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Socrates and Greek Tragedy

Friedrich Nietzsche

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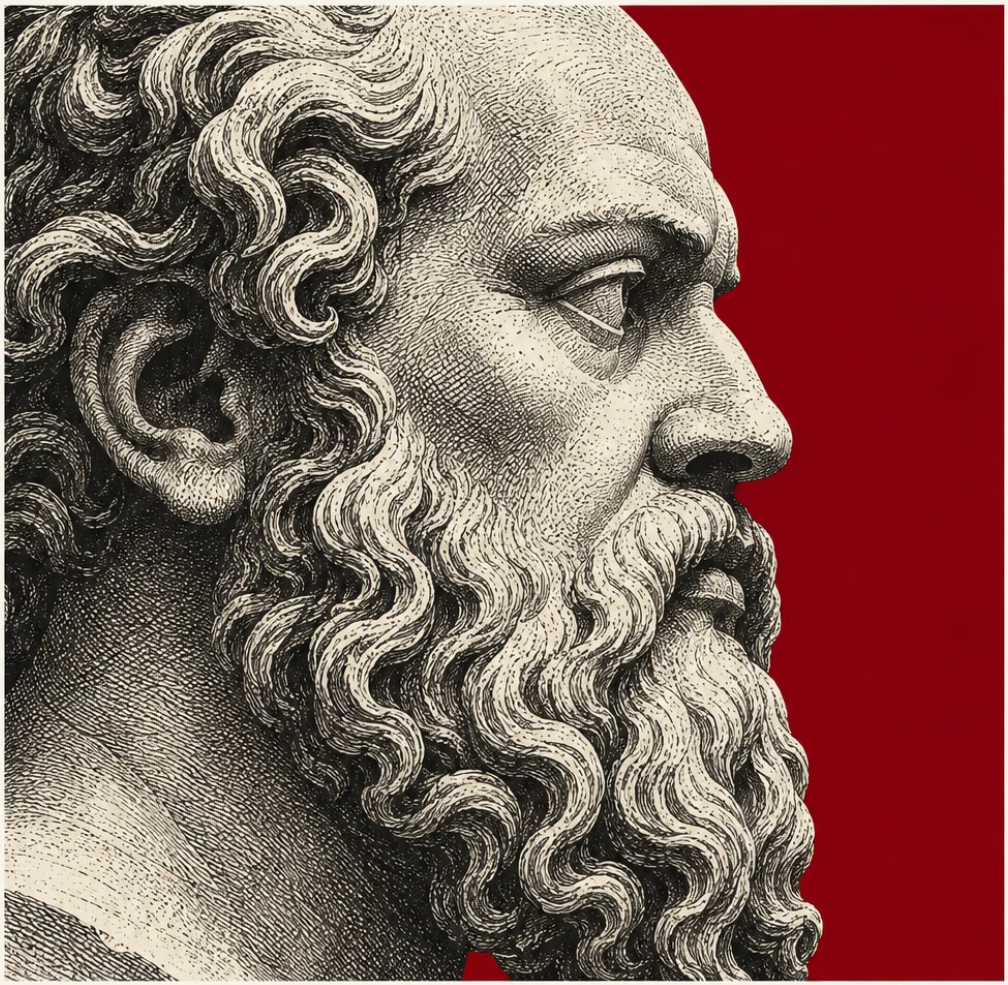

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Nietzsche Source, eKGWB/SGT (German original)

Socrates and Greek Tragedy

By

Dr Friedrich Nietzsche.

Professor in Basel.

Basel.

1871.

1.

Greek tragedy died in a different way from all the older kinds of art that were its sisters. It died by suicide, because of a conflict it could not solve. In other words, it died tragically. The others, by contrast, all faded away at a great age, with the most beautiful and peaceful kind of death. If it is a sign of a happy, natural life to leave the world without a struggle and with fine children left behind, then the end of those older kinds of art shows us exactly that kind of happy, natural state. They slowly sink out of sight, and before their dimming eyes their even more beautiful offspring already stands, lifting its head with a bold and impatient gesture. When Greek tragedy died, however, it left a huge emptiness that people felt deeply everywhere. Once, in the time of the Roman emperor Tiberius, Greek sailors passing a lonely island heard a shattering cry: "The great god Pan is dead!" In the same way, a painful cry of mourning now rang through the Greek world: "Tragedy is dead! Poetry itself is lost along with it! Away, away with you, you stunted, scrawny followers who came after the great ones! Off with you to the underworld, so that down there you can finally eat your fill of the crumbs left by the old masters!"

But then a new kind of art did grow and flourish after all, one that honored tragedy as its forerunner and teacher. And people saw with horror that it did indeed have its mother's features, but they were the

features she had shown during her long struggle with death. The one who fought out this death struggle of tragedy was Euripides. That later kind of art is known as the later comedy of Athens. In it, tragedy lived on in a decayed, degraded form, as a monument to how hard and violent its passing had been.

Given this connection, it is easy to understand why the poets of the later comedy loved Euripides so passionately. So it is no longer strange that the comic poet Philemon said he would gladly be hanged on the spot, just so he could go and find Euripides in the underworld, if only he could be sure that the dead man still had his wits about him even now. Now suppose we want to say very briefly, without claiming to cover everything, what Euripides had in common with the comic poets Menander and Philemon, and what made him such an exciting model for them. Then it is enough to say this: Euripides brought the audience member onto the stage. Think about what material the tragic poets before Euripides used to shape their heroes. Those poets were bold and grand, like Prometheus, and they had no wish at all to put a faithful mask of real life on the stage. Anyone who sees this will also see clearly how completely different the aim of Euripides was. Through him, the ordinary person of everyday life pushed his way out of the seats and onto the stage. The mirror that used to show only great and daring features now showed a painfully exact likeness, one that carefully copied even nature's failed and ugly lines. Odysseus, the model Greek hero of the older art, now sank in the hands of the newer poets into the figure of the "little Greek," a cheap, sly type. From then on, this figure stood at the center of the drama as a good-natured but cunning house slave. In the comedy The Frogs by Aristophanes, Euripides takes credit for having used his home remedies to slim tragedy down and free it from its pompous fatness. You can feel this most of all in his tragic heroes. Basically, the audience member now saw and heard his own double on Euripides' stage, and was delighted

that this double could talk so well. But it did not stop at this delight. People actually learned to talk from Euripides. He boasts of this himself in his contest with Aeschylus: thanks to him, he says, the common people had now learned to observe, to argue, and to draw conclusions skillfully and with the cleverest tricks of reasoning. By changing the way people spoke in public like this, he made the later comedy possible in the first place. From then on, it was no secret anymore how everyday life could be shown on stage, and with what kind of sayings. Ordinary middle-class people, on whom Euripides based all his political hopes, now got to speak. Until then, in tragedy it was the demigod, and in comedy the drunken satyr or the demigod, who set the style of speech. And so the Euripides in Aristophanes' play praises himself for having shown common, well-known, everyday life and business, which anyone was able to judge. If now the whole crowd was busy philosophizing, he says, and running land and property with amazing cleverness, and fighting lawsuits, and so on, then this was his doing, the result of the wisdom he had injected into the people.

