

Appearance, freedom and possible worlds: A Lesson from Nietzsche

George Bondor
“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi

Abstract

The present text is an analysis of the concept of appearance in Nietzsche's work. The first part represents a comparison between the respective approaches of this concept in his early writing *The Birth of Tragedy* and his more mature work *Twilight of the Idols*, highlighting the Socratic illusion of reason. Having assumed the distinction between good appearances (masks) and bad ones (Vattimo), an affirmation or, respectively, a denial of life, the concept of appearance is consequently placed in relationship to the issue of perspectivism. In this context, what falls under scrutiny is the interconnectedness between appearance, on the one hand, and the seemingly conflictual couple order-liberty, on the other. In the last part, the concept of appearance is compared with the concept of fiction, the relation between appearance and liberty being deeply analysed through concepts such as “world” and “possible worlds”.

Keywords: Nietzsche, appearance, freedom, possible worlds, meaning of life, perspectivism

1. Socratic illusions of reason: Good masks and bad masks

Dedicated to Richard Wagner, equally admired initially and hated eventually by Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* ignited a scandal in the academic world of classical philologists through entirely novel interpretations of Greek tragedy. Nietzsche understands it as the fight between two instincts: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The former is the instinct of individuation, of joy, of wisdom, of the redemption through appearances. On the contrary, the latter defines inebriation, the ecstasy to which man falls prey when he renounces his

individuation, leaving aside his own self and forgetting himself through singing and dancing. Overtaken by ecstasy and magic, a man dominated by the Dionysian forces becomes “member of a higher community.”

The Apollonian is the instinct of keeping good measure, that determines the individual to remain within his bounds, within the limits of his own individuality, and, simultaneously, to come to know himself (Nietzsche 1999 a, § 4). To withstand life’s suffering, the Apollonian instinct designs a liberating vision for the Greek, that facilitates finding the peace by means of contemplation. For this purpose, he has the entire Homeric world of Olympian gods at his disposal, as well as a thirst for beauty, giving rise to Doric art. However, Nietzsche finds the health brought by the Apollonian instinct rather chimerical, merely allowing the individual to contemplate life from the outside, while running by implacably – thus hiding the true reality. If the predominantly Apollonian man is an artist, the pulsating Dionysian instinct transforms him into a genuine work of art, able to envision entire worlds (Nietzsche 1999 a, § 1). The latter allows the whole artistic power of nature to work within himself, through wholesome identification with it, with world’s suffering and with the primordial One. In Nietzsche’s view, this is the authentic aesthetic justification of the world (Nietzsche 1999 a, § 5), not the Apollonian one. After all, Greek tragedy solely had as a subject Dionysos’ torment, all the tragic characters being nothing more than his own masks, metaphors for the pain caused by the loss of the originary totality and the self-imposed limits drawn by individuation.

Everything changes with Euripides, who attempts to use the Apollonian elements as the exclusive foundation for tragedy. His failure leads, according to Nietzsche, to an “aesthetic Socratism”, guided by the principle: “In order to be beautiful, everything must be rational” (Nietzsche 1999 a, § 12), corresponding to the Socratic principle according to which the only virtuous individual is the conscious one, as he possesses knowledge. In the prologue of the tragedies authored by Euripides, a single character always makes an appearance on stage, presenting himself to the audience and narrating what has happened and what is going to happen. In Nietzsche’s view,

these rational explanations eliminate the unforeseen and the agitation, dramatic elements par excellence. That is why Euripides considered himself to be the very first “awaken” mind among “drunken” poets, fighting against the Dyonisian element of the old art (Nietzsche 1999 a, § 12). Nietzsche brings into question the legend saying that Socrates used to collaborate on Euripides’ works. Even if he may not have done it in reality, it is known that the only theatrical manifestations that Socrates cared to watch were the ones staged by Euripides. The Oracle of Delphi also agreed on this comparison regarding the degree of lucidity, calling Socrates the wisest of the Greeks, followed by Euripides. The old “drunken” poets referred to by Euripides were similar to Socrates’ partners in dialogue. They exercised their profession “solely instinctively”. However, in all creators, instinct stands for creative, affirmative power, while consciousness only acts as critical voice, placing limits on the action of instincts. With Socrates, things are reversed: instinct is critical, while consciousness is creative. Not haphazardly, Socrates’ desire is to educate through a reformation of illusions of the city. Gifted with an overwhelming logical spirit, Socrates reflects the non-mystical type by far. But, as Nietzsche points out, his logical spirit is just as excessive as the instinctual wisdom of the mystical. Nietzsche unravels the unstoppable torrent that Socrates really was, a manifestation of the immense power of nature, found only in the most impressive forces of instinct.

