetics alone can compensate for the many challenges and difficulties that come with being a finite and vulnerable creature, acting as a curative palliative that restores and redeems the individual from his or her sufferings. The reenactment of initiation rituals involving dangerous feats that challenge the initiate, the activities of the festivals that incorporate music and dance, and the terrifying spectacles produced on the Greek stage, all make use of artistic components in order to actualize and make manifest the life-affirming antidote associated with Dionysian transcendence.

While the aesthetic impulse culminates in the creation of religious phenomena, materializing into the diverse assemblage of pagan gods found in the religious life of the Greeks, the psychological importance of religious belief, broadly speaking, is more fully articulated by Freud's psychoanalytic analysis, which is detailed in his works *The Future of*

an Illusion (1927) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). Recognizing that belief in religious phenomena cannot be corroborated by reason and is thus illusory, Freud, however, maintained that the function of these myths pertained to the fulfilment of some pragmatic end, which, for Freud, amounted to the development of civilization. Religions, for Freud, functioned as an adhesive mechanism, facilitating the process of collectivization as individuals are compelled to forgo their own interests for the sake of cohabitation and survival.

Paramount to the function of religious belief is the goal of ensuring survival. Given the dangers of the natural world, where the destructive forces of nature and the prevalence of hostile enemies must be avoided or deterred, a means of forging a united and cohesive group must evolve, necessitating the collective observance of shared values and traditions, which form communal links that tether the disparate individuals to each other. The aspects of spiritual fervor associated with religious belief is a manifestation of Eros, which Freud identifies as an instinctual proclivity that seeks the continued expansion of life. The feelings of brotherly love espoused by Christian belief, the tenderness and affection associated with familial bonds, and the passion of romantic feelings are all manifestations of the instinct of Eros, which, again, is an instinct or force intent on preserving the human race.

In opposition to this life force, however, remain the destructive instincts which seek to destroy life. Given that human nature, in Freud's estimation, is a biological phenomenon that evolved to ensure survival, a number of aggressive and violent instincts must have developed to preserve the individual's self-interest for safety. Thanatos, the death instinct, is the counterforce in opposition to Eros, which is the underlying energy that motivates all destructive and violent outbursts produced by society, including war and genocide. The

tension between these two instincts, those of life and death, ultimately find their culmination in the collective organization of society, which must calibrate the rules of law that ensure the long term stability of the group.

Given the range of functions of religious life, as analyzed by Nietzsche and Freud, an extraordinary reliance on religious symbols and legends remains paramount for human existence, which relies upon these inventions for a number of existential and pragmatic functions. The problem of meaning, particularly in life's most despairing moments, cannot be remedied by the consolation of scientific reason, which in Nietzsche's estimation, proves inept and futile against the tragedies that inevitably fall upon the human soul. Instincts, by contrast, which find expression in the world of aesthetics and religion, employ the artistic mechanisms associated with fantasy and the imagination, in order to construct vibrant narratives which impose order, meaning, and purpose upon the world. From the depths of their powers, great poets and artists summon images, figures, and ideas that inspire, give hope, and sustain the individual as he or she attempts to find solace in the turbulent world. The artistic products of a given culture, particularly their religious inventions, are the artistic vehicles that help transform the individual, preparing him or her for the trials of life. The religious sentiments induced by these inventions not only proffer profound psychological strength but also facilitate the feelings of universality needed for the continued development of civilization. The dissolution of the self in exchange for the united solidarity of the group is enhanced by the experience of transcendence as the individual comes to recognize the interrelatedness of human life. Aesthetics is merely the means by which these sentiments are apprehended and made intelligible. Products of art are able to preserve and give expression to the internal stirrings that give existence its meaning and vigor.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO NIETZSCHE

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche interprets religious narratives as aesthetic products or works of art. These inventions of the imagination form stories that ground the moral framework of a given community or culture, preserving their sacred values and traditions. While the believers who uphold and affirm the principles of their religious systems do so for a variety of complex reasons, according to Nietzsche, a particular strain of that reliance and dependence is rooted in the inextricability of human suffering. The problems of mortality, where humans are susceptible to injury, death, and old age, mark the tragic circumstances that comprise existence. For Nietzsche, myth, by means of an artistic capacity, possesses the power to transfigure the sufferings of existence into a life-affirming vision that redeems and justifies life, despite the tragic circumstances that pertain to the human situation.

What Nietzsche's analysis unearths is the vital necessity of art, particularly its therapeutic effect on the psychology of the individual. While it can be argued that the adherents of these religious narratives do not perceive their myths as illusions or inventions, but as divine realities that explain their cosmos, the means by which they acquire an understanding of this sacred reality is often experienced within an artistic dimension, either through a religious festival, ritual, or sacred text. To embark on a religious experience often involves the heightening of the senses, visually and sonically. For Nietzsche, religious myths are great examples of art's capacity to tranquilize, inspire, or heal, by producing experiences that ameliorate worldly troubles and rectify the limitations of existence. In order to grasp the power of art and to seize its capacity to transcend pain, the individual must discover the

essential link between meaning and beauty, components that help give life purpose and the strength that is needed to endure suffering.

The first part of this analysis will explore the rival artistic energies that produce works of art, which Nietzsche attributes to the tension found between Apollo, the god of sculpture, and Dionysus, the god of music and dance. The instinct for form and order, as represented by Apollo, is synthesized with the emotive frenzy associated with Dionysus, which birthed the complex fusion of elements that formed the tragedies of ancient Greece. The structure of the tragedy is composed of Apollonian symbols and dream images, while the emotional content of the drama exposes the spectators to a turbulent psychological experience, which Nietzsche argues embodies the life-affirming spirit of Dionysian intoxication.

While the deities embody opposing artistic energies, Nietzsche explains that the instincts associated with Apollo and Dionysus are inscribed within human nature. The next section will go on to explain the psychological importance of these faculties, particularly their capacity to orient and give meaning to the human experience of life. According to Nietzsche, the religious and spiritual life of the Greeks and the pantheon of Olympian figures that comprised this worldview, is a construction of these artistic faculties. These myths embody a number of psychic projections that appear to ameliorate the tragic sufferings experienced by conscious and mortal beings. The curse of individuation and the apprehension of death and suffering are predicaments which have found expression in the religious myths of Dionysus, who withstood the burdens of individuation with courage. These myths help articulate the tragic reality of suffering and give the adherents of this religious sect a directive with which to confront and accept the burdens of their existence.

The next part of this analysis will investigate the manifestations of Dionysian states of intoxication, which Nietzsche argues is the redemptive antidote that gives life its meaning during moments of great despair or suffering. Originally worshipped through a number of religious festivals, the followers of Dionysus used the bodily stimulus of song, dance, and narcotic to induce the ecstatic frenzy of emotions associated with transcendence. This state of ecstasy not only channels the energy found in many religious cults but also is the source of psychological nourishment that Nietzsche attributes to the life-affirming power of the Dionysian impulse. The rituals of the festival facilitate the dissolution of the self and conjoin the revelers into an amorphous whole, imparting a primordial state of experience that recreates the state of non-differentiation—the state of being before the development of autonomous individuality. Deciphering the mystery of song and dance, which as the rituals reveal are powerful vehicles that induce the religious excitement of transcendence, is then explored.

Finally, Nietzsche's position that the justification for life can be found in the sphere of aesthetics begins to take shape, as we learn that the constellation of religious figures, which emulate the ideal projections of human attributes, along with the spiritual rejuvenation that enables one to bear the burdens of existence, including the activation of a number of psychological mechanisms that enable one to enjoy and find pleasure in the apprehension of beauty, all transpire within the instinctual world of aesthetics. Art elevates the tragic experience of suffering and redeems it of its senselessness. Where reason and logic fail, art saves humanity by channeling the instincts of the will, which inspire the production of symbols and forms that organize and give meaning to the chaotic vacuum of existence. The religious life of humanity, including its moral values, ritual practices, and traditions, proffer

profound psychological benefits that augment the spiritual life of individuals. The strength of this energy is channeled through a number of aesthetic devices, which help capture the raw passion of human emotion. The yearning which seeks to affirm life, despite the inevitability of suffering, has been preserved in the religious cult of Dionysus, which teaches us to transcend the physical limitations of the body, facilitating an experience of transcendence and intoxication that justifies the experience of existence.

APOLLO AND DIONYSUS

In order to grasp the components underlying religious myth, Nietzsche conceptualizes a metaphysics of art, composed of two primordial forces. Constraining his analysis to Greek culture, Nietzsche identifies the manifestation of these two forces within the Greek Gods, Apollo and Dionysus, which he believes are personified representations of two rival artistic energies. The tension between Apollo, the god of sculpture and image, and Dionysus, the god of music and ecstasy, gives birth, in a sense, to the tragic drama of antiquity. As Nietzsche states, “Through Apollo and Dionysus, the two art deities of the Greeks, we come to recognize that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition, in origin and aims, between the Apollinian art of sculpture, and the nonimagistic, Dionysian art of music” (*Birth of Tragedy* 33). Though it may be difficult to conceptualize Apollo and Dionysus as primordial forces—perhaps instincts rooted in human psychology and biology—Nietzsche attributes these two impulses as products of nature itself and fathoms the origin of all artistic creations, including religious narratives, as byproducts of these drives.

Apollo and Dionysus, the constituent elements of creation, coexist within the individual as well, oscillating for dominance and expression. All great products of art are the result of these two competing drives, which produce the form and substance of the artistic

product. A great artist, endowed with a keen aesthetic sense, reproduces or makes manifest the expression of these primordial forces. As Nietzsche explains, “With reference to these immediate art-states of nature, every artist is an ‘imitator,’ that is to say, either an Apollonian artist in dreams, or a Dionysian artist in ecstasies, or finally—as for example in Greek tragedy—at once artist in both dreams and ecstasies” (*Birth of Tragedy* 38). For Nietzsche, Greek tragic drama is the greatest expression of the Apollonian and Dionysian tension, because it managed to calibrate the tendency for dream-images and intoxication in a highly sophisticated and pleasurable manner. The tragic artist makes use of both of these aesthetic states to create his work of art. To further elucidate the meaning of these two tendencies, Nietzsche contrasts their significance by conceiving them as separate art worlds: the worlds of dreams and intoxication.

Apollo is the representative of the imaginative capacity that is experienced in the realm of dreams, where symbols, images, and forms comprise an infinite set of sensual experiences and possibilities, unbound by the constraints of everyday life. As Nietzsche states, “In our dreams we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous” (*Birth of Tragedy* 34). The whole spectrum of life, the pleasurable and the terrifying, the exciting and the mundane, all pass before the dreamer in this world, encompassing the entire domain of human experience. These phantoms and figures elicit great feelings and sensations, yet remain illusory conceptions of the imagination for the dreamer. Like an artist who relies on images, symbols, and shapes to construct his figures and artistic designs, the world of dreams mirrors the same artistic process of creation, where an infinite arrangement of visual pictorial scenes is created for the subject to contemplate.

Along with being the “ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy,” Apollo must also be understood as the ordering capacity inherent in any artistic process of creation (*Birth of Tragedy* 35). As a prerequisite for any act of creation, the tendencies of form and order must be present for any creative project to become tangible and realized outside the imagination. The formalist dimension of the process of creation necessitates an impulse for control and constraint, vital proclivities that are, for example, highly developed in the craftsmanship of the sculptor. As Nietzsche explains, “We must keep in mind that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god” (*Birth of Tragedy* 35). The sculptor, in giving his creation shape and direction and by removing excess material, exhibits the instinct of the Apollonian. As Jennings defines, Apollo “represents the application of individual control over the artistic impulses of nature” (“From Philology to Existential Psychology” 70). Without the impulse for order, control, and form, no artistic product could be made tangible or accessible.

According to Nietzsche, this instinct of Apollo to organize and set boundaries is rooted in a biological motive for survival and adaptability. Because human beings are products of nature itself, it follows that an inclination for safety and security would prove necessary and urgent. The world, unordered and inhabited by chaos when not properly understood or explored, presents itself as a terrifying set of challenges, where potential dangers lay concealed. The tendency to render the world comprehensible by defining, mapping, and organizing it, is a pragmatic means of making the world less terrifying and surprising. As Nussbaum states, “Apollinian activity is not detached and coolly contemplative, but a response to an urgent human need, namely, the need to demarcate an intrinsically unordered world, making it intelligible for ourselves” (“The Transfiguration of

Intoxication” 95). While Nietzsche is interested in the artistic expression of this impulse, clearly the tendency to crave form and order permeates many aspects of human psychology, particularly when human beings are understood as a species intent on survival. While a byproduct of the Apollonian instinct may be the form-making process of artistic creation, its function presumably plays a vital role in many domains where order and control are necessary.