The later comedy could now speak to a crowd that had been prepared and educated in this way. Euripides had become a sort of chorus master for it, except that this time it was the chorus of audience members that had to be trained. As soon as this chorus had practiced singing in the Euripides key, a kind of play arose that was like a game of chess: the later comedy, with its constant triumph of cleverness and trickery. But Euripides, the chorus master, was praised without end. People would even have killed themselves to learn still more from him, if they had not known that the tragic poets were just as dead as tragedy. But with tragedy, the Greek had given up his belief in his own immortality. He gave up not only the belief in a perfect past, but also the belief in a perfect future. A well-known gravestone says of someone: "as an old man, careless and full of whims." Those words fit the Greek

world in its old age too. The moment, the joke, carelessness, and passing moods were now its highest gods. The fifth class, the class of slaves, now came to rule, at least in its way of thinking. And if we can still talk about "Greek cheerfulness" at all at this point, it is the cheerfulness of the slave. The slave has nothing serious to answer for and nothing great to strive for, and he values nothing in the past or the future more than what is happening right now. It was this beautiful illusion of "Greek cheerfulness" that so outraged the deep-thinking and fearsome people of the first four centuries of Christianity. To them, this weak, girlish running away from seriousness and terror, this cowardly settling for easy pleasure, seemed not only contemptible but the true anti-Christian attitude. And it is because of their influence that the picture of ancient Greece, which lived on for centuries, clung with almost unbeatable stubbornness to that pale pink color of cheerfulness. It was as if there had never been a sixth century before Christ, with its birth of tragedy, its secret religious rites, its thinkers Empedocles and Heraclitus. It was even as if the artworks of that great age did not exist at all. Yet each one of those works, on its own, cannot possibly be explained as growing out of such an old-mannish, slavish love of life and cheerfulness. Instead, they point to a completely different way of seeing the world as the reason they exist.

Earlier we claimed that Euripides brought the audience member onto the stage, and that by doing so he truly made the audience able to judge the play for the first time. That gives the impression that the older tragic art never got past a poor fit with its audience. And you might be tempted to praise Euripides' radical aim, to create a proper match between the artwork and the public, as a step forward beyond Sophocles. But "the public" is just a word. It is not one uniform thing that stays the same. Why should an artist feel he has to bend to a force whose only strength is its numbers? And if, because of his talent and his goals, he feels far above every single one of these audience

members, how could he respect the combined voice of all these lesser minds more than he respects the single most gifted person in the audience? In truth, no Greek artist treated his audience, over a long life, with more daring and more self-confidence than Euripides did. Even when the crowd threw itself at his feet, he proudly and defiantly slapped his own aim in the face, in public, the very aim that had won him the crowd. If this genius had had even the slightest awe for the noisy mob of spirits that is the public, he would have collapsed under the club-blows of his failures long before the middle of his career. Thinking about this, we see that our phrase, that Euripides brought the audience member onto the stage to make the audience truly able to judge, was only a temporary one. We need to look for a deeper understanding of his aim. On the other hand, everyone knows that Aeschylus and Sophocles enjoyed the full favor of the people all their lives, and even long after. So with these earlier poets there can be no talk of a poor fit between artwork and public. So what drove this richly gifted artist, who was constantly pushed to create, so forcefully off the road that was lit by the sun of the greatest poets' names and by the cloudless sky of popular favor? What strange concern for the audience member led him to turn against the audience member? How could he, out of too much respect for his public, end up not respecting his public?

Here is the answer to the riddle we just laid out. As a poet, Euripides did feel above the crowd. But he did not feel above two particular members of his audience. He brought the crowd onto the stage. But those two audience members he honored as the only judges able to judge, and as the masters of all his art. He followed their instructions and warnings. Up to then, a whole world of feelings, passions and states of mind had shown up at every festival performance, sitting on the audience benches like an invisible chorus. Euripides moved that whole world into the souls of his stage heroes. He gave in to the

demands of these two when he looked for a new way of speaking and a new tone for his new characters. In their voices alone he heard the real verdicts on his work. And in their voices he also heard encouragement that promised victory, whenever he found himself condemned once again by the court of the public.

Of these two audience members, the first one is Euripides himself. That is, Euripides as a thinker, not as a poet. You could say about him what you could say about Lessing: his huge talent for criticism, if it did not create a side urge to make art, at least kept feeding it all the time. With this gift, and with all the clearness and quickness of his critical thinking, Euripides had sat in the theater. He had worked hard to make out, stroke by stroke and line by line, the masterpieces of his great forerunners, as if they were paintings that had grown dark with age. And here something happened to him that should not surprise anyone who knows the deeper secrets of Aeschylus' tragedy. In every stroke and every line he noticed something that could not be measured. He saw a kind of clearness that fooled you, and at the same time a mysterious depth, even an endless background. Even the clearest character always trailed something like a comet's tail, which seemed to point off into the unknown, into something that could never be made clear. The same half-light lay over the way the play was built, and especially over the meaning of the chorus. And how doubtful the solutions to the moral problems seemed to him! How questionable the handling of the myths! How unevenly good luck and bad luck were handed out! Even in the language of the older tragedy he found a lot that offended him, or at least puzzled him. In particular, he found too much grand show for simple situations, too many figures of speech and monstrous images for characters who were plain and simple. So he sat restlessly brooding in the theater. And he, the audience member, admitted to himself that he did not understand his great forerunners. But since he believed that understanding with the

mind was the true root of all enjoying and all creating, he had to ask around and look about him. Did no one else think the way he did? Did no one else also admit that these works could not be measured? But the many, and with them the best individuals too, only gave him a suspicious smile. And yet none of them could explain to him why the great masters were still right, despite his doubts and objections. And in this painful state he found the second audience member, who did not understand tragedy and so did not respect it. Allied with this person, he could dare to step out of his loneliness and begin the enormous battle against the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles. He fought not with argumentative essays, but as a playwright, setting his own idea of tragedy against the one that had been handed down.

Before we name this second audience member, let us pause here for a moment. Let us remind ourselves of that impression of something split and unmeasurable in the very nature of Aeschylus' tragedy. Think of how strange we ourselves found the chorus and the tragic hero of that tragedy. We could not make them fit either with our own habits or with what had been handed down to us. That lasted until we discovered that this doubleness itself is the origin and the essence of Greek tragedy. It is the expression of two basic urges behind art that are woven into each other: the clear, dreamlike, ordered side (the Apollonian) and the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian).

Based on this understanding, we have to see Greek tragedy as a Dionysian chorus that keeps pouring itself out, again and again, into an Apollonian world of images. So the chorus parts that are woven all through the tragedy are, in a way, the mother's womb of the whole so-called dialogue, meaning the whole world on stage, the actual drama. In several bursts, one after the other, this deepest root of tragedy beams out the vision that is the drama. On one hand, this vision is completely a dream image, and in that sense it is like an epic. But on the other hand, because it gives outward shape to a Dionysian state, it

does not show the Apollonian kind of being saved by beautiful illusion. Instead it shows the opposite: the individual breaking apart and becoming one with the original oneness of all things. So the drama is the Apollonian way of making Dionysian insights and effects visible to the senses. And because of this, it is separated from the epic as if by an enormous gulf.

The chorus of Greek tragedy stands for the whole crowd stirred up by the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian), and our way of seeing things finally explains it completely. We are used to where a chorus stands on the modern stage, especially an opera chorus. Because of that, we could not understand how the tragic chorus of the Greeks could be older, more basic, and even more important than the actual "action" of the play, even though the old sources say this so clearly. We also could not make sense of something else: if the chorus was so important and so original, why was it made up only of lowly servant figures, and at first only of satyrs with goat legs? And the dancing floor in front of the stage, the orchestra, always stayed a riddle to us. But now we have come to understand this: the stage and the action were, at bottom and in the beginning, thought of only as a vision. The only "reality" is the chorus itself. The chorus produces the vision out of itself, and it speaks about that vision using all the symbols of dance, sound, and words. In its vision, this chorus sees its lord and master, Dionysus, and that is why it is always the serving chorus. It watches the god suffer and be glorified, and so it does not act on its own. Even though it stands completely as a servant before the god, the chorus is still the highest expression of nature, the Dionysian expression. So, like nature, it speaks in a state of inspiration, giving out sayings full of prophecy and wisdom. Because it suffers along with the god, it is also wise, and it announces the truth straight from the heart of the world. This is how we get that strange, fantastic figure that seems so shocking: the wise and inspired satyr, who at the same time is "the simple

fool" compared to the god. He is a picture of nature and its strongest urges, even a symbol of them, and at the same time he announces nature's wisdom and art. He is musician, poet, dancer, and seer of spirits, all in one person.

