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## Nietzsche and classical greek philosophy: Essays on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Heraclitus

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**NIETZSCHE AND CLASSICAL GREEK PHILOSOPHY:  
ESSAYS ON SOCRATES, PLATO, ARISTOTLE, AND  
HERACLITUS**

**A THESIS**

**PRESENTED IN**

**PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**BY**

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# Nietzsche and Classical Greek Philosophy: Essays on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Heraclitus

By

Daw-Nay N. R. Evans Jr.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction: Nietzsche and Classical Greek Philosophy.....	5
Chapter I: A Solution to “The Problem of Socrates” in Nietzsche’s Thought	
Section 1: Five Views on Nietzsche’s Treatment of Socrates.....	19
Section 2: Nietzsche’s Treatment of Socrates in <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> .....	32
Section 3: Nietzsche’s Treatment of Socrates in Earlier Works (1872-80).....	40
Section 4: Nietzsche’s Treatment of Socrates in <i>Twilight of the Idols</i> (1888).....	45
Section 5: Nietzsche’s Treatment of Socrates in Later Works (1882-86).....	55
Section 6: Nietzsche on the Use and Misuse of Reason for Life.....	59
Conclusion.....	64
Chapter II: Nietzsche and Plato: An Interpretation and Defense	
Section 1: Making Distinctions: Nietzsche, Plato, and Platonism.....	65
Section 2: Nietzsche and Plato’s Kallipolis.....	76
Section 3: Nietzsche’s Assessment of Plato’s Metaphysics and Epistemology.....	89
Section 4: Dialectic and Dialogue in Nietzsche.....	101
Conclusion.....	107
Chapter III: Thick as Thieves: Nietzsche’s Debts to Aristotle	
Section 1: The Scope of Nietzsche’s Debts to Aristotle.....	108
Section 2: Methodological Debts.....	111
Section 3: Ethical Debts.....	117
Section 4: Compatibilist Debts.....	128
Section 5: Nietzsche’s Critique of Aristotle’s Interpretation of Tragedy.....	134
Conclusion.....	137
Chapter IV: Myth and Reality: The Case of Heraclitus	
Section 1: The Nietzsche-Heraclitus Train.....	138
Section 2: Nietzsche’s Affection for Heraclitus.....	143

Section 3: Nietzsche on Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*.....152  
Section 4: Nietzsche on Heraclitus in the Lectures on the *Pre-Platonic Philosophers*.....157  
Section 5: Comparative Analysis.....163  
Conclusion.....175  
  
Bibliography.....177

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## INTRODUCTION: NIETZSCHE AND CLASSICAL GREEK PHILOSOPHY

*Nietzsche's high esteem for the Greeks is a commonplace; but it has been assumed that he wanted to return to the pre-Socratics, while his debt to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle ... has been overlooked.*

—Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) was born in the small town of Röcken, in the Prussian province of Saxony-Anhalt, which is located in what was, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, known as East Germany. His knowledge of the ancient world, derived from his rigorous education in classical studies, would prove to be an important reference point for several of his future philosophical projects.<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche originally began his study of Latin and Greek in 1851, while his more involved and disciplined study of the classics began in 1858 at the famous Pforta boarding school in Naumburg. Upon leaving the Pforta school in 1864 Nietzsche wrote his first philological study, in Latin, entitled “De Theognide Megarensi” (On Theognis of Megara).

From 1864 until 1868 Nietzsche studied classics with Otto Jahn and Friedrich Ritschl, who were considered to be among the leading classical philologists of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nietzsche's formal study of the classics ended in 1869 when, based upon the recommendation of his mentor, Professor Ritschl, he was offered a position as Professor of Classical Philology at Basel University at the unprecedented age of 24.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the University of Leipzig awarded him the doctoral degree, without his ever having to take comprehensive examinations or write a doctoral dissertation.

As a scholar, Nietzsche wrote several essays and lectures on Greek rhetoric, Latin grammar, Greek culture, and Greek philosophy, such as “Homer and Classical Philology” (1869),

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<sup>1</sup> For a rigorous defense of this view, see James Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> For a translation of Professor Ritschl's recommendation, see Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), 7.

“Socrates and Tragedy” (1870), “The Greek State” (1871), “The Greek Woman” (1871), “Introduction to the Study of the Platonic Dialogue” (1871-74), “Homer’s Contest” (1872), “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers” (1872), “Philosophy in The Tragic Age of the Greeks” (1873), and “Plato’s Life and Teaching” (1876). The extent to which Nietzsche was immersed in the classics helps us to appreciate the significance of his relationship to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and also provides important background information for understanding the nature of that relationship.

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand Nietzsche’s view of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. There are few, if any, studies that deal exclusively with—and provide an explanation of his relationship to—these philosophers. Furthermore, there are no studies on the implications of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and with regard to the origin and development of his later philosophical thinking. Nietzsche’s relationship to classical Greek philosophy is arguably the most underappreciated area of Nietzsche studies. In a section entitled “What is Needed” in the first edition of his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* Kaufmann—arguably the most important Nietzsche scholar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century— admits that we still “need scholarly and perceptive studies of some aspects of Nietzsche’s thought and influence that have never been explored adequately. For example, Nietzsche’s ... early *philologica*.” This call to scholarly and philosophical arms was made in 1950, and with only a few exceptions we have yet to heed that call.

The framework for interpreting Nietzsche’s attack on Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle can be located in Nietzsche’s unique style of *argumentum ad hominem*, which he launches against all three philosophers. The very last manuscript Nietzsche sent to his publisher C.G. Naumann was *Ecce Homo* (hereafter cited as *EH*). This is the only text where Nietzsche reflects on the significance of his past works, the influence of his parents, and the life circumstances that

cultivated and shaped the man he became. Besides being a parody of those who write autobiographies as well as a reflection on Nietzsche's own life, the work provides the careful reader with Nietzsche's strategy for understanding his polemics against his predecessors. In the first essay in *EH*, "Why Am I So Wise," Nietzsche says that he is warlike by nature.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he writes: "[t]he strength of those who attack can be measured in a way by the opposition they require: every growth is indicated by the search for a mighty opponent—or problem; for a warlike philosopher challenges problems, too, to single combat" (*EH I:7*). Nietzsche unravels this statement in what he dubs his "practice in war" which he claims can be "reduced to four propositions" (*EH I:7*).

**[A]** Firstly: I attack only causes that are victorious—under certain circumstances I wait until they are victorious.

**[B]** Secondly: I attack only causes against which I would find no allies, where I stand alone—where I compromise only myself...

**[C]** Thirdly: I never attack persons—I only employ the person as a strong magnifying glass with which one can make visible a general but furtive state of distress which is hard to get hold of.

**[D]** Fourthly: I attack only things where any kind of personal difference is excluded, where there is no background of bad experience. On the contrary, to attack is with me a proof of good will, under certain circumstances of gratitude. I do honour, I confer distinction when I associate my name with a cause, a person: for or against—that is in this regard a matter of indifference to me. *EH I:7*

The four propositions stated above supply us with the much-needed context to understand Nietzsche's *ad hominem* attacks against Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. However, the most important of these propositions for the present study is [C]. In [C] Nietzsche makes two things abundantly clear: first, his attacks upon Socrates, Descartes, and Kant, to name just a few, are a

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<sup>3</sup> I take Nietzsche to mean "war" in the figurative rather than literal sense. Throughout his works Nietzsche wages a tireless campaign against, among other things, conventional thinking, mediocrity, and complacency. War, in this sense, then, is both an internal struggle with oneself and an attack against idols of the age rather than physical violence against others.



means to an end. That is, at least as he implies here, the vitriolic disapproval that he shows for these philosophers is a direct reflection of the philosophical views they defend. Second, the problem that Nietzsche is trying to address requires the assistance of those whose philosophical position exemplifies that problem. Let me offer three examples that more clearly articulate the implications of Nietzsche's strategy in [C]: (1) if Nietzsche were concerned that the method of dialectic made famous by Socrates is somehow dishonest and misleading he might consider attacking the Athenian philosopher, who is arguably not only the most remarkable philosopher in the history of the western canon but the philosopher who, according to Nietzsche, placed an exceptional amount of faith in dialectical reason; (2) if he believed that the mind-body problem so prominent in philosophical circles today represented a false dichotomy he would do well to attack Descartes, whom most designate as the father of modern philosophy; and (3) if Nietzsche wanted to launch an assault against objectivism in ethics he might be inclined to attack Kant, whom many consider to be the most important ethical objectivist of the modern period. Not surprisingly, these three philosophers share a common trait—they all believe in the infallibility of reason. Socrates claimed that unaided reason was necessary to attain *eudaimonia*; Descartes's indignation toward the senses in favor of cognitive reason became legendary once he uttered that most famous phrase *cogito ergo sum*; and Kant's belief in the authority of reason to usurp the influence of the passions in order to provide the moral foundation necessary for the type of deontological ethics he envisioned was made explicit in his categorical imperative. In this way, the most celebrated ancient and contemporary champions for the supremacy of reason over the passions act as both a "strong magnifying glass with which one can make visible a general but furtive state of distress which is hard to get hold of," and an ideal target for Nietzsche's war on what he calls "*eternal idols*" (TI F:2). Thus, we can understand Nietzsche's critique of Socrates,

Plato, and Aristotle as means to undermine what Nietzsche considers long-standing philosophical problems that have yet to be challenged.

## **CHAPTER I: A SOLUTION TO THE “PROBLEM OF SOCRATES” IN NIETZSCHE’S THOUGHT**

Ever since the appearance of Walter Kaufmann’s very influential work *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, scholars have been trying to comprehend the place of Socrates in Nietzsche’s thought.<sup>4</sup> There have been several attempts to bring harmony to the several hundred seemingly contradictory passages on Socrates in Nietzsche’s works, but none of them have been able to get at the heart of the matter. The many apparently contradictory remarks about Socrates in Nietzsche’s works represent what I will call “the problem of Socrates” in Nietzsche’s thought. Solving this problem of Socrates is significant, I will argue, because, as one scholar pregnantly noted, “the ‘problem’ of Socrates is the problem of reason, of the status of reason in the life of man: and Nietzsche finds that problem inexhaustible.”<sup>5</sup>

Nietzsche’s view of Socrates has been studied at length by a number of scholars, and yet the accounts resulting from these studies, even when descriptively correct, have not given a full explanation of the relationship between the two philosophers. More specifically, they fail to clarify the proper connection between Nietzsche and Socrates in terms of fundamental aspects of Nietzsche’s thought, especially in terms of his view of reason. The most influential interpretation of Nietzsche’s relationship to Socrates comes from Kaufmann, who claims that Nietzsche’s view

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<sup>4</sup> For the most recent treatment of the problem of Socrates in Nietzsche’s thought, see Robert C. Solomon, Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: Schocken, 2000). In a section called “Nietzsche *Ad Hominem* (Nietzsche’s Top Ten)” these scholars have composed two lists: the first comprised of Nietzsche’s intellectual heroes, the second comprised of those thinkers whom he most criticized and detested. Interestingly enough, Socrates gains the top position on both lists. This is significant because it not only highlights Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Socrates, but also demonstrates that Socrates was the most important, as well as problematic, figure in Nietzsche’s thought.

<sup>5</sup> This is the view expressed by R.J. Hollingdale in an appendix to his translation of Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols* with *The Anti-Christ* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 207-208. Hollingdale, however, doesn’t offer any extended defense of this insightful suggestion.

of Socrates is one of pure admiration. More recently, scholars such as Nehamas have corrected Kaufmann's flawed interpretation. Although Nehamas has properly understood Nietzsche's view of Socrates to be one of ambivalence, his interpretation is wanting in that it provides only a Chapterial explanation of this ambivalence.

My own treatment of the issue will reinforce the thesis of ambivalence that certain other scholars have correctly espoused, but will go beyond even these accounts by properly explaining that ambivalence as a manifestation of Nietzsche's ambivalence toward reason itself. In this way, the explanation of Nietzsche's view of Socrates that I will offer will not only render unproblematic the seemingly contradictory passages throughout Nietzsche's works, it will also help us to understand those tensions.

My argument will take the following form. I will first establish in Sections 2-5 (A) Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates. Then, independently of that discussion, I will reveal in Section 6 (B), Nietzsche's ambivalence toward reason. The strict parallelism between these two manifestations of ambivalence in Nietzsche will permit me to make the claim that (B) explains (A). By this analysis I will demonstrate that Nietzsche is not only positive and negative in his assessments of both Socrates and reason, but that he is ambivalent to both for the same reasons. More specifically, for Nietzsche, Socrates' emphasis upon dialectical reason, as *the one and only* medium for attaining *eudaimonia* is ultimately nihilistic. It stands as a singular example of the variety of nihilistic practices that emphasize one perspective over all others; and to deny perspective, is, for Nietzsche, to deny life itself. Thus Nietzsche understands such practices, among which he includes Christianity, ethical objectivism, and Plato's metaphysics, as a *misuse* of reason. However, the appropriate *use* of reason involves experimenting with other modes of expression such as aphorisms, the performing arts, and poetry, which grant the individual as

much moral and intellectual freedom as necessary so that they may affirm life in the manner they find most satisfying and rewarding. Hence, it is only through a thorough investigation of Nietzsche's view of reason that his ambivalence toward Socrates can be fully understood, namely, as a manifestation of his ambivalence to reason.

### ***Strategy of Argument***

Let me now sketch the route I will follow in pursuing my goal of explaining Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates. In Section 1 I intend to examine five views on Nietzsche's treatment of Socrates, revealing the shortcomings in the secondary literature on this topic. The task of Section 2 is to examine Nietzsche's first sustained treatment of Socrates, which appears in *The Birth of Tragedy*,<sup>6</sup> where his antagonism towards the Athenian philosopher is readily apparent. Section 3 presents Nietzsche's treatment of Socrates in other works of the early and middle period, showing Nietzsche to be more sympathetic toward Socrates than he was in *BT*. In this way, Sections 2 and 3 combine to show Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in earlier works. Section 4 addresses Nietzsche's second sustained treatment of Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols* (hereafter cited as "TI") in an essay highly critical of Socrates entitled "The Problem of Socrates." In Section 5 I shall introduce more passages from Nietzsche's middle and late period where we find his view of Socrates to be more positive, thus counterbalancing the mostly negative treatment of the Athenian philosopher in *TI*. In this way, Sections 4 and 5 combine to demonstrate Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in later works.<sup>7</sup> Having thereby shown

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<sup>6</sup> In the first edition of 1872 the full title of this work was *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. However, in 1886 when Nietzsche wrote the new preface for the second edition entitled "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," he changed the title to *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism* (hereafter cited as "BT").

<sup>7</sup> Although some might object that the view of ambivalence that I argue for is not Nietzsche's and could be refuted if one were to take seriously what some scholars consider the "mature" Nietzsche of the late works rather than the Nietzsche of the early and middle works ought to consider Abbey's apt observation: "The classification of Nietzsche's works into three periods was coined by Lou Salomé, although this schema has become such a commonplace in Nietzsche scholarship that she is rarely credited with it. Salomé's periodization is offered as a

that Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates is a constant throughout his career and having in the course of doing so given a precise account of the nature of this ambivalence, I will explain Nietzsche's ambivalent attitude toward reason in Section 6. Following this, I will conclude by showing the strict parallelism between Nietzsche's ambivalence toward reason and his ambivalence toward Socrates, thereby defending my claim that the ambivalence Nietzsche has toward Socrates reflects, and is caused by, his ambivalence toward reason. As a result of this strategy I will be able to surpass previous scholarship not only by better defending the fact of Nietzsche's ambivalence, but also by better explaining that ambivalence.

## **CHAPTER II: NIETZSCHE AND PLATO: AN INTERPRETATION AND DEFENSE**

If one accepts the premise that Nietzsche's view of the historical figure known as Socrates is somehow different from and holds philosophical positions contrary to Plato—despite the difficulties associated with such a claim—one can then begin to investigate Nietzsche's view of Plato himself. By all accounts Nietzsche's view of Plato is far from sympathetic. According to Krell, “we can read sympathetically either Plato or Nietzsche, but not both: read Plato alone, and rest assured that Nietzsche is a sophist of the nastiest sort, ... read Nietzsche alone, and rest assured that Plato is a decadent of the most contemptible sort, and a charlatan besides.”<sup>8</sup> Despite Zuckert's claim<sup>9</sup> that Nietzsche's “understanding of Plato is the most salient feature as well as

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heuristic device only; she is too subtle and perceptive a reader of Nietzsche to suggest that each period represents a clean and complete ‘epistemological break’ with the earlier one. She points out, for example, that in his last phase Nietzsche returns to some of the concerns of his first, but approaches them in a different way. Thus it is possible to employ this schema while acknowledging that the boundaries between Nietzsche's phases are not rigid, that some of the thoughts elaborated in one period were adumbrated in the previous one, that there are differences within any single phase and that some concerns pervade his oeuvre” (Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xii).

<sup>8</sup> David Farrell Krell, *Infectious Nietzsche* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 83. Hereafter, I will cite this text as “Krell.”

<sup>9</sup> See Catherine Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, and Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 1.

the ‘defining factor’ of Nietzsche’s *oeuvre*, Krell’s statement is a much more accurate description of the tension that exists between the two philosophers. Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s view of Plato has probably been the most influential as well as problematic of all Nietzsche interpreters. At *BGE* 211 Nietzsche makes a distinction between (A) philosophical laborers and (B) genuine philosophers. The problem that confronts the reader when he or she approaches Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* is whether it is possible to locate Nietzsche amongst Heidegger (A) and Heidegger (B) when these roles are conflated in Heidegger’s corpus. Be that as it may, Heidegger’s account of Nietzsche’s attempt to overturn Platonism is still worth considering. Krell rightly notes that an understanding of not only Nietzsche’s wrestling with Plato’s metaphysics but also Plato’s “dramatic style” is just as deserving of careful exegetical work if we are to fully appreciate what Krell describes as Nietzsche’s “ambivalence with regard to Plato.”<sup>10</sup>

I will argue that Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Plato is comprised of four Chapters: (1) a sharp distinction between Plato and Platonism, (2) Plato’s political philosophy, (3) Plato’s metaphysics, (4) Plato’s epistemology, and (5) Plato’s use of dialectic and dialogue. In other words, this study begins with what Nietzsche considers an important philosophical and methodological distinction in (1). As we will see, Nietzsche views the substance of Plato’s philosophy—(3)—as highly questionable, if not, nihilistic *in toto*, while other features—(2), (4), and (5)—are, to a certain extent, to be applauded.

### ***Strategy of Argument***

In what follows I give details regarding how I will examine Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Plato. In Section 1 I analyze Nietzsche’s distinction between Plato and Platonism.

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<sup>10</sup> Krell, p. 88.

Following that, in Section 2, I explain Nietzsche's approval of certain features of Plato's political philosophy. Then I turn to Nietzsche's treatment of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology in Section 3. Finally, I examine Nietzsche's appropriation of Plato's use of dialectic and dialogue in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in Section 4. In so doing, we will finally have an accurate account of Nietzsche's view of Plato.

### **SECTION 3: THICK AS THIEVES: NIETZSCHE'S DEBTS TO ARISTOTLE**

Unlike Nietzsche's view of Socrates and Plato, Nietzsche's view of Aristotle has received scant attention by scholars over the last hundred years. Nevertheless, several scholars mention the plausibility of linking Nietzsche with Aristotle. In 1933 Knight argued that due to the "tragic Weltanschauung [*sic*] (which has nothing in common with the corruption of Tragedy [*sic*] by Sophocles, Euripides, Socrates, and Aristotle) that he admired pre-Athenian Greece."<sup>11</sup> Seventeen years later Kaufmann writes "Nietzsche's debt to Aristotle's ethics is ... considerable, and it is quite unjustifiable to infer from Nietzsche's disagreement with Aristotle's theory of tragedy that Aristotle meant little or nothing to him—or that the only Greek philosophers whom he admired were the pre-Socratics."<sup>12</sup> According to Knight, Nietzsche credits Aristotle with destroying the "metaphysical comfort" afforded by tragic insight, while Kaufmann argues that Nietzsche's understanding of morality is, to a large extent, the result of his engagement with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (BT 7). More recently Leiter tells us that there are "echoes in Nietzsche's discussion of the higher man of Aristotle's famous discussion of *megalopsychia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1123b-1125a16)."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Solomon cautions us "not [to] take

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<sup>11</sup> A.H.J. Knight, *Some Aspects of the Life and Works of Nietzsche, and Chaptericularly of his connection with Greek Literature and Thought* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1933), 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Fourth Edition, 1974), 384.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 121n.

the comparison of Nietzsche and Aristotle too far, however. Nietzsche considered Aristotle, along with Socrates and Plato, to be ‘decadents,’ latecomers to the glory that was Greece.”<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the inattention to Nietzsche’s view of Aristotle is due to our inability to take seriously Heidegger’s daunting as well discouraging statement to his students in the “Was heißt Denken?” lectures he delivered at the University of Freiburg: “It is advisable ... that you postpone reading Nietzsche for the time being, and first study Aristotle for ten to fifteen years.” If one dispenses with the “shock and awe” of Heidegger’s statement one can take him to mean that without performing the necessary exegetical work on Aristotle’s texts we will be unable to understand Nietzsche.

Although I disagree with Heidegger’s appropriation of Nietzsche in general, I regard the above assertion as true. The four features of Nietzsche’s view of Aristotle that require our attention are (1) Nietzsche’s appropriation of Aristotle’s philosophical methods, (2) the critical affinities that exist between Nietzsche’s “higher man” and Aristotle’s “magnanimous man,” (3) Nietzsche’s Aristotelian compatibilism, and (4) Nietzsche’s and Aristotle’s fundamental disagreement about the nature, purpose, and effects of tragedy.

### ***Strategy of Argument***

Now I want to discuss how I will explain Nietzsche’s view of Aristotle. In Section 1 I discuss the scope of Nietzsche’s debts to Aristotle. After that, in Section 2, I analyze Nietzsche’s view of Aristotelian logic. Section 3 will consist of an examination of Aristotle’s *megalopsychia* alongside Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* to show how Nietzsche draws upon Aristotle’s ethics to refine his own views of morality and moral psychology. Then I show the similarities and differences between Nietzsche’s and Aristotle’s views on the problem of free will. Finally, in Section 5, I

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<sup>14</sup> Robert C. Solomon, Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: Schocken, 2000), 107.



analyze both Aristotle's and Nietzsche's views of tragedy and the tensions therein as well as elucidate Nietzsche's views regarding the value afforded by tragic insight. In the end, I show how Nietzsche's thinking, in several areas of inquiry, has been shaped by Aristotle.

#### **CHAPTER IV: MYTH AND REALITY: THE CASE OF HERACLITUS**

Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus has taken on mythological proportions. Many commentators believe Heraclitus is, more or less, completely responsible for Nietzsche's philosophical development. Additionally, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are recognized as important, but their importance is often marginalized. The purpose of Chapter IV is to explain Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus in both his published and unpublished works. My more indirect aim will be to show the way in which Nietzsche's knowledge of Heraclitus as well as his own affection for him has contributed to the almost mythical nature of Heraclitus's influence on Nietzsche. There's no question that Heraclitus influenced Nietzsche. I would argue that such influence properly construed still leaves space for appreciating the manner in which Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle helped develop Nietzsche's thinking. In this way, Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus becomes a foil for the appreciation of Nietzsche's view of classical Greek philosophy as discussed in Chapters I-III.

##### ***Strategy of Argument***

Section 1 begins with a discussion of what I call the "Nietzsche-Heraclitus Train." Basically, I give a brief overview of the scholarly perspectives on Nietzsche and Heraclitus. Afterward, I turn to Nietzsche's published works to look at the role that Heraclitus plays throughout those works Nietzsche saw fit to print in Section 2. Next, in Section 3, I study Nietzsche's unpublished essay on *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and his lectures on "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers" to understand Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus's personality and

philosophical doctrines. Finally, I briefly summarize Nietzsche's view of Plato from Chapter II and the previous four Sections of Chapter V to determine how both Heraclitus and Plato have influenced Nietzsche's philosophical development. Having accomplished these tasks, I think a new appreciation for the archaic as well as the classical influence on Nietzsche's thought should arise.

#### **A NOTE ON METHODS: CHRONOLOGICAL AND THEMATIC**

Given Nietzsche's somewhat irregular treatment of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Heraclitus throughout his works, I employ two different methodological approaches to clearly elucidate his relationship to these philosophers. With respect to Socrates, I use a *chronological* approach. That is to say, Nietzsche's most and only substantive treatments of the historical figure known as Socrates appear in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), his first published work, and *Twilight of the Idols* (1886), the last completed work he sent to his publisher. To fully appreciate the consistencies and contradictions that could potentially be unearthed in light of this fact, I analyze these texts chronologically with a side glance aimed at other texts that were written earlier and later than both the former and the latter.

A precise rendering of Nietzsche's view of Plato and Aristotle is resistant to the chronological approach. Arguably, Nietzsche's treatment of Plato and Aristotle is never given an in-depth analysis in neither his published nor unpublished works. Despite this, one can find numerous passages on both Plato and Aristotle throughout Nietzsche's works that leave one in a state of perplexity as to the exact nature of his view of his Greek predecessors. For this reason, a systematic account of Nietzsche's view of these philosophers requires a *thematic* approach. In other words, a proper appreciation of Nietzsche's view of Plato and Aristotle requires one to

mine his corpus for remarks on these philosophers and render the sum total of such remarks into a coherent and cogent interpretation.

Nietzsche's treatment of Heraclitus is both substantive and piecemeal. Thus I employ both the chronological and thematic approaches. In his unpublished essays and lectures, Nietzsche articulates quite clearly and forcefully his view of Heraclitus's philosophy in his lectures on "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers" (1869-76) and *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*" (1873). For this reason, the chronological approach will be sufficient to address this material. From Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* to his *Ecce Homo*, he makes continual reference to Heraclitus. I employ the thematic approach to systematically identify those philosophical ideas in Heraclitus's philosophy from the published works that Nietzsche believes most closely align with his own views. Accordingly, this hermeneutic orientation will enable us to adequately situate Heraclitus's views alongside those of Plato's.

## CHAPTER I

### A SOLUTION TO THE “PROBLEM OF SOCRATES” IN NIETZSCHE’S THOUGHT

*Socrates, to confess it frankly, is so close to me that almost always I fight a fight against him.*<sup>15</sup>

—Nietzsche, MA 188

#### SECTION 1: FIVE VIEWS ON NIETZSCHE’S TREATMENT OF SOCRATES

In this Section I will consider five views on Nietzsche’s treatment of Socrates. The four major commentators I take up are Kaufmann in section 1.1, Tejera in section 1.2, Dannhauser in section 1.3, and Nehamas in section 1.4. I examine each commentator’s description and explanation (or lack thereof) of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates. After revealing the inadequacies in these discussions, I conclude in section 1.5 by suggesting how my thesis will overcome these shortcomings. Consequently, the purpose of this Section is to show how my work will advance our understanding of Nietzsche’s relationship to Socrates beyond that presently available in the secondary literature.

##### *1.1 Kaufmann’s Explanation of Nietzsche’s View of Socrates*

In this section I examine Kaufmann’s claim that Nietzsche is single-minded in his admiration for Socrates. According to Kaufmann, “Nietzsche’s conception of Socrates was decisively shaped by Plato’s *Symposium* and *Apology*, and Socrates became little less than an idol for him.”<sup>16</sup> Kaufman argues that Nietzsche regarded Socrates as his model of how a philosopher ought to conduct himself. Nietzsche is unwavering in his admiration for Socrates, says Kaufmann, because he wanted to imitate the integrity, honor, and sincerity displayed in the

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<sup>15</sup> Chapter I of the dissertation can be read as a commentary on this brief note written by Nietzsche in 1875. This translation appears in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 398. Cf. “The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the 1870’s*, trans. David Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979). Breazeale’s translation of the same note reads, “Simply to acknowledge the fact: Socrates is so close to me that I am almost continually fighting against him” (127).

<sup>16</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 393. Hereafter, I will cite this text as “Kaufmann.”

life Socrates lived and the tranquil manner in which he approached death.<sup>17</sup> Moving from *BT* all the way through to *Ecce Homo*, Kaufmann traces evidence that shows that Nietzsche's admiration for Socrates is consistent throughout his works. When speaking about *BT* Kaufmann writes:

Actually, Nietzsche starts out with the antithesis of the Dionysian and the Apollonian; and their synthesis is found in tragic art. Then Socrates is introduced as the antithesis of tragic art. The antagonism is not one which "may not be necessary." Rather, Nietzsche persistently concerned himself with what he accepted as necessary; and because Socratism seemed necessary to him—he affirmed it. (Kaufmann 394)

For Kaufmann, "Socratism" is to be understood as the acceptance of Socrates emphasis upon reason by those who were to become his philosophical heirs (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant). Socratism, however, does not include Socrates himself and what he stood for in his own time, but only the aforementioned philosophers who were to stress the importance of reason over the passions. Socrates was a necessary "turning point" in the history of western thought that allowed the continual regeneration of science into art (Kaufmann 394; 399). As Kaufmann sees it, Socrates was Nietzsche's "highest ideal: the passionate man who can control his passions" (Kaufmann 399). Consequently, what Nietzsche found admirable was the philosophy and life of Socrates, and what he found necessary was Socratism, which, according to Kaufmann, he nonetheless had to affirm.

When discussing one of Nietzsche's early lectures, "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers," Kaufmann states,

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<sup>17</sup> Kaufmann, 391, 393-394. Kaufmann supports this assertion by arguing, "Nietzsche, for whom Socrates was allegedly 'a villain,' modeled his conception of his own task largely after Socrates' apology." Kaufmann also refers to biographical material to support his view that Nietzsche admired Socrates. For instance, he says, "When Nietzsche graduated from school, he designated the *Symposium* his 'Lieblingsdichtung.' (Cf. his *curriculum vitae* in E. Förster-Nietzsche's *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches* I, 109.)" It should be noted that Kaufmann's essay is in some ways a response to previous Nietzsche scholars, who, following the view of Richard Oehler in his *Friedrich Nietzsche und die Vorsokratiker* (Leipzig: Durr, 1904), had argued that Nietzsche's view of Socrates is primarily negative. One scholar even goes so far as to claim, as Kaufmann notes in the text cited above, that, for Nietzsche, Socrates was "a villain." See Crane Brinton, *Nietzsche* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1941), 83.

One may suspect that Nietzsche must have felt a special kinship to the ever-seeking Socrates. In any case, the lecture on Socrates leaves little doubt about this self-identification. Socrates is celebrated as “the first philosopher of *life* [*Lebensphilosoph*]”: “Thought serves life, while in all previous philosophers life served thought and knowledge.” (Kaufmann, 396)

Kaufmann insists that within his lectures as well as in his early-unpublished essay “Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,” Nietzsche celebrated Socrates’ position as “a gadfly on the neck of man” and a member of “the republic of geniuses” that began with Thales and ended with Socrates. (Kaufmann, 397-398). Regarding another one of Nietzsche’s early lectures, “The Study of the Platonic Dialogues,” where Nietzsche calls Plato’s *Apology* a “masterpiece of the highest rank,” Kaufmann notes that “[a]pparently, Nietzsche himself derived his picture of the ideal philosopher from the *Apology*, and Socrates became his model” (Kaufmann 398).

As mentioned above, Kaufmann finds an idolization of Socrates throughout Nietzsche’s works. At this point I would like to further explore Kaufmann’s description of Nietzsche’s admiration for Socrates that he finds in two of his later and seemingly hostile works: *TI* and *EH*. In discussing *TI* Kaufmann contends

[j]ust as in Nietzsche’s first book, Socratism is considered dialectically as something necessary—in fact, as the very force that saved Western civilization from an otherwise inescapable destruction. In this way alone could the excesses of the instincts be curbed in an age of disintegration and degeneration; Socratism alone could prevent the premature end of western man. Socratism itself is decadent and cannot produce a real cure; by thwarting death it can only make possible an eventual regeneration which may not come about for centuries. (Kaufmann 406-07)

Here again Kaufmann maintains that Socratism, which was a necessary event, saved the Greeks from themselves, from the “anarchical dissolution of the instincts” (*BT P:1*). Without Socrates and his influence upon posterity Western man would have perished long ago. For Kaufmann, this demonstrates that, far from despising Socrates, Nietzsche greatly respected and appreciated what he had to offer Western civilization. Hence, the *décadence* of Socratism, with its emphasis upon

reason, can become an important contribution to Western civilization when allied with our instincts.

Moreover, Kaufmann argues that Nietzsche's *EH*, which is an autobiographical testament to his philosophical development, is not only unapologetic, in a manner similar to Plato's *Apology*, but more importantly:

In his discussion of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche ascribes to the overman that "omni-presence of sarcasm [*Bosheit*] and frolics" which he evidently associated with Socrates; and in speaking of *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche emphasizes his own love of irony. Yet not one of these points is as important as the fact that *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche's *Apology*. (Kaufmann 408)

Kaufmann clarifies the principal correlations between *EH* and Plato's *Apology* in the following two passages:

The heading of the first Section, "why I am so wise," recalls the leitmotif of the *Apology*. Socrates, after claiming that he was the wisest of men, had interpreted his wisdom in terms of the foolishness of his contemporaries, who thought they knew what they really did not know, and in terms of his own calling. Nietzsche answers his own provocative question in terms of "the disparity between the greatness of my task and the smallness of my contemporaries." (Kaufmann 408-9)

The second question, "why I am so clever," is similarly answered: "I have never pondered questions that are none". Again one recalls the *Apology*, where Socrates scorns far-flung speculations; he confined his inquiries to a few basic questions of morality. (Kaufmann 409)

Accordingly, then, Nietzsche modeled his conduct as a human being and a philosopher on the depiction of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*. Kaufmann maintains that Nietzsche revered Socrates, and, in a manner similar to his hero, he wanted, throughout his works, to play the gadfly on the neck of man in order to overcome the mediocrity he perceived in contemporary German culture (Kaufmann 397). In this way, Nietzsche's style of self-mockery, jokes, riddles, and satire were his strategy for living up to the image of his "highest ideal" as portrayed in the dialogues of Plato (Kaufmann 399).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Sarah Kofman, "Nietzsche's Socrates: 'Who is Socrates?'" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 15 (1991): 7-29. In a manner similar to Kaufmann, Sarah Kofman shows that Nietzsche wanted to imitate the wisdom and bravery displayed by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* (117c-118a), which is also mentioned by Nietzsche himself in

Now I would like to turn to a critique of Kaufmann's assertion that Nietzsche displayed nothing but admiration for Socrates.<sup>19</sup> First of all, there are two aspects of Kaufmann's analysis that I agree with: (1) Nietzsche admired Socrates because he played the gadfly on the neck of man, thereby challenging him to be more demanding of himself when it came to ethical matters; and (2) Nietzsche viewed Socrates as the first *Lebensphilosoph*, a thinker who made man, not metaphysics, his first priority in doing philosophy. Although I agree with Kaufmann on the two points mentioned above, I still find his description of Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates somewhat implausible.<sup>20</sup>

But for my purposes, the most important aspect of Kaufmann's claim that Nietzsche's attitude to Socrates was one of pure admiration is the way in which Kaufmann deals with the very harsh criticisms leveled at Socrates by Nietzsche in *BT* and *TI*. Kaufmann necessarily has to explain away all of Nietzsche's negative comments about Socrates in order to maintain his thesis that Nietzsche's relationship to the Athenian philosopher is one of idolization. For instance, when discussing the very unsympathetic comments about Socrates found in *BT*, Kaufmann argues,

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GS 340. However, Kofman does not go as far as Kaufmann in claiming that Nietzsche purely admired Socrates. She recognizes that Nietzsche was as cruel towards Socrates as he was congenial, thereby effectively noting Nietzsche's ambivalence; deficiently, however, she does not give an explanation why this ambivalence exists.

<sup>19</sup> Kaufmann, 398. Kaufmann makes a clear distinction between Socrates and Socratism, a mistaken distinction, but one that allows him to claim that Nietzsche was single-minded in his admiration for Socrates: "Now we have previously admitted that some distinction must indeed be made between Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates and Socratism, although it is false to say that Nietzsche abominated Socratism, if the latter is taken to mean the outlook Socrates embodied. Quite generally, Nietzsche distinguishes between (a) men whom he admires, (b) the ideas for which they stand, and (c) their followers" [*sic*]. Kaufmann's claim that Nietzsche (a) admired Socrates and (b) despised Socratism is misleading and far-fetched, to say the very least. For Nietzsche, Socratism is just the basic view behind Socrates' approach to doing philosophy, and those who were later to emphasize the importance of reason over the instincts were doing no more than what Socrates himself did in antiquity. That is to say, Socratism is an outlook on life that recognizes unaided reason as the only medium through which one might obtain the moral principles Socrates thought necessary to arrive at *eudaimonia*.

<sup>20</sup> For example, one of Kaufmann's assertions depends more upon pure speculation than any evidence found in Nietzsche's texts, specifically, his claim that Nietzsche's EH mirrors Socrates' appearance before the Athenian court in Plato's *Apology*. Kaufmann relies on evidence from EH that does not adequately support his view.



Though Nietzsche's uneven style brings out the negative and critical note most strongly, he was not primarily "for" or "against": he tried to comprehend. In a general way, his dialectic appears in his attitude toward his heroes. Like Oscar Wilde, he thought that "all men kill the thing they love"—even that they should kill it. (Kaufmann, 392)

Kaufmann here acknowledges that a "critical note" exists in *BT*, but he is unwilling to permit the negative criticisms of Socrates to taint Nietzsche's allegedly overall positive attitude. Had he done more justice to these criticisms, he would have come close to recognizing Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in this early work as later Nietzsche scholars such as Tanner and Nehamas have done. Instead, he downplays the passages critical of Socrates in order to maintain his thesis that Nietzsche purely admired Socrates. For instance, Nietzsche not only calls Socrates a "despotic logician" and a "monstrosity *per defectum*," but also credits the Athenian philosopher with causing the death of tragedy (*BT* 13-14).

