
Schooling for “Deep-Knowing”: On the Education of a Pithecanthropus Erectus

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We busted out of class, had to get away from those fools.
We learned more from a three-minute record, baby, than we
ever learned in school.
Tonight I hear the neighbourhood drummer sound,
I can feel my heart begin to pound.
You say you’re tired and you just want to close your eyes,
And follow your dreams down.

—from “No Surrender” (*Born in the USA*)
Bruce Springsteen

Twenty-five hundred years ago, Plato commented that the downfall of a city (*polis*) would result from the corruption of its tragedies. Tragedy, originally a “goat song” (*tragodia*) or sacred hymn performed at the festivals of Dionysus, god of wine and ecstasy, was the highest form of art in the ancient world. In tragedy, the poet (*poietai*) or “maker” was the teacher of grown-up men in the same way that the schoolteacher (*didaskalos*) was with regard to boys. Here, the case of the ancient, tragic poet-teacher is instructive in our modern context, for where a modern-day schoolteacher might be said to be an historian (*historikos*), or one concerned with understanding “the real facts” of the world and of human society, in his *Poet-*

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ics, Aristotle points out that the poet’s art is something “more philosophical and serious” than history (2001, IX.1-4). In the words of Eric Voegelin, poetry “does not relate mere facts, but it conveys what is ‘general’; we may say, perhaps, what is ‘essential’” (Voegelin, 1957, 246). In this regard, the “much-knowing” of the historian is opposed to the “deep-knowing” of the poet and the philosopher. The poet, unlike the historian, conveys a “general” insight by participating in the great search for truth. Education in schools today is a lopsided form of “much-knowing” bereft of the poet’s “deep-knowing”; fixated on the phenomenal, the immediate and the “particular,” with its emphasis on competitiveness and innovation, responding to fast-paced technological changes in the flux of what is new or most “up-to-date,” it tends to overlook what is “general”; in our schools, ever pressured to embrace what is most current, we (along with our students) easily lose sight of what is unchanging, eternal, or what underlies all change. In the midst of all this hustle and bustle for success, we fail to cultivate any awareness of what the ancients would understand as the tragic dimension of existence. And yet it is in this deep, tragic dimension that genuine education must have its roots.

At this point, it is important to clarify that tragedy is neither information about particular events, nor is it merely heart-wrenching fiction. As an art form, tragedy may be properly defined as the study of the human soul (*psyche*) in the process of making decisions. Tragic thought is “deep” thought or “deep” knowing insofar as it is fundamentally concerned with justice (*dike*)—not the lawyer’s justice of adjudication according to the law (*themis*), but a search for that ground of justice, that *dike* beyond *themis* into which the soul, suffering its tensions, must descend. Voegelin remarks that tragedy only arises when *themis* is no longer viewed as an adequate guide for decisions in a concrete situation. It only exists where the Dionysiac soul descends into its own depths acting in favour of *Dike* (Voegelin, 1957, 243-266).

In order for this truest form of tragedy to be socially possible, there must exist a citizenry that willingly opens its soul to tragic conflict. However, as an art form so sublime, tragedy appears to have died with the Greeks at the Battle of Mara-

thon. Modern day “tragedies” such as highway accidents or genocidal wars are not tragedies *per se*. Their ugliness and suffering are tremendous; our hearts bleed with the emotions they evoke, while our minds stretch out with questions of theodicy—of why such evils are permitted to exist in the world. And apart from the ample “opportunities” for terrible suffering that our own personal lives present, any adolescent, parent, or teacher can experience such things vicariously at the movie theatre, through story, drama, music, art, or literature. However, these experiences of suffering fall short of tragic experience insofar as they do not pin the individual in an impossible bind, where acting for justice involves tremendous suffering for *dike*. In Plato’s time, tragedy died from its popularity and became pandering to the throng of revellers—to an audience more concerned with the emotive content of the story (*mythos*) than with its articulation of truth and transcendent justice. Put another way, the citizenry were no longer willing to open themselves to tragic conflict; they lost a sense for the Dionysian depths of the soul (*psyche*).

Nietzsche on Tragedy: The Dionysian and Anti-Dionysian

The most illuminating writer on the meaning of tragedy, the nature of the Dionysian depths, and the problem of anti-Dionysian tendencies in modern-day society may be Friedrich Nietzsche. In his earliest book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche describes all of human existence as a tension between two opposed, cosmic principles which he calls the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Named after Dionysus, “the Dionysian” designates “the mystical Oneness” (Nietzsche, 1956, 23), “the primordial One” (1956, 24), or the “original pain” that is “the sole ground of being” (1956, 33). Elsewhere, he refers to Dionysian reality as “the primal architect of the cosmos” (1956, 42), “the Original Mother” (1956, 102), and “the very womb of things” (1956, 126). “The Dionysian” names the fundamental reality that human beings experience through different kinds of intoxication and ecstasy. In Dionysian experience, “not only does the bond between man and man come to be forged once more . . . but nature itself, long alienated or subjugated, rises again to celebrate the reconciliation with her prodigal son, man.” By virtue of Dionysian awareness, “each individual

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becomes not only reconciled to his fellow but actually at one with him" (1956, 23). The individual is "shattered," forgetting himself completely as he merges with "the mystical Oneness." Through this Dionysian merging, the individual participates in a "higher community" and a Oneness that knows no boundaries. This awesome experience of the Dionysian ground of all things is the beginning of wisdom, according to Nietzsche (Steel, 1998, 32-33).