Dionysus is the real hero of the stage and the center of the vision. But according to what we now understand, and according to the old sources, in the very earliest period of tragedy he is not truly present. He is only imagined to be present. In other words, tragedy at first is only "chorus" and not "drama." Later, people tried to show the god as real, and to present the figure from the vision, along with the glowing frame around it, so that every eye could see it. That is where "drama" in the narrow sense begins. Now the chorus of hymns to Dionysus gets a new job. It has to stir up the mood of the listeners in a Dionysian way, so strongly that when the tragic hero appears on stage, they do not see a clumsy man in a mask. Instead they see a vision-figure that seems to be born out of their own ecstasy. Imagine Admetus, deep in thought, remembering his wife Alcestis, who has just died. He is wasting away, seeing her only in his mind. Then suddenly a veiled woman is led toward him, shaped like her and walking like her. Imagine his sudden trembling unrest, how wildly he compares her to his wife, and his gut feeling that it is really her. That gives us something similar to the feeling of the audience member, stirred up in a Dionysian way, who saw the god walking toward him on the stage, the god whose suffering he had already become one with. Without meaning to, he moved the whole picture of the god, which was trembling magically in his soul, onto that masked figure. He dissolved the figure's reality, so to speak, into a ghostly unreality. This is the dream state of the clear, dreamlike, ordered side (the Apollonian). In it, the everyday world becomes veiled, and a new world keeps being born in front of our eyes, always changing. This new world is clearer, easier to understand, and more moving than the everyday one, and yet more

like a shadow. Because of this, we see a deep contrast of styles running all through tragedy. Language, color, movement, and the force of speech split into two completely separate areas of expression. On one side is the Dionysian song-poetry of the chorus. On the other side is the Apollonian dream world of the stage. The Apollonian appearances, in which Dionysus takes on visible form, are no longer "an endless sea, a shifting weaving, a glowing life," as the music of the chorus is. They are no longer those forces that are only felt and never harden into a picture, the forces through which the inspired servant of Dionysus senses that the god is near. Now, from the stage, the clearness and firmness of epic storytelling speaks to him. Now Dionysus no longer speaks through forces, but as an epic hero, almost in the language of Homer.

Everything that comes to the surface in the Apollonian part of Greek tragedy, in the spoken dialogue, looks simple, see-through, and beautiful. In this sense, the dialogue is a picture of the Greek person, whose nature shows itself in dance. That is because in dance the greatest strength is only held in reserve, but it gives itself away in how smooth and rich the movements are. In the same way, the speech of Sophocles' heroes surprises us with its Apollonian sharpness and brightness. We feel we can see right away all the way down to the deepest core of their being, and we are a little amazed that the path down to that core is so short. But let us set aside the hero's character as it comes to the surface and becomes visible. At bottom, that character is nothing more than a bright picture thrown onto a dark wall, that is, appearance through and through. Let us instead go deeper into the myth that is projected in these bright reflections. Then we suddenly experience something that works the opposite way from a well-known effect of the eyes. When we try hard to look straight at the sun and turn away blinded, we see dark colored spots in front of our eyes, as if they were a cure. It is the other way around with those

bright-picture appearances of Sophocles' hero, in short, with the Apollonian side of the mask. They are the necessary result of looking into the inner, terrible depths of nature. They are like glowing spots meant to heal eyes that have been hurt by a horrible night. Only in this sense can we believe we truly grasp the serious and important idea of "Greek cheerfulness." Meanwhile, of course, we run into the wrongly understood idea of this cheerfulness everywhere in today's world, as a state of comfortable ease where nothing is at risk.

The most suffering figure on the Greek stage is the unhappy *Oedipus*. Sophocles saw him as a noble person who, in spite of his wisdom, is doomed to make mistakes and to fall into misery. But in the end, through his enormous suffering, he gives off a magical power that blesses everything around him, and this power keeps working even after he dies. The deep-thinking poet wants to tell us that the noble person does not sin. Through what he does, every law, every natural way of acting, even the whole moral world may be destroyed. Yet exactly through these deeds a higher, magical circle of effects is drawn, and these effects build a new world on the ruins of the old one that was knocked down. That is what the poet wants to tell us, since he is also a religious thinker. But as a poet, he first shows us a wonderfully tangled knot, like a court case. The judge unties it slowly, link by link, and in doing so brings about his own ruin. The truly Greek delight in this clever, step-by-step untangling is so great that it spreads a feeling of calm, superior cheerfulness over the whole play. This cheerfulness takes the sharp edge off the horrible facts behind that case at every turn. In "Oedipus at Colonus" we meet this same cheerfulness, but lifted up into an endless, shining glory. On one side stands the old man, struck by more misery than anyone can bear, simply handed over, as someone who only *suffers*, to everything that happens to him. On the other side stands a cheerfulness that is beyond this world. It comes down from the realm of the gods and hints to us that the sad

hero, by being purely passive, reaches his greatest activity, an activity that stretches far beyond his own life. In his earlier life, by contrast, all his conscious striving and scheming only led him into being passive. In this way the knot of the Oedipus story, which to human eyes is tangled beyond any hope of untying, is slowly undone. And the deepest human joy comes over us at this godlike counterpart to clever reasoning. If this explanation does justice to the poet, we can still ask whether it covers everything the myth contains. And here it turns out that the poet's whole view is nothing but that bright picture which healing nature holds up in front of us after we have looked into the abyss. Oedipus, the murderer of his father, the husband of his mother, Oedipus who solved the riddle of the Sphinx! What does this mysterious set of three fateful deeds tell us? There is a very old folk belief, especially among the Persians, that a wise magician can only be born from incest, that is, from a child of close family members. Thinking of Oedipus, who solves the riddle and marries his mother, we must read this at once in the following way. Wherever the power of prophecy and magic breaks the spell of present and future, breaks the rigid law of being split into separate individuals, and breaks the real magic of nature itself, there must first have been some huge crime against nature as its cause, like incest in this case. For how could anyone force nature to give up her secrets, except by fighting against her and winning, that is, by doing what is unnatural? I see this insight stamped onto that terrible set of three things that happen to Oedipus. The same man who solves the riddle of nature, that two-natured Sphinx, must also break the holiest laws of nature as the murderer of his father and the husband of his mother. Yes, the myth seems to want to whisper to us that wisdom, and especially the wisdom of the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian), is a horror against nature. It seems to say that whoever uses his knowledge to throw nature into the abyss of destruction must also feel nature falling apart in himself. "The sharp point of wisdom turns against the wise man: wisdom is a

crime against nature." Such terrible sentences are what the myth calls out to us. But the Greek poet touches the grand and frightening statue of the myth like a ray of sunlight touching the famous statue of Memnon, which was said to sing at sunrise. And so the myth suddenly begins to sound, in the melodies of Sophocles!

Now, against this glory of being passive, I set the glory of being active, which shines around the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus. What Aeschylus the thinker had to tell us here, but what Aeschylus the poet only lets us sense through his picture-like story, the young Goethe managed to reveal to us in the bold words of his own poem "Prometheus":

"Here I sit, shaping human beings

In my own image,

A race of people to be like me,

To suffer, to cry,

To enjoy and to be glad,

And to pay no attention to you,

Just like me!"

Man rises to giant-like, rebellious greatness. He fights to win his own culture, and he forces the gods to make an alliance with him, because his own wisdom holds the gods' very existence, and their limits, in his hands. But the most amazing thing about that Prometheus poem is something else. At its core, the poem is really a hymn against piety, against humbly worshipping the gods. Yet what stands out most is Aeschylus' deep longing for *justice*. On one side there is the endless suffering of the bold "single person." On the other side there is the gods' own trouble, even a sense that the gods' twilight, their final downfall, is coming. And there is a power that pushes these two suffering worlds to make peace and to become one at the deepest level.

