

Speaking for Dionysus: Empathy and choral advocacy in Aristotle and Nietzsche

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Abstract

This essay argues for an abiding connection between empathy and advocacy by revealing their unrecognized parallels in Aristotle and Nietzsche. The argument makes three new claims. First, I identify an ancient form of sharing emotions, unnamed in but fundamental to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, that I call "empathy by analogy." Next, I show that the essential tragic function, for Nietzsche, is the sympathetic advocacy of the chorus for the Dionysian. While compassion and empathy are conflated in the *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), the later *Dawn* (1881) differentiates the two. The language of this disambiguation allows for a reconstruction of the advocacy work of empathy in Nietzsche's poetics. Finally, despite real differences between ancient and modern empathy, both exhibit an irreducible structural paradox that is best articulated by the choral *Fürsprache* for the Dionysian.

KEYWORDS

advocacy, chorus, emotion, empathy, poetics, tragedy

Aristotle and Nietzsche may seem unlikely figures to turn to for empathy. The former was a rational taxonomist in a culture that did not have a named concept for empathetic sharing. The latter is famous for his virulent diatribes against *Mitleid* (compassion) and never engaged with the nascent discourse of *Einfühlung* (empathy) in his time. Yet this essay uncovers a hidden structure of empathy at work in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and traces Nietzsche's evolving distinction between the phenomena of feeling for and feeling with others. For both, empathy turns out to provide

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an implicit means of achieving commonality while sustaining difference that is best illustrated by Nietzsche's image of the advocatory chorus in Greek tragedy.

One of the most intellectually thrilling accounts of empathy in recent years is tucked away in a groundbreaking article on advocacy. In "Outline for a Critical History of *Fürsprache*," Rüdiger Campe links the obsession with empathy in fin-de-siècle psychology and phenomenology to the modern desire for a model of direct communication between two persons. He lays out two basic tendencies of early 20th-century discourses on empathy, which serve both as the constitutive foundation *and* the empirical practice of intersubjectivity. In a counterintuitive but compelling move, Campe uncovers the *rhetorical* underpinnings of this paradox. The phenomenological problem of *Einfühlung* (the German word that inspired the coining of "empathy" in 1908) thus leads him back to the scenes of emotions in ancient rhetoric, a move that exposes the institutional framework underlying this seemingly direct form of interpersonal communication. "The givenness of institutional frames for acting and reacting in triangular scenarios is a necessary requirement for understanding intersubjectivity" (2008, p. 356). The recourse in the "problem of other minds" to the one-to-one sharing of emotions turns out to rely on the triangular scene of advocacy: the Self feeling with the Other becomes a scene of speaking for the Other before yet another Other. What had seemed to be a two-body problem turns out to be irreducibly a three-person scene.

In short, Campe connects modern empathy to ancient rhetoric. But this connection is only apparent in retrospect: While Campe reveals the hidden rhetorical structure that confounds the twentieth-century discourse on empathy, he does not try to show that there might be a crypto-empathy at work in Aristotle. This is unsurprising because the Ancient Greeks did not have a single term for the sharing of emotions.¹ Although passages in Greek poetry and philosophy clearly show that emotional transference was a phenomenon in the Greek world,² the lack of a name for it suggests that it remained unavailable as an intellectual concept.

But Campe's suggestive move to reveal modern empathy's reliance on ancient rhetoricians' scenes of emotion prompts me to ask whether the converse is also true: Does Aristotle's account of the passions rely on a hidden understanding of what we today call empathy? The *Rhetoric* clearly defines compassion (*eleos*) as the feeling one has for another who is suffering undeservedly, but there is no explicit articulation of feeling *with* another. Yet Aristotle's description of emotions (*ta pathē*), as I will show, invokes difference while implying commonality. This article lays out a framework for understanding what I call "empathy by analogy" in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* before uncovering Nietzsche's developing ideas about compassion and empathy. Observing these two very different thinkers' constructions of shared emotions reveals an underlying relationship between compassion and empathy and between cognitivist and non-cognitivist accounts of emotions. This relation can best be understood by thinking through Nietzsche's account of the Dionysian chorus in terms of rhetorical advocacy.

First, a terminological note: following Martha Nussbaum and contemporary psychologists, I distinguish *compassion* (feeling for others' suffering; Greek: *eleos*; German: *Mitleid*) from *empathy* (feeling with others' emotions; German: *Mitempfindung*, *Einfühlung*) (2001, pp. 301–4).³ I use *sympathy* when I do not wish to make a distinction between the two.⁴

1 | ANCIENT EMPATHY

In laying bare the inescapable and institutional framework of intersubjectivity, Campe relies heavily on the tripartite division that Aristotle identifies in the constitution of emotions. Every passion is a scene involving the "state of mind" of one person, another person "against whom" the emotion is directed, and the contextual reasons of its provocation (2008, pp. 370–71).⁵ This multi-point schematic is the structure of institutional givenness that turns out to provide Campe's solution to the seemingly intransigent paradox of modernist empathy as both foundational condition for and empirical proof of intersubjectivity.

Yet, while Aristotle's emotions manifest in triangular scenes, the precise language of Aristotle's definition of emotions demands a bifurcation rather than a triptych. The threefold division, which comes immediately on the heels of the defining formula, is worth reading closely:

The passions are all those sources of change on account of which people differ in their judgments that are accompanied by pain and pleasure; examples are anger, pity, fear, and everything else of that sort, as well as their opposites.

(Rh 2.1 1378a; 2009, p. 190)

Emotions are the cause of divergence in people's judgments. The implication is that, without the passions, everyone would judge everything identically. The emotions, therefore, are the very source of diversity in human experience. Hannah Arendt defined the essence of the human condition as *plurality* (1998, pp. 7–8); if this is so, then according to Aristotle, we have the emotions to thank for our humanity.