Dionysian experience of the destruction and dissolution of the psycho-mental, individualized ego-self in mystical Oneness is a hard wisdom, however. In his early writing, Nietzsche contends that insight into the ground of all things is unbearable for human beings, and that it petrifies them for action: "They realize that no action of theirs can work any change in the eternal condition of things, and they regard the imputation as ludicrous or debasing that they should set right the time which is out of joint" (Nietzsche, 1956, 51). For life to proceed and to overcome "the apprehension of truth and its terror," for the individual to exist who himself has been dissolved into the Oneness, for any sort of action whatsoever, "fair illusions" are needed which might enable human beings to rejoice in their existence (Steel, 1998, 34).

Nietzsche uses "the Apollonian" to name this capacity and drive for illusion. As "the soothsaying god" of visions and dreams, Apollo is also the god of poets and musicians. Dreams are the most basic Apollonian phenomena, "in the production of which every man proves himself an accomplished artist." All human beings, as dreaming artists, forget the waking world in order to enjoy their dreams, saying of these fair illusions, "It is a dream! I want it to go on" (Nietzsche, 1956, 20-21). In this way, Apollo bestows upon human beings a kind of "naivety" that allows them to enjoy dreams that they know to be dreams, and to forget the waking world while they dream on.

The Apollonian aspect of existence bestows upon the chaotic, Dionysian womb of things what Nietzsche refers to as "the *principium individuationis*" (Nietzsche, 1956, 22). By this principle human beings gain the illusion of distinction between themselves and the Oneness of which they are a part. Along with their reconstituted individuality, they also gain the

distinctions of order, regularity, and beauty. In this way, the Apollonian serves to oppose the Dionysian in a kind of contentious struggle or *agon*, out of which life is stimulated, art is produced, and the barbarism that might otherwise result from knowing the Dionysian nature of things is countered.

In his *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes that the Apollonian and the Dionysian are always in tension and opposition, “each by its taunts forcing the other to a more energetic production, both perpetuating in a discordant concord that *agon* which the term art but feebly designates” (Nietzsche, 1956, 19). When the tension between these two opposing forces is fierce, tragedy and Dionysian art are begotten. At such times, Nietzsche argues, there is “redemption” and “transfiguration” (Nietzsche, 1956, 26). This “redemption of the original Oneness” occurs when Dionysian reality is mirrored in Apollonian illusion in such a manner that human beings may revel and rejoice in the ground of their being and in their existence as participants in this ground. This is the “metaphysical solace” of tragedy; namely, “that, despite every phenomenal change, life is indestructibly joyful and powerful” (Nietzsche, 1956, 50). From the Apollonian-Dionysian tension exemplified in tragedy, “there arises, like the fragrance of ambrosia, a new illusory world, invisible to those enmeshed in the first: a radiant vision of pure delight, a rapt seeing through wide-open eyes” (Nietzsche 1956, 33). This is Nietzsche’s view of the redemption of Oneness in Dionysian art: it is illusion grounded in the experience of reality and reflected in a way that leads to eternal rejoicing in all of existence (Steel, 1998, 35-36).

According to Nietzsche, both the Dionysian and Apollonian tendencies must be present in heightened opposition to one another for this tragic redemption to be possible. If one god is deserted, then the other god will also abandon the deserter: “[B]ecause you had deserted Dionysus, you were in turn deserted by Apollo” (Nietzsche, 1956, 69). That is to say: without the Dionysian experience of Oneness there can be no wisdom or feeling for reality. Similarly, without a strong Apollonian leaning there is only savagery and barbarism. In Nietzsche’s view, if the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies are not properly related to one another, then the individual becomes “egoistic” and “unartistic.” Such a subject—i.e.,

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the striving individual bent on furthering his own egoistic purposes—can be thought of “only as an enemy to art, never as its source.” Indeed, it should be stressed here that, contrary to what is often assumed about Nietzsche, genuinely artistic creation is always a selfless or “egoless” activity. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, he is quite clear that art is *not* the product of any individual subject or will. Rather, both art and the artist are tools in the hands of the original Oneness for its own redemption: “[T]o the extent that the subject is an artist he is already delivered from individual will and has become a medium through which the True Subject celebrates His redemption in illusion.” Nothing about art is egoistic for Nietzsche. “[T]he entire comedy of art is not played out for our own sakes . . . nor can we consider ourselves the true originators of that art realm.” We are simply “aesthetic projections of the veritable creator and derive such dignity as we possess from our status as art works” (Nietzsche, 1956, 41-42).