All of this strongly reminds us of the center and main belief of how Aeschylus saw the world: above both gods and humans, he saw Fate sitting on a throne as eternal justice. Aeschylus was amazingly bold. He put the whole world of the Olympian gods on his scales of justice to be weighed. To understand how he could do that, we have to remember that this deep-thinking Greek had a solid, unshakable foundation for his thinking about the deepest questions: his secret religious rites. Because of that, he could let out all his doubts on the Olympian gods without losing his footing. The Greek artist in particular had a vague feeling, when he thought about these gods, that he and they depended on each other. And this feeling is shown in symbol form exactly in Aeschylus' Prometheus. The giant-like, rebellious artist found inside himself a defiant belief: that he could create human beings, and that he could at least destroy Olympian gods. He could do this through his higher wisdom, though he was forced to pay for that wisdom with endless suffering. The glorious power of the great genius, his "I can," which is worth more than even endless suffering can pay for, and the bitter pride of the *artist*: this is the content and the soul of Aeschylus' poetry. Sophocles, by contrast, in his Oedipus, begins to sing the opening notes of a victory song for the *saint*. But even the meaning that Aeschylus gave to the myth does not reach the bottom of its astonishing depth of terror. Rather, the artist's joy in creating, and the way artistic creation is enough for itself and defies every disaster, are only a bright picture of clouds and sky reflected on a black lake of sadness. In other words, the joy floats on top of a deep darkness. The Prometheus legend originally belonged to the whole family of Aryan peoples. It is proof of their gift for deep, tragic thinking. It may even be quite likely that this myth means for the Aryan character exactly what the story of Adam and Eve's fall means for the Semitic character, and that the two myths are related to each other like brother and sister. The Prometheus myth starts from the huge value that early, simple humanity placed on *fire*, seeing it as the

true protecting treasure of every culture on the rise. But for those thoughtful early people, it seemed like a daring crime against the gods that humans should control fire freely, instead of only getting it as a gift from heaven, like a lightning bolt that sets things burning or the warming heat of the sun. It seemed like stealing from the divine order of nature. And so the very first philosophical problem sets up a painful contradiction between human and god that cannot be solved, and it rolls this contradiction like a huge rock in front of the gate of every culture. The best and highest thing humanity can ever get, it wins through a daring crime against the gods. And then it has to accept the results: the whole flood of suffering and sorrow that the insulted gods send down on the noble, upward-striving human race, because they *have* to. This is a harsh thought. And because it gives *dignity* to the crime, it stands out strangely against the Semitic story of Adam and Eve's fall. In that story, the source of evil is curiosity, lying pretense, being easy to tempt, lust: in short, a list of feelings seen mainly as female. What makes the Aryan idea special is its lofty view of sin as bold action, seen as the true virtue of Prometheus. And with that, we have also found the moral foundation of pessimistic tragedy: it *justifies* human evil, both human guilt and the suffering that guilt brings on. The Aryan, thinking it over, does not want to explain away the disaster built into the nature of things. To him, the contradiction at the heart of the world shows itself as a tangle of different worlds, for example a divine world and a human world. Each of them is in the right as an individual being. But each, standing as a single one next to another, has to suffer for being split into separate individuals. The single person heroically pushes to become part of the whole. He tries to step beyond the spell that keeps us separate and wants to be the *one* being of the world itself. When he does this, he feels in his own body the original contradiction hidden in things. That means: he commits a daring crime against the gods, and he suffers. So the Aryans understand the daring crime against the gods as male, and the

Semites understand sin as female, just as the original daring crime is committed by a man and the original sin by a woman. By the way, the chorus of witches says:

Whoever understands that innermost core of the Prometheus legend, namely that the individual who strives like a giant has no choice but to commit a daring crime against the gods, must also feel at the same time how un-Apollonian this pessimistic idea is. It goes against the clear, dreamlike, ordered side (the Apollonian). For Apollo wants to bring single beings to rest precisely by drawing boundary lines between them, and by reminding them again and again that these lines are the holiest laws of the world. He does this with his demands: know yourself, and keep to the right measure. But there is a danger in this Apollonian aim. The form could freeze into stiffness and coldness, like ancient Egyptian art. And while trying to set each single wave its path and its area, the movement of the whole lake could die. So, to prevent that, from time to time the high flood of the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) comes again and destroys all those little circles in which the one-sided Apollonian "will" tries to trap the Greek world. That suddenly rising flood of the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) then lifts the small separate waves, the individuals, up onto its back, the way Prometheus' brother, the giant Atlas, carries the earth. This giant-like, rebellious urge to become, so to speak, the Atlas of all single beings, and to carry them on a broad back higher and higher, farther and farther, is what Prometheus and the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) have in common. In this sense, Aeschylus' Prometheus is a Dionysian mask. But in that deep longing for justice mentioned earlier, Aeschylus shows to anyone who looks closely that he comes from the family line of Apollo, as from a father. Apollo is the god of being split into separate individuals and of the boundaries set by justice. And so the double nature of Aeschylus' Prometheus, being both Dionysian and Apollonian at once, could perhaps

be put into a formula like this, which would amaze the logical-minded Euripides: "Everything that exists is just and unjust, and it is equally right in both."

That is your world! That's what you call a world!

There is a tradition that no one can argue with: in its very oldest form, Greek tragedy was only about the sufferings of Dionysus, and for a long time the only hero on the stage was Dionysus himself. But we can say with just as much certainty that, right up until Euripides, Dionysus never stopped being the tragic hero. All the famous characters of the Greek stage, like Prometheus, Oedipus and the rest, are only masks of that original hero, Dionysus. The fact that a god is hiding behind all these masks is one main reason why those famous characters seem so typical and "ideal", something people have so often marveled at. Someone, I forget who, once claimed that all individuals, simply because they are individuals, are comic and therefore not tragic. From this we could conclude that the Greeks simply *could not* stand to see individuals on the tragic stage. And in fact, that does seem to be how they felt. In the same way, Plato's distinction between the "idea", meaning the true form of a thing, and the "idol", meaning a mere copy, and his belief that the idea is worth more, is deeply rooted in the Greek character. If we borrow Plato's terms, we could describe the tragic characters of the Greek stage like this: the one truly real Dionysus appears in many different shapes. He wears the mask of a struggling hero, and he is caught, so to speak, in the net of a single person's will. So when the god appears and speaks and acts, he looks like an individual who makes mistakes, who strives, and who suffers. And the fact that he *appears* at all, with such clear and sharp outlines, like a character in an epic story, is the work of Apollo, the interpreter of dreams. Apollo explains to the chorus its own wild, ecstatic state (the Dionysian) by showing it this picture, which works like a symbol. In truth, though, this hero is the suffering Dionysus of the secret

religious rites. He is the god who feels in his own body the pain of being split into separate individuals. Wonderful myths tell of him: how, as a boy, he was torn to pieces by the Titans, and how in this torn-apart state he is worshipped as Zagreus. These myths hint that this tearing apart, which is the true Dionysian *suffering*, is like being changed into air, water, earth and stone. So we are meant to see the state of being split into separate individuals as the source and deepest root of all suffering, as something bad in itself. From the smile of this Dionysus, the gods of Olympus were born; from his tears, human beings were born. In this life as a god torn to pieces, Dionysus has a double nature: he is both a cruel, savage spirit-power and a mild, gentle ruler. But the initiates hoped for Dionysus to be born again. We now have to understand this rebirth, with a sense of something deep and hidden, as the end of being split into separate individuals. It was to this coming, third Dionysus that the initiates sang their roaring song of joy. And only in this hope is there a ray of joy on the face of the world, which has been torn apart and smashed into separate individuals. The myth shows this through Demeter, who is sunk in endless grief. She feels *joy* again for the first time only when she is told that she can give birth to Dionysus *once more*. In these ideas we have already gathered all the pieces of a deep and pessimistic view of the world, and with them, *tragedy's secret teaching*. First, the basic insight that everything that exists is one. Second, the view that being split into separate individuals is the deepest root of all evil. And third, beauty and art seen as the joyful hope that the spell that keeps us separate can be broken, as a sense, a hint, of a oneness that will be made whole again.

To cut that original, all-powerful wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) out of tragedy, and to rebuild tragedy fresh and pure on art, customs and a view of the world that had nothing Dionysian in them — this is

the aim of Euripides, which we can now see clearly, as if in bright light.

