ABSTRACT

Tragic Philosophy and Human Desire:
Bringing Nietzsche and Plato into Conversation with Contemporary Ethics

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In his *Retrieval of Ethics*, Talbot Brewer complains of a fundamentally inadequate moral psychology within contemporary ethics, most importantly the limitation of human desire to the instrumental. In response, Brewer, drawing primarily from Aristotle, develops an account of human desire that finds fulfillment-without-ceasing within "dialectical" activity, that is, activity that has an object irreducible to a propositionally describable state of affairs. In this work, I pursue interpretations of Nietzsche and Plato, arguing that they both practice tragic philosophies, implying in turn that that they both held that fundamental human desire can be fulfilled only in dialectical activity.

In chapters two through four, I trace Nietzsche's development from a metaphysical description of tragedy to the practice of tragic philosophy that rejects any metaphysics from which one may derive a *telos* or morality. This allows a fulfillment of human desire in the constant failure of knowledge to grant the state of affairs necessary to fulfill desires-that is, disappointment. And out of disappointment, one may fulfill-without-ceasing the will to power in ever new forms of creation, thus affirming the activity that is life.

Chapters five through seven offer an interpretation of Plato, in which he presents a Socrates who practices an erotic and tragic philosophy that shows a complementary relationship between the aporetic and constructive dialogues. Socrates' ironic claim to ignorance expresses both the human inability to acquire knowledge of metaphysics and the possibility of the practice of dialectic to bring one into the presence of the Good/Beauty. Socrates' practice of philosophy is both tragic and erotic, in that it expresses constant striving without the claiming of its goal (lack), and yet achieves the fulfillment-without-ceasing that can be the only "object" of *eros*.

Both Nietzsche and Plato expose a rich view of human desire, fulfilled only in dialectical activity. Their tragic philosophies reflect their views of desire, and so offer resources for contemporary ethics both in terms of philosophical method and more adequate accounts of human desire. In terms of fullness and lack, an important distinction arises between *eros* and the will to power that may encourage further discussion.

Tragic Philosophy and Human Desire:
Bringing Nietzsche and Plato into Conversation with Contemporary Ethics

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Philosophy

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2012

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A *The Anti-Christ*

AOM *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (part of volume II of *HA*)

ASC *An Attempt at Self-Criticism* (1886 preface to *BT*)

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*

BT *The Birth of Tragedy*

D *Daybreak*

EH *Ecce Homo*

EN *European Nihilism* (selections from *WP*)

GM *On the Genealogy of Morality*

GS *The Gay Science*

HA *Human, All Too Human*

PTA *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*

SE *Schopenhauer as Educator* (from *Untimely Meditations*)

TI *Twilight of the Idols*

WP *The Will to Power*

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Note: For Plato's works, I use no abbreviations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Dr. Anne-Marie Schultz for her direction and encouragement, as well as the countless hours reviewing and asking questions of the various drafts of this work. But primarily, I would like to thank her for leading me to a love of Plato.

Thanks to Dr. Robert Miner for his many helpful ideas and questions, particularly in working through Nietzsche's philosophy.

Thanks to the remaining members of my committee, Dr. Robert Baird, Dr. Lenore Wright, and Dr. Jonathan Tran, for their helpful and invigorating questions, comments, and general encouragement.

Thanks to the Philosophy Department at Baylor University for the funding and the opportunity to earn my doctorate and gain experience while doing so.

Thanks to my wife Chrissy, who has sacrificed more than can be counted to give me the opportunity to study philosophy and write this work. Her resource always stands ready to make up for my lack.

And finally, thanks to the various baristas, disappointing conversationalists, and that satyr-like coffee connoisseur who have acted as symposiasts, the inspiration of their drinks and relationships being reflected in the best of what is here written.

DEDICATION

To Chrissy

Whose love and friendship light the path to virtue

CHAPTER ONE

Ethics, Desire, and the Practice of Philosophy

Introduction

This work offers a comparison of the nature of desire and its relationship to philosophical practice in the thought of Nietzsche and Plato. The comparison that I establish between these two thinkers, particularly with regard to the insights into the nature of human desire and virtue, offers resources for contemporary philosophers to draw upon as they seek to overcome truncated views of human desire that often inform contemporary philosophy. I aim to present a more compelling understanding of ethics and the practice of ethical philosophy than is currently at play in contemporary analytic discussions of ethics.

Desire and the Failure of Contemporary Ethics

In his *Retrieval of Ethics*[1] Talbot Brewer claims that contemporary ethics, particularly virtue ethics, has failed to provide an adequate framework for understanding human motivation primarily because of its insufficient account of desire. I will not develop or provide substantial support for Brewer's claims. Rather, I use Brewer's work to show some of the difficulties within contemporary ethics, specifically virtue ethics, and to show that despite these concerns, we have failed to understand human desire in a way that will help us understand the relationship between virtue and happiness.

[1] Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2009).

Brewer focuses his argument primarily on how contemporary philosophical psychology fails to fit within with the virtue ethics tradition. He takes his cue from Anscombe's watershed article "Modern Moral Philosophy,"[2] in which she argues for three main theses: That moral philosophy will be a fruitless endeavor until a philosophy of psychology is well established, that the language of "ought" should be rejected because it is a derivative from a form of ethics that no longer exists, and that all the distinctions in the writers of moral philosophy following Sidgwick are unimportant.[3]

Other writers have developed these initial criticisms of Anscombe, most notably MacIntyre in his *After Virtue.*[4] Robert Adams criticizes the desire-satisfaction theory of Sidgwick in his *Finite and Infinite Goods,*[5] showing some important failures of the theory.[6] Most importantly for this work, a notable weakness in Sidgwick's theory is the shift from what is desired to what would be desired if one's desires were to be aligned with reason and based upon an extensive knowledge of possible outcomes.[7] Not only does this state of affairs create an ethics that cannot help in determining whether an act is good or not, or even the ability to determine what is desirable in any particular case, it also, without extensive qualification, stretches desire-satisfaction theory beyond acceptable bounds. Human desires seem to be perpetually trapped in ignorance, so that

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[2] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1, 1958): 1–19.

[3] Ibid., 1.

[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Third Edition*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[5] Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2002).

[6] Ibid., 84-93.

[7] Ibid., 85-87.

what one desires will never coincide with what one should desire if one were to possess all the requisite knowledge and rationality.[8] If one were to establish a meaningful connection between the nature of one's initial desire and the "proper" desire, this theory of desire-satisfaction would be significantly more plausible.[9]

Brewer's critique touches on the failure to understand human desire within contemporary ethical theory. He, like many who have been provoked into formulating theories of ethics founded on the idea of virtue, attempts to correct for the lack found in the various theories, primarily through the development of a robust moral psychology. Moral psychology, therefore, lies at the heart of his critique, which builds off of three "dogmas" that collectively make up what he terms "the world-making hypothesis."

The first dogma is that desire has an intentional object the content of which can be expressed in a proposition that a state of affairs be the case.[10] The second dogma states that "one has the relevant attitude towards a proposition when one is disposed to act on the world in ways calculated to make the propositions true."[11] The third dogma claims that pairing this understanding of desire with belief, which determines how or whether it is possible to make that state of affairs be the case, will "yield a rationalizing explanation of any action."[12] Brewer contends that this account of desire fails to explain many actions, including most of those on which we place the greatest value. He exposes various weaknesses and failures of the world-making hypothesis to explain actions. For

[8] Ibid., 86.

[9] Brewer offers a corrective to this very problem in what he calls "dialectic activity," which will be explained below.

[10] Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, 16.

[11] Ibid., 16–17.

[12] Ibid., 17.

the purposes of my argument, I focus on those issues that I believe to be the most relevant to the two philosophers under discussion.

The world-making hypothesis forces desire into a form that is fulfilled by a state of affairs that is describable in a proposition. That some desires are fulfilled in this manner is without question: I have a desire that the world would be such that the proposition "Travis has successfully defended his dissertation" be true. In such a case, the explanation of an action is given by reference to a desire and a state of affairs that fulfills it, thus leading to the cessation of that desire. Brewer contends, though, that there are a host of desires that have no clear state of affairs that would fulfill them. One particular type of desire is related to what he calls dialectical activity. Dialectical activity, as he uses the term, is that kind of activity that one begins without a clear idea of its goal, but through the attempt to reach the goal, it becomes clearer, though never perfectly clear, and so never a state of affairs that one could wish to obtain.[13] Brewer gives the example, which is perfectly suited for this study, of philosophical thought:

> Those who throw themselves into the pursuit of philosophy have no choice but to do so without a full understanding of what the activity calls for (that is, what would count as an ideally good mode of engagement in it). There is no other possibility, since a developed sense of what counts as good philosophy (e.g. what counts as a revealing or exciting line of thought, and which ways forward should be avoided as facile or tedious) is itself a high philosophical achievement.[14]

[13] The perpetual lack of perfect clarity as well as the impossibility of fulfilling the desire that motivates dialectical activity bars the possibility of some postmortem state that perhaps confers on humanity a "perfection" that accomplishes such things. With regard to the two philosophers under discussion in this work, Nietzsche emphatically rejects such a notion, and Socrates (and, I believe, Plato) hints that such as state is perhaps not desired. For example, in the *Apology* 40b-41b, Socrates reflects on the nature of death: either a state of cessation of perception or a relocation in which, he says, "I could spend my time testing and examining people there, as I do here" – that is, philosophical (dialectical) activity continues.

[14] Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, 38.

To desire the pursuit of philosophy, or even the engagement with a particular question, with a clear knowledge of the end one is trying to achieve seems to us as improperly narrow and simply not good philosophy. And yet also we may consider the desire to pursue philosophy as constituting a truly deep desire within (many) humans.

In addition to philosophy, and perhaps in close relation to it, Brewer adds the pursuit of virtue as a fundamental desire: "The most comprehensive dialectical activity in which human beings engage is the activity of living a good life."[15] That one begins the pursuit of virtue without a clear knowledge of what one is hoping to gain is not surprising. And, indeed, that one may spend one's entire life in the pursuit of virtue without having grasped the "end" to which one strives is also not surprising. The fullness of the good life, of virtue, appears as something unattainable—it is not a place, or a state of affairs, but a kind of constant activity or striving. Indeed, just like doing good philosophy, the desire to be virtuous does not find consummation in a state of affairs achieved, but rather in the activity of moving toward some vague, but ever clearer, form of virtue. In my view, Brewer believes that virtue is constituted by the pursuit of virtue.[16]

The world-making hypothesis makes nonsense of such pursuits. Insofar as a desire has a state of affairs it is hoping to bring about, the pursuit of some end which becomes better known and yet ever out of reach ends up being a fragmented staccato of myriad desires that have no relation to one another. In terms of the world-making hypothesis, therefore, the pursuit of virtue is a mere illusion of the unity of these varied

[15] Ibid., 49.

[16] As a clearer example of this dialectical "x = the pursuit of x," I would offer friendship. I believe that the best kinds of friendship are those that have a sense of trajectory, of developing toward something. This sense of movement is sensed as a movement toward (greater) friendship, and yet is itself constitutive of the friendship.

efforts. And not only are desires such as the pursuit of virtue and philosophy the kinds of desires that cannot find fulfillment in the proper truth value being assigned to a proposition, they are a richer kind of desire in that they can be fulfilled without ceasing—that is, they value the activity rather than just the end toward which the activity strives. Those desires that are purely instrumental do not allow us to become absorbed in the activity itself. Rather, the desire lives only as long as its state of affairs is kept separate from it—so that we attend constantly to a future state of affairs and not to the activity itself. And upon coming into that state of affairs, the desire disappears in its fulfillment. As Brewer states: "[This form of desire] can picture satisfaction only as the absence of restlessness. But this is the contentment of a sleeper or an oyster, not of a human being who is fully awake to the consummation of his longings."[17] In the terms of the world-making hypothesis, fulfillment of desire is nothing but the utter lack of desire.[18]

Again, this view makes nonsense of our most valued desires, which we believe to be fulfilled within unified dialectical activities. Brewer even claims that these kinds of desires separate human virtue from the virtue of other things. "Things do not go worse for a knife if this potentiality is never 'actualized' in cutting anything. Human beings are entirely different. It is essential to the sort of being we call human that it [that is, the human person] unfolds over time, and not merely in events that compose a series but in activities that compose a life."[19] One does not attain to a virtuous human life through

[17] Ibid., 120.

[18] Cf. *GM* III, 28: "man still prefers to *will nothingness*, than *not* will…" Note: For Nietzsche's works, I use primarily the translations in the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* series. For *Z*, I use Kaufmann's translation in *The Portable Nietzsche*; for *GM*, I use the edition in the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* series; for *PTA*, I use the Gateway edition; for *WP*, I use the edition translated by Kaufmann and Hollingdale.

[19] Ibid., 126.

having some resting potentiality for right action—like the knife—but rather through an extended series of activities that unify into a life.

It seems a reasonable step to claim that our deepest desire is to become what we are—to achieve virtue in the rich sense used by Aristotle. But we can make nothing of this while thinking in terms of the world-making hypothesis. Instead, non-instrumental desires must play an important, even *the* most important, role in one's activities. Surely the idea of a human being all of whose desires are instrumental is conceivable—but such a human would be a kind of aberration, incapable of virtue and always suffering either the pain of unfulfilled desire or the pain of *acedia*.[20] A maturing human person is one whose primary pursuits are directed by desires that are satisfied without cessation in dialectical activities. And, indeed, following Brewer and Aristotle, such a person is the only kind to be truly happy, to achieve *eudaimonia*.

While Brewer gives some attention to Nietzsche and Plato, his primary source is Aristotle. Though seeing some intimations of a philosophy of psychology in Nietzsche that would support a virtue ethics,[21] he criticizes what he sees as the Nietzschean-Homeric view of virtue.[22] Though Brewer grants Plato a bit more weight in his theories, I would argue that he both interprets Plato wrongly in some important ways[23] that would

[20] Schopenhauer grounded his view of the evil of life on this pendulum of longing and the kind of *acedia* of fulfilled desire—both of which, to him, are experiences of suffering.

[21] See Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, 149, where Brewer discusses eternal recurrence. Though he offers criticism of the idea, he suggests that it hints toward a sense of a vision of the good in life.

[22] E.g. Ibid., 270–1.

[23] Compare his interpretation of the *Republic*, and the nature of the virtuous one organizing herself under the control of reason, with my interpretation in the chapters on Plato. See Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, 201.

limit his usefulness for a moral psychology[24] robust enough to support a consistent virtue ethics. On the other hand, it is my contention that both Nietzsche and Plato contain much of what Brewer is pointing toward—namely, a moral psychology that gives a central place to non-instrumental desire, and serve as examples of practices of philosophy that are dialectical in a way that reflects human desire and virtue. Though I will not offer any analysis of Aristotle's philosophical practice, the exemplification of dialectical activity in that of Nietzsche and Plato arguably makes them better candidates for Brewer's program than Aristotle.[25] Despite the apparent clash between Nietzsche and Plato, I will offer interpretations of both that show many parallels and similarities between them. There are obvious and important distinctions between the two thinkers. However, they share a central idea: the explanation of a moral psychology that makes non-instrumental desire central to what it means to be a virtuous and happy human.

Disinterestedness and Understanding Desire

A pervasive view of philosophy emphasizes objectivity and disinterestedness, perhaps confusing this with lack of desire, while others have seen desire as undermining any attempts to ground meaningful knowledge. This dichotomy need not be the case. The *Symposium* presents a view of desire, even the apparently irrational *eros*, as

[24] By "moral psychology" and "philosophy of psychology," two terms that, for the purposes of this study, will be largely interchangeable, I mean a description of the nature of human desire such that can be useful for explaining human happiness and virtue. (It may be that the relationship between human desire and virtue is a negative one, though that will not be the case in Plato and Nietzsche as interpreted in this study.)

[25] There are dialectical notes to Aristotle's works. Consider, for example, the constant return in his works to the beginning, and rising from beginnings of appearance and working his way back. See, e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Hackett Publishing Co., 1999), bk. I. 4, §5, in which he justifies his own approach—discussion of general, acceptable views, back toward clearly reasoned principles. Nevertheless, as will be noted, the irony throughout Plato's dialogues and the similar unwillingness in Nietzsche's writings to take authority (think of Zarathustra's rejection of disciples in *Z* I, "On the Gift-Giving Virtue," 3) and clearly developing-toward-oneself nature offer clearer examples of a practice of philosophy that is dialectical and closely bound to a way of life.

essentially the drive of philosophy. Friedrich Nietzsche in his mature thought arguably reduces all drives to a will to power, including the drive for philosophy. Surely, desire plays a role in the pursuit of knowledge: Plato has Diotima describe *eros* as the desire that drives the philosopher; Nietzsche sees the will to power as that which drives all activity, even the ostensibly "objective" pursuits of scientific inquiry. But this view of *eros* need not undermine knowledge, though it may have a kind of tragic effect on knowledge, and thus also on the practice of philosophy. Again, Plato's *eros* is the child of both resourcefulness and lack, suggesting that philosophy will never acquire that fullness that comes from possessing its object. And Nietzsche's will to power, which comes to be realized and brought to a kind of ongoing fulfillment only through the backdrop of Dionysus, also finds itself undermined by that same principle. Such tragic disappointment tempers the claims of knowledge, but does not destroy its usefulness.

We are, of course, well acquainted with human desire. A kind of aesthetic quality permeates our learning about our own desires—one offers up a theory and we must decide whether it suits our tastes. Whereas one can argue that most theories lose something in such a process, praising instead the sturdiness of "disinterested" knowing, in the case of a theory of desire it is the faculty under discussion that chooses whether the theory is appropriate. That fabled excellence of "disinterestedness" may corrupt attempts to understand the objects of desire. When determining one's desire, a description of the object of desire would surely be recognized by virtue of the stirring of desire. Both Nietzsche and Plato, I argue, value this attentiveness to oneself and the object of desire and, through this attentiveness rather than rational explanation, they work to convince their readers of their view of desire.

Desire plays an obviously central role to Nietzsche's philosophy. Philosophy, as an act of life, arises from the fundamental will to power.[26] While not so obvious throughout his corpus, Plato[27] does not see desire as simply an object of study, but rather as essential to the activity of philosophy. Philosophy may even be called "the art of love."[28] Given the danger of circularity noted above, along with the essential place of desire in the philosophies of Nietzsche and Plato, a theory of desire may serve as a fundamental study for both thinkers. Philosophy is not simply a study begun by desire, but one that is driven by desire. Philosophy is a way of life, a pursuit perhaps of happiness, even an "art of living."[29] We might, therefore, expect to find in the philosophical method of these thinkers the fingerprints of their views of desire. That is, it may be helpful to try to offer a coherent understanding of the methods of these thinkers not only so that we might use this method to interpret specific texts that deal with desire, but so that we might see how the method itself reflects that view of desire. If we offer to our thinkers the honor of coherence, then an understanding of their philosophical methods will enrich and deepen our understanding of desire within their philosophies. More importantly, their practices of philosophy exemplify dialectic activity as described by Brewer, and therefore show the practice of fulfillment of desire without cessation.

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[26] E.g. *BGE* 13.

[27] In this work, I understand Socrates as Plato's character. Throughout the Plato half of the study, I present a theory that allows for a coherence between the dialogues, so that the idea that some dialogues are more "Socratic" and others more "Platonic" is unnecessary. Therefore, in the interest of simplicity, Socrates serves as Plato's character. This does not mean that Plato always agrees with Socrates. Nevertheless, I believe that Plato sets before us his character, Socrates, practicing philosophy in the manner in which Plato would have his readers practice it.

[28] "*ta erotica*" (*Symposium* 177e). For Plato's works, I have used exclusively Plato, *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

[29] Cf. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

Nehamas has noted the relationship between the methods of Nietzsche and Socrates, noting important similarities in their goals that bring about similarities in their methods. Indeed, Socratic irony, which will be discussed in some depth in chapter five, is a kind of understatement[30] that draws out Socrates' interlocutors and Plato's readers in a manner a simple treatise cannot. In the same way, Nehamas argues that "Nietzsche's writing is irreducibly hyperbolic," and that his exaggeration draws his readers into engagement in a manner similar to Socratic irony.[31] The hyperbolic "treatise" (if such a term can be used for Nietzsche's writings) and the understating ironic protagonist in the dialogue serve to accomplish much the same thing, that is, a provocation to engage in dialogue with the philosopher in a personal manner—that is, to take on the practice of philosophy, to become a philosopher. This provocation to become philosophers, rather than (and in opposition to) the setting forth of a series of doctrines, is central to both these philosophers. In turn, the call to do philosophy, as opposed to acquiring a list of correct doctrines that are purportedly the goal of philosophical investigation, arises from a tragic understanding of human nature and the happiness that may be achieved in the continuing fulfillment of the highest desire(s).

Overview and Method

This dissertation divides into two main sections, dealing first with Nietzsche and then with Plato. I have chosen to begin with Nietzsche so that I may set up his critique of morality derived from metaphysics prior to establishing an interpretation of Plato that restores metaphysics and morality while avoiding those aspects of Nietzsche's critique

[30] Though, I will argue, from one perspective it is not an understatement.

[31] Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1987), 21–31.

that are correct. Each of these sections will be divided in two. Each section offers an argument regarding the philosophical method of the two thinkers. I describe Nietzsche's general method in chapter two, and Plato's in chapters five and six. Whereas the content is parallel, discussions regarding the methods of the two thinkers will not use the same approach. Such differences are necessitated by the significant differences between the writings of each. With respect to Nietzsche, I argue for a method that makes sense of the development in his work and attempt to reflect on the majority of his corpus. On the other hand, for Plato I argue for a method based on a rejection of a theory of development in his philosophy as reflected in the now traditional idea of an early, middle, and late Plato. I contend that there is a better method of understanding Platonic philosophy that can show the complementary nature of the aporetic and constructive dialogues. Obviously, dealing with the entirety of the Platonic corpus exceeds the capacity of this work, so I choose to focus primarily on a handful of works pertinent to the comparison with Nietzsche, specifically, the *Meno*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Apology*, and *Phaedo*. After analyzing these texts, I present a perspective on the philosophical practices of both philosophers.

Chapters three and four (Nietzsche) and chapter seven (Plato) build off of their antecedent chapters, focusing in on the nature of desire in each thinker. Chapters three and four use Nietzsche's general philosophical practice as interpreted in chapter two not only to interpret texts that refer to the will to power, but will work to show how the will to power is an integral part of Nietzsche's method, present in various stages of development from his first work to his last. I argue in chapter two that Nietzsche's original ideas of the relationship between Dionysus and Apollo and the role of the tragic

chorus all serve to inform his practice of philosophy—that, in short, he sees the (true) philosopher as the tragic, Dionysian chorus. In chapters three and four, I show how his tragic philosophy develops through the shedding of teleological metaphysics and morals, and how this shedding opens up the possibility for a philosophy of psychology that is close kin to that for which Brewer argues.

Chapter seven focuses on the discussion of *eros* in the *Symposium*. As with the discussion of Nietzsche, the conclusions of chapters five and six will not only inform my interpretation, but will also be shown to be an integral part of the understanding of desire in Plato's work. I argue in chapters five and six for a particular understanding of Socratic irony that makes it integral to his philosophical practice, which should therefore be interpreted tragically. In chapter seven, this interpretation will be shown to arise directly from *eros* as presented in the *Symposium*.

The final chapter offers a summary of the previous chapters to elucidate the comparisons between Nietzsche and Plato, and will suggest lessons that contemporary ethics may learn from a better understanding of these two thinkers. Importantly, these two radically different, even opposed, philosophers find a point of agreement with regard to the nature of desire and the nature of virtue.[32] Nehamas claims that "Socrates and Nietzsche are inextricably joined by their common efforts, but each is inevitably repelled by the direction the other wants life to take as a result of his influence."[33] Scholars have interpreted Nietzsche's view of his own relationship to Plato in significantly different

[32] As will become obvious, this point of agreement was not noticed by Nietzsche, nor perhaps by many historians of philosophy today, for the point of agreement is arrived at only by virtue of a fairly non-traditional interpretation of Plato. That is, the interpretation of Plato with which Nietzsche would likely have been familiar does not allow for a point of agreement.

[33] Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, 27.

ways: Kaufmann suggesting that Nietzsche saw himself as a second Socrates, while thinkers like Dannhauser claim that Nietzsche sees himself as the hero to the villain Socrates.[34] Nehamas, correctly I think, interprets Nietzsche as being between these two approaches. I present Nietzsche and Plato in a manner that shows the similarities between their views on how one should[35] live so as to find happiness, and so I sound similar to Kaufmann. Nevertheless, I believe that significant differences stand between Socrates and Nietzsche, and that the latter's ambivalence toward Socrates and Plato arises partly out of an awareness of these differences, and partly out of a misunderstanding of Plato's project. The central similarity between Nietzsche and Plato is the tragic nature of the richest desires of humanity, which in turn results in their fulfillment being acquired not through a state of affairs obtaining, but in ongoing, dialectic activity. To the establishment of Nietzsche as a tragic philosopher I now turn.

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[34] Such a claim is a little misleading. See Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 269–74, in which Dannhauser suggests that there are a long list of similarities between Socrates/Plato and Nietzsche, in their practice of philosophy as well as their central concern (morality). Nevertheless, he does argue that throughout his career, Nietzsche's "perpetual encounter with Socrates must perpetually turn into a quarrel with him" (272). A portion of my argument in this work is to suggest that Nietzsche made this more of an argument than perhaps it need be.

[35] I am aware that "should" is a loaded term that may not be applicable primarily to Nietzsche. Nevertheless, there is a kind of understanding of what is good (versus "bad," rather than versus "evil," as one may say drawing from *GM* I).

CHAPTER TWO

Nietzsche the "First Tragic Philosopher"

"Hoping is…like steering a ship in a gale…a singularly unsentimental and unromantic affair. It permits no departure from reality, otherwise it becomes illusion and delusion. In Marcel's words 'Hope is a response to tragedy.'"

– Paul W. Pruyser, "Phenomenology and Dynamics of Hoping" [1]

Introduction

In his last book, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche almost prophetically entreated his readers: "*Listen to me! I am the one who I am! Above all, do not mistake me for anyone else!*"[2] Later in *Ecce Homo*, while discussing the writing of his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he claims "the right to understand [him]self as the first *tragic philosopher*."[3] Such a claim points to an essential characteristic of Nietzsche's philosophical practice, namely its tragic character, and, given the autobiographical nature of his philosophy, his self-observations also offer insight into his philosophical psychology: Nietzsche's philosophy mirrored his approach to living, so that to misunderstand his philosophical practice as either the affirmation or simple rejection of a set of doctrines was to misunderstand how a human being came to affirm a life that was essentially tragic. Nietzsche's philosophy is essentially the practice of creating meaning in a life that refuses to offer up its own meaning—he neither lists those things that give life meaning, nor embraces nihilism. His tragic philosophy stands between these two extremes.

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[1] Paul W. Pruyser, "Phenomenology and Dynamics of Hoping," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 3, no. 1 (October 1, 1963): 92.

[2] *EH* Preface, 1.

[3] *EH*, "Books," "The Birth of Tragedy," 3.

The Birth of Tragedy (*BT*), published in 1872, shows us a Nietzsche significantly different than the mature thinker of the late 1880s. Most notably, Schopenhauer's metaphysics and the admiration for Wagner, so dominate within *BT*, become objects of criticism for Nietzsche. In turn, there is also a difference in tone between the academic Nietzsche and the "freelance" philosopher that he became. Nevertheless, Nietzsche held onto some key elements of his first book throughout his life's work. For example, Dionysus appears in *BT* and reappears in his later works,[4] with Nietzsche announcing himself as his disciple. The relationship of Dionysus to Greek tragedy was important to Nietzsche in his early years, the marriage of Apollo and Dionysus serving as the foundational concept of *BT*.[5] The question remains then how the Dionysus of the later works, who appears without Apollo, differs from the Dionysus of *BT*, who reaches his height for Greek culture only through marriage to Apollo. The Dionysus of the 1880s, I will argue, maintains the tragic character, though Nietzsche's understanding of tragedy evolves significantly. That is, the Dionysus who was the patron of the poetic contests and, according to Nietzsche, whose cult was the origin of tragedy, remains central to Nietzsche as a "tragic philosopher." The nature of this development—from a kind of Romantic tragedy to a tragedy without teleological metaphysics—will be discussed in the chapter three. This chapter argues that tragedy remains a central theme to Nietzsche's

[4] E.g. *BGE* 298; *EH*, "Why I am a Destiny," 9.

[5] Throughout the terms Dionysus and Dionysian as well as Apollo and Apollonian will be used interchangeably. That is, Dionysus and Apollo are used not in reference to those particular gods, but in reference to the principles that they represent. I believe that this use is warranted because this is largely what *BT* does—the criticism of that book by Nietzsche's contemporaries being partly due to his transformation of the gods into principles. This criticism is noted below in the section dealing with Wilamowitz' criticism of *BT*.

philosophy.[6] Chapters three and four offer a more detailed discussion of the nature of tragedy as a practice of philosophy and the key to understanding Nietzsche's approach to a philosophical psychology in which one may affirm all of life.[7] From an understanding of the development of tragic philosophy in Nietzsche's thought, the meaning of his self-portrayal as a, or *the*, "tragic philosopher" can be more fully developed not simply as a theoretical concept, but also as a kind of philosophical autobiography of his own formation of a personal tragic philosophy. The practice of tragic philosophy provides a foundation for the discussion in chapter three of Nietzsche's philosophical psychology.

