The Synoptic Image: Fusing the Worldview Dichotomy

R. BRIAN TRACZ
Boston College

Everyone has an understanding of beauty in the world, and this understanding of the world as beautiful flavors how everyone views the world. That said, can a scientific worldview—a fundamental understanding of the world—exist that accommodates an aesthetic understanding of the world? A “scientific worldview” seeks to uncover laws that are foundational both to art and to science. How can one reconcile something like quantitative physical laws with something that is so nebulous as art?

One solution is to partition the two areas into two separate worldviews. Such an approach espouses a stereoscopic analysis: this approach divides worldview into two fundamentally disjointed methods—one scientific and one not scientific. This stereoscopic outlook is routine in everyday contemporary thought, but is it justified? Heidegger is concerned with this routine thinking when he says,

It will not do to admit … that, naturally, we are standing face to face with a tree in bloom, only to affirm the very next moment as equally obvious that this view, naturally, typifies only the naïve, because pre-scientific, comprehension of things… For with that affirmation we have conceded … that those sciences do in fact decide what of the tree in bloom may or may not be considered valid reality.¹

This purported tension between the non-scientific and the scientific views will be the central discussion in this paper. I claim that there is no understanding of the world that is not a unified understanding, for the scientific and non-scientific understandings do not exist separately. A stereoscopic analysis of worldview embraces a problematic conception of the nature of worldview, one that is either wholly hermeneutical or wholly epistemic in nature. By analyzing Friedrich Nietzsche’s

Apolline/Dionysiac distinction in *The Birth of Tragedy* and, in turn, reconsidering Wilfred Sellars’ manifest/scientific image distinction in “Science, Perception, and Reality,” I will argue that a fundamental aesthetic is the basis for synoptic worldview.

I. THE NECESSITY OF AN AESTHETIC: NIETZSCHE’S BIRTH OF TRAGEDY

Broadly put, one might describe an aesthetic as a novel method for interpreting the world. In “The Birth of Tragedy”, Nietzsche characterizes two aesthetic approaches: the Dionysiac approach and the Apolline approach. Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and emotional experience, contrasts with Apollo, the Greek god of poetry and rational endeavors. Nietzsche sees these two approaches as occupying two poles of an aesthetic spectrum, claiming that “one might describe Apollo as the magnificent divine image of the principium individuationis… Whenever the breakdown of the principium individuationis occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the Dionysiac, which is best conveyed by the analogy of intoxication.”ii Intoxication is understood as a kind of ceremonial loss of individual subjectivity called principium individuationis (the principle of individuation). This intoxication facilitated by the Dionysiac view “destroys the veil of maya” and brings about “one-ness as the genius of humankind, indeed of nature itself.”iii Division is, therefore, a “maya,” an illusion. The Apolline supports the principium individuationis, implying that the division of nature from the subject is justified in order to master nature. Both the Apolline and the Dionysiac contrast with “aesthetic Socratism,” an extreme perversion of the Apolline view, where “in order to be beautiful, everything must be reasonable.”iv Such a view posits a logical foundation that is uniform and predictable, particularly in things that are aesthetic in nature.

To clarify exactly why these divisions are important, let us consider Nietzsche’s example of Euripides—a non-Dionysiac. Nietzsche perceives a fundamental shift in the tragic form of drama in Euripides. The stimulating characteristics of Euripides’ drama included “paradoxical thoughts—in place of Apolline visions—and fiery effects—in place of Dionysiac ecstasies—and, what is more, thoughts and affects most realistically imitated, not ones which have been dipped in the ether of art.”v The Apolline supports a division of nature so that it might be knowable and, while artistic, differs from the emotion of the Dionysiac view in favor of concrete “visions” of nature. The Dionysiac supports a unity of nature that is accessed through a hyper-emotional “ecstasy,” ultimately rejecting the Apolline idea of nature as something to be divided and manipulated. The metaphor of “visions:ecstasies:Apolline:Dionysiac” is instructive in understanding Nietzsche’s distinction between things observed and things felt. Nietzsche himself best summarizes that “our whole [Apolline] knowledge of art is at bottom illusory, because, as knowing creatures, we are not one and identical with the essential being which gives itself eternal pleasure as the creator and spectator of that comedy of art.”vi The take-home message is that as mere “knowers” of the world, we will never be able to fully experience the “essential being” of the world in the form of a Dionysiac “ecstasy.” The visions of the Apolline are mere appearance in comparison...
to the real feelings of ecstasy of the Dionysiac. We thus see a symptom of a stereoscopic analysis—the Apolline’s “knowing” fundamentally differs from the Dionysiac’s “ecstasy.”