Near the end of his life, Euripides himself put the question of what this aim was worth and what it meant before the people of his time, and he did it as forcefully as he could, through a myth. Should the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) be allowed to exist at all? Shouldn't it be torn out of Greek soil by force? Certainly, the poet tells us, if only that were possible. But the god Dionysus is too powerful. Even the most sensible enemy — like Pentheus in the play "The Bacchae" — is suddenly put under his spell, and then, still bewitched, runs straight to his doom. The judgment of the two old men, Cadmus and Tiresias, seems to be the judgment of the old poet too. It goes like this: the thinking of even the cleverest individuals cannot overturn those old traditions of the people, that worship of Dionysus which keeps passing on forever. In fact, when facing such wondrous powers, it is proper to take part at least in a careful, diplomatic way. And yet, even then, the god may still be offended by such lukewarm involvement, and in the end may turn the diplomat — as he does here with Cadmus — into a dragon. This is what we are told by a poet who resisted Dionysus with heroic strength for a long lifetime — only to end his career by praising his enemy and by a kind of suicide. He was like a dizzy man who throws himself off a tower just to escape the horrible whirling that he can no longer stand. That tragedy is a protest against the idea that his aim could ever be carried out. But alas, it had already been carried out! The amazing thing had already happened: by the time the poet took back his position, his aim had already won. Dionysus had already been chased off the tragic stage, and this was done by a spirit-driven power that spoke through Euripides. In a certain sense, Euripides too was only a mask. The god speaking through him was not Dionysus, and not Apollo either, but a brand-new spirit-power called Socrates. This is the new opposition: the wild, ecstatic

side (the Dionysian) against the Socratic way of thinking. And the great artwork of Greek tragedy was destroyed by it. Euripides may try to comfort us by taking back what he stood for, but he fails. The most magnificent temple lies in ruins. What good to us is the destroyer's crying, or his confession that it was the most beautiful temple of all? And even the fact that Euripides, as punishment, has been turned into a dragon by the art critics of every age since — who could be satisfied by such a miserable payback?

Let us now take a closer look at that Socratic aim, which Euripides used to fight against the tragedy of Aeschylus, and to defeat it.

We now have to ask ourselves this: Euripides wanted to build drama only on things that were not Dionysian. If that plan had been carried out perfectly, what goal could it possibly have had? What kind of drama was left, if it was not to be born from the womb of music, in that mysterious twilight of the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian)? Only an epic story acted out. But in this area of art, which belongs to the clear, dreamlike, ordered side (the Apollonian), a truly tragic effect can never be reached. It doesn't matter what events are being shown. I would even claim that Goethe, in his planned play "Nausicaa," could never have made the suicide of that gentle, innocent girl — which was supposed to fill the fifth act — feel truly tragic and moving. The power of the epic, Apollonian way is so enormous that it bewitches even the most terrifying things right before our eyes, through our delight in beautiful illusion and through being saved by beautiful illusion. The poet of an epic story acted out can no more melt completely into his pictures than the old reciter of epic poems could. There is always a calm, still way of looking, gazing with wide eyes, that sees the pictures in front of itself, at a distance. The actor in this kind of acted-out epic, deep down, always stays a storyteller reciting a poem. Everything he does carries the blessing of the inner dreamer, so that he is never fully an actor. Only in this way can we

properly understand Goethe's "Iphigenia," which we should honor as the highest thing ever born from the mix of drama and epic.

So how does a play by Euripides compare to this ideal of a purely Apollonian drama? It compares the way the younger kind of reciter compares to the solemn reciter of the old days. This younger reciter describes himself in Plato's dialogue "Ion" like this: "When I say something sad, my eyes fill with tears. But when what I say is terrible and horrifying, the hair on my head stands on end with fear, and my heart pounds." Here we find nothing left of that epic state of being lost in beautiful illusion. There is none of the cool, unemotional calm of the true actor, who, exactly when he is working at his highest level, is entirely beautiful illusion and delight in beautiful illusion. Euripides is the actor with the pounding heart and the hair standing on end. As a thinker in the style of Socrates, he draws up the plan; as a passionate actor, he carries it out. He is not a pure artist, neither when he plans nor when he performs. So a drama by Euripides is something both cold and fiery at once, just as able to freeze you as to burn you. It cannot possibly reach the Apollonian effect of the epic. On the other hand, it has cut itself off from the Dionysian elements as much as it could. So now, to have any effect at all, it needs new ways to stir people up, and these can no longer come from the only two basic urges behind art, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. These new ways of stirring people up are cool, surprising, paradoxical thoughts — in place of Apollonian images — and fiery emotions — in place of Dionysian raptures. And these are very real, true-to-life thoughts and emotions, not in any way dipped in the heavenly air of art.

So we have seen this much: Euripides did not manage to build drama on the clear, dreamlike, ordered side (the Apollonian) alone. Instead, his aim toward that ordered side went astray and became something realistic and unartistic. Now we can get closer to what Socrates' rule for art: it must make sense really is. Its highest law goes roughly like

this: "Everything must make sense in order to be beautiful." This matches Socrates' own saying: "Only the person who knows is good." Euripides held this rule in his hand like a measuring stick. He measured every single part of his plays with it and corrected each one to fit the rule: the language, the characters, the way the play was built, and the music of the chorus. When we compare him with the tragedies of Sophocles, we often blame Euripides for being a weaker poet and for going backward. But most of what we blame him for is really the result of that sharp, critical process, that bold insistence on making sense. Let us take Euripides' prologue, the speech at the start of his plays, as an example of what this logical method produced. Nothing could be more against our own way of staging plays than the prologue in a play by Euripides. A single character comes on stage at the very beginning and tells us who he or she is, what happened before the story starts, what has happened so far, and even what will happen during the rest of the play. A modern playwright would call this a careless and unforgivable way of throwing away suspense. After all, we already know everything that is going to happen. Who would want to sit and wait for it to actually happen? This is not like the exciting case of a dream that predicts the future and then later comes true. But Euripides thought about it in a completely different way. In his view, the power of tragedy never depended on the kind of suspense you get in a long story, the teasing uncertainty about what will happen now and next. Instead, it depended on those great scenes of speeches and songs, where the hero's passion and arguments swelled up into a wide and mighty river. Everything prepared the way for strong feeling, not for action. Anything that did not prepare the way for strong feeling was thrown out as worthless. And what makes it hardest for a listener to enjoy and give himself up to such scenes is a missing piece, a hole in the fabric of the backstory. As long as the listener still has to work out what this or that person means, and what lies behind this or that clash of wishes and plans, he cannot fully sink into the suffering and

actions of the main characters. He cannot yet feel that breathless pity and fear along with them. The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles used the cleverest artistic tricks to hand the audience member, in the first scenes and almost as if by chance, all the threads needed to understand the story. This shows a noble kind of artistry: it hides the necessary, formal parts behind a mask, so to speak, and makes them look like they happened by accident. Still, Euripides believed he noticed something. During those first scenes, he thought, the audience member was strangely restless, busy doing the math problem of the backstory, so that the beauty of the poetry and the strong feeling of the opening were lost on him. That is why he put the prologue even before the opening scenes, and gave it to a character the audience could trust. Often a god had to guarantee to the audience, in a way, how the tragedy would go, and remove any doubt that the myth was real. This is similar to how the philosopher Descartes could only prove that the world we experience is real by pointing to God's truthfulness and the fact that God cannot lie. Euripides needs this same godly truthfulness again at the end of his play, to make sure the audience knows what the future holds for his heroes. That is the job of the famous, much-mocked god who swoops in to fix the ending. Between the storyteller's look ahead at the beginning and the look beyond at the end lies the present moment of action and song: the real "drama."

