



<https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-2-418-426>

Research Article / Научная статья

Nietzsche, Hamsun, and Sacred Violence

M.P. Matyushova , A.S. Perepechina , D.V. Mamchenkov  

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University),
6 Miklukho-Maklaya Street, Moscow, 117198, Russian Federation
mamchenkov-dv@rudn.ru

Abstract. This article deals with the analysis of neo-mythological and pantheistic subjects in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Knut Hamsun. The analytical comparison of Nietzsche's philosophical concepts and Hamsun's literary psychologism is poised to find an underlying understanding of human nature at the confluence of ethics and aesthetics — of goods and beauty, of evil and ugly. A precise definition of the aesthetic categories “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” is carried out based on Nietzsche's work “The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music”. The relevance of the Dionysian culture's phenomena is based on the Nietzschean belief in an *Übermensch* within the modern mindset. The concept of “Dionysus” finds its continuation in the postmodern philosophy of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, in such archaic emotional and aesthetic aspects of human essence as violence and sacrifice understood in an extremely abstract sense. The authors stress that modern culture's interest in violence and sacrifice is rooted in Nietzsche's idea of Dionysius in the meaning of one of the beginnings of any segment of European culture. The foundations for overcoming postmodernism in the 21st century and the subsequent development of aesthetic views can be found in an attempt to revise the foundation of European culture through rethinking the concept of *Übermensch*-Zarathustra-Dionysus.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Hamsun, Bataille, Blanchot, aesthetics, Apollonian, Dionysian, neo-mythology, pantheism

Funding and Acknowledgement of Sources. This work was supported by the project of Russian Ministry of Education and Science № 075-15-2021-603 “Development of the new methodology and intellectual base for the new-generation research of Indian philosophy in correlation with the main World Philosophical Traditions” and by the project of Russian Ministry of Education and Science № 104701-2-000 “Cognitive strategies of the major philosophical traditions of Eurasia”. This paper has been supported by the RUDN University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

Article history:

The article was submitted on 23.12.2021

The article was accepted on 16.03.2022

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For citation: Matyushova MP, Perepechina AS, Mamchenkov DV. Nietzsche, Hamsun, and Sacred Violence. *RUDN Journal of Philosophy*. 2022;26(2):418—426. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-2-418-426>

...the fire of sacrifice is none other than the divinity itself, which consumes the victim, or, to put it more exactly, the fire is the sign of consecration which sets it on fire.

*Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, Sacrifice:
its Nature and Functions*

Introduction

Tragedy. The tragedy of light and darkness, of Apollo and Dionysus. “Momentary tragedy”, Nietzsche said, “aids the eternal comedy of existence, and the sea ‘with its countless smiles’—to quote Aeschylus—will cover the greatest of tragedies with its waves” [1. P. 10].

The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music is the first work of F. Nietzsche presenting his new view of ancient culture, although the images and symbols that the German philosopher uses do not yet have the sharpness and categorical character as in the “Nietzschean Bible” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which is, in fact, a continuation of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The purpose of writing the book was to find the reason for the inconsistency of the Greek culture, which, according to Nietzsche, was not as organic as previous researchers believed, because it comprised two principles opposed to each other.

According to Nietzsche, everything in our world has a dual nature. A manifestation of this duality can serve the existence of good and evil, which is in the world only under the condition of the simultaneous existence of each other. Similarly, the entire culture of the ancient Greeks included Apollonian and Dionysian roots, which contributed to its development. Apollo is the god of sunlight and agriculture, creating utilizing images symbolizing a complete sense of proportion and self-restraint. By the initial significance of Apollo as a solar god, the main requirement of the Apollonian religion was the requirement of purity. God hates everything that stains a person and, through him, all kinds of filth. And if at first, it was possible to cleanse oneself from filth by rites, then in the 4th century the idea of moral purification prevailed.

Dionysus, in contrast to Apollo, is the deity that is most associated with the animal part of the human soul. We are talking about animalism, further developed by postmodernist followers of Nietzsche, such as Georges Bataille, who in his most important work *Les larmes d'Éros* (1961) writes “that the animal became human” [2. P. 4]. This Dionysian cult came from the land of violent passions, from Thrace. A characteristic feature of this cult was frenzy (ekstasis), achieved with the help of loud music — tympan, cymbals, flutes, and “orgiastic” dances. The Dionysian beginning also continues to be interpreted by modern theorists in the “Eros noir, a term for reflecting on the danger and violence of sexuality that Freud theorizes with the ‘death drive’” [3. P. 2].

