

# Abstract Contemplation on an Onion: Greek Tragedy and Philosophy

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## Précis

In his *Notes from Underground*, Fyodor Dostoevsky states that “an intelligent [reflective] man cannot seriously become anything... excessive consciousness is a disease.”<sup>1</sup> This disease inflicts the modern man in epidemic proportions. It is enthroned in Cartesian philosophy which attempts to liberate the will but actually displaces it. For in Cartesian philosophy the mind is elevated to the status of the divine. This deranges man’s relation to the cosmos. Nietzsche points out that the Greek tragedians were also attempting to provide a philosophy that preserves the species, but their philosophy also promotes life. The inherent life-affirming nature of the tragedies is the subject of this thesis. The focus is on Greek tragedy as an art, life as an extension of art. In essence, this thesis seeks out a remedy for, what Nietzsche calls, man’s metaphysical need that does not simultaneously subjugate his will. For through this need, man desires “truth.” Truth, according to Nietzsche, is a “mobile army of metaphors.”<sup>2</sup> Greek tragedy is one such metaphor and thus a remedy. So in order to illustrate Greek tragedy as an aid in the understanding of life experienced through the prism of art, this thesis first describes the plight of the modern man in the context of Cartesian philosophy and by using examples of post-modern disillusionment by Søren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, and Shankar Lamichane. Secondly, it explores Greek tragedy as the liberator of the modern man’s will through an examination of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the entrance of reason into tragedy itself through Euripides’ *Hippolytus*. Thirdly, it delves into the philosophical implications of the connection between the modern will and Greek tragedy via the Nietzschean interpretation of tragedy and subsequent critique of modernity. Ultimately, this thesis exposes the connection between truth as metaphors and man’s metaphysical need which illustrates Greek tragedy as the pinnacle of all metaphors. This distinction lies in the difference between science and art.

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<sup>1</sup> Dostoevsky, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *On Truth and Lie in an Extra Moral Sense*, 4.

It is, after all, the mark of that ‘fracture’ which everyone agrees is the original ill of modern culture, that the theoretical man should take fright at his own consequences, and, in his discontent, no longer dares to entrust himself to the terrible, icy stream of existence; anxiously, he runs up and down along the shore. He no longer wants anything in its entirety, complete with all the natural cruelty of things; this is how enfeebled and softened he has become by the optimistic way of looking at things.<sup>3</sup>

## I. Introduction

In the words of William Troy, “tragedy is something at once so simple and so difficult that its truths are in continual need of restatement in terms of the particular understanding of every age.”<sup>4</sup> Even though modern man does not experience tragedy as the Greeks did during the Greater Dionysia festival, tragedy defies temporality. The Greeks created such a unique and powerful art that it has continued to appeal to tragic audiences since its conception. Greek tragedy has the unparalleled ability to affirm the finite nature of mortal existence not by masking it but rather by bringing together optimism and pessimism or what Nietzsche called the Apollonian-Dionysian duality. The tragedies bring out deeply existential questions that are more than issues that plagued the ancient Greeks; they are questions that demonstrate the tragic nature of the human condition. Greek tragedy speaks to modern man in a way that many have tried to imitate. Therefore it should not be a surprise that these same questions are still very much a part of the modern existence. This thesis will attempt to demonstrate how Greek tragedy not only speaks to the modern reader but also liberates him using the Nietzschean interpretation of tragedy. Nietzsche’s examination of tragedy serves as both a critique of and liberator from modernity. So in order to demonstrate the power of Greek tragedy, this thesis will examine the malaise of modernity as it is enthroned in the philosophy of Descartes and harshly critiqued with examples of modern disillusionment by Jean Paul Sartre, Søren Kierkegaard, and Shankar Lamichane.

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<sup>3</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, 88.

<sup>4</sup> Troy, 251.

With an examination of Cartesian philosophy, it becomes clear that the chief weakness of this modern age is a mind plagued by ambiguity and feeble grasp on the matters of existence. Cartesian philosophy does not offer a viable solution for man's essentially tragic existence, and in fact it only serves to further cloud it. After wading through modernity's science and image-ridden lie of a culture, it becomes necessary to embrace something that does not deny the basic nature of man. So in an attempt to appeal to the demands of man's need of purpose, the modern man's questioning leads him to art. Through art, the suffocating modern man can experience life through the prism of art. This thesis will focus on Greek tragedy as an art, life as an extension of art; that is art as an outlet and guide for man's questions and will to truth. This may seem absurd, but a closer examination of the dark cloud engulfing modernity will illustrate the vital function of art to uncover life. Therefore, as Nietzsche points out, the task at hand is "to look at science through the prism of the artist, but also to look at art through the prism of life."<sup>5</sup> Within Greek tragedy, this distinction is particularly clear. Greek tragedy uncovers life through the prism of art in that the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles result in a triumph of the will over the influx of the Apollonian replacing the Dionysian. They enable the reader to make of his existence as he will.

Tragedy is born out of the spirit of music, and from this birth the tragic affirmation is an "affirmation of the world of beautiful semblance and its representative hero as well as of the ground from which, to which, and against which the world exists."<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche's understanding of this tragic affirmation is the connection between music as an image of the will and pure intellect.<sup>7</sup> The will is the desires, needs, and impulses that are at the very base of man which drive him to recognize and react to the world as a stimulus. Greek Tragedy, which is born out of

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<sup>5</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, preface §2.

<sup>6</sup> Rethy, 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

the spirit of music, is an affirmation of life. Moreover, in order to illustrate Greek tragedy as an aid in the understanding of life experienced through the prism of art, this thesis explores the plight of the modern man in that he is flooded with science and illusions of the times.

Accordingly, this thesis first describes the plight of the modern man in the context of Cartesian philosophy and by using examples of post-modern disillusionment. Secondly, it explores Greek tragedy as the liberator of the modern man's will and finally delves into the philosophical implications of the connection between the modern will and Greek tragedy. In essence, it exposes the connection between truth as metaphors and man's metaphysical need which illustrates Greek tragedy as the pinnacle of all metaphors.

## **II. The Plight of the Modern Man**

According to Nietzsche, the essence of humankind is its instinctual nature, but, as he notes, modern man does not live by instinct but rather by reason.<sup>8</sup> Modern man refuses to admit that man is driven by instinct, and at the same time, unlike animals, men need to know why or have an objective understanding of their world and their placement therein. Man has a will to truth or a need for a purpose and because of this need, man creates a world in which he can live. Descartes remedied this need in the form of reason and the mastery of nature. Reason is a response to the inherent emptiness of nature and man's instinct for preservation. However, everything that reason produces is an artifice; it allows for hidden origins in the sense that it is presuppositionless.<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche notes that like modern rationalists the tragedians too promote a philosophy that preserves the species but in a different way.<sup>10</sup> They promote the "life of the species by promoting the faith in life. 'Life is worth living,' every one of them shouts, 'there is

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<sup>8</sup> *The Gay Science*, §1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.

something to life, there is something behind life, beneath it; beware!''<sup>11</sup> The tragedians do not deny that man has instinct at the very base of his existence; in fact they enthrone it with the entrance of the Dionysian.<sup>12</sup> Modernity suffers from a severe lack of the Dionysian which taps into this instinct, and instead it is characterized by an influx of the Alexandrian.<sup>13</sup> Modernity is characterized by reason and consequently by a move towards science. In Nietzsche's view and critique of Descartes, the ultimate aim of such science is to enable men to experience as much pleasure with as little pain as possible. People accept an existence marred by the clear and distinct, and, as a result, they do not accept their irrational nature. However, as Nietzsche points out, one cannot experience so much pleasure without simultaneously experiencing pain.<sup>14</sup> These two go hand in hand; one cannot have one without the other. It seems to be the case in contemporary times that science attempts to provide men with as much pleasure as possible, but whether or not it can provide man with joy remains an issue. It forces men to ignore their instinctual nature with life-negating principles and turns them into cold statues.<sup>15</sup> As a result, Nietzsche asks if science is the great dispenser of pain.<sup>16</sup>

Before the life-affirming nature of the tragedians can be understood, it is necessary to understand the inherently life-negating principles of science. Mathematical science was first championed in the philosophy of Descartes as a tool that provides humanity with absolute truth, and as such it is explored in what remains of this section. Modernity, beginning with Descartes, is characterized by the quantifiable results of reduced reason and the liberation of the will which in turn qualifies the passions. Descartes' philosophy is based on his scientific method, and the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.