If this seems a rather hyperbolic claim for a syllogistic logician like Aristotle, it is worth thinking again about what the definition of emotions entails: passions are the sources of change (*metaballontes*) through which people's judgments differ (*diapherousi*).⁶ They are co-emergent with the very fact of plurality, which in turn brings about both the potential and necessity for rhetoric. Passion, remember, consists of a *scene*: one person (a) related to another (b) in a given context (c). Emotions can only arise in these three-part scenarios; it makes sense that no two people (a', a'') will ever judge something in exactly the same way, as it is physically impossible for them to share the same perspective with regard to an Other (b) or to have identical backgrounds and social contexts (c), both of which contribute to the circumstances of an emotion. The tripartite actualization of emotions explains how they function as a structural guarantor of plurality.

The endlessly rich variations of human experience set in motion by the triangular schema, however, tend to overshadow the surprisingly dualistic implications of the main clause of Aristotle's definition. The defining verb, to differ (*diapherein*), effectively divides the world in two: the undifferentiated Same and the altered Other. Even if in actuality *everyone* is subject to change, and necessarily on the side of difference, the act of differing presupposes (and, in fact, brings into being) an original unity as its very condition of possibility.⁷ The foundational moment of emotion, therefore, is the twofold division into Same and Other. In the most essential feature of the Aristotelian conception of emotion, it appears that we have come back (or forward) to the dyadic model of communication. This is the fundamental problem of knowing the other for which empathy was posited as a hopeful solution by early psychologists and phenomenologists: "Empathy claims to connect the otherness of the other and its over-coming by re-introducing the assumption of similarity" (Campe, 2008, p. 365).

Just because the problem of duality is legible in Aristotle's definition, however, does not mean that some form of empathy is necessarily implied as its solution. The very fact that he immediately follows up the defining sentence's bifurcating cleft into Same and Other with the "threefold division" (Rh. 2.11378a) rather than a gesture toward unity seems to indicate that the modern obsession with bridging the divide between selves is not his concern. But properly understood, the entire enterprise of Book Two of the *Rhetoric* is an exercise in empathy. Granted, this is not empathy in the modern sense of *Einfühlung* put forth by Lipps or Husserl nor is it the involuntary contagion of emotions in the eighteenth-century concept of sympathy of Hume or Smith. But Aristotle treats the passions in the *Rhetoric* because they are an integral part of any scene of persuasion: They are the corner of the rhetorical triangle that represents the audience. The job of an orator is to present herself as trustworthy (*ēthos*), argue the facts of the case justly (*logos*), and bring the auditors' emotions into alignment with the affected party (*pathos*). This alignment of emotions, I claim, is a form of empathy that accords with Ancient Greek understandings of emotion.⁸

The tripartite construction is necessarily constitutive of an ancient passion, whether in its original configuration or in its rhetorically inflected recreation. If a plaintiff has been unjustly insulted, he is involved in a scene of anger. But jurors have not been personally slighted and will not feel anger themselves. A rhetorician

must recreate the scene of this emotion for the audience by bringing the jurors to imagine themselves in the place of the offended party. She thus restages the triangulated scenario, casting the parts and decorating the scenery in parallel with that of the original scene of anger to create a kind of *tableau vivant* for her auditors, in which the relational vectors between people become visible. These external, spatial aspects of ancient emotions suggest a move from a theatrical to a geometric metaphor of the recreated emotion as a shape with similar points, angles, and lines.

Perhaps surprisingly, Euclid's *Elements* provides a helpful model to think through the workings of this type of empathy. Book VI is dedicated to the properties of *similarity* between rectilinear figures. It starts with a definition:

Similar rectilinear figures are such as have their angles severally equal and the sides about the equal angles proportional.

(2013, p. 124)

The word translated as “proportional” here is *analogon*, cognate with the English “analogous,” which would be a good term for this non-contagious kind of ancient empathy, in which emotions are not involuntarily transmitted like diseases or overtones, but rather deliberately recreated like a geometrical construction. The first proof of Book VI goes on to show how shapes are analogous, namely “triangles and parallelograms which are of the same height are to one another as their bases” (2013, p. 124). If one thinks of the actor participants involved in an ancient emotional scene as the sides of a shape, then the institutional framework that provides the circumstances of the feeling would be the base. In order to create this kind of analogous empathy, one must not only reconstruct the characters and dispositions of the participants but also place them in like relations of their basic social contexts. If the original shape in its triangulation of participants and institution is the first-order feeling, then the rhetorically recreated shape is the second-order emotion, where the audience posits the points and supplies the plane of relations. To the extent that these shapes *match*, empathy by analogy is successful.⁹ If the angles are too acute or obtuse, then the reproduced emotion will be askew.