The stereoscopic analysis becomes more apparent as we view Nietzsche’s interpretation of Socrates’ death. He notes that Socrates, esteeming rationality over emotion, finally realized that “things which I do not understand are not automatically unreasonable.” Socrates, on his death bed, finally resorted to poetry composition—the repulsive activity of the Dionysiac. By Nietzsche’s interpretation, Socrates realized the emptiness of the notion that beautiful things ought to be reasonable when all is said and done. For Nietzsche, the extreme Apolline view ultimately fails, and if we disagree with him, he invites us to look at what the great Apolline Socrates did on his deathbed, embracing the Dionysiac activity of poetry composition.

According to Nietzsche, the Apolline aesthetic, including aesthetic Socratism, ideally ought to give way to the Dionysiac aesthetic. According to the Dionysiac conception of art, “art [does] not simply imitate the reality of nature but rather [supplies] a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature, and [is] set alongside the latter as a way of overcoming it.” Art emulates the very reality of nature itself, and the resulting artistic metaphysics is an appropriate vehicle to discern the inner reality of nature. The extreme Apolline view is rejected because it embraces the principium individuationis of nature—subjectivity, by the Apolline view, is separated from a nature that is cut up into analyzable, individual pieces. Art embraces a unification that acts counter to the Apolline tendency. This implies that the individual things that we might call “facts” about the world have no privileged place in the unified aesthetic of nature that is the Dionysiac view.

Although the Dionysiac view is at first sight “unified” in its view of nature, one might still consider it a fragmented, stereoscopic viewpoint if one values any scientific, individual facts about the world in the creation of worldview. The ultimate goal of the Dionysiac view is to de-emphasize fact-claims that are individually known and to emphasize artworks that are holistically interpreted. Nietzsche’s claim above that as “knowing creatures” we are unable to act in concert with “the essential being as creator and spectator” takes on a new significance if we value “known” things like the facts of physics and evolutionary biology. If known things have cash-value for one’s worldview, then there is an issue with Nietzsche’s analysis: knowing is forever severed from interpretation or, at best, placed beside it. Indeed, one might have anticipated such an issue at the outset considering Nietzsche’s rejection that the objective foundation for “facts” exists in the first place.

Despite Nietzsche’s insistence on the dichotomy between individual, known facts and unified, creative art, Nietzsche’s claim that “only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified” is a deep insight for the discussion of worldview. If, as initially noted, an aesthetic is a method for interpreting the world, then Nietzsche is correct in noting that nothing is justified without some method of interpretation. Facts, even though they might be objective, do not interpret themselves. The major liability in Nietzsche’s analysis is the dismissal of aesthetic phenom-
ena that have Socratic character, that is, aesthetic phenomena that are logical or scientific in nature. We can do better by attempting to subsume scientific facts in an aesthetic interpretation of the world. I will consider scientific observations as particular types of aesthetic observation requiring interpretation, not as a purely “reasonable,” autonomous body of statements that speaks for itself. In Wilfred Sellars’ argument, such a recognition that scientific phenomena must be aesthetic phenomena if they are to “justify the world and existence” is not taken for granted. This fact will be central to the criticism of Sellars that follows.

II. THE MANIFEST IMAGE AND THE SCIENTIFIC IMAGE

Like Nietzsche, Wilfred Sellars sees a divide between a scientific outlook and a non-scientific outlook. Sellars believes that the scientific view is the ideal view, even though one might simultaneously entertain both views. He calls the scientific view the “scientific image” and the everyday view the “manifest image.” He calls either viewpoint an “image” on purpose: an image is ambiguous as to whether it is a picture, an impression, or a well-thought-out opinion. The manifest image is a refinement from a primitive man’s worldview—say, a “Neanderthal’s worldview”—in the same way that the scientific image is a refinement from the manifest image. Both the manifest and scientific images have an “empirical” component that separates them from very primitive images. However, Sellars “[accepts] the view that the scientific account of the world is (in principle) the adequate image.” This scientific image purports not to be aesthetic but to be neurophysiological (i.e. factual): “if the scientific image is interpreted [in accord with Science, Perception, and Reality, then our explanations] will be in terms of the constructs of neurophysiology [sic].” Furthermore, he is a staunch scientific realist who “[rejects] the view that the scientific image is a mere ‘symbolic tool’ for finding our way around the manifest image.” For Sellars, the statements of science are as real as everyday objects like chairs and cats. These statements are not constructs or interpretations that allow us to navigate the everyday world but are, instead, the very truth of the matter as far as worldview is concerned.