<sup>12</sup> The Dionysian is that which encompasses the god Dionysus or will, chaos, emotion, disorder, content, and actuality.

<sup>13</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §23. The Alexandrian is Nietzsche's name for modern culture and its Socratic lust for knowledge.

<sup>14</sup> *The Gay Science*, §12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

final outcome is the goal of the mastery of nature. He rejects all methods of reasoning that are not quantifiable. He rejects traditional philosophy because he claims it is mere sophistry aiming at being admired by the less learned, and within which opinion rather than truth is discovered.<sup>17</sup> He rejects theology because it does not provide the salvation it claims to and ancient moralities because they cannot teach the virtue they claim to.<sup>18</sup> All in all, in his search for a reliable method, he rejects tradition for principles that reside among the clear and distinct in mathematics and science. Through his method, men can

render [...themselves...] masters and possessors of nature, [...and...] this is desirable not only for the invention of an infinity of devices that would enable one to enjoy trouble-free the fruits of the earth and all the goods found there, but also... one could rid oneself of an infinity of maladies, as much of the body as of the mind.<sup>19</sup>

The fruit of Descartes' mastery of nature is the infinity of devices, which allows mechanics and technology to free man from labor, and medicine, which aims at a long, pleasurable life.

Mastery is the common good for mankind because it appeals to the fundamental desires enabling the transcendence of the human condition. His method is a way to guide the intellect that is directed by the will to discover clear and distinct principles which finally lead to the "cogito." So in effect, if man masters nature through the method, man satisfies all passions. The method is a means to an end, just as knowledge is the means by which one obtains power.

Descartes' method calls for a rejection of tradition, but in this rejection his philosophy is ultimately dehumanizing because he seems to philosophize in a vacuum, overlooking the fact

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<sup>17</sup> Descartes, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

that man cannot escape the past because humanity is historically situated.<sup>20</sup> Mastery of nature reduces everything to clear and distinct principles that can be rationalized to the point where the passions, emotion, and life-affirming matters are snuffed out; it upholds the standard that everything can and will be reasoned through and if not, then it should be denied. It denies life; it denies art, the imagination, and the expression of life therein. Nietzsche notes that the science of Descartes reduces existence to a mere function in that it suggests a

world of truth that can be mastered completely and forever with the aid of our square little reason. [...] Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this— reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its *rich ambiguity*.<sup>21</sup>

But instead, modernity's answer to the existence of man is to strip him of his humanity until the seeking for knowledge and questions no longer exist and man effectively performs his task and role in society as though he were a numb machine. Unfortunately, man has permitted himself and the aspects of his humanity that are most dear to be sacrificed for prosperity and progress. The plight of the modern man results in the subjugation of the will to the science and philosophy of the day. The modern man is a round peg forcing himself into a square hole. He denies his basic instinctual nature in an attempt to present himself as a rational being. This modern malaise has given birth to a uniquely modern disillusionment. The remainder of this section describes this disillusionment through examples as presented by Søren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, and Shankar Lamichane in that the postmodern condition has left man bound to apathy and life-negating principles.

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<sup>20</sup> *Being and Time*, §13-§14.

<sup>21</sup> *The Gay Science*, §373.

Modern philosophy in general focuses on the “abilities of human beings to discover natural and social truths and to reconstruct their worlds accordingly [... and they...] assume that there is order and laws in the cosmos and society that reason can discover in order to represent and control nature and social conditions.”<sup>22</sup> Consequently, reason is deemed the distinctive human faculty in which this cognitive power enables humans to dominate nature. Humans are able to master nature after they have worked through the Cartesian method. The “cogito,” Descartes’ first principle, is the firm ground upon which man stands as he works through the method.<sup>23</sup> This “faith in rationality” was born in the Renaissance and the scientific revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was “enthroned in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.”<sup>24</sup> This phenomenon has been questioned by philosophers like Kierkegaard who critiqued the modern age’s nurturing of reason and rationalism by comparing it to a prison. He notes that this “modern reflection” ensnares people to dwell on the “deliberation of the context of their actions and the calculation of their worth or outcome.”<sup>25</sup> This entrapment causes man to deny his basic nature because reflection drives away man’s humanity. Kierkegaard points out that through reflection the “coiled springs of life relationships... lose their resilience”<sup>26</sup> and “everything becomes meaningless externality, devoid of [internal] character.”<sup>27</sup> In an age obsessed with rules and regulations, genuine passion is renounced so that Kierkegaard complains that man is too “sober and serious” and even goes so far as to describe suicides as premeditated.<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard also states that individuals are passionless not in the sense that they are emotionless but rather that there is no true spiritual inwardness. Instead, passion exists in

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<sup>22</sup> Best and Kellner, 286.

<sup>23</sup> Descartes, IV.

<sup>24</sup> Best and Kellner, 286.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard, 78.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

simulation as the “rebirth of passion” through “talkativeness.”<sup>29</sup> For Kierkegaard, “chattering” stands in the way of “essential speaking” and merely echoes inconsequential events.<sup>30</sup> These “emotions” which have become far too pronounced have been denatured into forces that are ironically ambiguous. Thus, Kierkegaard critiques the unifying principles of modernity as ultimately negative in nature in so much as they have leveled off humanity.

In Jean Paul Sartre’s short story *Erostratus*, the main character Paul Hilbert personifies the classic disassociated modern man. He has resolved himself to murder someone in cold blood and often wanders the streets with his revolver at his side. Shortly thereafter, he begins to understand his destiny as short and tragic which he says then gives his passing moments considerable force and beauty. His assurance was no longer dependent on his revolver but rather on himself. At the end of the story, even though he does end up shooting one person, he asks himself why he should “kill all these people who are already dead?” and he laughs.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the story, Hilbert questions himself, his existence, and his relationship to the rest of the world. In a way, Hilbert hates himself for his questions. He is an outcast; he questions his existence and the existence of those around him. He rejects the so-called modern “humanist” principles which expect his compliance on his journey to the middle. Hilbert feels that everything around him belongs to these “humanists” and wants nothing more than to deny them. He expresses his suffocation by the ‘humanists’ in that “even the tools I used I felt belonged to them; words, for example: I wanted *my own words*. But the ones I use have dragged through I don’t know how many consciences; they arrange themselves in my head by virtue of the habits I have picked up from others.”<sup>32</sup> In this story, Hilbert is battling the overpowering mediocrity that

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-99.

<sup>31</sup> Sartre, 52.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

his society has become. He wants something to happen; he wants to break away from the masses and shine like a black diamond.<sup>33</sup> Hilbert's character and his rejection of the unification of humanity is representative of a critique on modernity's dehumanizing tirade.

Similar themes are at work in the essays of Shankar Lamichane, who offers an occidental version of western modernity. "Abstract Contemplation: Onion" begins with the meeting of Lamichane and the Nepali painter Bangdel. Bangdel has recently read one of Lamichane's essays and can only say that he finds it to be a far too realist perspective and suggests that Lamichane write a more abstract essay. At first laughing as he walked away from Bangdel, he then describes his position as being in a no man's land<sup>34</sup> in that he is lost in the shadows of the past which belongs to his ancestors and the future which belongs to his children. His position in no man's land demonstrates modernity's rejection of the past and future and the endorsement of man as his ego and the goods that quantify his life in materiality. He goes on to describe man's life being spent in abstraction because reality is too hard to bear. He says:

think of my life as an abstract one; from it I set myself aside everyday. [...]  
 Everyday my morning begins with 'I need enough money to buy vegetables for the day.' Everyday my afternoon is spent in searching for means to make that money. Everyday my evening ends in 'I came home a little more tired than the night before.' Everyday some acquaintances of mine die somewhere. I spend a little time forgetting their deaths. Everyday I remember a little history, I draw out a little bit of the future to come, and everyday I evaluate a little bit of the present.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Actually, this means the "ten yards space" which signifies the space between the borders of countries (in Southeast Asia).