The primary tension in Nietzsche’s corpus, however, is *not* between Apollo and Dionysus. Nietzsche certainly sees tragic wisdom and the ability to rejoice in all of existence as the result of heightened tensions between Apollonian and Dionysian forces in the soul; but he identifies the *anti-Dionysian* forces that serve to deny this redemptive *agon* as the primary cause for all our modern suffering, decadence, and weakness. Careful readers of Nietzsche will recognize that all of his writings arise from his two-fold experience of suffering this dichotomy: on the one hand, he is pained by our modern, anti-Dionysian “sickness” as himself a “convalescent”; yet on the other hand, he suffers from his own thwarted Dionysian longings, and as one seeking to rise above the confusions that bury modern-day men, even going so far as to write famously of himself in *Ecce Homo*, “I am no man, I am dynamite” (Nietzsche, 1989, 326). Indeed, Nietzsche *needs* to be dynamite in order to explode, to scatter, and to destroy all the heavy anti-Dionysian confusions that suffocate his spirit and prohibit its growth into a fully Dionysian life. Careful attention to this antagonism between the Dionysian and the anti-Dionysian is the real heart of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Although for him both Apollo and Dionysus continue to name “art-creating tendencies” (Nietzsche, 1982b, 519), after *The Birth of Tragedy* he never again writes

about the Apollonian-Dionysian *agon* as a cosmic principle, but instead focuses on the much more central antagonism between the Dionysian and the anti-Dionysian, hoping to embolden not only his own spirit, but also the spirit of his readers for the pursuit of Dionysian wisdom through first overcoming the anti-Dionysian forces that have run amok in our modern understandings and assumptions (Steel, 1998, 257).

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche refers to these anti-Dionysian forces that undermine the cultivation of tragic wisdom as “rationalistic optimism”—essentially the assurance that seeking out a certain kind of “knowledge” is the best way to live. Such “optimism” entails understanding everything in terms of strict rationality, reducing what *is* to the calculable, the quantifiable, or computable on the one hand, as well as attempting to “know” our own irrational or psychic states (i.e., the “I” that is dissolved through Dionysian experience) as what is most real on the other. In short, this form of optimistic “knowing” proceeds by denying the reality of the ground of our being, with the result that these “anti-Dionysian” forces cultivate egoistic attitudes. They reinforce our false beliefs in the indissoluble nature of the self, and they prevent us from coming to recognize the unreality of our fluctuating psycho-mentality. Put another way, anti-Dionysian forces proffer a false knowledge of self, identifying all knowledge with appearances rather than with underlying Dionysian reality. They are furthermore distinguished by their desire for mastery over the phenomenal and the fluctuating, and by the supposition that such “knowledge alone makes men virtuous” (Nietzsche, 1956, 79). Anti-Dionysian forces proceed in the soul not by assisting us in “forgetting” this false self in a deeper awareness of the Oneness that dissolves all psycho-mentality into death, but rather by insulating us against developing any awareness of this ground through rationalistic claims about “knowledge.” The result of these anti-Dionysian forces as they work upon the soul is a lingering upon the self and a fascination with its appearance. The intent is not to forget about the dissolution of the individual into the ground and to delight in illusions which might bring about rejoicing in the ground of such an existence, but to excite, distract, and titillate the individual. It is to stimulate, to affect the emotions, and to dazzle—to

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draw attention to the individual and away from the ground by manipulating “novel stimulants” which shock the soul, now freezing it with “cold paradoxical ideas in place of Apollonian contemplation,” later consuming it with “fiery emotions put in place of Dionysian transports” (Nietzsche, 1956, 78-79). In this way, anti-Dionysian stimulants sever the individual from both gods. The Apollonian effects of forgetting and delight cannot be achieved, because the individual is not allowed to forget; rather, he is made to dwell pensively upon his own individuated, waking ideas. Similarly, he loses his awareness of the Dionysian ground by being turned away from it, and by being continuously occupied with his own emotional and rational reactions to appearances and stimuli.

Using Nietzsche to analyze modern education and to explore ways of remedying its failings does not have to assume that his definition of the human predicament is in every respect satisfactory. It may be true that Nietzsche is prone to rhetorical excess and exaggerated, sweeping claims. Nietzsche does, however, deal penetratingly with subjects that cannot be ignored by any more-than-superficial pedagogy.

The “Tragedy” of Anti-Dionysian Schooling Today

What does Nietzsche’s discussion of tragedy, the Dionysian, and the anti-Dionysian have to do with teaching at the high school? Students are to be educated, but their education requires intellectual commitment. Intellectual commitment that immerses itself in tragic experience requires that the soul descend into its depths, and that it act for a *dike* beyond all government-mandated *themis*. And yet our teaching in schools, for all its pretensions about “depth” and “engagement,” is largely anti-Dionysian in character. In recent times, school structures have become almost exclusively concerned with “accountability” to government-mandated standards of achievement. When “push comes to shove” in education, nothing seems to matter more than the measurement, testing, and development of our students’ rational capacities and skills towards these “outcomes.” However, this rational activity is *not* Apollonian in character, but anti-Dionysian; that is, it does *not* emerge in the form of a joyful, reconstituted *principium individuationis* from an underlying awareness of the Dionysian ground; rather, as

teachers, our constant “summative” measurements rank each individual student in an attempt to separate and distinguish rather than to conjoin. Instead of enabling our students to see through their own egoistic selves into the Dionysian depths, our hypertrophied emphases on their academic performance, on measurement, and on strengthening all their various skills according to government-mandated objectives only serves to exacerbate their egoistic concerns. Under the stresses of “high-stakes testing,” students become even less open to deep teaching that invites experience of the self’s dissolution in the Dionysian ground. The way that we “teach-to-the-test,” the way that we reward the successful demonstration of psycho-mental competencies and “knowledge” on the one hand and punish the failure to do so on the other only reinforces the sense among students that their own psycho-mental identity, with all of its diverse aptitudes, drives, and desires, is of the *greatest* significance—that there is, indeed, nothing else to education than honing this ego so that it may experience satiation in the achievement of all of its dreams and ambitions. And just as we use our “summative” assessments to distinguish and reinforce the supreme reality of the egoistic self, so too do we design our “formative” assessments and pedagogical practices to strengthen one psycho-mental aptitude, to redirect another, and generally to shape the individual ego-selves of students under our tutelage for their future successes—as if this were the real nature of a genuine or deep education.

