MODULO INTERDISCIPLINARE CLIL
NIETZSCHE. APOLLONIAN AND DIONYSIAN
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LIFE
- Nietzsche was born in Röcken in 1844
- In 1869 he became professor of philology in Basel
- He makes friends with Wagner
- 1872 publishes *The Birth of Tragedy*
- *Human, All Too Human* marks the departure from Wagner and Schopenhauer
- His health deteriorates, he gives up teaching, starts travelling, but his financial conditions make him live in reduced circumstances
- In 1882 *The Gay Science* was published. In the same year Nietzsche meets Lou Salomé who however prefers Paul Rée to him
- In 1883-4 he published *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
- He settles in Turin where the first signs of mental imbalance appear
- He died in Weimar in 1900

WORKS
- *The Birth of Tragedy*
- *Untimely Meditations*
- *Human, All Too Human*
- *The Gay Science*
- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
- *Beyond Good and Evil*
- *On the Genealogy of Morality*

THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY
Apollonian spirit: (Apollo) balance, harmony, rationality; it manifests itself mainly in the visual and fine arts. The Apollonian disguises the tragic foundation of existence by reproducing the illusion of an acceptable, rationally ordered life. Apollonian is the symbol of humanity that expresses itself in balanced and clear figures.
Dionysian spirit: (Dionysus) expresses enthusiasm, exaltation; it manifests itself above all through music and tragedy. The Dionysian is the revelation of the blind cosmic Will, a chaotic and meaningless abyss; the Dionysian expresses the tragic foundations of existence. Dionysus is the symbol of humanity that "say yes to life"
The Dionysian and the Apollonian are "miraculously" paired only in pre-Socratic Greece, in the Attic tragedy. However, with Socrates and Euripides the Apollonian takes the advantages: with the Socratic presumption to understand and dominate life with reason the true decline of humanity began.

UNTIMELY MEDITATIONS
Nietzsche identifies three point of view on history:
Monumental history, which seeks models and masters for action in the past
Antiquarian history looks at the past with fidelity and love, but risks paralyzing the action
Critical historiography, looks at the past like a judge and discards the elements that constitute an obstacle for the future.

THE "ENLIGHTENMENT" PERIOD

"*Human, all too human*" opens the second phase of Nietzsche's thought. In this phase Nietzsche moves away from the previous models (Schopenhauer and Wagner). Schopenhauer and Wagner, at first time considered by Nietzsche the architects of the rebirth of the Dionysian, now are considered exponents of romantic pessimism, the pessimism of the defeatist, of the loser and the defeated. Nietzsche's pessimism, on the other hand, is a tragic pessimism: it is the pessimism of whose who accept life, even though they know it is painful tragedy.

"THE GAY SCIENCE" AND THE GREAT ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DEATH OF GOD

The death of God represents the end of "thousand – year- hold lies", the end of false certainties and metaphysics. The death of God frees humanity from the chains of supernatural, but leaves man without any reference point. The consequence is nihilism: there are no absolute values, there is no providence: only the abyss of nothingness remains.

THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

Zarathustra is the prophet who announces the Superman/Overman. The Superman/Overman loves life even though he knows it is tragic. He accepts the Fate (*Amor Fati*) and the eternal return (the conception of a world without beginning or end in which things happen repeatedly in the same way).

ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALITY

God is dead and morality has no absolute metaphysical foundation. Nietzsche uses the critical genealogical method to reveal the human origin of values. Morals are a tool to dominate others: Nietzsche distinguishes a morality of masters and a morality of slaves. Master morality represents the affirmation of strength, health and boldness. Slave morality expresses the resentment against strong people, slave morality is a morality of renunciation, of chastity, of piety, of humility.

01. Tuning in, L1-L2

1 Introduction

STEP 1

During this teaching unit, our mentors, Albert the Wise and Gregory the Curious will dialogue on the concepts of Dionysian and Apollonian.

- What **do** you **know** about the topic?
- What **would** you like to know about the topic?
- What do you think the words "Dionysian" and "Apollonian" **mean**?
- What do you **think** about teh topic?
- What would you like **to discover** and **why**?

Testing previous knowledge and opinions

Improving learning motivation

Work alone and work in groups

Activity 1

▸ **Try to answer the questions written above, then share your answers with the class and the teacher.**

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

▸ **Afterwards, write all your answers on a poster and post up it on the wall. At the end of the teaching unit you can check to see if you have found the answers to your questions and compare the starting point with the point of arrival.**

02. Finding out, L1-L2

4 Apollonian and Dionysian

track 20

Come back to the dialogue

Albert answers the first two Gregory's questions.



Albert

"I am glad you enjoyed last night but I hope you're not too tired and that you can follow good speech.