Euclid's word for “similar,” meanwhile, is *homoia*, source of our prefix ‘homo-.’ Aristotle uses this prefix in a series of related adjectives and verbs (*homopathēs*: adj. ‘of the same feelings’; *homopathein*: ‘to have the same feeling’; *sunomopathein*: ‘to have the same feeling along with’). If any words in Classical Greek carry the meaning of “empathy” in the sense of sharing emotions of any type, these are they. Usually, Aristotle reserves these terms for the related passions that close friends feel for each other (cf. NE 1161a), but one passage in the *Rhetoric* carries the logic of an almost modern sense of empathy: “[T]he hearer always sympathizes with (*sunomopathein*) someone whose speech is full of feeling (*pathētikōs*)” (Rh. 3.71408a; 2009, p. 257). Appropriately enough, this passage comes from a part of the *Rhetoric* in which Aristotle is discussing the appropriateness (*to prepon*) of speeches, in which he insists they should be emotionally expressive (*pathētikē*) in a way proportional (*analogon*) to the subject matter (Rh. 3.71408a). This demand for analogy in rhetorical delivery makes explicit the geometrical metaphor for ancient empathy. If listeners are carried away to sympathize with the emotions of an impassioned speech, then one might be tempted to think that the passions are contagious for Aristotle, as they are in Hume or Smith. Yet the warning comes in the context of a general explanation for why listeners can be misled by rhetoricians: “The soul falsely concludes that someone is telling the truth because they feel that way in such circumstances” (2009, p. 257). Again, the projection of emotion depends on being cognizant of the social circumstances and institutional conventions under which it arose. If this “base” of the emotion's figure is different from the foundation assumed by the audience, then the resulting second-order passion will be skewed and not analogous to the shape of the first.

Emotions are normally first-order phenomena (those feeling them are players in the scene in which the emotion arises), except in the very setting for the sake of which Aristotle writes his account of the passions: the rhetorical situation of speaking for another. In that case, the speaker is trying to get someone to feel an emotion on *behalf of someone else* in a second-order recreated scene. By necessity, then, all rhetorically produced emotions are cases of empathy. Many of the emotions Aristotle examines in the *Rhetoric* fall into this type, as they can only be

deployed by rhetoricians in order to evoke a second-order emotion in the audience: Jurors in a trial, for instance, will not feel angry or afraid themselves, but only for the defendant.

The major exception to this rule is compassion (*eleos*), which must function rhetorically as a first-order emotion. Orators do not ask their audience to feel pity *with* their clients in some kind of parallel scenario, as the suffering parties in question do not—cannot—feel pity at all. This fact will feature as one of Nietzsche's major criticisms of compassion in *Morgenröthe* (Dawn): He excoriates those who imagine that *Mitleid* involves "feeling with" the objects of pity (M§133).¹⁰ In Aristotle's explication of *eleos*, however, this confusion is impossible. Only those observing and judging the clients feel compassion for the suffering party, even if the jurors are far away from the miserable wretch and have never beheld him before in their lives.¹¹

If, however, empathy by analogy turns out to be so pervasive and fundamental to the operation of rhetoric and to the structure of Aristotle's thinking about judgment and emotion, how can one explain the fact that there is no clear term for it? Why does Aristotle not name and define it, as he does the passions in general? One might wonder why he does not simply make *sunomopathein* ("to feel the same with") a technical term and employ it, for instance, as a helpful clarifying contrast in his account of compassion. But one should not project modern conceptual taxonomies onto past ages. As the questions that concern cultures change, so will the constellation of concepts that people use to grasp the phenomena of life, in a process that Hans Blumenberg calls *Umbesetzung* (reoccupation). Perhaps the underlying commonality of human experience was not problematic until new models of individual selfhood in the modern age called forth a desire to name and hold fast shared emotions.

Nor is empathy alone in this respect: several phenomena of human experience that are evidenced to have played central roles in Greek understandings of the world remain unnamed in antiquity. The concept of the "institution," for instance, comes to mind. No one imagines that the givenness of social norms and procedures was invisible to the Greeks simply because they did not carve out an equivalent technical term to describe it. In fact, many of the specific characteristics of institutionality as understood today can be traced specifically back to Greek templates.¹² Some ideas are so obvious and pervasive to a way of thinking that they do not take *conceptual* form until they are rendered strange by a later age or by foreign observers.

Empathy by analogy is a prime example of this unnamed yet axiomatic element of thought. Not only is it critical to Aristotle's definition of emotions, but it is also the implicit reason for including the emotions in the *Rhetoric* to begin with. If the passions are the source of human diversity, then rhetorically inflected empathy is evidence of our commonality. Yet this commonality does not entail a distinction-erasing union like some modern versions of empathy, but rather a cognitively grounded and bodily felt parallelism that preserves difference.

2 | NIETZSCHEAN EMPATHY AND CHORAL ADVOCACY

While the Greeks never developed a theoretical vocabulary for the phenomenon of empathy, we can observe how such a notion originates as a theory and develops an explicit articulation in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. His early publications conflate compassion and empathy in the term *Mitleid*. By the 1880s, however, he began differentiating between *Mitleid* as compassion and *Mitempfindung* as empathy. This terminological clarification invites a reinterpretation of the earlier works in light of the later disambiguation, ultimately revealing a third-figure advocacy that even the seeming one-to-one communicative model of empathy entails. This trajectory becomes clear when we trace Nietzsche's evolving thoughts on sympathy through his reception of Schopenhauer.¹³

For Schopenhauer, *Mitleid* is the only truly moral incentive. The experience of compassion, which for Schopenhauer is immediate and unencumbered by cognitive deliberation, breaks down the walls of individuation. Sympathy makes people realize that the barriers between them are illusory and that they are united in the original suffering of the blind, unconscious Will. This language is echoed in Nietzsche's description of the Dionysian in *Geburt der Tragödie* (The Birth of Tragedy): both Schopenhauer's *Mitleid* and Nietzsche's Dionysian are forces that can smash the "Bann der Individuation" (GT§10; cf. Schopenhauer, 1978, GM§22).¹⁴ For Nietzsche, we must be

protected from the Dionysian power to confront us with the “Urleiden der Welt, [...] unmittelbaren Anschauen der höchsten Weltidee, [...] ungedämmten Ergüsse des unbewußten Willens” (GT§21).¹⁵ Nietzsche's language about Dionysus could easily be mistaken for that of Schopenhauer on the Will.