Government-mandated objectives exacerbate students’ egoistic concerns.

But as Nietzsche pointed out a century and a half ago, such anti-Dionysian activity is not deep at all; it merely pretends to depth while skimming along the surface of things, offering “novel stimulations” that reinforce, nurture, and reorganize the drives and capacities of the egoistic self all the while paying no heed whatsoever to the Dionysian ground. The “depth” and “engagement” sought out by schools is not at all aimed at Dionysian insight into the ground, but rather at “deeper” critical-analytic proficiency, more intensive and rigorous demonstrations of academic competencies, and deeper commitment to the orthodoxy of “rationalistic optimism” that supposes ever-heightened “engagement” in “the knowledge economy” will bring success to every *individual* learner in our society; indeed, through anti-Dionysian education, each

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individual is meant to be prepared to pursue those goals, ambitions, and desires (i.e., the gratification of psycho-mental states) that are particular to his or her own individuated existence in successful competition over against all others in a globalized economy.

To better serve these “optimistic” rationalistic purposes, our schools have begun to *individualize* educational programming through ever-increasing technological controls and mastery. In the process, any hope of a burgeoning Dionysian insight into the Oneness that dissolves the false, egoistic self decreases as the technological mindset with its need to control and to shape everything ergonomically according to our own preferences increases. Thanks to the surging commitments of schools to invest in “education technology,” our ability to tailor the “delivery” of education according to each individual student’s psycho-mental identity seems to have increased dramatically. Indeed, the “personalized learning” that is espoused as the grail-like achievement of education technology only reinforces anti-Dionysian ego fixations through the infinite variety of “novel stimulants” made instantly available to students on the world wide web—stimulants that are euphemistically called “engagement.” By contrast, deep, immersive awareness of the Dionysian ground necessarily involves *not* the multiplication of novel stimulants but the weaning away from all psycho-mental affectation in order to focus awareness on what lies beneath once this false self has been dissolved. A genuinely Dionysian education, therefore, would *not* engage in stimulations that reinforce the psycho-mental “I”—that is, the “i” in the iPhone, the iMac, the iPad, and the iPod—but would demand the *loosening* of our attachments to ourselves and our own preferences. In short the “tragedy” of our schools, it seems, is that our students are not taught for Apollonian *en-joy-ment*; they are not encouraged to revel in their own dissolution into Oneness, but to fear and loathe it. The cold calculus of “rationalistic optimism” has replaced “Apollonian contemplation,” while “fiery emotions” have been put in place of “Dionysian transports.”

*Barbarism vs. the Dionysian Education
of a Pithecanthropus Erectus*

The problem of the educator is essentially the problem of the tragedian: one's audience is fickle, ill-attentive, drunken, and disordered; some spectators are full of raw spiritedness (*thymos*) without refinement; others are apathetic and empty of *thymos*. Being youthful, the adolescent is eager for the *feeling* of life—for strong, overpowering experiences of being alive. However, these sorts of “engaging” experiences are not common in the classroom. Moreover, adolescent indulgence in such experiences can have an adverse effect on education. Continually seeking out such heightened experiences and stimulation can numb the intellect to the more refined, to the subtle, and to the mediocre in which most of life is lived. One must therefore constantly be on the lookout for barbarism among the young, and education has its proper civilizing function in this regard. As my old Dharma Master once told me during an informal talk at the local monastery, and as Allan Bloom and others too have written (Bloom, 1987, 79-80; Edmundson, 2012), the greatest problem with youthful, hedonistic pursuits is that they provide the undeveloped, undisciplined *psyche* with a quick fix of heightened experiences that would otherwise only be derived through vigorous contemplation, through extensive mental and spiritual discipline. Bereft of cultivation and preparation, the *psyche* lacks the requisite interpretive tools and self-restraint; it becomes acclimatized and addicted to novel stimuli and strong experiences. Having acquired them easily and quickly through artificial or surrogate means, the soul remains forever uneducated through lack of vigour and from the exhaustion of its thymotic potential.