Kaufmann utilizes the same strategy when he examines "The Problem of Socrates" in *TI*. His brief discussion of this essay offers very little insight into what the problem of Socrates might involve for Nietzsche. Kaufmann argues that what Nietzsche found necessary he affirmed. For this reason, Kaufmann views Nietzsche's very critical tone throughout the essay as a further sign of his admiration for the Athenian philosopher. If we were to follow this line of reasoning to its ultimate conclusion Nietzsche would have to idolize every thinker that he ever criticized—which is absurd.

Thus, Kaufmann's contention that Nietzsche unequivocally admired Socrates is inadequate because he underestimates the degree to which Nietzsche was hostile toward Socrates. Kaufmann offers only a brief and strained discussion of the only two sustained treatments of Socrates in Nietzsche's works, those in *BT* and *TI*, which are, for the most part, highly critical of Socrates. For this reason, he fails to give a correct description of Nietzsche's

attitude toward Socrates because he fails to do justice to all of the evidence found in Nietzsche's texts.<sup>21</sup>

### ***1.2 Tejera's Explanation of Nietzsche's View of Socrates***

In what follows I review *Nietzsche and Greek Thought*, a little-known monograph written by Victorino Tejera. Tejera is important to my study because he attempts to solve the problem of Socrates in Nietzsche's thought by way of a careful examination of the many different depictions of Socrates in antiquity. Tejera explores Socrates as seen through the eyes of Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, and Diogenes Laertius,<sup>22</sup> and explains what these different representations mean for Nietzsche.

The problem of Nietzsche's relation to "Socrates" could not be solved as long as "the problem of Socrates" itself stood unresolved. The problem of Socrates, then, is a result of the unmonitored conflation of D. Laertius's and Xenophon's "Socrates" with Plato's "Socrates" and the historical Socrates, idiosyncratically or traditionalistically imagined.<sup>23</sup>

On Tejera's view, Nietzsche's comments, *pro* and *con*, are an assortment of statements about the different depictions of "Socrates" that appear in antiquity. Tejera, then, not only recognizes that Nietzsche's attitude to "Socrates" is one of ambivalence, he also advances the search for an understanding of Nietzsche's ambivalent view of Socrates by offering an explanation for the tensions in his thought. In other words, the problem of Socrates in Nietzsche's texts is generated

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Thomas Jovanovski "Critique of Walter Kaufmann's 'Nietzsche's Attitude Toward Socrates,'" *Nietzsche-Studien* 20, (1991): 329-358, 331. Like Dannhauser (to be discussed below), Jovanovski thoroughly criticizes Kaufmann for incorrectly arguing that Nietzsche purely admired Socrates. He very carefully exposes some of Kaufmann's erroneous as well as speculative arguments about the relationship between the two philosophers. Jovanovski criticizes several other scholars for being either very confused about or unbalanced in their interpretation of Nietzsche's view of Socrates. Yet Jovanovski himself all but ignores Nietzsche's early lectures and manuscripts on the Greeks as well as his middle works where Nietzsche obviously displays admiration for Socrates. Jovanovski's failure to give these passages their due is Chapterly responsible for the very disappointing and unacceptable conclusion he reaches that Nietzsche viewed Socrates as a "destructive phenomenon of world-historical proportions."

<sup>22</sup> For more on Nietzsche's relationship to Diogenes Laertius, see Jonathan Barnes, "Nietzsche and Diogenes Laertius," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 15, 1986:16-40.

<sup>23</sup> Victorino Tejera, *Nietzsche and Greek Thought* (Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library, No. 24), 131.

by those features of Socrates present in the different representations of the authors of antiquity, some of which Nietzsche found admirable, others repulsive.

Yet Tejera's attempt to produce an explanation of the ambivalence towards Socrates in Nietzsche's thought fails because we in fact find Nietzsche making seemingly contradictory comments about "Socrates" even when dealing with the representation of Socrates from one and the same writer. For instance, referring to the Platonic Socrates, Nietzsche makes both of the following statements:

*The dying Socrates.*— I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said and did not say. This mocking and enamored monster and pied piper of Athens, who made the most overweening youths tremble and sob, was not only the wisest chatterer of all time: he was equally great in silence. (*GS* 340)

Socrates, the dialectical hero of the Platonic drama, reminds us of the kindred nature of the Euripidean hero who must defend his actions with arguments and counterarguments and in the process often risks the loss of our tragic pity; for who could mistake the *optimistic* element in the nature of dialectic, which celebrates a triumph with every conclusion and can breathe only in cool clarity and consciousness—the optimistic element which, having once penetrated tragedy must gradually overgrow its Dionysian regions and impel it necessarily to self-destruction—to the death-leap into the bourgeois drama. Consider the consequences of the Socratic maxims: "Virtue is knowledge; all sins arise from ignorance; only the virtuous are happy." In these three basic forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy. (*BT* 14)

According to the former passage, the Platonic Socrates is considered to be "great in silence," and is equally admired for his courage and wisdom, while in the latter passage he is accused of bringing about "the death of tragedy," which Nietzsche considered to be an art form of great value. These passages refer solely to the Platonic Socrates; yet, even though the one presents us with one of the greatest compliments any philosopher has ever bestowed upon Socrates, the other provides us with one of the most critical assertions ever directed against the Athenian philosopher. In other words, the contradiction produced by comparing these passages is sufficient to undermine Tejera's suggestion that we can resolve the problem of Socrates in Nietzsche's texts by the hypothesis that Nietzsche's positive and negative remarks are directed towards different representations of Socrates by different writers in antiquity. For Tejera's

argument to meet the objectives that he prematurely assumes it does Nietzsche's remarks on a Chaptericular "Socrates" from antiquity would have to be consistently negative or consistently positive in all of his texts. If his argument met these standards, then it could well be an adequate explanation of Nietzsche's relationship to Socrates. But, be that as it may, the discovery of only one instance of Nietzsche's contradictory remarks about Socrates in a single author is more than enough to refute Tejera's claim. Hence, since we find in Nietzsche contradictory remarks about the Socrates presented in one and the same writer from antiquity, Tejera's explanation that Nietzsche's *pro* and *con* comments refer to different depictions of "Socrates" in D. Laertius, Xenophon, and Plato fails to account for Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates.

### ***1.3 Dannhauser on Nietzsche's Ambiguity Toward Socrates***

Let me now turn to Dannhauser's *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* in order to assess his account of the relationship between the two philosophers. According to Dannhauser, "Nietzsche's image of Socrates ... is ambiguous. Provisionally, it can be said that for Nietzsche the Socratic life is somehow both a great temptation and something to be rejected."<sup>24</sup> As Dannhauser states, Nietzsche's view of Socrates does not decisively lean toward admiration or contempt. Dannhauser demonstrates that Kaufmann's claim that Nietzsche purely admires Socrates represents a mistaken description of their relationship. He wants to show instead that there are passages *pro* and *con* throughout Nietzsche's works, which display an attitude toward Socrates that is thoroughly "ambiguous."

For Dannhauser, Nietzsche's thought as a whole is ambiguous, and this is Chapterially due to Nietzsche's own experimental style. Most scholars agree that Nietzsche engaged in some form of experimentalism in his writing, which included short essays (*The Untimely Meditations*);

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<sup>24</sup> Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 20. Hereafter, I will refer to this text as "Dannhauser."

aphorisms ( as in *Human, All Too Human*); poems, songs, and riddles construed in the broadest possible sense ( as often in *The Gay Science*); biblical parody and speeches (as in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*); *ad hominem* arguments (as, for example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*); and extended disquisitions ( as in *On The Genealogy of Morals*). In addition to Nietzsche's writing style, his "desire to be as provocative as possible" presents special problems for interpreting his work (Dannhauser 20). "As a result of Nietzsche's experimentation, innovation, and pyrotechnics, his thought comes to view as tantalizingly ambiguous" (Dannhauser 20).

Dannhauser's description of Nietzsche's view of Socrates is developed in reaction to Kaufmann's description of their relationship. According to Dannhauser, Kaufmann wanted to refute the claim that Nietzsche was "hopelessly incoherent, ambiguous, and self-contradictory" (Dannhauser 31). He asks whether Nietzsche's "thought could not be coherent and free of obvious self-contradictions, but yet ambiguous?" (Dannhauser 31). Dannhauser argues that Kaufmann's description of Nietzsche's relationship to Socrates "oversimplifies Nietzsche by making him seem at once less ambiguous and less interesting than he really is" (Dannhauser 32). For Dannhauser, then, in contrast to Kaufmann, Nietzsche's view of Socrates is ambiguous.

While I agree with Dannhauser's view that Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates was more complex than Kaufmann allowed, there remains the problem of explaining the exact nature of this complexity. The central problem with Dannhauser's description is that he falls short of helping us understand *the reason for* Nietzsche's "ambiguous" view of Socrates. Dannhauser only provides a description of Nietzsche's view of Socrates where an explanation is also needed. As a result, Nietzsche's view of Socrates is left as an unexplained phenomenon: *the reason why* Nietzsche was ambivalent in his relationship with Socrates remains unintelligible.

#### ***1.4 Nehamas on Nietzsche's Ambivalence Toward Socrates***

Now I examine Nehamas' claim, as stated in his *The Art of Living*, that "Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates was ... fundamentally ambivalent. Socrates was neither his 'model' nor his 'villain.'"<sup>25</sup> Nehamas reaches the conclusion of ambivalence by attempting to understand whether Socrates, in the spirit of Schopenhauer and Wagner, was one of Nietzsche's educators: "Did Socrates play anything like the role Schopenhauer and Wagner played in Nietzsche's thought, or was he simply his enemy?" (Nehamas 132) For Nehamas, then, an understanding of Nietzsche's view of Socrates can be reached by an approach that examines the ways in which Nietzsche accepted and rejected the philosophy of Socrates in his own life and work.

Nehamas insists that, given the very thorough nature of Socrates' infiltration into the life and mind of Nietzsche, Socrates turned out not only to be his educator, but his competitor, nemesis, ally, and, a lifelong problem never to be resolved. "Was he perhaps, Nietzsche must have asked himself, Chapter and parcel of the philosophy from which he wanted to dissociate himself? Was Socrates perhaps not Chapter of the opposing tradition but Nietzsche's ally? And if he was an ally, what did that say about the originality of Nietzsche's project? Can one be liberated from philosophy or from Socrates as long as one is still writing about them, even if only to condemn them?" (Nehamas 155) Nehamas claims that the "problem of Socrates was for Nietzsche the problem raised by all these questions, and he could never resolve it to his satisfaction" (Nehamas 155). In Nehamas's view, Socrates was Nietzsche's "constant problem, forever gnawing at him, that he could never be sure that Socrates' ugly face was not after all a reflection of his own" (Nehamas 155). As a consequence, Nietzsche's view of

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 155. Hereafter, I will cite this text as "Nehamas."

Socrates is fundamentally ambivalent and “Nietzsche’s vehemence, in this as in almost everything else about him, was never unqualified, never without ambivalence” (Nehamas 129).<sup>26</sup>

In a manner similar to Dannhauser, however, Nehamas is unsuccessful in providing us with a proper account of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates because he fails to explain the way in which Nietzsche’s ambivalence emerges from basic ideas in his thought. Nehamas understands to some extent that Socrates’ denial of the instincts and his emphasis upon reason is a problem for Nietzsche, but he doesn’t go on to independently investigate Nietzsche’s view of reason, which, if done carefully enough, could solve the problem of understanding Nietzsche’s relationship to Socrates. Instead, Nehamas chooses to focus on the extent to which Socrates is Nietzsche’s educator, competitor, nemesis, and ally. Although all of these things may be true they still ignore the deeper significance that Socrates holds for Nietzsche’s life and his approach to doing philosophy.

### ***1.5 A More Adequate Explanation of Nietzsche’s Ambivalence Toward Socrates***

In this section I briefly present the view I will be defending of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates. My own treatment of the issue will reinforce the thesis of “ambivalence” that certain other scholars have correctly espoused, but will go beyond even these accounts by properly explaining that ambivalence as a manifestation of Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward reason itself. In this way, the explanation of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates that I will offer will not only render unproblematic the seemingly contradictory passages throughout Nietzsche’s works, it will also help us to understand those tensions.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14. Tanner reaches exactly the same conclusion as Nehamas on Nietzsche’s view of Socrates when he says: “The image of Socrates was never to let Nietzsche free; as with all the leading characters in his pantheon and anti-pantheon, his relationship with him remains one of tortured ambivalence.” By acknowledging that Nietzsche’s view of Socrates is one of ambivalence Tanner reaches the preliminary step in what I consider the best strategy for describing their troubled relationship, yet he stops short of explaining that ambivalence.

My argument will take the following form. I will first establish in Sections 2-5 (A) Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates. Then, independently of that discussion, I will reveal in Section 6 (B) his ambivalence toward reason. The strict parallelism between these two manifestations of ambivalence in Nietzsche will permit me to make the claim that (B) explains (A). By this analysis I will demonstrate that Nietzsche is not only positive and negative in his assessments of both Socrates and reason, but that he is ambivalent to both for the same reasons. More specifically, for Nietzsche, Socrates' emphasis upon dialectical reason as *the one and only* medium for attaining *eudaimonia* is ultimately nihilistic. It stands as a singular example of the variety of nihilistic practices that emphasize one perspective over all others; and to deny perspective, is, for Nietzsche, to deny life itself. Thus Nietzsche understands such practices, among which he includes Christianity, ethical objectivism, and Plato's metaphysics, as a *misuse* of reason. However, the appropriate *use* of reason involves experimenting with other modes of expression such as aphorisms, the performing arts, and poetry, which grant the individual as much moral and intellectual freedom as necessary so that they may affirm life in the manner they find most satisfying and rewarding. Hence, it is only through a thorough investigation of Nietzsche's view of reason that his ambivalence toward Socrates can be fully understood, namely, as a manifestation of his ambivalence to reason.



## SECTION TWO: NIETZSCHE'S TREATMENT OF SOCRATES IN *BT*

The objective of this Section is to understand Nietzsche's treatment of Socrates in *BT*. This task will be accomplished by treating in section 2.1 the structure and purpose of the work; in section 2.2 Nietzsche's view of the birth and death of tragedy; and in section 2.3 the meaning behind Nietzsche's references to Socratism, science, and art. Accordingly, then, Nietzsche's view of Socrates in *BT* will be understood in its full context, and we will appreciate some of the main ways in which Nietzsche is not only critical but also appreciative of Socrates in *BT*.

### *2.1 Intellectual Background to BT*

Nietzsche's first book, *BT*, arose from three lectures written in 1870: (1) a privately printed essay "Socrates and Tragedy," (2) "The Greek Music-Drama," and (3) "The Dionysian Principle." Originally, the text was supposed to be an explication of the connection between Socrates and Greek tragedy as articulated in the privately printed essay. However, as Nietzsche's relationship with the composer Richard Wagner grew more intimate the structure and purpose of the text gradually changed. The text can be read as primarily consisting of three main sections: the first ten sections (1-10) explain the origin of tragedy, the next five sections (11-15) describe the subsequent downfall of tragedy at the hands of Socrates through his influence on Euripides, and the last ten sections (16-25) are "less worthy of Nietzsche than anything else of comparable length he ever published—and he himself soon felt this."<sup>27</sup> These last ten sections are a glorification of Wagner's music and describe the way in which 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany could rise above their intellectual and cultural shortcomings in order to duplicate, and then surpass, what the Greeks had achieved in antiquity. Additionally, in Nietzsche's new preface to *BT*, written in 1886, he condemns the work as a whole for its being "badly written, ponderous, embarrassing,

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<sup>27</sup> See Kaufmann's "Introduction" to his translation of *BT* p. 13. I will not discuss the last ten sections of *BT*, because they have nothing to contribute to understanding Nietzsche's view of Socrates that isn't already articulated in sections 11-15.

image-mad and image confused, sentimental, in places saccharine to the point of effeminacy, uneven in tempo, without the will to logical cleanliness ...” (*BT* P:3). Nevertheless, what he found unacceptable about Socrates in *BT* in 1872 is in keeping with what he says about Socrates in the new preface of 1886:

And again: that of which tragedy died, the Socratism of morality, the dialectics, frugality, and cheerfulness of the theoretical man—how now? might not this very Socratism be a sign of decline, of weariness, of infection, of the anarchical dissolution of the instincts? (*BT* P:1)

Nietzsche argues that two elements were symptoms of the “dissolution” of the instincts and the subsequent death of tragedy: (1) Socrates’ belief that virtue or human excellence equals knowledge; and (2) Socrates’ inherent optimism about the power of reason to attain such knowledge, and hence virtue, along with the *eudaimonia* that comes with it. Thus, understanding Nietzsche’s claim that Socrates caused the death of tragedy through these two aspects of his thought is the purpose of this Section. This understanding will assist in explaining the meaning behind his sometimes sympathetic, but mostly disapproving, remarks on the Athenian philosopher in sections 11-15.

## ***2.2 The Birth and Death Tragedy***

In the following section I examine Nietzsche’s view of the origin of tragedy as a first step towards comprehending his view of Socrates in *BT*. According to Nietzsche, tragedy was born through the fusion of the Greek deities Apollo and Dionysus (*BT* 1). Apollo is “‘the shining one’, the deity of light, ... ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy” (*BT* 1). Apollo’s “inner world of fantasy” is one of calm repose and unaffected by our unruly emotions. Dionysus, however, awakens those same unruly emotions through music, and “as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness” (*BT* 1). In other words, the spirit of Dionysus shatters the restraints of subjectivity and individuality between men, and man and nature (*BT* 1). These two deities—the former representing dreams conceived of as *mere*

*appearance*, and the latter intoxication or ecstasies—are “artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself, without the mediation of the human artist—energies in which nature’s art impulses are satisfied in the most immediate and direct way ...” (*BT* 1, 2). Nietzsche holds that in tragedy the Apollinian drive is represented by the actors while the chorus, from which tragedy itself arose, embodies the Dionysian drive (*BT* 7). The relationship between the Apollinian and Dionysian drives represent what Nietzsche refers to as an “artist’s metaphysics” (*BT* P:2,5,7). The combined force of these two deities as they were represented on the Greek stage permitted the Greeks to formulate a “pessimism of strength.” That is to say, through their experience of tragedy the Greeks were able to recognize the character of human existence without falsifying illusions and nonetheless affirm existence under those conditions. Thus, tragedy finds its value as a life-affirming practice that allowed the Greeks to celebrate life without being overwhelmed by the degree to which it presents itself as an unstable and chaotic phenomenon. He speaks of the “metaphysical comfort” which tragedy provides through its lesson “that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable” (*BT* 7). For Nietzsche, it was through the fusion of Dionysus and Apollo that this “metaphysical comfort” in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles could be conveyed. However, in later Greek tragedy, Euripides, who, on Nietzsche’s view, was influenced by Socrates, destroyed the life-affirming power of tragedy (*BT* 10).

Let me now discuss the way in which Socrates, as Nietzsche sees it, brought about the death of tragedy. Euripides, as a critical thinker in the manner of Socrates, destroyed the metaphysical comfort created by the older tragedy of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Euripides lacked the ability to understand traditional tragedy, and in Socrates he found a companion who shared his sympathies about the past masters of the dramatic stage (*BT* 11). The old opposition between

the “artistic impulses” of the Apollinian and the Dionysian were now replaced with a new one: the Socratic and the Dionysian (*BT* 12). Euripides now became the chief mouthpiece of *aesthetic Socratism* whose main principle was: “To be beautiful everything must be intelligible” (*BT* 12). This “Socratic tendency” towards abstract reasoning and logical thinking as the one and only medium for relating to the human experience is what Nietzsche found anathema to artistic creation (*BT* 12).

Whereas in the case of all productive people instinct is precisely the creative affirmative force and consciousness makes critical and warning gestures, in the case of Socrates, by contrast, instinct becomes the critic and consciousness the creator—a true monstrosity *per defectum!* (*BT* 13)

Here Nietzsche criticizes Socrates for demonstrating a bias toward rational thinking, and downplaying the usefulness of his instincts. An overly enthusiastic bias towards reason, Nietzsche believes, stultifies an individual’s creative abilities, turning their intuitive yearnings for artistic expression into an instrument of self-conscious reflection whereby the necessity and usefulness of their creative impulses are put into question. Additionally, an exclusively rationalist perspective towards existence diminishes the degree to which other perspectives, such as those offered by art and poetry, can be appreciated; for an appreciation of these perspectives calls for something other than a purely intellectual response. By making “instinct the critic and consciousness the creator” Socrates was the archetypal rationalist and thus brought about the death of tragedy.

Moreover, Socrates destroyed not only the power of myth (for instance, in Homer’s and Pindar’s poetry) but also the “pessimism of strength” that resulted from the experience of Greek tragedy itself. “Consider the consequences of the Socratic maxims: ‘Virtue is knowledge; man sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy.’ In these three basic forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy” (*BT* 14). In other words, these Socratic maxims claim knowledge does

the following three things: (1) it makes one morally virtuous; (2) since nobody ever does wrong willingly knowledge would simply negate one's ability to do wrong; and (3) it places one in a state of *eudaimonia*. Thus, in Nietzsche's view, Euripides, through the influence of Socrates, sought to close the distance between "virtue and knowledge" on the one hand and "faith and morality" on the other by bringing to the "Socratic-optimistic stage" the "un-Dionysian art, morality, and world view" that follow from the three Socratic maxims mentioned above (*BT* 12; 14). According to Nietzsche, then, it was inevitable that such a worldview would bring about the downfall of the "older tragic art" (*BT* 11).

### ***2.3 The Question of Socratism with Regard to Science and Art***

Now I address the relationship between Socratism, science, and art. This section highlights Nietzsche's more sympathetic discussion about Socrates' philosophy in the midst of some of his more critical remarks in *BT*. Socratism, which is no more than the ideas of Socrates that were to be taken up by later thinkers, brought forth, "a profound *illusion* that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of logic, is capable not only of knowing being but even of correcting it. This sublime metaphysical illusion accompanies science as an instinct and leads science again and again to its limits at which it must turn into *art*—*which is really the aim of this mechanism*" (*BT* 15). For Nietzsche, science reverts to mythmaking when the fundamental principles of science are not understood. Nietzsche believes Socrates realizes this in Plato's *Phaedo*, where, in several different dreams, Socrates receives the following message: "Socrates, practice and cultivate the arts' " (*Phaedo* 60c-61a). Nietzsche argues that what this message indicated to Socrates was that there may be "limits to logic" beyond which the wisdom of the logician is of no assistance. Indeed, far from viewing Socrates' emphasis upon reason as "a merely disintegrating, negative force," Nietzsche

wonders whether the relationship between science and art could produce an “artistic Socrates” (*BT* 14).<sup>28</sup>

As Nietzsche sees it, this is the problem of Socrates and Socratism, the problem of understanding and articulating what a healthy relationship between science and art ought to be. Furthermore, the point at which science reaches the limits of enlightenment based upon reason is where artistic creativity begins, and the creation of myths, according to Nietzsche, is the “aim” of all science (*BT* 15).

Thus, Nietzsche’s view of Socrates in *BT* is, more often than not, highly critical of Socrates for the two reasons stated in the introduction to this Section: (1) Socrates’ belief that virtue or human excellence equals knowledge; and (2) Socrates’ inherent optimism about the power of reason to attain such knowledge, and hence virtue, along with the *eudaimonia* that comes with it. But even in *BT* we can see some ambivalence, since Nietzsche both criticizes Socrates’ overvaluation of reason and wonders whether the possibility that Socrates may have been aware of a healthy relationship between science and art.

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<sup>28</sup> On the possibility of an “artistic Socrates” Kaufmann says, “The ‘artistic Socrates’ is Nietzsche himself. He looks forward to a philosophy that admits the tragic aspect of life, as the Greek poets did, but does not sacrifice the critical intellect; a philosophy that denies Socrates’ optimistic faith that knowledge and virtue and happiness are, as it were, Siamese triplets; a philosophy as sharply critical as Socrates’ but able and willing to avail itself of the visions and resources of art” (see Kaufmann’s “Introduction” to *BT*, p. 12).

### SECTION 3: NIETZSCHE'S TREATMENT OF SOCRATES IN EARLIER WORKS

The goal of this Section is to present Nietzsche's view of Socrates in other works from his early and middle period. By doing this I will show aspects of Socrates' personality and philosophy that the early Nietzsche admired and appreciated.<sup>29</sup> I accomplish this goal by dividing the Section into three different sections, each section focusing on a Chaptericular work by Nietzsche and placing special emphasis on passages pertaining to his view of Socrates. In section 3.1 I examine excerpts from Nietzsche's unpublished<sup>30</sup> manuscript "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers with Interpretations of Selected Fragments."<sup>31</sup> In section 3.2 I discuss passages from Nietzsche's unpublished essay on "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks." Following this I introduce a passage from Nietzsche's *HH* in section 3.3. Finally, in section 3.4 I briefly conclude by discussing Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in his early and middle period as demonstrated in Sections 2 and 3. The goal of this Section, then, is to show that there is also a positive view of Socrates in Nietzsche's earlier works, thereby counterbalancing the more antagonistic depiction of the Athenian philosopher found in *BT*.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. section 544 of *Daybreak* where Nietzsche makes very approving comments of Socrates' use of dialectics. For other positive references to Socrates in Nietzsche's early works see UM II:6, UM III:6, HH 361; and section 72 of *The Wanderer and his Shadow*.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche's unpublished essays, manuscripts, and notes are usually referred to as the *Nachlaß*. The *Nachlaß* consists of material never published by Nietzsche himself, and probably would never have been authorized for publication by Nietzsche in their present form. It is very important to keep this in mind when comparing Nietzsche's published works with unpublished miscellanea. I am of the opinion that if what is found in the *Nachlaß* contradicts or is in conflict with the published material we must side with Nietzsche's published works. However, if the material in the *Nachlaß* complements and substantiates what is found in Nietzsche's published works, it can and should be regarded as supplementary evidence for his considered view on the matter under investigation.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Whitlock xxii-xxiv. According to Whitlock, Nietzsche's lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers were first offered in the winter of 1869-70 and subsequently delivered in the summers of 1872, 1873, and 1876. It should be noted that some disagreement exists about the actual date when Nietzsche first delivered these lectures. Whitlock agrees with Karl Schlecta that Nietzsche actually delivered a lecture series on the pre-Platonic philosophers during the winter of 1869-70, while Kaufmann believes the lectures were first delivered in the summer of 1872. Even so, it appears that both Whitlock and Kaufmann agree that the manuscript for the lecture series was almost certainly completed in 1872 with few alterations to come in the years that followed. Hereafter, I will cite this manuscript as "PP."

### 3.1 Unpublished Manuscript on “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers” (1872)

In the following section I bring out the meaning behind Nietzsche’s unorthodox labeling of the philosophers that came before Plato as *pre-Platonic*, and show how this label, rather than *pre-Socratic*, demonstrate Nietzsche’s more positive attitude toward Socrates in this work. For Nietzsche, Socrates, as well as those philosophers that preceded him, is what he refers to as a *pure type*, as opposed to Plato, whom he considers a *mixed type* (PP 1). In Plato’s theory of the Forms, Nietzsche argues, “Socratic, Pythagorean, and Heraclitean elements unite” to produce a philosopher who “possesses the traits of a regally proud Heraclitus; of the melancholy, secretive, and legislative Pythagoras; and of the reflective dialectician Socrates” (PP 1). Furthermore, Nietzsche shows his enthusiasm for the pre-Platonic philosophers when he says,

The Greeks produced *archetypal philosophers*. We recall a community of such diverse individuals as Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Parmenides, Democritus, Protagoras, and Socrates. Their inventiveness at this distinguishes the Greeks above all other peoples: normally a people produces only *one* enduring philosophical type. The Germans as well cannot measure up to this wealth. Each one of those [pre-Platonic] men is entirely hewn from one stone; between their thought and their character lies rigorous necessity; they lack every agreement, because, at least at that time, there was no *social class* of philosophers. Each is the first-born son of philosophy.... In any case, they are genuine “discoverers.” For all those afterward, it became infinitely easier to philosophize. They [the pre-Platonics] had to find the path from myth to laws of nature, from image to concept, from religion to science. (PP 1)

According to Nietzsche, what distinguishes Socrates as a forerunner to Plato is the originality of his contribution to philosophy. Socrates was the first philosopher to be concerned with the moral reformation of the individual: “The means, knowledge ... distinguishes him! Knowledge as the path to virtue differentiates his philosophical character: dialectic as the single path, induction ... and definition.... The struggle against desire, drives, anger, and so on directs itself against a deep-lying ignorance ...” (PP 17). No philosopher before Socrates: (1) emphasized knowledge as the vehicle by which the mastery of the emotions becomes possible, (2) used the dialectical



method to accomplish this goal, and (3) stressed the supplementary tools of induction and definition to assist in the struggle against ignorance.

Additionally, Nietzsche views Socrates not only as an original philosopher but also:

He is the first philosopher of *life* (*Lebensphilosoph*), and all schools deriving from him are first of all philosophies of life. (*Lebensphilosophien*). A life ruled by thought! Thinking serves life, while among all previous philosophers life had served thought and knowledge: here the proper life appears as a purpose; there proper knowledge [is seen as] the highest. (*PP* 17)

As the “first philosopher of life” Socrates began a new era of philosophizing whereby the fundamental goal of philosophizing was the understanding and improvement of human life itself. Hence, a great deal of emphasis is placed on practical living not metaphysical abstractions.

Nietzsche views Socrates as one of the most exceptional philosophers who ever lived. He admires how he calmly discussed philosophy with Crito in one of the most memorable scenes from the Platonic dialogues.

The instincts are overcome; intellectual clarity rules life and chooses death. All systems of morality in antiquity concern themselves with either reaching or conceiving the heights of this act. The last exemplar of the sage that we know is Socrates as the evoker of the fear of death: the wise man as the conqueror of the instincts by means of wisdom. Thereby the series of original and exemplary sages is completed; we recall Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Democritus, and Socrates. (*PP* 17)

Here Socrates is pictured as a “wise man” that conquered his instincts and chose death through the sheer power of his intellect. His ability to overcome his desires, fears, and other unruly emotions is something that we should all strive to imitate. Thus, Nietzsche’s view of Socrates in *PP* is unmistakably one of admiration for three primary reasons: (1) Socrates is a *pure type*, that is to say, he is an original thinker whose thought is harmonious both in itself and in connecting with the man’s character; (2) he is the first philosopher to place life at the center of his philosophizing; and (3) he used the powers of his intellect to conquer his weaker personality traits i.e., his instincts.

### 3.2 Unpublished Essay on “*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*” (1873)

Now I introduce further evidence of Nietzsche’s admiration toward Socrates in his early and middle period. I will basically list the only two excerpts from *PTAG*<sup>32</sup> where Nietzsche mentions Socrates, and then provide commentary on how they reflect Nietzsche’s admiration toward Socrates.

All other cultures are put to shame by the marvellously idealized philosophical company represented by the ancient Greek masters Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Socrates. These men are monolithic. Their thinking and their character stand in a relationship characterized by strictest necessity. They are devoid of conventionality, for in their day there was no philosophic or academic professionalism. All of them, in magnificent solitude, were the only ones of their time whose lives were devoted to insight alone. They all possessed that virtuous energy of the ancients, herein excelling all men since, which led them to find their own individual form and to develop it through all its metamorphoses to its subtlest and greatest possibilities.... Thus all of them together form what Schopenhauer in contrast to the republic of scholars has called the republic of creative minds: each giant calling to his brother through the desolate intervals of time. (*PTAG* 1)

It seems to me that those ancient wise men, from Thales through Socrates, have touched in their conversation all those things, albeit in their most generalized form, which to our minds constitutes typical Hellenism. In their conversation as in their personalities they form the great-featured mold of Greek genius whose ghostly print, whose blurred and less expressive copy, is the whole of Greek history. If we could interpret correctly the sum total of Greek culture, all we would find would be the reflection of the image which shines forth brightly from its greatest luminaries. (*PTAG* 1)

In the first passage, Socrates, along with the other pre-Platonic philosophers, is held up as a testament to the greatness of the Greeks. As a “monolithic” figure of antiquity he stands alone in his “magnificent solitude” as a monumental event in the history of philosophy. Nietzsche argues that the absence of professionalized academic philosophy allowed the pre-Platonic philosophers, Chaptericularly Socrates, to focus on developing his philosophical “insight” and “form” to its

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<sup>32</sup> According to Whitlock: “Though far better known, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is in most ways completely different from, and in some ways far less successful than “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers.” The lecture series approaches the pre-Platonics out of interest in doctrines. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is more concerned with the personalities of the pre-Socratics” (see Whitlock’s “Preface” to *PP* pp. xxvi-xxvii). Nietzsche only makes passing comments about Socrates in *PTAG*. He examines the personalities of Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Anaxagoras in great detail. He doesn’t treat the personalities of Pythagoras, Democritus, Empedocles, or Socrates at any length worthy of mention, his thought on Socrates being largely contained in the passages that I discuss above. From a philosophical perspective the PPP lecture series is much richer in content than *PTAG* and includes scholarly discussions of Anaximenes, Leucippus, Xenophanes, and the Pythagoreans— individuals who are hardly mentioned or receive no mention at all in *PTAG*.

maximum potential. That is to say, without the institutional pressures of academic life Socrates could narrow his duties to the perfection of his nature: moral as well as intellectual. The pre-Platonic philosophers, Nietzsche holds, possessed a “virtuous energy” that allowed them to move beyond the purview of pure scholarship into the realm of creativity, and thus Nietzsche (following Schopenhauer) dubbed the pre-Platonic philosophers the “republic of creative minds.”

According to the second passage, the “ancient wise men” of antiquity reflected the most essential elements of Greek culture, language, and ideas. In other words, what we find in Greek tragedy, comedy, sculpture, painting, and all Greek philosophy subsequent to Socrates, has already been explored in the “conversations” or theories of “its greatest luminaries.”

Both passages show, in a very definitive manner, Nietzsche’s high opinion, not only of Socrates, but also of the other pre-Platonic philosophers. Despite Nietzsche’s somewhat vague details regarding what he finds most impressive about these thinkers there is one overriding characteristic of their philosophical style and personality that he finds praiseworthy. Nietzsche views (as unsurpassed) the pre-Platonic philosophers’ very original questions (and not necessarily their answers to these questions) concerning the most general as well as perplexing concerns of an inquiring mind. For example, in the case of philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, and Parmenides the questions were: “What are the origins of the universe?” “What does the basic ‘stuff’ of the universe consist of?” “What can we know about the external world?” For Socrates, who dramatically shifted the search for a unified theory of everything to existential matters, the questions were, among others, “What is virtue?” and “How do I become a virtuous person?” Even though we now consider such questions commonplace and uninspiring, in Nietzsche’s mind the pre-Platonic philosophers were the first to ask such questions and also

the first to make an attempt at answering them, and therefore demand our sincere appreciation and rapt attention. Thus, we can infer from the two passages above that Nietzsche regarded Socrates as an unparalleled creative mind who laid down the “ghostly” blueprint of genius for the “whole of Greek history” that was to follow.

### ***3.3 Human, All Too Human (1878-80)***

In the following section I present one passage out of the many that appear in *HH* showing, undeniably, Nietzsche’s profound admiration for Socrates. *HH* was Nietzsche’s third published book after *BT* and *UM*. It includes exactly 1,396 aphorisms spread over two volumes. As Nietzsche’s subtitle “A Book for Free Spirits” suggests, he wants to encourage the “healthiest” and “strongest” individuals who value free thinking to see things anew from a plurality of different perspectives (*HH* II:II P 6), and he himself offers an abundance of such perspectives in the work. One of those perspectives concerns the importance of Socrates for future generations.

Socrates. – If all goes well, the time will come when one will take up the memorabilia of Socrates rather than the Bible as a guide to morals and reason, and when Montaigne and Horace will be employed as forerunners and signposts to an understanding of this simplest and most imperishable of intercessors. The pathways of the most various philosophical modes of life lead back to him; at bottom they are the modes of life of the various temperaments confirmed and established by reason and habit and all of them directed towards joy in living and in one’s own self; from which one might conclude that Socrates’ most personal characteristic was a participation in every temperament. – Socrates excels the founder of Christianity in being able to be serious cheerfully and in possessing that wisdom full of roguishness that constitutes the finest state of the human soul. And he also possessed the finer intellect. (*HH* II:II 86)

Here we can see Nietzsche’s unabashed preference for Socratism over Christianity. Christian morality was thoroughly nihilistic in Nietzsche’s eyes, and in the above passage he displays his contempt for Christendom by placing hope in the future possibility that the teachings of Christ will one day be replaced with those of Socrates. Nietzsche also finds valuable Socrates’ cheerful seriousness and roguish wisdom. That is, Nietzsche applauds Socrates’ ability to simultaneously

maintain the highest level of philosophical sophistication, while abstaining from the type of arrogance usually attached to the practice of philosophy.

In addition, Nietzsche considers Socrates to be a “guide to morals and reason” in whom the “joy of living” became a way of life through “reason and habit.” Furthermore, Socrates’ use of irony and humor enabled him to attain a healthier attitude towards life and, as Nietzsche contends, he also possessed an intellect superior to that of Christ. Thus, in *HH* Nietzsche once again celebrates Socrates’ moral and intellectual traits as manifestations of the “finest state of the human soul.”