The manifest image is a “common-sense” view of the world that includes efforts in philosophical thinking while the scientific image is an scientifically nuanced view of the world derived from the results of scientific inquiry.” It becomes apparent that the manifest and scientific images are alike in their empirical tendencies. However, throughout Science, Perception, and Reality, Sellars comes back to one major point that separates the scientific and manifest images:

The conceptual framework which I am calling the manifest image is, in an appropriate sense, itself a scientific image…. There is, however, one type of scientific reasoning which it, by stipulation, does not include, namely that which involves the postulation of imperceptible entities, and principles pertaining to them, to explain the behavior of
The scientific view proceeds by the postulation of unobservables and theoretical entities whereas the manifest view is directly tied to observables. To tie in Nietzsche's terminology, recall the analogy "visions:ecstasies::Apolline:Dionysiac." An analogy exists between Sellars' scientific image and the Apolline view. The person of the scientific image is similar to the Apolline "knower": a person of the scientific image has a worldview informed by knowledge of things—via "visions"—as opposed to emotional impressions of things via "ecstasies."

Contrary to Sellars' understanding, perhaps the scientific image is more a type of manifest image than the manifest image is a type of scientific image. Sellars sets the aim of the scientific image as explaining physical phenomena, and he claims that this explanation can fuel the most satisfying image of the world: all of our commonsense (manifest) notions must not be "reconciled" with the scientific image but "joined" to it. For Sellars, to view the world properly is to be scientific—to proceed by making hypotheses and testing them in a systematic fashion. One should not simply view science as an "alien appendage" but should embrace it in one's daily life.

Before continuing, let us take stock of the stereoscopic nature of both Nietzsche's and Sellars' viewpoints. Nietzsche sees that our view of the world has two methods, one Apolline and one Dionysiac, and though one emphasizes knowing and the other emphasizes ecstasies, both components are aesthetic. Sellars, on the other hand, sees that our view of the world has two different methods, one manifest and one scientific, but both components are empirical. We thus see that Sellars and Nietzsche have different conceptions of what worldview actually is. Sellars notes that the goal of philosophy is a combination of "knowing that" and "knowing how." Without going into detail, both of these goals of "knowing that" and "knowing how" are epistemic—they focus very much on known facts and the habits that we cultivate in understanding them. This is very much divorced from Nietzsche's concern for aesthetic justification of the world—a hermeneutic, not an epistemic, goal.

To explore this difference in overall goals, let us explore a fundamental part of many people's worldview—music. Take, for example, Chopin's Barcarolle or the last movement of Mahler's Fourth Symphony. Both are tone poems: they are meant to represent particular things. The Barcarolle represents a boat ride while Mahler's Fourth Symphony represents a child peering into heaven, and though they do not represent things in the mechanical vocabulary of science, they still represent parts of the world. At the bottom of every musical representation is a comment on the item represented. To put it into terms more friendly to analytic philosophy, Nelson Goodman noted that pieces of art not only represent something but also represent something as thus and so. Chopin's Barcarolle is meant to represent a pleasant, contemplative boat ride (perhaps down the Rhine, perhaps in Venice), while Mahler's Fourth Symphony represents a painful, sentimental, and magical fairytale. The italicized adjectives are the "representation as thus and so" that the music makes.

Sellars would be dissatisfied with the claim that music can represent things as thus
and so because “thoughts in the manifest image are conceived not in terms of their ‘quality’, but rather as inner ‘goings-on’ which are analogous to speech, and find their overt expression in speech.”xxi If music could represent the world as thus and so, it would still be reducible to some thought that is formally linguistic. The “quality” of thought is a purely physiological phenomenon that is analogous to language.xxii Music would thus be an interesting objection: if music, specifically tone poems, can represent objects, then it naturally must be present in thought, which is to say according to Sel-lars’ definition, it must be expressible in words. But music is not expressible in words alone, otherwise music’s presentation—the sound in the symphony hall or from the radio—would be reducible to words. Music represents an object as thus and so with such accuracy at times that we are at a loss to describe that object as effectively using words. Thus, thoughts find their “overt expression” not only in the form of language but also in form of art and music.

