Kantian and Nietzschean Aesthetics of Human Nature: A Comparison between the Beautiful/Sublime and Apollonian/Dionysian Dualities

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Abstract

Both for Kant and for Nietzsche, aesthetics must not be considered as a systematic science based merely on logical premises but rather as a set of intuitively attained artistic ideas that constitute or reconstitute the sensible perceptions and supersensible representations into a new whole. Kantian and Nietzschean aesthetics are both aiming to see beyond the forms of objects to provide explanations for the nobility and sublimity of human art and life. We can safely say that Kant and Nietzsche used the dualities of the beautiful/sublime and Apollonian/Dionysian to advocate their general philosophical worldview, and that the initial formation (in Observations and The Birth of Tragedy) and final dissolution (in the Critique of Judgment and Zarathustra and other later works) of these dualities are determined by the gradually established telos of their philosophical endeavor. Therefore, by observing the evolution of these so-called dualities, Kaplama gathers important clues as to how Kant’s and Nietzsche’s aesthetics transformed into different ways to affirm human art and life. On the one hand, Kant and Nietzsche used the dualities of the beautiful/sublime and Apollonian/Dionysian to advocate their general philosophical worldview, and that the initial formation (in Observations and The Birth of Tragedy) and final dissolution (in the Critique of Judgment and Zarathustra and other later works) of these dualities are determined by the gradually established telos of their philosophical endeavor. Therefore, by observing the evolution of these so-called dualities, Kaplama gathers important clues as to how Kant’s and Nietzsche’s aesthetics transformed into different ways to affirm human art and life. On the one hand, Kaplama argues, the Dionysian came to be the heart and soul of Nietzschean aesthetics and ethics, and the Apollonian (or the formal drive of individuation) was reduced into a mere aesthetic criterion. On the other, Kant treats the sublime (which is originally an idea-producing feeling and/or judgment) as a mere appendix to his Critique of Judgment and aesthetic theory teleologically reducing it into its possible moral consequences. This is why Schopenhauer calls the sublime “by far the most excellent thing in the Critique of Judgment” which touches on the real problem of aesthetics very closely but does not provide a real solution for it. Kant’s forced teleological move is to make his theory of aesthetic judgment stand as a ‘reaffirmation’ of the earlier ethical justification he believed to have accomplished in the first two Critiques and the Groundwork where he defends an affirmation of human life through a teleological morality centered on the principle of free-will. In contrast, Nietzsche’s aesthetics (particularly the Dionysian) guides his ethics and metaphysics again through defining an ideal human nature without which ethos would be static and meaningless, lacking the ability to move and change and represent the tragic pathos of human life.

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Kant believes he can show that aesthetic judgment is not fundamentally different from ordinary theoretical cognition of nature, and he believes he can show that aesthetic judgment has a deep similarity to moral judgment. For these two reasons, Kant claims he can demonstrate that the physical and moral universes – and the philosophies and forms of thought that present them – are not only compatible, but unified. Part A deals with Kant’s account of beauty, the sublime, and fine art. In the first two of these subjects, Kant’s concern is with what features an aesthetic judgment exhibits, how such a judgment is possible, and is there any transcendental guarantee of the validity of such a judgment. He understands Kant’s later work on aesthetics to be similarly occupied with the transition between the forces of nature and the human understanding of them. To better illustrate the principle of transition, Kaplama analyzes Kant’s idea of the sublime and Nietzsche’s idea of the Dionysian as two ideas that enact a link between natural forces and human understanding. The Dionysian, he suggests, is Nietzsche’s response to Kant’s tendency to moralize the sublime and “to isolate the human mind from external nature” (53). Like the Kantian sublime, Nietzsche’s concept of the Dionysian links cosmolog Academic journal article Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy. Kantian and Nietzschean Aesthetics of Human Nature: A Comparison between the Beautiful/sublime and Apollonian/Dionysian Dualities. By Kaplama, Erman. Read preview. Article excerpt. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that the 'satyr', as the aesthetic extension of the 'Dionysiac', became the raw and monstrous artistic expression of the sublime in nature as well as the sublime in human nature (75). It is the tragic and aesthetic idea that links the omnipotent and destructive Tita