### ***3.4 Nietzsche’s Ambivalence Toward Socrates in Earlier Works***

In this brief section I summarize the combined results of Sections 2 and 3. In Section 2 we discovered Nietzsche’s intense loathing of Socrates’ absolute dependence upon dialectic. For Nietzsche, dialectic was a serious hindrance to Socrates’ personal development, because, throughout most of his life, he denied the value of his instincts. Although it may have caused personal harm to Socrates, not to mention the death of tragedy, it was also a necessary turning point for Greek culture in general, because, according to Nietzsche, the Greeks were headed for dissolution by the anarchical nature of their instincts. On the other hand, as we saw in Section 3, Nietzsche applauded the innovative method of dialectic, as well as Socrates’ role as the first *Lebensphilosoph* in the history of the discipline. Furthermore, Socrates was seen as: (1) an original philosopher in his thought and actions, (2) a wise man who conquered his instincts, and (3) a thinker that others should aspire to imitate in word and deed. As a consequence, Nietzsche’s view of Socrates in his earlier works turns out to be unquestionably ambivalent.

## SECTION FOUR: NIETZSCHE'S TREATMENT OF SOCRATES IN TI (1888)

The purpose of this Section is to examine Nietzsche's essay "The Problem of Socrates" in TI in order to grasp the precise nature of the "problem" that Socrates holds for Nietzsche in this work.<sup>33</sup> It will be especially important to ask whether the problem of Socrates is rooted in another problem that Nietzsche has with the traditional methods of western philosophy. More specifically, is the problem of Socrates another way for Nietzsche to explore the problem of reason, which may be his real target for criticism?<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche treats Socrates as the best exemplar of the philosophical rationalist, and perhaps the best way to undermine the traditional use of reason in philosophy is to begin with a critique of the practices of its chief proponent.

This Section is divided into four sections. The first section provides background information on TI; the next three sections examine Nietzsche's view of the distinguishing features of Socrates' character as well as the various ways in which, according to Nietzsche, he attempted to elude *décadence* through his unrelenting confidence in the power of reason.<sup>35</sup> In section 4.1 I provide details concerning both the circumstances of Nietzsche's life as TI was being written and his primary aim in writing that text. Section 4.2 discusses Nietzsche's blatant

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<sup>33</sup> Nehamas (137) rightly notes that the essay "The Problem of Socrates" is Nietzsche's attempt "for the first and last time" to explain *the way* in which and *the reason* why Socrates places so much faith in the power of reason.

<sup>34</sup> This question will properly be examined in Section 6 of the thesis. There I present a detailed description and explanation of Nietzsche's view of reason. I have introduced this question here to serve as a temporary expedient to the reader so that they may: (1) gain a better understanding of why Nietzsche was so critical of Socrates in BT and continues his unfavorable commentary on the Athenian philosopher in *TI*, and (2) prepare themselves for the explanation of Nietzsche's view of Socrates to be rendered at the conclusion of the thesis.

<sup>35</sup> Socrates' daimonion is another aspect of the Athenian philosopher's character that Nietzsche views as a further indication of his *décadence*. Since Nietzsche only mentions it in passing and makes no other references to it again in "The Problem of Socrates," I don't discuss it in the body of the paper. Nevertheless, I consider his remark sufficiently relevant to the present discussion to be documented here. "It is not only the admitted dissoluteness and anarchy of his instincts which indicate *décadence* in Socrates: the superfetation of the logical and that *barbed malice* which distinguishes him also point in that direction. And let us not forget those auditory hallucinations which, as 'Socrates' *demon*', have been interpreted in a religious sense" (*TI* II:4).

contempt for what he deems to be Socrates' implicit belief that life is worthless. Section 4.3 presents Nietzsche's critique of Socrates' use of dialectic<sup>36</sup> as a form of *ressentiment*<sup>37</sup>.

Following this, in section 4.4 I examine Nietzsche's rancorous attitude toward Socrates for his attempt to gain control over his instincts by subordinating them to the authority of reason. As a result of understanding Nietzsche's critical assessment of Socrates' philosophical ideas as well as his personal idiosyncrasies we will be able to conclude that Nietzsche's characterization of the Athenian philosopher in this essay as a *décadent*<sup>38</sup> is due to his misuse of reason which, as

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<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche's critical assessment of Socrates in *TI* deals primarily with the destructive and refuting elements of the method practiced by the Athenian philosopher in the early Platonic dialogues. Therefore, I consider it fair to say that what Nietzsche finds troubling in the case of Socrates when he speaks about dialectic is akin to what most scholars more accurately identify as the *elenchus*. Nietzsche's contempt for Socrates in *TI* is Chapterially due to what he sees as the unyielding way in which the Athenian philosopher cross-examines his interlocutors in the belief that dialectic act as *the* determining factor in evaluating lives. By inviting his interlocutors to state premises that turn out to be inconsistent with each other, Socrates, in effect, proves that they must attain conceptual clarity about those terms that have a direct relation to that belief. In this way, Socrates employs the two primary characteristics of the *elentic* method: (1) he cross-examines the knowledge claims of his interlocutors and (2) he shows that their inconsistent statements betray deficiencies in their beliefs.

<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche's understanding of the French term *ressentiment* has been treated extensively in the secondary literature. *Ressentiment* is the fundamental principle of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. For my purposes here *ressentiment* will be defined as the combination of frustration, envy, and resentment that acts as a stimulus for the powerless to vent their anger in revenge against the powerful, thereby manifesting their inability to live a self-actualized life. For secondary literature that addresses Nietzsche's view of *ressentiment*, see e.g., Rudiger Bittner, "Ressentiment," in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Bernard Reginster, "Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), 281-305; and Mark Migotti, "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen: A Reading of the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998), 745-779.

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche always employs the term *décadent* in the original French to refer to, most notably, Socrates and Kant in *TI*, Jesus in *The Anti-Christ*, Wagner in *The Case of Wagner*, and himself in "Why I Am So Wise" in *EH*. Moreover, he consistently uses *décadent* in a derisive or negative fashion. From a literary perspective the term refers to a group of certain late 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, familiar to Nietzsche, such as Edmond and Jules Goncourt, Guy de Maupassant, Pierre Loti, Saint-Beuve, Flaubert and Octave Mirbeau who made disease and decay the focus of their writings by celebrating perversity and decline over the scientific positivism of the times. Cf. Nietzsche's comments on these and other French writers of the period at *EH* II:3 and in an appendix created by R.J. Hollingdale in his translation of Nietzsche's *TI* with *The Anti-Christ* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 203-204. Although Nietzsche shares some of the same concerns as the French *décadents*, they nonetheless lacked, in a manner similar to Socrates, what is crucial if they are to go beyond the nihilism that appears in their works. On this point Nietzsche says, "Exasperated pessimism, cynicism, nihilism, alternating with much boisterousness and good humour; I myself wouldn't be at all out of place there – I know these gentlemen inside out, so well that I have really had enough of them already. One has to be more radical: fundamentally they all lack the main thing – 'la force'." As it concerns Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates in *TI*, I will define a *décadent* as one who, for all intents and purposes, has inadvertently permitted a single instinct to lead them into psychological, moral, and physiological decline through the worship of "value-concepts" that are nihilistic or inimical to life itself. Cf. *TI* V:5; *EH* I:1; *EH* IV:4; *EH* VII:7. For secondary literature concerning Nietzsche's understanding of *décadence* and his relationship to the French

Nehamas argues, “is both a symptom and a result of his effort to escape the ‘disease’ ” of *décadence*.<sup>39</sup> In this way, the *reason* why Nietzsche considered Socrates to pose such a serious problem to his thought, at least in *TI*, is explained.

#### **4.1 Intellectual Background to *TI***

Nietzsche’s *TI* was the second to last book he finished for publication.<sup>40</sup> It was swiftly written in three to four months and, after some editorial changes, the manuscript was sent to the printer in October 1888, and published in January 1889. The original title of the book, *A Psychologist’s Leisure, or The Idle Hours of a Psychologist*, changed after some urging from his clerk, housemate, and friend Peter Gast. In response to Gast’s insistence, Nietzsche changed the title of the work to *Twilight of the Idols*, which is a caricature of composer Richard Wagner’s *Twilight of the Gods*.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, Nietzsche lost the use of his intellectual faculties just a few weeks after the publication of *TI* and was never to realize the impact his philosophy was to have around the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nietzsche doesn’t mince words regarding the aim of *TI*. In the “Foreword” to the text he claims that the work is a “grand declaration of war,” not on the idols of the age, but “eternal idols,” those he considers to be “*the most believed in*.”<sup>42</sup> As Nietzsche see it, there are “more

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moralists of his day and earlier periods, see Daniel R. Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1995), esp. Chap. 3; Asti Hustvedt, *The Decadent Reader* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); George E. McCarthy, *Dialectics and Decadence: Echoes of Antiquity in Marx and Nietzsche* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); and Brendan Donnellan, *Nietzsche and the French Moralists*.

<sup>39</sup> Nehamas, 137.

<sup>40</sup> EH was the last manuscript Nietzsche sent to his publisher as a completed manuscript, but one he was to never see published since he died in 1900 and the text was subsequently printed in 1908.

<sup>41</sup> See R.J. Hollingdale’s “Note on the Text” in the “Translator’s Note” of his translation of Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols with The Anti-Christ* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1968), esp. 26-27.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. EH XII:1: “That which is called idol on the title page is quite simply that which has hitherto been called truth. *Twilight of the Idols*—in plain terms: the old truth is coming to an end....” For Nietzsche, these idols include figures, concepts, and movements that have appeared throughout history and have become sacrosanct at the



idols in the world than there are realities” and his goal in *TI* is to “*sound out idols*” with a hammer “as with a tuning fork” so that their harmful influence may be avoided in the future. For our purposes here, the most important of these “eternal idols” is Socrates and his firm conviction that reason alone is capable of providing us with *eudaimonia*.

#### ***4.2 Nietzsche’s Critique of Socrates’ Negative Perspective on Life***

In the following section I look at Nietzsche’s critique of Socrates’ judgement that life is worthless (*TI* II:1). According to Nietzsche, as Socrates lay on his deathbed he told Crito “I owe a cock to the saviour Asclepius” (*TI* II:1). Asclepius is the god of medicine and one pays him a cock after being cured of an illness. For Nietzsche, Socrates’ declaration implies that life itself is the disease and death its cure. In other words, Socrates’ last words insinuate that he has been suffering from a sickness his entire life. Nietzsche argues, however, that such a perspective on life is only indicative of a certain type of life but not life itself.

For a condemnation of life by the living is after all no more than the symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether the condemnation is just or unjust has not been raised at all. One would have to be situated *outside* life, and on the other hand to know it as thoroughly as any, as many, as all who have experienced it, to be permitted to touch on the problem of the *value* of life at all: sufficient reason for understanding that this problem is for us an inaccessible problem. When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values.... From this it follows that even that *anti-nature of a morality* which conceives God as the contrary concept to and condemnation of life is only a value judgement on the Chapter of life—of *what* life? of *what* kind of life? (*TI* V:5)

According to Nietzsche, Socrates’ *décadence* can be attributed to his search after the *value of life* as opposed to assigning *value to his life*. (*TI* V:6). Assigning value to our lives according to our passions and interests as opposed to the strict adherence to an objectively set standard of the “good” is what we ought to strive after, since, as Nietzsche claims “*the value of life cannot be estimated*” (*TI* II:2). In order to put a value on life one would have to be situated outside of life

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forefront of human culture. For example, Socrates, Jesus, the faculty of “reason,” Christianity, the “real world,” the theory of causation, free will, God, and morality, are just a few of the eternal idols Nietzsche confronts in *TI*.

itself. In other words, one would have to have a God's-eye view of the world in order to know what value man should place upon it, and a view from above is an inaccessible one. Therefore, ethical statements of the objectivist kind that concern life, in the manner uttered by Socrates, according to Nietzsche,

can never be true: they possess value only as symptoms, they come into consideration only as symptoms—in themselves such judgements are stupidities. (*TI II:2*)

Furthermore, such judgements about life are symptomatic of a “declining, debilitated, weary” and “condemned life” (*TI V:5*). For Nietzsche, Socrates lived such a life. The life of a *décadent* in whom the “*instinct of décadence*,” as Nietzsche calls it, was a natural impulse. That is to say, it would be better to die rather than live a life not worth living, such as the life led by Socrates in which melancholy, weariness, and doubt reign supreme (*TI II:1*).

Now I turn to Nietzsche's *ad hominem* attack on Socrates' physical appearance, which Nietzsche treats as a further symptom and external feature of the Athenian philosopher's *décadence*. According to Nietzsche, Socrates belonged to the lowest order of society: “Socrates was rabble” (*TI II:3*). Socrates was physically unattractive; indeed, repulsive, according to the majority of accounts we have from antiquity. Moreover, at least in Nietzsche's view, Socrates was an insult to the Greeks' aesthetic sensibilities. Socrates was such a gruesome figure to behold that Nietzsche wonders whether he was a Greek at all (*TI II:3*). Additionally, Socrates was aware of the connection between his soul and his physical appearance. According to Nietzsche,

A foreigner passing through Athens who knew how to read faces told Socrates to his face that he *was a monstrum*—that he contained within him every kind of foul vice and lust. And Socrates answered merely: “You know me, sir!” (*TI II:3*)

Referring to the above passage Nehamas claims, rightly in my view, that for Nietzsche

Socrates' ugly face is an outward reflection of the total chaos within. Reason is just his means of keeping that chaos at bay. His face reflects an anarchy of instincts, a civil war ... that resulted in tyranny, not peace.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, Nietzsche views Socrates' very disagreeable physical appearance as less important than the "dissolution and anarchy of his instincts" that it reveals. Socrates' *décadence*, then, can be traced to his attempt to subjugate his instincts to his unshakable faith in reason. Socrates' physical appearance just happens to be the most obvious external feature of his person that Nietzsche, in his usual *ad hominem* way, associates with the degeneration and decay of which the Athenian philosopher is a victim.

#### ***4.3 Nietzsche's Critique of Dialectics as a Form of Ressentiment***

Let me now present Nietzsche's critique of dialectic as a form of *ressentiment* in "The Problem of Socrates." The primary aim of dialectic, Nietzsche holds, is the defeat of a "nobler taste; with dialectics the rabble gets on top" (*TI* II:5). Those who employ dialectics do so only as a "last ditch weapon" when no other expedient is available (*TI* II:5). Socrates' use of dialectics "was repudiated in good society," seen as "bad manners," and aroused the suspicions of those around him. Based on the ambivalent reception of dialectics in antiquity Nietzsche speculates whether

Socrates' irony [is] an expression of revolt? of the *ressentiment* of the rabble? does he, as one of the oppressed, enjoy his own form of ferocity in the knife-thrust of the syllogism? (*TI* II:7)

In other words, Nietzsche wonders what Socrates gains by being "absurdly rational" when one's contemporaries only heap scorn upon such an undertaking (*TI* II:10). Socrates, according to Nietzsche, through his use of dialectic, "compromises by conquering," "devitalizes his opponent's intellect," and forces his interlocutor to "demonstrate that he is not an idiot" (*TI* II:7). For Nietzsche, then, dialectic functions as a subversive device appropriated by Socrates to

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<sup>43</sup> Nehamas, 139.

acquire power over and take revenge upon his aristocratic contemporaries. Nevertheless, for Socrates, in Nietzsche's view, to take revenge in this way is a form of sickness (*TI* II:1).

Being sick is itself a kind of *ressentiment*... And nothing burns one up quicker than the affects of *ressentiment*. Vexation, morbid susceptibility, incapacity for revenge, the desire, the thirst for revenge, poison-brewing in any sense—for one who is exhausted this is certainly the most disadvantageous kind of reaction: it causes a rapid expenditure of nervous energy, a morbid accretion of excretions, for example of gall into the stomach. *Ressentiment* is the forbidden *in itself* for the invalid—*his* evil: unfortunately also his most natural inclination. (*EH* I:6)

Here Nietzsche claims “being sick is itself a kind of *ressentiment*” and to participate in any type of revengeful act is the psychic invalid's “most natural inclination.” The invalid's inability (1) to attain moral and intellectual independence without malice toward others and (2) to passionately channel his or her instincts unencumbered by even a modicum of resentment is due to their “vexation, morbid susceptibility,” and “thirst for revenge.” According to Nietzsche, this compels the invalid to behave in a most heinous manner. Socrates, being the prototypical invalid, used dialectic to take revenge upon his interlocutors by forcing them to confront their intellectual shortcomings, while he, the one suffering from the most wretched form of decay, was conveniently able to overlook his own non-intellectual imperfections (*TI* II:11).<sup>44</sup> As a result, Socrates' use of dialectic is a form of *ressentiment* that further demonstrates, at least in Nietzsche's eyes, that the Athenian philosopher was truly a *décadent*.

#### ***4.4 Nietzsche's Opposition to Reason as A Counter-Tyrant Against the Instincts***

Now I turn to Nietzsche's antagonism toward Socrates for establishing reason as a “counter-tyrant” against the tyranny of the instincts (*TI* II:9). According to Nietzsche, “everywhere the instincts were in anarchy,” and Socrates was to become the chief instigator of a movement that was to have unforeseen consequences, not only for Greek philosophers, but all philosophers thereafter. “The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato downward is

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. *EH* I:1: “My readers perhaps know the extent to which I regard dialectics as a symptom of *décadence*, for example in the most famous case of all: in the case of Socrates.”

pathologically conditioned: likewise their estimation of dialectics” (*TI II:10*). As the tragic age of Greece was reaching its final stages “Socrates understood that all the world had need of him—his expedient, his cure, his personal art of self-preservation ...” (*TI II:9*).<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, as discussed in the previous section, Socrates’ philosophical method was unwelcome amongst the more “principled” and “righteous” citizens of Athens; on the other, the youth of Athens found dialectic to be a resourceful method for the exploration of concepts, ideas and themselves. As Nietzsche sees it, Socrates and his associates had little choice to be “rational or not”: “it was *de rigueur*,” and “one had only *one* choice: either perish or—be absurdly rational” (*TI II:9*). In Socrates’ time to be taken seriously one had to be as rigorous as possible in order to “counter the dark desires by producing a permanent daylight—the daylight of reason” without deference to non-rational elements, that is to say, the instincts (*TI II:10*). Socrates and his “invalids,” in Nietzsche’s view, believed “one must be prudent, clear, bright at any cost: every yielding to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads *downwards* ...” (*TI II:10*). In other words, Socrates was the primary initiator of a “turn” that marked the transition from the archaic to the classical period in Greek thought and signaled a decline in the value assigned to the instincts. It was this feature of Socrates’ character that agitated Nietzsche the most:

The harshest daylight, rationality at any cost, life bright, cold, circumspect, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts, has itself been no more than a form of sickness, another form of sickness—and by no means a way back to ‘virtue’, to ‘health’, to happiness.... To have to combat one’s instincts—that is the formula for *décadence* : as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one. (*TI II:11*)

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. *TI X:2*: “Greek philosophy as the *décadence* of the Greek instinct; Thucydides as the grand summation, the last manifestation of that strong, stern, hard matter-of-factness instinctive to the older Hellenes. *Courage* in face of reality ultimately distinguishes such natures as Thucydides and Plato: Plato is a coward in the face of reality—consequently he flees into the ideal; Thucydides has *himself* under control—consequently he retains control over things....” Cf. *TI X:3*: “But the philosophers are the *décadents* of Hellenism, the counter-movement against the old, the noble taste (—against the agonal instinct, against the *polis*, against the value of the race, against the authority of tradition). The Socratic virtues were preached *because* the Greeks had lost them: excitable, timid, fickle, comedians every one, they had more than enough reason to let morality be preached to them. Not that it would have done any good: but big words and fine attitudes are so suited to *décadents*....”

He was to later express similar sentiments in *EH* where, reflecting on the second of two *novelties* to be found in his first book, *BT*, Nietzsche says,

The other novelty is the understanding of Socratism: Socrates for the first time recognized as an agent of Hellenic disintegration, as a typical *décadent*. ‘Rationality’ *against* instinct. ‘Rationality’ at any price as dangerous, as a force undermining life! (*EH* IV:1)

Nietzsche’s criticism here targets the peculiar way in which Socrates set reason up as a “counter-tyrant” against the tyranny of the instincts prevalent at the end of the archaic period of Greece.

Nietzsche holds that Socratism, Socrates’ outlook on life, can be formulated as follows: “reason = virtue = happiness” (*TI* II:4). In other words, Socrates lived by a thesis that we can reduce to the following moral principle:

Reason *alone* provides the framework through which the attainment of the virtues (e.g., courage, temperance, piety) is possible and hence the *eudaimonia* that comes along with it.

For Nietzsche, this perspective on life is incongruous with what is necessary, and what Nietzsche finds necessary is the affirmation of life. Furthermore, such a view of life is inimical to life itself and, for Nietzsche, justifies his relentless attack on Socrates in *BT* and *TI*. Socrates’ *décadence*, then, Nietzsche believes, can be attributed to his inability to channel his drives in a way that would allow the Athenian philosopher to become more well-balanced in his thinking by denying reason a privileged position above the other drives that deserve an equivalent amount of attention.

If, as I have argued, Nietzsche views Socrates as: (a) maintaining the negative view that life has no value and exhibiting the physical characteristics that reflect this negative attitude toward life to others; (b) attempting to evade the symptoms of such a perspective through his use of dialectic; and (c) emphasizing reason as *the* way toward *eudaimonia*, whereby the reliance on the instincts becomes suspect, then, “the problem of Socrates” is the problem, as discussed in *BT*, of trying to merge our instinctual yearning for creative expression and our Socratic drives or,

rather, the sensibilities of the artist with the analytical problem-solving methods of the scientist (*BT* 14). According to Nietzsche, then, at least in *BT* and *TI*, this is something Socrates failed to do and, for that reason alone, in Nietzsche's eyes, he embodies and exemplifies those qualities suitable for being described as a *décadent*.

## SECTION FIVE: NIETZSCHE'S TREATMENT OF SOCRATES IN LATER WORKS

The objective of this Section is to present Nietzsche's view of Socrates in later works outside of "The Problem of Socrates" from *TI*.<sup>46</sup> I will introduce passages from *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil* that disclose Nietzsche's admiration toward Socrates. An analysis of these passages will reveal a more sympathetic attitude toward Socrates than what we encountered in *TI*. In section 5.1 I offer Nietzsche's most explicit remark concerning his admiration toward Socrates in *GS*. Following this, in section 5.2, I examine a passage from *BGE* which displays Nietzsche's assessment of Socrates as a great philosopher based upon his attempt to challenge the haughtiness and narrow-mindedness of his contemporaries; in the course of doing so, Nietzsche speculates on whether greatness of the kind is still possible today given the sentiments of the present age. As a final point, in section 5.3 I sum up by discussing Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in later works as established by Sections 4 and 5. The objective of this Section, then, is to establish Nietzsche's more favorable view of Socrates in later works in order to counterbalance the harsh remarks stated by Nietzsche in *TI* and thus demonstrate once again Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates.

### 5.1 *The Gay Science* (1882)

Let me now offer a passage from *The Gay Science* that substantiates my claim that Nietzsche holds Socrates in the highest esteem in later works. *GS* was Nietzsche's sixth book and shows him experimenting with several different forms of expression such as poetry, songs, and aphorisms in order to demonstrate to the reader that, as Kaufmann says in his "Introduction" to the work, "serious thinking does not have to be stodgy, heavy, dusty, or, in one word, Teutonic."

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<sup>46</sup> In his late works the majority of Nietzsche's remarks about Socrates have a tendency to reflect his contempt for the Athenian philosopher in a manner similar to that expressed in *BT* and *TI*. But cf. *BGE* 191 and *GM* III:7 where Nietzsche's remarks about Socrates are rather ambiguous.



Nietzsche's remarks about Socrates in the following passage are similar to comments he made in earlier works, but it also introduces some new elements into his appreciation for the Athenian philosopher that hitherto went unmentioned.

*The dying Socrates.*— I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said - and did not say. This mocking and enamored monster and pied piper of Athens, who made the most overweening youths tremble and sob, was not only the wisest chatterer of all time: he was equally great in silence. (GS 340)

As we can clearly see from this passage Nietzsche pays homage to Socrates for three reasons, tersely stated as follows: (1) the courage he demonstrated by defying conventional methods of thinking; (2) the wisdom he exhibited through his method of dialectic, which turned out to be a new approach to education; and (3) the irony, humor, and what some refer to as false humility made prominent through the discussions he had with his friends and interlocutors. Although Nietzsche called Socrates the “wisest chatterer of all time” and “equally great in silence” he claims that he would have belonged to a “still higher order of spirits” had he refrained from uttering those very famous last words, “O Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius” (GS 340).<sup>47</sup> As Nietzsche sees it, Socrates' admission that he owed a debt to the god of medicine was an indication that he had been cured of a disease. In view of the fact that Socrates was on the verge of death and his last words alluded to a deity worshipped for his healing powers, Nietzsche concludes that the disease Socrates suffered from was life itself.

Even so, Nietzsche still finds Socrates worthy of his respect for the following three reasons: (1) the courage he displayed as he was persecuted and subsequently prosecuted by his contemporaries, (2) his ability to use irony and humor to convince his fellow Athenians to question themselves and the moral authority of their elder statesmen, and (3) his skill in and practice of dialectics.

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<sup>47</sup> Here, as in our discussion of *TI* in Section 4, Nietzsche interprets Socrates' last words as being an indication of his disgruntled attitude towards life.

## 5.2 *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)

At this time I would like to turn to section 212 of *BGE* where Nietzsche begins by declaring that philosophers are “extraordinary [promoters] of man” whose great task is “being the bad conscience of their time” (*BGE* 212). In his reflections on the purpose of the work that appears in the very eccentric autobiographical *EH*, Nietzsche claims that *BGE* is “in all essentials a *critique of modernity*, the modern sciences, the modern arts, not even excluding modern politics, together with signposts to an antithetical type who is as little modern as possible, a noble, an affirmative type” (*EH III:BGE:2*). Nietzsche apparently means to include Socrates among those “antithetical” and “affirmative” types who lay “the knife vivisectionally” to the “chest of the very *virtues of their time*” (*BGE* 212). In section 211 of *BGE* Nietzsche writes: “*Genuine philosophers, however, are commanders and legislators: they say, ‘thus it shall be!’*” Nehamas asks: “But who are those ‘genuine philosophers’? Nietzsche offers only one example. Amazingly, it is Socrates” (Nehamas, 151-52). As Nietzsche sees it, Socrates’ greatness resides in his ability to attack the pretentiousness of his contemporaries through his use of ingenious and unprecedented pedagogical techniques. Additionally, Nietzsche questions whether the greatness exhibited by Socrates is still possible today. Philosophers in the manner of Socrates, Nietzsche holds, are “dangerous question marks” in an age where conformity, complacency, and mediocrity are the norm (*BGE* 212). At such times, Nietzsche argues, “strength of the will” is a necessity for greatness. Socrates serves as an exemplar of this type of greatness.

In the age of Socrates, among men of fatigued instincts, among the conservatives of ancient Athens who let themselves go—“toward happiness,” as they said; toward pleasure, as they acted—and who all the while still mouthed the ancient pompous words to which their lives no longer gave them any right, irony may have been required for greatness of soul, that Socratic sarcastic assurance of the old physician and plebian who cut ruthlessly into his own flesh, as he did into the flesh and heart of the “noble,” with a look that said clearly enough: “Don’t dissemble in front of me! Here—we are equal.” (*BGE* 212)

According to Nehamas’ reading of this passage, Nietzsche

credit[s] Socrates with introducing the radically new principle of equality in opposition to the bankrupt hierarchical ideals of his time. Socrates rejected the anti-intellectual values and fashions of his age that allowed some people to act differently from others, relied instead on the universal reason that dictates that all should act alike, and convinced the rest of the world to follow him. (Nehamas, 152)

Furthermore, Socrates used irony to counteract the impulse to think and act intuitively on the Chapter of the Athenian nobility. Through his use of dialectics, Nietzsche argues, Socrates forced the aristocratic Athenians to realize that what they attained by way of wealth and class standing did not, on their own, entail that they were pious, temperate, or wise. According to Nietzsche, this was a *non sequitur* and Socrates was to make sure that the nobility of Athens were made aware of this predicament at every occasion.

As we have seen, then, in *BGE*, as similarly demonstrated in *GS*, Nietzsche credits Socrates with using irony as a device to question and expose the “hypocrisy, comfortableness, letting oneself go, and letting oneself drop” that was a commonly occurring phenomenon in Socrates’ Athens (*BGE* 212).

### ***5.3 Nietzsche’s Ambivalence Toward Socrates in Later Works***

Now I will sketch the combined results of Sections 4 and 5. In Section 4 we saw Nietzsche describe Socrates as a *décadent* for his overemphasis upon reason. In Nietzsche’s view, Socrates neglected the instincts in a futile attempt to circumvent that *décadence*. As we saw in Section 5, Nietzsche commends Socrates for (1) standing by his principles despite being ridiculed and reviled by a majority of his contemporaries, and (2) using irony, humor, and dialectics to cajole and spur those same contemporaries and the Athenian youth to re-examine some of their most basic assumptions about morality. Thus, the evidence presented here proves that Nietzsche’s view of Socrates in later works is one of ambivalence.

## SECTION 6: NIETZSCHE ON THE USE AND MISUSE OF PRACTICAL REASON FOR LIFE

Having demonstrated Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates throughout his works let me now give an explanation as to why this ambivalence exists. In doing so, I show that Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates is a reflection of the much larger problem of reason in human life that Nietzsche attempted to resolve through his experimental approach to doing philosophy.

The aim of this Section is to show that Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates is a reflection of his ambivalence to the role of reason in human life. Toward that end, I present Nietzsche's view of practical reason in earlier and later works in sections 6.1 and 6.2. Finally, in section 6.4, I review the most salient features of Nietzsche's ambivalence toward practical reason that emerge when the preceding two sections are taken together. The aim of this Section, then, is not only to clarify Nietzsche's view of practical reason; it also aims to show the way in which Nietzsche's ambivalence toward practical reason is due, on the one hand, to the positive role practical reason can play as a filtering mechanism to assist us in living the type of life we aspire to through the suppression, restraint, and, also, the release of the instincts (*Instinkts*) or drives (*Triebe*)<sup>48</sup>, and, on the other hand, the common *misuse* of practical reason as the *one and only* perspective through which we can understand ourselves and the world we occupy—a practice refined and adhered to by Socrates and the vast majority of later philosophers.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Conway claims that Nietzsche uses these terms interchangeably throughout most of his career. For a more in-depth discussion of Nietzsche's "roughly synonymous" use of *Instinkt* and *Trieb* until 1888, see Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 30-34.

<sup>49</sup> Nehamas, besides the contradiction between the view of "reason" he attributes to Nietzsche as just another "instinct" and his view that the instincts are "more or less unselfconscious" but can be acculturated through "effort and practice," is, in my opinion, confused about the discussion of self-mastery in Nietzsche's works. Briefly, to identify the main problem of his view, if reason is "no less an 'instinct'—a natural feature and development—than the rest of our impulses and faculties," and all instincts are "more or less" unselfconscious, then Nehamas' claim that the instincts can be acculturated through "effort and practice" is highly questionable, see Alexander

## 6.1 Nietzsche on Practical Reason in Earlier Works

Now I want to turn to an examination of Nietzsche's view of practical reason in his earlier works. Throughout his works Nietzsche displays ambivalence toward reason—favoring one form of practical reasoning, criticizing another.<sup>50</sup>

**T1:** Critical Reason: The negative use of reason as a form of critique to expose the reverence for psychologically destructive and thus physically debilitating concepts and practices.

**T2:** Constructive Reason: The positive use of unaided reason to attain knowledge of moral concepts and hence the *eudaimonia* that comes along with it, giving modest or no regard to the various passions or *akrasia* (e.g., Socratic dialectic).

**T1** is the form of practical reason<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche makes use of from *BT* to *TI*. That is, **T1** is the form of practical reason Nietzsche employs to bring about a “revaluation of values” (TI:F). In Nietzsche's philosophy **T1** becomes a method for declaring war on what he believes are some of the most life negating concepts and practices inherited from ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The most problematic of these practices, Nietzsche holds, is to view reason as the *one and only* mechanism for understanding the human condition. This is the

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Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), esp. Sections 5 and 6. Brian Leiter offers a more plausible interpretation of Nietzsche's talk of self-mastery: “The fact that one masters oneself is *not* a product of autonomous choice by the person, but rather an effect of the underlying type-facts characteristic of that person: namely, which of his various drives happens to be strongest. There is, as it were, no ‘self’ in ‘self-mastery’: that is, no conscious ‘self’ who contributes anything to the process. ‘Self-mastery’ is merely an effect of the interplay of certain drives, drives over which the conscious self exercises no control (though it may, as it were, ‘take sides’),” see Brian Leiter, “The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche,” in B. Leiter & J. Richardson (eds.), *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 281-321, 318. For Nietzsche's own discussion of the relationship between self-mastery and the drives (*Triebe*), see sections 109, 119, 221, and 553 of *Daybreak*. For other arguments in support of the view that Nietzsche is a naturalist, see Brian Leiter, “One Health, One Earth, One Sun: Nietzsche's Respect for Natural Science” *Times Literary Supplement* (October 2), 1998: 30-31; and Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Here I am focusing only on Nietzsche's ambivalence toward practical reason as it relates to Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates. Be that as it may, there is much to say about Nietzsche's view of theoretical reason as well as his own positive attitude toward practical reason.

<sup>51</sup> I use “practical reason” in two senses: first, reflective reason directed to the general problems of human life, and second, deliberative reason directed toward action in specific circumstances, T1 is a form of practical reason in the first sense.

conception of reason outlined in **T2**. In what follows I introduce Nietzsche's ambivalence toward reason as outlined above and conclude by clarifying that ambivalence.

Let us now turn to Nietzsche's pro attitude toward critical reason in earlier works. In *HH* Nietzsche writes, "school has no more important task than to teach rigorous thinking, cautious judgment and consistent reasoning" (*HH* I:265). As Nietzsche sees it, Socrates is the philosopher we ought to thank for discovering the "antithetical magic, that of cause and effect, of ground and consequence" (*D* 544). For Nietzsche, quoting Goethe, "the [most supreme] powers of man" are "reason and science" (*HH* I:265). Indeed, Nietzsche argues that the most profound demonstration of these powers can be found in the discipline of philology. "It was *only* when the art of correct reading, that is to say philology, arrived at its summit that science of any kind acquired continuity and constancy" (*HH* I:270, [my emphasis]). According to Nietzsche, the "greatest advance mankind has made lies in its having learned to draw correct conclusions" (*HH* I:271). For Nietzsche, then, one arrives at the "height of [their] powers" as a "logical, mocking, playful, and yet awesome spirit" when they learn how to both utilize reason as an instrument to appreciate their experiences and sublimate and freely express their drives.

At this time I want to discuss Nietzsche's antagonistic attitude toward practical reason in earlier works. What Nietzsche finds most objectionable about constructive reason is its adamant denial of the passions. By way of *ad hominem* attacks against Euripides and Socrates in *BT* we get a glimpse of Nietzsche's animosity toward constructive reason. According to Nietzsche, the "rationalistic method" employed by Euripides purged Greek tragedy of the emotional and mystical components most clearly represented in the tragic plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Yet it was Socrates' influence on Euripides that prompted the tragedian to abide by the Socratic principle that "to be good everything must be conscious" (*BT* 12). That is, everything must be

subject to measurement, calculation, and logical deduction. For Nietzsche, the emphasis on making *everything* conscious through the elevation of a single drive (in this case the drive for “dialectical investigation”) to the exclusion of all others is tantamount to moral and intellectual bankruptcy (*UM* III:6). In view of the foregoing, Nietzsche takes issue with constructive reason because of the “*optimistic* element in the nature of dialectic, which celebrates a triumph with every conclusion and can breathe only in cool clarity and consciousness ...” without properly considering the affective aspects of the human condition. (*BT* 14).

## 6.2 Nietzsche on Practical Reason in Later Works

As we have already seen, Nietzsche displays ambivalence toward practical reason due to the two aspects described above. In what follows I will examine passages in the essay “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” in *Twilight of the Idols* and supplementary evidence from Nietzsche’s *Nachlass* that further displays Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward practical reason in his later works.

Nietzsche’s “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” in *Twilight of the Idols* makes clear his opposition to constructive reason. In Nietzsche’s view, the history of metaphysics is little more than the history of empty concepts. Traditional metaphysicians such as the Eleatics and Plato favor being over becoming, that is, they have argued: “Whatever is, does not become; whatever becomes, is not ...” (*TI* III: 4). According to Nietzsche, advocates of constructive reason have formulated two main principles that govern their thinking:

- (P1) Moral: free yourself from sense deception, from becoming, history, lies—history is nothing but belief in the senses, belief in lies. (*TI* III:4)
- (P2) Moral: say no to anything which believes in the senses, to the whole of the rest of humanity: they are all just “the populace.” (*TI* III:4)

Put simply, **P1** denies that critical reason is a valid means to guide one’s actions, while **P2** goes even further by denouncing popular opinion unhelpful to the objectives of constructive reason.

As Nietzsche understands the history of ‘reason’ in philosophy, philosophers became bewitched

by what he dubs the “metaphysics of language” due to an overreliance on constructive reason. As a result of their fascination with constructive reason philosophers came to believe in such things as the “lie of unity, the lie of materiality, of substance, of duration” as well as the so-called highest concepts of “being, the absolute, the good, the true, the perfect, ...” and “the will” (*TI* III:2,4,5). Nietzsche argues that these lies are not the consequence of the evidence of ordinary sense-experience, but our interpretation of that evidence that allows these lies to subsist (*TI* III:2). He views constructive reason as an unsatisfactory means to understand the human condition, because it falls short of accounting for ordinary sense-experience. If Nietzsche is correct the concept of God—the “thinnest” and “emptiest” of concepts—becomes insignificant, and along with the concept of God we must also dispense with the continuing fascination with the apparent world/real world distinction. According to Nietzsche, we need to see “reason in reality—not in ‘reason’” (*TI* X:2). In section 507 of *WP* Nietzsche writes:

Trust in reason and its categories, in dialectic, therefore the valuation of logic, proves only their usefulness for life, proved by experience—not that something is true.