Another key element of the significance of Apollo is the formation of human consciousness. For the organizing and creative instinct to become realized, a conscious individual must actively seek and impose order and form on the world. The artist creates with an intended purpose and executes his demands with the force of his will, shaping and molding his desired object until it reflects his intended image or design. As Neumann states of the orienting function of consciousness, “In the course of these developments consciousness becomes capable of directing its attention upon any object it chooses, and at the same time the ego acquires a relative independence” (*The Origins and History of Consciousness* 344). Given the tendency for consciousness to desire order and freedom, Nietzsche attributes Apollo with the process of individuation or the development of the individual. “If we conceive of it at all as imperative and mandatory,” states Nietzsche, “this apotheosis of individuation knows but one law—the individual, i.e., the delimiting of the boundaries of the individual, measure in the Hellenic sense” (*Birth of Tragedy* 46). The individual, a conscious and autonomous being, is attributed with measure, demarcation, form, and structure, all of which are proclivities that enable artistic creation.

In contrast, the Dionysian impulse is conceptualized as a much wilder, emotive force, properly understood as an experience of intoxication and ecstasy. The instinct of Dionysus

can be perceived in the Greek religious festivals of antiquity, where the narcotic effects of alcohol and the stimulus proffered by the rhythmic vibrations of song and dance swirled into a destabilizing experience of mania and transcendental wonder. As Nietzsche explains, “Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness” (*Birth of Tragedy* 36). The great intelligibility of the Dionysian state can only be approximated as an emotive substance and power, a mania unearthed from the depths of the human psyche, incapable of being consciously comprehended. While the instinct of Apollo is recognized by its inclination for order and form, the Dionysian impulse appears chaotic, formless and unintelligible.

An element of the Dionysian passion is its association with the feeling of self-dissolution and its inclination for unification. As Higgins identifies, “Nietzsche links Dionysus to a mode of self-awareness that is characterized by a forgetting of all that is individual and by a sense of oneness with the rest of humanity and the rest of nature” (“Nietzsche on Music” 666). This state of intoxication disorients the festival participants and distorts their conscious reality and personal identities. The admixture of song, dance, and narcotic chemically induces a suspension of identity that helps conjoin the participants into a united mass. As Nietzsche states, “Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or ‘impudent convention’ have fixed between man and man are broken. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him ” (*Birth of Tragedy* 37).

These Dionysian emotions, while obliterating the experience of a self, longs instead for a communal sense of wholeness.

The Dionysian mania remains beyond the realm of conscious comprehension, but religious festivals appear to be the best means of apprehending the wild frenzy of this instinct. The individual is released from the prison of his body, merges with the rest of the dancing revelers, and returns to a primal state of being. By doing so, he or she delights in "...the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*" (*Birth of Tragedy* 36). The individual is freed, momentarily, from the constraints of everyday existence and rejoices in the passage to a new mode of being, embracing the force of a mystical experience that transcends his conscious understanding of life. His spirits are rejuvenated, his pains soothed, and his commitment to life reaffirmed.

For Nietzsche, underlying this activity of the festival and the consequent dissolution of the self is a nostalgic longing to return to a primal state of nature. Before the development of conscious awareness and the subsequent realization of human mortality and vulnerability, primitive human beings were closer to the nature of animals, where unconscious instincts played a significant role in guiding their actions and behaviors. The return to the primal state of unity, experienced as Dionysian intoxication, and the ensuing loss of self, is, to some extent, a return to a bestial state and preconscious way of being. Nietzsche alludes to this nostalgic element of Dionysian experience when he writes, "At the very climax of joy there sounds a cry of horror or a yearning lamentation for an irretrievable loss. In these Greek festivals, nature seems to reveal a sentimental trait, it is as if she were heaving a sigh at her dismemberment into individuals" (*Birth of Tragedy* 40). The development of the individual

and the expansion of conscious awareness entails a greater apprehension of suffering and the disorienting conditions of human existence, including the inevitability of death and decay.

The experience of the primal unity, before the differentiation of consciousness and the development of autonomous beings, is representative of this primordial, preconscious state of being, when group identity took precedence over the individual and when man was less conscious of his individual sufferings. As Neumann explains, "History teaches that in the beginning the individual did not exist as an independent entity, but that the group dominated and did not allow the emancipation of a separate ego" (*The History and Origins of Consciousness* 268). The Dionysian ecstasy facilitates this instinctual return, where a longing for the unity of the group and reconciliation with nature compels the abandonment of the self. As Nietzsche writes, "Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man" (*Birth of Tragedy* 37). The individual wishes to escape the burdens of his existence and find solace in a more harmonious state, one that is reminiscent of his animal-like nature.

The experience of intoxication is rejuvenating and curative. The struggles of individual existence seem to be pacified or soothed by this return to a primordial state, which alleviate the wounds that have been sustained by the emancipated individual. This Dionysian celebration, in Nietzsche's view, plays a vital role in ameliorating man's existential troubles. The return to nature serves a therapeutic function, and though only experienced momentarily, appears to significantly enhance man's vital powers and energies. As Higgins argues, "The recognition of one's union with the rest of biological and natural being is a matter of significance: Nietzsche suggests that he can overcome despair in the face of suffering and

human mortality only by recognizing that one belongs to this larger whole that will survive one's death" ("Nietzsche on Music" 666). The mysterious union with nature proffers a crucial experience for the individual that reaffirms his commitment to live and helps justify the trials of his existence. Though the actual content of the experience remain mysterious, the festivals of Dionysus are one means of actualizing this life-affirming transcendence.

As explained previously, for creation to be possible, both the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies must be present. Without the Apollonian impulse for order and control, the passion and raw energy associated with Dionysus cannot be represented or expressed in concrete form. An artist must incorporate both instincts in order to create. As Jennings states, "Nietzsche argued that true art originates in the spontaneous direct expression of Dionysian impulse, which are beyond rational control of the individual artist. However, the actual artistic creation only takes form at the point where the Apollonian artist—without denying or diluting the Dionysian forces—begins to mold or shape this chaotic energy into an image or idea" ("From Philology to Existential Psychology" 69). The ecstasy and mania that is felt during a religious festival, for example, is the emotional content that an artist must channel and control for his artistic creation to possess passionate energy. If done successfully, the artist gives shape to this raw substance and begins to craft a piece of art that is capable of expressing or articulating this emotional material.

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Pain, terror, and suffering, inextricable facets of the human condition, are elemental experiences that characterize the phenomenon of existence. Human consciousness and the experience of individuality, the awareness of death and the limitations and vulnerabilities of the human body, are burdens that must be eternally confronted. Proper adaptation to the

inevitability of these troubles has been a concern that has spurred religious worship and philosophical attempts to overcome, accept, and make sense of the meaning of suffering. As Tongeren notes, “Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers” (“Nietzsche’s Understanding of the Tragic” 28). For Nietzsche, the existential fears of suffering and mortality appear to explain, in part, the origins of mankind’s religious inventions, which have attempted to make sense of these experiences for thousands of years. These mythological narratives proffer a psychological means of appeasing, securing, or alleviating the troubles that describe existence, a capacity which Nietzsche characterizes as the redemptive or life-affirming phenomenon of aesthetics.

Nietzsche explains that the dream inspirations of great poets and artists of ancient Greece arose from the depths of the imagination and materialized into the epic fantasies that composed the religious and cosmic worldview of the Greeks. The Apollonian impulse, the creative energy that produces beauty and form, is the driving force that stimulates this creation of divine figures. Nietzsche writes, “For the same impulse that embodied itself in Apollo gave birth to the entire Olympian world, and in this sense Apollo is its father. What terrific need was it that could produce such an illustrious company of Olympian beings?” (*Birth of Tragedy* 41). The divine configurations of gods and supra-terrestrial beings that make up the pantheon of Greek religious life, for Nietzsche, was to some extent influenced by the psychological distress that entails the conscious comprehension of suffering. As Nietzsche continues, “The Greeks knew and felt the terror and horror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream birth of the Olympians” (*Birth of Tragedy* 42). These divine projections alleviated some

degree of pain for the individual, making his ordeals less of a burden to shoulder. Believing in these gods and superhuman figures provided a profound psychological comfort that rendered existence more capable of being endured. As Jennings explains, “Stated simply, Nietzsche’s systematic analysis of the role of art and religion in the evolution of ancient Greek tragedy ... constitutes a complete existential theory that encompasses the biological, the social, cognitive, and spiritual aspects of human motivation” (“From Philology to Existential Psychology” 58). The religious worldview of the ancient Greeks did not arise as an epiphenomenon but was an integral invention that served to ameliorate a number of psychological distresses, particularly the problem of suffering.

How can beauty, art, and the creation of these mental abstractions be of any psychological importance to the individual who suffers? A religious follower, though he may perceive these creations as real cosmic figures, independent of his conscious being, still attains an apprehension of these gods through an aesthetic means, either orally communicated or dramatically represented within his cultural tradition. A religious life, to some degree, participates within an aesthetic domain, as stories, rituals, paintings, architectural structures, and festivals all incorporate an aesthetic component to stimulate, subdue, or awe the spectators. All religious ideation relies upon an aesthetic capacity to communicate the profundity of its meaning and traditions to its allegiance of devotees. Unraveling the factors involved in the creation of these religious myths can perhaps illuminate the power of aesthetics in ameliorating suffering.

DIONYSUS AND RITUAL

In order to apprehend the mystery of Dionysian intoxication, a means of eliciting this sublime experience must become institutionalized. The Dionysian festivals are a particular

means of accessing this domain of transcendental experience, which as Eliade points out, is a pattern found in many religious festivals and activities. The dissolution of the self in exchange for group solidarity, the overabundant feeling of ecstatic intoxication and return to the primordial unity of creation, are archetypal patterns that comprise many myths and rituals. These myths model the desire for a return to pre-cosmogony, or a period before the differentiation of the world into forms and objects. Eliade writes, “The watery chaos that preceded Creation at the same time symbolizes the retrogression to the formless that follows on death, return to the laural modality of existence” (*The Sacred and The Profane* 42). The amorphous unknown world, before it is made comprehensible through reason, is often represented in myth as a formless sea of murky waters. The Dionysian experience of intoxication and confrontation with the primordial unity, is a means of accessing this incompressible and form-destroying state, reminiscent of unconscious non-being and oblivion.

The activities of the festival are in some manner designed to facilitate this abandonment of the self and fusion with the undifferentiated world. The powerful effects of music and dance, the stimulus provided by alcohol, the sexual licentiousness of the orgy, and the wild frenzy of excitement that surrounds the festivals of Dionysus all serve to induce this formless state of non-being. As Eliade explains, “From one point of view the orgy corresponds to the pre-Creation state of non-differentiation. This is why certain New Year ceremonies include orgiastic rites: social confusion, sexual license, and saturnalia symbolize regression to the amorphous condition that preceded the creation of the world” (*The Sacred and the Profane* 147). The Dionysian episode is an emotive force that cannot be articulated or made explicable through reason or language, but only symbolically represented and

reenacted through the activities of the festival. The rituals that make use of music, dance, and sexuality come closest to recreating this primal state.

Along with being a powerful experience for the individual, facilitating the discovery of the oneness of the world, Nietzsche's faith in the power of Dionysian intoxication is also paramount to his understanding of tragedy and its therapeutic function. As Gibson argues, throughout Nietzsche's works, "the image of the Dionysian festival recurs consistently as both the answer to the dilemmas of metaphysics, morality, and epistemology and as a model for the cure of the disease of nihilism" ("Celebration and Transgression" 2). Nietzsche, having recovered the profound experience of these Dionysian festivals, identifies the soothing capacities of music and dance as powerful curatives which help ameliorate tragic suffering. According to Nietzsche, these artistic instincts play a crucial role in promoting the continuation of life, capable of rejuvenating the beleaguered individual from his worldly miseries. This state of Dionysian ecstasy enhances not only the individual's vital energies but also endows the world with a sense of purpose and meaning, revealing a vision of life that justifies the individual's experience of suffering.

According to Nietzsche, music and dance are the artistic vehicles that make the transcendent experience associated with Dionysus possible. Often combined in ritual and myth, these two hypnotizing forces help unite the consciousness of the individual with the rest of humanity and nature, freeing him, temporarily, from his isolated sufferings. For these reasons, music and dance have been powerful instruments of religious activity, tools that help facilitate the process of spiritual transformation. In the following passage Nietzsche associates music and dance with the feelings of flight: "In song and dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community, he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is

on the way toward flying into the air, dancing” (*Birth of Tragedy* 37). Again, the festivals of Dionysus make use of these artistic energies as a means of eliciting an experience of bodily and spiritual transcendence. The individual described by Nietzsche is no longer capable of speaking or walking and can only keep the ecstasy of his experience through song, dance, and flight.