In GT, tragedy plays a Schopenhauerian role in exposing spectators to the Will, and sympathy is directly implicated in tragedy's effect. The word *Mitleid* occurs in various forms fourteen times in the text and is never invoked disparagingly. Hence, one might conclude that the early Nietzsche accepts the morality of Schopenhauer's *Mitleid* at face value. But look more closely at the precise function that *Mitleid* performs in Nietzsche's account of tragedy:

Wir sind wirklich in kurzen Augenblicken das Urwesen selbst und fühlen dessen unbändige Daseinsgier und Daseinslust; [...] Trotz Furcht und Mitleid sind wir die glücklich-Lebendigen, nicht als Individuen, sondern als das *eine* Lebendige, mit dessen Zeugungslust wir verschmolzen sind.

(GT§17)¹⁶

The opening language could have come directly out of Schopenhauer's description of the effect of music or *Mitleid*. It breaks down walls of individuation and unites people with the universal essence. Yet all this grand unifying action happens *despite fear and pity*. Thus, Nietzsche is clearly working with a different conception of *Mitleid* from that of Schopenhauer. But his polemic here is double-barreled: it takes aim not only at Schopenhauer's affective *Mitleid* but also at Aristotle's cognitivist compassion (*eleos*). Nietzsche has taken the very two instrumental emotions by which catharsis is accomplished in Aristotle's definition of tragedy and says that tragedy succeeds *in spite of* those tools.¹⁷

Nietzsche's evaluation of sympathy hence does not align with Aristotle's demands for tragic pity nor with Schopenhauer's melting *Mitleid*. Only toward the end of the book, when Nietzsche begins mooning over Wagner, do the details of his own conception of *Mitleid* come into focus. To describe the effect of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, he writes:

So gewaltig auch das Mitleiden in uns hineingreift, in einem gewissen Sinne rettet uns doch das Mitleiden vor dem Urleiden der Welt, wie das Gleichnisbild des Mythus uns vor dem unmittelbaren Anschauen der höchsten Weltidee, wie der Gedanke und das Wort uns vor dem ungedämmten Ergüsse des unbewußten Willens rettet.

(GT§21)¹⁸

Mitleid, here, is something that reaches into us and grasps us powerfully and violently. Yet however forcefully compassion digs in its claws, it does not destroy the boundaries of individuation and reveal our underlying unity. Whereas Schopenhauer's *Mitleid* exposes us to the original suffering of the world, Nietzsche's *Mitleid* protects us from it. This cited sentence reveals the source of the above-quoted list of attributes of the Dionysian that echo those of Schopenhauer's Will. Yet they appear in a series of contrasts that connect *Mitleid* not to the Dionysian, but to its opposite. Sympathy here is like thought, language, and the image of myth, all of which serve to represent and hence control the wild, chaotic terror of primal Dionysian suffering. In short, *Mitleid* is a function of the Apollonian.

Further along in the same chapter, it becomes apparent exactly what kind of function *Mitleid* serves for the Apollonian drive to representation:

So entreißt uns das Apollinische der dionysischen Allgemeinheit und entzückt uns für die Individuen; an diese fesselt es unsre Mitleidserregung, durch diese befriedigt es den nach großen und erhabenen Formen lechzenden Schönheitssinn; es führt an uns Lebensbilder vorbei und reizt uns zu gedankenhaftem Erfassen des in ihnen enthaltenen Lebenskernes.

(GT§21)¹⁹

The Apollonian “arouses compassion for individuals”; “displays a procession of life pictures”; and “stimulates us to grasp in thought.” These actions are nothing more nor less than the task of rhetoric as delineated in Aristotle and Quintilian. Here, Nietzsche rips *Mitleid* away from its Schopenhaurian immediacy and makes it a mediating device of representation. In doing so, he rejects the mystery of Schopenhauer’s *Mitleid* and moves it toward Greek *eleos*: as with Aristotle’s emotion of compassion, Nietzsche’s *Mitleid* requires judgment, cognition, and distance.

Mit der ungeheuren Wucht des Bildes, des Begriffs, der ethischen Lehre, der sympathischen Erregung reißt das Apollinische den Menschen aus seiner orgiastischen Selbstvernichtung empor und täuscht ihn über die Allgemeinheit des dionysischen Vorganges hinweg zu dem Wahne, daß er ein einzelnes Weltbild, z.B. Tristan und Isolde, sehe [...]

(GT§21)²⁰

Now the service that compassion provides to this rhetorical task of Apollonian representation becomes even clearer. By arousing sympathy, rhetoric—or tragedy—tricks us into feeling for single persons. The individuals we behold are still illusory, but now *Mitleid* constructs their delusive appearance rather than dispelling the illusion of individuality, as it does for Schopenhauer. In short, Nietzsche’s rhetorical *Mitleid* builds up walls between people, whereas Schopenhauer’s instinctive *Mitleid* tears them down.