▲ *Apollo del Belvedere*; the statue shows the harmonious proportions of the various parts of the body and the elegance of posture that, however, suggests the physical exertion of the hunt.

In the spirit and **Greek culture** there are two elements that are defined as "Dionysian" and "Apollonian". They are rival but they also have a close and constant relationship.

Apollonian literally means of perfect grace, harmonious, measured, ordered, or balanced in character.

The word Apollonian comes from the name of the greek god **Apollo**. Apollo was the god of harmony, inspirator of sculpture and architecture, because in those arts **proportion** and **beauty** were identified as formal balance between parts that made things pleasant. He was the god of all the **arts**, especially poetry, and was described as **the perfect archer**. In late antiquity the Greek god is identified as **driver of the chariot of the Sun** that keeps the balance between day and night.

The Apollonian spirit is the rational component of human beings acting with self-control and moderation, seeking serenity and harmony, rejecting all instinctual aspects and then repressing pleasures, vitality and naturalness.

On the contrary, **the Dionysian spirit is the part that exalts life, and inspires human beings to act with enthusiasm, vitality, even drunkenness and orgies. It is the liberation of the instincts and impulses, and this also has destructive manifestations typical of loss of control.**

▶



The word comes from the name of the greek god Dionysus that in mythology was the personification of mystical delirium and of intoxication, especially that generated by the consumption of wine. The archaic god was the patron of vegetation and of the lifeblood that flows into it; he was associated particularly with the grapevine and ivy, and so whit wine and psychotropic substances. He was celebrated in orgiastic rites with wild dancing and bloody sacrifices of animals, that broke down conventions and social and moral impositions, reconciling the human being with nature.

◂ The statue shows the lascivious and spontaneous nature of Dyonisus, devoted to the pleasures of life. In his hand he has a glass of wine and his posture is very relaxed, almost disordered, very natural.

5 The balance of tragedy

CD AUDIO track 21

There was an author who talked about both of these aspects: Nietzsche, philosopher of the nineteenth century but representative of the twentieth century, to the point that he called himself "a premature son of the century impending". **Nietzsche argues that the Apollonian and Dionysian are simultaneously present in human beings but, despite the fact that they are rival spirits, they find a balance in Greek tragedy**. The **plot** represents the rational, the Apollonian, while the **music** is the Dionysian element and vital.

An example of **Attic tragedy** in which the Dionysian and Apollonian are perfectly balanced is ***"Oedipus the King"***, written by **Sophocles**. It tells the story of Oedipus, a king with charisma and loved, who in the course of a single day comes to know the horrible truth about his past: he unknowingly killed his real father; then he married and fathered children with his mother. Shocked by these revelations, he blinds himself and flees into exile.

Oedipus, revered as the best of men, capable of large enterprises, follows a fate that led him to discover who he is; with this discovery he falls into despair and into chaos, reaching the awareness of being a pawn in the hands of fate. The **rational side of the plot** emerges clearly both in the well-defined character of the protagonist, and by the events that unfold from a beginning through a development to a finale, following a trend in which the situations are reversed one by one.

The **chorus**, which consists of fifteen actors in Sophocles' tragedies, has the task of interacting with the protagonist, of telling his story, of making think the audience about some aspects. In conclusion he serves to increase the **emotional aspect**. This was possible through the use of a variety of meters, and through the acting which was often sung and accompanied by **music** and **dance**.

▶

> And here, then, that **Apollonian and Dionysian materialize in the Attic tragedy**: the rational part, in a story well thought out and described, and the emotional side pointed out by the music, by the choir and by the dances that increase the tension in the viewer making him think about the state of the character, which finally, is the condition of all men.

Focusing on
Searching
Work in groups

Activity 2

▶ **Try to answer the following questions, based on Albert's explanation.**

1 How can you define the Apollonian spirit?

.....

2 How can you define the Dionysian spirit?

.....

3 Finally, how can the two models of being stay in balance in Greek tragedy?

.....

4 What is the role of the chorus and of music in Greek tragedy?

.....

.....

5 Why is "*Oedipus the King*" a tragedy in which there is a balance between the Apollonian and Dionysian?

.....

.....

Increasing metacognition
Work in pairs

Activity 3

▶ **Can you answer any key-questions? If yes, write down which ones and the answers, then share with the class and the teacher.**

.....

.....

.....

▸ Now, write down the key-questions that you haven't answered yet.

.....

.....

.....

WELL DONE, YOU'VE JUST ACHIEVED YOUR FIRST TWO GOALS!

Developing iconic language

Moving from iconic language to verbal one (transcoding)

Work in pairs

Activity 4

▸ Try to describe these images using informations given by Albert about the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Focus on **body posture**, **facial expression**, **body movement**, and then conclude whether each image is representative of the Dionysian spirit or the Apollonian one. Complete the sentences.



The body is .....

The facial expression is .....