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High school students today crave ecstasy just as much as the orgiastic revellers of 2500 years ago. Unlike their ancient counterparts, however, in our part of the world at least they have not the sobriety of facing the truly extreme experiences of war and military campaigning; they have no experiential distaste for the suffering of extremes, but seek out their toothless imitations on the internet or in the rave, in “extreme” sports, in video games and other idle pursuits, as well as in narcotics, alcohol, fighting, or sex. This penchant for rapidly changing and intense experience—itsself not unlike the anti-Dionysian

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preoccupation with “novel stimuli”—is not well served by the demands in a classroom for order and attention, for debate, rigour, and questioning. Indeed, the important practice of “taking up” (*anairesis*) student queries and wondering questions in the classroom—inasmuch as it involves “dying” or leaving one’s ego behind and forgetting oneself in the search for truth—is simultaneously a “going down” (*katabasis*) wherein the one inquiring seeks a *Dike* beyond all *themis*. For all of its shortcomings, when it is properly, directed the modern-day classroom experience too aims at descent into the soul’s depths. After all, in the best classroom, the soul is invited to encounter and to test limits, to uncover ignorance in light of new-found truths, and, most of all, to suffer in the truth, to be pained sweetly by the beautiful, and to languish in the good. But in order to facilitate “engagement” in the pursuit of Dionysian insights, such a classroom must avoid the anti-Dionysian pitfalls of “optimistic rationalism” on the one hand, and the replacement of Dionysian transports with “fiery emotions” through novel stimulations on the other.

A Dionysian classroom would be neither a rave nor an opium den, just as the festival revellers of 2500 years ago were neither a drunken downtown bar crowd nor lechers at a brothel. Rosemarie Taylor-Perry has pointed out that it is common to misapprehend the ancient Dionysian “orgy” as a vulgar indulgence in every base form of pleasure and vice—what Nietzsche refers to in *The Birth of Tragedy* as putting “fiery emotions in place of Dionysian transports.” She thoughtfully notes that the word “orgy”—originally an innocent term for the ritual worship of Dionysus—was demonized and vilified early on by Christian polemicists; however, this Greek word is itself derived from the verb *orgazein*, which comes from the root *zoe* (in the form *zein*), meaning “eternal” or “indestructible life” (Taylor-Perry, 2003, 13-14). Walter Otto famously articulated a similar insight much earlier by pointing out that what sets Dionysus apart from all the other gods, “whose passions are cooled by transient moments of possession, is the fact that his love is ecstatic and binds him to the loved one forever.” It is this spirit of timeless or eternal love that dwells in the hearts of his female worshippers. As Otto writes, “if an occasional off-colour scene shows up among the countless representations of

the actions of Dionysus, the remaining scenes demonstrate in a most convincing manner that the maenads are characterized by a stateliness and a haughty aloofness"; he further contends that "their wildness has nothing to do with the lustful excitement found in the half-animal, half-human companions who whirl around them." In Otto's view, the "modesty" of the Dionysian women in ecstasy is explicitly emphasized in the face of the "malicious stories told about them" (Otto, 1965, 177). In short, ritual participation in Dionysian reality is *not* concerned with vulgar sensual gratification or expending the spirit in base pleasures and intensified stimulations; its intent is not to leave participants dazzled or preoccupied by the thoughts and feelings associated with the unexamined life (*bios*) of the individualized, fleeting, and mortal self. Rather, Dionysian worship draws participants towards a deeper love and desire for the eternal, indestructible, and immortalized life (*zoe*) that is only discovered through the death or dissolution of the mortal, ego-self.

As with the education afforded to the *poleis* of ancient Greece through Dionysian festivals, so too with any modern-day education aimed at descent into the depths. A genuinely Dionysian education would not provide students with quick-fix experiences; rather, it would cultivate within them a desire (*eros*) to learn and to strive for the lovable ground of all things. "Engagement" in the classroom should be akin to the passion of a lover for his beloved. Following the images of Plato's *Phaedrus*, the chariot soul of the lover must not approach its beloved greedily or irreverently. Instead of seeking out its beauty with motives of gratification, lust, or rape, the student's chariot-like *psyche* must approach its beloved (the beautiful) with reverence, and under the discipline of the intellect. The perfect image of the defect in the irreverent soul twenty years ago is MTV, where images swirl and wash over the eye offering a continually changing stream of sensory stimulation without recognizable content or semblance of order. Today a more apt metaphor would be the internet and the activity of "surfing the web." Surfaced images are not investigated for their truth content; they are simply projected for their effect as stimulants, to occupy and to distract the mind without purpose, ever-moving yet with no destination in mind other than

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continual titillation.

In a Professional Development seminar on literacy a number of years ago, we teachers were required to sit through a presentation by an esteemed educator and teacher-trainer who conceived of his role in the classroom as one of a “Veejay-DJ”; he likened himself to the MC at a house party—a master of manipulating visual images and sound for the gratification of the throng. He quite seriously asserted that teachers exist for the stimulation, pleasure, and “engagement” of their students, and that as Veejay-DJ’s, they might learn to harness dark student cravings and direct them into the service of the curriculum. In his presentation to us, he voiced no hesitation about the bad musical choices of his students. Evidently, he chose to leave the “integrity” of these songs unquestioned and beyond debate as the one who spins the discs that-must-be-spun. However, in adopting such a pedagogical stance, he and his student-“homies” can only remain virtually unaware of the uncultured penchant for sensory input in this music, and of the unwillingness to descend into the tragic that this habit of listening betrays.