So Euripides as a poet is above all an echo of what he consciously understood. And that is exactly what gives him such a remarkable place in the history of Greek art. Thinking about his critical and creative work, he must often have felt as if he were bringing to life, for the stage, the opening of the book by the philosopher Anaxagoras. Its first words are: "In the beginning everything was mixed together; then reason came and created order." Among the philosophers, Anaxagoras with his idea of Mind seemed like the first sober man among a crowd

of drunks. Euripides may have seen his own relationship to the other writers of tragedy in a similar picture. As long as Mind, the only thing that orders and rules the universe, was still shut out of making art, everything was still mixed together in a chaotic primal soup. That is how Euripides had to judge it. As the first "sober" one, he had to condemn the "drunk" poets. Sophocles once said about Aeschylus that he did the right thing, even though he did it without knowing how. Euripides certainly would not have agreed with that. He would only have admitted that Aeschylus did the wrong thing precisely because he created without knowing what he was doing. The godlike Plato, too, mostly speaks with irony about the poet's creative power, whenever that power is not conscious understanding. He puts it on the same level as the gift of a fortune-teller or a dream-reader. After all, he says, the poet cannot write poetry until he has lost his conscious mind and there is no reason left in him. Euripides set out, just as Plato did, to show the world the opposite of the poet who "lacks reason." His basic rule for art, "Everything must be conscious in order to be beautiful," is, as I said, the twin of Socrates' rule, "Everything must be conscious in order to be good." So we can rightly call Euripides the poet of Socrates' rule for art: it must make sense. But Socrates was that second audience member who did not understand the older tragedy and therefore did not respect it. Together with him, Euripides dared to be the announcer of a new way of making art. If the older tragedy died because of this new way, then Socrates' rule for art: it must make sense is the deadly principle that killed it. And since the fight was aimed against the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) of the older art, we can see in Socrates the enemy of Dionysus. He is a new Orpheus who rises up against Dionysus. Even though he was fated to be torn apart by the wild women of Dionysus, here meaning the court of Athens that condemned him, he still forced the all-powerful god himself to run away. And the god did what he had done long ago when he fled from Lycurgus, king of the Edonians: he saved him-

self by escaping into the depths of the sea. That sea means the mysterious waters of a secret religion that was slowly spreading over the whole world.

People in ancient times, living in the same period, did not fail to notice that Socrates and Euripides shared a close aim. The clearest sign of this sharp instinct is a story that went around Athens: people said Socrates used to help Euripides write his plays. Those who longed for the "good old days" would name both men in the same breath whenever they listed the people who were leading the public astray in their own time. According to them, it was the influence of these men that caused the old, sturdy, rough-and-ready strength of body and soul, the kind shown by the men who fought at Marathon, to be slowly sacrificed to a doubtful kind of "enlightenment," while the powers of body and soul kept wasting away. The comedies of Aristophanes usually speak about these two men in this tone, half outraged and half scornful. This shocks modern readers. They are happy enough to give up Euripides, but they cannot stop wondering why Aristophanes shows Socrates as the first and greatest *Sophist*, as the mirror and perfect example of everything the Sophists stood for. Their only comfort is to put Aristophanes himself in the stocks, calling him a wild, lying Alcibiades of poetry, a reckless troublemaker in verse. I will not stop here to defend Aristophanes' deep instincts against such attacks. Instead I will go on to show, from the way the ancient Greeks themselves felt, how closely Socrates and Euripides belong together. In this sense it is worth remembering one thing in particular: Socrates, as an enemy of tragic art, stayed away from performances of tragedy, and only showed up among the audience members when a new play by Euripides was being staged. But the most famous pairing of the two names is in the saying of the oracle at Delphi. It called Socrates the wisest of all people, but it also ruled that Euripides deserved second prize in the contest of wisdom.

Third on this ladder, the oracle named Sophocles. He was the one who could boast, against Aeschylus, that he did what was right, and that he did it because he *knew* what was right. Clearly, it is exactly how clear and bright this *knowing* was that sets these three men apart together as the three "knowing ones" of their age.

But it was Socrates who put this new and never-before-heard-of high value on knowledge and understanding into its sharpest words. He found that he was the only person who would admit that he *knew nothing*. Meanwhile, as he went around Athens testing people, calling on the greatest statesmen, speakers, poets and artists, he found everywhere that they only imagined they knew things. He was amazed to see that all these famous people did not have a correct and sure understanding even of their own jobs, and that they did their work just by instinct. "Just by instinct": with this phrase we touch the heart and center of the aim of the Socratic way of thinking. With this phrase, Socrates' way of thinking condemns both the art that existed then and the morals that existed then. Wherever it turns its testing gaze, it sees a lack of understanding and the power of grand delusion. And from this lack it concludes that everything that exists is wrong and worthless at its core. Starting from this one point, Socrates believed he had to correct life itself. He, a single person, steps with a look of scorn and superiority, as the forerunner of a completely different kind of culture, art and morality, into a world whose mere edge we would count it our greatest luck to catch hold of with deep respect.

This is the huge uneasiness that grips us every time we face Socrates. It keeps pushing us, again and again, to try to understand the meaning and purpose of this most questionable figure of the ancient world. Who is this man who dares, all on his own, to reject the Greek spirit? That spirit, in the form of Homer, Pindar and Aeschylus, of Phidias, of Pericles, of the Pythia, the priestess at Delphi, and of Dionysus, is sure to remain both the deepest depth and the highest height of our

amazed worship. What spirit-driven power is it that dares to pour this magic potion out into the dust? What half-god is this, to whom the ghostly chorus of humanity's noblest people must cry out: "Woe! Woe! You have destroyed it, the beautiful world, with your mighty fist; it falls, it crumbles!"

One key to understanding what Socrates was really like is that strange thing known as "Socrates' inner warning voice." In special situations, when his enormous mind began to waver, he found something firm to hold on to: a divine voice that spoke up at such moments. Whenever this voice comes, it always *warns him against* doing something. In this completely unusual person, instinctive wisdom shows up only to *block* his conscious thinking now and then. In all creative people, instinct is exactly the force that creates and says yes, while conscious thought acts as the critic and the one that warns. But in Socrates, instinct becomes the critic and conscious thought becomes the creator. This is a true monster, a freak caused by something missing! In fact, what we see here is a monstrous lack of any gift for the mystical. So Socrates could be called the perfect *non-mystic*, a man in whom the logical side has grown just as wildly overdeveloped, like an extra growth on top of what is normal, as instinctive wisdom has in the mystic. On the other hand, the logical drive that showed itself in Socrates was completely unable to turn against itself. In the way it rushes on without any chains, it shows a force of nature of a kind we only meet, to our shuddering surprise, in the very greatest instinctive powers. Anyone who has felt even a breath of the godlike innocence and certainty of Socrates' way of life in Plato's writings will also feel that the enormous driving wheel of logical Socrates' way of thinking is turning, as it were, *behind* Socrates, and that we have to look at it through Socrates as if through a shadow. That he himself had some sense of this relationship shows in the dignified seriousness with which he insisted on his divine mission everywhere, even in front of his judges. Proving

him wrong about this was basically just as impossible as approving of his influence, which dissolved people's instincts. Faced with this conflict that could not be solved, once he had been dragged before the court of the Greek state, there was only one fitting way to condemn him: exile. They could have sent him over the border as something completely puzzling, impossible to label and impossible to explain, and no later generation would have had the right to accuse the Athenians of a shameful act. But it seems that Socrates himself pushed for the death sentence instead of just exile, fully clear-headed and without the natural horror of death. He went to his death with the same calm that Plato describes when he leaves the Symposium, the drinking party, as the last of the drinkers in the early dawn, to begin a new day. Behind him, on the benches and on the floor, his sleepy fellow guests stay behind to dream of Socrates, the true lover. *Socrates facing death* became the new ideal of the noble Greek young men, one never seen before. Above all, Plato, the typical young Greek, threw himself down before this image with all the passionate devotion of his fiery soul.