As can be seen, this transcendent moment entails a temporal reorientation, a feeling that one has abandoned the ordinary constraints of daily existence and soared to a new and heightened state of being. As Eliade explains of this religious experience, “Religious participation in a festival implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegration of the mythical time re-actualized by the festival itself” (*The Sacred and The Profane* 69). Mythic time is not an ordinary mode of being; it can only be accessed by the power of the ritual, which introduces the initiate to the mythic experience of reality. To access this spell of transcendence or sublimity, religious rituals, with the aid of music and dance, deliver the individual to a new plane of existence, one that can be described as mythic.

As Nietzsche’s illustration demonstrates, the individual confronts feelings of cosmic expansion and finds himself incapable of giving linguistic expression to his state of mind. He writes, “In the Dionysian dithyramb man is incited to the greatest exaltation of all his symbolic faculties; something never before experienced struggles for utterance—the annihilation of the veil of *maya*, oneness as the soul of the race and of nature itself” (*Birth of Tragedy* 40). Nietzsche’s description of the individual who experiences the annihilation of the self, along with the concomitant inadequacy of his verbal faculties in communicating this phenomenon, aligns with the definition of awe described by Haidt. According to Haidt, “The emotion of awe is most often triggered when we face situations with two features: vastness

(something overwhelms us and makes us feel small) and a need for accommodation (that is, our experience is not easily assimilated into our existing mental structures” (*The Righteous Mind* 264). Clearly, this mythic or transcendent episode is characterized by the titanic vastness of life, where the individual discovers he or she is tethered to all living beings, including nature. The experience of awe remains beyond the grasp of human reason, thus suggesting the otherworldliness of the aesthetic phenomenon.

Along with being a profound and personal experience for the individual, Dionysian ecstasy also draws out sentiments that seek an intimate relation to others, finding solace in the interconnectedness of human life. The experience of transcendence has a profound effect on the individual’s psychology that instills an inclination for communal solidarity and togetherness. These feelings tether him emotionally to the rest of the tribe’s inhabitants, creating a strong sense of group loyalty. These communal feelings find expression in dance, which appear to facilitate this harmonizing process. As Haidt explains, “European travelers to every continent witnessed people coming together to dance with wild abandon around a fire, synchronized to the beat of drums, often to the point of exhaustion” (*The Righteous Mind* 259). Again, Dionysian festivals create states of wholeness or amorphousness, where the individual participants lose themselves in the mass of the crowd. No longer concerned with personal interests, a sense of interconnectedness prevails which unites the individuals into a solidified whole. As Haidt writes of the communal function of dance, “It fosters love, trust, and equality. It was common in ancient Greece (think of Dionysus and his cult) and in early Christianity (which ...was a ‘danced’ religion until dancing in church was suppressed in the Middle Ages) (*The Righteous Mind* 259-260). According to Haidt, elements of communal bonding are present in many religious sects, with the shared goal of creating

group cohesion. Dancing, viewed from this perspective, appears to be one such element of religious practice that served to generate communal feelings of goodwill and togetherness.

The forces of rhythm direct and stimulate the movement of the body, generating within the individual a state of mind that is felt to be transpersonal or even other-worldly. “As a medium,” explains Sena, “the effective body is capable of ‘mirroring forth’ in gesture, word, or song that which lies beyond it; the effective body mirrors that which it to a degree is not, that which is other” (“Dionysus as Antidote” 200). The body, gripped by Dionysian ecstasy, channels the force of this instinct by discharging it into a ritual or religious performance, which symbolically reflects the dynamic energy of Dionysus. The function of these celebrations is to express what linguistically cannot be articulated. The body, through dance, expresses an emotional discharge which is beyond the sphere of cognitive contemplation.

While dance appears to be an important medium through which Dionysian emotion can be channeled, music, too, appears capable of producing this mythical state. As Higgins notes, “Nietzsche argues that music alone can invest myths with the power to convey the Dionysian wisdom that, despite suffering, individual existence is joyous and powerful because it is grounded in the basic unity of all that lives” (“Nietzsche on Music” 669). According to Nietzsche, music is a life-affirming force that compels one to carry on with existence; it reminds us that there is beauty in life despite the suffering it entails. For this reason, Nietzsche identifies the chorus of Greek tragedy as a crucial means of facilitating Dionysian redemption. As Nietzsche writes, “With the chorus the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so called world history as well as the cruelty

of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art—life (*Birth of Tragedy* 59). The power of the chorus helps the individual access a world of experience that justifies the predicament of his finitude, proffering a state of mind that rectifies his mortal limitations. Having confronted this sublime experience, the individual recovers a potent wisdom that saves him, uncovering a source of strength that stimulates, heals, and redeems. Interestingly, as Jennings notes, “Nietzsche’s historical argument was that the chorus used in Greek tragedy actually originated in the frenzied group ecstasies that occurred during religious celebrations in honor of the god Dionysus” (“From Philology to Existential Psychology” 67). Evidently, the musical dimension of Dionysian celebration is integral for the experience of this religious cult.

Another element of the Dionysian instinct for music remains its pragmatic function. Humanity’s proclivity for artistic creation is rooted in biology. Music’s capacity to articulate the emotional underpinnings of the individual express a sociological function. As Higgins explains, “The human capacity to experience music, according to Nietzsche, is something like a transcendental precondition for the possibility of language” (“Nietzsche on Music” 663). Human beings are inherently social and communication facilitates group adaptability. Having a spectrum of vocal registers makes distinguishing objects from each other more feasible. As Higgins continues, “Before the development of language, on this account, proto-human beings were aware of themselves only in connection with their larger herd to which they belonged. And only because of this intimate association of each animal with every other in the herd did language arise—it served a species need” (“Nietzsche on Music” 664). As Higgins suggests, the ability to distinguish between different tonal registers is an

evolutionary precursor to the development of language, which slowly developed in order to better describe the world as a place of objects. The practical function of language grew from the necessity of identification, whether it be to distinguish between members of other groups, predators, threats, or simply to identify members of one's own clan or tribe.

Considering music's primal relation to communication, serving as an evolutionary precursor to verbal language, the primordial effect that it induces when incorporated into a religious ceremony or ritual is more comprehensible. As Nietzsche writes, "Language can never adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music, because music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the primal unity, and therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena" (*Birth of Tragedy* 55). According to Nietzsche, music is the best means of articulating the feelings associated with the primal unity because spoken language is not equipped to convey the same aesthetic range of expression. As Higgins notes, "That is why the myths represented by Greek tragedies required music in order to achieve their full effect, for the words expressing the mythic tales provided only a surface image of the universal, Dionysian truths that the music expressed far more directly" ("Nietzsche on Music" 669). Music is as necessary a vehicle for experiencing a Dionysian state as the dramatic representation of the myth itself because it has the power to convey feelings of a primordial past that cannot be directly articulated or expressed in verbal language.

The experience of primal unity, the feeling of a return to nature and the accompanying dissolution of the self in favor of a communal unity, serves an important function for survival. Religious festivals help unite the group by creating feelings of love or ecstasy that tether the individual members of the community into a cohesive whole. As

Durkheim explains, “The very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation” (qtd. in *The Righteous Mind* 261). As a result of these emotional bonds, the stability of the tribe is strengthened and the odds of survival and safety greatly enhanced. Rituals that incorporate elements of music and dance serve a vital function in ensuring the stability of large and complex social arrangements.

Music, when incorporated as a ritual device, through some mystical capacity, disintegrates the individual concerns of the spectator and stirs within him feelings of awe and transcendence, uniting him with the natural world and the rest of humanity. As Gibson states, “Ritual can effect a transformation of the self so that it can participate directly in the primal unity. Such participation is not a matter of imposing one’s individual will upon the universe but of a mystical merging with, or affirmation of, the process of change that lies eternally behind any static structure” (“Celebration and Transgression” 9). The impulse for intoxication found in Dionysus emerges within these ritualistic celebrations, unleashing the potent elixir which heals and soothes. Music appears to be a primordial means of communication that helps induce this state by unearthing the buried substratum of emotions and preverbal modes of expression in the unconscious.

As has been discussed, music has a variety of functions related to human behavior. Because of its power to grip, direct, motivate, and inspire, music’s effect on human psychology has been used in a number of ritualistic practices. Music’s capacity to foster group cohesion and induce religious ecstasy makes it a powerful emotive force. As Nietzsche states, “Above all, men desired the utility of the elemental and overpowering effect

that we experience in ourselves as we listen to music: rhythm is a compulsion; it engenders an unconquerable urge to yield and join it; not only our feet follow the beat but the soul does, too” (*The Gay Science* 140). Nietzsche once again reaffirms music’s multifaceted aims at preserving human life. The pleasure in listening and the energy it exalts provides needful aid and sustenance. As Nietzsche continues, “It enabled one to do anything—to advance some work magically; to force a god to appear, to be near, and to listen; to mold the future in accordance with one’s will; to cleanse one’s own soul from some excess” (*The Gay Science* 140). The range of functions that music can provide in influencing human action and motivation suggests that its role in human life is paramount for existence to be bearable and worth living. The emotive force that music can summon not only channels feelings of religious exaltation, which endow the world with a sense of transcendental wonder, but also powerfully enhances the individual’s vital energies, augmenting the capacity of his strength and resolve to endure the trials of life.

ART AND THE REDEMPTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Nietzsche argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the justification for living in the world can only be reconciled when existence itself is understood as an aesthetic phenomenon. Central to his understanding of survival is Nietzsche’s conception of morality, which he also conceives as a product of aesthetic invention. His aesthetic appreciation of the world left Nietzsche to construct a philosophy “that dares to move, to demote, morality into the realm of appearance ...among ‘deceptions,’ as semblance, delusion, error, interpretation, contrivance, art” (*Birth of Tragedy* 22-23). While Nietzsche perceives morality to be a creative invention of man, he does recognize within this creative capacity a critical and vital power that enables one to live and thrive.

Nietzsche ponders the psychological significance of morality, particularly its aesthetic dimension and its role in developing and advancing human life. As Nietzsche asks, “What, seen in the perspective of life, is the significance of morality?” (*Birth of Tragedy* 22). How does the moral interpretation of the world influence the meaning one attaches to life, and how does this perspective influence the patterns of behavior which enable one to successfully live and endure in the world? Answering these questions ultimately comprises the bulk of Nietzsche’s analysis in *The Birth of Tragedy*, an analysis which uncovers the complex relationship between aesthetics, religion, morality, biology, and psychology.

Nietzsche’s observations on Greek tragedy and culture unearths the life-enhancing function of art, particularly its capacity to make life meaningful and worth living. As Nietzsche writes in *Will to Power* (1901), “Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life” (452). Nietzsche perceives art as a vital necessity for the continuation of life. Without our creative sense and apprehension of art, without the power of invention and abstract representation, life would not be endurable. As has been shown, the aesthetic faculty developed as a means of enabling humans to live in the world, a capacity which ensured the strengthening and development of the species. In our love of music and dance lies a mechanism which facilitates communication and group bonding, and the compulsion to invent and impose order on the world evolved as a means of keeping chaos and danger at bay. As Nussbaum states, “This being the case, life is made worth living, made joyful and made human, only by art—that is to say, in the largest sense, by the human being’s power to create an order in the midst of disorder, to make up a meaning where nature herself does not supply one” (“The Transfiguration of Intoxication” 99). Art is a capacity that elevates the experience of life.

Not only does art organize and structure the world, creating practical boundaries which order the individual's daily behaviors and activities, but meaning itself is a product of the creative artist's vision.

Art serves to remedy a number of life's existential predicaments, problems that are intrinsic to the peculiarities of the human condition. For Nietzsche, art's greatest service to human life lies in its capacity to ameliorate the tragic and horrifying ordeals of existence, particularly the phenomena of pain and suffering. The inevitability of death, the eventual decay of the body, and the often absurd tragedies that befall the innocent are perplexities which can make one question whether life itself is worth the trouble of being lived and experienced. The conscious comprehension of the chaotic senselessness of existence is a debilitating awareness that fails to find justification through an appeal to human reason. Nietzsche is critical of the Socratic optimism which assumes that reason alone can render life comprehensible and thus meaningful. As Jennings writes, "For Nietzsche, Socrates epitomized the rationalistic tendency, which seeks to transcend existence by rendering it intelligible—that is, by asserting that the world operates according to rational, ordered laws that can be ascertained through reason" ("From Philology to Existential Psychology" 71-72). According to Nietzsche, neither the causal explanations of science nor the penetrating power of reason can console the individual who apprehends tragic insight. "When they see to their horror," writes Nietzsche, "how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail—suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, tragic insight which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy" (*Birth of Tragedy* 98). Instead, the process of creation, a capacity driven by internal instincts, produces the therapeutic elixir that functions as a psychological balm.