I. Categories of Dreams and Intoxication

To show the contradiction between these principles in culture, Nietzsche introduces the artistic categories of dreaming and intoxication to form the most accurate understanding of the difference between these components. “Apollo’s intoxication holds primarily in a state of arousal of the eyes so that he gains the ability to see. The painter, plastic, epic poet — visionaries ... In the Dionysian position, on the contrary, the whole system of emotions is excited and enhanced: so that it immediately unloads all its means, expressions and simultaneously erects the power of image, imitation, transformation, all kinds of facial expressions and acting ... For a Dionysian man, it is impossible not to understand any suggestion, he will not overlook a single sign of affect” [4. P. 83—84]. Since the difference between intoxication and dream is not always traced, you need to know that it corresponds to the opposite of Dionysian and Apollonian.

The dream here is most interesting from a philosophical point of view, as many philosophers recognized this phenomenon as a “second reality”, different from the reality in which we exist. We see wonderful images, incredible pictures, objectified in images of fantasy, in dreams. We are immersed in dreams so much that we do not feel the boundaries between the illusory and the real, living what is not happening in reality. And only when we wake up, do we realize that “reality” was only a vision, an illusion. Nietzsche speaks of the difference between the comprehension of the present and the illusory: “But just as a philosopher relates to the reality of being, so an artistically receptive person relates to the reality of dreams; he readily and vigilantly peers at them: for according to these images he interprets his life, at these events he is preparing for life” [5. P. 33]. In this fragment you can see the premises of the Freudian interpretation of the unconscious, interpreting dreams.

II. The Contradiction and Unity of the Apollonian and Dionysian Principles in Art and Human Nature

Nietzsche uses the Dionysian principle as an aesthetic category in a broader sense and designates life, which from then on becomes its most important category. The concept of “life” is endowed with obscure signs and is filled with mythical content. Nietzsche himself characterizes Dionysian life as the ability of life to “transcend itself”, “develop according to the laws of its power” and ascribes to it special cruelty, anti-democracy, a tendency to everything chaotic, deadly. The Dionysian state is a state in which passions and instincts find a free exit, not controlled by any external barriers.

The Apollonian always existed among this, attracting Dionysian. Nietzsche notes that there is a contradiction in the moral character of the Olympic pantheon: “Nothing here reminds of austerity, spirituality, and duty; here everything tells us only about a luxurious, even triumphant existence, in which all that is present is deified, regardless of whether it is good or evil” [5. P. 40]. This is the abundance of enjoyment of life, the very suffering from excessive fullness. The main paradox that defined the relationship between the two principles was that they existed only under

the condition of simultaneous being with each other. It is in tragedy, as Nietzsche shows, that the two beginnings get along with each other and form a magnificent union.

In the images of Apollo and Dionysus, the ancient Greeks personified the conflict of human nature, and the division into Apollonian and Dionysian is because of the internal need for depicting the duality of man. The invention of civilization and rational outlook is associated with the Apollonian part of the human soul, and the natural worldview is determined by the power of the animal of Dionysian origin over man.

Nietzsche compares the world of Olympic gods with Christianity. He uses the concepts of Apollonian and Dionysian as a contrast between Christian and anti-Christian. According to Nietzsche, the Christian faith is a synonym for the hostile attitude towards life, its benefits, and pleasures: "...life in its essence is something immoral" [5. P. 25].

III. K. Hamsun and His Vision of the Dionysian Principle in Man

Nietzsche's philosophy and his aestheticism had a strong influence on forming the worldview of the Nobel laureate, Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun, the founder of a new genre in literature — a psychological novel.