Nietzsche shares this sentiment: “Language, as the organ and symbol of phenomena, can never, under any circumstances, externalize the innermost depths of music; when- ever language attempts to imitate music it only touches the outer surface of music.”xxxiii Just as music is not necessarily the quintessence of meaning, so too language does not share a special privilege as the goal of any description of the world. Attitudes toward the world need not be linguistic; the vast array of feelings captured in music attest to this. Furthermore, it is difficult to draw a non-trivial line between thought and “mere” attitude. Both, after all, are intentional—that is, they are both of or towards something (thought of books, attitude towards broccoli). Emotions can be intentional (you are mad at someone). This contradicts Wilfred Sellars’ understanding of thought when he says that a neurophysiological account of thought would leave “no ‘qualitative’ remainder to be accounted for.”xxiv If we take, as Sellars does, qualitative to mean “non-linguistic” then thought is qualitative in some way and the account of representation just traced reveals a fundamentally qualitative portion of thought to be accounted for in neurophysiology (at least “qualitative” by Sellars’ standards).

One might claim that this is all well and good but that music still explains nothing. However, this arises from too grand a sense of explanation. Again, we need to consider whether worldview is epistemic, as Sellars implies, hermeneutic, as Nietzsche implies, or a combination of both, as I am arguing. The claim that music cannot be the primary constituent of a worldview because it does not deal with factual explanation of our knowledge arises only if one assumes that Sellars’ epistemic conception of worldview is adequate. As we just saw, music does an impressive job of describing the parts of life that many consider to be of primary importance. At the same time, there is nothing prohibiting the general meaning of one’s scientific knowledge to be of primary im- portance. In a well-developed worldview, one ideally understands both science and music under the heading of a unified interpretation of the world. What is critical to note is that neither a scientific conception nor a non-scientific conception have any meaning whatever until they are interpreted. This is to say that they are not views of the world at all until they receive interpretation.

Although scientific and non-scientific explanation are both “deep” in respect to
meaning, the types of descriptions supplied by art and science are obviously not equal. The major differences come in the representation of art and science—either method of representation might be more effective for describing one thing or another—and in the aim of art and science—the former aims at personal expression of one’s attitudes toward the world while the other aims at objective understanding and manipulation of physical laws. To understand the similarities and differences between scientific and artistic description, let us clarify the nature of representation. As prominent philosopher of science Bas van Fraassen notes, “representation” is not necessarily “resemblance.”xxv Thus, the Barcarolle might represent a boat ride without having any actual aural resemblance to it, the splash of waves is atonal! A scientific theory represents a certain phenomena, but it does not really make sense to say that it resembles it: the trajectory of a missile represented on a two-dimensional graph only vaguely resembles the three-dimensional reality of the trajectory. In all cases, be they artistic or scientific in nature, van Fraassen observes that “what determines the representation relationship . . . can at best be a relation of what is in it to factors neither in the artifact itself nor in what is being represented [sic]”—factors such as use, practice, and context.xxvi Thus, the common sense notion that “F=ma” randomly inscribed in the sand by a turtle does not represent Newton’s second law because of the context of representation. Though the inscription might resemble Newton’s second law, nevertheless it does not represent it—the context of “a turtle using sand to express itself” is untenable. That we have a certain use in mind when we represent something further implies that a representation will inevitably leave out certain properties of the phenomena which it purports to represent. Such a view of scientific representation suggests that Sellars’ epistemology of “knowing that”/“knowing how” does not receive any scientific meaning until we interpret the various symbols involved in scientific representation.

Referring to Sellars’ quote above, one can object that both music and science involve the “postulation of imperceptible entities.” While Chopin’s Barcarolle refers to a phenomenon in the world—namely boat riding, it nevertheless involves an entity that is completely abstract and “theoretical,” namely, my particular imagination (at the time of the performance of the piece) of an ideal boat ride. This imagination is theoretical—it is based on my past observations, opinions, and notions about boat riding in general. Likewise, while a scientific theory refers to a phenomenon in the world, such as that of falling bodies, it also involves a component that is completely abstract and “theoretical,” namely, the theory of gravitation that claims that all bodies—not just this one in front of me—exert an attractive force on other massive bodies. On account of their differences, the comparison between the imperceptible entities of art and science is not perfectly parallel. However, the point is taken that both represent things and postulate things that are abstract, things that are not directly derivable from this observation right here in front of me, though they represent observable phenomena.