The Self-Criticism *as a Clue to the Relationship between BT and Nietzsche's Later Philosophy*

The development in Nietzsche's philosophy that took place between the writing of *BT* and his later works is evidenced in his 1886 preface for the book, entitled "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" (*ASC*) This self-criticism, though fairly harsh, never negates the idea of the book as a whole.[8] His development notwithstanding, he holds to some key elements of tragedy. Again, in *EH*, he affirms the content of *BT*, though he is still willing to criticize the Wagnerian and Schopenhaurian aspects of it. Indeed, he sees in it a great

[6] Cf. Matthew Rampley, *Nietzsche, Aesthetics and Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999)., 9. I am in agreement with Rampley that "one could read Nietzsche as engaged in the uncompleted project of constantly recasting the ideas at work in *The Birth of Tragedy* in the light of his more general development."

[7] The relationship between Dionysus and tragedy is evident in *BT*, but the nature of the relationship between Dionysus and tragedy changes in Nietzsche's later work. Nevertheless, Dionysus' connection to tragedy remains. The nature of the changed relationship will be discussed below. The necessary relationship between Dionysus, tragedy, and Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

[8] Daniel W. Conway, "Nietzsche's Art of This-Worldly Comfort: Self-Reference and Strategic Self-Parody," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (July 1992): 343–357.. Conway claims, in fact, that the new preface announces that the "book is salvageable" (347).

hope and a profound vision of what he was to become.[9] Nevertheless, though much of the content can be affirmed, his practice of philosophy in 1886 differs significantly from his practice in 1872. Importantly, his view of Dionysus differs as well.[10] This section expands on Nietzsche's claims in the *Self-Criticism*, offering arguments to show the shift from his writing about tragedy philosophically to his practicing tragic philosophy.

The philological and historical merits of *BT* have been a part of the scholarly discussion of the work from the onset. The first scholar to respond to *BT* was Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in his *Zukunftsphilologie* ("Philology of the Future"). In it, Wilamowitz attacked *The Birth of Tragedy* as being a kind of work of art masquerading as serious scholarship.[11] Though apparently writing for a varied audience,[12] Nietzsche obviously wished the book to be accepted as a scholarly work. But precisely what this new scholarship would be is unclear. The problem of extracting archetypes from and then reapplying them to a culture is a dubious exercise. *The Birth of Tragedy* is in large part this very practice. Contemporary scholars echo Wilamowitz' criticism: "[Nietzsche] would like his archetypes, and his book as a whole, to be allowed the imaginative freedom of poetry *and* to be rewarded with the earnest attention accorded to scholarship."[13] Extensive discussion of the criticism is unnecessary for our discussion,

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[9] *EH*, "The Birth of Tragedy," 4.

[10] Cf. Walter A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975)., 129, 152-153. I agree with Kaufmann that there is a difference between the early and later Dionysus, but, as will be discussed below, I do not agree with him on the precise nature of that difference.

[11] M. S. Silk and Joseph Peter Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983)., 96.

[12] Ibid., 94.

[13] Ibid., 190.

but the general nature of the criticism that Nietzsche received is important, and reflective of his *Self-Criticism*.

Nietzsche complains of this kind of attempt to play both sides in his *Criticism*. In retrospect, he sees *BT* as his initial clumsy move in the right direction: an attack on morality through an attempt to replace it with an aesthetic way of being.[14] He laments his hesitant manner thus:

> I now regret very much that I did not yet have the courage (or immodesty?) at that time to permit myself a *language of my very own* for such personal views and acts of daring, labouring instead to express strange and new evaluations in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations, things which fundamentally ran counter to both the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer.[15]

Arguably, Nietzsche did develop this individual language over time. The move through his more positivistic stage in his *Human, All Too Human* (*HA*) to the gospel-like *Zarathustra* and the later works is a kind of establishment of an individual language for these "individual contemplations." In particular, his means of writing becomes less devoted to a broad popular and academic audience, and functions more like the enigmatically subtitled *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "A Book for All and None."[16] *BT* reads like an academic work in many ways, though aesthetic and cultural motives drive it—as both Wilamowitz and the Nietzsche of 1886 noted. As his works progress, the focus of their polemic begins to shift: aphorisms, different forms of irony, extensive *ad hominem*, a psychological-introspective-genealogical method, self-reflection and glorification, and

[14] *ASC*, 5.

[15] *ASC*, 6.

[16] It was noted in the Introduction that his unusual way of writing philosophy serves as a means to call others into the practice of philosophy, as opposed to the treatise form of writing, which serves as a means of passing on doctrines. This will be discussed further in chapter two.

the persistent hyperbole[17]—these constitute the strange form of Nietzsche's later works, a form whose personal nature is perhaps best reflected in both the widely divergent interpretations of Nietzsche and the frustration of those who are looking for a clear argument in his works. No matter, we find that as the years pass, Nietzsche's writings become ever more reflective of his philosophy and personality, and less universally acceptable in academic terms. Such a shift is consistent with a shift from speaking philosophically about tragedy, to becoming one who practices philosophy tragically. Nietzsche, reflecting his "teacher" Schopenhauer, had a strong distaste for academia, and was overjoyed to finally break from it. His style of writing follows suit, flowering into the semi-poetry and energy of his mature works. More specifically, his less academic manner of speaking signals a shift into a philosophy that seeks to undermine Apollonian structures through the expression of an overwhelming Dionysian kind of metaphysics through Apollonian language. In short, this chapter argues that, in his late works, Nietzsche sees the philosopher as the tragic chorus.

Thus, the nature of this individual language is not simply a matter of Nietzsche compiling a personal vocabulary list that one must memorize to understand Nietzsche's arguments, say, in the style of coming to grasp the meanings of *a priori*, relatively *a priori*, and *a posteriori* in Kant. Instead, given that this is an important part of his criticism of *BT*, it reflects the relationship between philosophy and tragedy. Indeed, this "individual language," insofar as it is a manner of speaking of one's experience, can be understood as a means of practicing philosophy that is emphatically not dialectic (as Nietzsche understood the term)—that is, it is not founded on a rational setting forth of

[17] Nehemas, as noted in the Introduction, claims that Nietzsche's writing is "irreducibly hyperbolic." Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1987), 22.

doctrines arrived at through philosophy that one seeks to convince others to hold.[18] In the place of dialectic, Nietzsche offers such things as a piercing introspection, genealogical method, and even self-criticism. In turn, this personal language is not simply the unique language crafted to express his philosophy, but also a means of identifying himself closely with his philosophy in a manner that makes one see Nietzsche—"ecce homo," we might say.[19]

In section 3 of the *Self-Criticism*, Nietzsche describes his writing of *BT* as "stammer[ing] in a strange tongue, with great difficulty and capriciously, almost as if undecided whether to communicate or conceal itself. It ought to have *sung*, this 'new soul', and not talked! What a pity it is that I did not dare to say what I had to say at that time as a poet."[20] Though not technically the "personal language" announced as impossible by Wittgenstein, poetry approaches a kind of individuality in a respect important to Nietzsche: poetry is not subservient to the rules of dialectic reasoning. Consider his claim in "The Problem of Socrates" in which he argues: "Honourable things, like honourable people, do not go around with their reasons in their hand. It is indecent to show all five fingers. Nothing of real value needs to be proved first."[21]

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[18] Consider, for example, his rejection of "dialectics" (as a means of convincing others through rational argument) in *TI* II, 6.

[19] Building on the *Self-Criticism*, Conway argues that Nietzsche's particular approach to philosophy and "yea-saying" to life is found in joining two important ideas in Nietzsche: the need to affirm all of one's life, even the past, and that philosophy is always a reflection of the philosopher who holds it. Thus, the personal language is both philosophical and, in a sense, autobiographical in a manner that both criticizes and embraces. Conway, "Nietzsche's Art of This-Worldly Comfort." In this embracing/critical stance, Nietzsche's philosophy already exhibits important aspects of the tragic, as will be argued below and in chapter two.

[20] *ASC*, 3.

[21] *TI* II, 5.

The dialectical method, according to Nietzsche, exposes reasons, when value should be known, perhaps solely, by (good) taste.[22] For example, consider his claim in *EH*: "Anyone who does not understand the word 'Dionysian' but understands *himself* in the word 'Dionysian' does not need to refute Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer—*he smells the decay*…"[23] It is only those things that smell of decay and weakness that require dialectic as support. And so, "[y]ou choose dialectics only as a last resort…Dialectics is a type of *self-defence* used only by people who do not have any other weapons."[24] Thus, as Nietzsche's philosophy developed, he shrugged off straightforward academic argument. He by no means became a sloppy thinker, but began to develop a writing style that matched his practice of philosophy—a philosophy that takes root in pessimism, but grows strong enough to affirm life.[25] His is a noble philosophy that need not rely on dialectic to try to convince.

Nietzsche suggests that the use of poetry may have been a better conduit for the content of *BT* than his faltering attempts to place that content within the constraints of either philological academics or of Schopenhauerian philosophy. Poetry presents images, most often of a kind of personal experience of the world, rather than arguments. Though acquiring the mastery of, say, Kant's vocabulary is necessary to understand his claims,

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[22] Of course, coming to the point of having good taste requires more than simply pursuing what one at first finds pleasing, or appears to find pleasing. Merciless attentiveness to one's experience and one's actions within those experiences is at least part of what is required to acquire good taste.

[23] *EH* III, "The Birth of Tragedy," 2. Perhaps related as well is his criticism of his critiques in "Books," 1 in which he claims: "You will not have an ear for something until experience has given you some headway into it." This latter suggests that one's taste is not something that is simply disconnected from any support, but has roots in experience.

[24] *TI* II, 6.

[25] Cf. the rhetorical questions in *ASC,* 1: "Is there a pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual preference for the hard, gruesome, malevolent and problematic aspects of existence which comes from a feeling of well-being, from overflowing health, from an *abundance* of existence?"

one may argue with those claims for the vocabulary is not truly individual. Poetry, though, is unrelated to argument. One comes to comprehend the writings of a particular poet by becoming acquainted with his/her writings, and so in a way acquainted with the poet him/herself. This acquaintance allows one to see the images more clearly, and to "taste" whether they are good or bad. For a dialectical thinker, Nietzsche's entreaties need not be read well,[26] nor would it be a detriment to confuse Nietzsche with someone else. For, ultimately, it is the argument that matters, and the argument insofar as it is placed within the limits of rational discussion is translatable into all experiences and language. But poetic images do more (or less, perhaps) than an argument, and if one approaches the poetry using standards of rational argumentation, much of the meaning will be lost.

Nietzsche wrote some poems of varying excellence,[27] but clearly not all of his work was poetry. Nevertheless, the chasm between his kind of philosophical writing and that of what we might call "professional philosophers" is vast. Such a distinction is obvious by simply comparing Nietzsche's writings with any of his contemporaries. His discussion of the mixed reception of his books suggests that scholars had difficulty understanding, or concerning themselves with, what Nietzsche was doing, likely for this

[26] Not in the sense that Nietzsche uses the idea of reading well. He complains in the Preface to *GM* that the practice of reading well has been "unlearnt": "Admittedly, to practice reading as an *art* in this way requires one thing above all, and it is something which today more than ever has been thoroughly unlearnt – a fact which explains why it will be some time before my writings are 'readable' – it is something for which one must be practically bovine and certainly *not* a 'modern man': that is to say, *rumination*…" And, again, *GS* V, 383: "…I…am still willing to remind my readers of the virtues of reading in the right way – oh, what forgotten and unknown virtues!"

[27] E.g. *GS*, "'Joke, Cunning, and Revenge' Prelude in German Rhymes" and the "Songs of Prince Vogelfrei."

very reason. He even notes one reviewer who praised the style of *Zarathustra* highly, but seemed to believe the content was not intended to be important.[28]

Poetry is not the only form of a language that is external to dialectics. Nietzsche writes of a hypothetical book that speaks of "events lying completely outside the possibility of common, or even uncommon, experience,—where it is the *first* language of a new range of experiences."[29] He claims that in such a case nothing would be heard, and so the "listeners" would conclude that nothing was there. He believed that those who read his books experienced this deafness. With regard to his first book, though, he seems to admit that the fault lay with him. The book failed in large part because it attempted to present "new wine in old wine skins," a tragic philosophy within the strictures of 19th century philosophy.

Nietzsche looks back on his first book and exclaims that he "should have *sung*" or spoken as a poet. Considering the book to which this new preface is attached is about poetry, specifically how tragedy arose from the "spirit of music," this claim should not be taken lightly. The central claim in *The Birth of Tragedy* includes the description of the formation of Greek tragedy out of the Dionysian chorus. That the same Nietzsche who writes that he "should have *sung*" has declared himself a disciple of Dionysus is important for an understanding of his philosophical practice. The argument of this chapter is that Nietzsche's development is largely a long work to practice philosophy in a manner that accords with a tragic view of life. In short: while Nietzsche began his career describing tragedy as developing out of the Dionysian chorus, he finishes his career

[28] *EH*, "Books," 1.

[29] *EH*, "Books," 1. See also *BGE* IX, 268 in which Nietzsche explains the connection between language and experience. It is not unimportant that language can also deceive, as noted for example in *TI* III, 5. If this is the case, then insisting upon the common scholarly dialectic form is an invitation to error.

taking on the role of the Dionysian chorus. And one of the central characteristics, if not *the* central characteristic of this tragic philosophy, is the individual language developed out of a rich phenomenology. The criticism of *BT* suggests that Nietzsche was already moving in this direction—attempting to present a view of tragedy that was capable of coming into contact in a meaningful way with German culture so as to lead to a kind of reformation. A year before the publishing of *BT*, Nietzsche wrote: "Scholarship, art and philosophy are now growing together inside me so much that I'll be giving birth to centaurs one day."[30] Such a claim is prophetic, and, as will be argued in chapter three, this tragic mix of modes will enable him to form a life-affirming practice of tragic philosophy.

The Dionysus of The Birth of Tragedy

The Birth of Tragedy (*BT*) is an account of the origin of Greek tragedy. I intend this study as largely an attempt to understand Nietzsche's development in the way he would have understood himself from the perspective of his later works. Nevertheless, in interpreting *BT*, I work to give an exposition that Nietzsche of 1872 would find acceptable. This exposition allows for greater clarity on the nature of his development from doing a philosophy of tragedy to the practice of tragic philosophy.

BT grounds the richness of Greek poetry, and the civilization as a whole, in the tension and moments of resolution between Apollo and Dionysus, Greek gods that Nietzsche leverages to describe opposing drives that, together, form tragedy. He begins speaking of them thus:

> [The Greeks'] two deities of art, Apollo and Dionysos, provide the starting-point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous

[30] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 188.

> opposition, both in origin and goals….These two very different drives (*Triebe*) exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking (*reizen*) one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring.[31]

Nietzsche adds content to these two gods by connecting each with a particular form of art. Apollo is the god of dreams and the plastic arts: "Every human being is fully an artist when creating the worlds of dream, and the lovely semblance of dream is the precondition of all the arts of image-making."[32] The link between the ordered images of the plastic arts and the fleeting nature of the dream is important for Nietzsche. The ordered belong to the world of phenomena and serve as the "sublimest expression" of the Schopenhauerian *principium individuationis*.[33]

The plastic arts are those in which one can perceive the structure and order, this too is the world of phenomena in Schopenhauer's philosophy. And, in turn, they are formed much the same way and are both just as dream-like. Their dream-likeness is due to their being formed from the individual's will as well as their failure to reflect the way things really are. The *principium individuationis*, in a significant modification of Kant's view of the phenomena-forming faculties, is that which gives order to the world. But metaphysical reality is disorderly, insofar as individuation is necessary for a sense of order. The sense of this sublime reality in relation to the ordered world is imaged thus:

> Just as the boatman sits in his small boat, trusting his frail craft in a stormy sea that is boundless in every direction, rising and falling with the howling, mountainous waves, so in the midst of a world full of suffering and misery the

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[31] *BT* 1.

[32] *BT* 1. The rest of the sentence is thus: "including, as we shall see, an important half of poetry." That the poetic Nietzsche who labels himself a disciple of Dionysus has not forsaken Apollo is perhaps foreshadowed here. That Apollo remains present in the Dionysus of the mature Nietzsche will be argued more fully below.

[33] *BT* 1.

> individual man calmly sits, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*.[34]

Underneath and opposed to the Apollonian images stands the Dionysian. Dionysus is the god of drunkenness and the music of that most intoxicating of instruments, the flute. He represents that disconcerting reality that from time to time peaks out from behind the Apollonian images—a reality that stirs up both awe and ecstasy in the one who beholds it. The sublime represents this substratum of reality, the manifestation of that rolling ocean beyond the limits of one's ordered, but frail and tiny, boat. In the Dionysian we see an unraveling of the order of the Apollonian, specifically in drunkenness and the ecstatic dance in which not only the social order but also the self-consciousness on which it is formed fade.[35] Nietzsche describes it thus:

> Now, hearing this gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn apart, so that mere shreds of it flutter before the mysterious primordial unity.[36]

It is this Dionysian ecstasy, Nietzsche claims, that gives rise to Greek tragedy, embodied in the religious chorus whose participants envisioned themselves as satyrs who in turn beheld visions of their god. The vision of Dionysus is an Apollonian imaging. Nietzsche explains: "This insight leads us to understand Greek tragedy as a Dionysian chorus which discharges itself over and over again in an Apolline world of images."[37]

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[34] *BT* 1.

[35] *BT* 1.

[36] *BT* 1.

[37] *BT* 8.

Aristotle in his *Poetics* claims that the Dionysian dithyramb served as the root of tragedy[38] as is further suggested by the name of the theatre and the central place Dionysus played in the Greek mindset regarding tragedy. Notably, we find Dionysus appearing to judge between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and a kind of image of Dionysus appearing in the *Symposium* to judge between the tragedian Agathon and Socrates.[39] Nietzsche, though, moves this claim further. The chorus is not simply a device to protect the poetic nature of tragedy, but is rather that which gives birth to tragedy. Specifically, the activity that takes place on the stage is the Apollonian envisioning of the god whom the chorus worships, Dionysus.[40] If this is the case, then we should see within the tragic hero a unity of Apollonian beauty with the intoxicating chaotic Dionysian. Thus, some highly valued characteristics—anything from physical beauty to moral uprightness and nobility—will come to clash against the nature of the world. This clash modifies those values, but not necessarily through reducing their value.

Nietzsche saw in Greek tragedy a metaphysical picture that reflects important elements of the thought of Schopenhauer—an Apollonian world of ordered images (beauty, nobility, law, etc.), and a deeper metaphysical world lacking the structure of phenomenal reality, specifically individuality and those ordered images.[41] The heroes and that which makes them noble exhibit the Apollonian, the ordered and beautiful images. The world that brings the noble heroes to tragedy exhibits the Dionysian, the

[38] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449a.

[39] The reference is, of course, to Alcibiades, who enters the *Symposium* crowned in ivy and drunk, with the initial purpose of crowning Agathon for his victory in the tragic contest.

[40] *BT* 8.

[41] Nuno Nabais and Martin Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 10.

disordered and uncontrollable metaphysical substratum. And so, Nietzsche argues, the Apollonian and Dionysian principles came to a kind of resolution in Greek tragedy. The Apollonian is exhibited in the actors, the story, and the ennobling struggle of the characters toward their particular purposes. The Dionysian is exhibited in the musical surrounding of the story—meaning not only the choral foundation but also the manner in which the basic order gives way to that which defies that order.

Tragedy comes in many guises and situations. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* the noble Oedipus flees the terrible prophecy, hoping to keep his hand from fulfilling the evil. In turn, though, he nobly pursues the murderer of the king as well as self-knowledge—two apparently different, but in reality identical, pursuits. In the end, he finds himself to have fulfilled the prophecy precisely by fleeing it, and to have brought great suffering on the people he had previously saved. Oedipus acts nobly, and we see him as such. Nevertheless, his noble actions are unable to bring about a world of order. In fact, his nobility would perhaps be less evident if the world had ordered itself in accordance with his wishes.[42]

Another face of the tragic appears in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* in which Agamemnon is faced with a devastating choice between two evils. He is commanded by Zeus to attack Troy and yet faces Artemis' anger (apparently) at the expedition. To be able to sail forth, he must appease the ire of Artemis through the sacrifice of his daughter.

[42] There is clearly much more to the nature of this tragedy than has been said here. Saxonhouse offers a convincing interpretation relating the knowledge of Oedipus and the belief he had that this knowledge gave him freedom from the constraints of the unreasonable world. The tragic aspect being in his discovery that he had been, in an important sense, enslaved to those very things he believed himself to have escaped. See: Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "The Tyranny of Reason in the World of the Polis," *The American Political Science Review* 82, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 1261–1275. This interpretation fits well with Nietzsche's understanding of the tragic, particularly insofar as he sets tragedy up against Socratic dialectic.

The chorus, though having set up this dilemma as true and a matter of necessity, casts a kind of blame upon the king.

Martha Nussbaum discusses the dilemma of Agamemnon and offers the suggestion that the blame from the chorus arose out of his becoming a "collaborator, a willing victim" to the forces of necessity.[43] That is, while prior to making the decision to sacrifice his daughter, Agamemnon struggled because he saw no way to avoid evil in either choice. But when he had made the decision, the sense of being unable to escape the evil diminishes, and he takes on an attitude too comfortable with having made the best choice.[44] Agamemnon's failure may be understood as the belief that having made the best decision, all would now fall into proper order and turn out well. In a matter of a few lines, the decision moves from being "between woe and woe" to "it is right and holy…that I should desire with exceedingly impassioned passion…the sacrifice….May all turn out well."[45] If nothing else, we can claim that Agamemnon had lost a certain respect for the impossibility of the situation to turn out truly well. Even a "right and holy" will fails to accomplish the good it seeks. The chorus therefore finds Agamemnon guilty for taking comfort in the image of the goodness of his decision. The image of order and goodness is a thin veil over the unreasonable reality that lies under and undoes all of one's best attempts at making sense of the world.

These two examples give a taste of the Dionysian force—the nature of reality which refuses to submit to the order and value we perceive or create. Yet, Dionysus did

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[43] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35.

[44] Ibid., 35–6.

[45] Nussbaum's translation, in Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 35.

not stand for disaster itself, but rather for a kind of richness of being—that enormous, undefined substratum that gives to us unlimited possibilities for ways of approaching life. Because of this, Dionysus could not manifest wholly in any particular form of ordered life of (at least) civilized humanity. The tragedies were accompanied by satyr plays; Dionysus was also present in the comedies of Aristophanes. Perhaps Socrates' claim that a good tragic poet should also be a writer of comedy[46] is an affirmation of the Dionysian influence of both.

Both comedy and tragedy find their ground in the inexhaustible richness of being. Just as the spirit of music can never be explained through language,[47] so also does the Dionysian brightness outshine civilization.[48] Again, the influence of Schopenhauer's metaphysics comes through in the language-defying nature Dionysian: The individual will supports language, while the Dionysian music speaks out of "the heart of the world," a heart inexhaustible by any number of phenomena.[49]

As Kaufmann notes,[50] *BT* is not a book that simply glorifies the Dionysian at the expense of the Apollonian. Rather, the book describes and calls for a return to, an art form that is capable of expressing the awesome richness of life without overwhelming those who behold it by directing the depth into the suffering of the noble hero. This

[46] *Symposium* 223d.

[47] *BT* 6.

[48] *BT* 7.

[49] *BT* 21.

[50] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 129.

"bond of brotherhood between the two deities"[51] is at the core of *BT*. In turn, I argue, this union is close to the heart of even Nietzsche's mature philosophical practice.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche clearly emphasizes the Dionysian as both the metaphysical ground and driving force behind tragedy. And yet the Dionysian ground does not toss the Apollonian forms aside and stand alone. To expand the above quotation:

> Thus the difficult relationship of the Apolline and the Dionysiac in tragedy truly could be symbolized by a bond of brotherhood between the two deities: Dionysos speaks the language of Apollo, but finally it is Apollo who speaks that of Dionysos. At which point the supreme goal of tragedy, and indeed of all art, is attained.[52]

The "supreme goal of tragedy, and indeed of all art" seems bound up with what Kaufmann claims is "Nietzsche's greatest and most persistent problem," that is, the overcoming of nihilism.[53] That nihilism, or at least the overcoming of a fragmentation between life and the scholarly work might fulfill it, was important to Nietzsche during the writing of *BT* is suggested by (among other things) a letter written to his friend Paul Deussen: "I observe how my philosophical, moral and scholarly endeavours strive towards a single goal and that I may perhaps become the first philologist ever to achieve wholeness."[54] If this is the case, then nihilism may be expressed in two ways, relating to the Dionysian and Apollonian realms.

The first form of nihilism arises from grasping too tightly to the Apollonian. To repeat a quotation from Schopenhauer that hints toward the latter form of nihilism:

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[51] *BT* 21.

[52] *BT* 21.

[53] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche,* 101.

[54] Quoted in Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 38.

> Just as the boatman sits in his small boat, trusting his frail craft in a stormy sea that is boundless in every direction, rising and falling with the howling, mountainous waves, so in the midst of a world full of suffering and misery the individual man calmly sits, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*.[55]

The trust in the realm of the Apollonian as a support, not realizing the manner in which that support sits upon the chaotic seas, leads to nihilism. The cries of Nietzsche's madman serve as a clear explanation of the nihilism that arises when one has founded meaning upon an Apollonian order, only to find that order unacceptable:

> '*Where is God?*' he cried; 'I'll tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I!....Where are we moving to? Away from all suns?...Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as through an infinite nothing?'[56]

Of course, the tragic holds this loss of faith in the Apollonian order in a manner that does not drive one to nihilism. Just as Socrates in the *Phaedo* warns his interlocutors of the danger of becoming misologues out of undue trust in failed arguments,[57] so undue trust in an Apollonian metaphysics sets one up for nihilism. If the particular order in which one believes is held as a necessary condition for a meaningful existence, then the undoing of that order by a manifestation of the Dionysian reduces one to nihilism. Meaning is derived from our and the world's response to value. If I hold firmly to a particular set of values in response to which the world should act, and the world fails to do so, I will lose my grip on those values. Insofar as I believed that those were the only plausible values—that is, if I had gripped them tightly—I will lose belief in any value at all and will become a nihilist.

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[55] *BT* 1.

[56] *GS* III, 125.

[57] *Phaedo* 89d-e.

In *BT*, Nietzsche is not suggesting a chaos of existence. Rather, the ordered Apollonian images makes the bearing of the disordered Dionysian substratum possible. Schopenhauer is still exerting significant influence on Nietzsche's thinking at this point, and so we see a Schopenhauerian metaphysics in the Dionysian. Schopenhauer explains the experience of the sublime, which is the experience of the Dionysian, thus:

> Then in the unmoved beholder of this scene the twofold nature of his consciousness reaches the highest distinctness. Simultaneously, he feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can annihilate, helpless against powerful nature, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in face of stupendous forces; and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object is the supporter of this whole world.[58]

This Schopenhauerian perspective echoes throughout *BT* as the tragic experience. But Nietzsche, as he notes in the *Self-Criticism*, had already broken with some of Schopenhauer's ideas. Nietzsche's metaphysics is similar, but there is a different exhortative direction in *BT*. While Schopenhauer offered art as a means of weakening the will to life that upholds the phenomenal world, Nietzsche sees in art a means to "make existence at all worth living at every moment"[59] and that this arises from "the metaphysical solace that eternal life flows on indestructibly beneath the turmoil of appearances."[60] There is already in *BT* more of a sense of "yea-saying" to life than we see in Schopenhauer. Kaufmann's assertion that Apollo is not the defeated god in *BT* suggests that Nietzsche was not espousing a Schopenhauerian pessimism, but something more akin to the "pessimism of strength" that he saw in the Greeks: a pessimism that

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[58] Quoted in Bart Vandenabeele, "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Aesthetically Sublime," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37, no. 1 (April 1, 2003): 90–106., 97. Compare Nietzsche's claim that in experiencing Dionysian art we "are really for brief moments Primordial Being itself…" (*BT* 17, 69)

[59] *BT* 25.

[60] *BT* 18.

does not seek the cessation of the world of phenomena, but finds in the metaphysical comfort of the Dionysian the power to welcome the hardships of life.[61]

While an undue, and therefore brittle, attachment to some Apollonian order of the world can lead to nihilism, there is also the form of nihilism that arises from the unmitigated awareness of the Dionysian—the boatman in the boundless sea who has lost his boat will lose any sense of direction, hope, or value. Nietzsche was not unaware of this problem. Kaufmann's emphasis on the importance of the Apollonian in *BT* relates to the importance for Nietzsche of the Greeks' indomitable spirit. Apollo became a vessel that would communicate the Dionysian metaphysic, but did so in a manner that allowed this communication to bring about healing: "What can be beyond the healing magic power of Apollo, if it can even deceive us into believing that the Dionysiac could really be a servant of the Apolline…?"[62] When one holds the Apollonian as if it is opposed to the Dionysian, one is likely to lose one's grip. When one holds the Apollonian with a distinct awareness of the Dionysian, one will find the latter to serve almost as a support for those values.

Invoking the "wisdom of Silenus," that companion and teacher of Dionysus, given to King Midas that for a human non-existence is best of all, and to die soon second-best, Nietzsche claims that the "Greeks knew and felt the terrors of existence; in order to

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[61] Cf. *ASC*, 1.