The body movement is .....

At the end I can conclude that this sculpture is .....

.....

.....

.....

The body is .....

The facial expression is .....

The body movement is .....

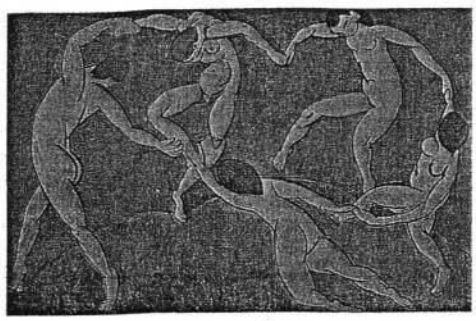
At the end I can conclude that this sculpture is .....

.....

.....

.....





▲ Henri Matisse, *La danse*, 1909, oil on canvas, 260 x 391 cm. (Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum). © Succession H. Matisse, by SIAE 2015.

The bodies are .....

The facial expressions seem .....

The bodies' movements are .....

At the end I can conclude that this picture is .....

.....

.....

.....

6 Nietzsche's biography and bibliography

Come back to the dialogue

track 22



Gregory

"Tell me more about Nietzsche. He seems a strange thinker. Who is he?"



Albert

"You'll soon be satisfied!

Well, Nietzsche studied at the University of Bonn orienting his courses to theology and philology. He then continued at the University of Leipzig – his hometown – with studies in classical philology. In addition to his studies, his training was influenced by the reading of the writings of Schopenhauer (for his approaches to philosophy) and by his friendship with the composer Richard Wagner.

Beginning in 1869 he taught at the University of Basel, where he composed the essay ***"The Birth of Tragedy"*** (1872). This is the book in which he expresses his theories on the balance between the **Apollonian and Dionysian in Greek tragedy**.

In the following years he wrote the four "*Untimely Meditations*", in one of which he expresses his **conception of history** which he divides into three different types: critical historiography, antiquarian and monumental. They are all valid as long as they are used in the correct manner. In these pieces it is also possible to read his praise for Wagner and Schopenhauer.



▲ Friedrich Nietzsche.

In 1878 he started what has been called the Age of Enlightenment of Nietzsche with the publication of "*Human, All Too Human*". In it Nietzsche **distanced** himself **from his old masters**, especially Wagner, and gave **priority to science**. He had second thoughts about previous themes, such as tragedy in philosophy,

▶

art and truth, the exemplary human being, and secular values after having subjected them to the **test of reason**.

Nietzsche began to be plagued by health problems, and he left teaching.

Between 1883 and 1885 he wrote his most famous work, *"Thus Spoke Zarathustra"*, with which he founded a **new philosophy**. In his later writings (*"Beyond Good and Evil"*, 1886; *"Genealogy of Morals"*, 1887) his **critique of moral values** becomes systematic. In 1889, after a fit of madness, he fell ill and did not again recover his senses. He dies in Vienna in 1900.

Comprehension questions

Work in groups

Activity 5

▸ **Answer the following comprehension questions. At the end, share and verify the answers with the class and teacher.**

1 What did Nietzsche study?

.....

2 Which book explains the Apollonian and Dionysian spirits?

.....

3 What did Nietzsche think about tragedy?

.....

4 Which book explains Nietzsche's conception of history?

.....

5 How did Nietzsche's thinking change after his essay *"Human, All Too Human"*?

.....

.....

7 Socrates morality

CD - AUDIO track 23

Come back to the dialogue

Read Gregory's reflections and requests, and Albert's answer.



Gregory

Thank you Albert! Now I know about the life and works of Nietzsche and understand the Apollonian and the Dionysian. But... Today, we are far from the age of Greek tragedy, so: is the balance between the two types of spirits still possible? Please, explain me this!



Albert

Mmh, let me think: **can the two models, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, still be reconcilable**?
I'll answer you with Nietzsche's reflections. He thinks that:

- **first, for a long time the Apollonian and Dionysian spirits did not stay in balance**;
- **second, a solution is still possible**.

Now, I'm going to tell you why we lost that wonderful balance a long time ago.
The **first guilty** party of the imbalance between the Apollonian and Dionysian was Socrates, because of the **birth of morality**. According to Nietzsche, Socrates is guilty of having exaggerated the rational interpretation of the world, in this way eliminating the Dionysian.
In tragedy, this is realized in Euripides. **The tragedy of Euripides lost the Dionysian element** in favor of a realistic and rational performance. The play introduced the common man and his daily life; rationality prevails in the narrative elements of cause-and-effect and the logical thread.
Behind this decline, Nietzsche sees the figure of **Socrates**, the philosopher obsessed with finding **logical definitions** and convinced of the **identity between happiness and moral virtue**, a connection that makes one lose all contact with the Dionysian dimension (chaotic, irrational, tragic) of the human being.
In Western culture the same kind of morality is then perpetuated and confirmed by **Christianity**. According to Nietzsche, Socrates's morality was also reinforced by the philosophies directed at a deification of history, like that of **Hegel**. And finally, in modern times, even in the new sciences and particularly in **Positivism**.