Now let's picture Socrates' one great Cyclops eye, like the single eye of a one-eyed giant, turned toward tragedy. In that eye, the sweet madness of artistic inspiration had never once glowed. Let's picture how that eye was never able to look with pleasure into the deep pits of the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian). So what, really, could it have seen in the art of tragedy, which Plato calls "lofty and highly praised"? It saw something quite unreasonable, with causes that seemed to have no effects, and effects that seemed to have no causes. On top of that, the whole thing was so colorful and so mixed that it was bound to put off a calm, sensible mind. And for excitable, sensitive souls it was dangerous tinder, ready to catch fire. We know the one and only kind of poetry he did understand: the fables of Aesop. And he surely understood them with a smiling, polite tolerance, the same way the hon-

est, good-hearted poet Gellert sings the praise of poetry in his fable about the bee and the hen:

But to Socrates, tragic art did not even seem to "tell the truth." Besides that, it speaks to people who "don't have much sense," and so it does not speak to the philosopher. That gave him two reasons to stay away from it. Like Plato, he counted it among the flattering arts, which show only what is pleasant and not what is useful. So he asked his followers to hold back and to keep strictly apart from such unphilosophical temptations. He was so successful at this that the young Plato, who wrote tragedies, first of all burned his own poems so that he could become Socrates' student. But where strong inborn talents fought against Socrates' rules, the force of those rules, together with the weight of his enormous personality, was still strong enough to push poetry itself into new positions that no one had known before.

Plato, whom we just mentioned, is an example of this. When it came to condemning tragedy, and art in general, he certainly did not fall behind the simple, blunt contempt of his teacher. And yet, because the artist in him truly needed it, he had to create a new form of art, one that was closely related, deep down, to the very art forms that already existed and that he had rejected. Plato's main complaint against the older art was that it was an imitation of a mere illusion-picture, and so it belonged to an even lower level than the everyday world we experience. Above all, that complaint must not be able to hit the new work of art. So we see Plato trying to go beyond reality and to show the idea that lies underneath that fake reality. But in doing this, Plato the thinker had taken a detour and arrived at exactly the place where he had always been at home as a poet. It was the same place from which Sophocles and all the older art had solemnly protested against that very complaint. Tragedy had soaked up all the earlier kinds of art into itself. The same thing can be said, in an odd and lopsided way, about Plato's dialogues. They were made by mixing

all the styles and forms that existed, and they hover in the middle between storytelling, song-like poetry, and drama, between prose and poetry. In this way they also broke the strict old rule that a work should keep to one single form of language. The Cynic writers went even further down this road. With their wildly patchwork style, swinging back and forth between prose and verse, they managed to create in writing the same picture of the "raving Socrates" that they liked to act out in their own lives. Plato's dialogue was like a small boat in which the shipwrecked older poetry rescued itself, along with all its children. Crammed together in a tight space, and nervously obeying their one helmsman, Socrates, they now sailed into a new world, which could never get enough of looking at this fantastic parade. In fact, Plato gave all later generations the model for a new form of art: the model of the novel. The novel can be described as Aesop's fable blown up to endless size. In it, poetry has the same rank compared to argument-based philosophy that this same philosophy had for many centuries compared to religion and theology: it is a servant, a handmaid, an "ancilla." This was poetry's new position, into which Plato pushed it under the pressure of the spirit-driven Socrates.

Here philosophical thinking grows over art, like a plant taking over, and forces art to cling tightly to the trunk of logical argument. The aim of the clear, dreamlike, ordered side (the Apollonian) has wrapped itself up in logical patterns, the way a caterpillar wraps itself in a cocoon. We noticed something similar in Euripides, and we also saw how he turned the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) into realistic, true-to-life emotion. Socrates, the arguing hero of Plato's dramas, reminds us of the similar nature of Euripides' heroes. Those heroes have to defend their actions with reasons and counter-reasons, and because of this they so often risk losing our tragic pity. For who could miss the optimistic element in the very nature of argument? It throws a victory party with every conclusion it reaches, and it can only

breathe in cool brightness and full awareness. Once this optimistic element has crept into tragedy, it has to slowly overgrow tragedy's Dionysian regions and drive it to destroy itself, all the way to its deadly leap into ordinary middle-class drama. Just think about where Socrates' statements lead: "Virtue is knowledge. People only do wrong because they don't know better. The virtuous person is the happy person." In these three basic forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy. Because now the virtuous hero has to be a skilled arguer. Now there has to be a necessary, visible link between virtue and knowledge, between faith and morals. Now Aeschylus' way of settling justice on a level far above this world has been dragged down to the shallow and cheeky rule of "neat reward and punishment," with its usual god who swoops in to fix the ending.

Faced with this new stage world of Socrates' optimism, how do the chorus, and the whole musical, Dionysian foundation of tragedy, look now? They look like something accidental, a leftover memory of where tragedy came from, one we could easily do without. And yet we have seen that the chorus can only be understood as the cause of tragedy, and of the tragic in general. Already with Sophocles, people start to feel awkward about the chorus. That is an important sign that even with him, the ground of the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) beneath tragedy is starting to crumble. He dares to use the chorus in a completely new way, as one of the characters taking part in the action, as an actor. It is as if he lifts it out of the dancing floor, the orchestra, and up onto the stage. Of course, this completely destroys what the chorus really is, even though Aristotle actually approves of exactly this way of seeing the chorus. Sophocles recommended this shift in the chorus's position through his own practice, and, according to tradition, even in a written work. It is the first step toward wiping out the chorus. The later stages of that destruction follow one another with frightening speed in Euripides, in Agathon, and in the later

comedy of Athens. Optimistic logic, using its chains of reasoning like a whip, drives music out of tragedy. That means it destroys the very essence of tragedy. And that essence can only be understood as a showing and picturing of Dionysian states, as music made visible in symbols, as the dream world of a wild rapture of the Dionysian kind.

So we even have to assume that there was a movement against the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) at work before Socrates, one that only found its incredibly grand expression in him. If so, we must not shy away from asking what someone like Socrates actually points to. After all, when we look at Plato's dialogues, we cannot see him as just a negative force that only breaks things apart. And it is certain that the very first effect of Socrates' drive was to break down Dionysian tragedy. Still, a deep experience from Socrates' own life forces us to ask a question: Is the relationship between Socrates' way of thinking and art necessarily one of pure opposites? And is the birth of an "artistic Socrates" really something that contradicts itself?

You see, that bossy master of logic sometimes felt, when it came to art, that something was missing. He felt a gap, an emptiness, a kind of half-blame, as if he had perhaps neglected a duty. As he told his friends while he was in prison, the same dream came to him again and again, and it always said the same thing: "Socrates, make music!" Right up to his last days he calmed himself with the belief that his philosophy was the highest art of the Muses. He did not really believe that a god would want to remind him of that "common, popular music." But finally, in prison, to clear his conscience completely, he agreed to make that kind of music too, even though he thought little of it. In that spirit he wrote an opening hymn to Apollo and turned a few of Aesop's fables into verse. What pushed him to these exercises was something like his spirit-driven warning voice, Socrates' inner warning voice. It was his insight from the clear, dreamlike, ordered side (the Apollonian): he realized that, like a barbarian king, he did

not understand a noble image of a god, and that he was in danger of sinning against a god simply by not understanding. Those words from Socrates' dream are the only sign that he ever had doubts about the limits of a purely logical mind. Perhaps, he must have asked himself, what I cannot understand is not automatically nonsense? Perhaps there is a kingdom of wisdom from which the logician is shut out? Perhaps art is even a necessary partner and completion of science and learning?

Following these last questions, which hint at what is to come, we must now say, to finish, how the influence of Socrates has spread out over all later generations, up to this very moment and on into the whole future. It has spread like a shadow that grows longer and longer in the evening sun. We must also say how this influence forces art to be created anew again and again — and art here in the widest and deepest sense, a sense that already reaches beyond the physical world. And because Socrates' influence never ends, it also guarantees that art will never end.