[62] *BT* 21. In some ways, this statement of the Dionysian serving the Apollonian is a significant foreshadowing of Nietzsche's later philosophy—for the Dionysian richness of being allows for almost unlimited creativity through disappointment (as defined in chapter two) and the resulting awareness of being an individual. Kaufmann's emphasis of the Apollonian, perhaps at the expense of the Dionysian, may be reflected in his understanding of Nietzsche's mature ideas of creativity over against nihilism. Nevertheless, this service of the Dionysian to the Apollonian is illusory. To miss this point is to lose the power of creativity that the Dionysian offers in its constant breaking-down of Apollonian structures. That is, it is appropriate to see the Dionysian serving the Apollonian for a time. Dionysus, though, will shatter this illusion. And that the Apollonian is under the authority of the Dionysian is necessary for the Dionysian to benefit the Apollonian.

live at all they had to place in front of these things the resplendent, dream-born figures of the Olympians."[63] The Olympian world found itself expressed in the art of the Greeks, which "approaches as a saving sorceress with the power to heal. Art alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live."[64] Without art, one is "in danger of longing to deny the will as the Buddhist does. Art saves him, and through art life saves him – for itself."[65]

These two forms of nihilism are more accurately described as means of becoming nihilists, for their ends are essentially the same. Embracing either Apollo or Dionysus to the detriment of the other will lead to a life without value or order. But art offers a balance between, or marriage of, these two principles, both in the form of tragedy and comedy. Importantly, Nietzsche's nascent attempts to overcome these nihilistic attitudes in *BT* shows already his drawing away from Schopenhauer's Buddhistic "longing to deny the will," hinting toward his later emphasis on yea-saying.[66]

This artistic mode of life grounded in the marriage of the Apollonian and Dionysian contrasts with the scientific optimism of Socrates. Socrates' optimism, one might argue, arises from the belief that knowledge can lead to happiness because the

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[63] *BT* 3.

[64] *BT* 7.

[65] *BT* 7.

[66] Though Schopenhauer's philosophy plays a significant role in *BT*, there are hints that even here Nietzsche is not a simple Schopenhauerian. Clearly, his metaphysics is essentially that of Schopenhauer, but art does not serve quite the same role for Nietzsche as for Schopenhauer. For example, one does not see in *BT* the ascetic denial of the will-to-live that was so important for Schopenhauer. There are passages that could be seen as suggestive of Schopenhauer's asceticism, for example Nietzsche's claim that the chorus sees its god acting, and so itself does not act. But obviously the chorus is only a part, though important, of the tragedy. The impact of the tragedy is on the spectators, who are not driven to passivity, as noted in the quotation above. More directly, Nietzsche's rejection of Buddhism, as discussed above regarding nihilism, and as the Greeks as standing between Rome and (Buddhist) India.

world is ordered in such a manner that acting wisely makes one happy. The tragedy of *BT*, on the other hand, is grounded in Dionysiac pessimism, but value in life is found in the Apollonian order. And so the contest is not between the Apollonian Socrates and the Dionysian tragedians. Tragedy is rather the balance, while Socrates, in rejecting the Dionysian, fails to even hold onto Apollo.

Euripides, the mask for the divine Socrates,[67] offers "aesthetic Socratism." Nietzsche, sharing Aristophanes' distaste for Socrates and the tragedies of Euripides, explains this in terms of the "theoretical man." Aesthetic Socratism claims: "Everything must be conscious in order to be beautiful."[68] Euripides made everything conscious. The extensive prologues, given by one who is obviously trustworthy, explain everything. All that is left is the agitation of *pathos*. In short, Euripides sought "to expel the original and all-powerful Dionysiac element from tragedy and to re-build tragedy in a new and pure form on the foundations of a non-Dionysiac art, morality, and view of the world."[69]

The attempt to drive Dionysus from the stage by giving clear form and order to the tragedy led to Euripides' inability to bring his tragedy even to the heights of the Apollonian. Euripides, in rejecting Aeschylean tragedy, lost the *epos* of Homer. In place of these two, one is given stimulants that belong to neither Apollo nor Dionysus: "cool, paradoxical *thoughts* – in place of Apolline visions – and fiery *affects* – in place of Dionysiac ecstasies – and, what is more, thoughts and affects most realistically imitated, not ones which have been dipped in the ether of art."[70]

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[67] *BT* 12.

[68] *BT* 12.

[69] *BT* 12.

[70] *BT* 12. It is perhaps necessary to note at this point, though it is obvious in Nietzsche's later

These pseudo-artistic stimulants replace the Dionysian metaphysical nature of tragedy with clarified phenomena. Nietzsche explains: "Here too we may observe the victory of the phenomenal over the universal…already we are breathing the air of a theoretical world where scientific understanding is more highly prized than the artistic reflection of a universal rule."[71] These phenomena stir up *pathos*, but through intelligibility.[72] It is this intelligible world that Socrates, in his scientific optimism, seeks to know and offer as a cure for the suffering of existence.[73]

Socrates declares his wisdom-testing mission as being originated by Apollo,[74] composed poetry in honor of him in his last days,[75] and is seen by Nietzsche as being a kind of deformed Apollonian. Just as Euripides, in pushing Dionysus away also lost hold of Apollo, so Nietzsche describes the spirit of Socrates in negative terms: anti-Dionysian.

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criticism of metaphysics, that troubles can be presented in stories that are insoluble in "this life" as long as their solubility is pointed to in another, more "reasonable," realm. And so, Socratic optimism may withstand even the conviction of death, for eternal life awaits the philosopher that repays his suffering with happiness, as is suggested in the *Phaedo*.

[71] *BT* 17.

[72] We already see here an important point that Nietzsche will make later, summed up perhaps in *BGE* IV, 72: "It is not the strength, but the duration of high feelings that make for high men." That Euripides' plays are this intelligible stirs up a powerful *pathos*, but their very intelligibility reduces that aspect of them that allows that *pathos* to be maintained. A contemporary example may be offered in popular music. A song that is rich musically may be ruined once lyrics are attached to it that are too intelligible. Thus, the music may relate to a variety of experiences, but the moment lyrics require that song to be understood in terms of some specific, concrete historical event, the song can lose some of its elasticity, even while gaining (for those with the required empathy) more immediate emotional power. This problem lies, I believe, at the heart of Nietzsche's distaste for tone-painting. The same can be done with a story—the more focused it is, the less it is able to stir up a broad and rich emotion toward life. As Nietzsche states, regarding Euripides' poor taste: "[A]s long as the listener has to work out what this or that person signifies, what the preconditions are for this or that conflict of inclinations and intentions, it is not yet possible for him to immerse himself completely in the suffering and activity of the main characters, or to share breathlessly in their fears and sufferings" (*BT* 12). It is in working to understand that one is forced to grapple with the sights, sounds, events, choices, and in so doing comes to a view of the world that incorporates the *pathos* of the story.

[73] *BT* 13.

[74] *Apology* 21a-b and ff.

[75] *Phaedo* 61a-b.

Scientific optimism offers to us an Apollonian metaphysics, which is, according to Nietzsche, destined for disaster. This optimism seeks to make all intelligible, and derives from the phenomena the universals. Socrates, "a true monstrosity *per defectum*," rejects the creative force of the instinct, assigning it the task of critic. And in its place, consciousness becomes the creator.[76]

Perhaps Nietzsche was thinking of his favorite Plato text, the *Symposium*, here.[77] In her Socratic discussion with Socrates, Diotima teaches him that *Eros* seeks to give birth in the beautiful.[78] Those "pregnant in soul" acquire the immortality offered in reproduction by giving birth to wisdom, the superlative of which is moderation and justice.[79] Shortly after, "Diotima's Ladder" is described, which leads to (the form of) Beauty.[80] The "only way that Beauty can be seen" is through reason,[81] not the instincts or muses of poets. And from the vision of Beauty, one gives birth to virtue through reason.

The philosopher, in the *Symposium*, emerges as the true *erotic*. Socrates embodies philosophy, rejecting tragedy for what can be grasped intelligibly. If we are to believe Diotima, "everything must be conscious in order to be beautiful."[82] The Dionysian cannot be made conscious, being apart from the *principium individuationis*. If we are to take Euripides as being akin to Socrates, then we see in Socrates an anti-

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[76] *BT* 13.

[77] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 393, fn. 3.

[78] *Symposium* 206e.

[79] *Symposium* 209a-b.

[80] *Symposium* 210b-212b.

[81] *Symposium* 212a. In my interpretation of the *Symposium* in chapters four and five, I argue that this is not what Plato would have us take from Diotima's talk of the "only way that Beauty can be seen." Nevertheless, I believe that Nietzsche saw this as Plato's idea.

[82] *BT* 12.

Dionysian spirit masquerading as an Apollonian. Optimistic scientism eventually leads to the nihilism announced later by Nietzsche's madman—a rejection of a ground of valuation, while attempting to maintain a brittle hold on values.

It is not the Apollonian against which Nietzsche exhorts us, but rather this bloated, pseudo-Apollonian spirit, scientific optimism. *BT* is not, therefore, a praise of Dionysus alone, but an attempt to bring back the proper balance between the two. Nietzsche's emphasis on the Dionysian arises for perhaps two reasons. The first is that Dionysus represents the metaphysical realm. Nevertheless, as argued above, Nietzsche does not encourage us into a despairing nihilism. The Apollonian is essential. The second reason for the Dionysian emphasis arises from the familiarity of modernity with its pseudo-Apollo. Apollo need not be given as much space, for in coming to know Dionysus, all those aspects that one once falsely attributed to Apollo would right themselves. One need simply get the proper context.

The Dionysian in *BT* is clearly just one of the art impulses. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's use of the Dionysian corrects an overly (pseudo-)Apollonian culture. In turn, given that Dionysus represents the metaphysical realm, art ultimately comes back to the god of wine. As Nietzsche says, "Dionysos speaks the language of Apollo, but finally it is Apollo who speaks that of Dionysos. At which point the supreme goal of tragedy, and indeed of all art, is attained."[83] Though Dionysus is the originator and goal of tragedy, this end cannot be achieved without Apollo. We might say that for one to know Dionysus without being overwhelmed, one must employ Apollo as ambassador. Or, put another way, in order to speak in a meaningful way about Dionysus, one must employ Apollo as the translator. Thus, while Dionsysus represents the disordered and unitary

[83] *BT* 21.

metaphysical, the Apollonian plays two important and related roles. The latter translates the Dionysian and, through that translation, allows us to create a kind of value. In terms of tragedy, the hero represents Dionysus in Apollonian form, and thus we are able to value that hero and her/his activities even in the midst of the Dionysian ground that undoes the benefits of even the noblest of acts.

The Philosopher as Dionysian Chorus

I have argued that Nietzsche sees the relationship between Dionysus and Apollo as essential for art and tragedy. It would seem reasonable to see this relationship as reflected in Nietzsche's later references to Dionysus, especially in light of his self-designation as the first tragic philosopher. Kaufmann claims rightly that the later Dionysus is actually "synthesis of the two forces represented by Dionysus and Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy*."[84] This synthesis is precisely the expression of the followers of Dionysus when they create tragedy. Consequently, I will argue in this section that Nietzsche picked up the role of the chorus of Dionysus, and perceived this as the essence of good[85] philosophical practice.

Nietzsche's descriptions of the Dionysian chorus explain the importance of Apollo for tragedy. The chorus is "the symbol of the entire mass of those affected by Dionysian excitement."[86] And further:

> In this enchanted state the Dionysiac enthusiast sees himself as a satyr, and *as a satyr he in turn sees the god*, i.e. in his transformed state he sees a new vision

[84] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 129.

[85] For our purposes, I understand "good" to refer to real philosophy, as opposed to simple academic laboring. Nietzsche insists that "people finally stop mistaking philosophical laborers and scientific men in general [e.g. Kant and Hegel] for philosophers" (*BGE* VI, 211).

[86] *BT* 8.

> outside himself which is the Apolline perfection of his state. With this new vision the drama is complete.[87]

The tragic hero is therefore the god Dionysus presented in an Apollonian image so that all may behold what the chorus has seen in its ecstasies. And whereas one may see various heroes in their noble deeds and noble sufferings, the "chorus sees in its vision its lord and master Dionysos…it sees how the god suffers and is glorified."[88]

Thus, the chorus through tragedy offers an image of Dionysus in Apollonian guise. This Apollonian imaging does not make the chorus a collection of worshippers of both gods, but rather a group of worshippers seeking to make perceptive their vision of Dionysus. Put in philosophical terms, it is the offering up of an incommunicable and overwhelming metaphysics[89] in the images required for communication.

With this understanding of tragedy in mind, it may be necessary to nuance Kaufmann's claim, or at least to emphasize the elements necessary for this discussion.[90] To explain, the later Dionysus is not simply a mixture of the two gods, but Dionysus expressed in Apollo's terms.[91] Nietzsche's works function in many ways like a tragedy.

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[87] *BT* 8.

[88] *BT* 8. The theme of suffering and glorification may be reflected in disappointment, as it will be described in chapter two.

[89] It is understood that the term "metaphysics" when speaking of the later Nietzsche's thought can only be used with some heavy qualification. Insofar as metaphysics is understood as "that which is," Nietzsche's "metaphysics" could be understood as an understanding of "what is" that is not universally definable, or, more particularly, an understanding of "what is" without a *telos* to give it a sense of direction or fulfillment, and therefore a clear definition. His approach to metaphysics will be discussed in chapter two.

[90] Kaufmann's concern may be significantly broader than that offered here. It is not my contention that Kaufmann is necessarily wrong, as I believe his claim is not inconsistent with that presented here.

[91] Though this claim is fairly strong, I believe it is supported in the later works. Note the last section of the 1887 addition to *The Gay Science* (V, 383), in which the words frustrate "the spirits of [Nietzsche's] book"—for these words constitute "raven-black music…bog-cries, voices from the crypt" and so forth. They demand that he sing a "morning song" that does not drive away the *Grille* (which can

As a tragedy brings into question the ordered nature of reality, so Nietzsche is constantly attempting to see the awe-inspiring reality that lies beneath the comfortable norms of the day. As tragedy offers this question in the terms of a noble hero, torn apart by suffering, impossible tasks, and no-win decisions, so Nietzsche offers his anti-teleological-metaphysics[92] in a discourse that can be understood. And of course as tragedy can be misunderstood when one attempts to remove herself from the experience, as perhaps Socrates and Euripides did, so Nietzsche is not really understood to one who does not experience that of which he speaks.[93]

Socratism perhaps preaches the virtues of being at a remove from experience. Such a remove disallows a robust philosophy, falling into an optimistic scientism. Such serves as part of the reason for Nietzsche's dislike for Socratism. Yet, clearly Nietzsche had grudging respect for Socrates himself, perhaps even more than respect. In 1875, he wrote: "Socrates, to confess it simply, stands so close to me, that I am almost always fighting a battle with him."[94] He includes Socrates as one of the "pure types" in his

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mean crickets and bad moods)—that is, Dionysian music. That the Dionysian is joyous without driving away the negative, but in fact the embracing of the negative, will be made clear in chapter two in the discussion of disappointment.

[92] Even the mature Nietzsche arguably does not reject metaphysics as a whole, despite the critical manner in which he speaks of metaphysics. His attack, as I argue in chapter two, is against teleological metaphysics, which I will define essentially as metaphysics that offer a means of avoiding disappointment. That is, a metaphysics from which morality can be divined and which offer a consolation to those who have a distaste for life. That is, he attacks metaphysics that lead to nihilism as he defines the term, but arguably has his own metaphysics, including concepts like eternal return and the will to power, that are not teleological in the way I have defined the term.

[93] Various texts in Nietzsche reference his inability to be understood by those who did not have the same tastes or experiences—or, more particularly, that one need no arguments when one's experiences/tastes are like that of Nietzsche. E.g. "Anyone who does not just understand the word 'Dionysian' but understands *himself* in the word 'Dionysian' does not need to refute Plato or Christianity or Shopenhauer—*he smells the decay*…" (*EH* "Books," "The Birth of Tragedy," 2). In addition, consider the above discussion on the relationship between personal language and experience.

[94] Quoted in Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 132.

Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,[95] and hints that he carries on the Socratic mantle in his method of questioning the wisdom of the day as well as his probable re-writing of the *Republic* in *Human All-Too Human* and *Beyond Good and Evil*.[96] It seems likely that Nietzsche was hinting toward his own future when he offered the question of "whether the birth of an 'artistic Socrates' is something inherently contradictory."[97] And later: "Now we knock, with emotions stirred, at the gates of the present and the future: will that 'transformation' lead to ever new configurations of genius and especially of the *music-making Socrates*?"[98] The music-making Socrates is perhaps Wagner, but more likely Nietzsche himself. And given that music portrays the Dionysian, and Socrates offers himself as a disciple of Apollo, we have here at the least the necessary conditions for tragedy: A marriage of Dionysus and Apollo.

The *Symposium* hints at the possibility of a Socrates who joins the Dionysian revelers. Alcibiades, a kind of incarnation of Dionysus, enters near the end, crowns Socrates with some of the wreath meant for the victor in the poetry competition, compares Socrates to a satyr and the statues of Silenus, and refers to Socrates as a flute player of divine melodies. Further, Alcibiades describes philosophy as a "Bacchic frenzy,"[99] invoking the image of the ecstasies of the Dionysian chorus. Even if the images here are produced more by the wine in Alcibiades' veins, it is noteworthy that

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[95] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1998), 31.

[96] For an argument regarding the parallel between *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Human All-Too-Human*, and the *Republic*, see Part 3 entitled "Nietzsche's New Eternity" in Laurence D. Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

[97] *BT* 14.

[98] *BT* 15.

[99] *Symposium* 218b.

Socrates, even when encouraged multiple times to stop him if Alcibiades said anything false,[100] never denies the charges. Alcibiades' speech is suggestive of a musical, Dionysian Socrates.[101]

Nietzsche obviously saw himself as a philosopher, and had hoped that *BT* would open the way into philosophy.[102] In addition, he practiced and loved music. He notes in a letter in 1881 to the composer Peter Gast that the latter's music was greater than his own work. That Nietzsche finds philosophy and music to be comparable underscores his view of the connection between the two. Or, perhaps better, Nietzsche sees the musician and the philosopher to be of comparable nature: "This is what I feel when I think about you-, and in this prospect I enjoy the reflected fulfillment of my own nature. You alone have given me this pleasure up to now, and only since I've come to know your music."[103] Nietzsche saw himself, at least at this point, as a philosopher whose nature is fulfilled in the composer—a true disciple of Dionysus.

And yet Nietzsche's passion was expressed in his writing. He is not simply one who offers up the Dionysian music, but one who gives this music an Apollonian form—meant to be understood by being more than simply read, but also in a rich sense, to be experienced—like a tragedy. Nietzsche begins his philosophical career writing about tragedy. As he matures, he does philosophy tragically; he becomes the tragic chorus.

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[100] *Symposium* 214e-215a, 217b.

[101] It is not my intention to draw out the Dionysian elements of Socrates too much in the discussion of Plato's philosophy. Nevertheless, insofar as Dionysus serves as an image of a metaphysical realm that defies the structures required for reason, I will be presenting a Socrates that too is Dionysian. See chapters four and five.

[102] See e.g. Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148.

[103] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Nietzsche: A Self Portrait from His Letters, eds. and trans. Peter Fuss and Henry Shapiro (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 58.

CHAPTER THREE

Becoming What One Is Through Disappointment, Part 1: From Metaphysics to the Disappointment of Nietzsche

"Sing me a new song: the world is transfigured and all the heavens are joyous."
– Nietzsche, Letter to Heinrich Köselitz[1]

Introduction

Nietzsche's sanity officially ended on January 3, 1889. On that day, he is said to have embraced a horse that was being beaten, and immediately collapsed.[2] Following, and in a few instances prior, to his collapse, Nietzsche manifested what seems to be a caricature of his tragic philosophy. Claims of divinity, of being Dionysus, and of control of and tremendous joy in the world filled his letters. While exaggerated in his insanity, these kinds of themes form a center in his philosophy, particularly his mature philosophy.

I argued in chapter two that Nietzsche's way of doing philosophy developed from his first book (*BT*), in which he speaks philosophically about tragedy, to his later works in which he practices philosophy as the tragic chorus. Dionysus, Apollo,[3] and world affirmation all loom large in both his mature philosophy and his insanity. Despite his holding to a form of tragedy that reflects key elements from his first book, Nietzsche's practice of philosophy experiences significant development. This and the following chapter present a more detailed description of the development of Nietzsche's

[1] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Nietzsche: A Self Portrait from His Letters, eds. and trans. Peter Fuss and Henry Shapiro (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 141.

[2] Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 531. Though a well-known story, Nietzsche's embracing of the horse to protect it may be apocryphal. Nevertheless, the story seems appropriate to him.

[3] In the previous chapter, I argued, largely in agreement with Kaufmann, that Dionysus post-*BT* is rather a mix of Dionysus and Apollo—that is, tragic.

philosophical practice, specifically his move away from teleological metaphysics which opens the door to the tragic ground necessary for life affirmation. Given that Nietzsche's rejection of Platonic, Christian, and Schopenhauerian metaphysics is largely an uncontroversial topic, I tell this story with a view to the details that influence his later practice of philosophy. In showing this maturing, I work to explain the "why" of this cleansing of teleological metaphysics, and how it can be understood as a rigorous development of his earlier tragic view. In particular, I show how Nietzsche's view of tragedy in *BT* develops into a rich concept of disappointment, and how becoming what one is relies on disappointment. Finally, I derive from these claims Nietzsche's understanding of moral psychology, in particular the drives that serve as the foundation and fruit of human virtue.

In this and chapter four, I essentially follow Nietzsche's own view of his development, with additional historical background information and some interpretation of Nietzsche's view when necessary to help clarify. And so I follow his explanation of himself and his works through his later works, especially *Ecce Homo* and the second edition prefaces of 1886. Though approaching Nietzsche through his view of himself may invite historical inaccuracies, especially given his imminent insanity in *Ecce Homo*, nevertheless this approach offers a more intimate understanding of the motives behind the development of his mature philosophy because it focuses on his own self-understanding.[4]

Discovering the motives affecting his development, ascertained with some help from other sources, is essential to understanding the development of Nietzsche's

[4] Nietzsche, writing to Overbeck about *EH*, says, "*Ecce Homo*, an absolutely important book, gives some psychological and even biographical details about me and my writings; people will at last suddenly see me." Quoted in Douglas Thomas, "Utilising Foucault's Nietzsche; Nietzsche, Genealogy, Autobiography," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 6 (October 1, 1993): 124, n. 3.

philosophical psychology and his view of the practice of philosophy. In fact, I believe he wants his development to be seen as an example of how philosophy should be done—specifically, to become what one is. For example, even in his later works, Nietzsche saw his relationship with Wagner as an important, even essential, part of his development. In the preface to *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche writes:

> What does a philosopher demand of himself, first and last? To overcome his age…My greatest experience was a *recovery*. Wagner was just one of my sicknesses. Not that I want to be ungrateful to this sickness. I argue here that Wagner is *harmful*, but I also argue that there *is* nevertheless someone who cannot do without him – the philosopher…I would also understand a philosopher who explained: 'Wagner *sums up* modernity. It's no use, you need to start out as a Wagnerian…[5]

Nietzsche's development links with his tragic view of life, which offers each individual particularized virtue in its rejection of teleological metaphysical systems. In turn, in this tragic perspective, one's desires are also tragic. Specifically, there is no particular object to our deepest desires, but rather they are "fulfilled" only through the pursuit of the creativity that is made possible in tragedy. Even Nietzsche's broken attachment with Wagner exemplifies the practice of tragic philosophy.

In this chapter, I trace Nietzsche's break with Wagner and Schopenhauerian metaphysics in a manner that suggests that his view of tragedy in *BT* finds its fruition in disappointment. The experience of disappointment disallows the consolation of both

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[5] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, Preface. See also, Daniel W. Conway, "Nietzsche's Art of This-Worldly Comfort: Self-Reference and Strategic Self-Parody," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (July 1992): 343–357, who makes the argument that Nietzsche, in his later prefaces to his earlier works—particularly the *Attempt at Self-Criticism*, seeks rather than writing off those parts of his philosophy that he later rejects, instead shows that "[t]his too is Nietzsche" (348). In so doing, his philosophical shifts do not simply show an interesting historical character, but rather a development that is central to the later Nietzsche and, indeed, his entire practice of philosophy. To set up a system of philosophy, and then to sacrifice it—"the *sacrifice* of its highest types – *that* is what I called Dionysian…that *you yourself may be* the eternal joy in becoming" (*TI* X, 5). In fact, Conway argues that Nietzsche purposely undermines his own authority—like Zarathustra speaking to his followers, "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves" (*Z* I, "On the Gift-Giving Virtue" 3)—and his critical embrace of his earlier self is an important means of undermining his authority.

intoxication and moral ideals, opening up the possibility of greater self-knowledge and self-formation. Disappointment requires, therefore, that one view oneself empirically, and therefore as an individual, rather than as primarily or solely rational. And, thus, disappointment is inextricably linked in Nietzsche to individual empirical existence. The development of tragedy into the rich concept of disappointment in this chapter finds its finale in that eternal affirmation of individual empirical existence: eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence can only be welcomed by those who can embrace disappointment, seeing the affirmation of themselves and life in that experience. Eternal recurrence serves as a starting point for the next chapter, which traces out some themes remaining in Nietzsche's philosophical development, and draws these together to give expression to a Nietzschean moral psychology. I conclude the following chapter by showing how, perhaps ironically, contemporary ethical theory may benefit from an understanding of his philosophical psychology. Further, the view of Nietzsche's moral psychology that I establish proves to be similar in some significant ways to that of Plato, as I interpret him in the following chapters. Key elements of this comparison of Platonic and Nietzschean moral psychology are set side by side in the concluding chapter.

Nietzsche's Initial Cleansing of Metaphysics

In chapter two, I focused primarily on *The Birth of Tragedy*, and worked to show Nietzsche's self-understanding as a tragic philosopher, and the manner in which tragic philosophy reflected Greek tragedy. In this chapter, I explore some important elements of Nietzsche's development, particularly as they show the relationship between tragic philosophy and philosophical psychology, particularly the dramatic shift in *HA* that informs all of his later thought. I argue that Nietzsche moves further and further from

teleological metaphysics or any claim that can be construed as a system—that is, any metaphysics that offers a kind of *telos* that gives it a clear form and the possibility of a culmination in which there is a cessation of striving or metaphysical comfort, or from which universal morality can be derived.

From Wagner to Nietzsche: "The Cockcrow of Positivism"

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche recalls his writing of *HA*. He began the work in the midst of the first Bayreuth festival (July-August 1876), an event in which he claims to have felt terribly estranged. Fleeing a little more than one hundred miles to Klingenbrunn, he brooded and began writing notes that would eventually form into the book[6]-a book, he claims, that is "the monument to a crisis." He explains further: "It calls itself a book for *free* spirits…I used it to liberate myself from things that *did not belong* to my nature."[7] And again, "I felt a complete displacement of my instincts…I saw that it was high time to reconsider *myself*."[8]

There are hints that this crisis had begun at least as early as the writing of the fourth *Meditation*.[9] Though not withdrawing from his admiration of the Greeks,[10]

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[6] *EH*, "Books," "Human, All Too Human," 2.

[7] *EH*, "Books," "Human, All Too human," 1. In German: "ich habe mich mit demselben vom Unzugehörigen in meiner Natur freigemacht." The English translations, the one above included, leave untranslated "demselben" ("in myself"). The addition of this word suggests may modify the translation thus: "I used it to liberate myself from the things [in myself] that *did not belong* to my nature." These are things *within* Nietzsche from which he was freeing himself, part of becoming who he is (*EH*), or "'giving style' to [his] character" (*GS* IV, 290). German from Spiegel Online: Projekt Gutenberg-DE, *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche-Ecce Homo*, http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/3246/1 (accessed May 15, 2012).

[8] *EH*, "Books," "Human, All Too Human," 3.

[9] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 220–1. It is possible that the break was much earlier. Haar claims that the break was solidly made already by the writing of *BT*. See Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, trans. Michael Gendre (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 39–40. Haar offers much of what is related in this and the previous chapter, the most important simply being that in *BT*, Nietzsche offers through tragedy what is "precisely the contrary of the [Schopenhauerian] negation

Nietzsche begins a career-long attempt to cleanse his work of teleological metaphysics,[11] including the systematization of life that is a kind of echo or shadow of these forms of metaphysics.[12] Young argues, I think rightly, that Nietzsche was at this time trying "to produce a *Dionysianism without metaphysics*."[13] Beginning at this point, Nietzsche's philosophy holds firmly to a trajectory that could rightly be called the pursuit of "Dionysianism without metaphysics."

HA was essentially an attack on claims that ideals have some kind of metaphysical ground. The idea of a metaphysical world,[14] religious asceticism,[15] and related matters. *HA* signaled the shedding of Schopenhauerian metaphysics along with the alignment with Wagner's program. An important influence on Nietzsche at the time was Paul Rée, who came to argue that all human morality is nothing but egoism in pretty dress. Nietzsche and Rée both shared an interest, then, in showing ideals to be "all too human."

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of the will-to-live!" (39). Nietzsche's remaining respect for Schopenhauer, he argues, is related to Schopenhauer's function as an educator, as described in *SE*—that is, one who helped to liberate Nietzsche by being an example of one who himself established himself as free (from academia, religion, etc.).

[10] In a letter to Mathilde Maier sent shortly after the publication of *HA*, Nietzsche writes: "I'm immeasurably nearer the Greeks than before." Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: A Self Portrait from His Letters*, 45.

[11] Even as he essentially still held to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, a form of the kind of teleological metaphysics he would come to reject, he wrote the following: "Who was it who said: 'a man never rises higher than when he does not know whither his path can still lead him'?" (*Schopenhauer as Educator* 1). The lack of a clear *telos* as presented by a metaphysical system seems helpful for one to become what one is, which is "immeasurably high above you" (ibid.).

[12] E.g., the veneration of science, which is ostensibly to have arisen out of a rejection of metaphysics. Of course, science held as the final arbiter of the nature of things is a metaphysical claim. Nietzsche, holding science in high honor beginning with *HA*, is unwilling to give science this level of honor.