This immuring sympathy is not the only wall-building in GT. Nietzsche cites with approbation Schiller’s interpretation of the chorus as “eine lebendige Mauer [...], die die Tragödie um sich herum zieht” (GT§7).²¹ Joshua Billings has cleverly shown how Nietzsche’s entire discussion of the Greek chorus here is a series of strategic misreadings of previous scholars (2009). What Billings does not mention is that all these misreadings turn the chorus into a kind of advocate. Nietzsche rejects two theories of the chorus before turning to Schiller’s. First, he condemns Joseph Reinkens’s political explanation of the chorus. Reinkens had seen the chorus “als Anwalt der Interessen des freien, edlen Volkes [...] beim Streite und Schicksale seiner Fürsten.”²² This would make the chorus an advocate of the people, speaking truth to power. Nietzsche goes so far as to call such proto-democratic theories of the chorus a blasphemous presentiment of “constitutionelle Volksvertretung” (GT§7).²³

Next, Nietzsche lambastes August Wilhelm Schlegel’s famous formula of the chorus as an “ideal spectator,” the popularity of which he drolly explains “durch die echt germanische Voreingenommenheit für Alles, was ‘idealisch’ genannt wird” (GT§7).²⁴ Nietzsche willfully misrepresents Schlegel’s theory to make it seem ridiculous, as if Schlegel meant for the chorus to represent an abstract cipher of the theatrical audience, entirely divorced from the fictional world of the myth. In fact, Schlegel understood the chorus to be participants in the action, albeit with a wider perspective than the individual characters. But in Nietzsche’s caricature of Schlegel’s position, the chorus becomes a *Fürsprecher* for the audience members—a kind of peanut gallery in the grand tradition of the Muppets’ Waldorf and Astoria, who gives voice to all the smart things the spectators might say in reaction to the drama if they were only clever and quick enough to do so.

The third explanation for the chorus that finally gains Nietzsche’s approval is from Schiller’s introduction to *Die Braut von Messina* (*The Bride of Messina*, 1803). Although Nietzsche adopts Schiller’s understanding of the chorus, it is telling, as Billings points out, that he wrongly attributes the function that Schiller assigns to the chorus in *modern* dramas to ancient Greek tragedy—namely, that of a “lebendige Mauer gegen die anstürmende Wirklichkeit” (GT§8).²⁵ Although building a wall around the dramatic action of the tragedy may not seem to be a form of advocacy, observe how Nietzsche goes on to specify the action of the chorus of satyrs who perform this task. He insists

dass mit [dem Satyr als dionysischem Choreut] die Tragödie beginnt, dass aus ihm die dionysische Weisheit der Tragödie spricht.

(GT§7)²⁶

Tragedy was born in the moment in which the first satyrs added words to their dancing; tragedy consists in the voice that the satyrs lend to articulate the wisdom of Dionysus. In short, tragedy is a function of advocacy, and the chorus of satyrs is the *Fürsprecher* for Dionysus.

It may come as a surprise to think of the wild raptures of dithyrambic song as a form of rhetorical representation, but that is the conclusion we are forced to draw if we take Nietzsche's language here seriously. It helps explain why Nietzsche seems to reject tragic pity but maintain a rhetorician's compassion later in the book. When he summarizes his explication of the chorus in the next chapter, however, the role that sympathy plays in the chorus's rhetorical agency is shuffled yet again:

Dieser Chor schaut in seiner Vision seinen Herrn und Meister Dionysus und ist darum ewig der dienende Chor: er sieht, wie dieser, der Gott, leidet und sich verherrlicht, und *handelt* deshalb selbst nicht. Bei dieser, dem Gotte gegenüber durchaus dienenden Stellung ist er doch der höchste, nämlich dionysische Ausdruck der *Natur* und redet darum, wie diese, in der Begeisterung Orakel- und Weisheitssprüche: als der *mitleidende* ist er zugleich der *weise*, aus dem Herzen der Welt die Wahrheit verkündende.

(GT§8, original emphasis)²⁷

In this passage, it becomes clear that we are to understand the chorus not so much as practicing advocacy or *Fürsprache* (speaking for), in the sense of Roman rhetoric, but more as engaging in *synegoria* or *Mit-sprache* (speaking with), as was common in Athenian oratory. Elsewhere, the satyr is described as the god's "mitleidender Genosse" (GT§8).²⁸ Yet, this description complicates our neat model of Nietzsche's *Mitleid* as a rhetorical distancing effect in opposition to both Schopenhauer's immediate affect and Aristotle's tragic pity. Here, the proclaiming *Stellvertreter* (representative, proxy) of Dionysus must himself feel the god's pain. There is no advocacy without sympathy.

Nietzsche goes on to explain that the satyr as the advocate of Dionysus unites musician, poet, dancer, and visionary in one *single* person—performing his advocacy antics for the benefit of others:

So entsteht denn jene phantastische und so anstößig scheinende Figur des weisen und begeisterten Satyrs, der zugleich 'der tumbe Mensch' im Gegensatz zum Gotte ist: Abbild der Natur und ihrer stärksten Triebe, ja Symbol derselben und zugleich Verkünder ihrer Weisheit und Kunst: Musiker, Dichter, Tänzer, Geisterseher in *einer* Person.

(GT§8, original emphasis)²⁹

Contrary to most popular interpretations, the Dionysian and Apollonian have to each other the relationship of the plaintiff to her representative, or the defendant to his advocate. The Dionysian by definition cannot speak for itself. Dionysus' advocating servant can only perform his duties under the auspices of Apollo. Language and gesture—the skills of the rhetorician as well as the actor—are the province of the Apollonian; music and dance, of the Dionysian. These forms all come together in the figure of the satyr chorist, whose *synegoria* makes him as much a *Mit-tänzer* as a *Mit-sprecher*, dancing as well as speaking in support of his divine client. The chorus performs *on behalf* of Dionysus *in the modes* of Apollo for a public who cannot access the truths of the one without the falsifying mediation of the other.

In the course of its appearances in GB, *Mitleid* takes on three seemingly incompatible meanings: At times, it is a derisive shorthand for tragic pity; at others, it is a positive account of how the Apollonian mode works to endear us to characters by means of a distancing effect similar to that of rhetorical pity; finally, in his explanation of choral advocacy, *Mitleid* involves the empathetic connection between the satyr and the suffering god, between the proxy chorus and the Dionysian. Instead of throwing our hands up in despair at this definitional confusion, let us instead consider how it in fact prepares for a nuanced conception of the relationship between empathy and compassion.