Everyday I weigh and evaluate, buy and sell, borrow and pay interest on my beliefs, my faiths, my devices and my urges.<sup>35</sup>

Lamichane spends his day amongst the abstractions of the past, present, and future. These abstractions are his life. He continues:

what man's life isn't abstract today? What man's life isn't full of ill-will– at least until he covers its foul stench with his absolute silence? What man does not bear ill-will in his heart– at least until he puts an icing of sweet smiles to bury them? What man's mind is not full of greed– at least until he buries it under slogans? These are not the days of hermits and sages!<sup>36</sup>

Man has lost something vital, and he says that “you will not find any greater non-man than myself” which he notes is not stated in some “whimsical emotional moment.”<sup>37</sup> Man, here, refers to the modern man who has lost something because of his endless pursuit of technological advancements and loosing sight of everything else that constitutes being human. He questions that if he truly is the one who says I am, then why must he dispose himself to the citizenship of some country when he crosses no man's land. He illustrates his presence in no man's land in that he is the line that separates the present from the past and the present from the future. He truly is in the space between. He ends his essay ironically by describing himself as an onion in a “most realist picture.”<sup>38</sup> He is the colorless onion, made of many layers with an endless foul smell and depth. Within those endless layers is the preservation of the storage of the foul stench of today's society, and it is there in that most realist picture that he will reside. This judgment of

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<sup>35</sup> Lamichane, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Hermits and sages have special place in Hindu culture and tradition. As such, here they seem to represent the older days where man's place in the universe was above the ‘tama’ (dark/untruth) of the demons and below the ‘sat’ (light/truth) of the gods.

<sup>37</sup> Lamichane, 47.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

society as foul is reserved for contemporary (western) societies because it is there that an absolute divorce between the past and future has taken place.

Modern philosophies of science like Descartes' have left man in some sense numb but at the same time wondering why. The perspectives of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Lamichane are witness to the negative effects of conforming man's instinctual nature into a philosophy of reason. Modern philosophy, Descartes in particular, is presuppositionless. It founds itself on rational transparency in that it calls for an absolute belief in reason and that reason can found itself. Man must then conform; the mind conforms to and makes use of clear and distinct principles so as to interpret the world. In a sense, these principles brand their standards into man's consciousness. Cartesian philosophy does not liberate the will but rather displaces it. The modern man's will is subjugated and must subscribe to a mediated social consciousness. Thus, this philosophy attempts to unify the will under reason. Modern philosophy is characterized by its attempt to marry modern science to a philosophy of the whole. Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Lamichane all see the rational idealism of modernity as rendering man impotent. More specifically, Kierkegaard describes the modern man as passionless, Sartre as destined for the standardization of an apathetic and complacent middle, and Lamichane as lost in the abstractions of the space between. The plight of the modern man results in the subjugation of the will. Through modern examples as presented by Soren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, and Shankar Lamichane, the postmodern condition has left man bound to apathy and life-negating principles.

After having examined the inherent life-negation that is modern science and the effects thereof as demonstrated in the perspectives of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Lamichane, it is now possible to move on to the life-affirming nature of the Greek tragedians. The following section demonstrates that, as man needs a purpose, there is remedy for that need that does not at the

same time mask or deny his most basic nature— Greek tragedy. For therein a power signifying what Nietzsche called the Apollonian and Dionysian duality can be heard as an “earthquake through which some primeval force that had been dammed up for ages finally liberated itself— indifferent whether everything else that one calls culture might begin to tremble.”<sup>39</sup>

### **III. Greek Tragedy as the Liberator of the Modern Will**

What it means to be human is a question that has plagued man for centuries. Being human places itself somewhere within the painful duality of adapting nature according to what is suitable for man in order to survive and at the same time the more nature is adapted to suit man’s needs the farther man gets from nature. Man becomes separated from what both attracts and instills fear within him. Just as man is situated between the past and future, he is also situated between the gods and beasts who are most connected to nature. In the space between, man has always attempted to find where he belongs. On this quest, man has tried to construct what is best for mankind by establishing laws, lifestyles, morals, and ethics. Different cultures have looked at this dilemma in their myths, folklore, and culture, demonstrating this eternal question for mankind. As this question has been asked in the West, the most powerful exploration of this topic was done by the Greeks. With this same issue being raised in modernity, modern man needs to examine not only where the question has been explored best but also how this translates to modernity. Modern man must understand the Greek legacy of raising the question of belongingness. The Greeks were the first to illustrate and bring together the extremities where human pessimism and human optimism come together. They come together in Greek tragedy encompassed in what Nietzsche called the Apollonian and Dionysian duality. In order to understand the dynamics of power relations that led to man’s construction of virtues, morals, and justice, Greek tragedy must be fully understood and appreciated. The question of human

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<sup>39</sup> *The Gay Science*, §370.

belongingness is best exemplified within tragedy, whether it is Oedipus' journey to establish himself as a self-made king or Medea and her understanding of her role in a patriarchic society. In all cases, they portray instances of the human quest for identity both as a member of the species and as an individual. Greek tragedy is a monumental example of the triumph of the will over the influx of Apollonian imagery that plagues modern man. This is apparent in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Even within the progression of tragedy itself the decline towards rationalization and order begins to rear its ugly head in the tragedies of Euripides.<sup>40</sup> This section will examine Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as examples of art that essentially affirms life through the triumph of the will and Euripides' *Hippolytus* as demonstration of the gradual decline and beginning of rationalization and order that subdues the will.

To begin, the historical context of Greek tragedy must be examined so as to understand the context within which Greek tragedy was born. Greek tragedy was originally performed at the Greater Dionysia festival in Athens during the fifth century BC. The tragic theater as well as the festival was financed by the state because it was considered to be an integral part of Athenian religious practices.<sup>41</sup> As a result of its importance, the festival was open to all people of the Hellas and was widely celebrated.<sup>42</sup> The tragedies appeal to such a large amount of people because the plot of the tragedies is usually mythical, an advantage for the audience who came to the performances with prior knowledge of the basic plot line.<sup>43</sup> With the basic plot lines already understood, the audiences could explore other realms of interpretation like dramatic irony as well as the religious and ethical elements of the play. The main function of Greek tragedy as it was

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<sup>40</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, §18.

<sup>41</sup> Goldhill, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Pickard-Cambridge, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Lesky, 228.

performed in the Greater Dionysia was as a religious ceremony with the myths being mediums of religious thought.<sup>44</sup> The performances exemplified man's relation to the controlling power of the universe, and the spectators witnessed the crucial problems of human life and the world.<sup>45</sup> The tragedies also had a high level of thematic development so as to make the experience more applicable to society.<sup>46</sup> The tragedies brimmed over with social and political concepts.

Greek tragedy was a very important part of Greek culture in the fifth century BC. The Greeks publicly addressed issues of disillusionment with war and politics, suffering, and the plight of man in relation not only to divine will but also to society as a whole in that the tragedies explored the conflict of a heroic figure who was bound by fate to a downfall. With this in mind, the Greek tragic audience had a very different experience of tragedy than the modern reader. The Greek tragic audience viewed the performance as part of a festival that explored their relation to the divine, society, and the universe, whereas the modern reader reads a Greek tragedy within a society that essentially ignores these issues. In modernity, these issues are not addressed by the society as a whole but rather on a voluntary basis in art which does not reach everyone and, when it does reach some, does not always do so in an engaging manner.<sup>47</sup> The Greeks set a monumental example with Greek tragedy, and thus in order for the modern man to truly examine the experience of life through the prism of art, Greek tragedy must be explored with its social context in mind but most importantly from a modern perspective so that the artist's constructive and deconstructive activity is vaporized in the work, which stands for and by itself. The representative artwork deceptively separates itself from its generative source, but rather than self-destructively negating the ground,

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<sup>44</sup> Burian, 191.