Consequently, Nietzsche looks to the instinctual world of art and aesthetics for the antidote to the inextricable trials of life. As Nietzsche is able to formulate in *Will to Power*, it is the discovery of the Dionysian instinct which appears to underlie the vitality and strength of humankind. As Nietzsche writes, “Art as 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 ... A highest state of affirmation of existence is conceived from which the highest degree of pain cannot be excluded: the tragic-Dionysian state” (*Will to Power* 452). As this analysis will attempt to convey, humanity’s aesthetic capacity to construct and invent is conjoined with an instinctual urge to survive. As discovered by Nietzsche’s exploration of Greek tragedy and the Dionysian impulse of tragic-affirmation, the instinct of creation that spurred the religious life of the Greeks also abstractly represents the primordial struggle of the individual’s adjustment to existence and confrontation with the inevitability of suffering. The capacity to impose meaning, purpose, and order on the world, are psychological necessities that help make a tragic existence bearable and worth living. The articulation of the Dionysian myth, which dramatically depicts the individual’s confrontation with suffering, helps organize and structure the chaotic reality of existence, giving the individual spectator a visual directive with which to orient him or herself when facing life’s tragic moments.

As previously discussed, religious rituals remedy a number of psychological distresses by challenging the initiate to confront his or her existential fears. These practices aim at strengthening the individual and preparing him or her for the trials of life. As Gibson argues, “Ritual is a crucial component of the process of affirming life in the face of its ultimately tragic nature. It contains an existential and cognitive dimension such that it serves, along with art, especially tragedy, as a mode of being, a way of encountering the

cosmos that affirms life” (“Celebration and Transgression” 2). Rituals, designed to enhance the vital energies of the initiate, proffer the same psychological benefits that Nietzsche identifies in art. Since rituals intend to induce altered states of consciousness, a means of penetrating and stirring the conscious experience of reality must be incorporated, which appears to be the function of aesthetics. Art, particularly tragic art, according to Nietzsche, seems to facilitate this needed psychological reorientation and acceptance of fate, goals equally pursued by many ritual practices.

Accordingly, the experience of Dionysian ecstasy found in religious rituals and the spectator’s identification with the suffering heroes of Greek tragedy share a common function, which is a capacity to profoundly transform the individual, making him stronger, healthier, and more capable of enduring the trials of his or her life. Religious rituals and tragic art both elicit powerful Dionysian emotions that Nietzsche identifies as vital for the continuation and affirmation of life. By understanding religious rituals as an aesthetic practice, an exercise that incorporates the Dionysian instincts of music and dance in order to transform the individual, making him or her more susceptible to the intoxicating experience of universality and the life-affirming capacity that Nietzsche identifies in tragic art, the relationship between art and its role in the development of human life can be better understood.

Religious rituals serve to enhance and strengthen the individual. As Neumann explains, “The goal of all initiation, however, from the rites of puberty to the religious mysteries, is transformation. In all of them the higher spiritual man is begotten” (*The Origins and History of Consciousness* 310). This process of transformation can only be activated when the initiate has encountered a number of strenuous tests and challenges,

forcing him or her to rise beyond their initial stage of development. “Most traditional societies,” explains Haidt “have some sort of ritual for transforming boys into men and girls into women. It’s usually far more grueling than a bar mitzvah; it frequently involves fear, pain, symbolism of death and rebirth, and a revelation of knowledge by gods or elders” (*The Righteous Mind* 266). If the initiate survives the trials of the ritual, he or she emerges transformed, spiritually and psychologically rejuvenated. The initiate elevates his or her position in the community and sometimes gains access to guarded knowledge as a reward.

Often, initiation rituals entail the reenactment of sacred actions performed by cultural deities or heroes. “Initiation rites entailing ordeals and symbolic death and resurrection,” explains Eliade, “were instituted by gods, culture heroes, or mythical ancestors; hence these rites have a superhuman origin, and by performing them the novice imitates a superhuman divine action” (*The Sacred and The Profane* 187). The challenges or obstacles faced by the initiate are purposefully designed to recreate a sacred moment in his or her community’s cultural history. The passage of boyhood into adulthood, for example, entails the reenactment of an action that was once conducted by a respected elder or heroic figure, and which has since become a symbolic image of ideal behavior and conduct. For the individual to transform and grow into adulthood, he or she must embody the patterns of action exemplified by their cultural hero or god.

From this perspective, the Greek gods antiquity, particularly those of the heroic type, are anthropomorphic representations of ideal human behavior, embodying values and patterns of action that model socially accepted and venerated forms of human conduct. These cultural heroes or gods reflect the patterns of behavior approved of by the prevailing moral community. By imitating the virtues and ideals embodied by their heroes, the

individual strengthens the development of his or her moral character, gaining the respect of his family and peers. The adults and respected elders of the community, who have successfully endured the trials of the ritual, embody the patterns of value that the initiates must one day develop in themselves. As Peterson explains, “Adults embody the behavior wisdom of their culture for their children. Children interact with adults, who serve as cultural emissaries” (*Maps of Meaning* 93). Adults, who embody the virtues and values of their respected elders or heroes, actions developed by the re-enactment of a ritual experience, reflect the patterns of behavior expected to be cultivated in their children and offspring. These patterns of value are passed on from one generation to the next.

The purpose of initiation rituals are to strengthen the individual, preparing him or her for the ordeals and challenges of life. A necessary element in this process of personal transformation entails the direct confrontation with fear and pain, obstacles which, when successfully tolerated, strengthen his or her capacity to endure suffering. The rituals, in a sense, destroy the old patterns of behavior associated with the individual’s past, the less resilient and inexperienced stage of adolescence. With the symbolic death of the old individual, the potential birth of a new and stronger being emerges. “To become a man in the proper sense,” explains Eliade, “he must die to this first (natural) life and be reborn to a higher life, which is at once religious and cultural” (*The Sacred and The Profane* 187). By transcending the aspects of pain and suffering associated with the ritual, the initiate emerges psychologically strengthened and spiritually purified, having overcome the fears and anxieties that once debilitated and frightened him or her.

Similarly, identification with the tragic hero appears to mimic the same therapeutic and transformative function of initiation rituals. By directly challenging the spectator to face

the disturbing circumstances of his or her existence, the observer of the tragic drama emerges spiritually augmented and prepared for life. As Nussbaum states, “In short, the achievement of Greek tragedy, according to Nietzsche, was, first of all, to confront its spectator directly with the fact that there is just one world, the world we live in, the chancy arbitrary but also rich and beautiful world of nature” (“The Transfiguration of Intoxication” 104). All the aspects of existence that frighten, disturb, and horrify us, and which remind us of the inevitability of death, the fragility of the human body, and the unpredictability of the future, are abstractly represented and given dramatic form. The tragic artist creates a drama for the spectator to examine and contemplate, thereby transforming the tragedy that makes up existence into a tangible work of art.

Though the aspects of life that nauseate and horrify can never be permanently expelled, the tragic artist creates for his audience a new means of perceiving the nature of reality and helps him or her come to recognize the value and necessity of suffering. The artist’s transfiguring lens is a gift that forces his audience to face the disturbing realities that come with being a mortal being, and which provokes thoughts that challenge and test the spectator. As Nietzsche states, “What should win our gratitude?—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—the art of staging and watching ourselves” (*The Gay Science* 132-133). The tragic artist uses his stage as vehicle for self-examination. All the worldly troubles and fears that plague the individual are externalized into the contents of the drama. The spectator is

given a new perspective by which to understand himself, finding solace in identification with the hero, who too must confront the frightening challenges of existence.

For Nietzsche, the tragic drama invented by the Greeks represents the greatest aesthetic expression of the impulse of Dionysus. The Dionysian attitude that affirms life even amidst the most distressing of life's circumstances is stunningly symbolized in the dramatic and mythic works of the Greeks, who possessed a philosophy of pessimistic strength that enabled them to endure the trials of existence. Again, as Nussbaum explains, "Nietzsche throughout his life finds it amazing that the Greeks should have been able to confront so truthfully the nature of life, without flight into religion of the world-denigrating resignationist sort" ("The Transfiguration of Intoxication" 105). As previously discussed, the religious festivals of Dionysus, which incorporated the sensual stimulus of song, dance, and intoxication, help induce the sublime experience of transcendence associated with the dissolution of the self and the primordial wisdom that celebrates and finds redemption in life, despite the inevitability of suffering. This vital, life-affirming, and creative instinct stimulated the birth of Greek tragedy, which infused the transcendent and life-affirming principle within the depiction of the Dionysian hero.

The conscious comprehension of suffering is the result of the development of individuality, which no longer is tethered to unconscious instincts or remains bound to the will of the group. Emancipated and autonomous, the individual must reckon with his mortality on his own. Individuation is perceived as a curse and can only be remedied through Dionysian attempts at universality and transcendence, episodes which provide momentary relief and spiritual rejuvenation. Insight into this tragic awareness, although disturbing, can be reconciled by the experience of the primal unity. As Tongeren explains,

“We experience this insight in a unity with the primal process of reality. In this unity we experience the process as joy. We feel this tragic joy in identifying with this primal process, an identification in which our individuality is also dissolved” (“A Splendid Failure” 23). To recognize that all life eventually perishes and to perceive suffering as an instrument of growth and transcendence, is to come to grips with the eternal dance of life, which participates within a cycle of creation and destruction.

As Nietzsche argues, the myths of the Greeks help articulate this tragic human quandary. He finds that the god Dionysus is the representative of the human struggle with individuation, who heroically bears the trials of the human condition. As Nietzsche writes, “In truth, however, the hero, is the suffering Dionysus, the god experiencing in himself the agonies of individuation, of whom wonderful myths tell that as a boy he was torn to pieces by the Titans and now is worshiped as Zagreus” (*Birth of Tragedy* 73). Dionysus is the tragic hero, who, like his human descendants, accepts a life of suffering as penalty for his freedom and conscious development. Awed by the power of this Dionysian myth, Nietzsche believed he had discovered within the myths of the Greeks an antidote to the trials of existence. “In this way,” states Jennings, “Nietzsche concluded that Dionysus served, first of all, as a psychological mechanism for dealing with what he called ‘the horror of existence’—which is a basic problem of being individuals living in any historical age” (“From Philology to Existential Psychology” 68). Dionysus’ heroism in enduring pain and acceptance of the tragic reality of existence bestows upon the individual suffer a dignity with which to affirm his worldly ordeals, summoning from the depths of his being a will that strives to emulate Dionysian courage and strength.

The tragedy of Dionysus symbolizes the sufferings of mankind, who each pay the price for the curse of individuation. Thrown into a chaotic world, where injustices befall the innocent, existence itself appears devoid of meaning and arbitrary. “Thus it is intimated,” writes Nietzsche, “that this dismemberment, the properly Dionysian suffering, is like a transformation into air, water, earth and fire, that we are therefore to regard the state of individuation as the origin and primal cause of all the suffering, as something objectionable in itself” (*Birth of Tragedy* 73). Life, from this tragic perspective, is something to fear and turn away from as suffering constitutes the primal experience of reality. “The reality of suffering,” states Tongeren, “is rather a fact that precedes the tragic. Life is suffering. It stands at the beginning and it is apparently taken as obvious” (“A Splendid Failure” 28). With this tragic and pessimistic view of the world, what then can redeem humanity from this predicament and justify the continuation of existence?

Perhaps art? To recapitulate, art or aesthetics, for Nietzsche, is a phenomenon deeply rooted in human biology and psychology, instincts which evolved to ensure survival. This capacity, as represented by Apollo, helps humans create order and form through their love of invention and also serves as a vehicle for expressing meaningful emotive states. According to Nussbaum, “all our cognitive activity, including logical reasoning, including the abstracting and generalizing tendencies, are profoundly practical—ways which we try to master the world and to make ourselves secure in it” (“Transfiguration and Intoxication 95). Together, these artistic impulses express a number of needs or desires which appear necessary for life. The life-preserving mechanism of art leads Nussbaum to identify what she considers to be a major theme of Nietzsche’s work: “the idea that art does not exist apart from life, in detachment from or even in opposition to its concerns. Art, indeed, is not for

art's sake, but for life's sake" ("Transfiguration of Intoxication" 98). Man's capacity for creation is not an arbitrary ability but a force intent on preserving the human race. In other words, mythological abstractions or illusions of the imagination are necessary, according to Nietzsche, for survival and the continuation of life.