Nietzsche did not publish a sustained analysis of *Mitleid* until a decade later. In fact, *Morgenröthe* (*Dawn*, 1881) is probably best known for its scathing excoriation of compassion and any moral system associated with it. Amid a long series of pity-bashing aphorisms, however, there is one entitled “*Mitempfindung*” that offers a surprisingly positive assessment of what today we call “empathy” (in fact, both recent English translators render *Mitempfindung* as “empathy,” even though the word did not exist until after Nietzsche’s death).³⁰ It is also important to clarify that Nietzsche was writing *Dawn* just as the discourse of *Einfühlung* was starting to take off among German aestheticians and psychologists. The phenomenon he describes as *Mitempfindung* bears a strong resemblance to the *Einfühlung* of Robert Vischer or Theodor Lipps, but as far as I can tell, Nietzsche never records the word or mentions its major contemporary exponents.

Nietzsche’s analysis of *Mitempfindung* is remarkably prescient of several threads of development in empathy studies in psychology, neuroscience, and affect theory of the last 40 years, and he even offers a proto-evolutionary account of the origin of empathy in human society, an argument made today by many evolutionary psychologists (Özen, 2021). The section begins:

Mitempfindung. – Um den Anderen zu verstehen, das heißt, um *sein Gefühl in uns nachzubilden*, gehen wir zwar häufig auf den *Grund* seines so und so bestimmten Gefühls zurück [...]

(M§142, original emphasis)³¹

So far Nietzsche is describing what psychologists today call “cognitive empathy.” It is quite distinct from his earlier critique of *Mitleid* because, as Nietzsche stresses, compassion is an emotion that only the one pitying experiences, and it is entirely separate from the suffering of the one being pitied. Here, Nietzsche equates one’s *intellectual* understanding of the Other with the *emotional* work of recreating the other’s feeling in oneself. The induction of the *cause* of the other’s feelings is a kind of perspective taking or mentalizing; this implies that emotions actually do have causes in the world and are the result of judgments or reactions that can be rationally justified and understood. Such a process would involve a cognitivist conception of emotions akin to those espoused by Aristotle or Martha Nussbaum. But before we put Nietzsche into the Aristotelian camp, let’s read further:

aber viel gewöhnlicher ist es, diess zu unterlassen und das Gefühl nach den *Wirkungen*, die es am Anderen übt und zeigt, in uns zu erzeugen, indem wir den Ausdruck seiner Augen, seiner Stimme, seines Ganges, seiner Haltung (oder gar deren Abbild in Wort, Gemälde, Musik) an unserem Leibe nachbilden (mindestens bis zu einer leisen Ähnlichkeit des Muskelspiels und der Innervation).

(M§142, original emphasis)³²

Here, Nietzsche is describing what contemporary psychologists call “affective empathy” or emotional contagion. His stress of the physical source of emotions in our bodily expressions, gestures, and movements could have come straight out of William James or any number of contemporary affect theorists (e.g., Brian Massumi, Eve Sedgwick): You don’t sweat and tremble because you feel fear; you feel fear when your body sweats and trembles.

Dann entsteht in uns ein ähnliches Gefühl, in Folge einer alten Association von Bewegung und Empfindung, welche darauf eingedrillt ist, rückwärts und vorwärts zu laufen. In dieser Geschicklichkeit, die Gefühle des Andern zu verstehen, haben wir es sehr weit gebracht, und fast unwillkürlich sind wir in Gegenwart eines Menschen immer in der Übung dieser Geschicklichkeit

(M§142)³³

In these explanations, Nietzsche goes back and forth between cognitivist/intentionalist; and affective/nonintentionalist understandings of emotions. The nearly unconscious contagion of affect in empathy here [nonintentionalist] is dubbed a *Geschicklichkeit* (skillfulness, adroitness, expertise), as if it were a skill that we could practice and exercise [intentionalist] “almost involuntarily” [nonintentionalist]. This complex interplay of body and mind foreshadows new

theories of constructed emotions that bypass the apparent standoff between cognitivist and affective camps (e.g., Barrett, 2017).

Only with the disambiguation of empathy from compassion in *Dawn* do the seemingly incompatible roles assigned to *Mitleid* in GT begin to make sense. Nietzsche's subtle explication of *Mitempfindung* incorporates assertions about emotions from both cognitivist and affect scholars to go beyond their impasse about the nature of feelings: Emotions are *both* automatic bodily reenactments of physical symptoms *and* perspectival judgments about scenes of people in the world. The involuntary and mysterious physical production of affects can only be recognized as specific emotions like fear, pity, anger, or shame through the conceptual judgment of interactive scenes between individuals. Projecting these distinctions back into the language of GT, the inchoate dance of Dionysian affect cannot become an object of consciousness except through the conceptual imagery of Apollonian cognitivism.

Now we can see more clearly the advocacy role that *Mitleid* plays in the tragic chorus. The Dionysian has no language: As soon as it speaks, it ceases to be Dionysian—hence the need for a *Fürsprecher*. But in using the Apollonian modes of speech and visual spectacle to represent the Dionysian, the chorus has to be devious—satyr-like even. By *feeling with* the god, the choral satyr experiences the affective striving of the Dionysian, but he must translate this *Mitempfindung* into compassion or cognitive empathy for the audience to understand it. At the same time, the cognitive judgments involved in tragic pity for individual characters can block the experience of the Dionysian championed by the chorus, and so the compelling physical empathy of their music and dance pulls us back in. If we fully join in on the Dionysian rapture, however, we cease to be an audience altogether: By joining in the riotous dance, we lose our selves and even the knowledge of the unity we attain in the process. To protect us from this loss, choral advocacy builds a living wall of rhetorically inflected compassion in lyrical language. This back and forth between *Mitempfindung* and *Mitleid*, between Dionysian participation and Apollonian spectatorship, determines the steps of the advocacy dance of the chorus. Compassion, ultimately, must intercede for empathy in order for empathy to become a conscious reality among spectators or in interpersonal encounters. Or, to put it another way, Dionysian affect is only accessible through the intercessory language of Apollonian cognitivist emotions.