<sup>45</sup> Ferguson, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Burian, 189.

<sup>47</sup> It can be said that some of these issues are generally addressed in religion. However, the extent to which religion addresses these issues is more similar to masking them.

it simply— as an obedient Orpheus— does not turn back, limiting its affirmative vision to a region where neither the being of the knower nor the becoming of the artist resides.<sup>48</sup>

A modern reading in no way lays claim to the original intent of the tragedian but rather explores the issues raised therein and relates them to modern society.

Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* are both examples of the art of Greek tragedy that essentially affirms life through the triumph of the will. In particular, the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles provide for the triumph of the will by manipulating the mythical subject matter to pose deeply existential questions. These questions are not answered in the context of the play but rather allow the reader to take these questions and make them their own. The questions do not cease at the end of the tragedy; they extend into the reader's life where they remain to be grappled with. The power then lies in the hands of the reader not the author because as these questions present themselves they are no longer bound within the context of the tragedy. The questions become a part of the reader. The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles relinquish these questions for the reader to pose upon himself. In effect, these tragedies give life to the reader as an extension of the questions raised therein.

Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* demonstrates these existential questions through opposition: throughout the play various situations are presented as they are in conflict between each other. For instance, Prometheus and Zeus are in constant battle with one another. They oppose one another both as entities and as that which they represent. The battle is not just between opposing entities but also between knowledge and force. Myths play a very particular role for Aeschylus because they are the "illustration of a great permanent truth that he finds at the heart of man's activity [...] and consequently the myths he uses most are those which tell of

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<sup>48</sup> Rethy, 22.

conflict on a cosmic scale.”<sup>49</sup> Prometheus is the champion of man; he raises man through the gift of intellect against the would-be destroyer of man, Zeus. At the beginning of the play, Prometheus bemoans his lot: “I groan for the present sorrow, I groan for the sorrow to come, I groan questioning when there shall come a time when He shall ordain a limit to my sufferings.”<sup>50</sup> Prometheus is well aware that he has fallen victim to both Zeus and his fate. He knows that for the time being Zeus is more powerful and will force him to be resigned to his lot. Prometheus understands his transgressions against Zeus and why he is being punished, but he neither denies nor regrets them. Prometheus gave man “blind hopes” so that they would not have to foresee their doom. This act is significant for Nietzsche’s interpretation because it marks the entrance of the Apollonian. Even though Prometheus does not question his actions, the chorus discusses this gift in that

it is a sweet thing to draw out a long, long life in cheerful hopes, and feed the spirit in the bright benignity of happiness: but I shiver when I see you wasted with ten thousand pains, all because you did not tremble at the name of Zeus: your mind was yours, not his, and at its bidding you regarded mortal men too high.<sup>51</sup>

The gift of hope amongst others was part of the cause for Prometheus’ “downfall.”<sup>52</sup> In a way, this position puts Prometheus in the place of man as he is a subordinate to the all-powerful Zeus. Prometheus did not submit to the will of Zeus but instead outrightly disobeyed and defied his power as head of the gods. The chorus continues to ponder Prometheus’ defiance by questioning “what succor [is] in creatures of a day? You did not see the feebleness that draws its breath in gasps, a dreamlike feebleness by which the race of man is held in bondage, a blind prisoner. So

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<sup>49</sup> Grene, 133.

<sup>50</sup> *Prometheus Bound*, lines 96-100.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 536-546.

<sup>52</sup> Grene, 62.

the plans of men shall never pass the ordered law of Zeus.”<sup>53</sup> Man might then be eternally at the will of a more powerful being.

This raises some very important questions for human existence which are explored in Nietzsche’s interpretation of *Prometheus Bound*. Nietzsche’s study of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* brings out the duality of Apollo and Dionysus. The Dionysian is represented in the striving against the bonds of natural law which Prometheus breaks and is thus doomed to eternally suffer. Nietzsche further explains that “humanity achieves the best and highest of which it is capable by committing an offence and must in turn accept the consequences of this, namely the whole flood of suffering and tribulations which the offended heavenly powers must in turn visit upon the human race as it strives nobly toward higher things.”<sup>54</sup> The legend of Prometheus is bound to this wrongdoing and the suffering that follows. Similarly with Oedipus being fated to suffer, Prometheus’ wrongdoing is also necessitated because he is bound to “sense the un-Apolline quality of this pessimistic view of things, for it is the will of Apollo to bring rest and calm to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them, and by reminding them constantly, with his demands for self-knowledge and measure, that these are the most sacred laws in the world.”<sup>55</sup> Nietzsche also describes how Aeschylus’ Prometheus is a Dionysian mask whereas the “aforementioned deep strain of justice in Aeschylus reveals to those with eyes to see his paternal descent from Apollo, the god of individuation and of the boundaries of justice.”<sup>56</sup> Prometheus embodies the Greek artist in as much as he, a Titanic artist, “found within himself the defiant belief that he could create human beings and destroy the Olympian gods at least, and that his higher wisdom enabled him to do so, for which, admittedly, he was

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<sup>53</sup> *Prometheus Bound*, lines 548-553.

<sup>54</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, §9.

forced to do penance by suffering eternally.”<sup>57</sup> Eternal suffering is but too small a price to pay for the “artist’s delight in Becoming, the serenity of artistic creation in defiance of all catastrophes, is merely a bright image of clouds and sky reflected in a dark sea of sadness.”<sup>58</sup> For this delight is evidence of the painful, irresolvable conflict between god and man in that humanity truly achieves only when it comes in offence. Thus, Aeschylus’ Apollonian yearning for justice is shredded by the flood of the Dionysian. The duality of Apollo and Dionysus is expressed in Aeschylus’ Prometheus in that he exudes the natures of both gods.

These matters draw on what really is man’s place in the universe and what his relation is to a being more powerful than himself. Prometheus’ gift of “blind hopes” is also very significant in that it allowed men to carry on their lives without being plagued with foreseeing their doom. It should also be noted that this gift was especially infuriating to Zeus, who throughout the play wanted to end mankind. It is very possible that this says something about human existence and implies that man’s knowledge of existence in its barest form could be his end. This issue is raised again in a discussion between Prometheus and Io:

IO: Besides this, tell me the limit of my own wanderings.

PROMETHEUS: It were better not to know than to know this.

IO: Do not hide from me what it is fated I should suffer. What shall its term be  
for this unhappy girl?

PROMETHEUS: It is not [that] I grudge you this gift that you ask.

IO: Then why not tell me everything at once.

PROMETHEUS: No grudging, but I dread to break your spirit.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>59</sup> *Prometheus Bound*, lines 622-628.

Prometheus does not want to break Io's spirit by telling her what fate has in store for her.

Perhaps, Prometheus' concern for Io is very much related to his gift of hope to man. What does this say about human existence? What happens to man when he experiences the end-all and be-all of his existence? All of these questions are raised in Aeschylean tragedy via opposition.

Oppositions such as the animal and spirit in man, violence and persuasion, and knowledge and force are ever present in the human experience. For instance, the battle to grasp man as an irrational being refers to man's baser instincts or animalistic tendencies. The other oppositions are very common as well, and they are demonstrated in the *Prometheus Bound* with Zeus' violent punishment of Prometheus and how he sends Hermes to persuade him to reveal what he knows and Prometheus' knowledge versus Zeus' power as head of the gods. Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* poses existential questions which ultimately lead to a triumph of the reader's will.