For Nietzsche, then, critical reason requires that life experience be an indispensable tool for guiding life.

### ***6.3 Nietzsche’s Ambivalence Toward Practical Reason***

In this Section I have shown how Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward practical reason endures from his early to late works. As we have seen, then, Nietzsche is ambivalent toward practical reason (i.e., critical and constructive reason). More specifically, Nietzsche holds, the *misuse* of practical reason occurs when we neglect the existential dimension of human experience in favor of theories and systems (i.e., constructive reason). Conversely, we learned that the proper *use* of practical reason requires that we treat our own lives as scientific



experiments. That is to say, we should make use of multiple perspectives in both our theoretical inquiries as well as our practical pursuits to achieve a desired end (i.e., constructive reason).

**CONCLUSION: NIETZSCHE'S AMBIVALENCE TOWARD PRACTICAL  
REASON AS A REFLECTION AS A REFLECTION OF HIS AMBIVALENCE  
TWOARD SOCRATES**

In Sections 2-5 I demonstrated (A) Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates, and in Section 6 I demonstrated (B) Nietzsche's ambivalence toward practical reason. By summarizing the conclusions reached in these discussions we can understand how (B) explains (A), and thus demonstrate the strict parallelism between these two manifestations. As I have already explained in Section 6, Nietzsche's *ad hominem* arguments against Socrates are Nietzsche's *modus operandi* for trying to uproot and hence eradicate a problematic conception of practical reason that lay at the center of both life and philosophy. Additionally, we came to appreciate Nietzsche's advocacy of one form of practical reason that he argues is useful for the affirmation of life.

As a whole, I have explained both Nietzsche's view of Socrates and his view of practical reason. More importantly, I have explained the connection between Nietzsche's ambivalence toward both Socrates and reason by giving an account of his *ad hominem* arguments against the Athenian philosopher. As a consequent, we can now understand *the reason why* Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates, as stated in the introduction, is both caused by, and a reflection of his ambivalence toward reason.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NIETZSCHE AND PLATO: AN INTERPRETATION AND DEFENSE

*In 1887, in a letter to Paul Deussen thanking him for a birthday gift from the Academy in Athens, Nietzsche claimed to be proud to have [Plato] as an opponent: “perhaps this old Plato is my true great opponent? But how proud I am to have such an opponent!”<sup>52</sup>*

#### SECTION 1: MAKING DISTINCTIONS: NIETZSCHE, PLATO, AND PLATONISM

Understanding Nietzsche’s view of Plato is just as important, and arguably more important, than understanding his view of any other philosopher. According to Zuckert, Nietzsche’s “understanding of Plato is a central, if not, the defining, factor, in [his] thought as a whole” (Zuckert 1996: 1). It is well known that Nietzsche’s “life task” was “*overcoming Platonism*” (Krell 1996: 83). Be that as it may, the aim of Chapter II is to give a precise rendering of Nietzsche’s view of Plato rather than Platonism. Chapter I of this dissertation tackled Nietzsche’s ambivalence towards Socrates as the first of three movements treating Nietzsche’s view of classical Greek philosophy. Yet, as Krell points out, “Nietzsche’s multiplicity of perspectives—and downright ambivalence—with regard to Socrates is well known, and has been the object of much discussion. Yet his ambivalence with regard to Plato must be emphasized every bit as much” (Krell 1996: 88). As a consequence, I will concentrate on Nietzsche’s ambivalence to Plato, which is usually trumped in favor of a one-sided analysis of Nietzsche’s disgust for Plato.

In what follows I will very briefly sketch an account of the distinction between Plato and Platonism for the sake of beginning an inquiry into the complex web of Nietzsche’s view of Plato. First, I touch on the intriguing duality of Nietzsche’s view of Plato. Here I merely allude to ideas that will receive a far more thorough treatment in subsequent Sections. Following that, I

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<sup>52</sup> Brobjer 2008: 11

provide a formal definition of Platonism itself for the sole purpose of framing the scope of my interpretation and defense of Nietzsche's view of Plato. All in all, I will highlight the way in which Nietzsche's view of Plato and his philosophical project are decidedly ambivalent, while Nietzsche's view of Platonism is undeniably harsh.

According to Krell, "Plato had something to do with Platonism" (Krell 1996: 83). Plato and Platonism are not always clearly distinguished in the secondary literature and the failure to make the distinction between them explicit often gives the misleading impression that Nietzsche weighed them equally or saw them as one and the same. Nietzsche's view of Plato himself is ambivalent. On the one hand, Plato is a "fantasist" and "utopian" for whom "the more opprobrious epithets perished with ancient Athens" (WP 374). Given the otherworldliness of Plato's metaphysics, Nietzsche thinks it appropriate to characterize him as one who "is a coward in the face of reality" (TI "Ancients" 2). Unlike Thucydides, whose depiction of human behavior in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* has helped to spawn the realist tradition in political and international affairs, Plato, to Nietzsche's chagrin, has little interest in tackling human behavior in a similar manner.

Thucydides "the Realist" recognizes quite clearly that the Athenians are not moved by "philanthropic and righteous principles," that they are driven, instead, by selfish and self-aggrandizing concerns, restrained only by the limits of their own power. Socrates and Plato, by contrast, chatter irrelevantly about "virtue and justice," when, as Thucydides makes plain, virtue and justice play no role in human affairs. (Leiter, "Holmes" 11)

Besides refusing to learn from Thucydides, Nietzsche calls Plato a "symptom of decay," an "agent of Greek disintegration," "pseudo-Greek," and even "anti-Greek." In other words, Nietzsche's assessment of Plato as a "symptom of decay" and an "agent of Greek disintegration" is an allusion to Plato's apparent evaluation of the Socratic elenchus as a destructive rather than constructive means to acquire truth. For Nietzsche, the Socratic elenchus and Plato's dialectic were useless tools for philosophical inquiry. The Platonic dialogue, in which dialectic is

embedded, is a “horribly smug, childlike type of dialectic” (TI “Ancients” 2). Not only is Plato ridiculed for using dialectic as means to acquire truth, but also the value he attaches to the “concept of the good,” which Nietzsche calls “life-endangering,” “life-caluminating,” and a “life-denying principle” (WP 644). For Nietzsche, Plato is “pseudo-Greek” and “anti-Greek,” because of the overly rational modes of reasoning Plato (in concert with Socrates) introduced at the height of the tragic era of the Greeks. In this case, Nietzsche primarily blames the student for corrupting the teacher.

Nietzsche is quite generous when it comes to expressing his contempt for Plato. In a note from the summer of 1878 he alleges that Plato is envious of Socrates’ young followers based on the account offered in the *Apology* at 23c-24b2. Plato, Nietzsche insists, “wants to monopolise Socrates *for himself*. He puts a lot of himself into Socrates, and he believes that he is making him more beautiful...freeing him from the Socratics...” (EN 19[34]). To Nietzsche’s mind, Plato’s attempt to make Socrates more beautiful has only made Plato himself the “greatest enemy of art Europe has yet produced” (GM III:25). Nietzsche goes so far as to say that Plato’s dialogues are a “*will to deception*” wherein he presents Socrates “unhistorically” (GM III:25; EN 19[34]).

Besides Plato’s envy, Nietzsche calls Plato’s ethics “moralistic,” his metaphysics “proleptically Christian,” “a higher hoax,” and “idealism” (TI “Ancients” 2). As we will see, Nietzsche’s seemingly *ad hominem* attacks as well as the many pejoratives he launches at Plato, as discussed in Chapter I, act as a “magnifying glass” to draw attention to what he judges as issues of serious philosophical import (EH “Wise” 7). Regarding Nietzsche’s use of *ad hominem* arguments, Brobjer contends there are at least three reasons why Nietzsche employs this tactic:

Chapterly he uses it as an authority – wise men have thought thus – this is perhaps not sufficient reason why the reader should accept it but it may be a good argument for examining the view seriously. This use is most prevalent in the writings of the early Nietzsche. Chapterly he uses it as an indicator or sign to clarify where he stands – these are my friends and those my enemies. Thirdly,

Nietzsche uses persons as examples – because in the final analysis what really matters is what sort of man one is. (Brobjer, “Ethics” 105)

In my view, Brobjer’s first reason is the only one of philosophical significance, the one that presupposes my study of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and the only one that Nietzsche claims as his own method of inquiry in EH. The other two reasons are intriguing from a biographical standpoint, but I do not view them as substantive from a purely philosophical one.

Let us turn to some of Nietzsche’s less acrimonious sentiments regarding Plato.

According to Nietzsche, the “youthful tragedian Plato” burned his poetry because of his association with Socrates (BT 14). Plato is a “divine” and “admiral innovator” who fell prey to Socrates’ charming ways (BT 12; D II:16).

An attempt at a characterization of Plato without Socrates. Tragedy – profound conception of love – pure nature – no fanatical turning away: obviously the Greeks were *about to find an even higher type* of man than the previous ones; then the scissors snipped, and there remains only the tragic age of the Greeks. (EN 6[18])

Had Plato never met Socrates Nietzsche envisions Plato having a more tragic outlook in his philosophizing. Perhaps Plato would have never burned his tragic plays. Perhaps he would never have become a mixed type. “Socratic, Pythagorean, and Heraclitic elements are all combined in [Plato’s] doctrine of Ideas. This doctrine is not a phenomenon exhibiting a pure philosophic type” (PTAG 2). Moreover, perhaps Plato’s “fanatical turning away” would never have produced a “doctrine of Ideas” in the first place. Despite Socrates’ influence, Nietzsche claims Plato is the “most beautiful flower of antiquity” and “too noble” for Socratic ethics (BGE P;BGE 190). With respect to the latter claim, Nietzsche argues that Plato was “too noble” for the Socratic paradox that no one does wrong willingly. Plato’s moral psychology allows for the possibility of *akrasia*, whereas Socratic intellectualism strictly views it as impossible.

In addition to distinguishing between Plato and Socrates with the purpose of recognizing what Plato was able to achieve even with Socrates hovering over him, Nietzsche has a great deal

to say about Plato independent of Socrates. Nietzsche maintains that Plato is one of only eight philosophers from whom he is willing to accept judgment regarding his own philosophical development. Furthermore, he is willing to listen these philosophers when they “judge one another” (AOM 408). “Whatever I say, resolve, cogitate for myself and others: upon these eight I fix my eyes and see theirs fixed upon me” (AOM 408). Plato, Nietzsche holds, is a “great philosopher,” a “royal and magnificent hermit of the spirit” who agrees with him that compassion is “worthless” (GM III:7; BGE 204; GM P:5, 6). At least on one occasion, Nietzsche sees Plato in a more admirable hue than his beloved Schopenhauer. Reflecting on Schopenhauer’s view that aesthetic experiences liberate us from an overbearing and incessant will, Nietzsche maintains that: “I still remember *against* Schopenhauer and in Plato’s honour that the whole higher culture and literature of classical France also grew on the ground of sexual interest” (TI “Skirmishes” 23). Regardless of whether Plato is celebrating homoeroticism as Chapter of the drama within a Chaptericular dialogue as seen in the exchange between Socrates and Charmides in *Charmides* or using ἔρωϑ as a metaphor for the highest form of love as love of learning reflected in the proper practice of philosophy in the *Symposium*, Plato places some form of sexual love at the center of his philosophizing.

There are also instances in which Nietzsche outright admits that Plato was right. Nietzsche quotes Plato: “Each one of us would like to be master over all men, if possible, and best of all God.”<sup>53</sup> “This attitude,” Nietzsche says, “must exist again” (WP 958). The “attitude” of desiring to become a god or, at the very least comparing oneself to one recalls Euthyphro’s circumstances in the dialogue of the same name. After claiming the pious is to “prosecute the wrongdoer,” Euthyphro cannot fathom why his fellow citizens would express anger towards him

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<sup>53</sup> Kaufmann claims this quote, supposedly from Plato’s *Theages*, is attributed to an imitator of Plato. Nevertheless, he claims similar passages can be found at *Theaetetus* 176. See Kaufmann’s *The Will to Power* pp. 503-504. In any event, the fact that Nietzsche attributes it to Plato is sufficient reason to consider it here.

and not Zeus who “bound his father because he unjustly swallowed his sons, and that he in turn castrated his father for similar reasons” (*Euthyphro* 5e-6a). The act of comparing oneself to a god is certainly an ancient rather than modern idea. With the onset of the three great monotheistic traditions, one exhibits humility rather than ὑβρις toward supernatural entities. All three traditions, especially Christian moral psychology replaced heroism and strength with mediocrity and the “disgraceful modern softening of feelings—” (GM P:6). It is the former, ancient attitude to which Nietzsche wishes we could return. As will be shown throughout Chapter II, Nietzsche’s view of Plato is decidedly ambivalent, but the same cannot be said of Platonism.

Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Plato is not interchangeable with his view of Platonism. His attitude toward Platonism is one-sided and unfavorable. Krell calls Nietzsche an “anti-platonist”, while Parkes refers to him as the “arch-enemy of Platonism” (Krell: 1996: 102); Parkes: 1991 53). According to Nietzsche, Platonism denies perspective which, as he sees it, is the “basic condition of all life” (BGE P). *Platonism is an umbrella term that encompasses philosophical and religious traditions that make use of Plato’s ideas for their own purposes.* Nietzsche was well aware of all of these traditions, but there is one in particular for which he reserved his rage. In the preface to BGE, Nietzsche states that: “But the fight against Plato or, to speak more clearly and for ‘the people,’ the fight against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia—for Christianity is Platonism for ‘the people’” (BGE P). By making this statement, Zuckert argues: “Nietzsche distinguished Plato from his popular influence or effect, Christianity....” (Zuckert 1996: 26). Christianity is certainly the most well known *Weltanschauung* that has made the most extensive use of Plato’s ideas. Similar to Plato’s philosophy but not identical with it, the Christian worldview, among many other things, (1) advocates moral objectivism, (2) privileges celestial spheres over earthly existence, and

(3) locates value in concepts. All three practices, Nietzsche argues, amount to nihilism. “For Nietzsche sees in Platonism the provenance of contemporary nihilism, the source of what we prefer to consider a strictly ‘modern’ malaise, which many blame on the admittedly infectious Nietzsche himself” (Krell 1996: 84). It has recently been argued at length that the overarching aim of Nietzsche’s philosophical project is addressing the problem of nihilism (Reginster 2006). If Christianity is Platonism for the people and Platonism is the provenance of contemporary nihilism, then a few more things should be said about Christianity to further solidify the distinction I want to draw between Plato and Platonism.

In what many consider to be Nietzsche’s most philosophically sober work *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche’s approach to dealing with the legacy of morality bequeathed to us by Christianity is primarily descriptive or explanatory rather than prescriptive or normative. As a descriptive analysis of the origin of morality, Nietzsche employs the metaethical stance of ethical naturalism. That is, Nietzsche relies upon the methods of the social and natural sciences to explain the origin of moral language. In doing so, Nietzsche further distances himself from the supernaturalism and thus nihilism of Christianity. His objective in GM is to answer the three questions that sit at the front of each of the three treatises, namely What is the *origin* of good and evil? What is the *origin* of bad conscience as the feeling of guilt? What is the *origin* of our attraction to ascetic ideals? To Nietzsche’s mind, *ressentiment* explains the transition from good and bad morality to good and evil morality. *Ressentiment* is a psychological state that is an admixture of both frustration and envy. It acts as a stimulus for the powerless to vent their anger in revenge against the powerful, thereby manifesting their inability to live a self-actualized life (GM I:10; cf. GM I:11). In other words, the concepts of good and evil are the imaginary



byproducts of the small but growing cult of Christianity that seemingly faced certain annihilation by their much stronger Roman adversaries.

Nietzsche's answer to the question posed in the "Second Treatise" is the *internalization of the instinct of cruelty* (GM I:16). As Nietzsche makes clear, the repression of the instincts is a life-denying practice that undermines our most natural inclinations.

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn themselves inwards—this is what I call the internalizing of man: thus first grows in man that which he later calls his "soul"... Hostility, cruelty, pleasure in persecution, in assault, in change, in destruction—all of that turning itself against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of "bad conscience." (GM I:16)

Again, Christianity as Platonism for the people requires its adherents to divorce their human, rational selves from their animal, irrational selves. Nietzsche's answer to the question posed in the "Third Treatise" provides an answer as to why someone would seek fight against themselves in such an anti-human manner. Nietzsche argues that the *will to power* accounts for unconscious, existential needs that all human beings have.

Every animal, thus also *la bête philosophe*, instinctively strives for an optimum of feeling of power; just as instinctively, and with a keenness of scent that 'surpasses all understanding,' every animal abhors troublemakers and obstacles of every kind that do or could lay themselves across its path to the optimum (—it is not its path to 'happiness' of which I speak, but rather its path to power, to the deed, to the most powerful doing, and in most cases in actual fact its path to unhappiness. (GM III:7)

As an instinctive need that "surpasses all understanding," Nietzsche's concept of the will to power is a form of psychological egoism. Put simply, psychological egoism is the view that human beings naturally do what is in their own best interest. If psychological egoism is true, then we could certainly do things that we perceive to be in our own best interests but, "in actual fact," lead to our downfall. This explains why some people would subject themselves to the rituals, demands, and life-negating practices of Christianity. Christianity provides a convenient anesthetic that gives comfort and promises heavenly bliss as a welcome respite from the daily challenges of modern life. Leiter sums up the "core argument" as follows:

1. Suffering is a central fact of the human condition.
2. Meaningless suffering is unbearable and leads to ‘suicidal nihilism’ (GM III:28).
3. The ascetic ideal gives meaning to suffering thereby seducing the majority of humans back to life. In other words, the ascetic ideal maximizes their feeling of power within the constraints of their existential situation. (Leiter, “NOM” 256)

Having made a distinction between Plato and Platonism with a brief overview of the most virulent, yet triumphant, form of Platonism in the guise of Christianity, I want to repeat that my objective in Chapter II is to address Nietzsche’s view of Plato and not the various forms of Platonism that have arisen since antiquity. These include not only Christian Platonism, but also Neoplatonism, Cambridge Platonism, and, oddly enough, the mathematical Platonism of Quine and Rorty. Before moving forward, I would like to address a remark by Brobjer in his “Wrestling with Plato and Platonism” that helps clarify not only the objective of Chapter II but the dissertation as a whole.

Although Nietzsche had an interest in and respect for the elusive person Plato, he made almost a caricature of Plato’s philosophy—with little or no distinction between that philosophy, Platonism, and neo-Platonism—in order to use it as an example of a metaphysical position opposite to his own. (Brobjer 256)

First, Brobjer, like Krell, acknowledges Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Plato. That is, it’s quite easy to find passages in which Nietzsche attacks Plato, but finding passages in which Nietzsche shows his respect for Plato are not as easily detectable. Second, Brobjer claims that Nietzsche made a “caricature” of Plato’s philosophy. After discussing how all societies reduce their opponents to caricatures, Nietzsche acknowledges Brobjer’s assertion: “Among immoralists it is the moralist: Plato, for example, becomes a caricature in my hands” (WP 374). My dissertation is *explanatory* rather than *evaluative*. In other words, I have no interest in whether Nietzsche gets Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle right. In my view, that’s a secondary project that can only be carried out once this preliminary study is completed. Third, Brobjer commits what I call the “conflation fallacy” by claiming that Nietzsche makes “little or no distinction between” Plato’s philosophy,

Platonism, and Neoplatonism to use them as an example of the metaphysical system which he opposes. The conflation fallacy is an error in reasoning in which one conflates Plato's philosophy with Platonism on the assumption that Nietzsche more or less views them in the same light. As we will see, Nietzsche has much to say about different aspects of Plato's philosophy that are not reducible to Plato's "metaphysical system." Again, when you look closely at what Nietzsche has to say about Plato's philosophy his reaction is mixed. I will demonstrate this in what follows. That being said, I think Brobjer is correct when he says that Platonism in all its various forms is something to which Nietzsche is opposed.

Let us now turn to a blueprint for Chapter II of the dissertation. My general aim is to explore what I consider to be Nietzsche's three primary areas of concern with regard to Plato: 1) Plato's political philosophy, 2) Plato's use of dialectic and dialogue, and 3) Plato's metaphysics and epistemology. In Section 1 I examine Nietzsche's praise for Plato's perfect state. In "The Greek State" and elsewhere Nietzsche praises Plato's ability to conceive of a state that will allow genius to flourish and the philosopher to live freely. Contrary to the usual consensus, Nietzsche is quite taken with Plato's political savvy and his view of tragedy, yet he is dismayed by what he deems as Plato's "socialism" as well as his restrictive view of culture. After that, in Section 2, I will argue that Nietzsche displays a certain degree of reverence for Plato's use of dialogue and made use of that form himself in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There has been much talk of Nietzsche's "style" of writing, but I know of no one who has traced Nietzsche's own "dramatic method" to Plato (Krell 1996). I will not be arguing that Plato directly influenced Nietzsche to write using dialogue form. That is, there exists no evidence that would support the claim that a *causal* relationship is even possible. Nevertheless, I want to make a weaker claim. I will argue

that there exists enough evidence to suggest there is a *correlation* between Plato's use of dialogue and Nietzsche's reliance upon the same method in a few of his works.<sup>54</sup>

Nietzsche's critique of Plato's metaphysics is very likely the most discussed feature of his relationship to Plato. Therefore, in Section 3, I will discuss both the various passages in which Nietzsche takes Plato to task for his theory of Ideas as well as his "How the Real World Became a Myth" in *Twilight of Idols*. Additionally, I will highlight the less frequently discussed parallels between Plato's *Republic* and Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to further demonstrate Nietzsche's opposition to Plato's idealism. Although Plato's metaphysics and epistemology is often viewed as inseparable, I will talk about what appears to be the only two places in Nietzsche's corpus where he mentions ἀνάμνησις. I will suggest that even though Nietzsche is critical of Plato's metaphysics, he seemingly finds value in his theory of recollection.

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<sup>54</sup> This hermeneutic will not only be a guiding principle in Chapter II, but also Chapter III.

## SECTION 2: NIETZSCHE AND PLATO'S KALLIPOLIS

### 2.1 Nietzsche's "Political Philosophy"?

Nietzsche has no political philosophy. Leiter aptly summarizes the issue:

Perhaps the most striking feature of the reception of Nietzsche in the last decade is the large literature that has developed on Nietzsche's purported "political" philosophy (Detweiler (1990) is representative). Even the casual reader knows, of course, that Nietzsche has intense opinions about everything, from German cuisine to the unparalleled brilliance (in Nietzsche's estimation) of Bizet's operas, not to mention various and sundry "political matters. The interpretive question, however, is whether scattered remarks and parenthetical outbursts add up to systematic views on questions of philosophical significance. (Leiter 2006: 292).

Even though Nietzsche has no full-scale systematic political philosophy that reflects his aristocratic, elitist tendencies, those aristocratic, elitist tendencies are sprinkled throughout his corpus. In other words, Nietzsche's philosophical analysis reflects a concern for and serves to inspire those who desire to live in a self-actualized manner. Such individuals *situate* rather than "will" themselves into certain positions that allow them to attain their "maximum in the feeling of power" (GM III:7).<sup>55</sup> Unlike Nietzsche's quips, Plato's political philosophy is neither composed of "scattered remarks" nor "parenthetical outbursts," and one to which I shall soon turn.

Achieving clarity about Nietzsche's allegedly "political" philosophy is important for understanding his view of Plato's Kallipolis. By doing so, we will learn what Nietzsche finds so intriguing about Plato's systematic political philosophy. The latter is especially interesting since it was Nietzsche who said: "I distrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity" (TI "Arrows and Epigrams" 26). Williams also attests to the German philosopher's unsystematic musings on politics: "Although he moved beyond the conception of the world as aesthetic phenomenon that is prominent in his major, early, work devoted to the

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<sup>55</sup> The problem of free will in Nietzsche's philosophy is Chapterically controversial. I will discuss what I deem Nietzsche's "compatibilism" in Chapter III.

Greeks, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he did not move to any view that offered a coherent politics” (Williams 1993: 10). Williams, correctly in my view, resists the urge that so many cannot. That is, given Nietzsche’s seemingly primary role as a critic of modernity, he is simply not interested in offering answers to the political questions of the day. For this reason, Shaw says Nietzsche is a “frustrating figure for political theorists” (Shaw 2007: 1). Political activists, political theorists, and political ideologues of various flavors want a Nietzschean political philosophy. Williams continues: “He himself provides no way of relating his ethical psychological insights to an intelligible account of modern society—a failing only thinly concealed by the impression he gives of having thoughts about modern politics that are determinate but terrible” (Williams 1993: 10). Williams’s latter claim might hold a flicker of truth had Nietzsche’s aim been to do what Williams suggests. As I see it, Nietzsche had no intention to connect his “ethical psychological insight” to society as a whole. Arguably, this is due to three things: (1) Nietzsche’s level of analysis, (2) Nietzsche’s perfectionism, and (3) Nietzsche’s political skepticism. Nietzsche’s level of analysis is the individual. That is, Nietzsche sought to liberate the individual from a slavish addiction to social norms and religious ideals. “Let’s submit to the facts: the people were victorious—or ‘the slaves,’ or ‘the mob,’ or ‘the herd,’ or whatever you like to call them—if this happened through the Jews, so be it! Then never has a people had a more world-historic mission” (GM III:9). In light of such rhetoric, Nietzsche sought to liberate the individual from the collective. The similarities in thought and action amongst the herd, in Nietzsche’s view, stifle the possibility of greatness. As the current offspring of the three monotheistic traditions, we have inherited a toxic perspective that has saddled we moderns with a life-negating ethics and moral psychology. Indeed, as Nietzsche points out, “Priests are, as is well known, the *most evil enemies*—why is that? Because they are the most powerless. Out of their powerlessness their

hate grows into something enormous and uncanny, into something most spiritual and most poisonous” (GM III:7).

Besides operating on an individual level of analysis, Nietzsche’s, what I would describe as, “quasi-normative” perspective corresponds to individual well being. *A quasi-normative perspective is one that determines norms for those individuals who are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to adhere to such norms.* In Nietzsche’s hands, perfectionism is quasi-normative. Perfectionism is the view that human excellence is the goal of human life. Nietzsche suggests quasi-perfectionism as one perspective among others for the cultivation of one’s *ethos*. The subtitle of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* hints at the content within. In other words, those who are ready to be stimulated to achieve greatness i.e., *to be a perfectionist*; this book is for them. Unlike Kant who binds all rational beings to their duty in virtue of their being rational agents and Mill who binds all social beings to the happiness they supposedly desire, Nietzsche’s quasi-perfectionism is akin to an assortment of hors d’oeuvre that one can choose to accept or reject with no promise of retaliation in the form of punishment. “Nietzsche, then, has no political philosophy, in the conventional sense of a theory of the state and its legitimacy” (Leiter 2002: 296).

At most, it can be said that Nietzsche is a political skeptic of some sort. In her *Nietzsche’s Political Skepticism*, Shaw explains her view:

His guiding political vision ... is oriented around the rise of [the] modern state, which requires normative consensus in order to rule, and a simultaneous process of secularization that seems to make uncoerced consensus impossible. The state has the ideological capacity to manufacture this consensus but no necessary concern that it should involve convergence around the right (as opposed to merely politically expedient) norms.

Nietzsche doubts that secular societies can otherwise generate sufficient consensus. They therefore lack any reliable mechanism for placing real normative constraints on state power... So his political skepticism derives from the fact that he holds both to be necessary but cannot see how they can be compatible. (Shaw 2007: 3)

As Shaw's passage demonstrates, Nietzsche's political skepticism stems from what he takes to be the modern state's inability to acquire "normative consensus" and exercise "normative constraint." Accordingly, for Nietzsche, then, this precludes the possibility of a political philosophy as such. Despite the absence of a political philosophy in Nietzsche's corpus, he still lavishes praise on certain features of Plato's Kallipolis.

## **2.2 True Lies: A Concise Propaedeutic to the The Noble Lie, Republic Book II (382a-d3)**

Toward the end of Book II of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates and Adeimantus begin a discussion about the nature of lying. Socrates argues that there are two kinds of lies, namely "true" or "real" lies and "useful" lies (*Rep.* 382a, 382c). True lies are ones that "gods and humans hate" whose content concerns the "most important things to what is most important in himself. Classical Greek ethics is wholly concerned about the care of the soul. Neither gods nor humans want to tell lies to their soul. In other words, no one wants to intentionally tell themselves things that they know to be false. Indeed, as Socrates argues: "On the contrary, he fears to hold a lie there more than anything" (*Rep.* 382a). According to the developmentalist school of Plato interpretation, a central tenet of Socratic ethics is "virtue is knowledge" (e.g., Vlastos 1991;1994; Brickhouse and Smith 1996;2004).<sup>56</sup> If no one does wrong willingly and we err only out of ignorance, then the best possible state of the soul is one teeming with knowledge. Although Socrates never acquired demonstrative knowledge of any of the virtues under discussion in the early Socratic dialogues, such knowledge meant one was in possession of the virtues and possession alone guaranteed eudaimonia. For this reason, Socrates argues, "to be ignorant, and to have and hold a lie there, is what everyone would least of all accept; indeed, they especially hate it there" (*Rep.* 382b).

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<sup>56</sup> I know developmentalists typically stop at Book I or earlier in terms of attributing views to the historical Socrates. My point here is simply to highlight the consistency of what Socrates argues in earlier dialogues and what he says here regarding ignorance.



Socrates makes a distinction between two types of useful lies. First, lies are useful when dealing with friends who are insane or ignorant (*Rep.* 382c). Second, lies are useful when “we do not know the truth about ancient events” (*Rep.* 382d). Plato views the perceived minimal harms of such lies as trivial compared to the greater good they serve. Generally speaking, Greek ethics is teleological and thus framed by means-ends reasoning, and hence justified from a consequentialist standpoint. Although Kantian deontological ethics views all forms of lying as morally impermissible, it is framed by reasoning concerning an end-in-itself. As such, lying is wrong in principle regardless of any benefits that might be accrued by doing so. Even so, Plato incorporates useful lies into his Kallipolis and, as we will see, Nietzsche approves.

### ***2.3 The Noble Lie: Republic Book III (414b8-415d2)***

In Book II of the *Republic*, Plato called those lies “useful” from which some advantage might be had. Now in Book III Plato labels such lies “noble.” Irwin, in his magisterial *Plato’s Ethics*, claims “Plato himself is not at all averse to the cultivation of useful fictions for the good of society” (Irwin 1995: 197). In his recently published *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth About Lying in International Politics*, Mearsheimer defines lying as follows:

*Lying* is when a person makes a statement that he knows or suspects to be false in the hope that others will think it is true. A lie is a positive action designed to deceive the target audience. Lying can involve making up facts that one knows to be false or denying facts that one knows to be true. But lying is not only about the truthfulness of Chaptericular facts. It can also involve the disingenuous arrangement of facts to tell a fictitious story. Specifically, a person is lying when he uses facts—even true facts—to imply that something is true, when he knows that it is not true. In such cases, the liar is purposely leading the listener to a false conclusion without explicitly stating that conclusion. (Measheimer 2011: 16)

In a manner similar to Socrates’ account of useful lies as a means to account for an unknown past, the purpose of lying is for “positive action” and “designed to deceive” for the sake of telling a “fictitious story.” Plato employs lying as a political strategy when he reasons that a noble lie is required for the cohesiveness of the state. “How, then, could we devise one of those useful lies

we were talking about a while ago, a single noble lie that would, preferably, persuade even the rulers themselves; but, failing that, the rest of the city?” (*Rep.* 414b-c) Plato’s aim is to secure harmony in his triChapterite state by having everyone in the *Καλλίπολις* perform tasks that are necessary to keep it afloat. Socrate argues that the noble lie “would have a good effect, by making them care more for the city and for each other” (*Rep.* 415d). To achieve this goal, Socrates shares the noble lie with Glaucon: “Although all of you are brothers . . . when the god was forming you, he mixed gold into those of you who are capable of ruling, which is why they are the most honorable; silver into the auxiliaries; and iron and bronze into the farmers and other craftsmen” (*Republic* 415a).

For the health and perpetuation of the state, Nietzsche claims “Plato needs the lie” (EN 19[180]). Indeed, Nietzsche and Plato are in agreement that the new residents of a perfect state need to be told a “necessary lie” (HL 10). This “*aeterna veritas*,” Nietzsche claims, is the “foundation of the new education and therewith the new state” (HL 10). Under the guise of this *aeterna veritas*, Nietzsche holds, it is “[i]mpossible to rebel against a past of this sort! Impossible to go against the work of the gods!” (HL 10) The social order is maintained by ensuring that the consent of the polity is appropriately manufactured. According to Zuckert,

Plato thought a just and rightly ordered society had to be founded on a ‘necessary lie.’ People must believe that they were shaped for their Chaptericular function in society before they were born, that is, by nature. The necessary lie is, then, that social order reflects a natural order. If social order does not rest on a natural order, as Plato’s insistence on the necessity of lying suggests, if perhaps there is no natural order at all, all actual orders have been based on ignorance, error, deceit, and violence. (Zuckert 1996: 18)

As we learned earlier, Nietzsche’s political skepticism rests on the state’s inability to arrive at a normative consensus. Yet, Plato’s noble lie and other “necessary lies” more generally, if they are believed, could assure normative consensus. Given recent history, however, lying should be seen as a less than sound political strategy. That being said, if “all actual orders have been based on

ignorance, error, deceit, and violence,” then normative consensus is impossible and Nietzsche’s skepticism concerning normative constraint is one we should all share. When philosophers, Nietzsche holds, “form the intention of taking in hand the direction of mankind, at once also arrogate to themselves the right to tell lies: Plato before all” (WP 141). *Prima facie*, this appears to be a biting criticism of Plato, but coming from Nietzsche it is the utmost compliment. To give oneself justification to act is to live in a self-actualized manner and, for Nietzsche, this is a trait that philosophers, writers, and political leaders that he admires share.

#### ***2.4 Nurturing Philosophical Genius***

In addition to Nietzsche’s praise for Plato’s ability to grasp the importance of using necessary lies to attain a normative consensus, he also views Plato’s Kallipolis as a laboratory for nurturing the kind of aristocratic elites that he favors. Before learning how philosophical genius is nurtured, it will be helpful to learn about the social conditions under which the earliest philosophers had to endure, Nietzsche’s preferred conception of the philosopher, and, finally, the role Plato’s Kallipolis plays in cultivating Nietzsche’s philosophical ideal.

At *Theaetetus* 155d Socrates states that philosophy begins in wonder [θαυμάζειν]. Yet, Nietzsche argues, the earliest philosophers had to conceal their investigations into the nature of things from their contemporaries. While wrestling with their own thoughts, they had to “fight down every kind of suspicion and resistance against the ‘philosopher in them’” (GM III:10). That is, these “power-thirsty hermits” and “innovators of ideas” had to fight the natural urge within themselves to judge their own desire for knowledge and understanding as something evil or wicked (GM III:10). In order for philosophers to survive they had to “slip into the disguise and chrysalis of the *previously established* types of contemplative human beings—as priest, magician, soothsayer, as religious human generally” (GM III:10). Zuckert explains: “Perceiving

the necessary tension between philosophy and established society (or the polity), Plato recognized the need for the philosopher to disguise the radical nature of his activity” (Zuckert 1996: 21). Moreover, the stereotypical representation of the philosopher as absent-minded, “world-negating, hostile toward life, not believing in the senses,” and “de-sensualized” is a necessary “ascetic misunderstanding” (GM III: 10). Had such a misunderstanding never occurred, philosophy would “*not* have been *at all possible* on earth” (GM III: 10). Philosophers posing as public intellectuals disturb the status quo, cause the masses to become aware of their own exploitation and alienation, and, in so doing, plant the seeds of revolution in the minds of the people. Understood in this way, philosophers have always needed to wear masks in order to hide their true intentions. As a consequence, they have always been homeless. That is, they have always been a band of roaming intellectual nomads.

When Nietzsche talks about what philosophers had to do to survive, he has a certain conception of the philosopher in mind. In Nietzsche’s view, “philosopher” is not a label for everyman nor is it appropriate to refer to professors of philosophy as philosophers. At BGE 211, Nietzsche argues that there is a difference between “philosophical laborers” and “genuine philosophers.” Philosophical laborers, to Nietzsche’s mind, are scholarly pedants. They engage in the kind of hair-splitting minutiae required by texts such as Duns Scotus’ *De Primio Principio*. Genuine philosophers, on the other hand, “create values” (211). The education of Nietzsche’s genuine philosophers may involve “almost everything in order to pass through the whole range of human values and value feelings” (211). The philosophical laborers are the “servants” of the genuine philosophers (211). Their task is to work out the nuances of Aristotle’s metaphysics, be apologists for Kant’s ethics, and defend the philosophical methods of an early Wittgenstein.

“*Geunine philosophers, however, Nietzsche argues, are commanders and legislators: they say, ‘thus it shall be!’*” (211)

Nietzsche’s genuine philosophers have a home in Plato’s Kallipolis. Plato’s philosopher-kings are the ruling class within his perfect state. Plato explains: “Until philosophers rule as kings in their cities, or those who are nowadays called kings and leading men become genuine and adequate philosophers so that political power and philosophy become thoroughly blended together” (*Rep.* 473c-d). Nietzsche and Plato share a similar vision. Both view the most well-educated, culturally sophisticated, strong-willed, and self-actualized as the most obvious candidates for political leadership. Nietzsche writes: “It almost looks now as though Plato really did achieve something” (SE 8). What Plato achieved in thought, if not in action, is a utopia for philosophical thinking to flourish without philosophers following in Socrates’ footsteps. That is, Plato’s Kallipolis is a welcome reprieve from those state powers that would exile or execute all those who would stand in its way. According to Nietzsche, Plato’s perfect state serves the “true purpose of the state” (EN 10[1]). This purpose is none other than the “procreation of the genius” (10[1]). Nietzsche identifies the criteria necessary to produce “philosophical genius” in the modern era: “free manliness of character, early knowledge of mankind, no scholarly education, no narrow patriotism, no necessity for bread-winning, no ties with the state – in short, freedom and again freedom: that wonderful and perilous element in which the Greek philosophers were able to grow up” (SE 8).