Having once been an adolescent, and having myself been both a teacher and a student, I am intimately aware of the importance of music for the ordering and disordering of souls. In music—perhaps more easily than through any other medium—students may intimate the Dionysian. One only need listen to Charles Mingus’s “Pithecanthropus Erectus” or Jimi Hendrix’s “Machine Gun” to feel the force of the ecstatic, to feel the music speaking to our own primordial depths, exposing “the forbidden,” and threatening to subvert or disrupt the everyday order of society. Music creates an awareness of tensions in the soul; that is, in music we feel our desire awakening to know the heights and depths of things. A student may listen, for instance, to Robert Johnson’s “Hellhounds on My Trail,” or Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Freebird,” in order to test the boundaries of ordinary experience; he or she may first descend into a realm of darkness and death with Johnson, and next, following the guitar melodies of Lynyrd Skynyrd, ascend heavenward into a realm of light as a bird released from its bonds. Music is a powerful educational force due to its ability to lead the soul into altered states. The Greeks understood this better than modern-

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day academics and educators; for them, all education (*paideia*) was a matter of either gymnastic or *music*.

Returning to the preamble of this narrative inquiry, Bruce Springsteen is correct when he sings, “we learned more from a three-minute record than we ever learned in school.” Most keen, thymotic youths that I have taught at the high school understand the truth of Springsteen’s lyrics; this is, after all, the reason why they “bust out of class” to get away from those “fools”—the teachers. School does not, in their view, attend to the deep pounding of their hearts—that “neighbourhood drummer sound”; nor does school align with their dreams—or at least those dreams that do not receive official parental or societal sanction involving the rationally-optimistic acquisition of wealth and prestige, or what might loosely be referred to as “success.” The poetic genius of Springsteen in this song should not be underestimated. The Dionysiac element of music is apparent not only in the descent within the heart, at the centre of the human being, but also in the descent into one’s dreams during sleep—a state that challenges the everyday order of fools and that borderlines on death, or dreamless sleep.

It is understandable that schools fear participation in the Dionysian. They associate it with barbarism and destructiveness; but they fail to see how pursuits aligned with Dionysus as the “Twice Born” god—although such pursuits *do* involve a kind of death—bring about a subsequent resurrection or transformation of the self through deeper understanding. Like a modern-day Pentheus, they mistake a frenzied Dionysian desire for rebirth into the immortal life of *zoe* through the dissolution of the mortal self (*bios*) for mindless vice, lawless barbarism, and rebellion against all social order. And indeed, inasmuch as adolescent student *eros* is *not* directed towards participation in the god’s true nature as “Twice Born,” schools are *right* to fear it; the unfettered desire for more and the boundless possibility of youth *is* a hurricane force in schools. It *is* dangerous and destructive. If the school can be likened to a ship perhaps as Plato likened society to a ship in his *Republic* (1989, 488a-489c), then let the teacher be its captain, and the *thymos* of the students a great storm—a Nor’easter. Following this metaphor, the teacher must navigate the storm’s torrent, harnessing some portion of its savagery, all the while being

careful not to catch too much rage in his sails; else wise, the brutal force of the storm will tear the sails and snap the ship's masthead. The able-bodied teacher will then be a mockery as a captain, commanding a dead, helpless boat tossed chaotically in a torrential storm. He, like the other casualties of teaching since time immemorial, will join the ranks of that great ship of "fools" with which Springsteen and most high school students are only all too familiar. In short, the *Dionysian* teacher must know how to channel and re-direct the *thymos* of his or her students not simply towards curricular "outcomes" or government-mandated *themis*. Rather, such a teacher must be a competent leader-of-souls (*psychopompos*) downward and inward towards that centre—the storm's "eye"—where a vision might be had of that *Dike* beyond *themis* that would enable all who engage in such "seeing" (*theoria*) to rejoice in their existence.

Dionysian Madness and Dancing Puppets vs. Sophist-icated Education

Who among us can remember a single lesson from high school mathematics, science, or history that left a real change or lasting impression? How *deep* have our own educations been? And how does a teacher encourage students to descend? How can a teacher's classroom be transformed such that thirteen years of public education can measure up to the effects of a three-minute record? This problem cannot be solved by the Veejay-DJ-teacher—by the manipulator of the great classroom beast. Indeed, my experiences as a teacher point to the truth of Plato's discussion of the sophist (literally, "wise man" or *sophos*) in his *Republic*, and to the falsehood spoken by the esteemed educator in our PD sessions. In discussion with some young students—Plato's two brothers—Socrates likens the sophist's manner of addressing his audience to that of one taming a great and savage beast (1989, 493ae). The sophist, in this regard, differs little from the esteemed educator—"the Veejay-DJ." Like the Veejay-DJ, the sophist learns the manners of the beast through observation and interaction; he knows its desires and its fears, and he knows how to manipulate the beast effectively by speaking with it. He encourages the beast by giving it what it wants, and he discourages it by threatening it with what it fears. Through effective manipulation, he trains

the beast to do his bidding; he tames it, socializes it, and commands its respect. He is, as (I hope!) grade 10 students learn in my English class, much akin to Shakespeare's Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar*.