Sellars’ point of differentiation between the manifest and scientific images is becoming less clear. Where does aesthetic (musical) experience fit into Sellars’ scheme? If it involves the postulation of abstract things like an ideal boat ride, then it cannot
be part of the manifest image. Perhaps we might claim that music and the like must be part of the scientific image. This obviously seems unsatisfactory. What if we loosen the strict dichotomy between the scientific and manifest image until it boils down to a unified “image”? The two images do not exist by themselves, and from this conjecture we might reject Sellars’ dichotomy between two modes of viewing the world as inadequately describing how worldview is.

III. WORKING PAST THE DICHOTOMY

Towards a remedy to this problem, let us consider William James’ suggestion that “men’s beliefs at any time are so much experience funded.” Indeed, we are talking about beliefs and attitudes when we talk about worldview. Although the natural sciences are among the most principled methods of codifying sense experience, we must still reconcile our worldviews, comprised both of beliefs justified by scientific inquiry and beliefs validated by personal experience, with any new judgments and facts whenever they arise. If, as James says, “truth is the function of the beliefs that start and terminate among [a body of facts],” then when two versions of a phenomena contradict, one must find the true version among the facts of experience. Critically, however, we now see that from beliefs and attitudes we must develop a hermeneutical system by which to interpret the “experience funding.” One’s ability to sort through the facts is contingent on a method of interpretation—a hermeneutical principle—which transcends the divide of “scientific”/”non-scientific” perception. Though the two sources of experience funding are different, nevertheless a single entity sorts through the funds and arranges them in a manner that is meaningful. Bas van Fraassen comments:

So in science too, we find interpretation at two different levels. The theory represents the phenomena as thus or so, and that representation itself is subject to more than one tenable but significantly different interpretation. As in art, we find the persons involved (those who create the work, those who peruse or appreciate it) often unconscious of the non-uniqueness of their interpretations and of the creative element in their response as readers. The texts of science are open.

A major consequence of blending the manifest and scientific images is that the divide between art and science becomes increasingly vague—is a car design a work of art or a scientific model? Scientific and non-scientific judgments of the world fall under the broad heading of interpretive attitudes toward the world, and the dichotomy, as it concerns worldview, yields no fruit. Nietzsche is right in saying that worldview requires a hermeneutical capacity, while Sellars is right in emphasizing the importance of an empirical epistemology in one’s worldview.

We return, though, to the claim that “only as an aesthetic phenomenon do existence and the world appear justified.” Claiming that one interprets the world in a
certain way because a scientific conjecture claims that it ought to be interpreted in that way is as mistaken as saying that one interprets a work of art in a certain way because the art claims that it ought to be interpreted in a certain way. Heidegger asks “Whence do the sciences derive the right to decide what man’s place is, and to offer themselves as the standard that justifies such decisions?” I answer here that it derives this right from the same place that art derives the same right: the right is derived from our interpretation of the world. Without a hermeneutic component, a scientific perspective is impossible as a complete worldview. This is not to say that we should adopt Nietzsche’s “aesthetic metaphysics.” On the contrary, I think that Sellars is most right when he says that science should no longer remain an “alien appendage” in the consideration of worldview. But, as we have seen, science does not interpret itself; worldview is not something to receive passively but is, rather, something to struggle with daily. The resulting interpretation is not a fragmented view but a holistic worldview in which “the world appears justified.”

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ENDNOTES

3: Nietzsche, 21.
4: Nietzsche, 62.
5: Ibid.
6: Nietzsche, 33.
7: Nietzsche, 71.
8: Nietzsche, 113.
9: Ibid.
11: Sellars, 375.
12: Sellars, 404.
13: Ibid.
14: Sellars, 376.
15: Sellars, 375.
16: Sellars, 408.
17: Ibid.
18: Sellars, 369.
19: Nietzsche, 78.
21: Sellars, 401.
22: Ibid.
23: Nietzsche, 36.
24: Sellars, 402.
25: Van Fraassen, Scientific Representation, 11.
27: William James, Pragmatism (Cleveland: Meridian, 1965), 146.
28: James, 147.
30: Nietzsche, 113.
31: Heidegger, 43.