Plato’s Kallipolis, I contend, can address some of Nietzsche’s concerns. As guardians must be “sharp-eyed, quick to catch what they see,” “strong,” “courageous, [*andreia*]” and “spirited,” their education in the Kallipolis will more than provide for “free manliness of character” (*Rep.* 375a-b). For the Greeks, *andreia* is a manly virtue and the central one in Plato’s

*Laches*. Mansfield, in his highly controversial book *Manliness*, writes: “The Greek word for manliness, *andreia*, is also the word the Greeks used for courage, the virtue concerned with controlling fear. When we come to fear, we enter the dark side of manliness. Manly men rise above their fear, but in doing so they carry their fear with them, though it is under control” (Mansfield 2006: 18). An “early knowledge of mankind” may be difficult to come by in as strictly a controlled environment as the Kallipolis. Training in *mousike*, *gymastiki*, and Plato’s infamous noble lie does not provide the kind of subterranean, psychologically insightful, actual knowledge about the nature of man that Nietzsche would think necessary. Plato’s training of the guardians begin at an early age and those guardians “who make the best blend of musical and physical training” will become philosopher-kings (*Rep.* 412a-c). Such training, however, will not produce the kind of philosophical laborers that Nietzsche considers too deeply mired in pettifogging. In a letter to his mother written in August of 1886 Nietzsche states: “For even if I should be a bad German, in all events I am a *very good European*” (Krell 1999). Nietzsche wanted his fellow Germans to consider themselves more broadly cosmopolitan than narrowly patriotic. For Nietzsche, the growth of culture can avoid asphyxiation by a “narrow patriotism” by drawing upon cultural resources that are not one’s own. The class of philosopher-kings, the class of guardians, and the class of supporters each have their unique responsibilities. The latter includes the merchant class would relieve the philosopher-kings from having to engage in “bread-winning” (*Rep.* 370e). Finally, Nietzsche’s desire to produce philosophical geniuses with no obligations to the state is impossible in Plato’s Kallipolis. Plato prohibits “violent laughter” (*Rep.* 388e), monitors the development of the children to identify any possible natural talents they might possess (*Rep.* 412e), and prohibits “drunkenness” (403e) for one reason and one reason alone, namely to the rulers, the soldiers, and the supporters.

Nietzsche recognizes the necessity of reimagining the nature of the state when he considers the fate of those who fall short of creating “new customs”:

Plato has given us a splendid description of how the philosophical thinker must within every existing society count as the paragon of all wickedness: for as critic of all customs he is the antithesis of the moral man, and if he does not succeed in becoming the law giver of new customs he remains in the memory of men as ‘the evil principle.’ (D 496)

To be a “critic of all customs” is to delicately negotiate the space between being a “gadfly” and a “midwife” (*Apology* 30e; *Theaetetus* 149a-151d). The gadfly fulfills the task of intellectual provocateur, while the midwife’s role is to assist in birthing strong and healthy ideas that, on occasion, are stillborn. Regardless of these philosophical roles, most philosophers will end up as the “paragon of all wickedness.” If Nietzsche is correct that all human beings seek to maximize their path to power and those paths are intertwined with institutions and social practices, then philosophers will certainly earn their ire, especially when they relish their role as “critic of all customs” without creating new ones. As a consequence, philosophers, who by necessity operate outside the bounds of conventional morality, are reduced to an “evil principle.”

Even though Nietzsche is pleased with certain features of Plato’s Kallipolis, his admiration would not be complete were it not balanced with a certain measure of derision. Nietzsche called Plato a “supreme philosophical lawgiver” whose political aspirations never materialized. According to Nietzsche, “he appears to have suffered terribly from the non-fulfillment of his nature, and towards the end of his life his soul became full of the blackest gall” (HH I: 261). Plato, Nietzsche argues, is a socialist (HH I: 473). Socialism is the “heir” to despotism, because the former seeks an “abundance of state power” (HH I: 473). Plato wanted to create a socialist state in which private property is abolished. Guardians will be given a “living quarter and other property” by the state and will be prohibited from owning any private property of their own (*Rep.* 416c-d). Given the mythic origin of guardians as having “gold and silver of a

divine sort in their souls” combined with their highly structured education, Plato believes that political corruption as well as the human, all too human emotions of jealousy and envy will be avoided (*Rep.* 416e).

For upon that which he possesses only in passing man bestows no care or self-sacrifice, he merely exploits it like a robber or a dissolute squanderer. When Plato opines that with the abolition of property egoism too will be abolished the reply to him is that, in the case of man at any rate, the deChapterure of egoism would also mean the deChapterure of the four cardinal virtues—for it has to be said that the foulest pestilence could not do so much harm to mankind as would be done him if his vanity disappeared. Without vanity and egoism—what are the human virtues? Which is not intended remotely to imply that these are merely names and masks of such virtues. Plato’s utopian basic tune, continued on in our own day by the socialists, rests upon a defective knowledge of man: he lacked a history of the moral sensations, an insight into the origin of the good and useful qualities of the human soul. (WS 285)

As I showed earlier, Nietzsche’s will to power is a form of psychological egoism. As such, it is a fundamental feature of our moral psychology. When Nietzsche argues that “the deChapterure of egoism would also mean the deChapterure of the four cardinal virtues,” he seems to be suggesting that weak egoism is true. Weak versions of psychological egoism suggest that disinterested actions are possible but illusory. That is, one can be Chapterial towards a Chaptericular person, thing, or idea, however, such favoritism should not be interpreted as evidence of altruism. On the contrary, “scratch the surface, and ulterior motives of self-interest, often disguised by pretence or hypocrisy, will be found behind seemingly disinterested actions” (Mautner 2005: 180). Plato’s four cardinal virtues, justice [*dikaiosynē*], wisdom [*phronēsis*], courage [*andreia*], and temperance [*sōphrosynē*], are pretensions that veil our more primal, natural impulses (*Rep.* 442b-d; 443d; 443e). Plato’s “knowledge of man” was lacking in that he never reached a bedrock understanding of the human condition in all its ugliness as well as the “useful qualities of the human soul.”

Nietzsche’s political skepticism keeps him from embracing any political system *in toto*. He finds Machiavellianism attractive, but still a practical impossibility. “But Machiavellianism



*pur, sans mélange, cru, vert, dans toute sa force, dans toute son âpreté*, is superhuman, divine, transcendental, it will never be achieved by man, at most approximated. Even in this narrower kind of politics, in the politics of virtue, the ideal seems never to have been achieved. Even Plato barely touched it” (WP 304).<sup>57</sup> While Plato did not produce a “politics of virtue,” at least to Nietzsche’s mind, on par with Machiavellianism, Plato did impress Nietzsche with his array of thought experiments.

Despite not having his own political philosophy and being a political skeptic, I argued that Nietzsche approves of Plato’s use of the noble lie and a three-tiered class system that provides philosophers with a space to nurture their own thinking. All in all, I wanted to show that Nietzsche admires certain features of Plato’s political philosophy, while also exploring those features that he finds disconcerting.

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<sup>57</sup> “Pure, without admixture, crude, fresh, with all its force, with all its pungency.”

## SECTION 3: NIETZSCHE'S ASSESSMENT OF PLATO'S METAPHYSICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY

### 3.1 Nietzsche's Critique of Plato's Metaphysics

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, metaphysics is, “most generally, the philosophical investigation of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality” (Audi 1999: 563). For Plato, the “structure of reality” consists in mind-independent, unchanging, perfect, and absolute objects of knowledge typically referred to as “Forms.” In Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima tells Socrates about Forms. “First, it always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes” (*Symposium* 211a). In addition: “It is not anywhere in another thing, as in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else, but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass way, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change (*Symposium* 211b). From the *Phaedo*, we learn that Forms are “that reality” of things that are the “same and in the same state” (78d).

However, Annas warns us that: “Books on Plato often refer to Plato’s ‘Theory of Forms’, but this has to be handled with caution. Plato not only has no word for “theory”; he nowhere in the dialogues has an extended discussion of Forms in which he pulls together the different lines of thought about them and tries to assess the needs they meet and whether they succeed in meeting them” (Annas 1981: 217). Be that as it may, Nietzsche does talk about Plato’s “doctrine of Ideas” (*PTA* 2). Regardless of whether we refer to Plato’s metaphysics as the “Theory” of Forms or doctrine of Ideas, Nietzsche’s primary concern was the way in which Plato’s metaphysics represents a break from the natural world. For Plato, the visible, apparent world is an imitation of the invisible, real world where knowledge exists. In Nietzsche’s view, Plato held

the belief that “if we are not to lose ourselves, if we are not to lose our *reason*, we have to flee from experience!” (*D V*: 448) Nietzsche continues:

Thus did Plato flee from reality and desire to see things only in pallid mental pictures; he was full of sensibility and knew how easily the waves of his sensibility could close over his reason.— Would the wise man consequently have to say to himself: “I shall honour *reality*, but I shall turn my back on it because I know and fear it? (*D V*: 448)

By seeing things “only in pallid mental pictures,” Plato, Nietzsche holds, can not only exercise control over the “waves of his sensibility” that threaten to “close over his reason,” but also provide him with the kind of objective certainty that he so desperately sought.

Besides referring to Plato’s metaphysics as a “doctrine of Ideas,” Nietzsche calls Plato’s metaphysics “idealism” (*GS V*: 372). In other words, Plato believes in ideas rather than experience. “He reversed the concept ‘reality’ and said: ‘What you take for real is an error, and nearer we approach the ‘Idea,’ the nearer we approach ‘truth’” (*WP 572*). As a philosophical naturalist, Plato’s “Idea” stands in stark contrast to Nietzsche’s own position aptly summarized by Janaway,

Most commentators on Nietzsche would agree that he is in a broad sense a naturalist in his manner of philosophy. He opposes transcendent metaphysics, whether that of Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer. He rejects notions of the immaterial soul, the absolutely free controlling will, or the self-transparent pure intellect, instead emphasizing the body, talking of the animal nature of human beings, and attempting to explain numerous phenomena by invoking drives, instincts, and affects which he locates in our physical, bodily existence. Human beings are to be “translated back into nature,” since otherwise we falsify their history, their psychology, and the nature of their values—concerning all of which we must know truths, as a means to the all-important revaluation of values. This is Nietzsche’s naturalism in the broad sense, which will not be contested here. (Janaway 2007: 34)

Nietzsche’s philosophical naturalism together with the label “pre-Platonic philosophers,” Nietzsche’s designation for those philosophers that preceded Plato, signify the thrust of Nietzsche’s critique of Plato’s metaphysics. In other words, Plato rejects a naturalistic account of the world and our experience of it. Plato’s idealism is mixture of various philosophical claims advanced by the pre-Platonic philosophers. Nietzsche makes this argument amidst an analysis of

those claims in the short essay *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and his lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. As a consequent, Plato is a “mixed type,” while the pre-Platonic philosophers are “pure-types” (PTA 2). As their successor, Plato not only discarded the less than compelling ideas of these early Greek philosophers but also kept those elements of their philosophies he found appealing. According to Nietzsche, Plato’s doctrine of Ideas “is not a phenomenon exhibiting a pure philosophic type” (PTA 2). As we learned earlier, Socratic, Pythagorean, and Heraclitic elements can be found in Plato’s doctrine of Ideas. Yet, Plato, as a “mixed type,” did not belong to the ‘republic of creative minds’ of which Socrates, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus were members (PTA 2).

Nietzsche’s quarrel with metaphysics can also be illustrated through a study of the image of the sun in Plato’s *Republic* and Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For instance, the role that the sun plays in Plato’s line analogy and Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* reflect certain core differences in their philosophies. Plato employs the sun as a metaphor to demonstrate that the chasm between imagination (*eikasia*) and understanding (*noesis*) is a bridgeable gulf by means of dialectic. In this way, Plato’s sun is an instrumental concept to further his discussion about four different psychological states or “conditions in the soul” (*Rep.* 511d-e).

As a naturalist, Nietzsche seeks to invert Plato’s idealism. Nietzsche views the sun as that which gives life. *Zarathustra* “preaches” the earth to human beings. He hopes to seduce them back to this life, back to this earth, back to this sun, and, ultimately, back to the realization that in a meaningless universe the only meaning that matters is the one they assign it. For those who find meaning in personal achievement, the meaning of life concerns reaching one’s highest potential i.e., as *Übermenschen*. *Zarathustra* wants to seduce them back to this reality and away from the metaphysics of Plato and his successors. Just as our values are not the creation of a

perfect being or derived from some transcendental realm, “the necessity with which a tree bears its fruit our thoughts grow out of us, our values, our yes’s and no’s and if’s and whether’s—the whole lot related and connected among themselves, witnesses to one will, one health, one earthly kingdom, one sun” (GM P: 2). Zarathustra addresses the sun in a reverent manner as soon as he steps out of his cave. “Greetings, Great Star! What would your happiness be, were it not for those whom you illumine!” (Z P: 1) Throughout *Zarathustra*, the sun is, among other things, a natural feature of the environment that invigorates life (Z I: 10; Z II: 21) and a pointer of a new day dawning (Z III: 4). Parke notes the significance of the sun for Nietzsche.

Zarathustra thereby sets the tone for the anti-Platonic argument of the book: whereas for Socrates the sun stands for the transcendent Idea of the Good, which is ‘beyond Being’, for Zarathustra it is a familiar that he claims is dependent for its being what it is on the response of him and his animals.<sup>58</sup>

For Nietzsche, we cannot move beyond our senses nor the world we inhabit to access anything transcendent. Plato’s metaphysics is an attempt to do just this. Unlike Plato’s “transcendent Idea” of the sun as the Good, Nietzsche’s sun is a “familiar” that connects human beings to the earth. It connects us to our animalism. That is, it connects us to nature. For this reason, I would argue that Zarathustra and his animals are not in a dependent relationship with the sun, but a mutually dependent one. On the one hand, as Parkes suggests, Zarathustra and his animals give the sun a purpose for existing. On the other, Zarathustra’s mood is tethered to the sun when he is bestowing gifts, however, during “The Night Song” everything changes. Lampert argues that the “imagery of the song reproduces the images of the sun and of shining, but from a perspective different from their early occurrences, where they were images of Zarathustras’s joy at gift-giving. The imagery of the Night Song signals what will prove to be a great shift in Zarathustra’s imagery of wisdom, culminating in the triumph of night over day, of sky over sun” (Lampert

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<sup>58</sup> See Parkes’s “Explanatory Notes” to his translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 288.

1986: 103). On the whole, Nietzsche's critique of Plato metaphysics essentially culminates in a desire to draw us away from the abstract and back to the concrete of lived existence.

### 3.2 *An Analysis of TI "World"*

For Plato, the problem of skepticism is the problem of unreliable sense data. The human body itself is a barrier to knowledge acquisition. "And above all, get rid of the body, this miserable *idée fixe* of the senses! Full of all the errors of logic refuted, impossible even, although it is impudent to act as if it were real!" (TI "Reason" 1) It was Heraclitus who claimed that since everything is in a state of becoming all knowledge is variable and certain knowledge is ultimately unattainable. Similarly, for Christian Platonists the problem of human suffering is unbearable. Additionally, as we learned earlier, the otherworldliness of Christian metaphysics gives the anxious mind the solace necessary to cope with tragedy.

Nietzsche's critical assessment of Plato's attempt to elude these problems by means of a distinction between reality and appearance can be found in Nietzsche's "How the 'True World' Became A Fable: The History of an Error" in *Twilight of the Idols*. Here we find Nietzsche's discussion of the reality/appearance distinction as well as the way in which Christianity became Platonism "for the people." Nietzsche's history has six stages; each stage corresponds to either a philosopher or historical movement. Now let us turn to the stage 1.

1 The true world attainable for a man who is wise, pious, virtuous, – he lives in it, *he is it*. (Oldest form of the idea, relatively coherent, simple, convincing. Paraphrase of the proposition 'I, Plato, am the truth.')

Since it was Plato who initially created the distinction between the real world and the apparent one, Nietzsche begins his history with him. Plato's real world is accessible to philosopher-kings who engage in dialectic. Through the dialectical process the real world becomes attainable. I contend that stage 1 is evidence that Nietzsche definitively lays the blame for the creation of the "true world" on Plato not Platonism. In his review of Tejera's *Nietzsche and the Greeks*, McNeill

makes note of this distinction. “And, despite the fact that he often refers to *Twilight of the Idols* (written in the same year), it is conspicuous that Tejera fails to comment on the aphorism entitled ‘How the True World Became a Fable’, in which, as Heidegger notes, Nietzsche explicitly distinguishes Plato from all platonism” (McNeill 1988: 298). Had Tejera analyzed “World,” I suspect that he would have discovered that his desire to conflate Plato with Platonism collapses if one recalls Nietzsche’s claim that Christianity is Platonism for the people. In other words, Nietzsche blames Plato for making the first error and Christianity the second. Therefore, if it is true that Christianity is Platonism for the people, then it turns out that Plato cannot be the source of both stage 1 and stage 2. Nevertheless, Plato can be the source of the stage 1 and an inspiration for stage 2.

Stages 2 and 3 are forms of Platonism, while stages 4-6 are a combination of different elements of Nietzsche’s own philosophy. Although our primary concern is Nietzsche’s critique of Plato’s metaphysics, an analysis of the other five stages will only deepen our understanding of Nietzsche’s disenchantment with Plato’s distinction between the “true world” and the “illusory” one. Be that as it may, Plato does reappear at stage 5. Let us turn to stage 2.

2 The true world, unattainable for now, but promised to the man who is wise, pious, virtuous (‘to the sinner who repents’). (Progress of the idea: it gets trickier, more subtle, less comprehensible, – *it becomes female*, it becomes Christian ...)

Stage 2 is the Kingdom of Heaven where an afterlife is possible. Arguably, the movement from a Greco-Roman, polytheistic worldview to a Christian, monotheistic one brings an evolution of the concept of god to that of God. In other words, during Plato’s era not only were the Greek gods having sexual relations with mortals and susceptible to the same foibles as the latter, but the aristocratic elite would typically be the only citizens with the education and the luxury to philosophize in a manner that Socrates or Plato imagined. After Christianity gained a foothold in the Greco-Roman world, misbehaving gods turned into an omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God. Additionally, God, like Plato’s

Forms, is immaterial, unchanging, and eternal. Whereas access to Plato's forms required serious study, access to the Kingdom of Heaven requires faith alone. In this way, Christianity became "trickier, more subtle, less comprehensible."

3 The true world, unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable, but the very thought of it a consolation, an obligation, an imperative. (Basically the old sun but through fog and skepticism; the idea become elusive, pale, Nordic, Konigsbergian.)  
Kant makes a distinction between the world of sense and the world of understanding.

Within the world of sense, there exist *phenomena* or, objects that can come to be known through sense-experience. Within the world of understanding, there exist *noumena* or, objects that are known to exist but whose nature is unknowable. In other words, the phenomenal world consists of things *qua* things, while the noumenal world consists of things-in-themselves. Even though we cannot cognize the contents of the noumenal world, we still belong to that world as rational agents. Nevertheless, the nature of that world is "unattainable, unprovable, and unpromisable." Furthermore, Kant's "supreme principle of morality," the categorical imperative, is a necessary byproduct of our own rational agency, which Chapterakes in the noumenal world. As a good Platonist, Kant continues the tradition of transcendental, *a priori* philosophizing started by Plato.

4 The true world – unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And as unattained also *unknown*. Consequently not consoling, redeeming, obligating either: how could we have obligations to something unknown? ... (Gray morning. First yawn of reason. Cockcrow of positivism.)

Reflecting on the last three stages of "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable,"

Clark writes:

"No one denies that Nietzsche places his own philosophy in stage 6. The relationship of his philosophy to the other two stages seems less clear. Magnus (1978, 135-40) finds Nietzsche's philosophy only in stage 6, whereas Heidegger interprets stage 5 as 'the beginning of Nietzsche's own way in philosophy' (1961, I, 239) and Wilcox (1974, 123) claims that elements from periods in Nietzsche's own development are found in all three of the final stages. (Clark 1990: 112)

To determine the significance of stage 4 to Nietzsche's philosophy more generally, I think a working definition of positivism is necessary. If positivism is a synonym for scientism, then



positivism so understood has no relation to Nietzsche's philosophy. "These two, science and ascetic ideal, they do, after all, stand on one and the same ground—I have already suggested that this is so—: namely on the same overestimation of truth (more correctly: on the same belief in the *inassessability*, the *uncriticizability* of truth)" (GM III: 25). Alternatively, if we refine our understanding of naturalism, I think we will come closer to understanding the significance of positivism for Nietzsche. Leiter makes a distinction between methodological naturalism (M-Naturalism) and substantive naturalism (S-Naturalism). M-Naturalists believe that the methods of philosophy should be continuous with those of science. S-Naturalists believe that the substance of their philosophizing should be continuous science. Leiter argues, I think rightly, that Nietzsche is a speculative M-Naturalist like Hume, Freud, and Marx all of whom attempt to understand the entirety of the human experience by modeling a "scientific way of understanding the world in developing their philosophical theories" (Leiter 2000: 4-5). Taking positivism as a form of M-Naturalism, I would argue that stage 4 is the beginning of a move away from metaphysics and a move towards the methods of science in all philosophical inquiries henceforth.

5 The 'true world' – an idea that is of no further use, not even as an obligation, – now an obsolete, superfluous idea, *consequently* a refuted idea: let's get rid of it! (Bright day; breakfast; return of *bon sens* and cheerfulness; Plato blushes in shame; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

Plato reappears and is made to bear witness to the end of a trend he started. As we saw at stage 4, the "true world" was starting to smell of decay. At stage 5, it is no more. Here philosophical inquiry, guided by the methods of science, has finally rendered the "true world" a thing of the past. "Quotation marks around 'true world' are now appropriate. The world whose existence stage 5 denies is not one to which it ascribes 'true being,' and it therefore becomes the 'so-called 'true' world,' a world to which others have ascribed 'true being'" (Clark 1990: 112).

Finally, I want to take a look at stage 6.

6 The true world is gone: which world is left? The illusory one, perhaps? ... But no! *we got rid of the illusory world along with the true one!* (Noon; moment of shortest shadow; end of longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)

Once the true world has been abolished, it makes no sense to talk about an illusory one. After Plato, Christianity, and Kantianism have all failed to sustain the distinction between those two worlds, nihilism becomes a specter that haunts modernity. Until Zarathustra, these older systems of thought fulfilled the existential cravings of humanity. Now that their wares are no longer bought and sold in the marketplace of human experience Zarathustra begins. His arrival signals the end of Plato's metaphysics.

### **3.3 Nietzsche on *Ἀνάμνησις***

As Vlastos and other developmentalists maintain, *Meno* is a transitional dialogue that reflects the shift from the Socratic elenchus to Plato's dialectic. *Meno*, Vlastos explains, "marks the transition from earlier to middle dialogues" (Vlastos 1994: 135). In Plato's earlier Socratic dialogues, it was assumed that one could carry out an inquiry into a Chaptericular virtue. For example, *Euthyphro* is concerned with the nature of piety, *Lysis* with friendship, *Laches* with courage, and *Charmides* with temperance. Unlike many of these previous dialogues, Plato's *Meno* is concerned with virtue (*arête*) itself. At the heart of the dialogue lay a paradox that Meno needs help resolving. Meno asks Socrates a question to which recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*), a central concept in Plato's epistemology, is the answer: "How will you look for [virtue], Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?" (*Meno* 80d)

Plato argues that the soul is both immortal and the place in which all knowledge lie dormant.

As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection” (*Meno* 81c-d).

For Plato, dialectic is a constructive process that makes recollection possible. In so doing, knowledge becomes obtainable. “Recollection ... does not and cannot tell us the date of the battle of Marathon, or the items on yesterday’s menu: the theory does not explain empirical judgments, whose objects are contingent matters of fact, but those judgments whose truth is guaranteed by systematic necessity” (Allen 1959: 167). Dialectic can provide the kind of “systematic necessity” in areas of inquiry that are highly contested, especially areas of philosophical interest.

Although Nietzsche employs the language of recollection in two notes from early *Nachlass* material, he does not associate the act of recalling with knowledge acquisition. “In lyric poetry we do not step outside ourselves; but we are stimulated to produce emotional moods of our own, mostly through ἀνάμνησις” (EN 2[11], 1869/1870). Nietzsche’s understanding of recollection operates on the same premise as Plato’s. That is, recollection is the soul remembering things from the past. Yet, they reach different conclusions about what precisely is being recalled. While Plato views recollection as a way to remember knowledge that lie in the soul, Nietzsche views recollection as a byproduct of our encounter with lyric poetry.

I take it that Nietzsche has in mind a remembrance of things past that we carry along with us wherever we go. That is to say, our lived experience is recalled during an encounter with lyric poetry. “As a designation of a category of poetry it is not found before the Hellenistic period (earlier writers term such a poem *melos*, ‘song’. Though the term was extended to poetry sung to other stringed instruments or to the pipes, it is always used of sung poetry as distinct from poems

which were recited or spoken” (Roberts 2005: 438). As a form of “sung poetry” that gives way to “emotional moods,” lyric poetry appeals to our affective rather than rational self. “Faced with a lyric,” Nietzsche writes, “we are also astonished to re-experience our most personal feelings, to have them reflected back to us out of other individuals” (EN 2[25], 1869/1870).

Janaway argues that Nietzsche’s own philosophical style can have a similar impact on us: “Nietzsche’s way of writing addresses our affects, feelings, or emotions. It provokes sympathies, antipathies, and ambivalences that lie in the modern psyche below the level of rational decision and impersonal argument” (Janaway 2007: 4). In this way, both Plato and Nietzsche make use of recollection. In Nietzsche’s case, recollection occurs in the context of a specific kind of aesthetic experience. Given this line of reasoning, his own texts can, arguably, be seen as works of art in their own right.

In the second passage, Nietzsche argues: “All man’s goals and purposes were once also conscious to his ancestors, but they have been forgotten. The directions followed by man greatly depend on the past: the Platonic ἀνάμνησις. The worm moves in the same direction even when its head has been cut off” (EN 23[10], 1876/1877). To be clear, I think Nietzsche is neither endorsing Plato’s doctrine of *metempsychosis*, which connects the wisdom of the past with those in the present, nor advancing the immortality of the soul as one of Kant’s postulates of practical reason. Arguably, Nietzsche’s meaning has more in common with George Santayana than either Plato or Kant. In his *The Life of Reason*, Santayana writes: “Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana 1905-1906: 131). Nietzsche is no stranger to such thinking. In his essay “On the Uses

and Disadvantages of History for Life” in *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche rails against a slavish historicism and suggests a new, threefold approach to history. In so doing, he tries to chart a new path for those in the present that might liberate them from both repeating the mistakes of the past and avoiding mindless hero worship.

To conclude, I have shown that Nietzsche’s fundamental criticism with Plato’s metaphysics culminates in Plato’s distinction between two worlds, neither of which actually exist. Additionally, I demonstrated how Nietzsche employs Plato’s concept of *ἀνάμνησις* to discuss our relationship to lyric poetry as well as the knowledge to be had from recalling the past.

#### SECTION 4: DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC IN NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche is majestic in his Scrooge-like refusal to acknowledge debts to his intellectual ancestors. Nietzsche, Parkes notes, may have “borrowed far more from this father figure [Plato] – whom he declines to acknowledge as a precursor in the field – than he cares to admit” (Parkes 1991: 53-54). Parkes rightly captures a major premise of this Section. Even though Nietzsche is usually hesitant to acknowledge his debt to previous philosophers, he makes use of their work in a manner that makes it possible to see a plausible correlation between his work and theirs. In this case, I will demonstrate how Nietzsche draws upon Plato’s use of dialogue and dialectic to advance his own philosophical positions. Again, McNeill, in the midst of his review of Tejera, makes a similar point.

In his desire to show that by ‘the whole phenomenon Plato’ Nietzsche really means Platonism, Tejera overlooks the extent to which a kindred spirit, the dialogical Plato, is indeed at work in Nietzsche. In Chaptericular, it leads him to assert, despite evidence to the contrary, that Nietzsche failed to appreciate the Platonic dialogues as an art-form. (McNeill 1988: 297)

It is well-known that Nietzsche is seemingly no friend of dialectics. He argues that Plato is wrong to believe that ““dialectics is the only way of attaining being and getting behind the veil of appearance”” (D V: 474). Nietzsche also claims that the “dialectical drive” seeks not truth but “sly prowling, encircling, etc” (EN 29[15], 1873). Despite these criticisms, of which many more can be adduced, Nietzsche’s more neutral, if not appreciative, views of Plato’s philosophical methods are often ignored. Nietzsche calls dialectics the “fencing-art of conversation” (D III: 195). Elsewhere, he argues that Plato gave posterity a “new art-form” that he calls the “model of the *novel*,” which places poetry in an ancillary position in relation to dialectic philosophy (BT 14). Had he not existed, Nietzsche argues, Plato’s creativity as an artist and sophistication as a philosopher, could certainly not have been dreamt of. “Imagine that the writings of Plato had been lost, that philosophy began with Aristotle; we would not be at all able to imagine this

ancient *philosopher* who is, at the same time, an artist” (Zuckert 1996: 11). Furthermore, Nietzsche asks: “What ultimately grew out of Plato’s philosophical erotics? A new, artistic form of the Greek *agon*, dialectics.” (TI “Skirmishes” 23). In Plato, we find myths, analogies, speeches, allegories, dialectics, dialogue, drama, and some elements of comedy. In a manner similar to Plato, Nietzsche is equally experimental. That is to say, equally creative. Nietzsche employs aphorisms, poems, speeches, a flamboyant prose style, metaphors, and satire.

Kaufmann writes: “Nietzsche was more consistently “dialectical”—or to avoid any misunderstanding, he was, like Socrates, a far more rigorous questioner and by no means prepared to admit that the systems of the past are overwhelmingly true” (Kaufmann 1974: 84). To be clear, I agree with Kaufmann that Nietzsche is “dialectical” in the sense of challenging traditional philosophical notions. Be that as it may, there’s a second sense in which he is dialectical. As we shall see, Nietzsche often embeds dialectic in a dialogue format to advance an argument he wishes to make.

#### ***4.1 An Analysis of Z: “P”***

In certain sections of “Zarathustra’s Prologue” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche employs dialectic and dialogue to make several philosophical arguments. In a manner similar to Plato, Nietzsche’s pedagogical style in *Z* is indirect. That is, Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* rivals Plato’s *Republic* in terms of the sheer number of literary devices and thought experiments it employs to touch, as discussed above, the “modern psyche” in ways that “rational decision” and “impersonal argument” do not. In what follows, I will primarily emphasize Nietzsche’s use of dialectic and dialogue in certain sections of “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” but I will also draw attention to some of the family resemblances that reflect, I argue, Nietzsche’s debt to Plato. To

be clear, I am not interested in providing a holistic interpretation of “Zarathustra’s Prologue” nor will I explain all of the concepts therein.

### ***Prologue 1***

From the very beginning of the text, Nietzsche’s weaves a narrative around Zarathustra as he exits his cave, talks to the sun, and makes his way to the people. Plato weaves a similar narrative in most of his dialogues. In Book 1 of the *Republic*, Socrates talks about going down to the Piraeus to say prayers to the goddess and watch a festival. Both Zarathustra and Socrates not only become focal points for philosophical reflection, but also protagonists that serve as guides to the work in question. Readers will often sympathize or question the sincerity of such characters, but very few will have an apathetic response to either Socrates or Zarathustra.

“Although neither Socrates nor Plato is mentioned in Nietzsche’s self-proclaimed masterpiece, Zarathustra is clearly intended to supplant Socrates as the image of the *living* philosopher” (Zuckert 1996: 23)

Nietzsche’s Zarathustra leaves his cave at the age of 30. In the *Republic*, Plato’s rulers cannot begin the study of philosophy until the age of 30 (*Republic* 537d). Besides their ages, few have noticed that both Socrates and Zarathustra are *descending* when they make their appearance in each of these works; they are going down to the people for the purpose of enlightenment. Socrates will address the crooked timber of inconsistent and contradictory beliefs of his interlocutors, while Zarathustra will teach humanity to “*go under*.” In Plato’s early Socratic dialogues, Socrates’ overly rational perspective often overwhelms his interlocutors. In most cases, there is no doubt that Socrates is intellectually superior to his conversation Chapterners. Zarathustra believes that in order to teach human beings that he has to become human himself. By the end of §1 Zarathustra begins the process of going-under. In so doing, Zarathustra is not



superior to the people, but a person himself with all pitfalls and possibilities that plague other human beings. In other words, he has to struggle with his own weaknesses as a human being as he simultaneously tries to teach other human beings to overcome their own shortcomings.

### ***Prologue 2***

*The dialogue between the old man and Zarathustra indirectly illustrates the absurdity of belief in God.* The old man in the forest is equal Chapters teacher, pathetic, dramatic, and comical. As a teacher, the old man tells Zarathustra that the people are “suspicious of solitaries.” Zarathustra refuses to listen to the old man and holds fast to his claim that: “I love human beings.” There is a certain degree of naiveté in Zarathustra’s understanding of those whom he wishes to liberate. He shall soon learn how hard it is to reach people who refuse to be reached. That being said, the old man is a misanthrope. His misanthropy fails to capture the irony of his situation. In other words, I contend that misanthropy implies self-hatred. The old man cannot hate human beings without exercising a certain degree of hatred for himself. Ironically, the old man does not realize his own self-hatred through his expression of hatred toward other members of his own species. Had he heard that God is dead, he would neither hold the view that human beings are to be despised nor would he seek refuge from them in the forest and the desert. Nevertheless, he still has to deal with his human, all too human self. The old holy man is a pathetic figure, because (1) he still believes in God and (2) he has an almost cheery demeanor about exiling himself from the rest of humanity. At one point, the old man tells Zarathustra: “Why would you not be, like me—a bear among the bears, a bird among the birds?” He also says: “I make up songs and sing them, and as I make up songs, I laugh and weep and growl: thus do I praise God. With singing, weeping, laughing, and growling I praise the God who is my God.” If one tries to imagine the old man engaged in such behavior, it is hard not to believe that

Nietzsche intended the reader to be entertained, if not somewhat saddened, by such ridiculously delusional behavior.

### ***Prologue 3***

*The dialogue between Zarathustra and one random spectator indirectly illustrates the importance of Zarathustra's teaching.* After telling the people that he is there to teach them the "Overhuman," that the "human is something that shall be overcome," that they should "*stay true to the earth*," Zarathustra is promptly ignored and at least one random spectator yells for the rope-dancer. The rather brutish dismissal by the spectators should stimulate the reader to consider Zarathustra's teachings most carefully. The Overhuman, I would argue, is our better selves. Rather than a stoic automaton, the Overhuman strives for greatness despite human frailties. The Overhuman does not attempt to escape that which is most human but seeks to redirect those energies that might otherwise be exhausted by the typical human experience. Chapter of this process requires, Nietzsche writes: "To 'give style' to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye" (GS IV: 290). Such persons are not adherents of Plato's metaphysics or any other form of transcendental philosophy. They "*stay true to the earth*" and do not denigrate the body in favor of the soul.

### ***Prologue 4-6***

*The dialogue between Zarathustra and the rope-dancer indirectly illustrates that life must be lived to the fullest even when that means taking risks.* After reiterating his teaching and casting his rod once more into the sea of faces that stand before him, Zarathustra still turns out to be a source of amusement for the crowd. The old man's words regarding the people's suspicion

of solitary walkers are seemingly true. “They do not understand me: I am not the mouth for these ears.” Rope-dancing is extremely dangerous work. It seems Nietzsche is using rope-dancing as a metaphor for being fully alive. In Nietzsche’s view, one must not be afraid to take chances, one must not be afraid to fail, one must not be afraid to succeed, and one must not be afraid of finding one’s own niche. The rope-dancer begins his performance but is plagued by self-doubt in the form of a jester. “On you go, you lazy beast, smuggler, paleface! Else I shall tickle you with my heel!” The jester teases and taunts the rope-dancer until he can no longer keep his balance and starts tumbling toward the earth. Although the rope-dancer lives dangerously, he still holds on to a mythology that no longer has any meaning. That is to say, if God is dead, then surely the Devil is no more. Given his chosen profession, the rope-dancer should take pride in his work.

### ***Prologue 7-9***

*The dialogue Zarathustra has with his heart indirectly illustrates that you can only teach those who are already motivated to learn.* The only human fish that Zarathustra caught with his teachings is a dead one. “Verily, a fine catch of fish has Zarathustra brought in today! No human did he catch, but rather a mere corpse.” After the death of God, Zarathustra voices his worries to himself: “Strange indeed is human existence and still without meaning: a jester can become its fatality.” It is beginning to dawn on Zarathustra that he may have been presenting his wares in the wrong way or to the wrong people. After encountering the jester and the gravediggers for whom he had nary a word, Zarathustra is forced to reckon with his rather futile attempts to find disciples. “A light has dawned for me: companions I need and living ones—not dead companions and corpses that I carry with me wherever I will. But living companions I need, who follow me because they want to follow themselves—and to wherever I will.”

## ***Prologue 10***

*The dialogue Zarathustra has with himself indirectly illustrates that self-knowledge helps to acquire a sense of emotional balance.* According to Lampert: “Reflecting Zarathustra’s own twofold spirit, the proud eagle soars high above the earth while the clever snake dwells nearest the earth; but the pride of soaring is not condemned, nor are nearness to the earth and its concomitant cleverness seen as a curse” (Lampert 1986: 29).