Though Nietzsche's philosophical outlook often appears pessimistic, he does recognize a redemptive justification for life's enjoyment in art's mystical capacity for transcendence. In his rediscovery of Dionysus, Nietzsche finds within the tragic myths of Greek culture a symptom of their underlying strength and vigor for life. With the sufferings of humans symbolized in the god Dionysus, who is marked with the curse of individuation, the Greeks are able to externalize their worldly troubles and find redemption in Dionysus' heroic example. Nietzsche writes, "In the heroic effort to attain universality, in the attempt to transcend the curse of individuation and to become the one world-being, he suffers in his own person the primordial contradiction that is concealed in things, which means that he commits sacrilege and suffers" (*Birth of Tragedy* 71). The heroic will of the individual to transcend his sufferings and to reclaim the primordial wisdom of the unity of all things, despite the tragic limitations of the human body, is the mythological meaning of the Dionysian myth. "For the hero embodies in her person," explains Nussbaum, "the inexorable clash between human aspirations and their natural/divine limits: his demand for justice in an unjust universe entails terrible suffering" ("Transfiguration of Suffering" 103). Despite the amorality of existence, where human endeavors often end in failure, where unforeseen consequences cut short goals and aspirations, where death ultimately marks the tragic destination of all living beings, the will to survive remains a source of Dionysian pride,

which summons from the individual suffer a source of power that enables him or her to affirm the sufferings of existence.

Dionysus suffers as a result of the development of human consciousness. To become self-aware, to recognize the inevitability of death and to be born into a fragile and vulnerable body, is of such existential magnitude that the symbolic representation of this human predicament has been abstractly projected into many Greek myths and legends. According to Nietzsche, this Dionysian myth is an archetypal struggle, “that all the celebrated figures of the Greek stage—Prometheus, Oedipus, etc.—are mere masks of the original hero Dionysus. That behind all these masks there is a deity, that is one essential reason for the typical ‘ideality’ of these famous figures which has caused so much astonishment” (*Birth of Tragedy* 73). The Greek myth of the individual who suffers at the hands of unjust cosmic forces is a story preserved in a variety of forms and tales. Though the individual characters may have different names and faces, the underlying significance of the meaning of suffering and the capacity for its transcendence remains intact.

Given the power of these myths, Nietzsche identifies the transfiguring capacity of art as a necessary means of promoting psychological health and vitality. As Nietzsche explains, “The same impulse which calls art into being, as the complement and consummation of existence, seducing one to a continuation of life, was also the cause of the Olympian world which the Hellenic ‘will’ made use of as a transfiguring mirror” (*Birth of Tragedy* 43). Again, the impulse for art is also the cause of the Olympian dream world, which exists as imaginative abstractions or illusions. The impulse for art and the impulse for divinity coexist within the same drive, transforming the experience of lived reality. The Apollonian artist has created a world populated by a celestial body of gods and titans, making existence more

beautiful and desirable. Nietzsche writes, “Existence under the bright sunshine of such gods is regarded as desirable in itself, and the real pain of Homeric men is caused by parting from it, especially early parting” (*Birth of Tragedy* 43). The experience of lived reality has been transfigured or elevated by these divine abstractions, seducing one to a continuation of life.

Religious abstractions are rooted in fulfilling existential needs, as they appear to alleviate suffering and make living bearable for humans. As Nussbaum argues, one cannot develop an adequate understanding of the role of art or beauty in human lives, “without connecting these to human practical needs—and needs that are directed toward living and affirming life, rather than toward resignation and denial” (“Transfiguration of Intoxication” 97). Art serves life by providing value and meaning to an otherwise chaotic and amoral world. Stories and myths are aesthetic attempts at giving the world order and form, making navigation in it manageable and safe. Beauty uplifts, inspires, and motivates. Cultural ideals develop and the orientation of society is achieved through the sharing of traditions and values, and by forging bonds and mutual aspirations for the collective vision and goals of society. All this is possible through the human capacity for art, which invents, maps, organizes, and transfigures the world. This creative mechanism appears to give the world order and meaning, making it a vital component for the strengthening and advancement of life.

CONCLUSION

Nietzsche’s interest in *The Birth of Tragedy* was to explore the origin of tragic myth. What would compel a culture to develop these gruesome dramas, thereby elevating the cruelest and most horrifying aspects of existence? Why would art be in the service of highlighting these difficult and tragic moments? As Nietzsche ponders, “Greeks and the art

form of pessimism? The best turned out, most beautiful, most envied type of humanity to date, those most apt to seduce us to life, the Greeks—how now? They of all people should have needed tragedy? Even more—art? For What—Greek art?” (*Birth of Tragedy* 17). For Nietzsche, peculiar to the Greeks, was their ardent commitment to the continuation of life, even during the most perplexing, tragic, and horrifying of life’s circumstances.

For the Greeks, life in itself is desirable, despite the inevitability of suffering. “[T]he good, severe will of the older Greeks to pessimism,” states Nietzsche, “to the image of everything underlying existence that is frightful, evil, a riddle, destructive, fatal? What, then, would be the origin of tragedy? Perhaps joy, strength, overflowing health, over-great fullness?” (*Birth of Tragedy* 21). In other words, what the tragic myths ultimately reveal, according to Nietzsche, is the overabundant strength and joy in life that sustained the lives of the Greeks, a passion and excess that produced one of the greatest epochs in human history. Pessimism was overcome by the Greeks by the strength of their character. They confronted the burdens of their existence with heroism and acceptance. For Nietzsche, Greek art conveys an underlying symptom of their vitality and health: “Is there a pessimism of strength? An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing health, by the fullness of existence” (*Birth of Tragedy* 17). To recover the strength of their way of life requires a conception of their worldly outlook. Their cultural artifacts, particularly their tragic myths, contain a perception of the world that produced a resilient, life-affirming being that endured the tragic aspects of life with courage and heroism. Faced with the prevailing pessimism of his culture, Nietzsche hoped that deciphering the aesthetic attitudes of the Greek’s could reignite the passion and lust for life in the contemporary world. “Thus Nietzsche promoted the super-

historical approach,” states Jennings, “which ‘look(s) backward at the [past] only to understand the present and stimulate longing for the future’” (“From Philology to Existential Psychology” 64). Recovering the worldly attitude of the ancient Greeks could potentially uplift the despairing souls of the modern world, who, according to Nietzsche, appear more despondent and dejected than their ancient brethren.

This view gives Nietzsche a powerful conception of art and all of its manifestations, perceiving this capacity as a necessary and vital means of overcoming the sufferings of the world. True knowledge, or contemplation of mortality and death, brings with it a potentially nauseating despair that frightens and paralyzes the individual, which hence requires a means of rejuvenating his spirit. As Nietzsche writes, “Here, when the danger to his will is greatest, art approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the sublime as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the comic as the artistic discharge of nausea of absurdity” (*Birth of Tragedy* 60). Both tragedy and comedy find their purpose in their capacity to soothe, inducing either a transcendental experience of sublimity or a cathartic purging of anxiety and hysteria. Each genre enables the activation of a profound psychological mechanism that helps make existence more tolerable and capable of being endured.

As Nietzsche’s analysis demonstrates, the capacity of man’s creative urge is intertwined with the religious instinct to invent divine beings and cosmic fantasies, and these beliefs appear to play a significant role in human psychology. The mutual interdependence of art and religion suggests mankind’s primordial yearning for illusion, which ultimately aims at redemption. Nietzsche accordingly surmises, “For the more clearly I perceive in

nature those omnipotent art impulses, and in them an ardent longing for illusion, for redemption through illusion, the more I feel myself impelled to the metaphysical assumption that the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision, the pleasurable illusion, for its continuous redemption” (*Birth of Tragedy* 44-45). Illusions function as a means of rectifying the tragic aspects of existence. Art heals, nourishes, and sustains. Though they may be mental abstractions, religious narratives help perpetuate the continuation of life and make existence for humans endurable. Without myth, the redemptive vision could not be realized. The psychological healing experienced under Dionysian intoxication is a state that helps reaffirm humanity’s commitment to continue with existence, despite its tragic inevitability. The individual is redeemed of his sufferings and continues to bear the burden of his troubles with nobility.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO FREUD

Historically, religions have played a significant role in shaping the social arrangement of human beings. Through the establishment of social values, laws, and traditions, humans have learned to integrate themselves within larger and more complex systems of organization, influencing the conduct of their individual lives and interpersonal relationships. In fact, the psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, hypothesized that the development of civilization arose in conjunction with the genesis of religion, which he believed played a role in binding individuals into larger collectives. The moral framework developed by a religious community is successful if it can cement cooperation among its adherents, while also stymieing the compulsion for aggression and self-interest inherent in human nature.

The psychological composition of the individual, which has undergone a number of evolutionary processes to prepare him for communal living, was integral for the early formation of tribal societies to develop, paving the way for the modern variations of social organization found today. Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic theory, embarked upon the task of demystifying the origins of civilization and sought to bring into conscious contemplation the underlying dynamics that comprise this complex phenomenon. Freud's theory of the human psyche, which he divides into the faculties of the id, ego, and superego, form the tripartite illustration of the inner workings at play in the human mind, which, along with religious ideation, enabled the formation of civilization.

Willing to accept a biological conception of man, Freud sought to understand the formation of society and the concomitant birth of religious phenomena from a consideration of the instinctual demands imposed upon human nature. As Steinberg states, "Specifically, it

is the needs of the body (organic stimuli), represented in the psyche by instincts, which provide the primary motivating force behind human behavior” (“Sigmund Freud: Scientist and Social Philosopher” 76). Driven by an assortment of instincts and drives, which biologically serve the interests of the species, the human subject must come to control and sacrifice a portion of these impulses for the sake of living in a group, necessitating a system of rules and regulations that limit and constrict his behavior. To further understand the significance of morality from Freud’s psychoanalytic perspective, his works *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), along with other supplemental writings, will be used to illuminate the complex relationship between moral psychology and social organization, where the moral development of the individual constitutes the fundamental element in improving the stability of civilization.

ILLUSION AND SURVIVAL

According to Freud, religious ideas originally arose from a psychological state of dependence. The stresses of life, the violent competition for resources, and the lack of protection from the forces of nature, developed within the human psyche a state of collective helplessness, which necessitated the development of religious inventions as a means of ensuring psychological stability. “I have tried to show,” explains Freud, “that religious ideas have arisen from the same need as have all the other achievements of civilization: from the necessity of defending oneself against the crushing superior force of nature” (*Future* 697). The challenges that threatened the security and safety of the individual required a means of being combated, both in order to appease the psychological terror of his or her experience of the world and to stabilize the conditions of their environment.

Given the dangers present in the world, suffering becomes an inevitable feature of human existence, challenging those alive to circumvent the frequent occurrence of pain. As Steinberg explains, “There are, according to Freud, three principal sources of human suffering: 1) the inevitable decay of the body, 2) the superior force of nature, and 3) the imperfect control of human relations” (“Sigmund Freud: Scientist and Social Philosopher” 82). For human existence to flourish, solutions to these three principal sources of pain must be explored, which, as Freud’s observations have uncovered, appear to be the motivating force driving the collective expansion of society. The fragility of the human body, the devastating power of nature, and the aggressive instincts that undermine peaceful relations between humans, are challenges that not only make existence difficult to bear but also necessitate the reliance and interdependence of individuals to resist and combat these ordeals, facilitating the development of a number of mechanisms that make group cooperation possible.

In an effort to understand the psychological structures which make suffering tolerable, Freud focused his analysis on the internal mechanisms that reduce pain. In terms of alleviating psychological distress, Freud observed that the human mind has developed a number of palliatives which serve to ameliorate the troubles it routinely encounters. According to Freud, “There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances which make us insensitive to it” (*Civilization* 728). For a tribe to endure and survive, the internal lives of its followers must be strong enough to accept or at least withstand the traumas of the world. These internal mechanisms ward off anxieties and psychological discomforts, making the experience of life more tolerable. From this

perspective, perhaps the function and purpose of these psychological remedies can be observed in the therapeutic effects that they bestow.

To understand the role of substitutive satisfactions, it is important to recognize the compensatory function that certain pleasures can extend to the afflicted human mind. While the individual may find him or herself deprived of certain worldly pleasures or find the stresses of life too unbearable to accept, certain substitutive satisfactions can appease, even if only momentarily, the difficulties that the individual experiences in life. Interestingly, Freud identifies the pleasure derived from art as one example of a substitutive satisfaction. As Freud states, “The substitutive satisfactions, as offered by art, are illusions in contrast with reality, but they are none the less psychically effective, thanks to the role which phantasy has assumed in mental life” (*Civilization* 728). With the limitations and constraints of the material world, where the burdens of life are innumerable, an outlet for joy appears to exist within the sphere of the imagination. As Marcuse notes, “[Freud] starts with the recognition that reality is hard for everyone to bear all of the time; that one needs occasional vacations; that art, as a source of pleasure and as a source of comfort in life, helps him who creates it and him who enjoys it” (“Freud’s Aesthetics” 4). This enjoyment in art or the satisfaction derived from the contemplation of aesthetic beauty, functions, within Freud’s worldview, as a consolation device, alleviating, to some degree, the stresses that existence entails.