The triumph of the will through questioning can also be seen in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. This play is concerned with an essentially tragic stricken man who was cast down by the gods into the deepest misery that is conceivable. In Sophocles' work, prophecy and the carrying out thereof hold a very important role in the play as a whole. These prophecies bear witness before man of the power of the gods. However, the prophecies themselves only serve to inform which in a sense leaves man to his own thoughts and plans. It is within this realm that the action of the play takes place. Thus, man is not just a "passive sacrifice to his destiny; he takes an active part, but the gods have so arranged it that every step which he takes in the hope of avoiding his fate brings him nearer to it."<sup>60</sup> The carrying out of prophecy is especially apparent in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus' road leads him directly into darkness and desolation.

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<sup>60</sup> Lesky, 284.

Sophocles' tragedies focus on man and his relation to the world and especially to the gods. In addition, his tragedies are concerned with men in action and in passion so that the

notion of tragic guilt is alien to his tragedies. His heroes are not guiltless, for they are human; but their fate does not depend on their moral or unmoral conduct.

Their tragedy is that, in spite of their faults and misdeeds, they are "innocent" or perhaps better put, outside the standards of guilt and innocence. Their tragedy is the tragedy of man, of the very fact of being a human being. Man is the toy in the hands of superhuman forces. It is the gods' role over man that is called "fate," and man's reactions against it, which make human life great as well as tragic.<sup>61</sup>

Man's world is a creation of the gods, and it is within this world that he has to live, breathe, and prove himself. His fate is bound up in the divine cosmos. For Sophocles, tragedy occurs in the clash between the divine order and human disorder.<sup>62</sup> For Nietzsche, the Sophoclean hero is surprising in its Apollonian "definiteness and clarity, so that we feel as if we are looking straight into the innermost ground of its being."<sup>63</sup> The hero wears a mask of sorts, but through tragedy it becomes clear that, as his character rises to the surface, it is merely an appearance being nothing more than an "image of light projected onto a dark wall."<sup>64</sup> Nietzsche understands that the appearances of the Sophoclean hero in the images of light or the "Apollonian quality of the mask are the necessary result of gazing into the inner, terrible depths of nature— radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by gruesome night."<sup>65</sup> The mask of the tragic hero emerges as exhibiting both Apollonian and Dionysian qualities. This duality becomes present in the appearance of the tragic hero who is bound to suffering, a suffering that is inherent within the

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<sup>61</sup> Ehrenberg, 24.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §9.

<sup>64</sup> Plato, *Republic* 514a *et seq.* qtd. *Birth of Tragedy*, §9.

<sup>65</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §9.

Dionysian. Sophocles' Oedipus is understood as the "noble human being who is destined for error and misery despite his wisdom, but who in the end, through his enormous suffering, exerts on the world around him a magical, beneficent force which remains effective even after his death."<sup>66</sup> Oedipus' very existence is bound to suffering; it is necessary. He is a purely suffering being. This man who solved the riddle of the Sphinx was fated to marry his mother and kill his father disturbing the most sacred orders of nature. Nietzsche identifies wisdom as being an offence against nature. Oedipus is wise, and this Dionysian wisdom causes him to plunge "nature into the abyss of destruction by what he... [knew]... must in turn experience the dissolution of nature in his own person."<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Sophocles' Oedipus is bound to suffering and the appearance of a tragic hero within which the duality of Apollo and Dionysus is inherently present.

Oedipus is very much a man with his own thoughts and plans. When he finds out about the prophecy that indicates he will murder his father and marry his mother, he immediately decided never to return to what he believed to be his true birthplace so as to avoid fulfilling the prophecy. So he happens upon Thebes, his actual birthplace. It is here that he encounters the Sphinx whose riddle he solves and in effect "saves" Thebes. He is made king and marries the former king's wife, Jocasta. Oedipus' curse was indeed the cause for the Theban suffering, and it is here that the tragedy occurs, the conflict between divine prophecy and the will of man.

Throughout the play, Oedipus' character is bound to the irony of his fate, acting as both savior and destroyer of his people so that his success is ultimately his undoing. It appears that he knows everything except himself. Even when he begins to learn of his fate, Oedipus does not

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, §9.

await his fate passively, but rather trudges forward to grapple with it. He is ready to deal with his fate:

HERDSMAN: O god, I am on the brink of frightful speech.

OEDIPUS: And I am of frightful hearing. But I must hear.<sup>68</sup>

The irony that was his fate demonstrates his valor and at the same time his place as a mortal. Oedipus' fate speaks for more than just himself, it is the revealing of cosmic irony and it raises serious philosophical questions about the limits of man's power and ambitions. After Oedipus learns of his fate, the chorus sings of the fate of men:

O generations of men, I count you and those whose lives are nothing, as equal.

Who— whoever was there whose share of happiness was more than a moment of illusion and an eternity of disillusion? Your fate is my example, your fate, yours, unblessed Oedipus. For mortals happiness is nothing.<sup>69</sup>

Shortly after, a messenger appears to tell that Oedipus blinded himself while chanting “they shall not see my fate, my guilt. In darkness for all time they shall see forbidden faces, fail to recognize those they love.”<sup>70</sup> At this moment, Oedipus can finally see; he is to live out his life in darkness and desolation. Throughout the grief and horror of Oedipus' undoing, the divine order always remained in the backdrop. Thus, Sophocles continually posed questions concerning man in relation to not only the cosmos but also to forces greater than himself. As with Aeschylus, these questions are not answered at the conclusion of the play but rather passed on to the reader. In light of this extension, man ponders these deeply existential questions himself which ultimately demonstrates the triumph of the will.

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<sup>68</sup> *Oedipus Tyrannus*, lines 1169-1170.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 1186-1196.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 1273-1275.

The tragedies of Euripides have a significantly different effect. He changed certain aspects of tragedy that demonstrate the beginning of the decline towards rationalization and order.<sup>71</sup> These changes no longer allow the power of the reader to triumph at the end of the tragedy. Although Euripides still poses questions in his tragedies, the manner in which he does so is very different than both Aeschylus and Sophocles. His characters seem far more dependent on psychologizing their fates. They attempt to rationalize their way out of their fates.<sup>72</sup> According to Nietzsche, this marks the entrance of Socratic ideology into Greek Tragedy. Diogenes Laertius notes that “it was thought that he [Socrates] helped Euripides to make his plays; hence Mnesimachus writes: ‘this new play of Euripides is the *Phyrgians*, and Socrates provides the wood for frying.’ And again he calls Euripides ‘an engine riveted by Socrates.’”<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche explores and in a sense champions this ‘meeting’ of Euripides and Socrates in his interpretation of the end of tragedy. Nietzsche does not take this meeting to be literal but rather a conceptual meeting.<sup>74</sup> According to Nietzsche, it was in alliance with Socrates that Euripides “dared to be the herald of a new mode of art.”<sup>75</sup> For Nietzsche, Socrates is

made into a symbolic figure, and one of appreciably greater significance. He is the archetype of rationalism: the spirit whose essence is seen by Nietzsche as an unalloyed confidence in the human intellect and its power to convert life into a soluble problem; the spirit which in his eyes is irrevocably opposed to true art; the spirit under whose influence Euripides subverted the art of true tragedy.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

<sup>73</sup> Diogenes Laertius, II.18.

<sup>74</sup> Silk and Stern, 153.

<sup>75</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12.

<sup>76</sup> Silk and Stern, 153.

Nietzsche's interpretation is not intended to mean that historically Socrates made Euripides into what he was. Nietzsche was well aware that the "main characteristics of Euripides' work were in evidence well before Socrates [...but he means...] that Socrates and Euripides are both 'children of the new age'; that in different ways they embody a new spirit which [...] Nietzsche sees [...] embodied in Socrates."<sup>77</sup> Socratism is logically and chronologically prior to Socrates.<sup>78</sup>

Nietzsche was aware that the actual historical meeting of these two men was probably not true because Diogenes Laertius is not the most reliable source, but he saw some truth or relevance in Diogenes' writing about Euripides and Socrates. Nietzsche understood their 'meeting' as a conceptual one so as to access the ancient mentality and its view of these figureheads.

