The Spectacle of Suffering: On Tragedy in Nietzsche’s *Daybreak*.

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Abstract

This paper argues that the passages on tragedy in Nietzsche’s *Daybreak*, taken together, articulate a conception of tragic psychology that plays a pivotal role in the overarching argument of the book. I maintain that in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche construes tragedy as the embodiment of a superior alternative to the (modern, Christian) moral worldview that is the main target of his critique, and that in the curious phenomenon of tragic pleasure, Nietzsche identifies a potent antidote to what he calls the Circean seductions of morality.
Nietzsche considered art as such a highly effective antidote to tragic insight and the “spasms and agitations of the will” because it induces what he called “Rausch”, a German word translated as rush or intoxication. For one to create any work of beauty, or truly appreciate beauty in art or nature, one must first enter into a state of Rausch: “For there to be art, for there to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological precondition is indispensable: Rausch. Rausch must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine: else there is no art.” (Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche)

Pity, Fear, and Catharsis in Nietzsche’s Corpus

The word “catharsis” appears once in The Birth of Tragedy, close to the end of the treatise. The passage would seem to say everything one needs to know about Nietzsche’s attitude to the concept and the problem of tragic catharsis: Noch nie, seit Aristoteles, ist eine Erklärung der tragischen Wirkung gegeben worden, aus der auf künstlerische Zustände, auf eine aesthetische Thätigkeit der Zuhörer geschlossen werden dürfte. Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure. What is this but amazing folly?