[13] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 221.

[14] E.g. *HA* I, 9.

[15] E.g. *HA* III, 136.

Nevertheless, in opposition to Rée, Nietzsche had a broader constructive purpose. He remained committed to the possibility of a culture as rich as that of the Greeks. Thus, the Dionysian, the tragic, was not sacrificed to a stringent form of positivism. Though explicit language of tragedy may be largely missing from these middle period works, he maintained the philosophical pessimism that he picked up from Schopenhauer and had wielded against, for example, the optimism of Strauss.[16] The shift was not from pessimism broadly speaking,[17] which would offer a groundwork for the tragic affirmation of life, but from the moral pessimism, or "romantic pessimism,"[18] of Schopenhauer.[19] *HA* serves the purpose of severing the moral, reinterpreting the ideals as "all too human." And within *HA*, art remains a means of moving toward science in a manner that can replace religion and teleological metaphysics.[20]

Why, though, has Nietzsche turned away from metaphysics, particular the Dionysian-Schopenhauerian perspective that drew him to Wagner and made him a virtual evangelist on its behalf? There are a variety of approaches to answering this question, but I will offer what I think the argument of this chapter requires. Rée's friendship and influence likely arose because of the anti-metaphysical impulse that was already present within Nietzsche's thought. Though we must be careful in leaning too heavily on the

[16] Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 39.

[17] *AOM*, Preface 4: "...I again found my way to that courageous pessimism that is the antithesis of all romantic mendacity, and also, as it seems to me today, the way to 'myself', to *my* task."

[18] *AOM*, Preface 7.

[19] Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Nietzsche's Dionysian Pessimism," *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 4 (December 2001): 930.

[20] *HA* I, 27.

hindsight offered in *EH* and the 1886 prefaces, they nevertheless clarify the nature of this shift in Nietzsche's philosophy.[21]

Nietzsche claims in the *Self-Criticism* that he was attempting to force a fundamental insight into the procrustean bed of Kantian and Schopenhauerian values.[22] In his discussion of *BT* in *EH*, Nietzsche argues that the Greeks had overcome pessimism through tragedy, while Schopenhauer looks to them as examples of pessimists.[23] In chapter two, I suggested that Nietzsche worked to overcome pessimism in *BT*, in which he does not simply praise the Dionysian, but rather the unity of the Dionysian and Apollonian. And, again, the Apollonian directs one not toward the death of the will, as Schopenhauer would have it. Rather, it allowed an affirmation of life that, though it could only function upon the ground of the Dionysian, yet obtained, in a sense, in spite of the Dionysian.

As Nietzsche retells the story, the link between the metaphysics of Schopenhauer and his values were already a source of tension in Nietzsche's thought prior to the writing of *HA*. Even in *BT*, Nietzsche was attempting to juggle the affirmation of life in the Greeks and the metaphysical pessimism of Schopenhauer. And, if we can take the section from *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "How the 'True World' Finally Became a

[21] Again, I understand that these later reflections by Nietzsche likely are not completely accurate. But for the purposes of this study, perfect historicity is unnecessary. Insofar as Nietzsche understood his work to be a movement toward a single purpose, a "single taste" as he discusses as important for philosophers in the preface to *GM* 2, it seems appropriate to take him at his (later) word. Therefore, I will, with appropriate qualifications, allow his 1886 prefaces and *EH* to guide this study regarding his development.

[22] *ASC*, 6.

[23] *EH*, "Books," "The Birth of Tragedy," 1. Nietzsche did not reject pessimism as a philosophical stance, but rather resignation in the face of pessimism. Cf. Dienstag, "Nietzsche's Dionysian Pessimism."

Fable" as a kind of autobiography,[24] then we see in Nietzsche's thought a shift away from useless metaphysics in the "[c]ockcrow of positivism."[25] Later in *HA*, Nietzsche describes the situation thus:

> Perhaps the *scientific demonstration* of the existence of any kind of metaphysical world is already so *difficult* that mankind will never again be free of a mistrust of it. And if one has a mistrust of metaphysics the results are by and large the same as if it had been directly refuted and one no longer had the *right* to believe in it. The historical question in regard to an unmetaphysical attitude of mind on the part of mankind remains the same in both cases.[26]

Though this is Nietzsche's attitude toward metaphysics in *HA*, it does not offer us a "why" to Nietzsche's shift.

Again, though there was the influence of the natural sciences, I would suggest that Nietzsche's description in "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable" and in the above quotation is not the cause for but the result of his disavowal of Schopenhauer's metaphysics. I believe that a couple of ideas and events came together to encourage the break with Schopenhauer. The first is a weakness in Schopenhauer's thought that Nietzsche had noted as early as 1867 or 1868. After having read Friedrich Lange's *History of Materialism and Critique of Its Significance for the Present*, Nietzsche wrote an extended critique of Schopenhauer's metaphysical claims in his notes.[27] The various criticisms included the following:

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[24] Though no clear evidence that this section should be understood autobiographically, the shifts in Nietzsche's life seem to reflect these moves. In turn, Nietzsche's historical analysis seems to include more than a retelling of facts grounded in collected historical evidence. Rather, his retelling of history, as in *GM*, includes rich self-reflection in which he tests historical claims against his understanding of human drives. In his retelling of history, we may then see a reflection of Nietzsche's own development.

[25] *TI* IV, 4.

[26] *HA* I, 21.

[27] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 89–91.

> The world will not fit as comfortably into his system as Schopenhauer had hoped in the intoxication of first discovery….His system is permeated by contradictions. Schopenhauer says that , as thing in itself, the will, is free of all the forms of its appearance…it is, he says, "never an object, since everything that is an object is mere appearance[”]…But he demands that what is never an object can be objectively thought…he decorates it with predicates, like bright clothes, drawn from the world of appearances…thus the [real, Kantian] concept 'thing in itself' is quietly abandoned and another secretly substituted.[28]

Though, obviously this criticism did little to weaken his dedication to Schopenhauer at the time, we can see already the seeds of his later description of how the "true world" became a fable. Schopenhauer claims to have discovered the thing in itself as the will, attaching to it demands that it never be an object, and then offers it to us as an object.

If Schopenhauer is right about the nature of the "true world," particularly the Hindu/Buddhist idea that the individual will is the ground of suffering, then resignation of one's individual will, asceticism, constitutes a proper alignment to the truth. Asceticism does not overcome pessimism as Nietzsche believes the Greeks accomplished in tragedy. It is not the "courageous pessimism"[29] he praises in the 1886 preface to *AOM*, over against the romantic pessimism of resignation.[30] Though the original criticism of Schopenhauer's attempt at an objective knowledge of what cannot be objectified did not sway Nietzsche, the growing realization that the pessimism of Schopenhauer was out of step with life affirmation of the Greeks likely brought Nietzsche to take advantage of the metaphysical and epistemological weaknesses of his "teacher." The uncertainty creates a sufficient chink in the armor of Schopenhauer's claims that Nietzsche can see them as

[28] Quoted in Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 91.

[29] *AOM*, Preface 4.

[30] *AOM*, Preface 7.

superfluous,[31] and eventually destructive-even of our ability to appreciate art.[32] But, even more so, this Schopenhauerian form of pessimism destroys the individual, as might all metaphysically grounded universal ethical structures. Referencing Nietzsche's works of 1872-4, Nabais argues that "[a]lready…the fault-lines that signal a rupture with Schopenhauer's thinking have begun to appear precisely in Nietzsche's search for a justification of individual empirical existence."[33] An affirmation of individuality requires an affirmation of the empirical. Even in *BT*, especially as re-presented in the *Self-Criticism*, one finds a critique of ethics and an attempt to understand the Apollonian as "[t]he beautiful that redeems;"[34] rather than something to be got rid of through resignation, as Schopenhauer would have it. The Apollonian beautiful helped the Greeks overcome pessimism. In particular, the Apollonian affirms "individual empirical existence" in the face of a Dionysian metaphysics.

The philosophical and the personal are never far apart in Nietzsche's thought. And so despite the presence of tensions between his own thought and Schopenhauer's, and so also aspects of Wagner's,[35] it was perhaps the physical and personal distancing

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[31] Young describes Nietzsche's approach to metaphysics in *HA* in this way. See Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 243.

[32] *AOM*, 28.

[33] Nuno Nabais and Martin Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 41.

[34] Ibid., 34.

[35] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 220–1, suggests that in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, Nietzsche hints toward the insufficiency of Wagner's work. In section 7, Nietzsche writes the following: "With him [the complete dramatist] we ascend to the topmost rung of sensibility and only there do we fancy [wähnen] we have returned to free nature and the realm of freedom." Young builds his claim off the use of the word "fancy" (wähnen), hinting that this is more of a kind of intoxication than a meaningful interaction with the nature of the metaphysical. Of course, intoxication will, in time, become an important theme in Nietzsche's attack on the nihilistic culture of contemporary Europe (e.g. *GS* II, 86). Note as well that the idea that we "fancy we have returned to free nature..." perhaps reflects the criticism of Schopenhauer,

between Nietzsche and Wagner, when the latter moved to Bayreuth, that brought things to a head. Nietzsche's idyllic communion with the Wagners in Tribschen likely kept many of these concerns at bay. With the move, the cracks could more easily be noticed and acted upon.[36] And Nietzsche held beliefs prior to the move that would encourage him to take advantage of this distance from the overbearing Wagner.

In *Schopenhauer as Educator* (*SE*), Nietzsche writes of becoming oneself, and the need for one to rely on oneself for this maturing. "[Y]our educators can be only your liberators,"[37] he writes, even as he worked in a job he despised[38] and alongside (or under) Wagner, who is known as somewhat tyrannical.[39] And again:

> All that is not you, [the soul] says to itself. No one can construct for you the bridge upon which precisely you must cross the stream of life, no one but you yourself alone. There are, to be sure, countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would bear you through this stream; but only at the cost of yourself: you would put yourself in pawn and lose yourself.[40]

What had begun in the *Untimely Meditations* was a single goal throughout Nietzsche's philosophy—to become what he was, to unify himself into a single taste:

> For nothing else befits a philosopher. We have no right to any *isolated* act whatsoever….Rather, our thoughts, our values, our yeses and noes and ifs and

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penned as early as 1867, in which Nietzsche claims that Schopenhauer claims to be seeing something that, according to his own writings, cannot be seen.

[36] Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins, "Nietzsche's Works and Their Themes" in Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28.

[37] *SE* 1.

[38] See, e.g., his reflection on his work as a philologist in *EH* "Books," "Human, All Too Human," 3.

[39] As perhaps one evidence of Wagner's overpowering presence: Edouard Schuré recounts his experience with Nietzsche at the festival in part thus: "In the presence of Wagner he was shy, inhibited, and almost always silent. When we left performances together he uttered not one word of criticism; he showed much more the resigned sadness of a someone who had lost something." Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 223-4.

[40] *SE* 1.

> whethers grow out of us with the same necessity with which a tree bears its fruits – all related and connected to one another and evidence of a *single* will, a *single* health, a *single* earth, a *single* sun.[41]

Nietzsche attempts no strictly deductive arguments against metaphysics, whether that of Schopenhauer or anyone else, though *HA* does begin with a fairly sustained attack upon metaphysics. His approach appears to reflect a growing awareness of how he, and humans generally, think and act.[42] "[T]here could be a metaphysical world," he admits, but then continues: "Even if the existence of such a world were never so well demonstrated, it is certain that knowledge of it would be the most useless of all knowledge: more useless even than knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor in danger of shipwreck."[43] Kant cut off theoretical knowledge of the metaphysical. Schopenhauer embraced this break, though in an inconsistent manner, as Nietzsche noted as early as 1867. This break from the metaphysical, from a "true world," makes it "unattained. And as unattained also *unknown*. Consequently not consoling, redeeming, obligating either: how could we have obligations to something unknown?"[44] That this view of the uselessness of the metaphysical was dawning on Nietzsche at this time is suggested perhaps even in *Wagner in Bayreuth*, hinting that Wagner's work may be a kind of intoxication.[45]

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[41] *GM*, Preface 2.

[42] See Conway, "Nietzsche's Art of This-Worldly Comfort," 354. Conway argues that by 1886, Nietzsche had begun a strategic self-undermining that was designed to attack all attempts to any ultimate human authority. If this is central to Nietzsche's philosophical project, even as early as *Schopenhauer as Educator* (though still in nascent form), his rejection of deductive arguments and preference for criticisms of all ideals as "all too human" is sensible.

[43] *HA* I, 9.

[44] *TI* IV, 4.

[45] See footnote 35 above.

Despite this break,[46] Nietzsche holds to the Dionysian, though now a "Dionysianism without metaphysics," and pursues a tragic means to affirm individual empirical existence. As Nietzsche reflects back on *HA* in *EH*, he describes the step away from the ideal to himself—not as a matter of conclusive refutation, but of simply being seen as disconnected with, or without use for, life: "One mistake after another is calmly put on ice, the ideal is not refuted, it is *frozen to death*."[47]

Our inability to know the metaphysical realm, along with the pretense of offering a means to glimpse it, creates the opportunity for metaphysics to be nothing more than a tool in the hands of wishful thinking. This realization perhaps being noted in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

> You want to *make* all being thinkable, for you doubt with well-founded suspicion that it is already thinkable. But it shall yield and bend for you. Thus your will wants it. It shall become smooth and serve the spirit as its mirror and reflection….You still want to create the world before which you can kneel: that is your ultimate hope and intoxication.[48]

Nietzsche's turn away from metaphysics toward something more positivistic enables him to clear the way for an understanding of the individual empirically, or, as Marylou Sena suggests, allows him to ground the metaphysical in the sensual:[49] to start simply with

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[46] It should be noted that the Bayreuth Festival itself perhaps helped to accelerate a break that was likely to come eventually. Whereas Nietzsche seemed to have hoped that the Festival would be more than he believed it would be, he appeared to find it populated with the "loafing riff raff of Europe." The price of the tickets alone guaranteed that only the well-established in society could be present (Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 224). Such is hardly the kind of gathering that could initiate a serious cultural renewal as it was essentially a gathering of those who maintained the *status quo*.

[47] *EH*, "Books," "Human, All Too Human," 1.

[48] *Z* II, "On Self-Overcoming."

[49] Marylou Sena, "Nietzsche's New Grounding of the Metaphysical: Sensuousness and the Subversion of Plato and Platonism," *Research in Phenomenology* 34 (January 1, 2004): 139–159. Sena offers a brilliant approach to Nietzsche as attempting to restore knowledge of the metaphysical precisely so it does not suffer the uselessness of the metaphysics that arose out of [what I think is the wrong interpretation of] Plato and Western philosophy in general.

what experience may say about life, and to give honor to the methods of natural science—specifically, a pursuit of knowledge without attempting to form "an apologia for knowledge"[50] in which it has an immediately clear benefit.[51]

Beyond Réealism: Nietzsche's Creativity

Nietzsche sent a copy of *HA* to Rée inscribed with the following: "To you it belongs – to others it will be given!" And further: "All of my friends are now of one mind, namely that my book was written by and had its source in you. And so I congratulate you on this new paternity! Long live Réealism."[52] Another friend of Nietzsche's, the motherly feminist Malwida von Meysenbug, hated the book. Despite her friendship with both Rée and Nietzsche, she saw in Nietzsche and his thought something beyond that of Rée. She wrote, prophetically, to Nietzsche:

> You will go through many phases in your philosophy…[because] unlike Rée, you are not born to analysis: you need to create artistically and though you strain against it, your genius will lead you to the same thing as *The Birth of Tragedy*, only with no more metaphysics…Unlike Rée you cannot use the scalpel to lay apart legs and arms and say, thus is the human being put together.[53]

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[50] *HA* I, 6.

[51] This is not to say that Nietzsche was in the business, even during this stage, of pursuing knowledge without any concern for benefit. Even in *HA*, he shows a concern for life, believing that one is set free by this pursuit of knowledge, and able to find a better way of living (e.g. the hortatory tone in I, 292). In turn, this suggests that though Nietzsche is criticizing metaphysics as a thinly veiled attempt to make knowledge match the "optimism" of logic, he has not quite let go of a kind of "optimism." We might sum this up as the pursuit that began in *The Birth of Tragedy* and was kept as a central concern for Nietzsche: that life itself should have within it all that is required for our affirmation of it. Again, this is not to say that circumstances will be pleasant enough for a full affirmation—but that if we approach life freely, we can affirm it—whereas a teleological metaphysics both rejects what life has to offer and traps us in a truncated existence.

[52] Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: A Self Portrait from His Letters*, 44, fn. 2.

[53] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 274. Young claims that Meysenbug's claim that Nietzsche's philosophy would end with *The Birth of Tragedy* without metaphysics is correct. This study is examining the reasoning behind the rejection of metaphysics and how this tragedy without metaphysics forms, or reflects, Nietzsche's moral psychology.

HA offered a sustained criticism of metaphysics, removing it in its teleological forms from Nietzsche's philosophy, and yet, as Meysenbug saw, he needed to create. The language of tragedy, lost perhaps in the largely critical *HA*, begins to reemerge in the time after because creativity and affirmation of life never stray far from one another in Nietzsche's thought.[54]

Of course, the middle period in Nietzsche's philosophy is not entirely deconstructive, in the manner of Rée. Meysenbug was, perhaps unknowingly, speaking of what is arguably there, but was simply difficult to see under the heavy criticism of *HA*. In *Daybreak*, it becomes more evident that Nietzsche was acting on more than a sudden infatuation with a kind of "scientism." In *EH*, Nietzsche refers to it as an "*affirmative* book."[55] The affirmative aspect becomes evident as his philosophy builds off of the metaphysical cleansing that took place in the book. In the introduction, I noted Adams' critique of Sidgwick's desire-satisfaction theory of ethics, perhaps most important of which is the shift from what one desires to what one would desire if one were, with excellent rationality, able to consider more information about the various possible outcomes than one usually possesses.[56] Teleological metaphysics purport to offer the requisite information for rational desire such that one's desires come to be understood and formed in relation to those metaphysical claims. Thus, Schopenhauer's metaphysics,

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[54] This is not to say that he was not looking toward creating even in the primarily critical *HA*. Rather, as noted above in reference to Sena's article, Nietzsche had found that metaphysics had rather blocked our ability to achieve any kind of meaningful existence. It had become intoxication and had made even our ability to establish affirmation of life through art almost impossible. See, e.g., *AOM*, 28, in which "metaphysical-mystical philosophy" corrupts our ability to enjoy art in a meaningful way. The manner in which the Greeks overcame pessimism is lost when art becomes mere vulgar intoxication.

[55] *EH*, "Books," "Daybreak," 1.

[56] Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2002), 85–7.

arising though it may be from his personality,[57] also places particular limits on what is appropriate to desire. The work of *HA* in particular was the beginning of Nietzsche's rejection of the procrustean bed of teleological metaphysics and coming to a better awareness of his own desires, or nature.[58]

Both *HA* and *Daybreak* (*D*) arguably attempt to find the ground of the tragic without metaphysics. To understand what to do with the tragic experience without metaphysics, one must make a significant shift. No longer could Nietzsche speak of Dionysian "reality" versus the everyday experience of the world. Rather, he must approach these questions starting with experience, particularly an examination of human drives. From these, he could then attempt to discover the place of the Dionysian and Apollonian for the individual and for the broader culture.

And this examination of human experience, the turning away from metaphysical explanations to a more physical explanation, is precisely what feels so harshly critical in *HA*. But a more humane goal still lay behind this front of analyticity: the role of tragedy in human life. *D* continues in the positivistic vein of *HA*, but is more clearly life-affirming. In it, Nietzsche claims that each philosophy, rather than deriving from some metaphysical grounding, is rather "an instinct for a personal diet."[59] But this "personal

[57] As Nietzsche claims, in various places, about philosophical systems. See e.g. *GM* Preface 2; *Z* II, "On Self-Overcoming"; *WP* 55.

[58] Admittedly, Nietzsche's understanding of the nature of the self is complex, and involves aspects that are unknowable but serve as a kind of foundation of what one is, and other aspects that draw the individual and are both unknowable in totality and unachievable. Nevertheless, there are knowable and craftable aspects of the self. For an excellent analysis of Nietzsche's view of the self, see Robert Miner, "Nietzsche's Fourfold Conception of the Self," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 54, no. 4 (2011): 337–360.

[59] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 299.

diet" is not simply the pursuit of whatever we desire. Throughout his philosophy, Nietzsche emphasizes both the individual nature of the person and the need for the individual to understand oneself, and so be able to find one's own way through life.[60] Finding one's own way does not require the lopping off of parts of ourselves, as Kant and Schopenhauer and Christian asceticism would have us believe, but rather an awareness of our drives so that we may strengthen and weaken them in accordance with our single taste. The greatest problem with metaphysics is that it causes us to attend to some otherworldly ideal rather than to ourselves. And so, in *D*, Nietzsche "complains…that since, typically, we do not attend to what our 'drives' really are, the question of which ones are to be strengthened by 'nutrition', and which allowed to wither through lack of it, is left to chance."[61] Metaphysics is so pliable that, whereas it essentially truncates the human to create an ideal, it nevertheless seems unable to support any clear principle or goal. Thus, Kant has his ideals, Schopenhauer his ascetic resignation, Wagner his Bayreuth, and Nietzsche his *BT*. All derive from much the same ground, and end with different emphases and ideals. The only thing they share is a tendency to avoid human experience and the self-knowledge that can only arise from experience.[62] Casting off metaphysics and pursing a more scientific-psychological approach gave to Nietzsche's philosophy—or perhaps grew out of—that quality of incisiveness regarding human motivation. But he did not stick firmly to a Rée-like satisfaction with a physical explanation of our various motives. Nietzsche, as the observant Meysenbug claimed, had

[60] This theme is found throughout Nietzsche's works, in the early works it is emphasized in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and is a central idea in his later works. Of course, they remain present in the positivist works, most evidently in *Daybreak*.

[61] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 305.

[62] Cf. *GM* Preface, 1.

to create, and affirm. And it is the notion of eternal recurrence—a non-mystical, non-teleological metaphysical idea—that allows him to do this very thing.

Eternal Recurrence

Heidegger claims that "Nietzsche's fundamental metaphysical position is captured in his doctrine of *the eternal return of the same*."[63] Though I believe Heidegger may be claiming its centrality beyond what is warranted, the idea of eternal return at the very least plays an essential role in Nietzsche's development. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche describes how the notion of eternal recurrence came to him. Near Sils Maria, on the shore of Lake Silvaplana, Nietzsche received "*the thought of eternal return*, the highest possible formula of affirmation."[64] The idea is first mentioned in published form in book IV of *The Gay Science* (*GS*), in which he speaks of a demon visiting and announcing that every moment of one's life would be repeated eternally.

The idea of eternal recurrence had a significant impact upon Nietzsche. Young notes that "[i]n later years, Nietzsche would fall silent when walking with a companion past the pyramidal stone (thirty minutes' walk from Sils), as if entering a holy precinct. The arrival of the thought had, for him, the character of a visitation."[65] The richness of the idea is partly due to its being a kind of test of life affirmation. Yet not only a test, but also a means of focusing one's attention on those moments and purposes that bring all that life has given together. And, in turn, serves as a sensually-grounded metaphysical

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[63] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two* (New York: HarperOne, 1991), vol. 2, 5. He goes on to compare eternal recurrence to the root of the tree of Nietzsche's philosophy (6).

[64] *EH*, "Books," "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 1.

[65] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 318.

justification of individual empirical existence. Nabais understands the role of eternal recurrence thus:

> To come into one's individuality, which is available in each moment to each individual as an original given, immanently conferred upon him from the beginnings of eternity, consists in responding positively to the question 'Dost thou want this once more? and also for innumerable times?' Individuality has the nature of an original given, and, simultaneously, of a task. It is that which we are and do in each instant, because in each instant we are simply repeating our existence exactly as it has been given once and for all from the beginning of eternity.[66]

Though a kind of metaphysical claim, eternal recurrence removes the teleological aspect and thus allows individuality, the stuff out of which one becomes what one is, to be "immanently conferred." One need not bend one's desires to what should be desirable given extensive knowledge of outcomes and some metaphysically grounded standard of rationality. And so, again, eternal recurrence offers a justification for individual empirical existence.

The idea of a justifying individual empirical existence needs some clarification. I believe that this is closely related to the idea of overcoming the kind of pessimism arising from Platonism and Christianity, culminating in Schopenhauer. That is, justification of individual empirical existence contains a kind of metaphysical element, but the most important test for justification is simply the ability to affirm life as it is, without a retreat into some other world. To see how eternal recurrence functions to allow life affirmation, I will present a discussion of its place in *The Gay Science* (*GS*) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Z*).

[66] Nabais and Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, 48.

Disappointment as the Means to Becoming Oneself

Near the end of book III of *GS*, Nietzsche offers what at first appears as a simple, even impossible to avoid, exhortation: "*What does your conscience say?* – 'You should become who you are.'"[67] Nevertheless, Nietzsche has much to say about all that this entails, the centerpiece of which is what I will call disappointment. Simon Critchley has argued that disappointment is the root of philosophy. Philosophy, he says,

> begins…in an experience of *disappointment* – that is both *religious* and *political*. That is to say, philosophy might be said to begin with two problems: (i) religious disappointment provokes the problem of *meaning*, namely, what is the meaning of life in the absence of religious belief?; and (ii) political disappointment provokes the problem of *justice*, namely, 'what is justice' and how might justice become effective in a violently unjust world? [68]

These two themes of religious and political disappointment are salient in Nietzsche's work and development. And, insofar as Critchley is right, Nietzsche moved fully into philosophy perhaps only upon entertaining the thoughts of *HA*. Nevertheless, there is a distinction between what Critchley has proposed and Nietzsche's development. Nietzsche spent his early years working his way toward disappointment for the purpose of life affirmation. In turn, his goal was emphatically not the disappointment of the question of the nature of justice and how it might become effective, at least, not in any easily translatable set of concepts. Nietzsche surely questioned the nature of justice, but his goal was ultimately to produce a kind of unease, an unsettledness. Critchley further suggests, following Heidegger, that philosophy is atheism, and states: "If atheism produced contentment, then philosophy would be at an end. Contented atheists have no reason to bother themselves with philosophy…However, in my view, atheism does not

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[67] *GS* III, 270.

[68] Simon Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

provide contentment, but rather unease."[69] As will be argued below, and is suggested by the tragic nature of Nietzsche's philosophy, unease—what I call disappointment—is necessary for life affirmation. Life affirmation is not the contentment that perhaps only a teleological metaphysics can offer, but rather the willingness to affirm one's life, even that it be repeated eternally.

It is disappointment that allows for an affirmation of life and, therefore, justification for individual empirical existence. Throughout the last several aphorisms of book III Nietzsche offers more examples of what he means by "becom[ing] who you are." Most evident is the revealing of a unique individuality, and the acceptance of one's individuality. In 267, he claims that a "great goal" makes one stand above justice. Justice, of course, is the general law to which humanity in general (or, at least, the nation in general) should adhere. Notably, one does not rise above justice simply by rejecting justice in pursuit of small purposes (say, pursuit of pleasure), but rather with a "great goal." In turn, this goal keeps one focused, so that as one moves beyond the norms of a society, embarrassment fades: "Whoever is always deeply occupied is beyond all embarrassment."[70]

Nietzsche: "*What do you believe in?* – In this: that the weight of all things must be determined anew." This re-determining of the weight of all things, or, to use a later phrase, "revaluation of all values" is essential to individuality. As justice is cast away as insufficient to the maintenance of an individuality driven by a great goal, one does not lapse into meaninglessness. How can one have a great goal if there is no value? Obviously, one has values to give one this goal, but, given the homogenizing nature of

[69] Ibid.

[70] *GS* III, 254.

justice and the valuations derived from Christian-Platonic morality, one must then revalue all things in relation to one's goal.

Such a disconnection from justice reveals what I believe is a central idea within Nietzsche's thought, that of disappointment. Disappointment, as I will be using it, refers to the experience of dissatisfaction with the world or events without the accompanying sense of injustice.[71] For example, say that while hiking in a park in which no one else is present, a rock falls from a nearby cliff destroying one of my legs so that I will for the rest of my life be crippled. My initial reaction, given the failure of medicine to repair the damage, is to desire justice to be on my side so as to be able to demand some form of recompense for what I have lost. But given the lack of human presence, I cannot blame humanity. Therefore, I appeal to something/one beyond the natural realm, with the ability to control it. I form a religion or metaphysical claim (or appeal to an existing claim) that allows me recompense in some future world. Or perhaps I establish that my suffering has arisen from some evil that I have committed. Either way, all suffering is justified. Justice will always be served.

But imagine that I reject this initial reaction and consider this as something that just happens. No one is to blame—no person, no evil principle, no sin that I have committed, and no divine being will make things better. This simply happened, and I cannot demand that it be different by appealing to justice.[72] In a sense, it may be that I

[71] Again, this is similar to, though I do not think precisely, what Critchley describes as disappointment in Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*.

[72] In *Z* III, "On Old and New Tablets," 21 the relationship between the valiant and justice is described relatively clearly. Zarathustra exhorts those who would be valiant: "For the worthier enemy, O my friends, you shall save yourselves; therefore you must pass by much -especially much rabble who raise a din in your ears about the people and about peoples. Keep your eyes undefiled by their pro and con! There is much justice, much injustice; and whoever looks on becomes angry. Sighting and smiting here become one; therefore go away into the woods and lay your sword to sleep. Go your *own* ways! And let the

should even affirm that it is as it should be, even if I do not like it.[73] Such an experience is that of disappointment.[74]

The most prevalent examples of disappointment may be derived from human relationships. Consider Nietzsche's elation-turned-suffering with his relationships to Lou Salomé and Paul Rée. From beginning a monastery of free spirits with his two friends, to a marriage proposal communicated through the not-so-faithful Rée, to the realization of the latter's undermining of his relationship with Salomé, Nietzsche went from the highest hopes to a painful loneliness. He, of course, had finished (the first four books of) *GS* prior to knowing Salomé. But the theme of eternal recurrence, life affirmation, and the move into *Zarathustra* surround the Salomé affair—during which time Nietzsche lost not only a lover (Salomé), a good friend (Rée), but also his family.