But this “logical instinct” remained impuissant when Socrates tried to examine himself. In Nietzsche’s vision, Socrates destroys instincts in the name of reason, but in fact he betrays himself and deludes everyone else. His cyclopic eye, unable to submerge into the spectacle of the Dyonisian abysses, could only see the irrational in the tragic art, reason for which he deemed it as “untrue”. This is why he invented dialectics. With Socrates, the Apollonian tendency takes the form of logical schematism, in a fashion similar to Euripides. There is an optimistic element in the dialectic methodology, more precisely the belief that the individual can live exclusively with the cold light of “consciousness”. The virtuous hero is thus forced to become a dialectician. A new theatre, a Socratic one,

emerges now, demolishing the Dionysian instinct that constituted the essence of tragedy. The theoretical man cannot be an artist. His orientations towards art and towards the world are completely different: the artist contemplates, delighted, what remains veiled, while the theoretical man indulges in unveiling the mystery, through his own capabilities. With Socrates, what appears is a metaphysical illusion, the idea that thinking could penetrate the abyss of reality, even endowed with the power to make it right. According to Nietzsche, this illusion is transformed into a new instinct: the instinct of science. By virtue of reason, it liberates us from the fear of death. This is the reason why Socrates is “one of the axes of universal history and its new turning point” (Nietzsche 1999 a, § 15).

In a chapter of *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Problem of Socrates”, Nietzsche performs an inquiry into the relationship between reason and instincts, identifying the mistake made by Socrates: the latter glorified reason while weighing against instincts. According to Nietzsche, the Greek philosopher believed that the Athenians of his time suffered from a horrific malady, the anarchy of instincts. The Athenian man had reached a point where he was dominated by his own instincts, unable to be his own master anymore, which prompted Socrates to categorize this as an obvious sign of decadence. The remedy of this “disease” could only be “a more powerful counter-tyrant,” since reason have dialectics as its weapon of choice (Nietzsche 1999 c, 71-72). Here, Nietzsche provides a spectacular interpretation. In his view, Socrates first invented the problem, only in order to imagine an alleged solution. In fact, the solution is false, because what was lacking was the freedom of choice. Athenians “were not given the choice of being rational”, this was “their last resort”. That is why, as Nietzsche points out, Athenians fanatically accepted the saviour reason proposed by Socrates. But the “choice” lacking freedom is, in fact, irrational. Reason is embraced as remedy through a completely unreasonable act. Following the footsteps of Socrates, the Greeks adopted a behaviour that was “absurdly rational”, claims Nietzsche.

Socrates was, in fact, a false doctor. Moreover, he was the sickest of all the Athenians. And his remedy represented nothing

more than a mere delusion, as the denial of instincts was just another disease, much more dangerous (Nietzsche 1999 c, 72-73). The real disease, shows Nietzsche, appears when we think we should fight against instincts, limiting their freedom of action. This was the most obvious symptom of the absence of improvement, so, consequently, of the denial of life itself: “To have to fight the instincts, this is the definition of *décadence*: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness equals instinct.”

Nietzsche overturns the preconceptions about reason and instincts that the civilized world cultivated over millennia. Through instincts, senses, emotions, needs and feelings, nature is pulsating in us, flowing through our veins, tranquil and stirred at the same time. It is our music, singing within us without cease, a music, however, that composes itself, moment after moment. On the contrary, reason freezes everything around it. It calms the instincts, but at incalculable costs. The ice it throws over life can have, on the long term, through successive accumulations, more toxic effects than a healthy strife of instincts, affects and nerves. Just like Cioran writes, “absolutely lucidity [is] incompatible with the reality of the organs” (Cioran 1998, 191). Reason is not the source of lucidity, of clear light, like Socrates made us believe. On the contrary, it is the source of disguise, dissimulation and the fake.