In this Section, I demonstrated that Nietzsche’s view of Plato on dialectics and dialogues is not entirely negative. That is, I showed how Nietzsche makes use of Plato’s literary techniques in his own work and, certainly, in his own unique way.

## **CONCLUSION**

In Section 1 I made a clear demarcation between Plato and Platonism to clarify the trajectory of Chapter II. My aim was to focus specifically on Plato’s philosophy so as to set parameters for addressing Nietzsche’s view of Plato. Sections 2-4 demonstrate Nietzsche’s rich ambivalence toward Plato. By focusing on Plato’s political philosophy, Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology, and Plato’s use of dialectic and dialogue, I could more easily frame and thus pinpoint precisely what it is that Nietzsche owes Plato in his thinking. Although I think there is a great deal more to say on this topic, I do think my treatment of this issue not only provides much to debate about, but also leaves the door open for different ways to approach Nietzsche’s texts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THICK AS THIEVES: NIETZSCHE'S DEBTS TO ARISTOTLE

*I honor Aristotle and honor him most highly—but he certainly did not hit the nail, not to speak of hitting it on the head, when he spoke of the ultimate aim of Greek tragedy.*

—Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

#### SECTION 1: THE SCOPE OF NIETZSCHE'S DEBT TO ARISTOTLE

According to the passage above, Nietzsche finds certain elements of Aristotle's philosophy enlightening, yet he is disappointed by Aristotle's view that the purpose of Greek tragedy is *katharsis*. Nevertheless, such intimacy betrays the *modus operandi* of both thinkers. In Aristotle's view, "it would perhaps be thought to be better, indeed to be our duty, for the sake of maintaining truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers or lovers of wisdom; for while both are dear, piety requires us to honor truth above our friends" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a14-17). Despite Nietzsche's "honor" for Aristotle, he claims that the "man of understanding must be able not only to love his enemies, but also to hate his friends. One repays a teacher poorly if one always remains only a student" (Z:1 "On the Bestowing Virtue"). In Chapter III, I want to argue for a Chaptericularly controversial thesis. That is, I will argue that Nietzsche's owes several debts of gratitude to Aristotle for helping shape his thinking in several different traditional areas of philosophical inquiry.

As most Nietzsche scholars observe, there is neither a sustained analysis of Aristotle in any of Nietzsche's works nor is there ample evidence to support the argument that Aristotle, in a manner that Nietzsche himself recognizes, directly influenced Nietzsche's thinking in some significant way. There are two schools of thought on the matter. Kaufmann asserts that "Nietzsche's debt to Aristotle's ethics is ... considerable, and it is quite unjustifiable to infer

from Nietzsche's disagreement with Aristotle's theory of tragedy that Aristotle meant little or nothing to him—or that the only Greek philosophers whom he admired were the pre-Socratics (Kaufmann 1974: 384). On the other side of this debate, Leiter argues that “Kaufmann (1974: 382-83) notices the similarity between Nietzsche's ‘higher’ man and Aristotle's ‘great-souled’ man, but never explains or examines it in any detail” (Leiter 2002: 121). Later, Leiter states that the “strongest claim anyone has made (the one from Kaufmann) is that there is a kind of similarity between a notion in Aristotle and a notion in Nietzsche, but not even Kaufmann (1) showed the similarity ran very deep; or (2) claimed that it arose from Aristotle's influence upon Nietzsche.”<sup>59</sup> I am sympathetic to Kaufmann's position. Be that as it may, his statement, let us call it the *Causal Thesis* (CT<sub>1</sub>), is one for which I think the evidence is mostly negligible. In other words, I think Kaufmann's account of Nietzsche's debt to Aristotle could be restated with more nuance.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, I will show that Nietzsche's encounter with Aristotle's thinking has *indirectly* influenced Nietzsche's thinking in multiple ways that have not received the attention that it deserves. Let us call this the *Correlation Thesis* (CT<sub>2</sub>). In so doing, I will demonstrate that those who prematurely conclude that Aristotle's influence on Nietzsche is more or less imagined are right to reject CT<sub>1</sub>, but should accept CT<sub>2</sub>. Even though I think there is only a *semantic* difference between Kaufmann's position and my own, I will do what Leiter claims has yet to be done, namely “explain” and “examine” in detail Aristotle's influence on Nietzsche.

### ***1.1 The Road Not Taken***

Over the next three Sections I analyze at least three areas in which Aristotle exercised some level of influence on Nietzsche's thought. Since I want to claim that Chapter III is a comprehensive treatment of Nietzsche's view of Aristotle, I explore one area in which influence

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<sup>59</sup> See McLemee's “Will to Power” in *Inside Higher Ed*, August 18, 2005: <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/mclemee/mclemee222>

is replaced by profound disagreement. In Section 2 I begin by challenging Yates's insinuation that Nietzsche's skepticism toward Aristotle's law of contradiction implies three things: (1) Nietzsche is skeptical of the correspondence theory of truth, (2) Nietzsche is not committed to logical reasoning, and (3) Nietzsche is unappreciative of Aristotle's methodological contributions to science and logic. Following that, I explore the similarities between Aristotle's *megalopsychia* and Nietzsche's *Übermensch*/higher human beings in Section 3. To my mind, this more narrowly focused discussion demonstrates a more convincing connection between Nietzsche's and Aristotle's ethics than the case that is often made that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist in the mold of Aristotle. Section 4 presents an argument that Nietzsche, like Aristotle, is a compatibilist rather than a metaphysical libertarian or hard determinist regarding the freedom of human action. Although both of these theses are provocative and somewhat controversial, they are philosophically defensible. Furthermore, if Nietzsche is a compatibilist, as I argue, then those wedded to the idea that he is a hard determinist of some sort will have to reassess his philosophy and reconsider their conclusions. Finally, in Section 5, I examine what Nietzsche takes to be Aristotle's misinterpretation of the function of Greek tragedy. In so doing, we will learn why their disagreement on this matter does not detract from Nietzsche's otherwise honorable attitude toward Aristotle, but deepens our understanding of their relationship.

## SECTION 2: METHODOLOGICAL DEBTS

### *2.1 Nietzsche and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*

According to Yates, Nietzsche's skepticism toward one of the key principles of Aristotle's propositional logic is best captured by section 516 of *The Will to Power*.

If according to Aristotle, the law of contradiction is the most certain of all principles, if it is the ultimate and most basic, upon which every demonstrative proof rests, if the principle of every axiom lies in it; then one should consider all the more rigorously what *presuppositions* already lie at the bottom of it. Either it asserts something about actuality, about being, as if one already knew this from another source; that is, as if opposite attributes *could* not be ascribed to it. Or the proposition means: opposite attributes *should* not be ascribed to it. In that case, logic would be an imperative, not to know the true, but to posit and arrange a world that shall be called true by us.

In short, the question remains open: are the axioms of logic adequate to reality or are they a means and measure for us to *create* reality, the concept "reality," for ourselves?—to affirm the former one would, as already said, have to have a previous knowledge of being—which is certainly not the case. The proposition therefore contains no *criterion of truth*, but an *imperative* concerning what *should* count as true. (WP 516)

In his *Nietzsche, Aristotle, and Propositional Discourse*, Yates quotes the above passage to help him establish various claims he makes throughout that piece. For instance, Yates argues that Nietzsche is critical of the correspondence theory of truth and thinks Nietzsche sees Aristotle as an "arch-propositionalist" (Yates 2004: 76). I will address both of these assertions in turn.

If one believes Nietzsche's works reflect a "ludic, contradictory, poetic, and metaphoric character," then it comes as no surprise that one might prioritize Nietzsche's "playfulness" over his philosophical insight. First, contrary to Yates, Nietzsche is committed to one of the three major theories of truth, namely the correspondence theory. I will begin by discussing the coherence and pragmatist theories, and then I will move on to the correspondence theory of truth.

Coherence theorists argue that the truth of a proposition is determined by the way in which it coheres with the system of propositions of which it is a part. That is to say, a set of beliefs should be analyzed to determine whether any inconsistencies or contradictions can be found therein. If both the former and the latter are absent, then the proposition under



consideration can be said to be true. Be that as it may, it's quite easy to see that Nietzsche is no advocate of such a theory. Regardless of how many Platonists argue for the coherence of Plato's metaphysics or natural theologians and similar apologists argue for the infallibility of their preferred religious tradition, Nietzsche is not interested in the multiplicity of ways in which alternative worlds get created. Pragmatists, on the other hand, argue that the truth of a proposition can be determined by whether or not it has practical value. In other words, if a proposition provides some kind of benefit or advantage, then that proposition can be said to be true. But, as Clark argues, "the pragmatic theory Danto attributes to Nietzsche, truth is what works, in the sense of what satisfies practical interests such as survival or happiness. But why couldn't a false belief make us happier than a true one? Nietzsche, in fact, insisted repeatedly that knowledge of the truth may conflict with the satisfaction of practical interests (e.g., GS 121, 344; BG 11)" (Clark 1990: 32).

Finally, I will consider the correspondence theory of truth. Correspondence theorists argue that the contents of a given proposition must correspond with scientific fact. For Nietzsche, this conception of truth leaves space for speculative philosophizing as long as such philosophizing is, at the very least, consistent with the *methodological techniques* of science and, at most, reaches the same *substantive conclusions* as science. One could only maintain the view that Nietzsche is a critic of "logic as correspondence with reality" by taking his early essay "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense" or material from his *Nachlass* as his settled position on truth. Many of Nietzsche's most well-known works display a fondness for naturalism and thus assume a correspondence theory of truth. For example, Nietzsche's critique of morality in *Daybreak*; his genealogical method in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Zarathustra's plea to "stay true to the earth" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, his critique of the distinction between the "true"

world and the “apparent” one in *Twilight of the Idols*, and his critique of Christianity in *The Anti-Christ* all either assume a scientific foundation from which a critique can proceed or a scientifically inspired alternative account of the matter under discussion from which a more realistic option is made possible. Despite Yates’s claim that “Nietzsche’s criticism of the notion that the truth/falsehood dichotomy is based on the correspondence, or lack of it, between propositional statements and ‘reality,’” Clark argues: “If he is consistent, then, Nietzsche must accept a correspondence conception of truth” (Clark 1990: 40).

Yates contends that Nietzsche “can usefully be understood as being in opposition to Aristotle taken as the arch-propositionalist” (Bishop 2004: 76). This is true if one fails to make a distinction between two types of correspondence theory of truth, namely a metaphysical and a minimalist version. According to Clark, Nietzsche rejects what she calls a “metaphysical correspondence theory of truth” and is committed to what she dubs a “minimalist correspondence theory of truth” (Clark 1990: 40-41; 38-40). The former, Clark holds, is the view that “reality is something-in-itself, that its nature is determinately constituted independently of us” (Clark 1990: 40-41). The latter, Clark insists, includes (1) “the equivalence principle (that ‘grass is green’ is true, for instance, iff grass is green)” and (2) “common sense realism (the claim that the world exists independently of our representations of it)” (Clark 1990: 40). Thus, Nietzsche’s skepticism toward Aristotle’s law of contradiction is not skepticism of correspondence theories of truth in general, but the metaphysical version discussed above. And, as we will see, this skepticism “exemplifies Nietzsche’s favorite rhetorical style—an apparent obliteration of a position, followed by withdrawal to Chapterly embrace it” (Hales 1996: 820).

## 2.2 Nietzsche on Logic

It should be noted that Nietzsche's skepticism toward the law of contradiction does not mean that Nietzsche rejects the methods of logical reasoning altogether. More specifically, such skepticism does not warrant the belief that Nietzsche rejects Aristotle's method of logical reasoning, which was the most influential and most dominant until the publication of Frege's *Begriffsschrift* in 1879. "Schooling has no more important task," Nietzsche writes, "than to teach rigorous thinking, careful judgment, logical conclusions" (HH I: 265). In addition Nietzsche writes: "The greatest progress men have made lies in their learning to *draw correct conclusions*" (HH I: 271). These are strong claims. Nietzsche's view of logic is not reducible to debates about its status in the wider curriculum of philosophy. That is, Nietzsche is not concerned with the question of whether logic is a Chapter of the discipline of philosophy or independent of it. For Nietzsche, the stakes are always much higher. Right reasoning is not only the purpose of an education, but also "greatest progress" of humanity. Arguably, learning to "draw correct conclusions" is due to Aristotle.

Nietzsche claims that Aristotle, along with Bacon, Descartes, and Comte, belong to what he calls the "great methodologists" (WP 468). All four of these thinkers in their own way were committed to scientific methods. Aristotle, Striker argues, "introduces the system of syllogistic moods by defining its technical terms, stating and justifying the primitive rules, and then providing formally correct proofs of the derivative. In other words, he developed a complete system of natural simple subject-predicate sentences, but otherwise flawless" (Gentzler 1998: 209). Bacon's empiricism, Descartes' scientific rationalism, and Comte's positivism all play a role in Nietzsche's development as a thinker. Lampert argues that "Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche mutually illuminate one another" (Lampert 1993: 2). Moreover, "Bacon and Descartes

come to light as legislators of modern times in a specifically Nietzschean sense, Nietzsche can come to light as the first thinker to have understood modern times comprehensively, to have encompassed and transcended them in his thought” (Lampert 1993: 2). Nietzsche himself argues that: “We are very far from knowing enough about Lord Bacon, the first realist in every great sense of that word” (EH “Clever” 4). Nietzsche calls Descartes the “father of Rationalism and hence the grandfather of the Revolution” (BGE 191). The intrinsic optimism of Comte’s positivism helped fashion a clearing through the metaphysical forest that would ultimately lead to Zarathustra’s beginning.

By calling Aristotle one of the “great methodologists,” Nietzsche acknowledges his intellectual debt, in this context, to Aristotle. Moreover, should one retain any doubt about such a debt, Nietzsche writes: “The most valuable insights are arrived at last; but the most valuable insights are *methods*” (WP 469). Given the numerous historical figures referenced in Nietzsche’s works, there are only a relative handful of these for whom Nietzsche has not a disparaging word. As a consequence, Nietzsche’s view of a given figure vacillates wildly from “highly critical” to “difficult to determine” with numerous other evaluations possible.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as Nietzsche himself notes above, he can “honor” Aristotle for some of his philosophical ideas, while criticizing him for others. Even though Nietzsche states that the “poorly supported philosophy of Heraclitus has greater artistic value than all the propositions of Aristotle,” we should not read Nietzsche as suggesting that we divest ourselves of the science of inference (EN 19[76]). We still need to reason in a sound and valid manner, but should remain mindful to avoid bewitchment by logical form. In other words, our proximity to truth is not diminished because of the way we represent propositions. That is to say, the *form* and *content* of a proposition are not interchangeable.

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<sup>61</sup> See Appendixes 2 and 3 of Brobjer’s *Nietzsche’s Ethics of Character*, pp. 339-348. Brobjer’s text has been invaluable resource for the dissertation.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche tells us: “*Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off*” (WP 522). Hales sums up Nietzsche’s appreciation for logic nicely: “So not only is logic not opposed to life, but in fact logic and logical thinking is a necessary condition to live at all” (Hales 1996: 822).

## SECTION 3: ETHICAL DEBTS

### 3.1 Introduction

In what follows I offer a brief overview of Nietzsche's knowledge of Aristotle's ethics. Then I provide an analysis of Aristotle's concept of *megalopsychia* (greatness of soul/proper pride) in Book IV, §3 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. After that, I will provide an analysis of the key features of Nietzsche's *Übermenschen*. Finally, against the views of those who reject CT<sub>1</sub>, such as Magnus and Daigle, I will identify those themes that Aristotle's and Nietzsche's ideal human beings share.

### 3.2 Nietzsche's Knowledge of Aristotle's Ethics<sup>62</sup>

According to Brobjer, "Nietzsche's knowledge of Aristotle was extensive, in spite of claims to the opposite" (Brobjer 1995: 226). In *Nachlass* material we find ten or more references to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. We also find a summary of Aristotle's view of pleasure categorized under three headings: "Grosse Ethik, Nicom. Ethik, and Nicom. Ethik, Book 10, and covers one and a half printed page. His general conclusion/summary is: 'thus pleasure is not the highest good/not every pleasure is desirable'" (Brobjer 1995: 230n). His personal copy of *Nicomachean Ethics* is "spotty and appears to be well read" (Brobjer 1995: 231n). As Brobjer demonstrates, Nietzsche owned several secondary works on Aristotle's philosophy, many of which have Nietzsche's own markings.

Besides his library, Nietzsche was very close friends with Paul Rée whose dissertation on Aristotle, *TOY KAIIOY Notio in Aristotelis Ethicis Quid Sibi Velit*, was defended at the University of Halle in 1875. Their first meeting was in 1873 and their friendship began in earnest in 1876 and ended in 1882 (Brobjer 1995: 232). As Small makes clear in his *Nietzsche and Rée*:

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<sup>62</sup> This section is a summary of Brobjer's "Nietzsche's Reading of Aristotle and Homer" in his *Nietzsche's Ethics of Character*.

*A Star Friendship*, Rée's influence on Nietzsche cannot be underestimated. Their relationship would have also made an impression on Nietzsche's thinking on ethical life and morality.

As a young scholar and teacher, Nietzsche intended to write a book on Aristotle: "Books for 8 years. Schopenhauer, Dühring, Aristotle, Goethe, Plato" (Brobjer 1995: 232). In addition, he planned to offer a course on Aristotle's *Ethics* in 1875 and one on Aristotle's *Politics* in 1876.

The sections of *Nicomachean Ethics* dealing with *megalopsychia* give the impression of having been handled far more than surrounding sections. The term, Brobjer explains, appeared in much of the secondary literature Nietzsche read. Although the term *megalopsychia* does not literally appear in Nietzsche's published works, Brobjer still identifies references in those works that can arguably be said to refer to *megalopsychia*. More importantly, Brobjer has identified at least three or four references in Nietzsche's *Nachlass* that explicitly reference the concept. (Brobjer 1995: 243n). For our purposes, it will be enough that Nietzsche was well-acquainted with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, read secondary works on Aristotle's ethics, made direct references to *megalopsychia*, and discussed these ideas with others. This is more than sufficient for CT<sub>2</sub>.

### **3.3 An Analysis of *Nicomachean Ethics* 1123a34-1125a35**

"This place in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," Brober writes, "is longest and most detailed discussion of *megalopsychia* in Aristotle" (Brobjer 1995: 241). For Aristotle, virtues are neither passions nor capacities but psychological states of character. As such, they are obtained through habituation and regulated by Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean. The latter is the framework through which habituation occurs. Identifying the virtue at the mean between two extremes provides the moral agent with a compass for right action. Without the Doctrine of the Mean, all would-be Aristotelians would be on a slippery-slope toward excess or deficiency. *Eudaimonia*

(well-being, flourishing) is secured by the habitual practice of those virtues that meet Aristotle's stated criteria as discussed in Books II-IV.

**Worthy of Greatness.** Of all the virtues, I think it should be stated right from the start that greatness of soul or proper pride is the "crown of the virtues" (*Nic. Ethics* 1124a1). Having this Chapteric virtue makes one greater. That is to say, those who have greatness of soul have a greater desire for achievement, a greater desire to distinguish themselves, and generally have greater ambition than others. The great man is "worthy of great things and *is* worthy of them" (*Nic. Ethics* 1123b3-4). Although some may view this as *hubris*, Aristotle contends that these are features of one who properly exhibits a great soul in relation to their accomplishments and temperament.

**Honour-Lover.** Given his emphasis on being triumphant in all of his endeavors, it should come as no surprise that achieving recognition for such deeds in the forms of honours is an extension of his thinking. In other words, honors are a confirmation of a life dedicated to the practice of greatness. Honour and dishonours act as a measuring stick for the great-souled man to determine his own self-worth. Honours, Aristotle argues, are what the great-souled man "chiefly claims" (*Nic. Ethics* 1123b23-24). Although this seems crude on its face to modern ears, the great-souled man's desire for honours is balanced by him being "good in the highest degree" (*Nic. Ethics* 1123b28-29). There is no tension, Aristotle holds, between being a virtuous person and a high-achieving one. For us moderns, achieving greatness requires hard work and, for many people, hard work implies workaholism. As a consequence, those tagged as workaholics are, more often than not, seen as being *bad* fathers, *irresponsible* mothers, or *self-absorbed* Chapterners. Not only is the great-souled man worthy of honours given his achievements and a



morally virtuous agent besides, but he also has “greatness in every virtue” (*Nic. Ethics* 1123b29-30). This is truly an exceptional individual.

The great-souled man is the result of a noble lineage and a good character. He has a built-in barometer for recognizing the mediocre, the good, and the great and treats people accordingly. For instance, when receiving honours from “good people” he will accept them, however, he is fully aware no honour is equivalent to “perfect virtue” (*Nic. Ethics* 1124a9-10). Be that as it may, he will not accept honours from the *hoi polloi*. Indeed, “honour from casual people and on trifling grounds he will utterly despise, since it is not this that he deserves, and dishonor too, since in his case it cannot be just” (*Nic. Ethics* 1124a10-11). He deserves the greatest honors from the best men. As Aristotle makes clear, the great-souled man is not obsessed with collecting honours. Such honours are simply the just deserts for one whose actions reflect a great soul.

**Gift-Giver.** Aristotle argues that the great-souled man “confers benefits” on others and is “ashamed” of receiving such benefits (*Nic. Ethics* 1124b9-10). According to Aristotle, conferring benefits is a characteristic of a superior nature, while receiving such benefits suggests inferiority. There is a sense in which the one who confers benefits does so because he has surplus of spirit. That is, he is overflowing with goodness. A person who accepts benefits he has neither earned nor requested places himself in a power relation of which he is on the losing side. With one seemingly innocent gesture, the benefactor has positioned himself as a *creditor* and the beneficiary of his generosity a *debtor*. All in all, great-souled men prefer to give than receive and “ask for nothing or scarcely anything” (*Nic. Ethics* 1124b17-18).

**Herculean Achievers.** The great-souled man has larger than life aspirations. He avoids activities that are “commonly held in honour” (*Nic. Ethics* 1124b23). He challenges himself in ways that would be too grueling for the average person. “Great work” or “great honour” is his

motivation. He does not occupy himself with a multitude of semi-meaningful tasks, but reserves his time and energy only for “great and notable” accomplishments.

***Independent.*** The great-souled man is an independent, critical thinking person whose allegiance is to his own rational faculty and the perfection of his moral virtue. In Aristotle’s view, the great-souled man “must be unable to make his life revolve round another,” avoid “flatterers,” and refrain from showing admiration for persons or things lest he find himself practicing idolatry.

***Oblivious.*** Any wrongs perpetrated against the great-souled man are quickly forgotten. He holds no grudges. “Nor is he mindful of wrongs; for it is not the Chapter of a proud man to have a long memory, especially for wrongs, but rather to overlook them” (*Nic. Ethics* 1125a3-4). Neither aloof nor forgiving capture the attitude of Aristotle’s great-souled man. He is not aloof, because he is still aware of the wrongs he suffered. Also, he is not forgiving because he does not create space for reconciliation. He intentionally reduces wrongs to trivialities. As trivialities, they become insignificant and irrelevant asides. Hence, they are disregarded in favor of far more pressing concerns.

***Care of the Self.*** The great-souled man is concerned with the care of the soul and the care of the body. The care of the soul is about personal style. The great souled-man is disciplined and deliberate in speech and action. He carries himself with confidence, speaks with authority, and carefully parses his words. “Further a slow step is thought proper to the proud man, a deep voice, and a level utterance” (*Nic. Ethics* 1125a13-14). Regarding the body, the great-souled man is healthy and physically strong.

### 3.4 Nietzsche's *Übermensch*/"Higher Human Beings"

Having identified some central themes in Aristotle's account of the great-souled man, let us now turn to Nietzsche's account of the *Übermensch*/"higher human beings." In Nietzsche's philosophy *Übermensch*, Brobjer writes, "means: far superior to the ordinary man, transcending the limits of human nature or god-like man" (Brobjer 1995: 272). As we will see, the same can be said for Nietzsche's "higher human beings." Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* appears once before *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* at GS 143 and completely disappears after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Brobjer 1995: 282; Leiter 2002: 117). In my view, the qualities that Nietzsche attributes to the *Übermensch* are the same as those he attributes to higher human beings. It seems to me that much of the disagreement with Kaufmann's attempt to link Aristotle's *megalopsychia* with Nietzsche's *Übermensch* comes down to not linking the latter concept with what Nietzsche says about higher human beings, which, ultimately, turns out to be mirror concepts with different names. To remedy this problem, I will draw upon the five criteria Leiter believes are "plainly sufficient to make someone a higher type" (Leiter 2002: 116). They will serve as the foundation for my analysis of Aristotle's and Nietzsche's ideal human beings in the next section.

1 *The higher type is solitary and deals with others only instrumentally.*

2 *The higher type seeks burdens and responsibilities, as he is driven towards the completion of a unifying project.*

3 *The higher type is essentially and resilient.*

4 *The higher type affirms life, meaning that he is prepared to will the eternal return of his life.*

5 *The higher man has a distinctive bearing towards others and especially towards himself: he has self-reverence.* (Leiter 2002: 116-120)

### 3.5 Comparative Analysis: Nietzsche and Aristotle

Although Kaufmann claimed that Aristotle's "*Nicomachean Ethics* influenced Nietzsche on several points," recent commentators, Magnus and Daigle, have been unswerving in their denial of such a possibility. Magnus argues that "Aristotle's ethics—even his conception of pride—has very little to do either with Nietzsche's moral philosophy, or with his conception of

*Uebermensch*” (Depew 1980: 260). Daigle claims that “we must go beyond Kaufmann” (Daigle 2006: 1). If I were trying to defend the CT<sub>1</sub>, then I fear both Magnus and Daigle might be correct. Yet, the CT<sub>2</sub>, as I discussed above, is a philosophically plausible alternative.

***Independent/Honour Lovers/ 1 The higher type is solitary and deals with others only instrumentally.***

Both Aristotle’s great-souled man and Nietzsche’s higher type stand alone. Besides enjoying solitude for its own sake, solitary figures tend to create their own sustenance. As such they are incredibly independent and deal with others to the extent that they can help them reach their goals. Nietzsche argues that the “concept of greatness entails being noble, wanting to be by oneself, being able to be different, standing alone and having to live independently” (BGE 212). In this way, as I mentioned earlier, the great-souled man and the higher type are psychological egoists. That is, they naturally do what is in their own best interest. The great-souled man accepts honours from good men even though such honours are not a true reflection of his perfect virtue. Nevertheless, such honours are a tribute to man who is deserving of the greatest tributes.

***Herculean Achievers/2 The higher type seeks burdens and responsibilities, as he is driven towards the completion of a unifying project.***

The kind of “burdens and responsibilities” a higher type or great-souled man seeks are beyond the reach of the average man. Indeed, these ideal human beings strive to be god-like.

Aristotle and Nietzsche are in agreement on this point. Aristotle writes:

But such a life [the contemplative life] would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of virtue. If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything. (1177b30-1178a1)

Nietzsche makes a similar point in *Human, All Too Human*.

The Greeks did not see the Homeric gods as set above them as masters, or themselves set beneath the gods as servants, as the Jews did. They saw as it were only the reflection of the most successful exemplars of their own caste, that is to say an ideal, not an antithesis of their own nature. They felt inter-related with them, there existed a mutual interest, a kind of symmetry. Man thinks of himself as noble when he bestows upon himself such gods, and places himself in a relationship to them such as exists between the lower aristocracy and the higher. (HH I: 114)

Both the great-souled man and higher human beings see themselves from a radically different perspective than their fellow human beings. Their *telos* as human beings is driven by outdoing themselves. This kind of motivation is contrary to that which motivates adherents of Christianity. A Christian's task is to be completely subservient to their God and act in accordance with the dictates of scripture. What some of these critics abhor about these concepts is that they tie self-worth to achievement and thus are not fit for mass consumption. In this way, they are certainly only for an elite group who can muster the tenacity to continually challenge themselves with ever greater "unifying projects." Unlike monotheists, the great-souled man and the higher human being eschew living meekly, comfortably, and in service to one's neighbor. In this way, Kaufmann argues, "Aristotle's conception apparently made a tremendous impression on Nietzsche, whose opposition to Christianity can scarcely be seen in proper perspective aChapter from Aristotle's ethics" (Kaufmann 1974: 382).

***Care of the Self/3 The higher type is essentially healthy and resilient.***

Pursuing a "unifying project," achieving "great honour," and completing "a great work" is impossible without proper care of the self. Aristotle writes: "But, being a man, one will also need external prosperity; for our nature is not self-sufficient for the purpose of contemplation, but our body also must be healthy and must have food and other attention" (*Nic. Ethics* 1178b33-1179a1). Even achieving modest, human-size goals require a sound mind in a sound body. If we assume that climbing Mt. Everest, finishing a triathlon, or writing an original philosophical

treatise is the kind of task that a great-souled man or a higher human being would set for himself, then he will need to be exceptionally healthy in both mind and body to carry out, let alone complete, such tasks.

***Worthy of Greatness/4 The higher type affirms life, meaning that he is prepared to will the eternal return of his life.***

Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, what Bernd Magnus once called an "existential imperative," is a thought experiment that poses a potentially life-changing question (Magnus 1978).

*The greatest weight.* –What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moon light between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (GS 341)

Besides those who have given up any possibility of accomplishing anything in this life and thus have resigned themselves to the afterlife, most would not want to repeat their mediocre lives. This group would certainly throw themselves "down and gnash" their "teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus." Is it possible for someone to desire their mediocre life "once more and innumerable times more"? This is certainly possible, but great-souled men and higher human beings do not suffer from delusions of grandeur. According to Aristotle, "he who thinks himself worthy of great things, being unworthy of them, is vain" (*Nic. Ethics* 1123b6-8).

Aristotle's great-souled man and Nietzsche's higher human being would salivate at the opportunity to affirm the lives they have lived. A frisson of immeasurable enthusiasm would be

palpable. They would “crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal.” They think and act as if greatness is their birthright. For both Aristotle’s great-souled man and Nietzsche’s higher human beings, I contend that “*the thought of eternal return*” is “the highest formula of affirmation” (EH “Books” Z:1). For this reason, they have what Nietzsche calls *amor fati* (love of fate). But what is fate to the great-souled man and the higher human being? It consists of the circumstances that are the result of a life cultivated by these persons themselves. A repetition of their joys and successes are as eagerly desired as their sorrows and failures. And thus loving under these conditions is nothing more than a powerful form of self-love. “My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it—all idealism is hypocrisy towards necessity--, but to *love* it ...” (EH “Clever” 10). Great souled-men and higher human beings, based on the descriptions of each provided by both Aristotle and Nietzsche, would have it no other way.

***Oblivious/Gift Giver/ 5 The higher man has a distinctive bearing towards others and especially towards himself: he has self-reverence.***

The great-souled man is a gift giver not because he wishes to please his neighbor. His gift-giving has more to do with reverence for himself more than anyone else. Aristotle argues: “The good man ought to be a lover of self, since he will then act nobly, and so both benefit himself and his fellows” (*Nic. Ethics* 1169a12-13). Again, Nietzsche shares Aristotle’s sentiments on this matter: “*The noble soul has reverence for itself*” (BGE 287). This self-reverence makes it possible for him to exercise distance toward those who might otherwise do him wrong. The great-souled man and the higher human being are oblivious to or have a distinctive bearing towards others primarily because of how they lead their lives. “The noble human being,” Nietzsche insists, honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has

power over himself, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness” (BGE 260). Someone “who delights in being severe and hard with himself” will have no patience for the inane or indecisive, and will certainly not entertain wasting any of their time with such folks. Their life is full of bold challenges anchored by a persistence that treats what would be colossal failures to the average mind as small obstacles to be swiftly overcome. At the helm of this ship is a rational faculty with a no retreat, no surrender attitude.



## SECTION 4: COMPATIBILIST DEBTS

### *4.1 Introduction*

Following up on the *Nicomachean Ethics* as the nexus for Aristotle's influence on Nietzsche, I will argue that both Aristotle and Nietzsche are committed to some sort of compatibilism. Given the similarities between their philosophies of action, it should come as no surprise that Nietzsche's own thinking on free will is motivated by ideas in Aristotle's ethics. First, I will give a concise overview of the problem of free will in which I provide a definition of compatibilism that I think is at work in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and influenced Nietzsche. Second, I will show how Aristotle is committed to that definition by briefly discussing some sections of Book III in the *Nicomachean Ethics*." Third, I argue that Nietzsche is also committed to that definition by considering certain theses and assumptions that arise out of his works. In the end, I think it fair to conclude that Nietzsche's compatibilism is arguably an *indirect* product of Aristotle's compatibilism. Moreover, this Section serves as more evidence for the CT<sub>2</sub>.

### *4.1 A Very Concise Overview of The Problem of Free Will*

Is the will free, determined, or otherwise? Both Aristotle and Nietzsche have an answer to this question. As we will see, their answer is exactly the same. Within the free will debate, there are three basic positions, namely libertarianism, determinism, and compatibilism. Libertarians argue that the human will is completely free. That is to say, the human will is unhindered by either nature or nature. In other words, one's genetics and environment are not impediments to action. As a consequence, moral responsibility is possible and all moral agents can be held accountable for their actions. Hard determinists argue that our actions are determined by external causes outside of our control. For the hard determinist, there is always some causal mechanism

that explains human behavior. Physical determinism, environmental determinism, and biological determinism make moral responsibility impossible. Compatibilism is the no-man's land between libertarianism and determinism. Kant called compatibilism a "wretched subterfuge," while William James described it as a "quagmire of evasion" (Kant 1788; James 1897). As libertarians, Kant and James were not inclined to take compatibilism seriously.

Compatibilism is the view that there is no conflict between libertarianism and determinism (Kane 2005: 12). The biggest hurdle for compatibilists is determining to what extent that our wills are free and to what extent our wills are determined. Although most compatibilists disagree with one another on the details, I would argue, as Kane suggests, that it is undisputed that there exists some *power* that allows an agent to act. "Freedom ... is, first of all," Kane explains, "a power or ability to do something, a power I may or may not choose to exercise" (Kane 2005: 13). For our purposes, *compatibilism is the view that our ability to choose one action over another is due to internal psychological powers or states that free us from being compelled or coerced to act against our will.*

#### ***4.2 Aristotle's Compatibilism***

"Compatibilism was held by some ancient philosophers," Kane maintains, "like the Stoics, and perhaps Aristotle too, according to some scholars" (Kane 2005: 12).<sup>63</sup> Aristotle makes a strong case for clearly distinguishing between voluntary acts and compulsory ones. At 1111a22-24 he writes: "Since that which is done by force or by reason of ignorance is involuntary, the voluntary would seem to be that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the Chaptericular circumstances of the action." Aristotle argues for two key ideas. First, external factors outside of our control can compel us to act in ways that we

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<sup>63</sup> Stephen Everson is one such scholar. In his "Aristotle's Compatibilism in the *Nicomachean Ethics*" in *Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1):81-103 (1990), Everson makes the case that I think is essential for this Section. I owe some of my thinking to Everson's very thorough account.

otherwise would not. In this case, involuntary acts have a moving principle outside the agent and “being a principle in which nothing is contributed by the person who acts—or, rather, is acted upon, e.g. if he were to be carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power” (*Nic. Ethics* 1110a2-4). Second, the cause of voluntary acts is located within the moral agent himself as a “moving principle.” Let us call the first principle the VMP (Voluntary Moving Principle) and the second the IMP (Involuntary Moving Principle). The VMP is nothing other than the internal psychological powers I discussed above. Voluntary acts, then, are the direct result of the moral agent. Compulsory acts are those external to the moral agent of which he is not the cause.

Aristotle argues that praise and blame are attached actions that are the result of the VMP, while pardon and pity are attached to actions that are the result of IMP. Yet the degree to which such judgments are attached to one’s actions become complicated when taking into consideration actions that are simultaneously voluntary and involuntary.

For such actions [i.e., mixed actions] men are sometimes even praised, when they endure something base or painful in return for great and noble objects gained; in the opposite case they are blamed, since to endure the greatest indignities for no noble end or for a trifling end is the mark of an inferior person. (*Nic. Ethics* 110a20-24)

Regarding the first type of mixed actions, we can imagine someone suffering from vomiting, muscle fatigue, and blistered feet for the sake of completing the Bank of America Chicago Marathon. On the other hand, imagine someone suffering the exact same “indignities,” because they thought it would be “cool” to walk barefoot on Lakeshore Drive from Rogers Park to Hyde Park for the sake of an award-winning hamburger from Medici on 57<sup>th</sup>.

On the whole, I think the key to understanding Aristotle’s compatibilism is appreciating the distinction between libertarianism and Aristotle’s view of the VMP and the IMP. Most libertarians argue for a will that is free from the spider web of causal necessity. For libertarians,

then, we can talk not only about their internal psychological powers such as their choices and desires as being free, but also the moral agents themselves being free. On Aristotle's account, antecedent events restrict a moral agent's ability to act as he pleases. Thus Aristotle's compatibilism consists in understanding the manner in which the VMP leaves room for practical freedom, yet such freedom is still subject to the determinism of the IMP.