Hamsun's Nietzschean anti-Christianity is accompanied by the rejection and condemnation of the Christian God, for he does not accept that "monstrous injustice" that reigns in the world, and later, with aesthetic pantheism in the spirit of Zarathustra, praising nature, which is the highest expression of beauty in the world, is true being. In the novel *Pan*, the main character Glan addresses nature: "Thank you for a lonely night, for the mountains! For the rumble of sea and darkness, it is in my heart. I also thank you for being alive, for breathing, for breathing that night! Shh! What is there, in the east, in the west, what is it there? This is God walking through spaces, this blood is boiling in the veins of the universe, this work is boiling in the hands of the creator, I and the world are in his hands" [6. P. 520]. Hamsun's image of Pan is essentially Nietzsche's portrayal of Dionysus: "It is the name of the novel — "Pan" that sets a certain mood, orientates the reader to appeal to Greek mythology, to the image of Pan, the spirit of the forest. The image of Pan does not hold such an important place in Hamsun's work, as, e.g., the image of Dionysus in Nietzsche. However, these images are quite similar, and perhaps Hamsun, not to follow the same paved path, used the name of another pagan god to express the same phenomenon ... Pan, like Dionysus, embodies the elements, mysterious, mythical forces existing in nature and affecting humans. Being in the retinue of Dionysus, Pan is often portrayed as his friend, admirer, and servant of the great god" [7. P. 6—7].

In the article *On Unconscious Spiritual Life*, Hamsun describes inspiration as an irrational, mystical process, since the writer is somewhat a recorder of his feelings and the prophet is "a silent causeless ecstasy, a surge of internal energy; the ability to pick up distant signals from the depths of airspace and the elements of the sea, the painful and amazingly sharp ability to perceive sounds, which makes it

possible to catch even the flutter of unknown atoms, the existence of which you can only guess; sudden, supernatural penetration into unknown kingdoms; foreboding of future misfortune at the moment of cloudlessness...” [8. P. 561].

This gives rise to a motive for subordinating a person to unconscious impulses, particularly manifested in the process of inspiration: “I... all in the power of wild fantasies ... started talking to myself. Madness was raging in my brain, and I gave it free rein, fully realizing that I was the victim of impulses, which I can’t resist” [9. P. 109]. This state of mind and spirit entails the pleasure of introspection, which is a mental defense from life realities, ugly by nature. Contrasting self with the anti-aesthetic world and environment turns into a radical charm with the sensual, almost animal principle in a person.

The described experience of the process of inspiration, comparable with the state of insanity, is like the category of intoxication introduced by Nietzsche, explaining the obsession of the Dionysian Greek with an emotional impulse and his submission to unconscious stimuli in all acts filled with pleasure and suffering.

Nietzsche’s influence on Hamsun’s work was also reflected in his attitude to the mob, to the “herd”, as well as in glorifying the war, for it is imperative for self-exaltation and self-affirmation of life. Through war the selection and tempering of higher individuals take place. Comparing the political views of Nietzsche and Hamsun, it is easy to notice that through the lips of Karen, the hero of the play *At the Gates of the Kingdom*, speaks Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: “I laugh at eternal peace for its arrogant disregard for pride. Let there be a war, there is nothing to think about to save so many human lives because the source of life is inexhaustible and inexhaustible; but it is necessary to support the true in us ... I believe in a born despot by nature, in a lord, in someone who is not elected, but who himself proclaims himself the leader of these herds of earth” [9. P. 201]. This is almost a verbatim confirmation of Nietzsche’s thoughts, who in *The Antichrist* states that “not peace — war ... let the weak and ugly perish — the first commandment of our humanity” [10. P. 19]. Hamsun saw the Dionysian principle and faith in the Übermensch and the great ruler transforming the world in Hitler, met with him and Goebbels, wrote an obituary to Hitler’s death, and answered the investigator’s question about contacts with the National Socialist society that there were people in this society much better than himself.

IV. Postmodernists on Dionysian:

G. Bataille’s “Sacred Violence” and M. Blanchot’s “Ultimate Experience”

Nietzsche’s line of understanding of man as denying his animal nature and suffering from hiding his irrational, sensual nature was continued by thinkers with a postmodern bias in the philosophy of art. Thus, in the works of the leading French postmodernist and psychologist Georges Bataille, the Nietzschean concept of “Dionysus” is found under other names, in particular, as “an open being” (*l’être ouvert*) [11. P. 259—264]. “An open being is an animal that is aware of and accepts its animality, has achieved self-awareness in the Hegelian sense of the word” [12. P. 42—46]. As we may notice, the French philosopher borrows interest from

Nietzsche's Übermensch concept designed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is of a person denying his nature, an intermediate step between the animal and the Übermensch [13. P. 3]. Bataille carries the idea further through the comprehension of the "will to power" and calls it violence, endowing the real category with ontological meaning and giving it a place in the sacred area (sacré), identifying it with the transcendental. Violence is that against oneself, having the character of sacrifice or self-sacrifice. Violence is sacred because it is hidden as something undesirable, frightening, disgusting, and ugly. The fear of death is considered in this concept as one of the aspects of the essential characteristics of life. Therefore, according to G. Bataille, and after him post-structuralists M. Blanchot, M. Foucault, J.-L. Nancy, J. Lacan, concealed or sacred lethal violence attracts a person, creates interest precisely because of prohibition. The transition to the sacred, hidden, is necessary as an internal experience. This violates the boundaries of the individual world, i.e., violence.