A teacher of this sort, like the sophist, knows the desires of his students and can manipulate them to perform their duties as students. However, students taught by "wise-guys" remain beasts in that their higher faculty of reason (*logos*) is not developed except in relation to the fulfilment of their appetites; the force and authority of their appetites is never questioned or evaluated. Noetic inquiry (*noeisis*) into their desires, their fears, and their corresponding objects is never broached. There is no Dionysian descent into the heart or the dream world outlying death. The boundaries of "fools" are left undisturbed and unchallenged. Teaching, as the sophists' art (*techne*), is, at most, the cultivation of low-grade anti-Dionysian rationality in the form of calculation (*logismos*) about the attainment of relativistic ends. Today, we commonly rank schools and the teachers in them by how well their students meet these socially esteemed outcomes on their standardized tests. Improving such scores has become the primary goal of education.

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Plato's Athenian Stranger points out in the *Laws* that every young thing leaps and cries chaotically (1989, 672c), somewhat mirroring David Lee Roth's refrain on Van Halen's record, 1984: "Jump! Go ahead and jump!" Every young thing is full of spirit and life, and all want to dance. In mythical terms, human beings are playthings of the god (*theos*); they are divine puppets meant to please the god by dancing beautifully (1989, 644d). However, in order that they might be pleasing to the god, they must not simply leap savagely, but learn grace, timing, and form through discipline and education. Their desires must be harnessed and directed towards beautiful ends and beautiful pursuits. The erotic leaps of the puppet are natural, but its *eros* or desire for goodness, truth, and beauty must be encouraged through the cultivation of attentiveness to the tugs of the Divine Puppeteer upon its strings. Following Plato's image, the string to which the marionette must respond in order to dance divinely is the golden chord of reason (1989, 644e). As we have already seen, our responsiveness to the upward pull of the god (*anairesis*) is simultaneously a descent

(*katabasis*); that is, through dying to the pulls of other strings and to the strains of gravity exerted by our mortal nature (*bios*), we become animated and alive to the pulls of the transcendent “primal architect”; we begin to participate joyfully in immortal life (*zoe*) through a reconstituted *principium individuationis* arising from an underlying awareness of the Dionysian ground.

But how does a teacher encourage his students to dance divinely? How might high school students be encouraged to listen for this divine music and to respond to its rhythms? One method is to investigate these rhythms through dialectical inquiry—through the give and take of discussions in the classroom. In dialectical inquiry, any statement or opinion (*doxos*) of a student or a teacher might be “taken up” (*anairrein*) for its truth (*aletheia*), such that both student and teacher might ascend what is commonly referred to as Plato’s “ladder of Love” (Plato, 1989, *Symposium* 209e-210e). Another, less well-understood method of learning to dance divinely is for the soul to descend (*katabasis*) into its depths. That great gnomic sage and shaman Heraclitus understood that “the way up and the way down are one and the same” (Robinson, 1933, 94; DK 22 B 60). Indeed, many students who are not willing to engage in dialectical ascent towards the Beautiful may be willing to seek out the Good through Dionysian descent into the depths of the *psyche*.

This insight is not strictly a Platonic, Nietzschean, or Heraclitean one; it is readily available to poets and musicians as well. Springsteen, like a shaman or sage of old, knows that the Good may be encountered anywhere along the *axis mundi*—that where one shaman may ascend a rope to heaven, another might descend into the land of the dead through a hole in the earth. Where the high school teacher remains sane, his feet firmly rooted in the body of accepted knowledge or curriculum “orthodoxy” (*orthodoxos*, literally: “correct opinion” as opposed to knowledge or *episteme*), the madness of the philosopher, the poet-musician, and the shaman impels them beyond orthodoxy. The tension in the soul of the philosopher-poet is greatest, and the amplitude of soul exhibited in the philosopher’s straining for the heights and the depths of being surpasses the mediocre, sane world of the “wise-guy” pedagogue. Many students sense this difference and, burning with the erotic mad-

ness of the god, they crave some initiation into the extremes, into psychic tension—into both the heights and the depths of their being.

What many high school students intuitively seek in school is *not* sanity but madness (*mania*). In his *Phaedrus*, Plato had Socrates speak of two forms of madness, one being “human” and the other being “divine.” Human madness is a sickness. Students who seek out the good, the true, or the beautiful do so imperfectly, with an imperfect understanding of what is good for them, what is true, or what is beautiful. They may forsake a higher manifestation of the beautiful for a lower one, preferring beautiful bodies to beautiful souls, for instance. Or they may hold to their own ignorance as though it were a greater good than the pursuit of understanding.

The problems of human madness are endemic at high school. The human madness about which Plato writes is most common among students who refuse to open themselves to the tugs of the god. Human madness is not quite the same as sanity, since sanity is a kind of rootedness in orthodoxy, of which the “fool”-teacher is a prime example. Students who are mad in a human way are often most notorious in their rejection of such orthodoxy. Rather, their madness is a kind of rebellion against not simply the orthodoxy of social order, but against all order that is not *their* order. Generally, they seem to believe that all order is socially or personally constructed—that there is, indeed, no “universe,” nothing universal, and certainly no “good order” or *cosmos* in which all things participate and according to which all our various articulations of order might be measured. Ironically, the root of this rejection of *cosmos* and the source of what causes them to dismiss all order as “constructed” or (dare I say!) as a *lie*, very often has taken hold in them because they have been *socialized* to think precisely in this fashion! Such students find themselves in a terrible place of suffering because they are existentially cut off from any awareness of their kinship with the cosmic order that enfolds them; throughout their years of schooling they have been acclimatized to cease wondering at the world around them and within them; they have not been taught or encouraged to seek out what *is*; however, this activity of seeking-to-know (*zetesis*) is precisely where wonder (*thauma*) resides and erupts for us.