### ***4.3 Nietzsche on Free Will***

The problem of free will in Nietzsche hovers ambiguously over Nietzsche studies. On the one hand, philosophers such as Strawson (2002) and Leiter (2001; 2002; 2007) view Nietzsche as an adherent of some variety of determinism. On the other hand, philosophers such as Jaspers (1965) and Nehamas (1985) view Nietzsche as a teacher of self-creation, and thus regard him as a proponent of libertarianism. I will argue that Nietzsche is a compatibilist rather than an incompatibilist about human action. I will advance two arguments as a prelude to a third. First, I will adduce evidence that supplements the claim that Nietzsche is a libertarian. Second, I consider evidence that supplements the claim that Nietzsche is a causal determinist. Each of these claims, on their own, are insufficient to explain Nietzsche's view of human agency. Taken together, however, they point to Nietzsche's compatibilism. On the whole, I will show how Nietzsche's compatibilism is the most promising answer to the question: How do we reconcile Nietzsche's discussion of philosophical ideas such as *Übermensch* and the eternal recurrence of the same with his explicit denial of free will in several places throughout his works?

#### ***4.3.1 Nietzsche's Libertarianism***

In the "Preface" to *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche talks about the free spirit whose "*great liberation*" will result in a "will to self-determination." This "will to free will" shall demonstrate his "mastery over things." Free spirits have free wills and act in accordance with

their own best laid plans. Elsewhere Nietzsche writes: “We, however, *want to become those we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (GS 335). Here Nietzsche sounds Kantian in the autonomy that he affords those who would “give themselves laws” and “create themselves.” Indeed, Nietzsche even claims that one of the men he most admired, Goethe, “created himself” (TI “Skirmishes” 49). Zarathustra, perhaps more than any other of Nietzsche’s texts, is saturated with libertarianism. There we find central concepts such as the *Übermensch* and the eternal return as well as Zarathustra’s urging that people become more than a “laughingstock,” “painful embarrassment,” and a “rope tied between beast and Overman” (Z “Prologue” 3-4).

#### **4.3.2 Nietzsche’s Determinism**

At BGE 15 Nietzsche calls *causa sui* a “fundamentally absurd” concept. For something to be *causa sui*, it must literally be its own cause. At one time this label was only reserved for gods. With the rise of German idealism, it came to be associated with the self. Nietzsche calls *causa sui* the “best self-contradiction that has been conceived so far, it is a sort of rape and perversion of logic” (BGE 21). As Nietzsche sees it, there is no “will” behind, above, or within the self that makes it possible to act. He maintains that “there is no substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply fabricated into the doing—the doing is everything” (GM I: 13). Free will’s *raison d’être* is far more disturbing than some of Nietzsche’s other criticisms of the concept. According to Nietzsche, free will is “the shadiest trick theologians have up their sleeves for making humanity ‘responsible’ in their sense of the term, which is to say *dependent on them* ....” (TI “The Four Great Errors” 7).

### **4.3.3 Nietzsche's Compatibilism**

As a whole, Nietzsche's view of free will is ambivalent. Grillaert asks the critical question: "In what way, then, should the positive manifestations of free will be comprehended and distinguished from the negative?" (Grillaert 2006: 47). Arguably, one way of tackling this question is by arguing that Nietzsche is a compatibilist in the manner described above.

"[F]reedom of the will," Grillaert argues, "means to possess the power to determine oneself" (Grillaert 2006: 47). That is, Nietzsche recognizes that we have internal psychological powers when he talks about the "will to self-determination" and the "will to free will." In other words, Nietzsche does talk about the will being free, even though there are far more references to the will being unfree. At the same time he talks about the myth of *causa sui* and maintains that there is no "being behind the doing." In my view there is agency in Nietzsche, however, such agency has to be construed as being restricted by determinism. Grillaert argues that Nietzsche's compatibilism should be understood in the light of his concept *amor fati*.

By accepting and willing the necessity of one's own fate as it is and will always be, and the necessity of the eternally recurring circle of all being, the individual will becomes free.... Free will is to be acquired in the act of creation: it is the power to accept fate, one's own and the necessity of all being, as it was in the past and as it will be in the future, and at the same time to overcome this fate by continuously re-creating and re-determining it. The spirit becomes free in the eternal process of self-determination. (Grillaert 2006: 57)

### **4.3.4 Compatibilism: Aristotle and Nietzsche**

Although every aspect of the two accounts may not be identical, I think it fair to say that both Aristotle and Nietzsche are compatibilists. Again, I am not arguing that Nietzsche is a compatibilist in the exact same manner as Aristotle, but rather Aristotle's compatibilism with its VMP and IMP correlates to Nietzsche's less nuanced talk of a self-determining will and will being determined by forces outside its control.

## SECTION 5: NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF ARISTOTLE'S INTERPRETATION OF TRAGEDY

### 5.1 Introduction

In the area of aesthetics Nietzsche owes no debt of gratitude to Aristotle. Be as it may, there are at least two reasons to clarify the nature of the disagreement between the two philosophers on the purpose of tragedy. First, the epigram that sits at the head of Chapter III has been only Chapterially understood. To both acquire a full understanding of the epigram and thus Nietzsche's apparent criticism of Aristotle, the current study is essential. Second, I want to provide a comprehensive account of Nietzsche's view of Aristotle. Thus I must discuss their conflicting views of tragedy. To accomplish this task, I will explain Aristotle's, at least in Nietzsche's view, misunderstanding of tragedy. After that, I will consider Nietzsche's tragic wisdom.

### 5.2 A Tragic Misunderstanding

Nietzsche's critique of Aristotle's view of tragedy does not change from his first book to his last. At BT 22 he argues that Aristotle so misunderstands tragedy that it leaves "philologists uncertain whether to count it amongst the moral or medical phenomena." This is certainly a biting criticism from Nietzsche given the power that he accords tragedy. Art, if understood aright and executed correctly, has the power to save. To view Greek tragedy as no more than a "pathological moral," Nietzsche holds, is to not have heard that "tragedy is a supreme art" (BT 22). Nietzsche reasons that Aristotle's view of the purpose of tragedy as a *katharsis* of the emotions of pity and fear has the effect of sending the spectators home "cold and more placid" (HH I: 212). That is, on Aristotle's view, one is emotionally unstirred, peaceful, and, to Nietzsche's mind, without the kind of experience he believes tragedy provides. Tragedy, as we will see, moves the spirit in the most intensely emotional ways. Nietzsche muses sardonically:

“Do ghost stories make one less fearful and superstitious?” (HH I: 212). If ghost stories do not make us more frightened, which is their proper function, then how can a tragic play leave us feeling serene? There is something certainly amiss in thinking that their function is to leave us in a state of tranquility.

According to Nietzsche, Aristotle’s approach to understanding tragedy was “moralistic” and this is why he failed to grasp its nature (WP 1029). The tragic poets themselves are not driven by a desire to infuse their spectators with moral sentiments of any kind. Rather they aspire to craft beautiful speeches.

Indeed, they did everything to counteract the elementary effect of images that might arouse fear and pity—for *they did not want fear and pity*.... Just look at the Greek tragic poets to see what it was that most excited their industry, their inventiveness, their competition: certainly not the attempt to overwhelm the spectator with sentiments. The Athenian went to the theater *in order to hear beautiful speeches*. And beautiful speeches were what concerned Sophocles: pardon this heresy! (GS 80)

The aesthetic experience of hearing “beautiful speeches” should, Nietzsche argues, make “*you yourself* to be the eternal joy in becoming,—the joy that includes even the eternal joy in negating ...” (EH “Books” BT: 3). What is “joy in becoming” and “joy in negating”? Moreover, how does one inhabit such joy, becoming, and negating? Tragedy is an aesthetic experience that imbues its spectators with an understanding of the true nature of reality without their actually having to experience the true nature of reality for themselves. Tragedy gives spectators knowledge about the horror, madness, and meaninglessness of existence, while being mesmerized by beautiful speeches. In this way, one leaves a tragic play with a profound sense of reality which, in turn, serves as a catalyst for the pursuit of greatness. This is one’s joy in becoming. One’s joy in negating is inspired in the same manner but it consists in “saying yes to opposition and *war*” (EH “Books” BT: 3). All strong spirits enjoy and welcome such opposition. Such feelings are only heightened by the tragic play.



If Aristotle were right about tragedy, Nietzsche reasons, “tragedy would be an art dangerous to life: one would have to warn against it as notorious and a public danger” (WP 851). Tragedy, Aristotle claims, is “a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used]separately in the [various] Chapters [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions” (*Poetics* 49b25-27). Besides being wrong, Nietzsche thinks Aristotle’s interpretation of tragedy is “dangerous to life,” because tragedy teaches us to *avoid* that which inspires fear and *approach* others with pity in our heart.

### **5.3 Tragic Wisdom**

Nietzsche calls himself the first tragic philosopher. As he sees it, “I have the right to understand myself as the first *tragic philosopher*—which is to say the most diametrically opposed antipode of a pessimistic philosopher. Nobody had ever turned the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos before: *tragic wisdom* was missing” (EH “Books” BT: 3). Following Guay, Nietzsche’s tragic wisdom consists in appreciating the relationship between four phenomena: 1) tragic representation, 2) self-knowledge, 3) self-actualization, 4) priestly realism vs tragic realism.<sup>64</sup>

Tragic representation is the representation of the tragic on stage. It is the medium through which we acquire tragic wisdom. Moreover, tragic representation is the aesthetic experience that makes possible the other three phenomena mentioned above.

The very first sentence in the “Preface” to Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality* reads: “We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers: and for a good reason. We have never sought

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Guays’s “The Tragic as an Ethical Category” (the long, unpublished version) is an excellent piece. He brings out certain themes that I think correctly capture what is most significant about the kind of wisdom Nietzsche believes we can derive from Greek tragedy. Here I owe the four themes above to Guay, but I do not always use them in a manner consistent with his analysis.

ourselves—how then should it happen that we *find* ourselves one day?” In addition to Nietzsche’s genealogical method, tragic representation makes self-knowledge possible. In Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the intriguing duality of the twin concepts of self-knowledge and self-actualization manifest themselves in Oedipus and they have consequences as well. Once Oedipus acquires knowledge of his past as well as his present situation, he is immediately confronted with a choice. First, he has self-knowledge. Second, that self-knowledge creates an opportunity for self-actualization. In other words, self-knowledge presents us with an opportunity to affirm our existence in either a life-affirming or life-negating way. Both Oedipus and Jocasta make life-negating choices. Oedipus blinds himself and Jocasta hangs herself. One might walk away with the knowledge that suffering is inevitable but also we can make better choices than both Oedipus and Jocasta. This is tragic wisdom.

Priestly realism is on offer from the monotheistic tradition. It provides numerous safeguards against reality. Additionally, it has ready-made narratives for every possible human predicament. Tragic realism, on the other hand, teaches us that we live in a chaotic world subject to luck and chance. It teaches us that the world is indifferent to our suffering. More importantly, it teaches us that our fate consists in our suffering

## CONCLUSION

In Chapter III I wanted to show two things. First, Aristotle’s influence on Nietzsche is best understood by the CT<sub>2</sub> rather than the CT<sub>1</sub>. To accomplish this aim, I looked at Nietzsche’s debts to Aristotle in science and logic; ethics; and moral psychology. Second, I take it that comprehending the contours of Nietzsche’s critique of Aristotle is worth considering in the context of Nietzsche’s relationship to Aristotle more generally. Having done these things, I think the investigation opens up a number of new avenues with new questions that still need answers.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MYTH AND REALITY: THE CASE OF HERACLITUS

*My ancestors: Heraclitus, Empedocles, Spinoza, Goethe.*

—Nietzsche

*In his own way the young Nietzsche does establish a vibrant rapport with the personalities of the Preplatonic philosophers; but his interpretations of the texts are commonplace, if not entirely superficial, throughout..*

—Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinkers*

#### SECTION 1: THE NIETZSCHE-HERACLITUS TRAIN

Heraclitus's supposed influence on Nietzsche has reached mythical proportions. Given his seemingly unconditional and uncritical appropriation of all things presocratic, it is easy to see why many scholars would argue that Nietzsche embraces the archaic period without any hesitation (Oehler 1904; Rawson 1969; Habermas 1993; Wilkerson 2008). In his mostly critical review of Wilkerson's *Nietzsche and the Greeks*, Mann echoes this common refrain. "There is something right about Wilkerson's instincts, and this is where I most appreciate his book, that is, where it draws attention to Nietzsche's reverence for early Greek culture as a model community of truth seekers" (Mann 2008: 181). With respect to Heraclitus specifically, some scholars are keen to demonstrate Nietzsche's relationship to "The Obscure" through quite unorthodox yet convincing pathways that begin with the assumption that Heraclitus's fragments are uniquely impenetrable (Kofman 1987). Others are more interested in demonstrating that the Heraclitus to which the early Nietzsche refers is not the one often talked about by "twentieth- and twenty-first century philologists" (Jensen 2010). Yet there are those who, pace Heidegger, attempt to show that the "Nietzsche-Heraclitus" academic train has completely run amuck and that Nietzsche created his own "Heraclitus" out of whole cloth. That is to say, not only does the historical figure

known as Heraclitus lack any philosophical affinities with Nietzsche but Nietzsche's "Heraclitus" is mostly a byproduct of Nietzsche's own imagination (Przybylski 2002).

Fortunately, there are scholars such as Kirkland who argue that to truly understand Nietzsche's relationship to the presocratic philosophers we must try and understand the "moment of *persönliche Stimmung* or 'being attuned,' to the world, which grounds and gives rise to thinking" (Kirkland 2011: 417). Against Mann, Habermas, Rawson, et al. Kirkland writes: "Contrary to what is a very common misconception, however, early Nietzschean philology does not promise such a remedy through any *return* to the Greeks, i.e., through some recovery of the pre-modern truth of Greek thought and culture" (Kirkland 2011: 418). Following Porter, Kirkland argues that Nietzsche is not advocating a simplistic return to some Newfoundland of "counterclassical antiquity" (Porter 2000: 226; Kirkland 422). For the most part, I agree with both Kirkland and Porter here. However, Porter goes on to make a point I find somewhat curious.

Nietzsche can tell no one story about antiquity because he has no one story to tell, and he cannot even tell the stories he does have to tell in a straightforward, easily traceable way. But this only gets at the surface of the problem, for Nietzsche's views about antiquity, I want to suggest, are not easily reducible or even easily deducible as such, because he in fact has no views about antiquity. What his writings offer us instead is a series of often competing accounts of antiquity, which in turn are best read as a series of exploratory postures and attitudes toward antiquity understood as a problem. (Porter 230)

From the outset, Porter's hasty generalization is too broad to be of any use. Nevertheless, he is right to argue that Nietzsche's relationship to antiquity is both complex and manifold. Indeed, this is an apt description of Nietzsche's relationship to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; yet one is still able to discern the precise nature of those relationships to reveal the "postures," "problems," and debts that Nietzsche sometimes acknowledges and other times ignores. In other words, Nietzsche's views about antiquity are not as difficult to determine as Porter suggests. Not only is Porter's assessment here somewhat mistaken, we can actually draw upon the interpretive

methods that Nietzsche himself makes available to us to discover his views about antiquity.<sup>65</sup> It is well known that Nietzsche lays bare his problems with these three philosophers throughout his corpus, but the same cannot be said of the presocratic or, as Nietzsche calls them, the pre-Platonic philosophers, especially Heraclitus. That is to say, Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus does not include any "problems" as such.

Throughout Nietzsche's published works, he makes sixteen references to Heraclitus and all of these are "highly positive" (Brobjer 342). As we will see, these positive references extend to Nietzsche's unpublished works as well. But Mann is right to remind us that "explicit textual allusion does not necessarily decide a case" (Mann 182). We can question both the frequency of the engagement and the quality of that engagement. Here is where I think Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's knowledge of the pre-Platonic philosophers is helpful, even if recent Nietzsche scholars find Heidegger's assertion somewhat provocative or unfair. In his *Nietzsche* lectures Heidegger's critique continues: "We heard that the fundamental character of beings is will to power, willing, and thus Becoming. Nevertheless, Nietzsche does not belong to such a position—although that is usually what we are thinking when we associate him with Heraclitus" (Heidegger 1936-39: 19). Heidegger's assessment of Nietzsche's relationship to Heraclitus humbles not only Nietzsche's own understanding of that relationship but also the mania that Nietzsche's exaggerations have created. Despite Przybyslawski's view, I think Heraclitus's influence on Nietzsche is genuine and important, but it has to be understood in its proper context. Nietzsche's affection for Heraclitus has led scholars to perpetuate a line of reasoning that includes casting aspersions against Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle when doing so is intellectually irresponsible and leads to philosophical blind spots. To demonstrate the manner in which Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus should be understood, I will argue that despite Nietzsche's

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<sup>65</sup> See p. 3 of the "Introduction."

ambivalence to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as well as his reluctance to admit it, Nietzsche's philosophical development owes as much to these classical philosophers as it does to their archaic predecessors but for very different reasons.

My strategy for proving this argument takes place over five Sections. In Section 2 I start by discussing Nietzsche's affection for Heraclitus in his published works. In examining these passages, we will consider what Kirkland calls the "anthemic strains in Nietzsche's rhetoric that point toward hero-worship" (Kirkland 423). To my mind, these "strains," taken together, have disproportionately encouraged the current scholarly consensus surrounding Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus to the detriment of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Then I analyze Nietzsche's depiction of Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* in Section 3. Whereas some scholars erroneously believe Nietzsche is merely fascinated by intellectual biography in this early essay, I follow Kirkland and Jensen by arguing that Heraclitus represents a moment of attunement as well as a cultural exemplar. Following that, in Section 4, I turn to Nietzsche's study of Heraclitus in his lectures on "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers" in which Nietzsche elaborates on themes already broached in *PTAG*. Having arrived at Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus in previous Sections, I offer a comparative analysis of Nietzsche's view of both Plato and Heraclitus to show that he appreciates both figures but for very different reasons in Section 5. Here I treat Plato and Heraclitus as paradigm cases for their respective periods. That is, I view Plato and Heraclitus as barometers for gauging Nietzsche's general attitude toward the archaic and classical periods. Instead of pitting Heraclitus against Plato, I want to show that once we remove the shroud of reverence that surrounds Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus we will then be able to more fully appreciate the roles these figures play in Nietzsche's philosophical development. At the very

least, this essay should serve as a corrective to those who exaggerate Nietzsche's relationship to Heraclitus, while downplaying his debts to Plato.

## SECTION 2: NIETZSCHE'S AFFECTION FOR HERACLITUS

In what follows I take a chronological approach to those passages in Nietzsche's published works where his "highly positive" evaluation of Heraclitus is, more often than not, intermingled with his philosophical concerns. As Jensen notes: There is also the matter of Nietzsche's own affection for Heraclitus: among all philosophers, ancient or modern, he is one of only a few for whom Nietzsche seems to have an unqualified admiration" (Jensen 2010: 335). With respect to his published works, the view that Nietzsche "seems to have an unqualified admiration" is due, in Chapter, to the passages below.

(1) *The Birth of Tragedy*: While lambasting the common misunderstanding of the Greeks as purveyors of a misguided, optimistic naiveté, Nietzsche argues that to amend this error one need only reflect on the teachings of Heraclitus. For Nietzsche, Heraclitus is the antithesis of everything Christian. He is a "dark" thinker whose understanding of nature and the human condition "can hardly be explained as having originated in any such senile and slavish pleasure in existence and cheerfulness" (*BT* 11; 24). Heraclitus's teachings destabilize the ground upon which Christian metaphysics rests. Specifically, it obliterates the comfort afforded by the promise of a loving deity; a pleasant alternative reality that exists in time and space; predestination; eternal life; and pure goodness. *The Birth of Tragedy* was written as Nietzsche was thinking quite seriously about Plato and the pre-Platonic philosophers and thus the fondness he feels for Heraclitus is only beginning to simmer.

(2) *Untimely Meditations*: Prior to his more well-known discussion of the faculty of suppression and the faculty of memory in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche discusses the relationship between these faculties and history in his essay "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life." There he claims that to be a true pupil of Heraclitus one must



resist the temptation to mire in the muck of the past by dwelling on previous failures, lost loves, and unfulfilled ambitions. Instead, one should leave the past behind and turn toward the present moment and all that comes with the inevitability of forward movement.

Heraclitus is identified as one of a few “*strong personalities*” who are kept at a distance and completely unacknowledged by the modern age (*HL* 5 p. 86). To Nietzsche’s mind, the present age is unprepared to deal with the kind of truths offered by “The Obscure.” Such truths, as we will learn later, “indicate” or imply by indirect or mystical means the truth about the world as we experience it (*HL* 10 p. 122). Heraclitus is the “great Ephesian” whose philosophical mood is captured by the music of Richard Wagner. “Wagner seizes every degree and every shade of feeling with the greatest sureness and definiteness: he takes the tenderest, most remote and wildest emotions in hand without fear of losing his grip on them and holds them as something hard and firm, even though to anyone else they may be as elusive as a butterfly” (*RWB* 9 p. 242). The early Nietzsche views music as reflecting Heraclitus’s view of the *logos*. Furthermore, Nietzsche, in the spirit of Schopenhauer, thinks music can have a salvific affect that can provide an individual or an entire culture with the possibility of living on the precipice of Heraclitus’s central teaching without, if one is courageous enough, experiencing the feeling of vertigo.

(3) *Human, All Too Human*: In “Assorted Opinions and Maxims,” Nietzsche argues for the centrality of history in the quest for self-knowledge. Specifically, he mentions Heraclitus’s “stale” yet “true and valid” aphorism that “we cannot step into the same river twice” (*HH* II:223). Heraclitus’s fragment reads: “Anhalation (*vaporisation*). Those who step into the same river have different waters flowing ever upon them. (Souls also are vaporized from what is wet)” (Freeman 1987: 25). In Nietzsche’s view, the past is always with us in two ways. First, the human drama is always the same. The Chaptericulars of the cultural, political, and social

situation will be different, because we are considering entirely different historical periods. Yet, the commonalities between human beings, as they go about the business of interacting with each other, do not change. In this way, the “past continues to flow within us in a hundred waves; we ourselves are, indeed, nothing but that which at every moment we experience of this continued flowing” (*HH* II:223). Second, the past informs the present. We are the sum total of what happened in the past; we are the grand conclusion of all that has gone before. For example, we are living out the results of the Atlantic slave trade, the American Revolution, the terrorist attack on 9/11/2001, as well the financial collapse of 2008, et cetera.

(4) *Gay Science*: In “Joke, Cunning, and Revenge: Prelude in German Rhymes” Nietzsche translates one of Heraclitus’s principal teachings, justice is strife, into poetry.

Heraclitean

Only fighting yields  
Happiness on earth,  
And on battlefields  
Friendship has its birth.  
One in three are friends:  
Brothers in distress,  
Equals, facing foes,  
Free—when facing death! (GS J:41)

One of Heraclitus’s many paradoxes is given the royal treatment by Nietzsche. Given the value that Nietzsche attaches to poetry, the poem is significant for two reasons: (1) it expresses a Heraclitean truth; and (2) it expresses that truth without relying on the Socratic elenchus, Platonic dialectic, or Aristotelian logic. Nietzsche is certainly not against using the dialectical format in his own work if he deems it sufficient to communicate his own ideas. Additionally, Nietzsche does make use of deductive reasoning in his own work. There is no better example of this than his quite sober *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

(5) *Beyond Good and Evil*: Nietzsche decries the “philosophers of reality” and the “positivists” of his day as being pied pipers of a philosophically impotent and empty scientism (BGE 204). Their philosophical agenda neglects the human experience. It is devoid of those literary, artistic, and religious elements that ordinarily inform human life. Moreover, “philosophers of reality” and “positivists” lack the kind of all-encompassing, holistic *Weltanschauung* characteristic of Heraclitus and his contemporaries.

In his *Nietzsche’s Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil*, Lampert, with a little help from Nietzsche, explains the situation.<sup>66</sup> “Victorious science, now ‘in full exuberance and ignorance,’ aims to fashion laws for philosophy and ‘for once to play the ‘master’—what am I saying! The philosopher’” (Lampert 2001: 182). Sam Harris, author of the recently published *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, is a “victorious scientist” and cares little for anything philosophers have to say. His central thesis is that science can give us answers to questions about the “well-being of conscious creatures.”<sup>67</sup> Harris writes:

Many of my critics fault me for not engaging more directly with the academic literature on moral philosophy. There are two reasons why I haven’t done this: First, while I have read a fair amount of this literature, I did not arrive at my position on the relationship between human values and the rest of human knowledge by reading the work of moral philosophers; I came to it by considering the logical implications of our making continued progress in the sciences of mind. Second, I am convinced that every appearance of terms like “metaethics,” “deontology,” “noncognitivism,” “antirealism,” “emotivism,” and the like, directly increases the amount of boredom in the universe. My goal, both in speaking at conferences like TED and in writing my book, is to start a conversation that a wider audience can engage with and find helpful. Few things would make this goal harder to achieve than for me to speak and write like an academic philosopher.<sup>68</sup>

Besides refusing to acknowledge that values cannot be inferred from facts, Harris believes that science should, by and large, replace philosophy as a repository of the best ideas regarding

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<sup>66</sup> There are two detailed studies of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, Lampert (2001) and Burnham’s *Reading Nietzsche: An Analysis of Beyond Good and Evil* (2007). As with similar such books, they both have their virtues and vices. However, Lampert’s is the only one that mentions Heraclitus.

<sup>67</sup> [http://www.samharris.org/site/full\\_text/the-science-of-good-and-evil](http://www.samharris.org/site/full_text/the-science-of-good-and-evil)

<sup>68</sup> [http://www.samharris.org/site/full\\_text/a](http://www.samharris.org/site/full_text/a)

human flourishing. As Nietzsche sees it, Heraclitus's vision is grand enough to incorporate all of humanity into a seamless thread with the universe and yet not so self-righteous as to play the pedant when it comes to morality.

(6) *On the Genealogy of Morality*: In the "Second Treatise" Nietzsche argues that the internalization of the instinct of cruelty explains the origin of bad conscience as the feeling of guilt. At GM II:16, he maintains that the process of internalization creates a world all its own. "The entire inner world, originally thin as if inserted between two skins, has spread and unfolded, has taken on depth, breadth, height to the same extent that man's outward discharging has been *obstructed*." Given the repression of his strongest instincts, man's self-hatred almost necessitates the projection of his best qualities into someone or something other than himself. This projection manifests itself in "the 'big child' of Heraclitus, whether called Zeus or chance—he awakens for himself an interest, an anticipation, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with him something were announcing itself, something preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a path, an incident, a bridge, a great promise ..." (GM III:16) Having succumbed to the societal forces that civilized man and coerced him to flee from his own self-worth and natural self-understanding, he will struggle mightily to reverse this downward spiral of self-destruction.

The "Third Treatise" attempts to explain the origin of ascetic ideals. The latter, Nietzsche holds, means different things to different human types. Artists, priests, philosophers, and the majority of humans each have their own distinctive relationship to ascetic ideals. Given the philosopher's preoccupation with truth, Heraclitus is held up as an archetype for what is necessary for its proper pursuit, namely distance from the *hoi polloi*. "That which Heraclitus was evading, however, is still the same thing *we* steer clear of: the noise and the democratic chatter of the Ephesians, their politics, their news from the 'empire' (Persia, you understand me), their

market stuff of ‘today’—for we philosophers need rest from *one* thing before all else: from all ‘today’” (*GM* III:8). The timeliness of popular culture and the consumerism to which it is inextricably linked are impediments to the kind of timelessness that philosophers desire.

(7) *Twilight of the Idols*: The Section on “‘Reason’ in Philosophy in *Twilight of the Idols* highlights the tension between “being” and “becoming.” That tension is one of the chief philosophical themes Nietzsche scholars tend to associate with Heraclitus’s influence on Nietzsche. In Nietzsche’s view, philosophers who assign value to “being” fundamentally misunderstand the evidence of the senses. In doing so, they demonstrate their “lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism” (TI “Reason” 1). As Heidegger noted earlier and Przybyslawski recognizes: “The useful term ‘becoming’ cannot be found in Heraclitus’s text. It has been created by the commentators, but Heraclitus himself could not use it. The reason is obvious: Heraclitus did not believe in grammar” (Przybyslawski 93). Even if Heidegger and Przybyslawski are correct and even if this help us to rein in the Nietzsche-Heraclitus hysteria in the secondary literature, Nietzsche’s affection for “The Obscure” is nonetheless quite palpable. Despite Nietzsche’s claim that Heraclitus “did the senses an injustice” by claiming that they should be interpreted in one rather than another, Nietzsche writes: “With the highest respect, I except the name of Heraclitus” (TI “Reason” 2). Few of Nietzsche’s philosophical predecessors have received such high praise. Heraclitus, Nietzsche insists, “will remain eternally right” that change is the medium through we can understand the nature of reality and thus that “being is an empty fiction” (TI “Reason” 2).

(8) *Ecce Homo*: Fittingly, Nietzsche’s affection for Heraclitus reaches its apotheosis in *Ecce Homo* which was published eight years after Nietzsche’s death. In his reflections on *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche identifies Heraclitus as the only philosopher to possibly have taught

the eternal recurrence of the same prior to it being proclaimed by Zarathustra. “The doctrine of the ‘eternal recurrence,’ that is, of the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things—this doctrine of Zarathustra might in the end have been taught already by Heraclitus” (EH “Books” BT:3). Again, Heraclitus, Nietzsche thinks, affirms the “passing away *and destroying*, which is the decisive feature of a Dionysian philosophy; saying Yes to opposition and war; *becoming*, along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of *being*—all this is clearly more closely related to me than anything else thought to date” (EH “Books” BT:3). In the end, Nietzsche stands in philosophical solidarity with Heraclitus with whom he feels “warmer and better than anywhere else” (EH “Books” BT:3).

There are three things to notice about these passages: (1) there are at least five philosophical theses scattered amongst them; (2) Nietzsche merely alludes to rather than argues for any of the theses he associates with Heraclitus; and (3) Nietzsche positively endorses all things Heraclitus from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*.

The five philosophical theses to be found in the passages above are as follows: (i) the affirmation of passing away and destroying (BGE, EH) ; (ii) saying yes to opposition and war {i.e., justice is strife} (GS, BGE, GM, EH); (iii) the rejection of being and the acceptance of becoming (BT, HH, BGE, TI, EH); and (iv) the eternal recurrence (UM, BGE, EH). Most of these ideas emanate from Nietzsche’s early engagement with Heraclitus. Jensen notes, wrongly in my view, that “we must follow Nietzsche in believing that these were his four main interests in Heraclitus, I would stress that this preference is stated at a later time and from a different philosophical point of view than that in which we find the systematic interpretation of Heraclitus in *PHG* and *VP*. What interests Nietzsche in those lectures is not the same as would interest him

twenty years later, nor should we expect it to be” (Jensen 352). When we turn to Section 3, we will learn how many of these ideas were already germinating in Nietzsche’s early thought.

Many of these philosophical theses are asserted without any accompanying argumentation. Indeed, Nietzsche is simply being consistent with his own strategy of experimenting with multiple forms of expression. Even though Nietzsche’s variety of styles or “experiments” includes deductive arguments, he views his intuitions as equivalent to arguments. In a manner similar to his use of aphorism, I would argue that Nietzsche’s assertions regarding the wisdom of Heraclitus’s philosophy operate as another “style” that Nietzsche employs as a further means to share his perspectives. To my mind, this happens far too often to be an accident. The word “intuition” comes from the Latin *intueri* which means to gaze at or behold and I maintain that Nietzsche asserts without arguing for those things whose veracity is above reproach. As I see it, the sum total of Nietzsche’s styles is an “epistemology of intuition.”<sup>69</sup>

An excellent example of Nietzsche’s experimentalism that would fall under the umbrella of this intuitive epistemology is his use of poetry to reimagine Heraclitus’s paradoxical claim that justice is strife. “That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony” (Freeman 1983: 25). This fragment seems to be what motivated Nietzsche to try his hand at poetry. For Heraclitus, antithetical phenomena are the necessary stimuli not only for thought but also for the universe itself. “Beautiful harmony” is the result of the clash between these contraries that are not actually contrary but complementary concepts that interact in a contrary manner. These phenomena are inseparable and thus intimately linked to each other in a necessary way. As Nietzsche makes clear in his poem, conflict brings “happiness

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<sup>69</sup> Although I discuss this concept more in the following Section, I do not have the space in Chapter IV to give it the attention it deserves. Be that as it may, I think explaining his experimentalism this way might actually bring us closer to connecting his philosophical style with the substance of his ideas. As far as I know, no commentator has used such language with regard to Nietzsche’s philosophical style.

on earth.” Without this dialectic, progress would not be possible. Nietzsche is more discursive on this issue elsewhere. A few pages after Nietzsche’s “Heraclitean” poem he writes:

Evil.— Examine the lives of the best and most fruitful people and peoples and ask yourselves whether a tree that is supposed to grow to a proud height can dispense with bad weather and storms; whether misfortune and external resistance, some kinds of hatred, jealousy, stubbornness, mistrust, hardness, avarice, and violence do not belong among the *favorable* conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible. The poison of which weaker natures perish strengthens the strong—nor do they call it poison. (GS 19)

Following Heraclitus, Nietzsche argues in a seemingly counterintuitive fashion for things that most people would find abhorrent. We need these horrible experiences to advance as a species. The more clarity we acquire on understanding how the “beautiful harmony” is produced; the closer we come to understanding Heraclitus’s *logos*. What is more important than acquiring clarity and moving closer to the *logos* is accepting the truth of what it teaches.

Nietzsche’s affection for Heraclitus is easily evidenced by the absence of any critical engagement with Heraclitus’s ideas in his published works. The absence of such an engagement is what has fueled the Nietzsche-Heraclitus train and led to an unwarranted and distorted understanding of Nietzsche’s view of Heraclitus. Even Nietzsche’s former students have memories of Nietzsche’s passion for Heraclitus. Ludwig von Sheffler was a student of Nietzsche’s during the summer of 1876. As Nietzsche lectured on the pre-Platonic philosophers, he finally made his way to Heraclitus: “Here the lecturer’s voice also was overcome by a gentle trembling, expressing a most intimate interest in his subject-matter: Heraclitus!!” (Gilman and Parent 1987: 73) Nietzsche’s excitement was infectious. “I always feel a shudder of reverence when I think of the moving end of that lecture. . . . Nietzsche folded the pages of his manuscript together as he said: ‘I sought myself!’” (Gilman and Parent 1987: 73) I think this small anecdote appropriately captures not only Nietzsche’s fascination with Heraclitus but also the current view amongst commentators.



### SECTION THREE: NIETZSCHE ON HERACLITUS IN *PHILOSOPHY IN THE TRAGIC AGE OF THE GREEKS*

Now I want to turn to an overview of Nietzsche's engagement with Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* to understand Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus in that work. Kirkland argues that Whitlock is mistaken to assume that Nietzsche is concerned only with personalities rather than doctrines in *PTAG* (Kirkland 423). Moreover, in making that claim, Kirkland argues, Whitlock implicitly assumes that Nietzsche views a discussion of "personalities" as inferior to one about philosophical doctrines. I will show how Nietzsche is concerned with both personalities and philosophical doctrines equally rather than primarily one or the other as some have argued (Whitlock 2006: p. xxvii). To my mind, Nietzsche's discussion of Heraclitus in *PTAG* reveals the birthplace of Nietzsche's epistemology of intuition, offers his philosophical analysis of Heraclitus's *logos* as well as Nietzsche's account of the "mood" or feeling that Heraclitus himself inspires (*PTAG* 23).

Let us begin with a concept I introduced in Section 2, namely Nietzsche's epistemology of intuition. Arguably, Nietzsche's epistemology of intuition has its birthplace in Nietzsche's *PTAG* as he explains the novelty of Heraclitus's *logos*. There he says intuitive thinking "embraces two things":

- (1) the present many-colored and changing world that crowds in upon us in all our experiences
- (2) the conditions which alone make any experience of this world possible: time and space (*PTAG* 5)

Regarding (1), intuitions capture the multifaceted nature of experience that, more often than not, is not given philosophical consideration. In so doing, one takes seriously the knowledge to be derived from the senses. Furthermore, as Nietzsche says in (2), one's intuitions are a direct reflection of the time and space in which we find ourselves. That is to say, our intuitions about

the world are the result of the context in which our reasoning powers find themselves. According to Jensen: “Neither empirically nor through logic can the truth of the Heraclitean metaphysic be grasped” (Jensen 344). Heraclitus’s “real passion,” Nietzsche holds, is his extraordinary power to think intuitively. Toward the other type of thinking, the type that is accomplished in concepts and logical combinations, in other words, toward reason, he shows himself cool, insensitive, in fact hostile, and seems to feel pleasure whenever he can contradict it with an intuitively arrived-at truth” (PTAG 5). For Nietzsche, Heraclitus’s *logos*, his chief intuition about the nature of reality, has to be understood as an “aesthetic perception of cosmic play” (PTAG 7).

Nietzsche tells us that Heraclitus declared: “‘Becoming’ is what I contemplate” (PTAG 5). It should be noted that it is from this one intuition that, as Nietzsche understands it, we get several other claims which are attributed to Heraclitus but rarely shown to connect to his initial intuition. Nietzsche systematically demonstrates that this intuition is what leads to the other insights afforded by Heraclitus’s *Weltanschauung*. From this intuition, Nietzsche argues, comes two “negations” (PTAG 5). First, Heraclitus denies what ultimately forms the cornerstone of Plato’s metaphysics, namely the distinction between a “physical world” and a “metaphysical one” (PTAG 5). Second, Heraclitus denies being. In bringing up both of these points Nietzsche is giving us an account of Heraclitus’s philosophy. Heraclitus’s insight can potentially have a devastating affect on all human beings but especially those committed to the permanence of ideas. Nietzsche writes: “The everyday and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is, as Heraclitus teaches it, is a terrible paralyzing thought. Its impact on man can most nearly be likened to the sensation during an earthquake when one loses one’s familiar confidence in a firmly grounded earth”

(PTAG 5). The kind of paralysis that results from thinking through the consequences of such a thought is what led many subsequent philosophers to create large-scale metaphysical systems.