The influence of Socratism on Euripidean thought can be demonstrated in the *Hippolytus*. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, one of the main characters, Phaedra, reasons her way through what has been fated for her as she addresses the chorus:

once I saw how my trouble was developing, I knew there was no medicine with which I could combat it: there was no changing my mind. Now I will tell you the way I reasoned it out. When love had wounded me I looked about how I might best put up with it. I began with the resolve to keep quiet and hide my disease. You cannot trust the tongue, which knows well enough how to rebuke the willfulness of other people but is its own worst enemy. Next, I intended to overcome my folly by my self-control, and so endure it. And thirdly, when I could not master Cyprus by these means I thought it the best plan—to die.<sup>79</sup>

In this excerpt, Phaedra is actively reasoning through what fate has dealt her; she refuses to bear what she must and thus is going to kill herself. This example demonstrates that Phaedra is taking

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>79</sup> *Hippolytus*, lines 388-402.

her fate into her own hands, denying her fate, and championing her own ego which illustrates the influence of Socratic rationalization on the writing of Euripides.<sup>80</sup> Michelini writes that this speech “reveals the seductiveness of the Socratic argument that nobody willingly commits a moral error.”<sup>81</sup> She also notes the play of Socratic terminology at work in Phaedra’s speech which appears like a “tribute to Socratic influence.”<sup>82</sup> According to Michelini, Hippolytus is a Socratic hero in that he accepts his death in a similar manner to how Socrates accepted his own.<sup>83</sup> For it is in the “tranquility with which the Euripidean figures meet their end, and their refusal to repine against what they have accepted as the right course of action [...which is a...] mark of similarity to the Socratic myth.”<sup>84</sup> She also points out that Hippolytus’ experience as a ‘just man’ resonates with Socratic ideology.<sup>85</sup> In particular, Hippolytus experiences what Plato describes as “never having done wrong, let him have a reputation of the greatest wrongdoing, that he may be put to the test in regard to justice.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, the *Hippolytus* bears witness to the influence of Socratic ideology on Euripidean thought.

As Nietzsche suggests, Euripides, too, “was merely a mask; the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysus, nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn daemon called Socrates. This is the new opposition: the Dionysiac versus the Socratic, and the work of art that once was Greek tragedy was destroyed by it.”<sup>87</sup> In addition to rationalizing tragedy, Euripides delivered his fatal blow through his incorporation of the *deus ex machina*.<sup>88</sup> This is a device by means of which a god or goddess sweeps in at the end of the play to conclude it. At the end of the *Hippolytus*,

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<sup>80</sup> Michelini, 297-304.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-306.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-306.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-310.

<sup>86</sup> Plato, 361c qtd. Michelini, 310.

<sup>87</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, §12.

<sup>88</sup> Bieber, 30.

Artemis appears and restores the relationship between Theseus and Hippolytus to whom she has promised the shearing of unwed maidens' tresses before their wedding night. This type of conclusion resolves the issues raised in the play. It gives the answers to the questions posed in the play. Nietzsche notes that "Descartes could only prove the reality of the empirical world by an appeal to the truthfulness of god and his inability to lie [...and...] Euripides makes use of the same divine truthfulness again, at the end of his drama, in order to reassure the public about the future of his heroes; this is the task of the infamous *deus ex machina*."<sup>89</sup> According to Nietzsche, Euripides essentially deserts Apollo and Dionysus. He was the first to bring the "spectator" upon the stage which represented the common man. This "common man" was from the real world not the Apollonian dream-state that existed in Aeschylus and Sophocles.

Euripides also incorporated this new Greek "cheerfulness" which was completely devoid of the Apollonian appearance that rescued the tragic hero bound to Dionysian suffering. Euripides was motivated by Socrates to drive Dionysus out of tragedy. When he succeeded, Socratism triumphed. In addition to driving Dionysus out of tragedy, Euripides also rejected the Apollonian dream-state in which intuition was replaced by thought and ecstasies by passions. In essence, both Apollo and Dionysus were shunned and art was denied. Euripides championed the idea of the rational poet by adding a prologue and by rejecting that the poet should be unconscious and bereft of reason. This rejection follows what Nietzsche called aesthetic Socratism in that "to be beautiful everything must be made intelligible."<sup>90</sup> With this dictum in mind, Euripides measured his tragedies and their "language, characters, dramatic construction, [and] choral music and rectified it in accordance with this principle."<sup>91</sup> This is one of Nietzsche's most ardent criticisms against Euripides in that "what we criticize so frequently as a

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<sup>89</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

poetic flaw and a step backwards in Euripides' work [...] is mostly the product of that penetrating critical process, that bold application of reason."<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche also calls Euripides' work the echo of his conscious perceptions which "he must often have felt as though his task was to give dramatic life to the beginning of Anaxagoras' work."<sup>93</sup> For Anaxagoras' work begins with "in the beginning everything was together; then reason came and created order."<sup>94</sup> Anaxagoras appeared among philosophers as the first sober man, and Euripides' relationship to Aeschylus and Sophocles was very similar.<sup>95</sup> For as long as this order remained "shut out from artistic creation, everything was together in a chaotic, primal soup; this is how Euripides must have judged things; this is why he [...] was bound to condemn the 'drunken' poets."<sup>96</sup> According to Nietzsche, Euripides was the poet of "aesthetic Socratism."

Euripides drove Dionysus from the stage, and in a certain sense he too was a "mask; the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysus, nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn daemon called Socrates."<sup>97</sup> The new opposition is the Dionysian versus the Socratic and ultimately it annihilated the work of art that was Greek tragedy. In consequence, Euripidean tragedy was the beginning of the decline to rationalization and order in a genre it did not belong which perverts the triumph of the will that the Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedies promote.

Greek tragedy is a gift to the modern man. Its power transcends time and background, and for this reason it is important in its relation to philosophy. Modern philosophy subjugates the will. Even though this phenomenon was not invented by the moderns, they, in a certain sense, refined it. The subjugation of the will rears its ugly head within tragedy itself. It appears

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, §12. This mention of Anaxagoras is significant because in a passage from Diogenes Laertius (II.45) Socrates and Euripides were both students of Anaxagoras.

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle, 984b qtd. *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, §12.

<sup>97</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12.

in the tragedies of Euripides who was influenced by the onset of Socratic philosophy. On the other hand, the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles promote the triumph of the will. In the cases of Aeschylus and Sophocles, the tragedies pose deep existential questions that go unanswered at the end of the play and thus are left at the disposal of the audience. The audience is not forced to conform to the image and interpretations such as Euripides presents but rather takes that which is discussed and makes it in its own image resulting in a triumph of the will. Hence, Greek tragedy via Aeschylus and Sophocles champions the will. The audiences' interpretation of the tragedy is carried on from the questions posed therein and then is enabled to make these questions in their own image. Even though the tragedian imposed his own will to power on the audience, at the same time Greek tragedy allows the reader to tap into his own will to power by not simply absorbing a question and answer but by carrying over these questions into his own life.<sup>98</sup> Essentially, the reader is flexing his own will to power by posing these questions onto his own existence and sense of belongingness in the cosmos.

The Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles do not by any means brand their audiences' interpretation of the art but rather enable them to make something of their own with it. Euripides suffocates this aspect of tragedy by answering his own questions. These resolutions come with what Nietzsche called aesthetic Socratism. It is exemplified in not only Euripides' use of the *deus ex machina* but also in the ordered nature with which the characters such as Phaedra and Hippolytus rationalize their situations. It is in these answers that the rise of reason as a means of rationalization subdues the passions and the will. Euripides may serve these means of rationalization on a silver-plated platter; he is still essentially denying the will.

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<sup>98</sup> The will to power discussed here is the Nietzschean will to power which "asserts that life is in a constant state of struggle and that this is the basic fact underlying all human history, thought and activity. All living beings have desires, which must be seen in the context of power, because the desires of individuals can only be achieved by excluding the desires of others." Robinson, 77.