I believe that Nietzsche's drive for life affirmation caused him to experience these events as disappointments, in the manner in which I have defined the term. The poem that Salomé wrote, entitled "To Pain," had a powerful effect on Nietzsche[75] and describes well Nietzsche's approach:

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people and peoples go theirs – dark ways, verily, on which not a single hope flashes any more." Here Nietzsche shows how strong individuality, that kind of individuality in which there is hope, requires the rejection of that way of groups: justice.

[73] Depending on the situation, the reasons for claiming that it should be as it is, even if I do not like it, can be anything from the need to deny laws of physics to have avoided the event, to demanding things that are not good for me or those I care about, or the realization that there are things or relationships that I simply do not deserve to go my way, and so forth.

[74] Other, more poignant, examples may abound. Indeed, as will be noted, tragedy is full of examples that are akin to the following: *A* desperately wants something to be the case (or, more to the point, its opposite not to the be the case). But *A* discovers that this desire must not be fulfilled in order that events will work out in the best manner. *A* decides to experience the suffering of this unfulfilled desire for some greater good. Thus, *A* is left without recourse to mitigate the pain, but must embrace it fully. This inability to hide from pain by appeal to justice or another mitigating power is essential to disappointment.

[75] He announces to Köselitz (Peter Gast) that the poem "belongs to the things that have a total power over me. I have never been able to read it without tears; it sounds like a voice that since my childhood I have waited and waited for." (Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 351).

Who can escape you when you have seized him
When you fasten him with your serious gaze?
I will not curse when you grip me
I never believe that you merely destroy!
I know that every earthly existence must go to you
Nothing on earth is untouched by you.
Life without you – would be beautiful
And yet – experiencing you has value.
Certainly you are no ghost of the night
You come to warn the spirit of your power
Struggle is what makes the greatest great
The struggle for the goal, on impassable paths…[76]

The necessity of pain for life and the greatness that can arrive only from struggling with pain—these give pain value. And this value of pain is central to the idea of disappointment. For disappointment does not demand that some concept of justice give us respite from the suffering, either through leveraging the morality of society against our pain or through the promise of another life in which all the sufferings of this life receive recompense. Rather, disappointment acknowledges and even affirms pain.[77]

Insofar as appealing to justice in the face of suffering undermines individuality through homogenization, to define all pain as nothing but disappointment bolsters individual freedom. As one approaches freedom, one also loses that which draws individuals together into a people (a "herd" the later Nietzsche might say). In turn, to surrender justice is to lose one's claim on others. As Nietzsche was soon to experience and struggle with for years, he had no claim (of justice) on Rée or Salomé. Perhaps this link of suffering in loneliness and desire for individuality are what Nietzsche intimates in writing thus: "*What makes one heroic?* – To approach at the same time one's highest

[76] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 351.

[77] Cf. also *GS* IV, 318.

suffering and one's highest hope."[78] To give someone pity (*Mitleid*),[79] or even to have pity on oneself,[80] denies this suffering and this disconnect from the homogenized world that is necessary to becoming what one is. To become what one is is "one's highest suffering and one's highest hope," and such is the nature of the noble, the heroic.

Justice, Pity, and Shame in The Gay Science

Individuality stands as an affront to the group, and of course to justice as well. The tool of justice for smoothing out the wrinkles of individuality is shame. The last three aphorisms of book III work out this theme. Shame comes in a variety of forms. For the one who acts differently from the group, shame is to be expected. But so also is shame the possession of those who are forced to receive pity. Pity, within the realm of justice, is that which brings those ostensibly incapable of living inside the acceptable limits within those limits through undeserved "gifts." If I am to receive these gifts I must admit at least two things: The gift-giver determines correctly what is proper for how one should live and I am incapable of living properly by my own means.[81]

The negative side of pity is further explained in book IV, 338:

> What we most deeply and most personally suffer from is incomprehensible and inaccessible to nearly everyone else; here we are hidden from our nearest, even if we eat from the same pot. But whenever we are *noticed* to be suffering, our suffering is superficially construed; it is the essence of the feeling of [pity][82] that it

[78] *GS* III, 268.

[79] *GS* III, 271.

[80] *GS* III, 266.

[81] Note that acceptable limits may include anything from financial to cultural to moral issues, and thus the pity can include anything from financial help to "patience" and "forgiveness."

[82] I opt for what seems the more appropriate translation of "pity" rather than "compassion." "Pity" should be preferred, given that "compassion" can be used more generally to mean to share a feeling with someone, including even joy. Nietzsche ends 338 contrasting *Mitleid* with *Mitfreude*—sharing suffering versus sharing joy. "Compassion" can include *Mitfreude*, while "pity" is specifically a view toward

> *strips* suffering of what is truly personal: our 'benefactors' diminish our worth and our will more than our enemies do.

Pity, again, destroys individuality by construing the suffering as an instantiation of something more general, something with which everyone can identify. And, so, Nietzsche continues, the one showing compassion

> knows nothing of the whole inner sequence and interconnection that spells misfortune for *me* or for *you*! The entire economy of my soul and the balance effected by 'misfortune', the breaking open of new springs and needs, the healing of old wounds, the shedding of entire periods of the past – all such things that can be involved in misfortune do not concern the dear compassionate one: they want to *help* and have no thought that there is a personal necessity of misfortune…that the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell.

Pity keeps us from becoming individuals. It is not a stretch to understand Nietzsche as espousing here a tragic (disappointment-centered) form of virtue ethics: one cannot achieve the heights of one's self—one's personal heaven—without disappointments—one's *personal* hells.

The one "who always wants to put people to shame"[83] is then not always one who is mocking, but may often be the one who is filled with pity and compassion. In turn, "[t]o spare someone shame"[84] must mean to avoid both forms of shaming, demanding of no one that they live in accordance with some general justice, nor declaring that there be some universal propriety. Pity remains the greatest danger, the last ditch effort of a morality that has already lost its metaphysical ground, God, and is still drawn on by the

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suffering. Further, "pity" has condescending connotations along with a strong motive of self-sacrifice, both of which are not as tightly connected with the word "compassion."

[83] *GS* III, 273.

[84] *GS* III, 274.

smell of his decay.[85] The last aphorism of book III reads thus: "*What is the seal of having become free?* -No longer to be ashamed before oneself." This casting off of shame comes out of that great goal that gives to one's life a purpose and revalues all values. So, again, it is not the shamelessness of a degenerate pleasure-seeker, but the shamelessness of one who is seeking a goal that elevates one above all values that cause us to desire homogenization over individuality.

By looking at these aphorisms on shame, a necessary condition for becoming what one is becomes evident: a goal that forces one to revalue life in terms of that goal rather than in terms of some universal ideal. This goal and revaluation will likely result in suffering, perhaps most obviously in loneliness, but that suffering is experienced as disappointment, and thus may help to draw one away from the homogenizing effects of justice and give evidence that one is approaching one's greatest hope. Disappointment, therefore, arises from a rejection of those homogenizing universal ideals to which one may cling when experiencing either suffering or shame.

A Unified Style to the Drives

In book IV, Nietzsche offers some description of what it means to become oneself, most directly in the aphorism entitled "*One thing is needful*." To quote him at length:

> To 'give style' to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a great mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of first nature removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it is reinterpreted into sublimity. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and employed for distant views – it is supposed to beckon towards the

[85] *GS* III, 125.

> remote and immense. In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that rules and shaped everything great and small – whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may think; it's enough that it was one taste![86]

One should "'give style' to one's character" ultimately so that one "should *attain* satisfaction with [one]self – be it through this or that poetry or art."[87] This "poetry or art" is not some simple creativity, but is achieved through cultivating and pruning one's various drives,[88] "through long practice and daily work at it,"[89] so that they are clearly the expression of a single taste. Nietzsche contrasts this with the approach of "the weak characters with no power over themselves."[90] These weaker natures despise the limiting force of this single taste. They are akin to the anarchical-tyrannical soul in Plato's *Republic*, interpreting the pursuit of each and every inclination as their true nature, freed from limits and convention.[91]

Constraint into a unified style serves as the central element of character formation in Nietzsche's thought. It is how one becomes what one is. Other value claims, ethics, have no significant bearing: "whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may

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[86] *GS* IV, 290.

[87] *GS* IV, 290.

[88] The means of pruning one's drives is a complex problem in Nietzsche's philosophy. It is not my intention to dwell on the various problems of this, though I argue that the experience of disappointment is essential to this pruning. In turn, against both claims that this is an easy affair and those that claim it is impossible given Nietzsche's philosophy, I appeal to Miner's exposition of Nietzsche's view of the self. In it, he argues that Nietzsche sees four aspects of the self, and that one has varying degrees of control over and knowledge of these aspects. See Miner, "Nietzsche's Fourfold Conception of the Self."

[89] *GS* IV, 290.

[90] *GS* IV, 290.

[91] We see here at least part of Nietzsche's critique of Romanticism. Cf. *GS* V, 370, in which he describes those who are impoverished in life and so seek experiences of "intoxication, paroxysm, numbness, madness." Romanticism grants them these experiences that covers over the pessimism.

think; it's enough that it was one taste!"[92] Universal moral valuations notwithstanding, there is a control, a kind of personal "morality"—a contradiction insofar as morality is to be universal/rational—that is anything but the chaotic approach of the weak characters.

What is the nature of this personal "morality"? Or, to put the question another way, what is it that offers direction to those who seek to give style to their character? Very simply, it seems that one must simply follow one's taste. But in order to do so, one must distinguish what is one's own taste from that which is alien, though one may have been habituated by some external force (culture, religion, etc.). Some of this guidance is derived by the sense of ugliness in various aspects of one's life. Some of it involves attempting to clarify vague drives, discovering that at which they really point. But it seems that one could easily be confused regarding what is ugly given the powerful influence of these alien forces. And it is here that disappointment, or perhaps the recognition of disappointment, serves an important function. When one is unwilling to experience disappointment, as it is described above, then one has accepted that one's frustrations are, or should be, universal frustrations. Put another way, these frustrations arise out of the breaking of some universal ethical principle. Or, if one is seeking to become a moral person and believes that one's frustrations are out of line with those universals, one works to ignore those frustrations—simply condemning any amoral/immoral frustrations as unworthy of concern. The rejection of the claim that one's complaints arise, or should arise, from the breaking of some universal ethical principle serves as a necessary condition for coming to knowledge of one's own drives.

And yet rejecting ethical principles appears to leave one without direction, as Nietzsche himself says through the mouth of his madman: "What were we doing when

[92] *GS* IV, 290.

we unchained this earth from its sun?...Where are we moving to? Away from all suns?...Is there still an up and down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing?"[93] Such a state is that which is the pure Dionysian—that is, without the Apollonian—as described in the second chapter. One floats upon the ocean, with no control and so also without any firm footing. But this is only a difficulty for the weak—either those who believe this chaos is authentic freedom, or those who cannot handle this sense of directionlessness by forming new values, and so require a firm, external source of direction (metaphysics, ethics). For Nietzsche himself to come to this point took many years of searching, misdirection, and suffering. Throughout that time, he moved from a zealous Christian, to a zealous Schopenhauerian/Wagnerian, and finally began his mature thought through *HA*, the shape of which starts to become evident in already in the first four books of *The Gay Science*. In his discussion of this evolution in *Ecce Homo*, we see his own take on this question of development in a person—the importance of a task. Discussing his break with Wagner, as well as with professional scholarly pursuits, Nietzsche describes his situation thus:

> To creep through ancient metrists with diligence and bad eyes – that is what I had come to! I was worried how thin and starved I had become: my knowledge was completely devoid of *realities*, and 'idealities' were not worth a damn! – I was seized with an almost burning thirst….That is when I first understood the connection between, on the one hand, an activity chosen against your instinct, a so-called 'calling' that you are not *remotely* called to – and, on the other hand, the need to *anaesthetize* feelings of hunger and monotony using a narcotic art,-the Wagnerian art, for example….too many people are condemned to make up their minds before they are ready, and then to *waste away* under a burden that has become impossible to throw off,…They crave Wagner like an *opiate*,-they forget themselves, they lose themselves for a moment...[94]

[93] *GS* III, 125.

[94] *EH* "Books," "Human, All Too Human," 3.

Nietzsche's frustration with his professorship was, it seems, anaesthetized by Wagner's work. It was in his slow separation from Wagner,[95] culminating in the Bayreuth Festival and the initial work on *HA*, that Nietzsche appears to have begun to see Wagner as his own opiate. Wagner was likely happy to have such an advocate in professional academia, and perhaps Nietzsche felt some pressure from Wagner's tyrannical nature to remain in that position, so there was a kind of obscene give-and-take here: pressure from Wagner (as well as the need for an income, etc.) to remain in the professorship dealt with by an idolatry of Wagner and the anaesthetization of his art. Intoxication, whether through simple pleasure-seeking or an ideal or a decadent art, is the primary cause (or perhaps the result) of the failure to become oneself. Intoxication offers a means of either ignoring of some of our drives or a kind of quick fulfillment of them that has no lasting value. It is an escape from our individuality rather than a confrontation and development of it. And, as Nietzsche learned from experience, such attachment causes the eventual break to be all the more painful.

What is it about Wagner that was particularly anaesthetizing? The semi-confrontation that took place between Wagner and Nietzsche on August 6, 1874 over the latter's presentation of a Brahms score, and his notebook reflections on Wagner's hatred of the Jewish composer, suggests that even at this early date, Nietzsche's move away from not only Wagner himself, but Wagnerianism, had begun. One of his criticisms at this time involves the lack of "measure" and "limit": "With Wagner, that is, one often struggles in vain to find bar-lines and hence rhythmic order in his music. This lack of

[95] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 110-11 notes in particular the dramatic impact on Nietzsche of Wagner's move from Tribschen to Bayreuth—the Tribschen days being remembered as the greatest in his life even in *EH*. Young suggests that Nietzsche may even have experienced this move as a betrayal. In a letter to Rohde, speaking of visiting Tribschen on a hiking trip after the Wagners had moved, Nietzsche claims to have felt "completely 'disinherited'" (Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 111).

'measure', Nietzsche continues, evokes the wandering 'infinity' of the sea (an effect, we know, Wagner consciously sought to produce)."[96] Further, Wagner's art was not the expression of who he was, an "inner necessity,"[97] but rather an attempt to overwhelm the audience with an "'intoxication of sensory ecstasy'; its aim is to *move* – at any price."[98] In short, Wagner was an actor—a criticism, as we have seen, that is close cousin to Nietzsche's critique of his earlier self: "Wagner the actor is a tyrant, his affect throws every taste, every resistance right out of the window."[99] Wagner, like Nietzsche at the time, was not himself.

One hears the echoes of this very early criticism of Wagner in Nietzsche's description of giving style to one's drives as discussed above. Wagner produced pieces that lacked the constraint of true art. It was overwhelming, and offered particular to the youths of the day a kind of pendulum experience: in everyday life, one lived out "a so-called 'calling' that [one is] not *remotely* called to"[100] and then had a kind of vacation from this in Wagner's art. The people experiencing this pendulum-existence are, to dip into book V, "those who suffer from an *impoverishment of life*"[101] and so seek the Schopenhauerian-Wagnerian (Romantic) resignation and/or intoxication/madness.

> But the one who "suffer[s] from a *superabundance of life*"—the Dionysian can allow himself not only the sight of what is terrible and questionable but also the terrible deed and every luxury of destruction, decomposition, negation; in his

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[96] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 187.

[97] Ibid., 186.

[98] Ibid.

[99] *The Case of Wagner* 8.

[100] *EH* "Books," "Human, All Too Human," 3.

[101] *GS* V, 370.

> case, what is evil, nonsensical, and ugly almost seems acceptable because of an overflow in procreating, fertilizing forces capable of turning any desert into bountiful farmland.[102]

This last quotation may appear at first to be discussing the kind of person who can see much violence and be fine with it, but I do not think this is what Nietzsche had in mind, at least not centrally. Rather, we should understand this person of abundant life as one who experiences these ugly things as pains.[103] After all, Nietzsche parallels this description against those who need "opiates" to deal with pain. And so, also, these experience pain but do not require these "opiates," but through these sufferings arise as creators. This experience for the Dionysian is the experience of disappointment—a suffering that brings joy, die Fröhlichkeit—because it evidences one's distinction from the systems of the world, or in more Nietzschean language, the herd. This distinction, in turn, allows for the freedom to create. And, again, this freedom is not the freedom of the Romantics—chaos of the drives without restraint—but the freedom of the strong, who form their drives, their characters, into a work of art.

Wagner's art was neither the expression of the strong nor was it an art for the strong. It was nothing more than a Romantic narcotic—a chaos that either gave a sense of relief from being something that one is not for a moment, or a "reason" to pursue chaos itself as what one is. Wagner soothes the

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[102] *GS* V, 370.

[103] In *Z* III, "The Convalescent," 1-2, Zarathustra experiences the nauseating thought that the "small man" too will come back eternally. And this though, painful enough to cause him to faint and then remain silent and fasting for seven days, he had not just welcomed, but commanded to come to him: "I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle; I summon you, my most abysmal thought!...Come here! Give me your hand!....Nausea, nausea, nausea – woe unto me!" Such is perhaps the nature of what may be the ultimate disappointment, given that it is his own teaching that brings about the suffering. Thus, his animals claim he would speak in his dying: "'I spoke my word, I break of my word…as a proclaimer I perish.'"

> weak and, as it were, feminine discontented types…[who] show their weakness and femininity by gladly letting themselves be deceived from time to time and occasionally resting content with a bit of intoxication and gushing enthusiasm...they are also the promoters of all who know how to procure opiates and narcotic consolations…[104]

The weak discontents are those who seek to ignore dissatisfaction, either through emphasizing beauty and profundities or the use of narcotic arts, while the "strong discontents" are "innovative at making [life] better and safe,"[105] and so seek to bring the world into a form that rids them of any dissatisfaction. The former attempt to ignore and cover up disappointment, the latter to empty the world of it. In both cases, the individual disappears, and greatness becomes impossible. Without disappointment, one will never experience the Dionysian, and so too will lose the richness of creativity.

Da Capo: Eternal Recurrence, Disappointment, and Non-Instrumentality

"What if some day or night a demon were to steal 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 again and innumerable times again…'"[106] So begins the famous section introducing eternal recurrence, aptly entitled "*The heaviest weight*." Nietzsche sets up the most rigorous test of life affirmation—would we desire that "every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh" be repeated innumerable times precisely as it has been in this life? Would we curse or praise the demon? To praise the demon, to affirm life, one must desire that one's individual empirical existence be affirmed, justified, by its temporal eternality.

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[104] *GS* I, 24.

[105] *GS* I, 24.

[106] *GS* IV, 341.

Nietzsche hints that most people most of the time would find this state of affairs unbearable. But it is possible that some have had moments where they would rejoice at the demon's message. These moments, though, are not simply moments of pleasure or joy. Indeed, such moments are not uncommon for those addicted to opiates. Rather, Nietzsche asks: "how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?"[107] One must not have a moment of escape from life to desire that all of life be lived again and again. Those who find this moment want to have that moment become eternal and so develop a "metaphysic" around it. They want an end to (the rest of) life. The affirmer of life is one who sees even the pains of life—something with which Nietzsche was quite familiar—and approaches them as disappointment, as affirmations of one's individuality over against the world, and as a means of discovering who one is. Indeed, life itself, not some single part of it, becomes a fulfilling thing.

It is not insignificant that Nietzsche speaks of the demon entering one's "loneliest loneliness." Loneliness may be defined as dissatisfaction with the world that has not yet achieved some resolution. So, for example, if I am treated poorly, I am lonely until I am able to have my suffering understood as an injustice—that is, the moment that someone, or the many or a god, agree(s) that I should not be suffering. Loneliness is resolved through the establishment of one's suffering as an injustice, either against the many or against the metaphysical "real" world. One experiences one's "loneliest loneliness" as a situation in which there has yet to be a resolution. And so the test is particularly trying. For the weak, this is the worst of times and they desire nothing but relief, a resolution in either something soothing or in madness and intoxication. For the strong, on the other

[107] *GS* IV, 341

hand, this is the very experience of disappointment—the experience of what is "evil, nonsensical, and ugly"[108] and so, too, becomes an affirmation of themselves as individuals capable of greatness. They have become very well disposed to themselves and life—two loves that, in the experience of lonely disappointment, cannot be separated.

Thus, this love of oneself and life cannot be the love of some moment of achieved happiness. It is being well disposed to oneself as active in all the moments and changes of life. One must love one's living of life, not some end toward which one is working—only in that can one affirm oneself and life as a whole. Put simply, one's primary desire(s) must be non-instrumental. All instrumental desires are the pursuit of the relief of some lack. One who has this non-instrumental love of life is one that accepts the various lacks, not simply the moments of their relief—and, in fact, accepts lacks that may have no specific relief, which become opportunities for creativity. Indeed, a world in which all has a structure, an order, that is beyond me is one in which creativity is impossible. In turn, a world that is ordered according to some desire or lack that I feel, in which all that I suffer will be reimbursed in some way fitting my desires, is also detrimental to that rich creativity that makes things beautiful. An artist must have constraint, limitations, and suffering—for art is to Nietzsche not simple "self"-expression, but also self-formation.

It is important that Nietzsche has this announcement of eternal recurrence follow immediately upon the section entitled "*The dying Socrates.*"[109] Nietzsche interprets Socrates' command for Crito to offer a rooster to Asclepius as the statement: "O Crito, *life is a disease*." Plato, the paradigmatic metaphysician, has his hero be one who

[108] *GS* V, 370.

[109] *GS* IV, 340.

"*suffered from life*" and so sought to avenge himself on it by referring to it as a disease. Socrates could not affirm life, and so despite his cheerful demeanor was never well-disposed toward either life or himself. Socrates is that one who "is dissatisfied with himself [and] is continually prepared to avenge himself for this."[110] And so, Nietzsche states, "Socrates *suffered from life*! And then he still avenged himself."[111] Because he was unable to affirm life, Socrates, beyond simply leaving this "veiled, gruesome, pious, and blasphemous saying"[112] on his deathbed, sets up the tyranny of the rational and metaphysical over the drives and individual empirical existence in such dialogues as the *Republic* and *Phaedo*.[113] Following Socrates in the reign of reason not only over but also against the drives, philosophers have been led into a morality of emaciation. Our desires are to be directed toward what one would desire if one were perfectly rational and knew all ends.[114] In pursuing the rational, it is not surprising to think that we may have failed to acquire a philosophical psychology sufficient to make sense of the richness of human desire.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how Nietzsche's approach to tragedy, heavily influenced by Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian elements, was cleansed through a shrugging off of teleological metaphysics. Though much of the language of tragedy

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[110] *GS* IV, 290.

[111] *GS* IV, 340.

[112] *GS* IV, 340.

[113] My contention is that this is a misinterpretation of Socrates (and Plato). See chapters four and five.

[114] Of course, Kant, arguably the end of a particular trajectory arising from Plato, is so rational as to be unconcerned with phenomenal ends altogether.

fades after *BT*, I have argued that key elements survive throughout, developing into the idea of what I have termed disappointment. Disappointment simply is Dionysianism devoid of teleological metaphysics. Tragedy without teleological metaphysics, that is, disappointment, drives one to find value in life and in one's individual empirical existence without any transcendent consolation or intoxication. Eternal recurrence serves as the test of whether one has embraced disappointment, or whether one still looks somewhere other than (this) life for value. In chapter four, I examine the further development in Nietzsche's tragic philosophy in order to offer an understanding of his mature moral psychology.

CHAPTER FOUR

Becoming What One Is Through Disappointment, Part 2: A Metaphysics of a Tragedy of Systems

Introduction

In chapter three, I presented the development in Nietzsche's view of tragedy from within the constraints of Schopenhauerian metaphysics to a tragedy without teleological metaphysics. This new view of tragedy, "purified" through Nietzsche's newly critical philosophy manifested first in *HA*, gives birth to what I have described as disappointment. In this chapter, I argue for a further development in Nietzsche's thought that shows his rigor in removing universals from the minds of the strong. I trace a line from eternal recurrence, that test for life affirmation, through the will to power, which serves as a kind of experience-grounded metaphysics, to the rejection of any system-like general pronouncements about the world that would distract from the happiness that arises from activity. Though Nietzsche never seems to drop eternal recurrence or the will to power as useful concepts, they too come against the Dionysian and must be surrendered to disappointment so that life may be affirmed.

Nietzsche's practice of philosophy, therefore, serves as a call, rather than a set of doctrines. A key part of this call is to attentiveness to one's own experience, a centerpiece of his philosophy that was present from the beginning, but took on its distinctly anti-metaphysical tone in *HA*. And so Nietzsche's practice of philosophy calls the reader to practice philosophy, rather than depending on Nietzsche's authority, or the authority of any doctrine he sets forth. "Know thyself," perhaps the starting point for all

philosophy, remains the ever clearer and yet never attained goal of Nietzschean tragic philosophy. This pursuit, the practice of tragic philosophy, constitutes human virtue and shows itself to be the object of human desire—an object that grants continual fulfillment without ever allowing the desire to cease.

The Tragedy Begins…Again

The idea of eternal recurrence gave birth to Zarathustra—a character whose importance did not diminish in Nietzsche's mind even as he was losing it. The last section of the first printing of *GS* introduces this character,[1] the founder of the first religion, as it is believed, that made a battle between good and evil. Zarathustra, in a way surely meant to negatively reflect the life of Jesus, makes a significant change at age thirty,[2] going into solitude. In the Gospel of Luke 4:1ff., one finds an account of Jesus entering the wilderness alone and, after a time there—fasting and being tempted—he returns and begins his ministry. Zarathustra speaks of Jesus in the section entitled "On Free Death,"[3] suggesting that had Jesus spent more time "in the wilderness and far from the good and the just," he would have found a love of life. That is, in experiencing loneliness and separating himself from the purveyors and actors of universal morality, Jesus would have had the opportunity to experience disappointment, for attention to the crowd and ethics, whom Zarathustra claims Jesus hated, blurs the sight of disappointment. Zarathustra, unlike Jesus, purposely sought solitude, and this time of solitude grants him the understanding that one should overcome good and evil. time in

[1] *GS* IV, 342.

[2] Luke 3:23.

[3] *Z* I, "On Free Death."

which Zarathustra comes to understand that good and evil are to be overcome. After this time alone in the wilderness, Zarathustra, like Jesus, goes back among humans to "minister."

Zarathustra is introduced with the Latin "*Incipit tragoedia*"[4]—"the tragedy begins." And in this section, he compares himself to the sun—that which is overabundant and relieves itself of this abundance by shining upon all, even the underworld. Zarathustra's "ministry" will involve becoming like the sun, shining on those who are below him—humans.[5] Tragedy here is disappointment—that experience of loneliness and the calmness of one who stands apart, free floating, as it were, above the movements of the world, which will be reflected in the consistent misunderstanding of Zarathustra by the masses. The sun is that "calm eye that can look without envy upon all-too-great happiness" and that is what Zarathustra desires to reflect. A complete affirmation of life is the very essence of such a calm overabundance, and this cannot be achieved, as argued above, without disappointment. Zarathustra achieved wisdom *in his solitude*—just as the demon comes to one in one's "loneliest loneliness"—and he is now going under to humanity only due to an overabundance. Life is, for Zarathustra, an act of creation from the overabundance achieved in his loneliness.[6]

As one reads the gospel-like account of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, one discovers that Zarathustra did indeed remain largely separate, and even asserted the need for individuality, or solitude. The last section of the first book includes Zarathustra's

[4] *GS* IV, 342.

[5] *GS* IV, 342.

[6] That activity and creativity arise from overabundance rather than lack hints at Nietzsche's idea of will to power as the ground of all drives.

exhortation to the rich loneliness that arrives through disappointment, that is, individuality: "Now I go alone, my disciples. You too go now, alone. Verily, I counsel you: go away from me and resist Zarathustra!...Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves."[7] The means of finding oneself, or becoming oneself, as discussed above, requires the experience of disappointment. A follower can only experience disappointment when she ceases to be a follower, for to be a follower means that one determines that about which one is dissatisfied by looking to the leader (or group). In so doing, disappointment is either ignored or avoided, and one cannot find (or become) oneself.

The Rise of the Will to Power

Once again, the test of one's life affirmation is found in one's reaction to the hypothetical demon. But Nietzsche was not satisfied with this psychological test, or the claim that eternal recurrence just is the nature of things. Nabais writes:

> Nietzsche's notebooks of the [late- and post-Zarathustra] period tell of the search for some other kind of cosmological justification for this new figure of individuality contained in the idea of the Eternal Recurrence. It is as though he had understood that the hypothesis, of all things being subject to repetition, still needed something to complement it. The Eternal Recurrence needed to be developed from the internal perspective of the individuality of each person and it had to go beyond the idea that one's temporal condition could be extended into infinity.[8]

Nietzsche's solution is the development of the idea of the will to power.

Following the dramatic cleansing of metaphysics from his thought in *HA*, the will to power is perhaps the closest Nietzsche comes to employing a metaphysical concept to

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[7] *Z* I, "On the Gift-Giving Virtue," 3.