Gregory

I can't understand Nietzsche's point of view! I always thought that morality is essential **to living happily in society**. Why doesn't Nietzsche think so?



Albert

Pay attention. We're talking about Socrates's morality...

Developing hypothetical-deductive thinking

Work in pairs

Activity 6

▶ **Help Gregory answer his own question. Then, share your answer with the class and read Albert's answer.**

▶ Fill in the gap with the right words: **Socrates morality / moral virtue / rationality / rationality.**

Premises

1 In Socrates, **happiness** < (**derives from**) ..... = (that is only) .....

Come back to the dialogue

track 24



Gregory

Now I understand why Socrates's morality is rejected by Nietzsche, but why Christian morality too?



Albert

In the passage just read, Nietzsche speaks of **Christian morality** because, as I mentioned before, Christianity has helped to perpetuate and strengthen the killing of the natural balance of man, a process that started with Socrates.

Also Christian morality is based on the **negation of life**. It suppresses true human nature and imposes models that, in fact, are against nature. Christianity is a religion that keeps people in a **sense of guilt** for many actions that, on the contrary, according to Nietzsche, are expressions of life. **By suppressing sexuality** and **prohibiting the attachment to worldly reality**, Christianity obliges man **to hope to satisfy his desires in another world** and prevents him from living in this. The result is the total **domestication of man**, carried out by the figure of the priest, against which Nietzsche fights.

With the Greeks and Romans, the search for truth had brought great results. Christianity, however, denied this search and imposed **obedience to the theological virtues, killing** instincts and balance between rationality and instincts.

The suppression of the vital spirit of the human being has achieved in the history of Christianity some excesses, creating real **religious fanaticisms**.

Consider, for example, the hermits who used to mortify themselves with various practices. There were those who were sentenced to live on their feet, and the Stylites, who spent their lives on the top of a column. Another special form of mortification was voluntary imprisonment for which many faithful literally locked themselves in a cell, and lived on charity. These forms of mortification of the flesh were a way to silence the pulse of a body made of instincts and they were a form of atonement for the sins that the instinctual part of the human being desires. Even the ascetics sought devaluation of the body, achieved through sacrifices and mortifications of the flesh, in order to achieve a higher spirituality.

The identification of the **seven deadly sins** intended to eliminate certain instincts which are natural in the human being, but which Christian morality considers sins just because they are not directed toward God.



Gregory

I remember that you told me that he talks about deification of history in Hegel, which is another reason for losing of balance between the Apollinean and the Dyonisian. Please explain this part of Nietzsche's point of view to me.

Come back to the dialogue

track 26



Gregory

You have spoken of Positivism...



Albert

Yes. The thinking of Nietzsche is influenced by a positivist background. He proposes an **evolutionary interpretation of morality** that is a tool of adaptation for self-preservation.

However, there is a conflict between rationality and life. **Positivism** is placed in the sphere of rationality and Nietzsche in the sphere of life. For him, reason is important but it must be always reconciled with the vital impulse.

Nietzsche proposes a **people-oriented morality** as opposed to traditional and anti-vital morality: **the soul is non-existent, man is composed of a body, and this body is the only way in which man exists in the world.**

Nietzsche defines positivism "disease of the mind": those who rely on science seek the security and certainty of the facts observed in front of the chaos of the world that in reality is not objective, but subjective and can be interpreted only on the basis of the circumstances and the feeling of the individual.

So now the **critique** is no longer just against morality but also **against knowledge.**

For Nietzsche, **science** does not produce a knowledge of the world but an **interpretation** of it, since it's a set of values. Therefore he applies his radical critique also to knowledge.

Science doesn't present something true but **something in which you want to believe. The certainties of Positivism are not the truth but an adaptation to the environment**; they are the interpretation of the world which proved to be more effective, and are something created by rationality.

Science considers the world a place governed by perfect mathematical principles, which has all the comforting and artificial characteristics of morality, metaphysics and religion. All this has affected the human being who creates his knowledge in response to physical, psychological and social needs.

But the human being is not made only of rationality. The human being is not only Apollonian, a part of him is also Dionysian. **The interpretation of the world through a mathematical point of view**, objective, such as science claims to be **suppresses the subjective and vital point of view of man** as such, with his feeling and the circumstances of the moment. Nietzsche criticized Positivism and the new science for having renewed one point of view about the world, eliminating old values and pushing ahead to occupy the space left behind, not leaving room for anything else. Once again, the rational part takes precedence over the Dionysian.