2. The Philosopher with a Thousand Eyes and a Thousandfold Consciousness

According to Nietzsche, the whole existence has a perspectivist character. The world is a network of forces that intersect, giving birth to configurations only marked by relative stability. Such a configuration is named by Nietzsche a will to power. Each will to power has its own perspective on its surrounding: a clearer perspective on its vicinity and a more obscure one on what is in the distance. Vicinity and distance decide not just on the extent to which a force can be seen, but also on how and for how long it can act. “Each power centre – not just man – builds from itself the rest of the world, in other words it measures it, it touches it, it moulds it through its own will...” (Nietzsche 1999 d, 373; KSA 13, 14 [196]). Thus, each power centre acts as a falsification of its proximity, which

becomes more poignant the more we climb the biological sphere, beginning from the inorganic and ending with human one. In the case of man, each perspectivist interpretation bears a certain value (see Figl 1982; Hoffmann 1994; Hoffmann 1996). Lie is at home here, being permanently used as an instrument to increase power, as means to improve or preserve domination over others. Man's self-improvement does not entail a disposal of values, but, on the contrary, a recognition of their universal presence within the human world. The lie is, consequently, ubiquitous across the entire humanity.

The colour and intensity of the lies the individual tells to himself depend on the specificity of the forces that govern him – and of the particular will to power with which he identifies. They are lies necessary to preserve life – or, on the contrary, to improve it. In other words, lies of the denial of life or lies of life's self-affirmation. They are bad masks, or, conversely, good masks (Vattimo 1983). In one form or the other, "the lie is necessary", declares Nietzsche. Moreover, it is inevitable. We live in a world of illusions, of appearances, and the only truth resides in acknowledging the omnipresence of the lie and its universal existence.

Values are the elements that provide meaning to the world – to each world created around a will to power. They impose a line of understanding and interpretation. Within the human sphere, everything is coloured in value. Values infiltrate each and every human act, thought and perception. Everything is a perspective based on value. One set of values represents the rule of the game that a will to power imposes on its proximity. We should each imagine such a world – generated by a will to power dominating its vicinity through the mediation of a value or of a set of values – something like a play, staged on a scene.

The actors play what is dictated by the director, within the limits of their designated stage, with its decor, props and lights. The director is here the very light that sheds over domination. But he can, at any time, change the entire mis-en-scene, the whole play, and the actors, if not observant, can live under the impression that they are playing their parts in the old play, without understanding that the show is a completely different one (see François 2009; Bondor 2015; Frunză 2017).

The whole play can be different when a new value is imposed on everyone, thus becoming universal. Believing in it changes the perspective on the world. A weak man suddenly becomes strong when he believes in something. The appearance of a new value and its universalization changes the entire world – like in the case of Christianity. However, not only religion is always subject to change, but also the boundaries of the stage on which the play is being acted out. The stage is continuously modified, new characters are joining in, new roles are being handed out, new sets of decor appear (see Foucault 1994; Franck 1998).

This exact situation is described by Milan Kundera, on a page in *Laughable Loves*: “man assumes he is playing his part in a certain performance, without suspecting that in the meantime, on stage, the decor has been unknowingly changed, and, without sensing it, he suddenly finds himself in the middle of a play somehow different from the previous one.” The proximity of the will to power can fall victim to change, through conquering new territories, through dividing the initial territory or by means of reconfiguring the territory. Even the old characters undergo a ceaseless transformation. Each part takes but a second. And behind each part, each mask, there is no hidden ultimate figure, no decisive self-identity. Just an ongoing series of masks. Each of them showing and hiding. None of them is totally transparent, none of them is totally opaque. This subtle dialectics of revealing (of transparency) and hiding, ignited by a history of philosophy that trusts essences much too enthusiastically, is, in its turn, deconstructed. It is the viewpoint of the slave. A mere funeral suite of masks, of illusions that pretending to bear consistency, uniqueness, identity. The author is himself trapped in this dance of the masks, temporarily identifying himself with one of the characters, in turns. We do not know his true face – for he does not have one.