Along with being psychologically nourishing, illusions also play a practical role in modifying human behavior. Freud traces the development of mankind’s aesthetic inclinations to the gradual evolution of the imagination. “The region from which these illusions arise,” explains Freud, “is the life of the imagination; at the time when the development of the sense of reality took place, this region was expressly exempted from the

demands of reality-testing and was set apart for the purpose of fulfilling wishes which were difficult to carry out” (*Civilization* 732). The imagination, for Freud, with its capacity for phantasy and creative invention, functions like a tool and facilitates the acquisition of a specific desire, goal, or wish. Though these illusions or inventions can be experienced as a source of pleasure, as the apprehension of beauty appears to facilitate, its basic function is constrained by utility.

As Marcuse notes, “Freud, rather, sought to find in man’s aesthetic expression—as he did in every other important expression—the life-purpose which had brought it into being” (“Freud’s Aesthetics” 2). The imagination and the process which materializes fantasies and illusions are not arbitrary powers but vital functions which serve a critical need in human life. From this perspective, the imagination’s function can be seen when the acquisition of a desired object is being sought. Not bound by the constraints of reality, the imagination can be utilized for invention, which, when used like a tool, can creatively conjure up an infinite number of potential solutions to difficult and complex problems, which often obstruct a desired goal or wish. The fulfillment of a wish, which often utilizes the imagination, is experienced as pleasurable and reaffirms its value as a vital capacity.

Returning to the compensatory mechanisms which make life less of a troublesome experience, the human proclivity for intoxication and the substances that induce this state will be examined. For Freud, the experience of intoxication is related to a type of mania. While certainly the consumption of a drug may induce an altered state of consciousness, Freud pays closer examination to the disposition of the human subject, which seems psychologically predisposed to the frenzy and excitement of a manic experience. As Freud explains, “But there must be substances in the chemistry of our own bodies which have

similar effects, for we know at least one pathological state, mania in which a condition similar to intoxication arises, without the administration of any intoxicating drug” (*Civilization* 730). Human beings appear predisposed for the experience of mania. Given the pragmatic and utilitarian scope of Freud’s analysis, the inclination for intoxication must serve to satisfy some end or purpose. Again, Freud’s understanding of human psychology, including the function of fantasy life, is informed by the biological requirements imposed upon human nature, which, out of necessity, requires the acquisition of both psychological and social stability for the maintenance of survival. Thus, the predisposition for mania or the psychic proclivity for states of intoxication, must, hypothetically, serve to satisfy some urgent need associated with psychological health and social interaction.

Exploring the function of the imagination, Freud identifies the stimulus proffered by aesthetic beauty and recognizes its capacity to induce a form of intoxication. “The enjoyment of beauty,” states Freud, “has a peculiar, mildly intoxicating quality of feeling. Beauty has no obvious uses; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it” (*Civilization* 733). While Freud acknowledges that he cannot identify any purpose for beauty, at least while considering its function in society, he does state that the beauty found in art can have a consoling and pleasurable impact on human beings, and, even if only in jest, suggests that civilization could not maintain itself without some form of it in existence. Again, as Freud states, “People who are receptive to the influence of art cannot set too high a value on it as a source of pleasure and consolation in life” (*Civilization* 732). To reiterate, aesthetic beauty, as Freud makes sense of the phenomenon, is a mildly stimulating source of pleasure that can also psychologically

console, making it a valuable cultural artifact that serves as a compensatory satisfaction. The extent to which society depends or makes use of beauty remains to be explored.

ART AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

While aesthetic beauty has some therapeutic benefits, Freud recognizes that its capacity to psychically heal is limited. “Nevertheless the mild narcosis induced in us by art,” explains Freud, “can do no more than bring about a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs, and it is not strong enough to make us forget real misery” (*Civilization* 732). Though art can soothe the pains of some sufferers, ultimately, the psychological remedies induced by art fall short of proffering absolute consolation. There are some miseries which art cannot compensate or relieve. Despite these limitations, Freud perceives another mechanism attributable to art’s purpose, which appears to be its capacity to induce feelings of awe, which help create feelings of affinity and attachment between the individual and his culture

Constraining the function of art to its social or cultural utility, Freud recognizes that art can stir up feelings of exaltation within members of a community, creating between the individual and his culture a kind of reverence. As Freud states, “the creations of art heighten his feeling of identification, of which every cultural unit stands in so much need, by providing an occasion for sharing highly valued emotional experiences” (*Future* 692). The emotional experience induced by art binds the individual, in a sense, to his or her culture or tribe, by forging a communal link between the individual and the other members of the group. As Kaye concurs with Freud, “Art, too, while primarily accessible to the elite, offers substitute satisfactions for our repressed wishes and can heighten feelings of identification within the cultural unit by strengthening devotion to its ideals” (“Was Freud a Medical

Scientist or a Social Theorist?” 390). The architectural designs of ceremonial buildings, the pattern and shape of religious sculptures and paintings, along with the melodies of great arrangements of music elicit, as Freud points out, feelings of admiration and awe that are shared between all the inhabitants of a particular clan. These artistic products, which excite and stir the senses, mystify the spectators who expose themselves to the beauty of these pieces, thereby creating a lasting affinity that binds the individual spectator to his or her culture.

Following the line of thought employed by Freud, who looked to uncover the life-enhancing function of art, Paul states, “In the condition of society without civilization, at least of our sort, the arts and techniques of culture finally exist to promote, enhance and sustain life, whose continuation across generations represents the paramount value served by all others” (“The Genealogy of Civilization” 394). The artistic products produced by a given culture possess a germinal power, strengthening the likelihood that the values and traditions of the social unit will continue to perpetuate themselves across generations. Reared under the influence of his culture’s artwork, the individual begins to mold his identity around these sacred objects, finding reverence and admiration in their historical significance. Bound by the strength of these feelings, the individual ensures that the values and traditions of his group will be passed on from one generation to the next, by immersing his own children within the same network of traditions and customs.

As Freud’s analysis has shown, a major source of motivation which influences the development of civilization is the problem of suffering and the practical considerations that come with addressing the experience of pain. Aesthetic beauty, with its capacity to console, not only provides a kind of psychological nourishment but also produces collective feelings

of transcendence which create a lasting sense of awe and admiration for one's culture. These shared feelings unite the individual members of a group, ensuring that their values and traditions will survive, despite the existence of aggressive instincts that might otherwise put their traditions in jeopardy. While Freud's analysis supposes a sociological function for art's role in society, the same can be said for the achievements of science, which, according to Freud, are also motivated by an underlying concern for safety and survival. As Freud explains, "If we assume quite generally that the motive force of all human activities is a striving towards the two confluent goals of utility and a yield of pleasure, we must suppose that this is also true of the manifestations of civilization which we have been discussing here, although this is easily visible only in scientific and aesthetic activities" (*Civilization* 740). An examination of a society's artistic and scientific achievements can reveal the influence the pursuit of utility and pleasure have had on the development of culture. Again, as Freud hypothesizes, the process of social organization was pursued as a means of combating the difficulties that survival would pose for the solitary human being, whose limitations as a fragile and mortal creature necessitated the cooperation of others to maximize his or her odds at maintaining safety. Thus, art and science exist as branches of knowledge which serve to fulfill the needs of civilization, addressing both the needs of the individual and the larger social group.

When examining the aims of scientific pursuits, such as innovations in agriculture, engineering, or medicine, one can observe the influence the desire for stability and order has had on the development of these goals. As Freud acknowledges, "The benefits of order are incontestable. It enables men to use space and time to the best advantage, while conserving their psychical forces" (*Civilization Discontents* 739). For instance, the desire to develop

preservation techniques that extend the duration of a community's food supply, or constructing systems of transportation which ease the delivery of vital goods and services, ensure that a stable food source remains accessible to a large number of people, despite the logistical difficulties that may be present, mitigating, in effect, the suffering that may ensue because of famine and starvation. Clearly, these achievements express a concern for the welfare of the human species. The human subject, which seeks protection from the chaotic forces of nature and refuge from the hostilities of enemies, aims to guarantee his or her safety and to reduce the frequency of suffering. The impetus which motivates these human aspirations are driven by a number of biological instincts. The collective organization of society appears to be a biologically driven phenomenon that maximizes the individual's proclivities for order and safety. The products of culture, as seen in both art and science, help to reinforce the relative stability of society. Art, in particular, appears to activate a number of psychological mechanisms which both appease the psychological anxieties of the individual suffer and foments feelings of group solidarity, creating a process which conjoins the individual members of the group into a collective sense of unity and togetherness.

RELIGION AND HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

With these considerations constraining the focus of Freud's understanding of the origins of civilization, where the biological and psychological demands imposed upon human nature dictate the course and development of culture, a consideration of the influences surrounding the genesis of religious phenomena can illumine their role in shaping and modifying human behavior. Returning to the sphere of the imagination, which as previously discussed was related to the development of art and the creative fulfilment of wishes, the affinity between religious invention and constructions of fantasy, which manifest as products

of culture, will be shown to share a common origin and purpose. Both the inventions of art and religion are vehicles that induce states of transcendence, which satisfy the communal goals of the group and the personal needs of the individual.

Before religious inventions can be understood as products of the imagination and thus comparable to works of art, Freud's understanding of illusion must be made. "An illusion," states Freud, "is not the same thing as an error; nor is it necessarily an error" (*Future* 704). Again, comparable to the construction of wishes, illusions are not limited by the constraints of material reality. Illusions are inventions of the imagination, free from the demands of reason. As Freud explains, "What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes. In this respect they come near to psychiatric delusions" (*Future Illusion* 704). Illusions, like wishes, serve to satisfy some desired end or goal. Because illusions belong to the sphere of the imagination, an irrational component underlies this mental function. To dream, wish, or imagine, though these states are often experienced positively, can veer in the direction of a delusion, which can potentially impair rational judgement.

Freud is wary of illusions, but he does acknowledge that a distinction exists between a belief that is considered delusional and one that is merely a vehicle for fulfilling a wish: "In the case of delusions, we emphasize as essential their being in contradiction with reality. Illusions need not necessarily be false—that is to say, unrealizable or in contradiction to reality" (*Future* 704). An illusion, existing as a mental abstraction, can serve a purpose in reality as long as the aim of the desire or wish is tenable or within a reasonable possibility of being acquired. A wish can become actualized and be attained in the objective world, while a delusion remains bound to the sphere of the individual's imagination. "Thus we call a belief an illusion," Freud continues, "when a wish-fulfilment is a prominent factor in its

motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relation to reality; just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification” (*Future* 704). To reiterate, illusions are critical functions of the mind that serve to abstractly represent a desired wish or goal. Illusions, while being a product of the imagination, are thus purposeful and practical tools which help satisfy some desired end, particularly the pursuit of survival.

While the function of the imagination can potentially have a number of positive and pragmatic uses, as we have seen with the therapeutic pleasure induced by aesthetics or with the mental construction of wishes, the invention of a religious system, for Freud, falls dangerously close to the delusions of irrational thinking. As Freud writes, “The religions of mankind must be classed among the mass-delusions of this kind. No one, needless to say, who shares a delusion ever recognizes it as such” (*Civilization* 732). While religious ideas cannot be verified by empirical evidence nor can its claims survive the rigor of stringent analysis, their power to possess and take hold of its adherents strikes Freud as symptomatic of a kind of pathology. As Steinberg notes, “With the rationalists, [Freud] condemned traditional religion as an opponent of reason; by imparting illusory beliefs, religion inhibited free thought and put unnecessary prohibitions upon individual freedom” (“Sigmund Freud: Scientist and Social Philosopher” 87). Religious thinking, for Freud, not only compromises that clarity of rational thought produced by the individual but also constrains the freedom of his or her individual actions, placing taboos and prohibitions that do not always align with the subject’s personal interests or desires.

However, despite how rationally incoherent these ideas may be, their existence throughout human culture remains apparent, manifesting in various forms and traditions across the broad spectrum of human life. Understanding the function of these inventions and

their relation to human life presents an intriguing set of problems for Freud to explore. As Freud ponders, “We must ask where the inner force of those doctrines lies and to what it is that they owe their efficacy, independent as it is of recognition by reason” (*Future* 703). According to Freud, the human mind appears psychologically predisposed or prefigured to adopt and accept religious beliefs, despite their illusory nature. While Freud is critical of religious ideations, perceiving them to be symptomatic of a type of psychological neurosis, he does go on to outline their pragmatic functions, which serve to constrain the desires of the individual and to foster collective feelings of harmony. Again, the biological limitations of the species, which necessitate a number of basic needs for survival—such as protection, food, and shelter—informs Freud’s understanding of the origins of civilization. Religious phenomenon, though it may harm the progression of rational and logical thinking, must function, in part, to satisfy a number of instinctual needs, particularly those associated with mental health. For Freud, the purpose or aim of these religious illusions was to ameliorate the many ordeals and struggles that confronted primitive man.