This choral advocacy speaks directly to the ways in which the chorus has been staged and theorized by scholars in recent decades.³⁴ Although Ulrike Haß rarely mentions Nietzsche in her magisterial *Kraftfeld Chor*, she seems to be channeling him when she describes the paradoxical liminality of the ancient chorus, which teeters between the collective and the individual:

[T]he chorus [...] can be considered a threshold figure par excellence like Dionysus. In the constellation of chorus and protagonist, the chorus forms the place where differentiating takes place before difference, plurality comes before the collective, and metamorphosis before identity

(while protagonists exercise asserting difference, collective, or identity).³⁵

These troubled and troubling distinctions (the section from which the passage is taken is dubbed “Gattungs-trouble”) between the plural chorus and the singular protagonist are strikingly analogous to Nietzsche's codependent dichotomy between the Dionysian and Apollonian.

Strikingly, the brand of Athenian advocacy that Nietzsche attributes to the chorus and that he insists is inseparable from the satyrs' dance and action—namely, *speaking with* (*synegoria*)—finds its echo in Haß's analysis. She identifies three distinctive choral actions: Going-with, feeling-with, and speaking-with (*Mitgehen*, *Mitempfinden*, *Mitreden*, 2021, pp. 102–3). The first of these, the chorus's accompanying movement, is specifically linked to a grounding of emotions: “Der Chor ist nicht Adressat von Emotionen, sondern ihr Ort: die gesicherte Stelle ihres Ausdrucks und ihres Kommentars” (2021, p. 103).³⁶ Haß's vision of the chorus is a distributive phenomenon made up of “Leute, die mitgehen, mitempfinden, mitreden” (2021, p. 121).³⁷ As Nietzsche insists, the empathetic choral advocacy is one of speaking, dancing, and feeling alongside (rather than just for or on behalf of) Dionysus. Haß

manages to translate Nietzsche's anti-democratic claims for the chorus, however, into an idiom of hope for a less patriarchal, more communal-oriented collective.

This essay sketches a preliminary outline of how empathy is presupposed by advocacy in Aristotle and how the advocacy chorus functions as a conduit between incompatible conceptions of emotions in Nietzsche. The contradictory walling and connecting action of the chorus is partially emblematic of the hidden role that empathy plays in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The unnamed potentiality of empathy is a condition for plurality and rhetoric in Aristotle, just as the chorus serves as a ground for the emergence of the protagonist and the subject. My major goal has been to show that both Aristotle's empathy by analogy and Nietzsche's advocacy chorus provide sophisticated models of empathy as an emotion that must sustain difference in order to actualize commonality.

Yet, while Apollonian emotions and Dionysian affect in Nietzsche exist in a relationship of co-emergent interdependence, first- and second-order emotions do not have this precise mutual logic in Aristotle. The task remains to determine the exact relation of empathy by analogy to the other emotions in the *Rhetoric*. Another necessary next step in understanding the specific work of empathy's advocacy will be to explore its action in concrete choral performances, both ancient and modern. Such a study would not only advance important research on the chorus begun by Haß and others but would also build on the foundation laid by Campe's compelling connection of empathy to the history of rhetoric.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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Endnotes

- ¹For helpful scholarship on empathy in Ancient Greece, see Konstan, 2001, pp. 60–61. He lists many of the related terms that signify feeling *with* specific emotions (*sun* + feeling), but concludes “Not even these compound terms [...] indicate the kind of *emotional* fusion that modern coinages such as empathy imply” (60).
- ²Rachel Sternberg provides a clear lexical taxonomy of “other-concern” in Ancient Greek (2006, p. 12). Although she agrees that there is no Greek word for empathy as “the imagining oneself into the situation of another person,” she avers that the phenomenon of empathy is powerfully evidenced in Greek literature, citing examples in Herodotus and Xenophon (15).
- ³Although this article follows Nussbaum's terminological distinctions, the analysis of empathy in Aristotle and Nietzsche undertaken here complicates the clear distinctions Nussbaum tries to draw between the ethical implications of empathy and compassion.
- ⁴To avoid confusion in discussions of the subtle differences between these terms in Aristotle's and Nietzsche's texts, I also include the Greek (*eleos*) and German (*Mitleid*, *Einfühlung*, *Mitempfindung*) words where necessary for disambiguation.
- ⁵Cf. *Rh.* 2.11378a.
- ⁶Parenthetical inclusions of the Greek are from Aristotle (2020).
- ⁷This seeming paradox is explored in Plato's *Sophist* as the condition of Being and thought. It is central to the thinking of Schiller (the Naive and the Sentimental), Hölderlin (*Sein und Urteil*), and, as we shall see, Nietzsche (the Dionysian and the Apollonian). See Wiggins, 2019, pp. 41–44, 51.
- ⁸For a helpful account of ancient emotions as scenes in contradistinction to modern interior conceptions of emotion, see Campe and Weber (2014, pp. 1–18).
- ⁹For a different explication of sympathy as a kind of ‘matching’, see Marshall (2018).