Values are inscribed in man’s body, infiltrated in his skin and flesh, pulsating in tissues and nerves. With them, countless lies make their appearance. The body has a profoundly perspectivistic character. Acquiring values and ideals, coming from the individual past or the cultural one, the body bears a whole network of stories, sometimes puzzling,

sometimes concurrent, sometimes harmonious. The body is like a battlefield, a stage on which plays come and go in an endless line. In the case of man, the body is the main stage, a pluralistic one, always transforming. And within the body there is no headquarters of these stories, they are evenly distributed in every organ and even in every cell. Each cell takes part in the story, when it is not telling one itself. Who speaks through the body of each of us? This is the basic question of the genealogical approach. Do forces of action speak? Or do the forces of reaction? Is it the will affirming life, or the one denying it?

3. Appearance versus fiction, starting from Kundera and Borges

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera reminds of an old German proverb, whose meaning is that living once does not count, it is like not even living at all (“one time is no time”) (see Wrong 2004). In fact, this has been said about literature, defining it as the possibility of living more lives in addition to one’s own. This idea is related to Nietzsche’s concept of perspectivism. For him, the philosopher is the only one who has “one thousand eyes and a thousandfold consciousness”. He alone is able to feel everything that has been, all the worlds of the past and even the worlds of the future. The idea has a double meaning. We must be aware of these worlds being present within us, otherwise we are tied to them without even realising. At the same time, possessing all of them means gaining in possibility, liberating ourselves from the overwhelming present. Nietzsche investigates man’s addictions, the frameworks that guide and limit him, the totalities in which he enrolls himself and the ones in which he is thrown by others. Man is subjected to the tyranny of the species and of the crowd, of states and societies, of culture and history, of reason and values. We bear within us the old failures, secular wounds disguised as victories.

We wear the frayed clothes of the past, but we think our gesture is a sign of maturity and spirit. We carry a thousand years on our back, like the butler in Marivaux’s fable was saying. We cannot free ourselves from all this. We can only watch them, free, like a vast spectacle, like a convoy of masks

gleefully passing, but not through our nerves, only in front of our eyes. Salvation is in acknowledging the truth of these masks, this is our ground zero reality. This is Nietzsche's lesson – the “grand health” (Nietzsche 1999 b, § 382, 635-7): we must experiment everything, to live the whole spectrum of values and things considered desirable up to the present moment, to know all the feelings of a conqueror and of an explorer, the feelings of an artist, a saint, a lawmaker, a sage, a scientist, a believer, a devout.

This means living life in the most dangerous way (“To live totally, you have to live dangerously”). To recognize them in ourselves and to say “yes” to them means, in fact, to “freeze” them, like Nietzsche writes in *Ecce homo*, it means becoming aware they are nothing but a sum of illusions, of lies that were necessary for life in the past, of appearances in which man has invested his life and found his ultimate justification. To understand the fact they are just passing, to look at them with detachment – this is the true freedom of the “grand health”, the liberation it can give us. This way we could become once again free to design new possibilities – this time our own, not coming from any form of otherness. Our horizon becomes free again, like a new land, still unknown. The angst in front of the abyss, of limitless – but also directionless – freedom, brings endless joy to the philosopher “with one thousand eyes and a thousandfold consciousness”: the joy of a “new infinity”, the joy of all possible beginnings. He shall now face all his possibilities, all his potential worlds.

Order and hazard are understood in a different manner compared to the philosophy of old. The occurrence does not invade order, it does not represent a failure to adhere to the norms of order. Chaos is not the intruder in a perfect universe. On the contrary, order is a mere form of display for hazard, one of minimal consistency. Chaos is continuous, order is the element of rapture, of discontinuity. Chaos is the rule, order is the event. Order implodes in the (non)world of hazard. What is the element that decides on this exception? What makes a certain roll of the dice the emblematic one, the decisive one, the one that eventually shapes a destiny? However powerful (at anchor in a value which gives it consistency and continuity), no

decision is definitive, final. Just like the prose of Borges, from each place and each moment several possibilities can spring, several versions of future open up. Each and every moment registers a choice, so, consequently, the refusal of numerous possibilities. The decision means elimination, rejection, cruelty. For it is not a mere decision on one's future, but also on the future of others. One decision can be epochal – and still not conclusive. Far from being a duty towards others, the decision is a duty towards yourself – a duty of being cruel, of becoming the master, of forcing your way onto the others.