As Freud takes upon the challenge of demystify the events which gave birth to civilization, wrestling with the origin of religious ideas naturally falls within his investigation, primarily as they relate to human psychology. In reference to the cultural significance given to these myths and their relation to human psychology, Freud states, “And now the question arises: what are these ideas in the light of psychology? Whence do they derive the esteem in which they are held? And, to take a further timid step, what is their real worth?” (*Future* 697). Given the number of cultures that have developed their own religious systems, the strong feelings of sanctity proffered to traditions and institutions associated with these myths and customs, the proclivity with which people accept and adopt these beliefs,

and the lengthy duration that these narratives have survived in history, it is easy to recognize that something vital for human beings sustains their significance, at least with regards to satisfying some psychological desire.

For these reasons, Freud designates the phenomenon of religious belief as the most significant element when considering the construction of civilization. Again, as Freud states, “No mention has yet been made of what is perhaps the most important in the psychological inventory of a civilization. This consists in its religious ideas in the widest sense—in other words (which will be justified later) in its illusions” (*Future* 692). To recall Freud’s previous distinction between beliefs that are either illusions or delusions, some wish that has the potential to be realized constitutes an illusion, while beliefs that contradict the realm of reason are considered delusions. While Freud recognizes that an aspect of religious thought appears delusional and may be symptomatic of some neurotic difficulty, given the illogical position of certain religious beliefs or claims, there does exist a strain of religious thinking that is considerate of practical needs, particularly when it comes to ensuring survival and psychological health. For Freud, religious ideas, though they often appear irrational, serve some vital function and help ensure, through some capacity, the psychic health of civilization.

One of the purposes underlying the complex arrangement of numerous individuals into a social and cooperative group is the maximization of survival. The strength and power of a group proves more lasting and resilient against the hostile conditions of the world than that produced by a single individual. When it comes to enhancing survivability, defending oneself against the deadly conditions of nature is necessary. “For the principle task of civilization,” explains Freud, “its actual *raison d’etre*, is to defend us against nature” (*Future*

Illusion 693). As Freud examines the scientific and aesthetic achievements of mankind, he perceives that a drive for pleasure, utility, and a concern for practical ends influences the course of these developments. According to Freud, matters of utility and pleasure underlie the function of religious inventions as well.

One of the motives driving the development of civilization is the yearning for safety from the forces of nature. The destructive terror of an earthquake or the crushing blow of a seismic ocean wave, along with the devastating aftermath of flash floods, tornados, or volcanic eruptions, all demonstrate how terrifying and titanic natural disasters can be. Consequently, a means of combating or taming the power of these catastrophes would give rise to a number innovations, all aimed at reducing the amount of suffering caused by these events. Given the immense magnitude of these deadly strikes, appearing to befall at random and with no concern for human life, it is possible to assume that an omnipotent force provoked the eruption of these events. As Freud states, “In the same way, a man makes the forces of nature not simply into persons with whom he can associate as he would with his equals—that would not do justice to the overpowering impression which those forces make on him—but he gives them the character of a father” (*Future* 694-695). In Freud’s estimation, primitive society, before the development of the natural sciences, personified the forces of nature and projected upon it a paternal character. To conceive of an external entity, with the power to unleash immense destruction at random, altered the psychological orientation of man and transformed his relationship with the world. As Sharma writes, “Religion for Freud is a search for security in a hostile world in which God plays the role played by a father in childhood” (“The Future of an Illusion: Forty Years Later” 67). Now a cosmic paternal figure holds dominion over the earth and the destiny of mankind.

This personification and projection of human attributes upon nature entails the preliminary construction of an anthropomorphized deity, which is perceived as superior to man. The apprehension of this supreme father-like being significantly alters the behaviors and actions of humanity. Again, Freud's interest lies in deciphering the purpose of religious phenomena as it relates to human psychology. While the complexity and significance of religious belief may never be fully understood, Freud does pin down three plausible functions for the purpose of the gods. As Freud states, "The gods retain their threefold task: they must exorcize the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them" (*Future* 695). Now that the forces of nature are perceived to be the manifestation of some single or conglomeration of entities, someone or something can now be bartered with to appease the severity of natural catastrophes, establishing a form of sacrificial control over the future of their lives. This sacrificial element also aligns with the latter two functions of the gods, which are, in part, responsible for justifying the meaning of suffering.

As stated previously, the feelings of helplessness caused by the forces of nature and the fear of living with a fragile and mortal body would prove unbearable to endure in isolation. A single human organism is no match for the numerous obstacles and enemies that surround him in the world. In support of Freud's analysis, Haidt explains that "In ancient times, loners were more likely to get picked off by predators than were their more gregarious siblings, who felt a strong need to stay close to the group" (*The Righteous Mind* 225). As expected, a more practical means of securing safety would be to rely and cooperate with other individuals, who each share the same concern for survival. The formation of a tribe or

larger social group can potentially compensate against the limitations and dangers of being a fragile and vulnerable being. For these reasons, Freud identifies the mechanism which makes group cooperation possible as critical for the development of civilization. “Human life in common is only made possible,” explains Freud, “when a majority comes together which is stronger than any separate individual and which remains united against all separate individuals” (*Civilization* 740). The process which unites individuals into larger and more complex arrangements is a natural defense that guarantees safety. While an increase in size improves the strength of the group, a mechanism must be in place which ensures that the individual members of the group get along and willingly work with each other, forestalling a potential internal collapse.

The mechanism which facilitates this process of collectivization is achieved through the moral regulation of each individual, which as Freud identifies, is a byproduct of religious belief. “And the more autonomous nature became,” explains Freud, “and the more the gods withdrew from it, the more earnestly were all expectations directed to the third function of the gods—the more did morality become their true domain” (*Future* 695). As knowledge of the physical arrangement of the world grew, a result of the continual development of the natural sciences, a material understanding of natural events would later explain the origin of these terrifying disasters. Sacrificial rituals would no longer be used to placate the wrath of a disgruntled god. However, adhering to the religious deity’s moral precepts and submitting to the moral law of the tribe would guarantee the sought after stability.

While living in a group may be the best defense against the conditions of the world and maximize the odds of survival, a number of troubles forestall the process of unification, particularly each individual’s unique desires and proclivity for self-interest. If each human

being is driven to pursue their own pleasures—problematic when the availability of desired ends is scarce—the existence of competitors claiming a right to these same objects would only intensify the potential for discord and internal division. For a group to exist, conflict and aggression between members of the group must be peacefully resolved. As Freud theorizes, a mechanism must be in place which suppress the desires of the individual, while simultaneously fostering feelings of loyalty and respect that unite the group. The ability to forge group solidarity is particularly complicated by the number of social relationships that often exist within a given society. As Freud states, “The last, but certainly not the least important, of the characteristic features of civilization remains to be assessed: the manner in which the relationships of men to one another, their social relationships, are regulated—relationships which affect a person as a neighbor, as a source of help, as another person’s sexual object, as a member of a family and of a State” (*Civilization* 740). Given the variety of social relationships that exist within a complex civilization, a systematized means of coordinating these many social interactions would have to be in place for order to become predictable and reliable. The practitioners of these values and rules of behavior would have to submit to them voluntarily or be forced to obey them through some means of coercion.

Given the terrifying state of circumstances the individual would have to confront on his own, his best and most practical means of deterring danger would be to submit to the expectations and collective values of a group and participate within its framework of moral laws and traditions. A means of regulating and constraining the desires of the individual in regard for the group’s moral values would have to be in place, which ultimately aims at establishing stability and order. The individual must sacrifice a portion of his or her own desires for the sake of the group. As Freud writes, “A good part of the struggles of mankind

center round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation—one, that is, that will bring happiness—between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group; and one of the problems that touches the fate of humanity is whether such an accommodation can be reached by means of some particular form of civilization or whether this conflict is irreconcilable” (*Civilization* 741). An individual who does not conform to the values of the tribe risks undermining the strength of its internal integrity. As a result, “The power of the community,” states Freud, “is then set up as ‘right’ in opposition to the power of the individual, which is condemned as ‘brute force’ (*Civilization* 740). The individual, compelled by a fear of punishment, tolerates the dissatisfaction that comes with suppressing his desires in exchange for the potential benefits that come with living in a united group. As Zweig writes, “Society must keep the instincts repressed except for an irreducible minimum necessary to reproduce itself, and the notion of bad hence attaches to that which is prohibited” (“Freudian Psychology and Ethical Doctrine” 100). The creation of laws and prohibitions would thus serve to deter the onset of internal conflicts that could comprise the group’s solidarity.

Freud contends that the individual’s innate hostilities and proclivity for aggression must be regulated for a group to develop into the complex civilizations we see today. While violent means of coercion can be successful at deterring disobedience, an internal regulation of the individual’s rebellious impulses greatly facilitates the process of unification as the compulsion for order becomes self-imposed. Eventually, voluntary adherence to a community’s rule of law acts as the stabilizing mechanism which preserves the group. As Freud states, “The final outcome should be a rule of law to which all—except those who are not capable of entering a community—have contributed by a sacrifice of their instincts, and

which leaves no one—again with the same expectation—at the mercy of brute force” (*Civilization* 741). The mechanism which Freud conceives of is the gradual development of the human conscience, which he calls the super-ego, which acts as a moral tyrant when a perceived transgression has taken place, striking within the individual feelings of pain and anger that manifest as guilt and anxiety.

In order to deter violent confrontations from destroying the group, individuals involved must impose upon themselves a form of restraint, internalizing the source of their anger. As Freud states, “His aggressiveness is introjected, internalized; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from—that is it is directed towards his own ego” (*Civilization* 756). This ego, or conscious personality, receives the feelings of pain that otherwise would have been directed at the source of agitation: “There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and which now, in the form of ‘conscience,’ is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals” (*Civilization* 756). The super-ego enforces the collective values of the community, which as previously discussed, were devised with the intention of preserving group solidarity. The feelings of guilt triggered by the conscience are painful enough to forestall the escalation of a violent outburst, ensuring that the individual submits to the community’s moral and legal law. The individual is also reinforced to curb his aggressive instincts because upsetting the group may lead to the penalty of exile and consequent loss of protection.

THE INSTINCTS OF LIFE AND DEATH

According to Freud, the formation of groups is antithetical to the natural interests of individuals, whose aggressive instincts and proclivity for self-preservation undermine the

process of unity. A natural hostility arises when two individuals, who are unrelated and unknown to each other, come into proximity. From these tensions arises the fear of the stranger. As Freud states, “Not merely is this stranger in general unworthy of my love; I must honestly confess that he has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred. He seems not to have the least trace of love for me and shows me not the slightest consideration” (*Civilization* 748). Not only are the intentions of the stranger unknown and thus a source of paranoia but, to care and shelter this outsider, when the availability of resources is scarce, places a heavy strain upon the community.

This fear of the stranger can also be corroborated by what Haidt considers the “omnivore’s dilemma.” As Haidt explains, “The ‘omnivore’s dilemma’ (a term coined by Paul Rozin) is that omnivores must seek out and explore new potential foods while remaining wary of them until they are proven safe” (*The Righteous Mind* 172). Thus, human beings are driven by two competing motives, an interest for novelty and fear of new things. “Plagues, epidemics, and new diseases,” continues Haidt, “are usually brought in by foreigners—as are many new ideas, goods, and technologies—so societies face an analogue of the omnivore’s dilemma, balancing xenophobia and xenophilia” (*The Righteous Mind* 173). Because a stranger or foreigner may potentially risk the stability of the community, either introducing a number of diseases or disrupting the cultural status quo, a variety of psychological and biological mechanisms have evolved which create a natural wariness for what is unknown, ensuring that dangers are kept out and avoided.

The innate feelings of fear and aggression provoked by the stranger, evolved, presumably as a mechanism for deterring death or injury. But these same feelings impede, to a great extent, the feelings of respect and solidarity needed to form a group. Again, as Freud

makes clear, “But if he is a stranger to me and if he cannot attract me by any worth of his own or any significance that he may already have acquired for my emotional life, it will be hard for me to love him” (*Civilization* 748). While a biological repellent appears to surround what is foreign or unknown, some contrary mechanism must be present which attracts and combines; if not, the formation of a group, particularly the size of modern societies, could not be possible.