[8] Nuno Nabais and Martin Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 50.

explain everything. In time, as will be noted below, he may even draw back from giving the will to power that unifying authority.

The will to power describes what allows the strong to affirm life. It is that creative power that forms "the most high-spirited, vital, world-affirming individual, who has learned not just to accept and go along with what was and what is, but who wants it again *just as it was and is* through all eternity, insatiably shouting *da capo*."[9] Without the creativity noted above, in which one sees in even one's own suffering the opening of possibility for creativity, one cannot achieve this kind of world-affirmation. Will to power allows one to countenance a world, a life, that contains disappointment, or perhaps will to power becomes exposed through disappointment. Yet, the will to power is unsuitable for a strict positivist—it goes beyond mechanistic descriptions and moves into a metaphysical kind of explanation. In his notes, later put into *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche criticizes the insufficiency of the mechanistic description, claiming that "a presentiment, or anxiety, is to be noted…as if the theory had a hole in it that might sooner or later prove to be its final hole…One cannot 'explain'…one has lost the belief in being able to explain at all."[10] The optimism arising from the power of science for description begins to falter when one desires a real explanation, that kind of understanding that gives the meaning of what one is describing. In book V of *GS*, Nietzsche explains further:

> Thus, a 'scientific' interpretation of the world…might still be one of the *stupidest* of all possible interpretations of the world, i.e. one of those most lacking in significance. This to the ear and conscience of Mr Mechanic, who nowadays likes to pass as a philosopher and insists that mechanics is the doctrine of the first and final laws on which existence may be built, as on a ground floor. But an essentially mechanistic world would be an essentially *meaningless* world! Suppose one judged the *value* of a piece of music according to how much of it

[9] *BGE* III 56.

[10] *WP* 618.

> could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas – how absurd such a 'scientific' evaluation of music would be! What would one have comprehended, understood, recognized? Nothing, really nothing of what is 'music' in it![11]

In response, one might suggest that perhaps there is no meaning to life, no value in what we experience. But human thought is, to Nietzsche, fundamentally valuation. "Setting prices, estimating values, devising equivalents, making exchanges—this has preoccupied the very earliest thinking of man to such an extent that it, in a certain sense, constitutes *thinking as such*….man designated himself…as *the* 'measuring animal'."[12] To think about the world without giving value or meaning borders on nonsense. Such is truncated thinking, leaving a "hole" that will eventually become impossible to ignore.

Clearly, explanation must go beyond the strictly "scientific" and move to something richer. Nietzsche gives hints about his approach when he criticizes the idea of scientific laws, claiming that such "savors of morality."[13] The aroma left over from morality is the claim that between all things there stand laws that determine how everything must relate to everything else, so that an order reigns over all things. If one removes any sense of morality, then all that remains of relations between things is power: "the stronger becomes the master of the weaker, in so far as the latter cannot assert its degree of independence—here there is no mercy, no forbearance, even less a respect for 'laws'!"[14] Nietzsche rejects ethical law, and so too rejects physical law.

It is important, therefore, that Nietzsche does not believe in fundamental objects (such as atoms) but rather only in forces themselves, and that all is simply the power

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[11] *GS* V, 373.

[12] *GM* II, 8.

[13] *WP* 630.

[14] *WP* 630.

relationships between forces. If there were fundamental objects, one would need some sort of law to explain how they relate. In turn, then, we see the connection between Nietzsche's rejection of the division between doer and deeds[15] and his rejection of the separation between object and its forces. Such a separation requires law/morality to explain the actions of the doers/objects. The relationship that exists between forces is a kind of "immorality"—the outcome that is determined simply by power. Such an explanation arguably coheres better with an empiricist approach for it rejects the positing of what cannot be seen as the substratum of all things: laws. Nietzsche echoes Hume concerning the law of causation: "Has a *force* ever been demonstrated? No, only *effects* translated into a completely foreign language. We are so used, however, to regularity in succession that its oddity no longer seems odd to us."[16] And, elsewhere: "In short: the psychological necessity for a belief in causality lies in the inconceivability of an event divorced from intent….The belief in *causae* falls with the belief in télê."[17] That is, we posit causality because we cannot imagine a force that does not have some end in mind, some desire it seeks to fulfill. But if we reject the idea that some end is intended, we must drop any intentions that have ends as their objects. There are only power relations. And power relations have no end but the exertion of power—they are without a *telos*. As Cooper says, "There is a reason Nietzsche chooses to speak the language of will rather

[15] *GM* I 13 is perhaps the clearest statement of Nietzsche's rejection of this distinction, though the idea appears earlier in the corpus. Of course, the rejection of a doer is not simply the result of his metaphysics, but I believe rather the opposite. The presence of a soul behind the deeds (and the drives) removes the support for empirical individuality. One is once again thrust into the metaphysical and must bend one's drives to match this metaphysical grounding (whatever nature it may take on).

[16] *WP* III, 620. In many ways, Nietzsche anticipates some of the criticisms that arise within logical positivism and its close relatives, particularly the idea that seems to lie somewhat under the surface of Nietzsche's philosophy, that to speak of anything meaningfully, one must speak in terms of its effects. Compare the "criterion of verifiability" and its implications in Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 31 and throughout.

[17] *WP* III, 627.

than desire, and power rather than beauty."[18] There is no *telos* drawing the will or the power.

That leaves the will to power, the force, nothing to drive it except itself—it is not a lack of something, but an abundance. The desire to exert its power is all that the force "desires"—to, in a sense, impress itself upon the world, and even form the world, as much as possible, into an object of that particular force. Nietzsche's perspectivism rises out of his view of forces, for each force exerts power upon the whole and in pressing against and the being pressed back upon the force forms a kind of "perception." And so, too, the impact of that force impresses the whole with the "perspective" of that force. As Nabais argues:

> In this way, *perception* and *perspective* are represented as the external and internal face, respectively, of the relation between forces; via perception each force will express in itself the point of view of the totality of forces and their differences in power and, via perspective, each force will express its own internal degree of power before that same totality.[19]

And, again: "Any quantity of power is an expression of each force's quality of perspective over other forces."[20]

So, while Nietzsche firmly rejected metaphysics in his positivistic-like turn in *HA*, he was then led to critique the scientific perspective of his day as presenting in its laws and fundamental objects the wolf (metaphysics, morals) in sheep's clothing (strict science). Thus, Nietzsche must pursue a different method of explanation, and the theory of forces offers rich possibilities. It adheres to that empirical approach that Nietzsche

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[18] Laurence D. Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 208.

[19] Nabais and Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, 60.

[20] Ibid.

acquired. Replacing laws that govern forces with the will to power is a sort of Occam's Razor approach to experience—pruning the belief down to only what is necessary as an explanation.

But why does Nietzsche offer an explanation at all? Let us grant Nietzsche his rejection of laws, and look at things as openly as possible—with what are we left? It seems that will to power is an acceptable explanation, but could there be something there that we may not know? Of course, in a positivistic spirit, what we are unable to know has no meaningful relation to us. And Nietzsche has claimed that we at least feel the need for an explanation. Could it not be that this felt need is not really a need at all, perhaps a kind of metaphysical hangover?

In any case, at this point (1885 – early 1888),[21] Nietzsche does believe some explanation is important and attainable. A view, as I note below, he may eventually begin to question. He says:

> The victorious concept "force," by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as "will to power," i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive, etc. Physicists cannot eradicate "action at a distance" from their principles; nor can they eradicate a repellent force (or an attracting one). There is nothing for it: one is obliged to understand all motion, all "appearances," all "laws," only as symptoms of an inner event and to employ man as an analogy to this end.[22]

Why is one "obliged" to posit this "inner event" as the explanation of all activities? I believe that this question is partially answered by the further audacious claim that we must "employ man as an analogy" to achieve this explanation. That is, a human cannot think of anything without peering through the lens formed by human experience. And we

[21] 1885 is the year of the majority of the quotations from *WP*. The reasoning for "early 1888" will be given below.

[22] *WP* III, 619.

experience our activities as arising from an inner event. Nietzsche, wary of accretions from metaphysics and ethics, reduces this inner event to the simple desire to exert power.

Nietzsche rejects fundamental substantial constituents of reality. Rather, Nietzsche asserts that there are simply forces in relation to one another. A force, unlike an object, exists only by virtue of being an activity. An object may be at rest, and through some mysterious "law" may be forced to act in particular ways. But a force simply is the activity. The force therefore, insofar as it is to be discerned as an individual, has an identity that is inseparable from its activity—it just is what it does.[23] To posit that there is some fundamental object from which the force proceeds creates difficulties in explanation—but positing that a force exerts power, to clean up the deceptive grammar, says only that a force is a force. And, so far, Nietzsche's explanation is not really an explanation, but has trimmed away the fat of metaphysics and morals. It is the addition of the claim that these forces have a "will to power" that sounds strangely metaphysical. The will to power is the human analogy. What does the human analogy explain that makes its use justifiable, or even necessary? And, further, why *this* human analogy? Would it not be possible to think of other analogies—the animistic presence of a soul within all things, or some similar sort of description?

By way of answering these questions, consider the nature of explanation. An explanation gives an understanding of things that is applicable to all without being void of meaningful content. Laws are applicable to all (as far as we can know), but, despite their usefulness, lack a meaningful content. Laws teach us that one's identity and one's

[23] Nabais and Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, 48. Nabais says that "[i]ndividuality has the nature of an original given, and, simultaneously, of a task." Though he is here speaking of human individuality, it may be applied to forces given that Nietzsche's method allows for the human analogy.

activities are not related in any necessary manner. Further, they teach us that one is governed by forces external to one. This move to governance is why Nietzsche smelled in laws the stench of morality. Strangely enough, then, physical laws echo the weakness and nihilism of Christianity and Platonism. Will to power, too, applies to all situations, but it has meaningful content. Any individual thing is nothing but what it does.[24] Rules that govern what it may or may not do are not present to limit it. The only limit of the individual is the extent of its own power. Thus, one avoids the moral background of laws. More to the point, within this perspective, becoming oneself, accepting one's task, and affirming life are all of apiece. Life denial and rejecting what one is arise the moment one appeals to some law(s) as the director or constrainer of one's actions. Just as with a force, one who defines one's actions according to something external rejects what one is.

Will to power and disappointment are therefore organically connected. The one who appeals to laws can never accept the individuality that arises from accepting disappointment. In turn, one cannot accept one's task in life, but must always look elsewhere for happiness or remain mired in disdain for life. Zuckert claims rightly that Nietzsche sees philosophy as a particularized understanding of meaning. That is, all attempts to understand life and the world are a kind of self-understanding. She argues that "[i]f all existence is particularistic…the truth can be perceived and 'incorporated' only in a particular form of existence."[25] Thus, one may obey "laws" that are particular

[24] Nehamas connects this claim to Nietzsche's genealogical approach. "Genealogy…is Nietzsche's alternative to ontology," founded on the idea that we should not be looking behind things for their essential nature, but rather to effects alone. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 104.

[25] Catherine Zuckert, "Nietzsche's Rereading of Plato," *Political Theory* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 1985): 218.

to that person in order to accomplish something great, as noted in the third essay of *GM*. But the metaphysical nature makes the laws and ideals grounded in the universal, homogenizing rationality so honored by philosophers incapable of helping the individual face life, herself, and to experience disappointment.[26] The will to power is empirical, founded in experience and not in the positing of anything underlying that experience. It is therefore a "metaphysical" claim that does not require that one make any universal claims, but leaves individual empirical existence alone to determine its own meaning. Not that one may interpret the world however one may wish—disappointment evidences that one is not simply a piece of the world, and the world does not simply reflect one's most prominent desires or rationality, in that the world and the individual often disagree on a particular turn of events.[27] Of course, when one forms a philosophy, it is a reflection of one—but this can be done well or poorly. When one demands that the world function a particular way, so that one attempts to universalize it and becomes impervious to disappointment and the further development that arises from disappointment (tragedy), then that is a classical metaphysical approach and is done poorly. On the other hand, if one does well, one will form a meaningful view of the world, but always be open to disappointment (tragedy) and so never seek to universalize it. The former metaphysical approach is akin to those who, "divinely absent-minded," fail to attend to experience—

[26] It is perhaps this very reason that Nietzsche claims that he should have spoken differently in *BT*—even singing or writing as a poet would have been an improvement. See *ASC*, 3.

[27] Though at first appearance it may seem that this claim is at odds with Zuckert's interpretation of Nietzsche that one interprets the world through one's own experience, one must keep in mind the Dionysian/tragic ground. One utilizes one's experience to interpret the world, but ultimately the world fills experience with opportunities for disappointment. Disappointment might arise partly because of our lack of self-knowledge: the ground of one's drives and one's highest self remain unknown and unknowable. But one moves ever forward toward self-knowledge and toward what one is, insofar as one does not surrender to the consolation of metaphysics and ethics. In terms of what parts of one's self is knowable in Nietzsche, I refer you to Robert Miner, "Nietzsche's Fourfold Conception of the Self," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 54, no. 4 (2011): 337–360.

the will to power[28]—and instead intently focus on what lies behind experience, and so remain "unknown to [them]selves."[29] "[*P*]*erspectivism*…is the fundamental condition of all life."[30]

The goal of knowledge is to promote life, that is, individual empirical existence: "We do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment….The question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life."[31] This claim returns us again to the strong who can affirm life. For insofar as one denies life, the theories at which one arrives will be life-denying. Nietzsche claims: "I have gradually come to realize what every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir."[32] So, the first question we should ask when looking at a philosophy, particularly the metaphysical aspects, is not whether the claims are reasonable. Instead, "it is always good (and wise) to begin by asking: what morality is it (is *he* –) getting at?"[33] A life-denying morality is hardly beneficial, and for that reason is simply bad, leading to decay. It is only the one who is life-affirming who is able to give a good account of the way things are,[34] for only the life-affirming one is attending to experience.

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[28] Cf. footnote 24: in attending to experience, one attends to genealogy rather than ontology.

[29] *GM* Preface, 1.

[30] *BGE*, Preface, 4. Indeed, the objective one, who seeks to overcome perspectivism, is almost not alive: "he is a tool, a piece of slave…but nothing in himself,-*presque rien*….without substance or content, a 'selfless' man" (*BGE* VI, 207).

[31] *BGE* I, 4.

[32] *BGE* I, 6.

[33] *BGE* I, 6.

[34] Though, of course, this account of the way things are will always be tentative and will never demand to be universalized.

The positivistic turn in Nietzsche was an attempt to remove the metaphysical limitations of his thinking and allow him to truly attend to experience. Insofar as one must get to the "moment of shortest shadow"[35] in "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable," we see that this shift is not enough. His flirtation with "Réealism" did not quite get Nietzsche where he wanted to go. The removal of the metaphysical leaves us with little to support life. Nietzsche worried in his notebooks of the time about whether Rée and his form of thought was helpful or made things worse.[36] In *GM*, his critique becomes more substantive: Rée fails, like the "English psychologists," to have a proper historical spirit[37]-that is, they are sufficiently attentive neither to what the available scholarly work has to offer, nor to their own experience of the world. So, though they embody that mischievous spirit that allows one to step outside of conventional, comfortable explanations, they end up with just another theory incapable of promoting life(-affirmation).

But why does something like deontological ethics, utilitarianism, or indeed contemporary virtue ethics fail to support life, or life-affirmation? The strong affirm life, not because they have received particular things that they enjoy, but because it offers the opportunity for creativity, even (or especially) when it does not cooperate. Pure reason, utility, and any instrumental approach to desire fail to capture this creativity. The theory reduces human motivation to the desire for some kind of specific end, arising from a

[35] *TI* IV, 6.

[36] Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 256.

[37] *GM*, Preface 4 and I, 2.

lack—particularly that which is useful for survival (of oneself or the species)[38]—it is essentially the desire-satisfaction model of moral psychology of Sidgwick as described in the introduction. Nietzsche firmly rejects this approach because it is a misunderstanding of human desire.

More broadly, humans are, according to *GM*, creatures that determine value.[39] Utilitarianism (as well as a host of other –isms) claim that value is determined by humans "according to *pleasure* and *pain*, which is to say according to incidental states and trivialities."[40] Insofar as one values life according to these, rather than the possibility of creativity itself, one cannot affirm all of life without an unbroken fortuitous chain of events. All of one's energy must be focused on achieving pleasure and avoiding pain. One cannot even attend to life in its purity—the simple joy of action, of creating significance ("signs" of one's presence), of forming, of possibility—that is, those things that only an individual can do. To always look toward some particular utility is to fail to see life. It is the same disease that ails the "seekers of knowledge"—always working to "bring something home," they fail not only to enjoy life, but are not even capable of attending to experience.[41]

A utilitarian person, what Zarathustra may call one of the "last men,"[42] will set upon life a value. And that value obtains in some end point, some moment of cessation

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[38] In *TI* IX, 14, Nietzsche rejects the idea that survival is the fundamental character of life. Rather, "[w]here there is a struggle, it is a struggle for *power*…" Zarathustra, the affirmer of life, even gives death a place in the fulfillment of one's life, allowing it to be a festival. See *Z* I, "On Free Death."

[39] *GM* II, 8.

[40] *BGE* VII, 225.

[41] *GM* Preface, 1.

[42] *Z I, "Zarathustra's Prologue,"* 5.

of desire, of rest—in a kind of death. And, most importantly, this valuation will arise *because such a person was not paying attention*. The utilitarian, or Christian, or Platonist—they are looking past life to some end to be achieved, and so fail to see that "[i]n the end, we love our desires and not the thing desired."[43] If one confuses one's love of desire for love of the thing desired, then one fails to affirm oneself (for one is one's drives), and to fail to affirm the life in which these drives work, but rather look for the end of life, the end of desire, the end of oneself, death. Epistemologically speaking, it involves looking past life when making judgments about it.[44] It is no wonder, then, that such judgments would see life, or the intervening time between the presence of the desire and its fulfillment, as naught but an obstacle. Nietzsche and Brewer share this rejection of any attempt to reduce all human desire to such instrumentality—the distaste for life that arises from a purely instrumental understanding of desires.[45]

The one attending to life may serve as an analogy for life—and the explanation of this strong one is the most appropriate, for it is one that reflects the beliefs of the one living, as opposed to the beliefs of those who look only toward death. Nietzsche's perspectivism has some elements of a kind of pragmatism, in which what is "true" is that which makes sense to those who are able to affirm life,[46] and so the theory itself is life-affirming. Whether this is true in an absolute sense is, perhaps, another question—or,

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[43] *BGE* IV, 175.

[44] Versus the Sidgwickian approach, described in the introduction, then we see that Nietzsche undermines the possibility of Sidgwick's view that what is desirable is based on one's desire insofar as it is in line with rationality and a knowledge of the many possible outcomes. Indeed, tragedy is surely an outcome to be avoided in Sidgwick's understanding, but its possibility is a *sine qua non* of Nietzsche's understanding of life-affirmation.

[45] Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, First Edition, First Printing. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2009), 120.

[46] For one who describes Nietzsche as a kind of pragmatist, see Matthew Rampley, *Nietzsche, Aesthetics and Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

more to the point, another *kind* of question, namely, one that makes no difference to us. What does matter, though, is that a Nietzschean form of pragmatism is not merely a matter of what is useful or pleasant[47]—despite the appearance of much of his writing, Nietzsche is not one to form beliefs without rigor. But such rigorous clear thinking arises not merely from mental acumen, but also from the experience of disappointment which drives one to "know thyself." *HA* exemplifies the rigorous removal of what Nietzsche claims did not belong to his nature. In short, his kind of pragmatism is grounded in a rigorous attentiveness to experience that never allows for any universalizing that could remove the possibility of disappointment, and thus arrives at an understanding of the world, the formation of value, that will not contradict individual empirical existence.[48]

Nietzsche devotes a section of *BGE* to arguing for the will to power as the most fundamental knowable property of the world.[49] His argument is rather simple and aligns with what was stated above: We have our given, the most fundamental being that we have drives—even understanding being "*only a certain behaviour of the drives towards one another*"[50]—and we experience our wills as efficacious. Thus, we believe in the efficacy of these drives, from which the will proceeds. From this experience of the

[47] See, for example, the preface to *A*: "When it comes to spiritual matters, you need to be honest to the point of hardness…You need to have become indifferent, you need never to ask whether truth does any good, whether it will be our undoing…" The tragic aspect of knowledge is present here. Particularly, insofar as destruction and creation are closely connected, in that creation often requires prior destruction (see, e.g., *GS* II, 58).

[48] Note that individual empirical existence is a complex idea, and as noted above (footnote 279), there are aspects of what we are that are unknowable. Nevertheless, to Nietzsche, it is not ours to speculate where our knowledge fails, but rather to more closely attend to what is possible to know.

[49] *BGE* II, 36.

[50] *GS* IV, 333.

efficacy of our wills we derive our belief in causation, not vice versa.[51] And so, with the last addition of the methodological demand to a unity in explanation—to positing a single form of causation that lies under the many forms of causation—we just apply what is most basic in our experience: the will to power.

The will to power, then, is a kind of anti-teleological metaphysics, seeking to offer an explanation of the world that does not drain it of the possibility of a full affirmation of life. In short, it explains not only one's experience but also the nature of the world itself that supports the positive acceptance of eternal recurrence present in the strong. In turn, the will to power is without any specific object—it is a desire to act, to create. There is no *telos* to the desire, and thus the desire does not seek its own death, and the one who attends to this desire can affirm life.

The Tragic Chorus Developed: Revaluation of Eternal Recurrence and the Will to Power

Eternal Recurrence

Nietzsche's final years of sanity were initially driven by the goal of writing a kind of *magnum opus*, the revaluation of all values. This goal, in turn, was driven by the idea of eternal recurrence. In time, though, both the goal of the monumental work and the idea driving it fell by the wayside. The will to power became not something that served as a cosmological support for eternal recurrence, and indeed the latter became less and less a metaphysical claim in itself. It is here that we begin to see the fruition of

[51] Note that if we were to begin with causation before the will, then we would be explaining what is closest to us in experience through something that cannot be experienced at all. And those who define experience by what cannot be experienced can easily (or perhaps are bound to?) lose the value in what is experienced. That is, they become nihilists.

Nietzsche's early account of tragedy, as well as the full development of Dionysian philosophy.

In the unfortunately organized *The Will to Power*, there are a series of out-of-order sections that were written in June of 1887 and collectively entitled "European Nihilism" (*EN*).[52] *EN* arguably manifests a significant shift in Nietzsche's thinking with regard to eternal recurrence and the place of the will to power. Perhaps the most obvious is found in the last two paragraphs. Nietzsche starts the second to last paragraph thus: "Who will prove to be the strongest in the course of this? The most moderate; those who do not require any extreme articles of faith; those who not only concede but love a fair amount of accidents and nonsense."[53] To what do these "extreme articles of faith" refer? At minimum, it would include those that rid the world of "accidents and nonsense." Thus, they would have no need of any totalizing metaphysic or morality that clear up the mess, or remove the possibility of disappointment—most obviously in this writing, that of Christianity. But Nietzsche hints that this may also include the idea of eternal recurrence. The final paragraph is simply: "How would such a human being even think of the eternal recurrence?"[54] A rhetorical question with the apparent answer that the thought of eternal recurrence would strike such a person as unnecessary. Nabais offers an explanation of Nietzsche's purpose of ending with this question:

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[52] In referring to *EN*, I am not referencing the entire first book of *WP*, but rather only the following sections (in proper order) *WP* I: 4, 5, 114, and 55. See 9, fn. 3. Though I believe that it is best to look toward the published texts for Nietzsche's mature thought for a variety of reasons, nevertheless, I believe that in attempting to grasp some elements of his development, appeal to his unpublished notes can be helpful. Nabais argues that *EN* (the "Lenzer Heide Fragment") contains the seed of his mature thinking, most importantly *GM*. See Nabais and Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, 128. Following Nabais, I believe that *EN* exhibits an important shift in Nietzsche's thinking regarding eternal recurrence.

[53] *WP* I, 55.

[54] *WP* I, 55.

> Nietzsche does not respond. Nor does he have to respond. The destiny of these stronger men no longer depends on the way in which they conceive of the idea of the Eternal Recurrence, but solely on how they feel, with pleasure and lust after, as though it were something of value, this most "fundamental characteristic" which is their will to power.[55]

Given this, Nabais argues that these "[a]ffirmative wills, sovereign wills, are characterized by not needing any representation of the world, of men, of eternity, or of repetition."[56] Nabais' claim may go further than Nietzsche. The strong continue to need representations of the world, but they do not need any particular representation. Eternal recurrence may, as in Nietzsche's own development and his image of the strong, Zarathustra, serve as a representation of the world that can bring about a powerful affirmation of life. But, in turn, if I am entitled to draw from *EN*, it may even serve as a distraction to the strong.

EN offers some suggestive criticisms (beyond the final question) of eternal recurrence.[57] Earlier, Nietzsche speaks of nihilism arising when the suffering or oppressed discover that their morality, their only weapon against the will to power of the strong, is simply another form of the will to power. In such a situation, which can only happen when suffering has been significantly reduced, morality collapses and the weak are left with a sense of utter meaninglessness in their suffering.[58] Nietzsche seems to believe that scholarship, grounded in some mechanistic understanding of a world set free from metaphysics, will inevitably lead to a belief in eternal recurrence. And the now not-

[55] Nabais and Earl, *Nietzsche & the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, 156.

[56] Ibid., 155.

[57] All of the following is taken from the thirteen sections of *WP* I, 55, unless otherwise noted.

[58] Nietzsche notes that the suffering of a human is primarily a sense of powerlessness against other humans, rather than against nature. In this case, then, it would seem that the reduction of suffering would be the achievement of greater equality as well as other broadly liberal ideas (*WP* I, 55).

so-bad-off weak will see the idea of eternal recurrence as a curse that drives them to action—to self-destruction: "not to be extinguished passively but to extinguish everything that is so aim- and meaningless, although this is a mere convulsion, a blind rage at the insight that everything has been for eternities."

The strong, on the other hand, are not those who reject the belief in eternal recurrence. They are simply unconcerned with any such sweeping claim. They are "moderate" and have no need of "extreme articles of faith." We can see further now what Nietzsche means: they stand between the strict adherence to morality and the nihilism of the self-destructive weak. Though they have rejected any claim that gives all life meaning, neither are they without any sense of purpose or meaning. That is, they do carry around "articles of faith"—just not the kind that demand total subjection or offer any totalizing claims. The strong have purpose(s) to which they feel no need to cling. They are open to tragedy, to disappointment. They take part in the tragic chorus.

So, too, does eternal recurrence mean little to the strong. It neither adds nor takes away from life. Eternal recurrence tests the weak, driving them into self-destructive (and purifying) despair by ridding them of the possibility of *télê*. But the strong have no need of any doctrine that attempts to eternalize the meaning they have given to their lives; they already reject metaphysical *télê*. In fact, eternal recurrence may begin to feel like a distraction. Rather than responding to the demon, "You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine," we might imagine the strong offering a noncommittal shrug and moving on to the business at hand. For the business at hand is the pleasure of the activity itself. No external justification of a theory, even one like eternal recurrence, is necessary.

Individual empirical existence is justified by the values created within it, not by a theory from without.

Nietzsche himself notes this two-edged nature of eternal recurrence in *Z*. In the section entitled "The Convalescent," Zarathustra suffers greatly from the realization that even the sickly and weak would eternally return. He convalesces partly through a sense of purpose remembered with help from his animals, who say to him:

> Sing and overflow, O Zarathustra; cure your soul with new songs that you may bear your great destiny...behold, *you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence*-that is your destiny! That you as the first must teach this doctrine-how could this great destiny not be your greatest danger and sickness too?[59]

Though from the standpoint of the strong, as opposed to the weak, Nietzsche yet sees the nausea that arises from the realization that the weak will eternally return. Perhaps, Nietzsche too, while teaching eternal recurrence, that in relation to the weak, it "is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the "meaningless"), eternally!"[60] The strong form values and affirm life without help from outside doctrines, and so safely ignore this double-edged sword. Eternal recurrence, therefore, serves a function in making the nihilism of the weak clear to them and so "it purifies...it pushes together related elements to perish of each other... it assigns common tasks to men who have opposite ways of thinking."[61] The strong, it seems, pass through eternal recurrence. They need not hold to the belief.

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[59] *Z* III, "The Convalescent," 2.

[60] *WP* I, 55.

[61] *WP* I, 55.

The Will to Power

The will to power did not suffer quite the same fate as eternal recurrence in Nietzsche's late thought. His intention to write a monumental "revaluation of all values" was centered on the idea of the will to power. But the goal for such a *magnum opus* seems to have fallen away, at least in terms of a huge work reflecting those of Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Kant. Instead, it was likely fulfilled in *The Anti-Christ*, with the unfortunately assembled *The Will to Power* serving as an out-of-order jumble of notes. It is my understanding that Nietzsche gave up the project, for reasons similar to his giving up the doctrine of eternal recurrence. I have argued, along with Nabais, that the will to power was originally set forth as a kind of internal and cosmological support for the affirmation of eternal recurrence. As the language of eternal recurrence fell away, the will to power remained. Could Nietzsche put together a revaluation with the will to power as its non-teleological metaphysical ground?

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche makes the following broad claim: "I distrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity."[62] This claim reflects part of his reasoning for avoiding a grand project based on the will to power as a unifying concept: "Intellectual integrity, then, forced Nietzsche to abandon both the cosmological and the biological doctrines [of the will to power]. Neither is even mentioned, let alone endorsed, in the published works of 1888."[63] Zuckert concurs,

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[62] *TI* I, 26.