Bataille notices Nietzsche's interest in play (jeu). In this context, the French intellectual is interested in the Nietzschean concept of the game as an event transcending the given. He connects this playful moment with the conception of "sacred": "Indeed, at times in *Sur Nietzsche*, "child's play" signifies triviality—and worse: the very opposite of that gambling or gaming, that putting into play (mise en jeu) which Bataille equates with human possibility... Accordingly, he concludes that, "compared to the urgencies of chance, God's necessities are child's play!" This is where Bataille's antihumanist anthropology begins (and ends): with identification between the human and the capacity to will loss, to will chance, to play" [1. P. 6].

The hidden, the sacrificial, the sacred, the violent expresses sexuality: "The thwarted pursuit of community in the vacated space of Nietzsche's death of a God is a persistent leitmotif of the following in the account it offers of the thought of Georges Bataille and other members of the Collège de Sociologie. Eros noir, at the fatal cusp between ascendant manifest sex and a latent diminished Christianity, underwrites much of the French intellectual contribution to the symbology of cultural modernism" [3. P. 2].

Bataille's contemporary Maurice Blanchot spoke about the same thing, calling such a mystical experience the ultimate experience. In his 1969 "Infinite Conversation", he defines the latter as "the answer that a person faces when he decides to radically question himself" [14. P.302]. The essence of ultimate experience is to perform the act of removing the boundaries between subject and object, object and thought, material and spiritual. This is a significant difference between non-classical and classical (Winkleman, Lessing, Schelling). For Blanchot, the problem of deindividuation in this work is assigned a paragraph called "Impersonality — a condition of perception", which postulates the opinion that it is necessary to separate the author from the work of art. To create, according to Blanchot, should be in a state of inspiration, close to being in the power of affect. This is nothing more than the removal of Schopenhauer's principle of individuation ("principium individuationis"). A. Schopenhauer describes the author's passivity as

a phenomenon of noninterest, i.e. by immersing the subject (the person) in the object (the work of art) that he observes, where the person becomes a pure subject (he feels himself as nature, and nature as himself). Thus, in art, the ability of a person to encompass everything is shown, i.e., to connect the manifestation of the world with the world will itself (with the essence of the world). The philosopher writes: “Pure, limp cognition is achieved when the consciousness of other things rises to such a high potential that the consciousness of the Self disappears. For the world is perceived objectively only when we no longer know that we belong to it, and all things seem more beautiful the more we see only them and less of ourselves” [10. P. 402]. Non-classical concepts actualize Nietzsche’s idea of the duality of culture and revive interest in the aesthetic category “Dionysian”, presenting it under other names. The Dionysian as a metapoetic concept, as a universal category of existential problematics, originates from Nietzsche’s invention of the new Dionysus, no longer the ancient God of the fertile forces of nature and wine, but the prototype of the future man — the “universal man” (“Generell-Menschlich”), where Dionysus is a harbinger and a necessary element of entering a new type of cultural space, an integral part of which is creativity. Nietzsche connects the creation of the new with the Dionysian part of the culture (externally, transcendently) and human nature (internally, immanently). We note that Nietzsche’s thought in the postmodern view is qualitatively modified and developed within the framework of the problem of psychologism rather than system philosophy.

Conclusion

Having carefully studied the mythopoetic imagery of Hellenic culture, Nietzsche revealed the noumenal component of the phenomena of art. He created a new approach to understanding the main issue of philosophy at all times — the relationship “Man — World” through the prism of the correlation of Apollonian and Dionysian principles. K. Hamsun, using the genre of “psychological literature”, in describing his heroes, pays greater attention to their unconscious origins, and gives it superiority concerning rational life, showing us the human sensory origins.