Freud identifies this natural proclivity for aggression as Thanatos, or the death instinct, which he hypothesizes is ineradicably rooted in human nature. As Freud writes, “Starting from speculations on the beginning of life and from biological parallels, I drew the conclusion that, besides the instinct to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units, there must exist another, contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and to bring them back to their primeval, inorganic state” (*Civilization* 754). Not only do these hostile instincts hinder the development of communal relations, but the impulse for aggression to what is unknown or foreign promotes the likelihood that irreconcilable conflicts between neighboring tribes will resolve themselves in war. As Kay points out, “The brutal spectacle of human slaughter obviously raised the problem of human aggression in a way that Freud could no longer avoid theoretically” (“Was Freud a Medical Scientist or Social Theorist?” 387). Given this innate tendency for violence and destruction, which motivates the occurrence of war and genocide, a counterforce must stymie or replace the instincts which seek to undermine the formation of civil societies. As Freud writes, “And now, I think, the meaning of the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction,

as it works itself out in the human species” (*Civilization* 756). This instinct of life, or Eros, appears to be such an antidote.

The adhesive phenomenon which combines individuals into large social groups is perceived by Freud to originate from the mysterious force of love. The specific type of love, whether the frenzy of romantic feelings between two lovers or the love associated with the care of a family, is not specified by Freud, but is hypothesized to stem from the same source. According to Freud, “The love which founded the family continues to operate in civilization both in its original form, in which it does not renounce direct sexual satisfaction, and in its modified form as aim-inhibited affection. In each, it continues to carry on its function of binding together considerable numbers of people, and it does so in a more intensive fashion than can be effected through the interest of work in common” (*Civilization* 744). According to Freud, the phenomenon of love is the principle which organizes and arranges society, manifesting bonds of affinity between members of a tribe, creating, in effect, an extended social family. As Steinberg corroborates, “The power of love functions psychologically to maintain the family, including the male to keep his object near him, and the female to keep her children close to her” (“Sigmund Freud” *Scientist and Social Philosopher* 84). Freud terms this force, Eros, which he believes fuels the intensity of familial bonds and romantic feelings. “I may now add,” explains Freud, “that civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind” (*Civilization* 755). The love shared between a community or social group is like that exchanged between members of a family, which ensures that each individual is cared for and supported. Again,

without this force of Eros, the natural proclivity for aggression and destruction would make group cooperation impossible, as no feelings of attachment would exist to unite the group.

The formation of civilization is constrained by the demands of necessity, which requires that large groups of individuals can work together and coexist with one another. Eros, or the instinct which propels the feelings of unity and harmony associated with love, is the mechanism which drives the continued expansion of societies. Without the bonds of familial affection or, at a minimum, feelings of common decency, shared between members of the tribe, the social fabric which collectively unites the group would collapse and self-interest and aggression would undermine its stability. For these reasons, the individual must voluntarily sacrifice his freedom and suppress his hostile instincts or face a coercive punishment. For the individual to accept the necessity of these sacrifices, the benefits of the group must outweigh the risks of living in isolation, where dangers would be more difficult to fend off.

To return to the inquiry over the purpose or function of religions, the individual's submission to the accepted values and traditions of the group is determined by Freud to be a necessary process in the task of preserving society. Gods or religious deities were used to enforce the moral obligations of the group, serving as exemplars of ideal human conduct. Interestingly, the moral commandments enforced by religion and the instinct of Eros which leads to the emotional attachment of others aim at the same task, which is to foster feelings of unity and cooperation. The sanctification of moral duties and responsibilities, inculcated by the accepted traditions of society, can be seen to coincide with the phenomenon of love, particularly as it is observed in Christianity. But as Freud observes, "When once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community,

extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence” (*Civilization* 752). While the religious leader Paul advised his followers to bestow feelings of love between members of his Christian congregation, inevitably, as Freud predicted, the hostile instincts innate to human nature became projected and directed at outsiders or foreigners, demonstrating the hostilities between competing religious sects. Nonetheless, Eros, or love, remains a central element of religious thinking, as can be seen in the tenants of Christianity, which appear to align with Freud’s hypothesis that religious phenomena aims at combining individuals into larger collectives.

Religious phenomena and the instinct of Eros share a common origin. In fact, Freud recognizes that the sentiments of love and the feelings of communal harmony associated with this force may explain the feeling of religious ecstasy. In correspondence with a friend, Freud details the form-destroying and overwhelming sensation of love, comparing the impact of its potency to the vastness of an ocean. As Freud writes, “It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of ‘eternity,’ a feeling as of something limitless, unbound—as it were, ‘oceanic’ (*Civilization* 723). The strength of this sensation is powerful enough to distort the conscious experience of the subject’s sense of reality, as the boundaries which contain the individual’s self slowly dissolve. Again, as Freud continues, “At the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that ‘I’ and ‘you’ are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact” (*Civilization* 724). While this anecdote relates the experience of love between two romantic partners, the sensation of the ego’s collapse and the feeling of being

united with an external agent describes, to some extent, the same feelings of awe and transcendence associated with religious experiences.

Interestingly, the description of this state is reminiscent of Freud's analysis of aesthetic beauty, which also produces states of transcendence. As previously discussed, products of art are psychologically pleasing and can sometimes elicit mild forms of intoxication, which are pleasurable and mildly consoling. If possible, a comparison between this oceanic, transcendent, or sublime experience, which Freud perceives can be activated by both aesthetic objects and the instinct of Eros, can be used to interpret the significance of religious phenomena. Perhaps, a gateway exists between the experience of love or Eros and aesthetics, which can illuminate the purpose and function of religions. As Zweig states, "Eros, the life instinct, concomitantly strives to unite units of organic life into larger and larger wholes, and subsumes under it the sexual instincts" ("Freudian Psychology and Ethical Doctrine" 102). The feelings of affection which exist between a man and his lover or a mother to her children, exhibit the same mechanism of attachment that is induced by the aesthetic products of a culture, which also serve to bind individuals into larger social collectives. In this manner, Eros, or the life instinct, appears to manifest in a number of channels, with the function of creating strong transcendent experiences that forge unity.

Freud recognizes that the goals pursued by civilization are motivated by pragmatic needs and the desire for pleasure, which appear to drive both scientific and aesthetic innovations. For a civilization to exist, the individuals who collectively participate within a group must be capable of satisfying a number of biological and psychological needs, without endangering the group's solidarity. Thus, each individual must sacrifice a portion of their freedom in exchange for the advantages of living in a community, which can greatly deter the

dangers of the world. As a result, the individual's impulses and desires must be regulated, ensuring that he or she does not undermine the group's interests. Instead, the individual must recognize the moral traditions and values of the community, which are often reinforced by religious laws and customs. Though cohabitation and communal living is strenuous and agitating, the individual must suppress his violent instincts or find an outlet to expel his frustrations, which often manifests itself through tribal warfare. To subdue these tensions and thwart the outbreak of internal division, feelings of harmony and unity must be present to ease the strain of living in a group. Eros, or the life instinct associated with love, including the power of the romantic and familial sort, is projected amongst the members of the group, tethering them to each other by bonds of affection. The intensity of experience produces emotions that strengthen the group's solidarity, which ensure that both trust and cooperation are possible, vital elements that propel the development of civilization.

Religion, through the enforcement of its moral customs and traditions and propensity to elicit the experience of transcendence, appears to be the mechanism that keeps society functioning. Together, the moral regulation of the individual and the transcendent experience of love, which binds the individual to the group, are necessary components of a healthy and functioning society. Without the benefits of group cooperation, the sacrifices forced upon the individual would be too burdensome to submit to voluntarily, necessitating a means of violent coercion. Religion, which enforces the moral traditions of the community, appears to be the mechanism that facilitates the collective formation of society.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Religious myths, while they may be inventions of the imagination or psychic projections of human needs or longings, play a vital role in augmenting the spiritual development of human beings. The moral development of the individual relies upon an assortment of traditions and values to shape and mold the impulses inherent to human nature, which, as Freud's analysis has shown, can either be constructive or destructive in advancing the project of communal living. Without an established procedure of initiation rituals, rites of passages, heroes to emulate, or parables and stories to uplift and inspire, human beings are left with a great void of chaos with which to orient themselves, as they desperately search for meaning and purpose to buttress the pain of their suffering.

As Nietzsche and Freud foresaw, the rising tide of reason and scientific thought would initiate a depreciation in the value of religious myth, as material explanations for the nature of reality would prove more appealing to the modern mind. Faith in illusions would prove unsatisfying to a mind that has been advised to value empirical reason and scientific truth over the fantasies of religious belief. While Freud remained optimistic that scientific reason can be a suitable replacement for the irrational practices of religious ritual and custom, questions remain whether science itself can replace the spiritual benefits associated with religious transcendence, which Nietzsche regarded as a vital antidote for the alleviation of pain and suffering.

While scientific truth may produce practical solutions to civilization's array of problems, of particular concern are those individuals who find themselves struggling to cope with the anxieties and stresses induced by existence. The psychological health of a community is vital for its continued maintenance and stability. Without a framework of

meaning to interpret and make sense of their sufferings, how will individuals discover a justification for their worldly troubles or ordeals? Discovering a suitable replacement that can offer the same psychological relief once afforded by religious consolation remains an uncertain project. As Freud writes, “Civilization has little to fear from educated people and brain-workers. In them the replacement of religious motives for civilized behavior by other secular motives would proceed unobtrusively; moreover, such people are to a large extent themselves vehicles of civilization. But it is another matter with the great mass of the uneducated and oppressed, who have every reason for being enemies of civilization. So long as they do not discover that people no longer believe in God, all is well” (*Future Illusion* 710). While Freud perceives that some individuals may be able to forgo their dependence on religious illusions, he does acknowledge that others may struggle to transition from this mode of thought. Given that metaphysical beliefs help substantiate the moral precepts proscribed by a community or tribe, lack of voluntary submission to the Law can potentially undermine and destroy the group’s cohesion and stability, as destructive instincts are no longer suppressed or subdued. The psychological relief that religious inventions once assured also becomes jeopardized as the legitimacy of religious claims becomes questionable and fallible.

The continued development of scientific rationalism is partly to blame for the desiccation of myth, which has been stripped of its vitalizing appeal. Without an appreciation for the instinctual and aesthetic components of myth, religions lose their power to bestow meaning and vitality. As Nietzsche explains, “For this is the way in which religions are wont to die out: under the stern, intelligent eyes of an orthodox dogmatism, the mythical premises of a religion are systematized as a sum total of historical events; one begins apprehensively to defend the credibility of the myths, while at the same time one

opposes any continuation of their natural vitality and growth; the feeling for myth perishes, and its place is taken by the claim of religion to historical foundations” (*Birth of Tragedy* 75). All the elements of the myth that provoke states of transcendence and feelings of otherworldliness, that stimulate by means of music and dance, that spiritually augment the individual, including initiation rituals and rites of passage, have all been distilled and removed from the myth, leaving behind a record of historical events that poorly substantiate the claims of their religious sect. The concern for logical coherence, the incompatibility of scientific and religious explanations for the origin of the universe, and the quest for the rational intelligibility of the cosmos, has dislodged humanity from the pillar of meaning that previously secured them from the vortices of existential angst and despair.

While science and religion have a long history of conflict, their polarity need not be irreconcilable as each domain of knowledge pursues independent and distinct goals. Scientific analysis cannot derive spiritual values from material reality nor provide the existential relief proffered by religious consolation. Aesthetics, on the other hand, can psychologically transform and heighten the experience of life for humans, as values, goals, and ideals can be constructed and collectively adhered to, which then guide and direct the development of the human soul or psyche. The values developed and cultivated by religious communities are founded upon the desire to preserve the human species. As Nietzsche writes, “Whether I contemplate men with benevolence or with an evil eye, I always find them concerned with a single task, all of them and every one of them in particular: to do what is good for the preservation of the human race” (*The Gay Science* 73). These values can only be retained and disseminated to their adherents by cultural artifacts that encode and preserve the sacred laws that keep their society functioning.

Aesthetics and the human disposition that finds pleasure and joy in the arts, activate a number of psychological mechanisms that tether the members of the group to their culture. These strong sentiments not only facilitate the process of communal living but are also responsible for eliciting the feelings of sanctity that imbue the world with a transcendent meaning. The instinctual substratum of human emotions that fuel the creation of these cosmogonic myths articulate the profoundest depths of the human psyche, which can only materialize and become manifest through the medium of aesthetic invention. While the origins of these myths cannot be validated by scientific explanations, they have often served to morally and psychologically uplift the individual, making him or her more capable of enduring the trials of existence. The Socratic optimism that celebrates scientific reason's ability to provide intellectual fulfillment neglects to take into consideration the irrational stirrings of the human heart, which as Freud and Nietzsche have shown, has perennially yearned for an apprehension of transcendent truths and realities since the dawn of humankind. Aesthetics, when perceived as a portal to the divine, is able to transport the individual to a sphere of experience that makes the religious sentiments that once inspired the world comprehensible, thus suggesting that another mode of thought exists that can provide refuge from the debilitating uncertainties of existence.

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