[63] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 546. In the preface to *TI* (written Se30, 1888, after both *TI* and *The Anti-Christ* had been finished), Nietzsche still refers to *The Anti-Christ* as the first book of the revaluation of all values, thus suggesting that he was still planning a large work. Nevertheless, it may be the case that even in the writing of a book whose purpose is to sound out all the idols, Nietzsche began to turn away from the idea of a grand project. Within two or three weeks, he saw *The Anti-Christ* as a sufficient completion of the project. See Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 510. I believe Conway argues correctly that Nietzsche in this later period sought a kind of undermining of his authority, so that, like Zarathustra, people

suggesting that if we were to follow Nietzsche in his conception of (good) philosophy, "we need to think of it in terms of an ordering activity that produces a great sense of self-satisfaction and yet continues on the basis of the perception that no order is complete."[64] That is, a monumental systematic work would likely act as a means of undermining these central aspects of his view of the practice of philosophy.

What does Nietzsche mean by "a lack of integrity" as being the ground of a will to a system? As noted, the will to power, in the works of 1888, ceases being a principle of all things. Young claims that "[t]he late works abandon…the reductive psychological doctrine and allow human motivation to blossom into the richness it actually has."[65] Some noteworthy statements appear, for example, in *The Anti-Christ*. "…when there is no will to power, there is decline."[66] "Whenever the will to power falls off in any way, there will also be physiological decline, decadence."[67]

Young summarizes the shift in Nietzsche's thinking thus: "With a certain inflection, all this can still be said by the formula 'life is the will to power'. But now 'life' has exchanged description for evaluation."[68] I think this interpretation captures an important element, but needs further explanation so that its implications can be seen. *EN*

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did not become a herd-like group of disciples. It would make sense, though, that Nietzsche would desire to produce a grand work like those of the great philosophers-Hegel and Kant in particular. The role of *A*, in Conway a kind of irony that criticizes both Christianity and Nietzsche's own authority, would serve as a fulfillment of presenting his philosophy without creating a new system. That is, a call to become a philosopher. See Daniel W. Conway, "Nietzsche's Art of This-Worldly Comfort: Self-Reference and Strategic Self-Parody," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (July 1992): 343–357.

[64] Zuckert, "Nietzsche's Rereading of Plato," 233.

[65] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 547.

[66] *A* 6.

[67] *A* 17.

[68] Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 548.

hints toward a fuller explanation as to what takes place in the post-*EN* writings. Nietzsche, in describing an erstwhile hero of his, notes the use of one's character in understanding the world. To quote him at length:

> Can we remove the idea of a goal from the process and then affirm the process in spite of this? – This would be the case if something were attained at every moment within this process – and always the same. Spinoza reached such an affirmative position in so far as every moment has a logical necessity, and with his basic instinct, which was logical, he felt a sense of triumph that the world should be constituted that way.
> But his case is only a single case. Every basic character trait that is encountered at the bottom of every event, that finds expression in every event, would have to lead every individual who experienced it as his own basic character trait to welcome every moment of universal existence with a sense of triumph. The crucial point would be that one experienced this basic character trait in oneself as good, valuable – with pleasure.[69]

To sum up: Spinoza was able to affirm every aspect of life because he saw his own "basic instinct" reflected in the nature of the world. Being able to see in the world one's own nature allows affirmation without concern for a *telos*.

Spinoza is admirable for seeing the world in relation to his own nature, but he is not an image of the strong, for he held to an "extreme article of faith"—an all-encompassing view to which he clung too tightly. Nevertheless, Spinoza's perspective allows room for some disappointment, in that one may not get one's way in every event and has no recourse to demand change, and an affirmation of oneself and life can rise out of this. But Spinoza's "is only a single case"-other approaches are possible. Spinoza could not allow these differences, and though he sees the world as a reflection of his basic instinct, finding fulfillment in every moment of the process of life even in the midst of possible disappointment, the inability to allow other possibilities precludes a deeper disappointment: the fully tragic Dionysian, the realization that one's perspective of the

[69] *WP* I, 55.

world may falter and require replacement. And, though admirable in its affirmation of life, Spinoza's system could not bring one to an activity of increasing self-knowledge in the manner that Nietzsche's tragic practice of philosophy may.

Nietzsche's claim that the "will to a system is a lack of integrity" suggests the nature of Spinoza's failure to achieve the fullness of strength. In his notes in the years 1885-1886, Nietzsche wrote the following: "Profound aversion to reposing once and for all in any one total view of the world. Fascination in the opposing point of view: refusal to be deprived of the stimulus of the enigmatic."[70] Surely, this describes Nietzsche's own development—from Schopenhauerian to semi-positivist to a significant critique of positivism[71] and a tragic philosophical practice. Spinoza, who saw the world as a reflection of his being, had achieved an important step. But one who has achieved the strength that Nietzsche extols is not only able to see the world as a reflection of one's being, but countenances opposing understandings. And not only countenance, but even accept change. In 1888, Nietzsche wrote in his notes: "In so far as the word 'knowledge' has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. – 'Perspectivism.'"[72] It is this perspectivism that Spinoza lacked—the realization that lying underneath the world is no meaning.[73] In Nietzsche's words: "Saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems; the

[70] *WP* III, 470.

[71] E.g. *WP* III, 481: "Against positivism, which halts at phenomena – 'There are only *facts*' – I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations."

[72] *WP* III, 481.

[73] At least no knowable meaning, which is to say, no meaning that is at all meaningful to us. Cf. *TI* IV: "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable."

will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types – *that* is what I called Dionysian."[74]

Nietzsche, then, is less interested at the end of his career in any particular perspective, except insofar as he rejects any perspective that ossifies. His concern is the practice of philosophy—that is, how one does philosophy, or what it means to be a philosopher. Again, in his notes of 1888 he writes: "The most valuable insights are arrived at last; but the most valuable insights are *methods*."[75] Nietzsche's most valuable insight, in seed form in his *theory* of tragedy, comes to fruition in his *practice* of tragic philosophy.

Tragedy as the Practice of Philosophy and as Virtue

As discussed in chapter two, the tragic chorus offered up its vision of Dionysus through an Apollonian form—and this constituted tragedy. Further, it was argued that Nietzsche saw philosophy as being the tragic chorus. Here the choral nature of his view of philosophical method becomes clear: for the strong philosopher of the future offers up an interpretation of the world without grasping hold of it, drawing not out of homogenizing moralities and reason, but out of the infinitely fertile meaninglessness of the world.

Dancing around the edges, and in fact present in every Apollonian formation that these strong philosophers offer, is disappointment. Not only the disappointment of an interpretation of the world that does not allow one recourse to metaphysically-grounded justice, but also the disappointment that must always be present knowing that one has

[74] *TI* X, 5.

[75] *WP* III, 469.

developed this perspective without a metaphysical ground. The meaninglessness of the world allows one to form meaning—one's meaning is emphatically not grounded in a higher or more fundamental meaning. Thus, one always stands upon a ground of disappointment, a disappointment that is full of possibility, strength, and a kind of joy—the joy of creating, and even of the destruction that always must precede it.

Nietzsche perceives philosophy in much the same way as the ancients—it is a, or perhaps in the world in which he lived the only, means to virtue. His linking of philosophy and virtue is evident in the manner in which the two parallel one another, and in fact how tragic philosophy is necessary to free virtue from the procrustean bed of morality. In *A*, Nietzsche sums up his view of virtue in contradistinction to Kant (and Christianity and Buddhism):

> One more word against Kant as a *moralist*. A virtue needs to be our *own* invention, our *own* most personal need and self-defence: in any other sense, a virtue is just dangerous. Whatever is not a condition for life *harms* it: a virtue that comes exclusively from a feeling of respect for the concept of 'virtue', as Kant would have it, is harmful. 'Virtue', 'duty', 'goodness in itself', goodness that has been stamped with the character of the universal and impersonally valid – these are fantasies and manifestations of decline, of the final exhaustion of life, of the Königsberg Chinesianity.[76]

An comprehensive, universal "virtue," calling all to a form that takes no account of the individual's unique set of drives, is no virtue at all. One has one's virtue, discovering this through forming one's drives into an art.[77] As discussed above, Nietzschean "virtue" is no chaotic, lazy pursuit of whatever drive happens to be strongest at the moment.[78]

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[76] *A* 11.

[77] *GS* IV, 290.

[78] See also *TI* IX, 21.

Instead, it requires the ability to handle and thrive in disappointment, indeed finally in the deepest disappointment of tragic philosophy.

One is not a philosopher due to the knowledge one has acquired. Collected knowledge makes one a mere worker. The philosopher must be a creator, and so also a destroyer—the tragic chorus, a "disciple of the philosopher Dionysus."[79] The practice, not the knowledge acquired, makes one a philosopher. Indeed, as noted in the preface to *GM*, an obsession with "bringing something home" keeps one from coming to know oneself. In the same way, one loses virtue if one seeks simply to bring something home, to get to that moment of fulfillment and cessation. Virtue is a method, a practice, a living of life, not a state of purity acquired by adherence universal rational law. Rather, one becomes virtuous insofar as one practices the formation of the drives into an art, so that all that one is becomes beauty and a delight. In order to accomplish this, one must not submit to any one drive, nor follow them chaotically, but must give them order. In turn, to achieves this order, one must avoid certain fulfillments, redirect others, sublimate still others, and so forth. Neither the acquisition of the object of any one drive, nor even the objects of all the drives, achieves virtue.

Even more importantly, the fulfillment of any or all of one's drives does not achieve the yes-saying to life that Nietzsche holds as central—Nietzsche's version of *eudaimonia*. It is in achieving virtue, that formation of oneself into art, that one achieves this kind of *eudaimonia,* looking at life and being able to affirm it wholly. And, again, this formation is never finished, for the disappointment that haunts the tragic philosopher is always present, both upsetting various orders, but also granting greater insight and opening up new possibilities for creation. Virtue is more like a continual song than a

[79] *TI* X, 5.

sculpture. Ends, whether in this life or in some other, must never become one's focus, for in doing so, one becomes degenerate, vicious.

Virtue Ethics and Nietzsche's Approach to Plato: The Self and Metaphysics

Nietzsche's distaste for Plato/Socrates, fairly evident in *BT*, is reduced a bit during his middle period, and becomes once again strong in his late works.[80] In the above discussion, it becomes fairly obvious why he attacks Socrates so firmly in *GS* and later works. Teleological metaphysics plays the most obvious role in Nietzsche's rejection of Platonism, and its simpler offspring, Christianity. The difficulty with metaphysics in the later works includes, of course, the obvious removal of value from this life to another, unverifiable world. But I believe that this is not the fundamental reason Nietzsche has for rejecting metaphysical ideas. Rather, it is the manner in which metaphysics is known. If one believes that one has acquired a metaphysical truth, then this truth, insofar as it has any applicability to us, will restrict both method and the variety of forms of life possible.

A metaphysical truth restricts method, as has already been discussed at length, insofar as it removes the Dionysian from philosophy. That is, the method becomes ossified and the philosopher unable to experience that deeper disappointment that the tragic offers. A metaphysical truth also reduces the variety possible for forms of life. Concepts about human nature arrived at through metaphysical claims places severe limitations on ways of living. And, of course, metaphysical insights are derived from that which transcends experience, and so inevitably loses regard for experience. Thus, metaphysics consistently counsels humans to distrust that which can be learned from experience. Metaphysics almost always leads to (Nietzsche's interpretation of) Socrates'

[80] Throughout his work, as Kaufmann argues in his seminal biography, Nietzsche has tremendous respect for Plato and Socrates. But much of this is respect for a kind of archenemy.

last words: "Life is a disease"[81] and "[D]eath is the only doctor here…Socrates was only sick for a long time."[82]

Metaphysics, though, is not simply a free-floating object of rational inquiry. To Nietzsche, metaphysics is organically united to the idea of a self, a doer behind the deed. His later writings consistently reject the idea of a self that lies behind the deeds. In his published works and his notes, he makes it clear that the "self" is more of an effect than a cause—an error derived from grammar and in the interest of morality. And in this sense, the self is within the confusion of cause and effect discussed in that section in *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "The Four Great Errors."

Nietzsche claims that a confusion of cause and effect lies at the core of all religion and morality. Insofar as Plato, Descartes, Kant, and Schopenhauer stand as the paradigmatic metaphysicians, it is obviously the case that metaphysics as a whole stands within this criticism of religion and morality. In the first section of "The Four Great Errors," Nietzsche references a book by one Cornaro, in which the author "suggests his meagre diet as a recipe for a long and happy—virtuous—life."[83] Nietzsche criticizes this man for confusing cause and effect, for he believed that his diet gave him virtue. He who could not do other than have his light diet was not free to do otherwise. So, his diet was an effect of his happiness, not its cause.

In the notes of 1887, Nietzsche offers this line of reasoning against Descartes' *cogito*:

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[81] *GS* IV, 340.

[82] *TI* II, 12.

[83] *TI* VI, 1. Note how Nietzsche uses the word "virtuous" here, in a kind of eudaimonistic manner.

> "There is thinking: therefore there is something that thinks": this is the upshot of all Descartes' argumentation. But that means positing as "true *a priori*" our belief in the concept of substance – that when there is thought there has to be something "that thinks" is simply a formulation of our grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed….one does not come upon something absolutely certain but only upon the fact of a very strong belief."[84]

It is indeed a "very strong belief" that a deed is always done by a doer. Nietzsche suggests that the doer should instead be understood as the effect of the deeds—a claim that fits perfectly his understanding of virtue—the one thing needful. And though Nietzsche's rejection of the doer behind the deed can cause significant trouble for interpreters, it remains a centerpiece of his thought. There might be good reason, apart from a simple kind of skepticism, for this move, namely: if there is no doer, then no desire is ever fulfilled in the acquisition of a particular state of affairs.

Nietzsche claims that the belief in a doer behind the deed is linked to our belief in substance. In such a situation, the doer carries out an activity that is ultimately for the purposes of a substance. The desires of a substance, if plumbed to their depths, are ultimately desires for substance. Thus, the doer as substance forces us to accept activity as always being directed toward substance, metaphysics. In turn, substance engages in the contingent—activity—regretfully. The goal is always cessation. Thus, Nietzsche's turn away from the substantial self is a means of giving activity meaning over against a fulfillment that is simply a desire for cessation. And this arises out of the realization that our richest desires, particularly those most closely associated with virtue,[85] are not fulfilled in the acquisition of some state of affairs that allows cessation. Rather, virtuous desires are those that are only fulfilled in the activity. And for Nietzsche, this activity is

[84] *WP* 484.

[85] As has been stated by others and has been explained in some detail above, this is virtue as Nietzsche sees it—a kind of Homeric form of virtue, as opposed to the more Platonic-Christian form.

that of creation, specifically, the kind of creation that comes from tragedy. The deep Dionysian disappointment reveals the pliable, meaningless sub-structure to all experience. And this disappointment allows for further creation—the Apollonian side of tragedy. In turn, the manifestation of value in the Apollonian allows for the possibility of further disappointment.

The virtuous one is strong enough to accept and even delight in this disappointment. The philosopher of the future reveals the tragic nature of reality, announcing the Dionysian in the Apollonian form. At the end of the book V of *GS*, one sees Nietzsche's mix of Apollonian-Dionysian, his tragic philosophy, and the delight even in disappointment. To quote him at length:

> *Epilogue*. – But as I finally slowly, slowly paint this gloomy question mark and am still willing to remind my readers of the virtues of reading in the right way – oh, what forgotten and unknown virtues! – it strikes me that I hear all around myself most malicious, cheerful, hobgoblin-like laughter: the spirits of my book are themselves descending upon me, pulling my ears and calling me to order. 'We can't stand it anymore', they shout, 'stop, stop this raven-black music! Are we not surrounded by bright mid-morning? And by soft ground and green grass, the kingdom of the dance? Was there ever a better hour for gaiety? Who will sing us a song, a morning song, so sunny, so light, so full-fledged that it does *not* chase away the crickets[86] but instead invites them to join in the singing and dancing? And even plain, rustic bagpipes would be better than the mysterious sounds, such bog-cries, voices from the crypt, and marmot whistles with which you have so far regaled us in your wilderness, my Mr. Hermit and Musician of the Future! No! Not such sounds! Let us rather strike up more pleasant, more joyous tones!'[87]

Nietzsche's questions, descriptions, arguments—these are never quite Dionysian enough. They are the Apollonian forms. But those who can read "in the right way," who in fact hear Nietzsche as the tragic chorus, understand that the Dionysian "spirits" lie underneath

[86] As noted in the edition of *The Gay Science* used, the word here is "Grille"—which importantly means not only "cricket" but also "bad mood."

[87] *GS* V, 383.

what is said. And, in arriving at this understanding, cease to care for the book and seek only the revelry and dance of the Dionysian music. Of course, this is not the end of the matter for those who read Nietzsche aright. Instead, in hearing the music, the way is opened for them to become creators; they see now how to become philosophers in following "the philosopher Dionysus" and so become who they are, become virtuous.

Conclusion

Nietzsche's tragic practice of philosophy comes to fruition in his setting aside of all systems, even to the extent that he sets up questions regarding his own authority. The philosophical "doctrine" one finds in his writings should be understood as pointing to an experience of life-affirmation. Unlike Kant and Hegel who had followers working out the implications of their systems, but more like Zarathustra who left his followers so that they might find themselves, Nietzsche's late writings exhibit tragic philosophy without any doctrines or systems that allow one to attach oneself in order to make life meaningful. Instead, one is constantly thrown back upon oneself—from eternal recurrence to the will to power to the anti-systems criticisms, Nietzsche keeps turning the reader back to life, to take on the practice of tragic philosophy so as to find how s/he may affirm life.

The tragic philosopher, that member of the Dionysian chorus, can never wholly rest in some system to direct desire and show where desires may find fulfillment. Rather, the drives, the existence of which may be one thing Nietzsche could not question, make up one's life. The interaction of these drives in a manner that brings a constant fulfillment without cessation—what Brewer calls dialectical activity—brings the drives into a form that simply is the affirmation of life—that is, the self-affirmation of the

drives. One must reject any system that may become unyielding morality or a draw to a final cessation of the drives. In so doing, disappointment may be experienced and one's individuality will be affirmed in that experience. In addition, disappointment, that intrusion of the Dionysian into those Apollonian structures that give one meaning, creates new ground fertile for creativity, the continuation of becoming what one is. This continual creativity of becoming what one is under the bright shadow of disappointment allows the formation of one's own virtue, in which one makes oneself and all of experience filled with new values, and through this to affirm all of life—not because life is cooperative or fulfilled in some other life in which desires ceases, but because one's individual existence manifests itself in both disappointment and the creativity that arises from it. That is, through this, one affirms the perpetuation of desire and acts of creativity, this affirmation is Nietzschean virtue, and it is this virtue that is the unceasing fulfillment of the human's deepest desires.

Plato, in Nietzsche's interpretation, sets forth a philosophical psychology that seeks the cessation of desire that comes with death. In the following chapters, I argue for a different interpretation of Plato that will draw his and Nietzsche's perspectives on human desire and virtue much more closely together. Though differences remain between the two philosophers, much of their view of desire and their similar call not to a set of doctrines but rather to a practice of a tragic philosophy show significant similarities from which much can be gleaned for contemporary philosophical psychology.

CHAPTER FIVE

Going Beyond the Hypotheses, Part 1: The Ignorance of Socratic Knowledge

"Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does?"

– Socrates , *Meno* 84b

Introduction

In chapters two through four, I argued for a particular understanding of Nietzsche's philosophical practice. I then drew from this analysis not only for purposes of interpretation of specific texts, but also as a means to inform our understanding of Nietzsche's practice of philosophy more generally and in particular its relationship to the nature of human desire and virtue. Specifically, Nietzsche's rejection of teleological metaphysics opens the way for the experience of disappointment and, in turn, the development of virtue. A tragic understanding of life and the experience of disappointment are necessary for Nietzschean virtue, that is, his understanding of happiness, the affirmation of life. Nietzsche's criticism of teleological metaphysics and the ethics that derive from them and his view of human desire and happiness manifest significant similarities to the complaints and solutions offered by Brewer concerning contemporary philosophical psychology.

This half of this study (chapters five, six, and seven) argue for an interpretation of Plato's works[1] that establishes a philosophical psychology more amenable to Nietzsche than the latter may have realized, at least in terms of those issues that draw Nietzsche and

[1] I believe that this interpretation applies more broadly to Plato's works as a whole. But this chapter alone does not contain sufficient argumentation for such a broad claim.

Brewer together. The central question of this chapter and chapter six concerns Socrates' ironic claims to ignorance in relation to his practice of philosophy, while that of chapter seven is the nature of *eros* as the drive that leads to philosophy, and so virtue. As with Nietzsche, so with Plato: I argue in this and the following chapter that Plato's character Socrates[2] practices philosophy in a manner that directly reflects human desire and its proper fulfillment in virtue. In turn, he also gives hints that, when dealing with vice, the practice of philosophy takes a different turn. Plato sets up clues to determine when Socrates' interlocutors are vicious enough to require Socrates to practice philosophy with them in what Gonzalez calls the method of hypothesis.[3] The method of hypothesis plays the role in Plato's writings as a kind of lesser approach to philosophy, one used in situations in which virtue is lacking. Socrates' claims to ignorance and his approach in the constructive dialogues (such as the *Republic*) should be interpreted as directing our attention to the place of the method of hypothesis as well as its failure alone to achieve the goals of philosophy.

If we understand Socrates specifically as speaking more and more Platonically as the dialogues become "later," then Nietzsche's criticism of these thinkers can more easily find purchase. This study rejects the developmental approach to Plato's works, that is, the division into early, middle, and late Plato such that the early is more Socratic and the

[2] Given the nature of the interpretation taking place in this chapter (specifically, in that I will attempt to show a coherence between the philosophy done by Socrates in all of the works), distinguishing the real Socrates from the Platonic Socrates would be difficult and, I believe, unhelpful. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, "Socrates" will refer to the character of Plato's works. The similarity between the character Socrates and the historical Socrates is not my concern.

[3] Francisco Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998).

late Platonic.[4] Rather, I will offer up an interpretation of the kinds of dialogues that suggests that a "Platonic" metaphysical system is the intent of neither Plato nor his character Socrates, and that an important goal for the dialogues is encouraging the failure of a kind of knowledge. Nevertheless, the final goal is not the failure of knowledge as a whole, but the realization of a richer kind of "knowing."

I do not address Plato's ultimate goal fully until chapter seven. Nevertheless, the interpretive method set forth in this chapter and chapter six serves to cover the dialogues essential to this study and creates the possibility of a rich understanding of Platonic *eros* in the *Symposium*. In turn, this interpretation of *eros* offers fertile ground for a comparison with Nietzsche's view of desire, especially in terms of the tragic dimensions of both. I show that in the texts covered Plato avoids key elements of Nietzsche's criticisms, particularly those related to metaphysics, the cessation of human desire, and the nature of happiness (or life affirmation). Plato practices a tragic philosophy very much like that of Nietzsche. In turn, both Nietzsche and Plato give us a philosophical psychology with far greater explanatory value for the wide range of human desires than the world-making hypothesis that Brewer argues dominates contemporary ethics. At the heart of this chapter is the simple but potent claim that the dialogue form is not incidental to Plato's philosophy: to ignore the events and characters of the dialogue leads to a loss of Plato's message.

[4] Though other scholars have noted the problems of chronology, Howland brings together some of the significant problems nicely in Jacob Howland, "Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology," *Phoenix* 45, no. 3 (October 1, 1991): 189–214. I agree with his assessment and therefore do not use the developmental hypothesis in my interpretation of Plato.

The variety of types of Plato's dialogues has engaged scholars for millennia.[5] The *aporia* of the *Euthyphro* seems to issue from the mouth of a different Socrates than the one who makes claims about the eternality of the soul in the *Phaedo*. The pronounced differences between the dialogues have been explained in terms of a chronological development. This chronological explanation has broad enough support for the language of early, middle, and late to be standard in Plato scholarship. Nevertheless, criticisms of this view are not a new development. I believe that Howland has offered arguments that are fatal to the view in his "Re-reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology."[6] It is not within the scope of this work to defend this position, but my argument is based upon a rejection of the developmental view.[7]

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[5] These different kinds of dialogues include the more aporetic, such as *Euthyphro*, in which no conclusion is reached; the more constructive, such as *Republic* and *Phaedo*, in which some significant claims are made, and in turn those dialogues in which Socrates either plays a small part or is not present at all, such as *Laws*. The manner in which these dramatically distinct forms of dialogues relate, the place of Socrates (is he the hero?), and whether there is a development in them, either of Plato's own thinking or in terms of a kind of story that he intends his readers to follow, are all important and complex questions. The developmental view handles these different kinds of dialogues by claiming that the aporetic are more true to Socrates himself, while the more constructive and those in which Socrates is missing (e.g. *Laws*) are more in line with Plato's mature thought. Zuckert suggests an approach that takes into account the dramatic date of the dialogues as a kind of broad story that, in the development of philosophy within that story, has its own broader message. See Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*, 1st ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009).

[6] Howland, "Re-Reading Plato." See also Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers*, 17, n. 30.

[7] I am not arguing that Plato's thought did not develop, nor does Howland. All that is being argued is that, as Nails says, "that the quest for a chronology does more harm than good to the interpretation of Plato" (Debra Nails, "Plato's 'Middle' Cluster," *Phoenix* 48, no. 1 (April 1, 1994): 62–67. 66, fn. 12). Nails hints in this article that quantifiable stylistic relationships between different works can be more productive for tying together various dialogues. I hold serious reservations about benefits of stylistic analysis for the purposes of drawing together various dialogues, insofar as these stylistic relationships are meant to offer us a view that gets "behind" the author. Various humorous examples can be offered that show that attempts to dissect or relate various texts by virtue of stylistic relationships is fraught with interpretive danger. These dangers are perhaps made most evident in the so-called documentary hypothesis that has been used in Pentateuch studies. Such work may be helpful, but it seems terribly difficult to prove. Different kinds of content call for different styles, as is evident from comparing the style of a scholar's published work with a thank you note written at the same time, or even a philosopher writing about, say, metaphysics in one work and political philosophy in another. Therefore, it seems that stylistic analysis can offer useful information, but to use it to set up a framework for interpretation is, I believe, giving it more than its due.

Therefore, this study will pursue a relatively unified reading of Plato. In this and the following chapter, I will be interpreting aspects of dialogues that are either directly discussed or alluded to in some important manner in Nietzsche's corpus: *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Symposium*.[8] Given that it is both alluded to and particularly useful for showing the important similarities between Nietzsche and Plato, there will be an extended discussion of the *Meno*. Through an examination of these dialogues, I will present an argument for practice of philosophy that I believe Plato suggests through the activity of his character Socrates.[9]

Ignorance and Irony: The Wisdom of Socrates

Without the dubious benefits of the developmental approach, one is forced to discover a means of relating dialogues as apparently divergent as the *Euthyphro* and the *Phaedo*—the former ending in *aporia*, the latter building to an argument for something as questionable as the eternal nature of the soul and the after-life benefits of being a philosopher. Crafting an interpretation that shows the coherence of these two kinds of dialogues[10] in a single approach to philosophy will reveal a possible account of Plato's

[8] That Nietzsche was familiar with a significant portion of Plato's works is without question. At the very least, during his time at Basel he also taught at the Pädegogium the *Apology, Phaedo*, *Phaedrus, Symposium, Republic*, and *Protagoras*. See Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 101. This chapter will also deal with considerable portions of *Clitophon* and *Republic*, as well as a few references to other dialogues.

[9] Given the rejection of the developmental interpretation of Plato, the relationship between Plato and Socrates becomes a little trickier and more dependent upon the clues that Plato gives us in each dialogue. For example, the purposeful distancing of Plato from the events in the *Phaedo* suggest that the Socrates we are seeing may perhaps not be completely true to life. Nevertheless, I would suggest that this is not showing that the Socrates is more of a reflection of Plato, but rather that the Socrates we see and the arguments we hear are to be approached in a particular way that Plato himself wants us to notice. Some of this will be discussed below in the section on the *Phaedo*.

[10] I am aware that this chapter is by no means sufficient to interact with all the various questions of interpretation. Nevertheless, I believe that it is sufficient to make the case that this method of interpretation of Plato is reasonable and consistent, and at least superior to developmental interpretations.

philosophical practice that allows for a richer account of human desire. That is, as I argue, such an interpretation opens up a perspective of human desire, virtue, and the pursuit of philosophy that rejects their instrumental forms as less than ideal because these instrumental forms do not fulfill the desires they purport to fulfill. This chapter and chapter six focus on a kind of ignorance as a central element in the wisdom of Socrates and the manner in which this ignorance forms his practice of philosophy and the goal of philosophy. In turn, this form of ignorance opens the way for an interpretation of *eros* that has as its goal something other than a cessation in a metaphysical state of affairs.

Approaching Plato for the first time, one would see two kinds of dialogues: those that seem to come to no conclusion, which have been called "aporetic," and those in which Socrates offers theories, which I call "constructive." The aporetic dialogues perhaps find their clearest verbal description in the words of Socrates in the *Apology*. In retelling his testing of the claim of the oracle that he was the wisest man, Socrates confronts many individuals, after which he tells himself the following:

> I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know.[11]

Socratic ignorance, if we allow the *Apology*[12] to be taken seriously with regard to the mature beliefs of Plato, seems an important aspect of the practice of philosophy.

Of course, Socrates may be describing himself as ignorant in order to evoke the awareness in his listeners that he actually did know something—that is, he is speaking in

[11] *Apology* 21d.