- ¹⁰ All German citations from Nietzsche come from *Nietzsches Werke* (1995) and are cited parenthetically with the title (GB = *Geburt der Tragödie*; M = *Morgenröthe*) and section number.
- ¹¹ Some emotions in the *Rhetoric*, in contrast, could be deployed either as first-order scenes or as second-order recollections. A speaker may invite jurors to feel indignation (*nemesis*) at the undeserved success of a cheating schemer directly, or on behalf of someone whom the cheater unfairly outstripped.
- ¹² Rüdiger Campe does precisely this in the introductory essay to this volume.
- ¹³ For a different but complementary account of sympathy in Nietzsche, see Ansell-Pearson and Bamford (2021, pp. 93–109).
- ¹⁴ “The spell of individuation” (2000, p. 60).
- ¹⁵ “The original suffering of the world [...] the unmediated contemplation of the highest world idea [...] the unbridled outpouring of the unconscious will.” (2000, p. 114, trans. modified).
- ¹⁶ “For a few short moments we really are the original essence itself and feel its unbridled craving for existence and joy in existence; [...] In spite of fear and compassion, we are the fortunate living beings, not as individuals, but as a *single* living being, with whose joy in creation we are fused.” (2000, p. 91).
- ¹⁷ For a helpful account of Nietzsche’s evolving ideas about the effect of tragedy, see Emden (2018).
- ¹⁸ “Despite how violently compassion sinks its clutches into us, its sympathetic suffering rescues us in a certain sense from the original suffering of the world, just as the allegorical image of myth rescues us from the unmediated contemplation of the highest world idea, just as thought and word rescue us from the unbridled outpourings of the unconscious will.” (2000, p. 114, trans. modified).
- ¹⁹ “So the Apollonian tears us away from the Dionysian universality and allows us to delight in individuals; it chains the arousal of our compassion to these individuals, and through them it satisfies the sense of beauty which craves great and sublime forms; it leads a procession of images of life past us and stimulates us to grasp in thought the core of life contained in them” (2000, p. 115).
- ²⁰ “With the tremendous proliferation of the image, the concept, the ethical doctrine, the arousal of sympathy, the Apollonian principle tears man up out of his orgiastic self-annihilation and deceives him about the universality of the Dionysian process by deluding him that he sees one single image of the world, Tristan and Isolde for example [...]” (2000, p. 115).
- ²¹ “A living wall which tragedy builds around itself” (2000, p. 44, trans. modified).
- ²² “As an attorney for the free, noble people [...] in their struggles and fortunes with their rulers.” Billings adds that the chorus also “represent[s] the ‘öffentliche Meinung’ (public opinion)” (quoted in: Billings, 2009, p. 254).
- ²³ “Constitutional representation of the people” (2000, p. 43).
- ²⁴ “From the truly German prejudice in favor of everything going by the name of ‘ideal’” (2000, p. 43).
- ²⁵ “A living wall erected against the pounding storm of reality” (2000, p. 47).
- ²⁶ “That tragedy begins with him [the satyr as Dionysian choreut], that the Dionysian wisdom of tragedy speaks out of him” (2000, p. 45).
- ²⁷ “In its vision this chorus beholds its lord and master Dionysus and is therefore eternally the chorus of *servants*: it watches how the latter, the god, suffers and glorifies himself, and therefore itself refrains from *action*. But in this attitude of complete service to the god, the chorus is the highest, indeed Dionysian expression, of *nature* and speaks therefore, like nature, oracular words of wisdom in a state of enthusiastic excitement: as the *compassionate* chorus, it is at the same time the *wise* chorus, proclaiming the truth from the heart of the world.” (2000, p. 51).
- ²⁸ “Compassionate comrade” (2000, p. 47).
- ²⁹ “It is in this way then that the fantastic and apparently so offensive figure of the wise and enthusiastic satyr emerges, the satyr who is at the same time the ‘stupid man’ in contrast to the god: a copy of nature and its strongest drives, even their symbol and at the same time proclaimer of their wisdom and art: musician, poet, dancer, visionary in *one* person.” (2000, pp. 51–2).
- ³⁰ I.e., R.J. Hollindale (1997) and B. Smith (2011).
- ³¹ “Empathy. — To understand another person, that is, to *imitate his feelings in ourselves*, we do indeed often go back to the reason for his feeling thus or thus [...]” (1997, p. 89).
- ³² “But it is much more usual to omit to do this and instead to produce the feeling in ourselves after the *effects* it exerts and displays on the other person by imitating with our own body (at least as far as a faint similarity of the play of

muscles and nerves) the expression of his eyes, his voice, his walk, his bearing (or even their reflection in word, picture, music)." (1997, p. 89, original emphasis, translation modified).

- ³³ "Then a similar feeling arises in us in consequence of an ancient association between movement and sensation, which has been trained to move backwards or forwards in either direction. We have brought our skill in understanding the feeling of others to a high state of perfection and in the presence of another person we are always almost involuntarily practicing this skill" (1997, p. 89).
- ³⁴ I only have space to engage glancingly with Ulrike Haß's scholarship here, but see also Einer Schleef (1997), Bettine Menke (2013), and Sophie Bocksberger (2021). A recent special issue of *Germanic Review* on "Choral Figurations" (edited and introduced by Evelyn Annuß, Fatima Naqvi, and Sebastian Kirsch) brings together a rich collection of voices on diverse approaches to understanding the chorus as "collective appearance" (2024, p. 137).
- ³⁵ Quoted here in Fatima Naqvi's translation (2024, p. 149; cf. Haß, 2021, 20). Other translations from Haß are my own.
- ³⁶ "The chorus is not the addressee of emotions, but rather their location: the secured site of their expression and their commentary."
- ³⁷ "People who speak-with, feel-with, go-with."

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