Aeschylus and Sophocles champion the will and by no means allow their tragedies to become denatured by making man a rational animal as is the case with Euripides. Enlightenment principles have led man to accept the representations of things as the thing itself.<sup>99</sup> The Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles do not give man answers to his existential questions; they enable man to make them his own. Thus, they give life through the prism of art. These Greek tragedies are an example of the liberating effect of art on humanity. They give life to their readers by liberating the will that modernity shackled with mathematics and science. Greek tragedy preserves man's consciousness as non-quantifiable. This section examined Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as examples of art that essentially affirms life through the triumph of the will and Euripides' *Hippolytus* as demonstration of the gradual decline and beginning of rationalization and order that subdues the will.

#### **IV. The Philosophical Implications of the Connection between the Plight of the Modern Man and Greek Tragedy**

Thus far, this paper has discussed the plight of the modern man and how through art, specifically Greek tragedy, man can liberate his will. These distinctions warrant philosophical discussion of their implications. Art is an expression of the human condition that appeals to man's most basic nature—his irrationality. Art does not brand its image onto the human consciousness but rather allows man to make of it what he will. Modern philosophies such as Descartes' have stripped away this vital aspect. Instead, it calls for man to seek out that which is clear and distinct and to deny that which cannot be rationalized in terms of mathematics and science, for example tradition. However, man does not exist in a vacuum; his existence is historically situated in that he is just as involved in the past and the future as he is the present.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Robinson, 14-15.

<sup>100</sup> *Being and Time*, §13-§14.

Man is driven to the “truth.” But it is not truth in a strictly factual sense, for this kind of understanding is merely an illusion. As has been previously stated, man makes the world in his own image and truth is a

mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms— in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power.<sup>101</sup>

Man seeks out the truth that he makes in his own image so that it is merely a subjective projection of his own concepts on the world. Therefore, the base of this will to truth is not mathematics and science or the desire to fit the conceptual world into a box. Underneath this will to truth is the will to power. The will to truth is but a mere species of the will to power that drives everything. The world then appears to be disclosing itself but it is actually mediated from man to man by one with a greater will to power. The “world” exists because man makes it exist.<sup>102</sup> This mediated social consciousness is part of the fundamental structures of reality in which the intellect is a phenomenon of the will. According to Nietzsche, the intellect is a tool for survival in that it is part of man’s conceptual framework to ask questions and seek out their answers. In essence, the intellect works to secure man’s existence within the cosmos.

In like manner, Plato and Aristotle responded to man’s existential insecurity by creating the soul and god. Nietzsche rejects the metaphysical<sup>103</sup> presuppositions of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and instead he views such metaphors as weak metaphors to resolve man’s metaphysical need. This need originates in the misunderstanding of the dream in which the

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<sup>101</sup> *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Robinson, 15.

<sup>103</sup> Metaphysics: study of the insensible principles of Being

“man of the ages of barbarous primordial culture believed that in the dream he was getting to know a *second real world*.”<sup>104</sup> This ineradicable metaphysical need is what drives the creation of metaphors. The intellect maintains man in existence or provides existential security longer. Consequently, man, the “rational” being, now “places his behavior under the control of abstractions. He will no longer tolerate being carried away by sudden impressions, [...but...] he universalizes all these impressions into less colorful, cooler concepts, so that he entrusts the guidance of his life and conduct to them.”<sup>105</sup> Man is a great builder who constructs the world in his own image; he does not subscribe to *adequaetio rei et intellectus*.<sup>106</sup> Man makes his own truths, his own metaphors; the world does not create truth. The intellect allows man to form his own metaphors by asking questions and uncovering the answers.

Such queries all turn on variants of the same things or binary opposites. As Heraclitus states: “το αντιξουν συμφερον και εκ των διαφεροντων καλλιστην αρμονιαν.”<sup>107</sup> How do these binary opposites coming together translate for man? They come together in art. When an artist creates a work he “stands contemplatively above and at the same time actively within his work, how necessity and random plan, oppositional tension and harmony, must pair to create a work of art.”<sup>108</sup> Art is the coming together of binary opposites to create a better whole. Art demonstrates this coming together of binary oppositions in Greek tragedy. For it is within Greek tragedy that the artist can stand both above and in his work and at the same time release it for the audience to make of it as it will. In Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, Greek tragedy is exposed as the ultimate life-affirming metaphor. *The Birth of Tragedy* begins with the idea that the

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<sup>104</sup> *Human, All too Human*, I.5. For it is through dreams that man begins to believe in metaphors such as the soul, spirits, and gods.

<sup>105</sup> *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, 5.

<sup>106</sup> This is a common phrase associated with the classical correspondence theory of truth and is translated as: ‘conformity of the mind to the thing.’

<sup>107</sup> Heraclitus, fragment 8. “The opposed coming together, and from what differs the most beautiful harmony.”

<sup>108</sup> *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 62.

“continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.”<sup>109</sup> Tragedy is the coming together of two opposing aspects of life and existence, the will and representation<sup>110</sup> or the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Although the Apollonian and Dionysian are drastically different from one another, they are inherently related to one another in that one cannot be had without the other. They require the cooperation of one another because as, Nietzsche points out, “pure or absolute Dionysian music would be too direct an expression [... of...] truth [... and the tragic spectator survives...] only because of the illusions Apollo creates.”<sup>111</sup> But before this argument progresses further, a deeper consideration must be given to the Dionysian and Apollonian duality.

The Dionysian resounds in the will in as much as it focuses on content, actuality, and the thing in itself;<sup>112</sup> whereas the Apollonian resonates in representation as it focuses on form, image, and appearance. Accordingly, a duality between the metaphysical and the physical erupts in the tragic scene. The Dionysian is the “eternal and original power of art which summons the entire world of appearances into existence, in the midst of which a new, transfiguring semblance is needed to hold fast within life the animated world of individuation.”<sup>113</sup> This world of appearances is the entrance of the Apollonian into what is the art of tragedy. This is the essence of the duality and of tragedy as a whole; Nietzsche effectively short-circuits the everyday perception of the world and presents a greater sense of reality.

First, the tragic is explored through the hero who is usually the main character of a Greek tragedy. The most important for Nietzsche’s conception of the tragic is the hero’s suffering and

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<sup>109</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, §1.

<sup>110</sup> These concepts were developed in Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea*, and subsequently used by Nietzsche to make his distinction between Apollo and Dionysus, representation and will.

<sup>111</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, xxi.

<sup>112</sup> “thing in itself” is not Nietzschean phraseology, it is Kantian. However, the phrase works well in this context.

<sup>113</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, §25.

destruction. The hero belongs to the “physical, the ephemeral; his destruction to the metaphysical, the eternal; and his status is defined by contrast with the chorus, whose concern with the eternal, explicit in their gnomic comments and implicit in their dramatic permanence, gives them a special role.”<sup>114</sup> This distinction of the aspects of the hero is important because the ephemeral Apollonian is created or unreal compared with the permanence of the Dionysian. However, because of this conflict the hero usually attempts to overstep his bounds that are part of his eventual demise. Thus, the audience perceives this difference and reacts to the Dionysian on a deeper level.<sup>115</sup> This conveys an insight into the relationship of man to the cosmos. In the productions of Greek tragedy, the tragic hero wears a mask which emerges exhibiting both Apollonian and Dionysian qualities.<sup>116</sup> This duality becomes present in the appearance of the tragic hero who is bound to suffering, a suffering that is inherent in the Dionysian. This Dionysian wisdom causes him to “plunge nature into the abyss of destruction by what he [... knows ...] must in turn experience the dissolution of nature in his own person.”<sup>117</sup> The suffering of tragic figures is undergone as the manifestation of Dionysus experiencing the sufferings of individuation in his own person. Dionysus manifests himself behind masks, such as Oedipus and Prometheus, entangling himself in the net of the individual. Hence, the god appears as an “erring, striving, suffering individual” and the fact that he “appears at all with such epic definiteness and clarity, is the effect of Apollo, the interpreter of dreams, who interprets to the chorus its Dionysiac condition by means of this symbolic appearance.”<sup>118</sup> Thus, the state of individuation is the source and primal cause of all suffering. The hero wears a mask of sorts, but through tragedy it becomes clear that, as his character rises to the surface, it is merely an

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<sup>114</sup> Silk and Stern, 266.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-267.