So, on the one hand, in good Hegelian fashion, the classicist line is preserved in aesthetics and culture. Yet, Nietzsche’s criticism of European cultural tendencies based on Hellenism is concluded in postmodernism by mainstream philosophers like Bataille and other post-structuralists. Of course, the interest in violence and sacred sacrificial moments has its roots in Nietzsche’s idea of Dionysian in the meaning of one of the beginnings of any European culture segment. The 20th century is full of modernist vs. postmodernist debates just like a few centuries before that, the modernists were waging wars with antiquity. The 21st century is tired of postmodernism. The solution for the later development of aesthetic views in modern times can be found in an attempt to look deep into all the processes of proto-European culture through a deep study of Nietzschean Übermensch-Zarathustra-Dionysus.

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About the authors:

Matyushova Maria P. — Cand. Sc. in Philosophy, Associate Professor, Department of Ontology and Epistemology, RUDN University; Moscow, Russia (e-mail: matyushova-mp@rudn.ru). ORCID: 0000-0003-0585-8412

Perepechina Alexandra S. — Head Teacher at the Department of Foreign Languages, RUDN University; PhD student at the Department of Ontology and Epistemology, RUDN University; Moscow, Russia (e-mail: perepechina-as@rudn.ru). ORCID: 0000-0002-3226-1040

Mamchenkov Dmitry V. — Cand. Sc. in Philosophy, Associate Professor, Department of Ontology and Epistemology, RUDN University; Moscow, Russia (e-mail: mamchenkov-dv@rudn.ru). ORCID: 0000-0003-0484-2232

Ницше, Гамсун и священное насилие

М.П. Матюшова , А.С. Перепечина , Д.В. Мамченков  

Российский университет дружбы народов,
Российская Федерация, 117198, Москва, ул. Миклухо-Маклая, д. 6
mamchenkov-dv@rudn.ru

Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена анализу неомифологических и пантеистических сюжетов в творчестве Фридриха Ницше и Кнута Гамсуна. Аналитическое сравнение философских концепций Ницше и литературного психологизма Гамсуна раскрывает

глубинное понимание человеческой природы на стыке этики и эстетики — добра и красоты, зла и уродства. Понимание эстетических категорий «Аполлонический» и «Дионисийский» разрабатывается на основе работы Ницше «Рождение трагедии из духа музыки». Актуальность феноменов дионисийских культур основана на истинной ницшеанской вере в Сверхчеловеческую природу современного мышления. Концепция «Диониса» находит свое продолжение в постмодернистской философии Жоржа Батая и Мориса Бланшо, в таких архаичных эмоциональных и эстетических аспектах человеческой сущности, как насилие и жертвенность, понимаемые в крайне абстрактном смысле. Показано, что интерес современной культуры к насилию и жертвоприношению уходит своими корнями в идею Ницше о Дионисии в значении одного из начал любого сегмента европейской культуры. Основание для преодоления постмодернизма в 21 веке и последующего развития эстетических взглядов может быть обретено в попытке глубокой переработки фундамента европейской культуры через переосмысление концепта Супермена-Заратустры-Диониса.

Ключевые слова: Ницше, Гамсун, Батай, Бланшо, эстетика, аполлоническое, дионисийское, неомифология, пантеизм

Информация о финансировании и благодарности. Работа подготовлена в рамках Соглашения между Министерством образования и науки РФ и Российского университета дружбы народов № 075-15-2021-603 по теме: «Разработка методологии и интеллектуальной базы нового поколения по изучению индийской философии в ее соотношении с другими ведущими философскими традициями Евразии». Публикация выполнена при поддержке Программы стратегического академического лидерства РУДН.

История статьи:

Статья поступила 23.12.2021

Статья принята к публикации 16.03.2022

Для цитирования: *Matyushova M.P., Perepechina A.S., Mamchenkov D.V. Nietzsche, Hamsun, and Sacred Violence // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Философия. 2022. Т. 26. № 2. С. 418—426. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-2-418-426>*

Сведения об авторах:

Матюшова Мария Петровна — кандидат философских наук, доцент кафедры онтологии и теории познания, Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Россия (e-mail: matyushova-mp@rudn.ru). ORCID: 0000-0003-0585-8412

Перепечина Александра Сергеевна — старший преподаватель кафедры иностранных языков, аспирант кафедры онтологии и теории познания, Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Россия (e-mail: perepechina-as@rudn.ru). ORCID: 0000-0002-3226-1040

Мамченков Дмитрий Валерьевич — кандидат философских наук, доцент кафедры онтологии и теории познания, Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Россия (e-mail: mamchenkov-dv@rudn.ru). ORCID: 0000-0003-0484-2232