Very often, students who believe there is nothing universal and no cosmic order have been socialized to think that way.

Indeed, the ancient Greeks write that it is only when we engage in this activity of attempting to see-what-is (*theoria*) that we are filled with wonder and awe at the order of the *cosmos*. Plato writes that wonder is the beginning of all philosophy; it is also the spiritual centre, the “belly-button,” or *omphalos* for all the ascents and descents craved by students who intimate a deep learning in their “three-minute records.”

That anything exists, rather than nothing, was held, since time immemorial, to be an indication of its goodness.

Etymologically, the word “universe” means “to turn around one axis” (*uni* and *verso* in Latin). The order of the universe arises from its movement in relation to this world axis (*axis mundi*), which is variously called “God,” the “mystical Oneness,” or the “ground of being.” The fact that anything exists rather than nothing was, since time immemorial, held to be an indication of its goodness since God, being good, would not create anything that was not good. This awareness of the order of being was articulated similarly by the pagan philosophers and through myth, in which the universe was best understood as a *cosmos*, or “good order.” The student who rebels against all order is mad in the sense that his or her rebellion is a kind of nihilistic negation of the universal or the cosmic—of order *per se*. The madness of asserting that there is no cosmic order is revealed in the contradiction of the act of making such an assertion; as Albert Camus points out in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, when an assertion is made, some form of order is presumed. To say that there is no order is simultaneously to contradict oneself, since order is immediately invoked in the assertion. In the words of the poet Dennis Lee, “A world that denies the gods, the gods make mad” (Lee, 1979, 53). This is the human madness of nihilism that overflows at high schools.

Human madness is a difficult and deadly thing. A student deeply infected with human madness is not easily swayed from his or her rebellion since any attempt at reasoning involves some admission of order. On the one hand, I have yet to meet a truly nihilistic high school student, since all students seem to accept the reality of their passions as a foundation for order. On the other hand, when the only reality acknowledged by students is the reality of their urges, passions, rage, or rebellion, any form of speech that does not feed the fire of such perceived goods is heaped with scorn and deemed utterly worthless. Just as Socrates was made subject to the scorn and

eventual capital accusations of citizens unwilling to examine their own predilections and claims to knowledge, so too will any teacher who admonishes students and plays the gadfly to their sloth and revolt also meet with a bad end. There is a very real sense in which many students are not able to be educated because of this predilection for revolt; teachers will always meet with failure in some instances. This fact accounts for much of the pain we feel as teachers who care deeply about our students; but although our efforts might be all for nought, we must never stop trying to cure them of this malady.

Concluding Remarks and Dionysian Hopes

“Believe with me in this Dionysiac
life and in the rebirth of tragedy!”
—Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1956, 124)

For those students who are not so deeply infected with human madness, and in whom the tug of the god can still be felt, the desire to ascend and descend may still thrive. It is in these individuals that the philosopher-poet might find worthy disciples—“students” in the ancient sense (Latin, *discipuli*). It is with such students that one can reason, and with whom one sometimes finds willing companions for inquiry and dialectical investigation. Such students, although often unwilling to ascend, may yet be willing to descend into the depths of their soul through the influence of a Muse—through music, art, and literature, for instance. Any student, in short, open “to wonder” (*thaumazein*) might yet philosophize. Any student still willing to remain open to the rhythms of the *cosmos*—whether by music, gymnastic, or geometry—might still be led upward or downward to recognize the great heights and depths of his or her own being through the experience of its tensions.

If these experiences of tension (*tasis*) are not spurned as unnecessary suffering by the *discipulus*, such a student may yet seek greater height, greater depth, greater tension, and consequently greater understanding. Not only Plato, but Nietzsche too, understood that it is primarily an act of courage and strength that is demanded of every one who would not live

a shrivelled, flattened existence as a “last man,” or as Springsteen’s “fool.” Each of us—both teachers and students—must be willing to suffer this tension of soul—and not simply to suffer it, but in fact seek to *increase* it and the suffering produced by it. Returning to the images of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the soul that sprouts wings must endure tremendous pain in order to love the Beautiful. Wisdom, for the Greeks, was a goddess (*Sophia*). As Nietzsche points out, “Wisdom always loves the warrior” (1982a, 153). She always rewards the one willing to suffer and to battle for her charms. It is my intuition that a great many students are yet leaping and longing to dance with the goddess. Good teachers must develop a keen eye for different ways to entice these students to ascend or to descend out of the “fool’s” existence into the broad-souled existence of the poet-musician, the philosopher, and the tragedian.

Because this argument has employed a largely Greek frame of reference, the emphasis has tended to be on matters intellectual and aesthetical rather than moral. The importance of moral character is in some ways recognized by the Greeks, but its centrality comes more into focus elsewhere. Yet the lessons taught by Nietzsche that have here been used to discuss education can be fruitfully applied also to ethics.

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