<sup>116</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, §9.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, §10.

appearance being nothing more than an “image of light projected onto a dark wall.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, in Nietzsche’s conception of the tragic, the suffering and destruction of the hero is significant in that it offers cosmic insight.

The duality of Apollo and Dionysus lies at the very heart of *The Birth of Tragedy*. This duality in tragedy mirrors an underlying metaphysical paradox that “what we take to be most real about ourselves, our very individuation as separate beings, is nothing but an illusory appearance generated by a non-individual metaphysical entity (the Will).”<sup>120</sup> Thus, tragedy teaches man that suffering and joy are inherently related. Greek tragedy as an art form does not rid man of his mortal troubles by appealing to fear and pity as Aristotle attempted to demonstrate with *catharsis* but rather it is an affirmation of life through suffering.<sup>121</sup> Even though the terrifying uncertainty of all the conditions of existence bear down on man, this is “where the power of the Apollonian, bent on restoring the almost shattered individual, bursts forth, bringing the healing balm of a blissful deception.”<sup>122</sup> This blissful deception that Nietzsche discusses here is the veil of Maya.<sup>123</sup> Tragic knowledge has insight into the impossibility of knowledge— it recognizes by virtue of itself that it too has limits. Hence, tragic knowledge has to bear what it cannot be— what it cannot know. Ultimately, the tragic aspect of knowledge does not culminate in a grand revelation of truth but rather knows that no truth can ever really be understood. The Greeks were a people who felt the weight of existence and thus sought out the affirmation of life through pessimism. Moreover, tragedy is the coming together of drastically different aspects, the will and representation or the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

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<sup>119</sup> Plato, 514a.

<sup>120</sup> *Birth of Tragedy*, xix.

<sup>121</sup> *Poetics*, 1449b.

<sup>122</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, §21.

<sup>123</sup> The veil of Maya is the illusion that the phenomenal world of separate objects and people is the only reality. *Ibid.*, §2.

Humanity seeks out “truth” but in the sense that man can devise his own version of the truth. Greek tragedy, especially that of Aeschylus and Sophocles, investigates man’s existence in relation to the cosmos, and through the posing of questions concerning existence it does not attempt to provide answers and a means of dealing with man’s existential insecurity. Instead these tragedies draw these issues to the forefront so that man is encouraged to grapple with them, not to hide them behind religion and philosophies of science. William Troy also discusses this phenomenon in that

for once the dynamic metaphor is properly seized by the imagination, once it has been certified by the intellect and identified with the will, it must be realized in some appropriate mode of expression. It must be expressed in order to pass from the plane of pure contemplative knowledge to that of the senses, where it can be incorporated, in the literal sense of the word, in the very functioning of the human organism.<sup>124</sup>

Such encouragements are needed because man is inherently weak; he is “necessity down to his last fiber, and totally ‘unfree,’ that is if one means by freedom the foolish demand to be able to change one’s *essentia* arbitrarily, like a garment [...because...] their intellect in general is a poor witness when moist slime fills their souls.”<sup>125</sup> Modern man is practically consumed by this “moist slime” of modern science and mathematics. It deludes him into believing that his life is structured and order driven when in actuality it is this very slime that plagues him. The clear and distinct principles of modernity deny the basic nature of man. They are slime and they prey upon man’s weaknesses. Man’s most fundamental drive is the drive to the formation of metaphors,<sup>126</sup> and modern science and mathematics deny this drive. These principles deliver a rational,

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<sup>124</sup> Troy, 264.

<sup>125</sup> *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 63.

<sup>126</sup> *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, 8.

structured world that is to be branded onto man's consciousness. Man no longer needs to think or to create metaphors; man becomes a receiver in that he is the receptacle to which these principles are thrown away. This drive cannot be dispensed, for "one would thereby dispense with man himself."<sup>127</sup> For this is similar to what Socrates accomplished, a "man [...that...] may be perfected, not by being a more complete man but by ceasing being man."<sup>128</sup> Accordingly, man seeks other outlets or another channel for his most basic activity, and he finds it in art. This drive continually

manifests an ardent desire to refashion the world which presents itself to waking man, so that it will be as colorful, irregular, [...] and charmingly new as the world of dreams. Indeed, it is only by means of the rigid and regular web of concepts that the waking man clearly sees that he is awake; and it is precisely because of this that he sometimes thinks that he must be dreaming when this web of concepts is torn by art.<sup>129</sup>

The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles more closely represent a dream than the waking world of the "scientifically disenchanted thinker." Art allows man to reconnect with his most fundamental drive that modernity has denied him. For the "wisdom that animates tragedy and the 'tragic age of the Greeks' [...is...] that the playful being that erupts into life is ineluctably hidden and violent, while life can only be lived, liberated from this ground, in that manifest and serene moment."<sup>130</sup> Greek tragedy liberates the modern will through the affirmation of life in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The modern obsession with the present also denies that man is historically situated. This denial plagued Lamichane as he sat in no man's land and

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>128</sup> Rethy, 28.

<sup>129</sup> *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, 8.

<sup>130</sup> Rethy, 42.

Heraclitus as he contemplated that the “past and future are as perishable as any dream, but that the present is but the dimensionless and durationless borderline between the two.”<sup>131</sup> These plights touch on man’s existential insecurity. The intellect is man’s tool to secure himself, to gain some semblance of belongingness by creating his own metaphors. However, there is no “regular path which leads from these intuitions into the land of ghostly schemata, the land of abstractions.”<sup>132</sup> Modern man is bombarded with clear and distinct principles that have an answer for everything except why man cannot create for himself. Men cling to modernity because it is habitual and the alternative is far too foreboding. But until man accepts that his basic instinct and drive tell him otherwise, he will reside within the safety and stability of modern science.

## V. Conclusion

Art arises from the human will to create metaphors. Through these metaphors, the artist can stand above and within his work which enables the life-affirming aspects of art in general. The plight of the human condition is what essentially connects people and at the same time feeds the creation of art. Man is not satiated with modern science and mathematics which is why modernity has not successfully driven away art. Art gives people something of their own. Art is life, and because art is also volition, it allows the suffocating modern man to experience life through the prism of art. Greek tragedy is art in its truest form. The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles enable the triumph of the will– the will to power. The goal of the will to power is to dominate, and through the intellect man can take the questions posed in tragedy and create his own metaphors. The will to power feasts on the death rattle of modernity which is characterized

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<sup>131</sup> *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 53.

<sup>132</sup> *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, 9.

by the rise of Cartesian philosophy and the subsequent philosophies that attempted to marry modern science with a philosophy of the whole.

Man cannot philosophize in a vacuum. Modern man has allowed himself and the aspects of his humanity that are most dear to be sacrificed for prosperity and progress; he exists in the desert of the real underneath the intellectual skies scorched by the quantifiable. The post-modern views of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Lamichane are witness to modern disillusionment and the backlash against Cartesian philosophy. Modern man is the onion that Lamichane so ironically uses to describe himself: colorless, made of many layers with endless foul smells and depth. Those endless layers preserve the foul stench of modern society and man's subsequent contemplation of the abstractions that he has become. Moreover, in order to illustrate Greek tragedy as an aid in the understanding of life experienced through the prism of art, this thesis explored the plight of the modern man in so much as he is stranded in the desert that is modernity. Accordingly, this thesis first described the plight of the modern man using examples of post-modern disillusionment. Secondly, it explored Greek tragedy as the liberator of the modern man's will and finally delved into the philosophical implications of the connection between the modern will and Greek tragedy. Ultimately, this thesis exposed the connection between truth as metaphors and man's metaphysical need illustrating Greek tragedy as the pinnacle of all metaphors.

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