With Nietzsche, time is circular, but circularity is also a form of continuity, of “now” coming after another “now.” Time is not plural, it is one. It does not have branches, there are no parallel times, like in fiction. The infinity of time – with its endless return – takes place within the frames of the same time. Parallel worlds do exist, like Leibniz's monads, but all within the same time. On the contrary, fiction allows for parallel times, ramifications lacking any sense of logic, pure hazard. After the death of God and the moral imperatives, Nietzsche's advice is existential: he urges us to live every moment like it were to repeat itself for infinity. Opposed to this, literary fiction urges us to become aware of the existence of multiple possible worlds. The idea is excellently formulated by Paul Ricoeur, in terms borrowed from Heidegger: “fiction, poetry open up in the ordinary reality new possibilities of being-in-the-world; fiction and poetry focus on the being not according to what is given, but to what could be” (Ricoeur 1986, 115). Or, in Husserl's words, we could say that literature performs imaginative variations on the real, with everyday reality going through a metamorphosis.

Between the Nietzschean ubiquity of masks and the literary abundance of fiction, the truth of the human being is being acted out. In order to free ourselves from the overwhelming necessity of the present we need both the truth of illusions and the truth of fiction. Without either of them we could not ever find *the* truth.

* A version of this text in Romanian is currently under publication in the cultural magazine *Vitraliu*, nr. 50 / 2019.

REFERENCES

- Bondor, George. 2015. "Langage et valeurs. Les mécanismes du pouvoir chez Nietzsche". *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy* VII (1): 76-86.
- Cioran, E.M. 1998. *The Temptation to Exist*. Trans. by Richard Howard. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Figl, Johann. 1982. *Interpretation als philosophisches Prinzip. Friedrich Nietzsches universale Theorie der Auslegung im späten Nachlass*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Foucault, Michel. 1994. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire". In *Dits et écrits*. Tome II. Paris: Gallimard.
- Franck, Didier. 1998. *Nietzsche et l'ombre de Dieu*. Paris: PUF.
- François, Arnaud. 2009. "Les deux justices selon Nietzsche : un exemple d'inversion des valeurs". *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy* I (2): 302-319.
- Frunză, Sandu. 2017. "Axiology, Leadership and Management Ethics". *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy* IX (1): 284-299.
- Hoffmann, Johann Nepomuk. 1994. *Wahrheit, Perspektive, Interpretation. Nietzsche und die philosophische Hermeneutik*. Berlin/ New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hoffmann, Johann Nepomuk. 1996. „Hermeneutik nach Nietzsche. Thesen und Überlegungen im Anschluß an Nietzsches Begriff der Interpretation." *Nietzsche Studien* 25: 261-306.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1999 a. *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. In *Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. von Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari, Band 1. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag & Berlin / New York: De Gruyter.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1999 b. *Morgenröte*. In *Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. von Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari, Band 3. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; Berlin / New York: De Gruyter.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1999 c. *Götzen-Dämmerung*. In *Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. von Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari,

Band 6. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; Berlin / New York: De Gruyter.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1999 d. *Nachlaß 1887-1889*. In *Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. von Giorgio Colli &azzino Montinari, Band 13. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; Berlin / New York: De Gruyter.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1986. *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Vattimo, Gianni. 1983. *Il soggetto et la maschera. Nietzsche et il problema della liberazione*. Milan: Bompiani.

Wrong, Dennis H. 2004. *The Persistence of Particular Things*. Somerset: Taylor & Francis Inc.

George Bondor is professor at the Department of Philosophy, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi. He is the scientific director of the Center for Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy and the coordinator of the *Sophia* series at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Press. He teaches in the fields of phenomenology, hermeneutics and contemporary philosophy. He is author of *The Dance of the Masks: Nietzsche and the Philosophy of Interpretation* (in Romanian, Humanitas Press) and *Metaphysical Files: Hermeneutical Reconstruction and Critical History* (also in Romanian, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Press).

Address:

George Bondor
Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences
“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi
Bd. Carol I, 11
700506 Iasi, Romania
Email: bondor@uaic.ro