Before this could be seen, and before it was clearly shown how deeply every art depends on the Greeks — the Greeks from Homer all the way to Socrates — we had to go through with the Greeks what the people of Athens went through with Socrates. Almost every age and every stage of culture has at some point tried, with deep resentment, to break free of the Greeks. The reason was that next to the Greeks, everything people had made themselves, everything that seemed completely original and that they sincerely admired, suddenly seemed to lose its color and life. It shrank into a failed copy, even into a cartoon of itself. And so, again and again, a heartfelt rage breaks out against that arrogant little people who dared to call everything foreign "barbarian" for all time. People asked themselves: who are these Greeks? Their glory in history lasted only a short time. Their institutions were laughably narrow. Their morals were of doubtful worth, and they were

even marked by ugly vices. And yet they claim the dignity and special place among nations that belongs to a genius among the crowd. Sadly, no one was lucky enough to find the cup of hemlock poison that could simply get rid of such a being, the way Athens got rid of Socrates. All the poison that envy, slander and rage could produce was not enough to destroy that self-sufficient splendor. And so people feel ashamed of the Greeks and afraid of them. The only exception is someone who values truth above everything and so dares to admit this truth too: the Greeks hold the reins of our culture, and of every culture, like chariot drivers. But almost always the chariot and the horses are made of poor stuff and are not worthy of the glory of their drivers. And the drivers think it is a joke to race such a team over the edge of a cliff — while they themselves leap across the gap, with the jump of Achilles and the beauty of a rainbow.

To prove that Socrates holds this leading position, it is enough to see in him the model of a way of living that had never existed before him: the model of the theory-minded person. Our last task is to understand what this type means and what it aims at. The theory-minded person, like the artist, finds endless satisfaction in the world as it is. And like the artist, this satisfaction protects him from the ethics of despair acted out in real life, and from despair's sharp eyes, like those of Lynceus in the old myth, which see only in the dark. Here is the difference. Whenever truth is unveiled, the artist always keeps gazing, enchanted, at whatever is still a veil even after the unveiling. The theory-minded person, on the other hand, takes his joy and satisfaction in the veil that has been thrown off. His greatest pleasure is the process of unveiling itself, an unveiling that always goes well and succeeds through his own strength. There would be no science and learning if all it cared about was that one naked goddess, the bare truth, and nothing else. Because then its followers would feel like people trying to dig a hole straight through the earth. Each of them

would see that even with the greatest effort over a whole lifetime, he could only dig through a tiny piece of that enormous depth. And even that piece would be filled in again before his eyes by the work of the next person. So a third person would seem wise to pick a new spot of his own for his digging. Now suppose someone proves convincingly that you can never reach the other side of the earth by this direct route. Who would still want to keep working in the old holes? Only someone who is content, in the meantime, to find precious stones or to discover laws of nature. That is why Lessing, the most honest theory-minded person, dared to say that he cared more about searching for the truth than about the truth itself. With that, the deepest secret of science and learning was revealed, to the surprise and even the annoyance of the scientists. Of course, next to this one-off insight — which was an excess of honesty, if not of cockiness — there stands a profound grand delusion. It first came into the world in the person of Socrates. It is the unshakable belief that thinking, following the thread of cause and effect, can reach down into the deepest pits of existence, and that thinking can not only understand existence but can even correct it. This lofty grand delusion about the deepest nature of things is given to science and learning as an instinct. It leads science again and again to its limits, where it must turn into its opposite: into art. And in fact, in this whole mechanism, art is what it was really aiming at all along.

Now let us shine the torch of this idea on Socrates. Seen this way, he looks like the first person who could not only live by that instinct of science and learning, but also, which is far more, die by it. That is why the picture of Socrates facing death matters so much. Here is a man whose knowledge and reasons have freed him from the fear of death. This picture is like a coat of arms hung over the front gate of science and learning. It reminds everyone who enters what science is for: to make life seem understandable, and so to make it seem justi-

fied. Of course, when reasons run out, science must in the end use myth for this as well. A moment ago I even called myth a necessary result of science, and indeed its real purpose.

Try to picture clearly what happened after Socrates, who was like the priest who led people into the secret rites of science and learning. One school of philosophers followed another, like wave after wave. A hunger for knowledge, wider than anyone had ever imagined, spread through the whole educated world. For every gifted person, this became the real task in life, and it carried science and learning out onto the open sea, where it has never since been fully driven back. Through this wide spread, a shared net of thought was stretched for the first time over the whole Earth, with glimpses even of the laws that rule an entire solar system. Whoever pictures all of this, together with today's amazingly tall pyramid of knowledge, cannot help seeing Socrates as the one great turning point, the whirlpool, of what we call world history. Because imagine that this whole countless amount of energy, spent on that worldwide aim, had *not* gone into the search for knowledge. Imagine it had been used instead for practical goals, which means selfish goals, of single people and whole nations. Then, most likely, in endless wars of destruction and constant mass migrations, the natural, instinctive love of life would have grown so weak that suicide would become a habit. In such a world, a person might feel he was doing his last bit of duty if he strangled his parents as a son, or his friend as a friend, as the people of the Fiji Islands are said to do. That would be despair acted out in real life, and it could even produce a horrifying morality of killing whole peoples out of pity. And by the way, this kind of despair does exist, and always has existed, everywhere in the world where art, in some form, especially as religion or as science and learning, did not appear as a cure and a shield against that poisonous breath of plague.

Set against this despair acted out in real life, Socrates is the model of the optimist who trusts thinking. Because he believes, as described, that the nature of things can be understood to the bottom, he gives knowledge and understanding the power of a medicine that cures everything. And he sees error as evil itself. To dig down into those deepest causes, and to separate true knowledge from beautiful illusion and from error: to the Socratic person, this seemed the noblest calling, even the only truly human one. In the same way, from Socrates on, that machinery of ideas, judgments and logical conclusions was prized above all other abilities, as the highest activity and the most admirable gift of nature. Even the greatest moral deeds were explained this way. Feelings of pity, self-sacrifice, heroism, and that hard-won stillness of the soul, calm as a windless sea, which the Apollonian Greek called calm self-control: Socrates and his like-minded followers, right up to today, traced all of these back to the logic of knowledge, and so they said these things could be taught. Someone who has tasted the joy of Socratic understanding for himself, and feels how it tries to take in the whole world of appearances in wider and wider rings, will from then on feel no spur driving him to live more sharply than the longing to finish that conquest and to spin the net so tight that nothing can get through. To someone in this mood, Plato's Socrates then looks like the teacher of a completely new kind of "Greek cheerfulness" and happiness in being alive. This happiness tries to pour itself out in action. And mostly it will find that outlet by working on noble young men, helping new ideas to be born in them like a midwife and educating them, so that in the end a genius may be produced.

But now science and learning, spurred on by its powerful grand delusion, rushes on without stopping until it reaches its limits. There the optimism hidden in the very nature of logic breaks down. Because the edge of the circle of science has endlessly many points. No one can yet

see how the circle could ever be fully measured. And yet the noble, gifted person, even before the middle of his life, cannot avoid running into such points on the edge, where he stares into what can never be made clear. Here he sees, to his horror, how logic coils around itself at these limits and finally bites its own tail, like a snake. At that moment a new kind of understanding breaks through: tragic understanding. And just to be bearable, it needs art as its protection and its cure.

Let us look, with eyes made stronger and refreshed by the Greeks, at the highest levels of the world that floods around us. There we notice that the greed for endless, optimistic knowledge, which first showed itself in Socrates as the model, has turned into its opposite: into tragic acceptance and a need for art. It is true, though, that the same greed, at its lower levels, has to show itself as an enemy of art. Above all it must hate, deep down, the wild, ecstatic side (the Dionysian) of tragic art. We saw an example of this in how Socrates' way of thinking fought against the tragedy of Aeschylus.

So here, with stirred hearts, we knock at the gates of the present and the future. Will that "turning into its opposite" lead to ever new forms of genius, and in particular to a Socrates who makes music? Will the net of art that is spread over life, even if it goes by the name of religion or of science and learning, be woven ever stronger and finer? Or is it doomed to be torn to shreds in the restless, barbaric rushing and whirling that now calls itself "the present"? Worried, but not without hope, we stand aside for a little while, as onlookers who are allowed to witness these huge struggles and changes. Ah! But that is the magic of these struggles: whoever watches them must also fight in them!

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