Given that the nature of reality is becoming rather than being, Nietzsche reasons that this not only leads to an incongruence between language and the world we experience, but also our daily experience is such that we do not experience things as we once did. Nietzsche, channeling Heraclitus, says “You use names for things as though they rigidly, persistently endured; yet even the stream into which you step a second time is not the one you stepped into before” (PTAG 5). Nietzsche argues that the “impermanence of everything” was born out of the interaction between opposites. He explains that two fundamentally different qualities/activities/ideas/things seek unification with each other. It is the wrestling match between these qualities that creates the illusion of permanence and the reality of coming-to-be and passing away. “Everything that happens, happens in accordance with this strife, and it is just in the strife that eternal justice is revealed” (PTAG 5).

Heraclitus’s insight is simple yet elegant. Even so, Nietzsche argues there is another component to the Heraclitean puzzle. “Heraclitus who, as far as being a physicist was concerned, subordinated himself to Anaximander, re-interprets the Anaximandrian warm as warm breath, dry vapor, in other words, as fire” (PTAG 6). Nietzsche continues: The “pure vapors are the transformation of sea into fire, the impure ones the transformation of earth to water” (PTAG 6). In his *Big Bang: The Origin of the Universe*, Simon Singh claims Heraclitus’s views are in sync with those of a nineteenth-century theory of the universe called “uniformitarianism” (Singh 2004: 79). Uniformitarians believe that the earth gradually developed over time. They claim that the earth is billions of years old and the universe could potentially be eternal. I offer a glimpse of Singh’s history of the origin of the universe not to confirm that Heraclitus is right but

rather to show that Heraclitus knew intuitively what scientists have only recently discovered. In this way, scientists are the janitors and handmaidens of philosophers whereas many of the trends in professional philosophy over the last hundred years restricted the boundaries of philosophical discourse to the scientific worldview. As we have seen, Nietzsche's analysis of Heraclitus's central idea clearly demonstrates that he did not leave those ideas for later works as Jensen believes nor, as we will see, did Nietzsche view his discussion of the pre-Platonic philosophers, Chaptericularly Heraclitus, as one merely about "personalities" as Whitlock believes.

Besides providing an analysis of Heraclitus's *logos*, Nietzsche tell us that he is a "great individual human being," an "archetype of philosophic thought," prideful, and "unbelievable" (PTAG "P"; "P" 1;8). Behind Nietzsche's quite complimentary remarks is something other than mere hero worship. After great human beings die, they leave us with "one incontrovertible point: personal mood, color" (PTAG "P"). Kirkland captures Nietzsche's sentiment accurately when he writes: "Indeed, the personality that Nietzsche claims it is history's task to uncover and preserve is the undeniable element in a philosophical system precisely, as we shall see, *it is the moment of immediate contact with the world prior to reflective and dialectical articulation in concepts*" (Kirkland 424). Hegel's concept of the "world-historical individual" is analogous to Nietzsche's concept of the "great human being" that leaves us with a "personal mood," which, as Kirkland makes clear, is prior to the analytical impulse. The analogy is apt. Hegel's world-historical individuals leave an impression on the world they inhabit. (*LPH* p. 32-33). Their accomplishments reflect a personal mood that reverberates through time and draws us close to their greatness. This mood is their personal attunement and we should try and give voice to it philosophically (Kirkland 426). The philosopher's goal then, Kirkland writes, is to "let the always prior sounding of the world resound or echo throughout him or herself completely and

intensely, and then to express philosophically or in the language of concepts and dialectical argumentation that attuned experience (Kirkland 426). This is precisely what Nietzsche himself has tried to do through his epistemology of intuition.

This theme is repeated and reinforced in Nietzsche's 1874 essay on "The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life." In the midst of criticizing German politicians for intellectual clumsiness and mistaking "feeling for sentiment," Nietzsche argues that only strong personalities can appreciate what the past has to teach us (*HL* 5). Towards the end of his "Nietzsche and drawing near to the personalities of the pre-Platonic Greeks," Kirkland maintains that to do philology properly is to take up the "challenge" of "drawing near to the pre-Platonics precisely in their irremediable distance" (Kirkland 436). The possibility of drawing near in the manner just described is an impossibility if one approaches the past out of weakness rather than strength. Heraclitus's greatness lies not only in his intuitions but also in his ability to confront and embrace the *logos* without succumbing to the human, all too human tendency to shy away from the most horrifying truths. One who approaches Heraclitus out of strength may very well be able to "reconstruct the philosophic image" not for the purpose of idolatry or to lose oneself in the mythology of past glory but rather to be inspired to push forward in one's own time (*PTAG* "P"). This is the greatest role that Heraclitus of Ephesus can play for us today.

Jensen advances a similar argument. He argues that Nietzsche's "fixation on personality is no mere philological sidetrack" (Jensen 337). As Jensen sees it, Nietzsche's goal is to offer us a "*Gesamtbild* of a flourishing life" (Jensen 337). That is, Nietzsche's aim is to present Heraclitus as a philosophical exemplar who might serve as a prototype for all future philologists and philosophers. "In this sense," Jensen explains, "such personality reconstruction has a definite pedagogical function in providing history exemplars ready for emulation" (Jensen 339).

## SECTION 4: NIETZSCHE ON HERACLITUS IN THE LECTURES ON THE PRE-PLATONIC PHILOSOPHERS

Nietzsche discusses philosophical doctrines and personalities in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and in his lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers. In the latter, Nietzsche extends his analysis on many themes already found in his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Nevertheless, he provides even more details on those themes and introduces new ones that will better help us to understand Heraclitus's *logos*. For these reasons, I will follow Nietzsche in briefly treating Heraclitus's life and then moving on to the four main concepts that correspond to Heraclitus's central teaching.

### **4.1 Das Gesamtbild**

Nietzsche tells us that Heraclitus was a solitary figure who sought refuge in the Temple of Artemis to escape insufferable human beings (*PP* 10: p. 53). He found human beings so unbearable that he preferred the company of children than mature adults (*PP* 10: p. 54). Heraclitus had the "highest form of pride" and conveyed a "regal air of certainty." His "magnificence" and "self-glorification" radiate the kind of commanding presence that Nietzsche admired. These characteristics exude a sort of noble confidence that Nietzsche admires in great human beings such as Goethe, Caesar, Emerson, and Shakespeare. These figures give off the sort of exemplary mood Nietzsche believed worthy of imitation. Heraclitus's pride rests in his absolute belief in the power of his own intuitions. Such pride makes him, Nietzsche holds, an "inspirational" and "grand" human being (*PP* 10: p. 55). According to Nietzsche, Heraclitus became the new face of the sagacious human being. Along with Pythagoras and Socrates, Heraclitus is identified as one of the "purest paradigms" (*PP* 10: 58). Heraclitus is the archetype of the "wise man as investigator of all things" (*PP* 10: p. 58).

#### **4.2 First Main Concept: *Becoming***

Becoming has two correlates. First, everything is always in motion. Second, there is no such thing as “duration and persistence” (PP 10: p. 60). To demonstrate the truth of the first claim, Nietzsche turns to a thought experiment a German scientist by the name Karl Ernst von Bar. “The rates of sensation and of voluntary movements, thus of conscious life, appear among various animals to be approximately proportional to their pulse rates” (PP 10: p. 60). Depending on the rate of acceleration or deceleration of our pulse rates everything would appear to be moving so fast that we would barely notice their existence or they would be moving so slow that they would seem to have a permanence that they do not possess. In either case, Heraclitus is still right about the nature of reality. “Every shape appearing to us as persistent would vanish in the superhaste of events and would be devoured by the wild storm of Becoming” (PP 10: 61).

The second claim, Nietzsche argues, is best described in a paper by physicist Hermann Ludwig von Helmholtz. His work explains how “nature is just as infinite inwardly as it is outwardly” (PP 10: 62). If one assumes Heraclitus’s intuition about Becoming is true and “nothing unalterable exists,” then it is inevitable that the universe will destroy itself. According to Nietzsche, this is the “intuitive perception of Heraclitus; there is no thing of which we may say, ‘it is.’ He rejects *Being*. He knows only Becoming, the flowing. He considers belief in something persistent as error and foolishness” (PP 10: p. 62). The entire process of Becoming is nothing other than the “Logos in all things,” which Nietzsche identifies as fire (PP 10: p. 62-63). In order to properly understand the nature of this idea Nietzsche brings in justice, which he calls the “second main concept” in, what I call, Heraclitus’s epistemology of intuition (PP 10: p. 63).

#### **4.2 Second Main Concept: Justice**

The interplay of opposites captures the properties of all things in their “Arising and Passing Away” and, in so doing, Nietzsche argues, presents us with Heraclitus’s *cosmodicy*. According to Whitlock, the “term means a vindication of the goodness of the cosmos with respect to the existence of evil, as contrasted to ‘theodicy’; from κόσμος and Δίκη” (Whitlock 63). The “entire world of differences,” the bitter and the sweet as well as the “sunny light of life” and the darkness of death” are Chapter of the One. In other words, difference is not an impediment to the *logos*. The phenomena of difference itself is the process of eternal transformation. Kofman explains: “The world of becoming is the only one, it presents the spectacle of natural forces perpetually in conflict, but brought under the law of sovereign justice and of the *logos* returned to its state of innocence; it thus no longer requires, as for Anaximander, the fiction of a hereafter”(Kofman 47).

#### **4.3 Third Main Concept: Strife**

Nietzsche explains that Heraclitus’s *cosmodicy* or *logos* is a form of justice. Moreover, the work that *logos* does occurs by means of strife. Strife is a metaphysical concept that not only accounts for the interaction between theoretical entities and inanimate objects like electrons and trees, but also human beings who engage in all types of contests. “From the gymnasium, musical competitions, and political life Heraclitus became familiar with the paradigm of such strife” (PP 10: p. 64). Nietzsche argues that only the Greeks could have come up with the “idea of war-justice.” That is to say, Greek social customs dictated that all Greeks were to challenge themselves athletically, intellectually, and politically. It was not simply competing but victory in competition that spoke to one’s prowess. Greeks were of a psychological disposition that serious contests were the norm and expected. In his *Daily Life of The Ancient Greeks*, Robert Garland



writes: “The first day of the Olympic Games was devoted to oath taking, checking the qualifications of the competitors, sacrifices, and prayers. So important was winning that competitors prayed ‘either for the wreath or for death’” (Garland 1998: 174). Such was the cultural milieu in which Heraclitus lived.

Nietzsche says that the *logos* is initially both “terrifying and uncanny.” The terror that one feels upon realizing the true nature of reality is akin to someone being “in the middle of the ocean or during an earthquake, observes all things in motion. It calls for an astonishing power to transmit the effects of sublimity and joyful awe to those confronting it” (*PP* 10: p. 64-65). Luke Simmonds had such an experience in 2004. He was literally in the middle of the Indian Ocean when an earthquake occurred. His story provides a glimpse into the unimaginable terror of which Nietzsche speaks.

At about 10:30 we went to the beach. Lars and I planned to go sailing, but there was no wind so we opted for water skiing. We waited for the boat and noted the wind was picking up so we would sail afterwards. First Lars skied and then it was my turn. At the moment I got into the water the lagoon started to drain out - in Chaptericular on the far right hand side of the bay (as you look out to sea). Within seconds it was too shallow to ski, so I climbed back into the boat. Lars, I and the driver sat there just watching the water drain away without any comprehension of what was to happen next. At first we saw a couple on a Kayak struggling in the current - they were being sucked out to sea. But then almost immediately they were on the top of a small wave kayaking into the beach at some speed. We were excited by the site and just imagined they were having some fun. Of course we could not know of the huge volume of water that was underneath them, that once it reached the shallow water would simply rise up into a huge wave. That is basically what happened next.

We were in the ski boat facing towards the shore, when the water passing underneath us began to pull the boat around and towards the shore. Almost out of nowhere there was a huge wall of water, behind us at the beach. We were at the bottom of a 10 meter wave that stretched the entire length of the beach, maybe 1km. I said to Lars that we were in trouble - at this moment it didn't even dawn on me that the wave would pass through the island causing the destruction that it did. I screamed at the driver to get us out to sea, but even at full power, the boat just got sucked to the bottom of the wave. The wave collapsed on the top of the boat. I remember covering my head and rolling into a ball. Underwater I just kept on thinking “please don't get hit by something.” I came to the surface, breathed, and then was pulled under again. I like to think that all of the diving I have done helped me - I knew not to fight the current and to wait as long as I could before reacting. The truth is I was just lucky. I came to the surface, grabbed some more air, and then saw a huge wave coming at me. I could see that it wasn't about to break where I was so I took a breath and dived through it, coming up the other side. I grabbed some wood to hang onto, but then saw a life jacket (presumably from our boat) floating 10 meters away. I swam like crazy for

it - in my head I knew it was the best thing to do. I got it on and instantly felt safe - I was afloat in the sea and things didn't look that bad for me. I knew I was safe from drowning I just had to wait for help. I looked for Lars, saw our driver first, and then Lars about 150 meters away, he looked unhurt, but even from that distance I could see his face had taken on a different aspect. I have thought about this since and have decided that it was survival.<sup>70</sup>

Simmonds moves from disbelief to excitement to apprehension to terror, and finally to relief and acceptance all in one absurdly surreal yet very real experience. Simmonds's experience seems to accurately illustrate Nietzsche's understanding of the profundity of Heraclitus's insight.

#### ***4.4 Fourth Main Concept: Fire***

For Heraclitus, Nietzsche explains, fire is the one, original substance from which all other substances are generated. Furthermore, fire is also the catalyst for change that brought the universe into existence. "Warm, wet, and fixed (Earth)" are the transformations through which change occurs (Earth)" (*PP* 10: p. 67). Fire is a Chapter of the process of transformation as well as the lone constituent within that process that exists outside of it. "Since everything is fire, then whatever is not fire, which would be the opposite of fire, cannot exist at all" (*PP* 10: p. 67). All that exists are degrees of warmth. "Absolute cold" is a seemingly separate and independent phenomenon from warmth but in actual fact cold does not exist (*PP* 10: p. 67). Rather, absolute cold is a relative unit of measurement in relation to warmth. In other words, cold is a degree of warmth at a certain level of intensity.

As mentioned earlier, fire is the means through which the interaction between opposites occurs. Nietzsche calls this process justice. He also refers to it as a process of purification. "The world process is a huge act of punishment, the workings of justice and the consequent purification, or catharsis, of fire" (*PP* 10: p. 68). Moreover, the "conflagration is attained purity" (*PP* 10: p. 69). As Nietzsche makes clear, we should avoid the kind of anthropomorphism that places human beings at the center of Heraclitus's *logos* as a means for punishing the wicked.

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<sup>70</sup> <http://phukettsunami.blogspot.com/2004/12/first-hand-story-luke-simmonds.html>

This error was committed by the Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria who claimed the conflagration is “the purification by fire of those who have led bad lives” (*PP* 10: p. 69). This kind of anachronistic interpretation of the *logos* leads to a misunderstanding of Heraclitus’s teaching and ushers in a multiplicity of false yet psychologically soothing interpretations of reality. “The highest form of nature is not humanity but fire” (*PP* 10: p. 74). More importantly, humans have neither a central role to play with respect to the *logos* nor is it necessary for them to acknowledge this process. “There is no necessity, qua human being, that he must acknowledge the Logos” (*PP* 10: p. 74). All in all, those who wish to avoid the truth of the *logos* will continue to do so by calling Heraclitus “dark, grave, gloomy, and pessimistic” (*PP* 10: p. 74). Ad hominem attacks, however, cannot rescue them from that which they are eternally and inextricably linked.

## SECTION FIVE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In “What I Owe the Ancients” in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche is adamant that he has learned nothing from classical Greek philosophy. There he claims “Plato is boring” and for good measure calls him a “*first-rate* decadent of style” (TI “Ancients” 2). This is certainly the view some of Nietzsche’s readers reiterate when it comes to articulating his relationship to Plato. In other words, even while Nietzsche’s debt to classical Greek philosophy has not been completely ignored; it still does not receive the attention it deserves. Yet Nietzsche’s apparent glorification of the pre-Platonic philosophers and certain Roman thinkers and seeming disdain for Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle betrays the philosophical record. It is quite tempting to blame Nietzsche for this distorted picture and, to be fair, he is Chapterly to blame. Nevertheless, the greater responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of his readers who have not read him carefully enough. Often his language, as seen above, is seemingly exaggerated and thus misleading. As I suggested earlier in this Section and discussed in the “Introduction” to the dissertation, Nietzsche has a method that informs his engagement with historical figures. Following that method throughout Chapters I-III of this dissertation, I have sought to give an accurate account of Nietzsche’s encounter with classical Greek philosophy. As a consequence, his relationship to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle was shown to be deeply ambivalent. In this Section, I want to prove that both Plato and Heraclitus are responsible for stimulating Nietzsche’s thinking in very diverse ways. Moreover, Plato is Nietzsche’s chief *antagonist* in the classical period and Heraclitus his chief *protagonist* in the archaic period. As such, they both play a crucial role in Nietzsche’s philosophical development.

To accomplish this task, I will begin by briefly summarizing Nietzsche’s view of Plato from Chapter II of the dissertation. After that I will briefly summarize Nietzsche’s view of

Heraclitus from Chaps. 1-4 above. Having summarized Nietzsche's view of Plato and Heraclitus, I will show the way in which these figures have shaped Nietzsche's thought.

### ***5.1 Nietzsche and Plato***

There are four areas in which Nietzsche and Plato converge: 1) political philosophy, 2) metaphysics and epistemology and 3) dialogue and dialectic. Although Nietzsche has no political philosophy, he does agree with Plato that misinformation may be a necessary tool to control the polity. In this way, he agrees with Plato's concept of the noble lie. Nietzsche's political skepticism leaves open the possibility of employing questionable mechanisms to bring about a civil society, because neither politicians nor the citizenry are completely trustworthy. For these reasons, Nietzsche holds, there are no disinterested actions. Nietzsche also follows Plato in believing that there ought to be space for the proper cultivation of philosophical genius. Nietzsche believes in philosophical elites just as much or more than Plato. They are both aristocratic elites who await the arrival of great human beings.

With respect to Plato's metaphysics, Nietzsche has nothing but scorn for the kind of analytically-informed metaphysics on offer in Plato's *Republic* and elsewhere. Be that as it may, Nietzsche might have a taste for scientifically-informed metaphysics. That is to say, he is open to utilizing scientific methods, even if he is quite wary of a creeping scientism. Even if Nietzsche rejects Plato's metaphysics, he seems to appropriate Plato's concept of *anamnesis* as a feature of a certain kind of aesthetic experience. In his discussion of lyric poetry, he talks about the manner in which such poetry puts in mind of past experiences. Rather than an intellectual experience, Nietzsche believes that the kind of recollection associated with lyric poetry allows us to have an affective experience. Nonetheless, Nietzsche and Plato view the concept of anamnesis as an important component of the human experience.

Nietzsche employs dialectic in a dialogical format in several of his works in a manner similar to that found in Plato's dialogues. Nietzsche never seems to reach a definitive conclusion on this Chaptericular philosophical method. On the one hand, he could not imagine a world without Plato's grand art form. On the other hand, he finds dialectic as one more sign of a decadent philosopher. In works such as "The Wanderer and His Shadow," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche is certainly drawing upon a dialectical format. After reading some of these works, one is left with the impression that for all of Nietzsche's struggles with his "true great opponent" he is certainly no stranger to experimenting with philosophical methods that are most convenient for his philosophical purposes.

## ***5.2 Nietzsche and Heraclitus***

As evidenced throughout this Section, Nietzsche is quite fond of Heraclitus. It is Heraclitus who "raised the curtain on this greatest of all dramas" (*PTAG* 68). The drama of *logos* stayed with Nietzsche throughout his philosophical career. His affection for Heraclitus is always attached to his agreement with most, if not all, of Heraclitus's central teachings. Nietzsche's views about Heraclitus never waver from his earliest to his latest works. Contrary to Jensen's distinction between Nietzsche's earlier and later treatment of Heraclitus, I have shown that Nietzsche's interest in Heraclitus does not change from his earlier to his later works.

The central themes of interest in regards to Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus are as follows: 1) the epistemology of intuition, 2) the philosophy of Becoming, 3) the personal feeling or mood of a figure like Heraclitus, 4) the affirmation of passing away and destroying, 5) saying yes to opposition and war, 6) the rejection of being, 7) the eternal recurrence, 8) justice as *catharsis*, and what Jensen calls 9) a "physiognomic coloration of the post-Kantian theory of perception" (Jensen 351).

### **5.3 Methods**

At the beginning of her article “Nietzsche and the Obscurity of Heraclitus,” Kofman says “a ‘detail’ can reveal more and be more symptomatic than an apparently central theme, as is well known thanks in large Chapter to both Nietzsche and Freud” (Kofman 39). Given this hermeneutic, I am going to follow Kofman on this point by drawing upon details in her article to elucidate the aim of this section. She writes: “The conceptual mode of understanding and the intuitive one reflect two different perspectives, two different evaluations of the world” (Kofman 47). To my mind, the distinction that Kofman has drawn here not only brings to mind the chasm that exists between Plato and Heraclitus philosophically but it is also the means for explaining what precisely Nietzsche finds so appealing about both of these figures. They offer, as Kofman argues, two modes of being in the world which Nietzsche unites in his philosophy.

With regard to methods, dialectics and an epistemology of intuition could not be more different. Dialectics requires an intersubjective engagement with other minds or the mind with itself. If that engagement happens alone then the inquiry grows with the introduction of more and more concepts. Dialectics may draw upon rules of inference, a framework for addressing the subject at hand, and the exclusion of irrelevant lines of reasoning. An epistemology of intuition is grounded on the inner experience of the individual and the way in which that individual experiences the external world. Knowledge by means of intuition circumvents Platonic dialectics and Aristotelian propositional logic for the immediate insight. The distinction between the conceptual and the intuitive as it regards philosophical methods is similar to the distinction between natural theology and divine revelation. Both the former and the latter are a means to know the mind of God. Natural theology draws on tools of formal logic. Divine revelation is a

kind of disclosing that is instantaneous. More often than not, there is direct communication between humans and the divine.

From Plato, Nietzsche learned how to isolate concepts and demonstrate their veracity over time. For example, Nietzsche uses deductive reasoning, meditations, and essays to demonstrate philosophical points in works such as “On the Advantage and Disadvantage for Life” and *Twilight of the Idols*. For example, in “On the Advantage and Disadvantage for Life,” Nietzsche the historicist argues that there are three different rational narratives that should be used to properly approach and appreciate history, namely monumental, antiquarian, and critical. He does something similar when he argues against free will in “The Four Great Errors” in *Twilight of the Idols*.

From Heraclitus, Nietzsche learned how to employ supposedly unorthodox philosophical tools like aphorisms, maxims, songs, and poetry to express profound truths in a concise, compact form. As Kofman said, these are two different world views that find their synthesis in Nietzsche’s works. Nietzsche’s epistemology of intuition, like that of Heraclitus’s, shows up in places like “Arrows and Maxims” in *Twilight of the Idols* or his discussion of eternal recurrence in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Together these literary devices demonstrate his commitment to an epistemology of intuition.

In discussing Plato’s, Aristotle’s, and Hegel’s views of mythical discourse Kofman writes: “Unlike dialectical discourse, which even a cobbler or a slave can understand, mythical discourse is necessarily solitary and aristocratic, in essence ‘obscure,’ enigmatic, and constitutes a problem by its very nature” (Kofman 41). As is well known and discussed above, Nietzsche values Heraclitus’s desire for solitude as well as the seemingly “mythical,” “aristocratic,” and “enigmatic” nature of his pronouncements. To Nietzsche’s mind, thinking in this manner



requires the reader to wrestle more intensely with what is to be thought. Moreover, there's a certain kind of intimacy that grows around the thinker and the thought. It is hardly accidental that Zarathustra is a cave dweller who is lured out of his cave due to his love for human beings.

At the same time, Nietzsche values dialectical discourse given its prominence throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This is demonstrated by Zarathustra's dialogues with the following characters: Zarathustra's own conscience; the old man in the forest; Zarathustra's animals; the tight-rope walker; the jester, the hunchback; Zarathustra's nameless disciples; and the "higher human beings." Whether some of these characters are intended as real persons in the text or metaphors for Zarathustra's struggle with his own soul in order to bring harmony between his affective self and rational self is irrelevant. That is to say, the dialectical discourse in this work brings Nietzsche and Plato together in a manner that is often overlooked.

#### ***5.4 The Knowledge-Drive***

In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche writes: "Whoever concerns himself with the Greeks should be ever mindful that an unrestrained thirst for knowledge for its own sake barbarizes men just as much as a hatred of knowledge" (PTAG 1). As Nietzsche understands it, Plato's and Heraclitus's view of knowledge acquisition divide them sharply. Heraclitus knew when to put restraints on the search for knowledge, while Plato's unrelenting, systematic inquiry into the nature of reality, Nietzsche believes, led him to produce a life-negating philosophy. Despite Nietzsche's concerns over the philosophical aspirations of rational, conscious beings such as ourselves, we should not conclude that he sees no value in the pursuit of truth. There is no problem with the pursuit of truth as long we understand that the truth should serve life itself. Plato's metaphysics moves beyond this in way that is hostile to life. Moreover, Nietzsche cannot be understood as being critical of rational, conscious philosophizing

and being an advocate of irrational, unconscious presuppositions. He embraces both of these. Typically, he is seen as the playful, metaphorical thinker who is skeptical of truth and dismissive of traditional philosophical problems or the analytic, scientifically-inclined philosopher who is primarily preoccupied with responding to the philosophical agenda laid down by his philosophical predecessors. Nietzsche is both of these.

Although Nietzsche wants to “twist free” of Plato’s metaphysics, he certainly also wants to address the problems that Plato thought was important. By doing so, Nietzsche’s philosophical development, the questions he chose to address, and the answers he gave to those questions were directly influenced by Plato, even if the genesis for doing so was negative inspiration. Heraclitus’s holistic, if one can call it that, metaphysics does not separate the Chapters from the whole. That is to say, Heraclitus’s *cosmodicy* does not separate persons from the universe. Together they are Chapter of a larger sequence of events; they are one with Heraclitus’s *cosmodicy*. Not only does Plato separate persons from the universe of which they are a Chapter, he also heaps scorn on the body and vilifies it as an instance of inauthentic materiality.

#### **5.4 Mood, Redux**

In many ways Plato’s mood is the perfect philosophical antithesis to that of Heraclitus.

Kirkland explains:

The pre-Platonics fascinate Nietzsche because they present him with monolithic philosophical responses to life, seeking ‘knowledge’ in some sense, but a knowledge of the world of their own peculiar experience, which they singlemindedly attempt to express in their philosophical thinking. In contrast to the pre-Platonic thinker and the ‘necessity’ binding his basic condition and his philosophical thought, Plato presents the ‘the first magnificent mixed type (*der erste großartige Mischarakter*)’. (Kirkland 422)

Heraclitus has an agonal, prideful, and original mood that Nietzsche finds invigorating.

Heraclitus’s intuitions have the air of absolute confidence about them, because they have the sense of coming from a place of categorical necessity. Kofman argues that the “Heraclitean

model of the world is not dialectical but juridical and agonal, truly Greek” (Kofman 47). That is to say, Heraclitus carries within his thinking and thus within himself a Greek cultural sensibility that Nietzsche admired. What is “truly Greek” is his ability to express that sensibility philosophically.

Plato, on the other hand, has a personal feeling or mood of an entirely different sort. Despite Nietzsche’s misgivings about Plato’s metaphysics, he does consider Plato, as Kirkland notes, the “first magnificent mixed type.” As discussed in a previous Section, Heraclitus is a pure type and Plato a mixed one. Indeed, Plato is a mixed type as both a philosopher and a human being. “As a human being, too, Plato mingles the features of the regal exclusive and self-contained Heraclitus with the melancholy compassionate and legislative Pythagoras and the psychologically acute dialectician Socrates” (*PP* 2). After Plato, every philosopher is a mixed type including Nietzsche himself. Nietzsche learned how to incorporate a multiplicity of different styles not only into his philosophizing but also into his personal mood. Yet Plato, at least to Nietzsche’s mind, is still unoriginal when compared to a figure like Heraclitus. Nietzsche’s appreciation of Heraclitus and, to a certain extent, Plato’s personal mood is due to the manner in which Nietzsche approaches these figures. “To a psychologizing reading,” Kofman explains “Nietzsche substitutes a typologically differential reading” (Kofman 41). A typological reading would suggest that Nietzsche thinks there are a cluster of characteristics that correspond to each type. Consequently, Nietzsche finds the personal mood of both thinkers worthy of esteem.

### ***5.5 Art and Truth***

In his “Traces of Discordance: Heidegger-Nietzsche,” McNeill highlights the tension between art and truth which, in this section, will highlight the importance of Heraclitus and Plato

for Nietzsche's philosophical development. He writes: "For Nietzsche, the affirmation of the sensuous may be expressed in the insight that 'art is worth more than truth.' Platonism, by contrast asserts that truth is worth more than art" (McNeill 1995: 180). As demonstrated in Chapter II of this dissertation, Platonism and Plato are mutually exclusive. Nietzsche is ambivalent towards Plato, while he is decidedly hostile toward all forms of Platonism. For our purposes, the thread of Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Plato that will prove useful is the one that signals their fundamental disagreement about art. In other words, Plato, like many of his adherents, believes "truth is worth more than art."

In his lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers, Nietzsche writes: "The eternally living fire, αἰών [Aeon, boy-god of the zodiac], plays, builds, and knocks down: strife, this opposition of different characteristics, directed by justice, may be grasped only as an aesthetic phenomenon. We find here a purely aesthetic view of the world" (*PP* 10: p. 70). As discussed in earlier Chapters of the dissertation, Nietzsche has always believed that art has redemptive power. Heraclitus's *logos* comes into existence around the same time as Greek tragedy and plays a similar role in human experience. It serves as an example of the way in which human creativity dances with the meaningless and chaotic nature of the universe and tries to make sense of it. Like Greek tragedy, Heraclitus's *logos* shows us how the human impulse to create can reveal the horrific truth about reality to us, while shielding us from the raw cruelty of that reality and the inevitability of death. In this way, both Greek tragedy and Heraclitus disclose a path for maneuvering through life with the shadow of death ubiquitous in all facets of daily existence.

As Heidegger makes clear in his *Nietzsche* lectures, Nietzsche never really disentangles himself from Plato's metaphysics even when he claims to invert Platonism. Ironically, Plato's view of art comes to intimately define Nietzsche's entire philosophical project. Plato calls tragic

art mimetic; Nietzsche believes the creativity expressed in tragic art is an important Chapter of the human condition. Plato believes art corrupts the soul; Nietzsche believes that art saves the soul. Plato maintains that art alludes to things rather than argues for them; Nietzsche insists that art appeals to our affective rather than rational selves. On the whole, Plato thinks that art is incompatible with truth, whereas Nietzsche believes that art saves us from truth.

The tension between art and truth which is the tension between Nietzsche's view of Heraclitus and Plato is one that Nietzsche sought to resolve. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche envisioned an "aesthetic Socrates" that would combine our creative impulses with our search for truth. One of the best ways to explore Nietzsche's attempt at a resolution is to explore that area of his philosophy for which he has been the most influential, namely his critique of morality. Most scholars agree that Nietzsche's critique of morality is his most enduring philosophical legacy. However, there is no consensus on the precise nature of Nietzsche's "positive ethical vision" (Leiter 2004). Moreover, there are thorny metaethical issues surrounding Nietzsche's positive ethics which make it difficult to give a coherent account of what he intended. For example, how do we reconcile (1) Nietzsche's attack on traditional morality with (2) his call for a "revaluation of all values" (A 62)? Furthermore, how can Nietzsche's call for the creation of new values avoid succumbing to the same criticisms that he himself launches against the old ones?

Nietzsche tries to synthesize the best of Heraclitus with the best of Plato in what Hussein calls a "fictionalist simulacrum of valuing" in his "Honest Illusion: Valuing for Free Spirits" (Hussein 2007: 158).

Hussain argues that Nietzsche's "genuine philosophers" and "free spirits" should view their philosophical task as the practice of a "fictionalist simulacrum of valuing" (Hussein 158).

First, I will discuss the “interpretive puzzle” that leads to this conclusion (Hussein 158). Second, I will discuss the conclusion itself. In so doing, we will see how Nietzsche has learned to bring together the form, rather than the content, of Heraclitus’s *logos* as a fundamentally “aesthetic phenomenon” and Plato’s unrelenting pursuit of truth without leaning too far in either direction. As a metaethicist, Hussain is concerned with second-order questions. Even so, the philosophical commitments he assigns to Nietzsche should have far-reaching implications for those whose first-order assumptions regarding Nietzsche’s positive ethical vision have already been settled.

Hussain claims there are four interpretive constraints that together give rise to an interpretive puzzle. First, Nietzsche’s free spirits are tasked with creating new values. In so doing, they have to be careful not to merely reproduce the old ones. Second, Nietzsche’s free spirits view reality “*as it is*” rather than how it appears to be (Hussein 158). That is to say, they have the ability to cope with the truth of reality without needing the anesthetic of idealism or the supernatural. Third, Nietzsche is not only an error theorist about moral claims, but all evaluative claims in general. Put simply, Hussain argues that Nietzsche views all such claims as false. Finally, Hussain states that there is a “close connection drawn in Nietzsche’s works between art, the avoidance of practical nihilism, and the creation of new values” (Hussein 164). This last interpretive constraint points the way forward. *Art helps us to create new values as it shields us from the practical result of the belief that there is nothing worth valuing.* This latter claim is triggered by the natural sciences in their “depiction of the world as lacking value in itself” (Hussein 164). Given the foregoing, Hussain’s interpretive puzzle becomes clear: “So the interpretive puzzle is how can we make sense of the importance of values and valuing in Nietzsche’s higher men and free spirits—including, importantly, himself—while staying within our interpretive constraints?” (Hussein 165)

Nietzsche's free spirits will create "honest illusions" (Hussain 166). According to Hussain, this should be understood as a "form of make-believe, pretending, or, the non-Nietzschean phrase adopted here, 'regarding...as': *S* values *X* by regarding *X* as valuable in itself while knowing that in fact *X* is not valuable in itself" (Hussain 166). Prima facie, an honest illusion may seem like a contradiction in terms. To be honest is to have an unswerving dedication to truth. An illusion is a false view of reality. Art creates illusions. Nevertheless, we can still have a gratifying aesthetic experience of a work of art, while fully recognizing that such an experience is based on our interaction with an illusory object. Hussain explains: "Art understands that its illusions are illusions without the illusions themselves being undermined." (Hussain 169).

How then do Nietzsche's free spirits go about the practice of a simulacrum of valuing in a fashion analogous to art? In other words, how do his free spirits create their own honest illusions? Arguably, a passage towards the end of the "Second Treatise" of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* not only exemplifies what Nietzsche envisions but also acts as further evidence for Hussain's thesis:

Let this suffice once and for all concerning the origins of the "holy God."—That *in itself* the conception of gods does not necessarily lead to this degradation of the imagination, which we could not spare ourselves from calling to mind for a moment, that there are *more noble* ways of making use of the fabrication of gods than for this self-crucifixion and self-defilement of man in which Europe's last millennia have had their mastery—this can fortunately be read from every glance one casts on the *Greek gods*, these reflections of noble and autocratic human beings in whom the *animal* in man felt itself deified and *did not* tear itself aChapter, *did not* rage against itself! For the longest time these Greeks used their gods precisely to keep "bad conscience" at arm's length, to be able to remain cheerful about their freedom of soul: that is, the reverse of the use which Christianity made of its god. (GM II:23)

By "fabricating" gods, we can affirm our existence as we are and not as traditional morality would like us to be. To be precise, we can affirm our existence as the sometimes irrational, finite, that is, human, all-too-human animals that we are. Thus, we "learn how to *regard* something as

valuable in itself even when we know that it is not valuable in itself” (Hussain 170). For Hussain, Nietzsche’s simulacrum of valuing also includes “imaginative play” (Hussain 173). Art and imaginative play share similar features. The most important of which is illusion. By engaging in art and imaginative play, Nietzsche’s free spirits can create values for themselves even though they know such values have no intrinsic worth.

As Hussain argues, Nietzsche practices a fictionalist simulacrum of valuing. This practice is an aesthetic phenomenon in the sense that one is creating values for themselves that have no objective reality. At the same time, one acknowledges that all values are illusions, yet that acknowledgement is filtered through art or “imaginative play.” In this way, Nietzsche’s philosophy is very much a synthesis of Heraclitean and Platonic elements.

## **CONCLUSION**

Chapters I-III of the dissertation demonstrated the complexity of Nietzsche’s relationship to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. In demonstrating this complexity, it became clear that Nietzsche is deeply ambivalent towards all three figures. To prove that the classical Greek philosophers were just as important as their archaic predecessors, I decided to examine Nietzsche’s view of Heraclitus. In Section 1 I discussed various perspectives on Nietzsche’s view of Heraclitus. Sections 2-4 examined every mention of Heraclitus in Nietzsche’s published works and two unpublished works. Finally, in Section 5, I did a comparative analysis that showed how both Heraclitus and Plato, in their respective contexts, were responsible for motivating certain aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophical development.

On the whole, this dissertation has touched on areas that will require further exploration. With five towering figures and thus a multiplicity of different perspectives, this was inevitable. There are other areas in which scholars have spent a great deal of time forging new ground.



Within those spaces, I think I have a few novel things to say about Nietzsche's relationship to antiquity. As Nietzsche scholars are wont to do, I engaged the secondary literature a great deal throughout the dissertation. This seemed the best approach to deal with Nietzsche's philosophical style and indifference to systematic reasoning. Finally, this study is a necessary prelude for anyone who wants to judge Nietzsche's engagement with the ancient tradition. In this way, explanation precedes critical evaluation.

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