[12] Obviously, throughout Plato's work we find many claims to ignorance about specific topics, and even claims to broad ignorance, like that in the *Meno* (80c): "…for I myself do not have the answer when I perplex others, but I am more perplexed than anyone when I cause perplexity in others."

a kind of ironic manner. But this would be an odd way of interpreting his comment, given the context of his trial. To explain, Socrates is in precisely the situation he is in because various people understood him to know more than he claimed to know. He makes mention of this problem in his speech.[13] It was not uncommon for his interlocutors to understand him as one who has an answer, but, rather than revealing his view, would prefer to engage in some sort of eristic. Jill Gordon, I think rightly claims that the reader is to see him/herself reflected in Socrates' interlocutors,[14] and so perhaps should be wary of seeing Socrates as having a system, an answer, that he simply refuses to delineate in a clear, treatise-like manner. Or, more to the point, one should be wary of granting the constructive dialogues pride of place over the aporetic in terms of presenting Plato's "mature thought," or even his ideas that can be presented following the "clearing of the decks" of the aporetic dialogues. I argue that the aporetic dialogues serve an important function in dialectic itself, rather than simply as a prolegomena to the constructive dialogues.

Though irony is surely present throughout the works, it seems to have moved beyond irony when Socrates gives a speech in which he persists in telling precisely the opposite of the truth. Charles Griswold notes[15] the various kinds of irony used in the dialogues. That Socrates spoke ironically and that this irony served as a kind of veil is obvious enough. But it is hardly irony to tell a simple falsehood. Irony not only covers, but also reveals or points toward what may not be stated easily. We need not interpret

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[13] *Apology* 23a-b.

[14] Jill Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy: Literary Device and Dramatic Structure in Plato's Dialogues* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999)., 83 and *passim*.

[15] Charles L Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature* 26, no. 1 (April 1, 2002): 84–106.

Socratic claims to ignorance as ironic humility. In turn, Griswold's warning regarding interpreting irony should be noted: "The acknowledgment that irony may be present could be taken as a license to read one's own message into the text."[16] If one, therefore, believes that a good philosopher erects rational systems of metaphysics and epistemology, built upon the pillars of important doctrines, like Kant or Hegel, then one may be tempted to read into Socrates' claims to ignorance nothing more than a provocative falsehood.

To be careful to interpret Socratic claims to ignorance, I consider three possible interpretive approaches: (1) He is being ironic in the sense of being completely dishonest, and in fact has precisely the knowledge that he shows his interlocutors not to have; (2) he is not ironic at all and at least believes that he lacks the knowledge that he shows his interlocutors not to have;[17] and (3) he is being ironic in that he knows something about what his interlocutors do not know, but this knowledge is not of the kind or form that his interlocutors hold.[18]

(2) is fairly simple to reject. It is difficult to maintain the claim that Socrates' only advantage over his interlocutors was that he knew he was ignorant. Vlastos argues rightly that (2) cannot be the case, given that there are points where Socrates either claims directly or implies that he knows something.[19] That Socrates pursued knowledge itself suggests that there is something he is attempting to gather. Even more, that he believes

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[16] Ibid.., 87.

[17] This lack of knowledge can be understood in the sense of just having right opinion, as virtue is described in the last part of the *Meno*.

[18] Vlastos sets up two thinkers, Norman Gulley and Terence Irwin, as contenders for views (1) and (2) respectively. See Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35, no. 138 (January 1, 1985): 1–2.

[19] Ibid., 5–11.

that (some form of) knowledge is virtue is suggestive—for he believed that the philosopher was virtuous.[20] If (some form of) knowledge is virtue and the philosopher is virtuous, then the philosopher must have (some form of) knowledge. Further, accepting his claim to ignorance at face value would place a huge question mark over the constructive dialogues, and indeed may imply that the developmental theory has the order of the dialogues reversed.[21] As Griswold rightly notes: "In presenting himself in the *Apology* as the messenger of god to benefit the citizens of Athens, Socrates implies that he knows well the truth about virtue and the other issues about which he inquires, or at least that he knows more than he is letting on."[22]

(1) seems initially much more plausible. It is clear that Socrates "knows more than he is letting on." The difficulty here is that we would need to understand him as simply lying. Perhaps we can appeal to Socrates' recommendation of the "noble lie" in the *Republic*, and so interpret this lie as that same kind—as Gulley states, this claim to ignorance serves as "an expedient to encourage his interlocutor to seek out the truth, to make him think that he is joining with Socrates in a voyage of discovery."[23] But the

[20] The virtue of the philosopher is obvious throughout Plato's works. In our sampling, consider the following. Socrates' claim that "[n]either Meletus nor Anytus can harm me in any way…for I do not think it is permitted that a better man be harmed by a worse" (*Apology* 30d); his claim in the *Phaedo* that the soul of philosopher is made clean through philosophy (e.g. *Phaedo* 114c); and the claim that the one who "looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen" gives birth to virtue (*Symposium* 212a)

[21] This is perhaps not such a far-fetched idea. After all, the aporetic dialogues usually begin with someone who claims to know something, and Socrates often leads that person to ignorance. The dialogues could be construed as structured in this way: The constructive reflecting the more confident interlocutor, and the aporetic representing the growing awareness of error. As most Plato scholars are aware, the constructive dialogues tend to include significantly erroneous thinking. The arguably dystopian just city in the *Republic* may be the most glaring example. Though not precisely holding this position, Catherine H. Zuckert holds in her *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) that *Laws* should serve as a kind of introductory read to the dialogues, whereas scholars often date *Laws* as one of the latest.

[22] Ibid., 89.

[23] Quoted in Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," 2.

"noble lie" in the *Republic* does not present the opposite of the truth, at least not regarding the essential points, as this view of his claims to ignorance would. In fact, the "noble lie" reveals the important truths in a way that avoids the difficulties of telling the whole truth, while what it conceals is relatively unimportant in terms of accomplishing the good of the *polis*.

Griswold rejects (1) when speaking of Socrates' ironic claims to ignorance:

> We assume that, while not wise, [Socrates] has learned a great deal along the way, as manifested by the ability to put the right questions and conduct the conversation. Thus, to repeat, in claiming ignorance Socrates both means and does not mean what he says. The interlocutor may well take this as nothing more than deception on Socrates' part, but it does not follow that it was Socrates' intention to deceive, or at least not simply to deceive.[24]

In short, Griswold seems to be leaning toward (3). Vlastos concurs.[25]

(3) seems to be a more acceptable understanding of Socratic irony, particularly with regard to his repeated claims to ignorance. It also holds significant explanatory value for and consistency with Socrates' statements and actions, more so than either (1) or (2). I believe that Socrates' claims to ignorance reveal an ignorance of a form of knowledge, but in doing so point to a different form of "knowledge." Following is an extended example that gives evidence for this interpretation as well as offers a foundation for the discussion of Socrates' philosophical practice for this and the following chapters.

[24] Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues." 89-90.

[25] Such is the claim of his entire paper, but see particularly Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," 11ff.

The Irony of Socrates: The Ugly Beloved and the Ignorant Teacher

One of the forms of Socratic irony that Griswold lists is irony of actions.[26] The speech of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* exhibits well this form of Socratic irony. In his encomium to Socrates, Alcibiades argues that the philosopher exhibited outwardly an obsession over beautiful boys. Notably, when he offers this information about Socrates, Alcibiades immediately adds: "Also, he likes to say he's ignorant and knows nothing."[27] Without explaining this statement, Alcibiades moves directly back to discussion about Socrates' love of beautiful boys. Of course, this obsession of Socrates was ironic, in that he refused to take advantage of Alcibiades' shameless advances.

But, in an important manner, Socrates really is obsessed with beautiful boys. Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* includes the famous ladder of Diotima. According to Diotima, *eros* leads one from love of beautiful bodies up to the form of the beautiful. Socrates seems obsessed with beautiful boys, and yet shows that he is in fact intent upon the form of the beautiful. There is a dissembling element to this, but it is not as if Socrates is acting in a manner that is the opposite of the truth. After all, love of beautiful bodies is not *opposed* to love of the form of the beautiful, but is simply a starting point. And, indeed, one gives birth to virtue in (the presence of) Beauty,[28] so Socrates' pursuit of beautiful boys both conceals and reveals.

Alcibiades encourages Socrates to deny any falsehood in the speech,[29] yet Socrates never interrupts him. Taking this as a hint for interpretation, it seems right to

[26] Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," 90.

[27] *Symposium* 216d.

[28] *Symposium* 206b.

[29] *Symposium* 214e-215a.

understand that Socrates did see himself as exhibiting behavior that looks like, and perhaps even was, a love for beautiful boys. Yet, Socrates was ugly and, though he had some obsessive followers, like Aristodemus and Apollodorus, he did not seem to have lovers or beloveds. Alcibiades believed early on that Socrates wanted him,[30] and he had good reason to think so.[31] But, given Socrates' speech about the lover-beloved relationship in the *Phaedrus*, describing the self-control that allows them to grow wings,[32] what Alcibiades and the rest of the Athenian community might see in Socrates is not really the case. He is not obsessed with beautiful boys—at least not in the way that others would infer from his actions. Rather, he is drawn to Beauty. His lack of a beloved is not an issue of ignorance or failure of the power to acquire one. Rather, Socrates chose not to acquire and interact with a beloved in the normal manner among the Athenians.

Alcibiades sees Socrates as arrogant in his rejection of such advances—that Socrates deceives one who should be a beloved into becoming his lover,[33] and so Socrates must consider himself the more beautiful, despite his ugliness. Socrates reverses the lover-beloved relationship with Alcibiades. Not only that, but Socrates *exhibits* almost superhuman virtue, which is what makes him beautiful—thus the sudden shift to talk of Socrates' courage, temperance, etc. after the story of Alcibiades' failed seduction[34] and Alcibiades' image of the statues of Silenus. Socrates, though in appearance much

[30] *Symposium* 217a.

[31] *Alcibiades* 103a; *Protagoras* 309a-b.

[32] *Phaedrus* 256a-b.

[33] *Symposium* 222b.

[34] *Symposium* 220a-221d.

inferior to Alcibiades, shows a beauty that makes him worthy of being Alcibiades' beloved.

If we apply this same pattern to Socrates' dialogues throughout Plato's works, we should find him reversing the teacher-student relationship, as well as *exhibiting* something that shows that he has a kind of knowledge, that is, has what is required for one to be teacher. Is such an analogy warranted? Alcibiades' speech includes a couple apparent asides or afterthoughts, which appear unrelated to the rest of the speech. The first is the statement tossed seemingly at random into the part of Alcibiades' speech that describes Socrates' apparent obsession with beautiful boys: "Also, he likes to say he's ignorant and knows nothing."[35] The second is the penultimate section of Alcibiades' speech in which, ostensibly as an afterthought, he mentions that Socrates' arguments are like the statues of Silenus-ugly on the outside, but full of divine reason.[36] These apparent asides help to direct and inform the analogy.

Following the analogy, then, we see Socrates reversing the teacher-student relationship. Such is the case in at least the aporetic dialogues, and even throughout the more constructive. Socrates asks to be taught what the other knows, coming as a lover of knowledge to the one who holds it. But in the questioning, the one who was teacher is shown to be ignorant. Instead, Socrates now looks like the one who has the knowledge. But Socrates refuses to give knowledge, but rather claims ignorance. He seems to exhibit virtues that make him worthy of being teacher, rather than a sophist, but he insists that he

[35] *Symposium* 216d.

[36] *Symposium* 221d-222a.

does not have what the interlocutors had claimed to have: an answer to the What-is-x? question.[37]

Just as his ugliness makes him unworthy of being a lover, so his ignorance makes him unworthy of being a teacher. Just as his ugliness hides a kind of divine beauty, so his ignorance hides a kind of divine knowledge. But just as his beauty is not the same kind of beauty of, say, an Alcibiades, so his knowledge is not the same kind of knowledge of, say, a Euthyphro. If this analogy holds, as perhaps Plato would have us believe given the clues in Alcibiades' encomium, then it would make sense that the irony in Socrates' claims to ignorance are not a lie, but a kind of veiling that is intended to reveal something important. Socrates tells the truth in that he is ignorant of the *kind* of knowledge that people mistake him for having. And yet he is not ignorant in terms of the kind of knowledge that he sought. And this irony is not a matter of deception, but perhaps of attempting to show that the kind of knowledge his interlocutors claim to have is impossible to acquire.

This analogy is by no means a complete statement of Socrates' philosophical practice or his goals. Nevertheless, it offers a starting point in intepreting his claims to ignorance that permeate the aporetic dialogues, and I believe play a central role in the

[37] Vlastos has argued that what Socrates was rejecting when he claimed ignorance was knowledge in terms of certainty, but that he was willing to claim knowledge acquired through elenchus, which could never be proven to the point of certainty. (See Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," 18). I believe that Vlastos is at least partly right. Nevertheless, I think that the understanding of the knowledge set out by Gonzalez, differentiating between that acquired through the method of hypothesis and through dialectic offers greater explanatory value for (at least) the works of Plato covered in this study. Indeed, it covers Vlastos' understanding as well, for knowledge through elenchus is uncertain knowledge insofar as what is propositionally possessed is always uncertain. And, in turn, when claims to certainty regarding propositional knowledge are made, the purported possessor is implying that s/he has surpassed the method of hypothesis—a possibility only for something greater than humans (cf. *Apology* 20d-e). See below for support.

constructive. What is required is an understanding of the constructive dialogues that supports, or is at least consistent with, this interpretation. To this task, I now turn.

Aporia *and the Purpose of the Constructive Dialogues*

Given that this study has rejected the idea of a development in Plato's works, I am required to discover a different manner in which we may begin to relate dialogues that seem to present two different versions of Socrates, one aporetic, the other constructive, as well as the so-called "late" dialogues in which Socrates plays either an apparently insignificant or nonexistent role. Once again, this study is far too small to offer anything approaching an adequate argument for a comprehensive understanding of Plato's entire corpus. But I argue for some key ideas that should offer a hermeneutic context sufficient to support the claims of the next chapter. In particular, I focus on a means of interpreting those dialogues that are important in relation to Nietzsche.[38]

I have argued that Socrates' claim of ignorance is ironic, and that we should understand this irony not as a straightforward ignorance of the topic being discussed, but rather an ignorance of the topic as his interlocutors believe it should be known. In the remainder of this chapter, I answer the question of how the constructive dialogues relate to the aporetic in terms of what it means for Socrates to have some other kind of knowledge. That is, I answer the question: What "other kind of knowledge" does Socrates possess?

[38] As stated above, these include: *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Meno*, and *Phaedo*. We have also drawn some from the *Apology*. Obviously, Nietzsche was aware of more than these dialogues, but these are the most obviously referenced works and, I believe, sufficient for the purposes of this study.

In his *Dialectic and Dialogue*,[39] Francisco Gonzalez argues for a return to the interpretive basics for Plato. Gonzalez examines what it might mean for Plato to suggest that some kind of knowledge distinct from that of Socrates' interlocutors might be had. At the center of most of the dialogues lies the What-is-x? question. Socrates' dialectic most often disallows the talk of various characteristics of x. Examples and definitions, in the aporetic dialogues, are consistently judged as failures.[40] Gonzalez hints that perhaps the difficulty lies in the propositional nature of these answers. In his introduction, he states: "In knowing a proposition about something, I can only know *that* certain things are true *of* it; therefore, any form of knowledge that does not have this character cannot have propositions as its content."[41] Throughout his questioning, Socrates seems to be trying to get beyond claims about x and intent upon an answer as to what x itself is.[42] I believe Gonzalez is right, and so must give an explanation of the role of the more constructive dialogues. Gonzalez begins with a discussion of some of the aporetic dialogues, *Cratylus*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, and *Euthydemus*. The conclusion of his argument for each is that the answer to the What-is-x? question is found not in what is *said*, but in what is *shown*, specifically what is shown by Socrates. Regarding knowledge of the good, Gonzalez claims that the aporetic dialogues show that "knowledge of the

[39] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*.

[40] As will be noted below, these need not be considered a waste of time for the reader of the dialogue. See Anne-Marie Schultz, *Plato's Socrates as Narrator: A Philosophical Muse* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Press, forthcoming), in her chapter on *Lysis*, in which she argues that an aporetic ending serves as an invitation to a "philosophical life"—that is, an invitation to become a philosopher, rather than relying on Socrates for answers. See also Roochnik's discussion of the use and overcoming of *techne* in the dialogues, e.g. Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom*, 251.

[41] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*., 8.

[42] This particular focus of Socrates in ridding the discussion of any secondary or tertiary characteristics is clear throughout his dialogues. I will suggest below in the analysis of the *Meno* that the abstract definition of an object is also included in those things Socrates is trying to get past.

good is not of that kind that could be expressed in any set of propositions, no matter how comprehensive; rather it is a knowledge that can be shown only *at work*."[43]

Therefore, the question "What is courage?" cannot be answered sufficiently in any proposition. But it can be seen in Socrates as he pursues wisdom.[44] So, too, Euthyphro may have had done better in "answering" Socrates' question if he had simply attended to Socrates, and imitated him.[45] Perhaps in these cases the propositions can get in the way of perceiving the good. But propositions fill the constructive "later" dialogues. Isn't the question "What is justice?" answered in the *Republic*? If it is, then Gonzalez's claim seems to falter, and indeed the claim that there is some kind of development makes much more sense—either a development in Plato's own thinking or a development based on the aporetic dialogues serving as a kind of prolegomena to the constructive dialogues.

Gonzalez devotes the penultimate chapter of the book to the *Republic*. His interpretation of the divided line in *Republic* VI serves as an excellent summary of his understanding of Plato's view of knowledge. The line is divided into four sections relating to imagination (*eikasia*), belief (*pistis*), thought (*dianoia*), and understanding (*noesis*). In *Republic* 510b-511a, Socrates tries to explain to Glaucon the thought section of the line. It is something between the stuff of the world around us and the highest

[43] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*., 58-9. (Emphasis his) This accords in a way with Vlastos' claim that Socrates only held to knowledge that could be supported through elenchus, rather than knowledge that could be known with certainty—at least, in the sense that this knowledge is acquired through the activity of interacting with ideas and showing the insufficiency of propositions. Nevertheless, Vlastos holds that this knowledge through elenchus is propositional.

[44] Compare the courage of Glaucon in pursuing the question of justice in *Republic* II, 357a.

[45] Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 85–86. That it seems no one really imitates Socrates is an important part of Blondell's argument.

section of understanding. Socrates refers to these things as "images" (510b). Further, they are understood as those things used in the method of hypothesis, which does not move toward a first principle. That is, they function in terms of the way those images work.

Socrates uses geometry as an example, claiming that these things within the thought section of the line are like the perfect image of a triangle, as opposed to the triangle that has been drawn. This imaged triangle fits all the idealized rules about triangles. What then is the nature of these images that lie within the thought section of the line? Gonzalez claims that they are "propositions that mirror the forms in abstract (i.e., not fully explicated or understood) concepts, which, as such, acquire content only when illustrated by sensible objects."[46] Propositions relate to one another and function in obedience to certain rules. And they need no content to relate correctly.

A proposition that attempts to answer the What-is-x question always proves inadequate. Socratic ignorance, therefore, concerns the propositional knowledge that his interlocutors claimed to have. But it may be possible that Socrates had a different kind of knowledge, a kind of "vision"[47] of courage, piety, the Good, Beauty, and so forth. If Gonzalez is indeed correct as I believe he is, then Socrates exhibits the topic of discussion, whether virtue or *eros*—ironically beautiful and knowledgeable. Put another way, Socrates practices philosophy erotically, having both resource and lack, and so too his practice of philosophy is tragic. To give further evidence for this perspective, I turn

[46] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*.., 220.

[47] The word "vision" is inadequate, insofar as what can be perceived can be described propositionally. It may be more appropriate, given that this "vision" is acquired in a practice, not in some end to which a practice drives, to speak of a kind of relationship to what something is. Diotima in the *Symposium* speaks both of a kind of "vision" and of being in the presence of the form of Beauty. Therefore, I use these concepts interchangeably.

now to a discussion of the *Meno*, in which one sees both the aporetic and constructive elements of dialogue. I present an interpretation that shows that Socrates prefers the stirring of a vision in philosophical dialogue over precise, and relatively contentless, propositions. In turn, the pursuit of propositions turns out to be driven by lack of virtue, and to achieve only a preliminary function in encouraging a reduction of animosity toward philosophy and philosophers.

Virtue, Vice, and the Practice of Philosophy in the Meno

The *Meno* contains aspects of both the aporetic and constructive dialogues[48] in that the dialogue offers a fairly clear example of the different means of defining[49] things—of those kinds of definitions that are useful and those which are not, and so the nature of the top two portions of the divided line. Because of the presence of these two types of definitions, this dialogue serves as a useful beginning in establishing an understanding of Socrates' practice of philosophy that can show coherence between the aporetic and constructive dialogues. In coming to an understanding of this Socratic practice of philosophy, I show the relationship between the practice of (good) philosophy and the pursuit of virtue, in part by showing the manner in which vice hinders the practice of philosophy.

The *Meno* contains an aside in which Socrates offers two definitions of shape and one of color. In this portion of the dialogue, we get a hint toward what he may be saying in reference to the divided line. His two answers defining shape are as follows: "shape is

[48] For this reason, it is usually classified as a transitional work. See introduction to the *Meno* by John M. Cooper in Plato, *Plato Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 871.

[49] "Defining" is to be understood somewhat roughly, for some of the descriptions Socrates gives are clearly not watertight definitions. Such is the nature of the following discussion.

that which alone of existing things always follows color"[50] and "a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid."[51] His definition of color, distinctly different than the previous two, is: "color is an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived."[52] Socrates prefers the former two, particularly the first,[53] while Meno, a student of Gorgias and oratory in general, prefers the last.[54] Why does Socrates claim that the former two are better than the last? Clearly, the last is more accurate, as several problems could be brought up regarding the first two. Nevertheless, the first two are closer to a vision of shape, while the latter seems dependent on other definitions and the relationship between words. That is, when one hears the first two definitions, one can almost see what he is saying. The third definition sounds intelligent but lacks a kind of "visual" content.

It is not that the third definition lacks all content. To get a sense of the kind of content the third definition possesses, one can look back at a rhetorical question Socrates asks early in the dialogue: "Or do you think that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these?"[55] Despite the agreement between Meno and Socrates that the answer should be

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[50] *Meno* 75b.

[51] *Meno* 76a.

[52] *Meno* 76d.

[53] It is immediately after giving this first definition that Socrates says, "I should be satisfied if you defined virtue in this way" (75c). More will be said about why this first definition was likely his favorite below.

[54] *Meno* 76e.

[55] *Meno* 71b. Note that we are perhaps given a clue that the answer to this question is not unequivocally "No." In 76b, Socrates claims that "Even someone who was blindfolded would know from your conversation that you are handsome and still have lovers"—this because Meno is "forever giving orders in a discussion, as spoiled people do." The implication is clear that if someone were to approach

"No," it seems that we should respond with a "Yes". One might know a lot about Meno without knowing who Meno is: either by being told that there is a certain person who has these various qualities, or perhaps by interacting with Meno without knowing that he is Meno, say through anonymous letters. Of course, our understanding depends on the meaning of the phrase "does not know at all who Meno is." Fortunately, the *Meno* contains several references to this kind of ignorance of something (or person) in relation to knowledge about that thing (or person), and in fact this question arguably holds a central place in the dialogue.[56]

The most explicit references to this idea of knowledge of something itself versus knowledge about something can be found in Socrates' discussion of the method of hypothesis. Meno begins the dialogue with the question of whether virtue can be taught.[57] Socrates turns the discussion toward the nature of virtue. After Meno fails several times to give the form of virtue, and after a couple asides to discuss the forms of shape and color, as well as the famous proof of recollection using the geometrically-ignorant servant, Meno presses Socrates to go back to the question of the teachability of virtue. Socrates gives in, but immediately shifts the manner of discussion to the method of hypothesis. Nevertheless, Socrates first hints toward the depth of this concession, claiming that he will change the method "because you do not even attempt to rule

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blindfolded who did not know Meno at all, but was to hear him, that person would know very quickly that he was attractive and so forth.

[56] As will be noted below, Plato seems to be trying to remind us of this early question in 76b when he says, "Even someone who was blindfolded would know from your conversation that you are handsome and still have lovers."

[57] *Meno* 70a.

yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me…"[58] Meno had used the idea of ruling others as part of his previous attempts to define virtue—definitions that were ruled out as failures. And, if we keep in mind other dialogues, such as the *Phaedrus* and *Republic*, we know that self-rule is somehow essential to being virtuous. Meno's failure to be virtuous links to his unwillingness to pursue the question as Socrates felt would be best. Meno's lack of moderation and his "interruptions thereby dictate the course, as well as diminish the quality, of the conversation."[59] This conversation of diminished quality is none other than the method of hypothesis.

Socrates describes the method of hypothesis as the pursuit of a specific question about something without knowledge of the thing itself.[60] In his example, he refers to whether a triangle of a certain area can be inscribed within a particular circle. Speaking as one making the hypothesis, Socrates says, "I do not yet know whether that area has that property, but I think I have, as it were, a hypothesis that is of use for the problem…"[61] And so the question is approached from the outside rather than the inside, so to speak. Or, perhaps better, the question never gives knowledge of the nature of the object in question, but simply offers something like a series of conditionals. If X obtains, then Y does as well. If X does not obtain, then Z obtains. Whereas these conditionals offer information regarding the properties of the topic discussed, they do not, to borrow the langue of the book VI of the *Republic*, make their "way to a first principle that is *not* a

[58] *Meno* 86d.

[59] David Roochnik, *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's "Republic"*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 144.

[60] *Meno* 86e-87b.

[61] *Meno* 87a.

hypothesis."[62] Therefore, philosophy as the method of hypothesis may arrive at answers that suffice to answer the questions posed. But Socrates' practice of philosophy goes beyond this, pressing toward something that cannot be as easily answered, if answered at all. Indeed, insofar as the method of hypothesis comes to a sufficient conclusion, the pursuit of knowledge will cease with the acquisition of the appropriate propositions. The method of hypothesis reflects, therefore, the world-making hypothesis described by Brewer: a desire, in this case, a desire for knowledge, that finds its fulfillment and cessation in a particular state of affairs (the acquisition of the proposition). Socrates' practice of philosophy moves past these propositions, reflecting Brewer's dialectical activity—an appropriate designation.

But the goal of Socrates' practice remains unclear. What kind of first principle is beyond what is achieved in these hypotheses? The rest of the *Meno* gives us an idea. In the discussion using the method of hypothesis, Socrates and Meno finally come to the conclusion that virtue is something that guides correctly, but fails to be knowledge. All of this is grounded in the bi-conditional established immediately after shifting to the method of hypothesis:[63] Something is knowledge if and only if it can be taught. Meno and Socrates first agree that virtue is beneficial because it guides correctly, and so must be a kind of knowledge, and so, by virtue of the above bi-conditional should be teachable. But Socrates immediately doubts this because of the lack of teachers of virtue—even the virtuous fail to teach their own children to be virtuous. Given the lack of teachers and students, the claims of the sophists notwithstanding, it appears that virtue is not teachable. Therefore, according to the above bi-conditional virtue cannot be knowledge. It seems

[62] *Republic* VI, 510b.

[63] *Meno* 80b-c.

therefore that a contradiction has arisen, but Socrates then offers the claim that we can be led correctly by right opinion. Thus, given that virtue leads correctly and yet cannot be taught, it seems that it must be right opinion.

The conclusion that virtue is only right opinion has not only answered Meno's question, but has even said something about the nature of virtue itself. But what is said about the nature of virtue is almost without useful content. The nature of virtue is touched upon only for the purpose of answering the question of whether it can be taught, and so is understood only as far as it can be by one pursuing that question. Virtue as right opinion tells us that despite the appearance of teachable knowledge, virtue is something else. Socrates and Meno did not arrive at this understanding of virtue as something other than knowledge because they knew the nature of virtue, and so also this understanding of virtue as right opinion is essentially useless to help them know virtue or become virtuous.

But Socrates suggests that the conclusion that virtue is not teachable may not be entirely accurate. At least, Socrates seems to be hinting toward this in the final paragraphs of the dialogue. In what I believe to be a kind of veiled reference to himself, Socrates says

> …unless there is someone among our statesmen who can make another into a statesman. If there were one, he could be said to be among the living as Homer said Tiresias was among the dead, namely, that "he alone retained his wits while the others flitted about like shadows."[64]

There is obvious irony in this claim, for Socrates is poking fun at Anytus and Meno. But the mere mention of a possible teacher suggests that Socrates thinks it is possible to teach virtue. But one does not teach virtue as one teaches knowledge, because virtue is something not quite like knowledge—that is, at least not like knowledge as Meno and

[64] *Meno* 100a.

Socrates' other interlocutors might interpret it. But this would also mean that virtue is not simply right opinion, but something more solid—less likely to flee like an unchained statue of Daedalus. Is there someone with virtue, someone who can teach it? I think the answer is "Yes": Socrates is a virtuous teacher of virtue. And as various scholars have noted,[65] Socrates' teaching is not simply a matter of offering the right answers to questions. His life and philosophical practice are part of his virtue.

Gonzalez, in his interpretation of the divided line, argues that the area of the line labeled "thought" was that part that dealt with propositions. Propositions are images of things that are known in their nature through other means. Propositions function in terms of logical relations and are the content of the method of hypothesis. And, as was seen in the *Meno*, the method of hypothesis never gets to the nature of the thing itself. Knowledge of this first principle is non-propositional knowledge.[66] Thus, one can begin to see what the Gorgias-like definition of color is lacking that the two definitions of shape, primarily the first, have. Whereas the third definition, that of color cannot be as easily criticized, it lacks the "vision" of the definitions of shape. That is, when one reads the definitions of shape, one is offered a kind of image of our actual experience of shape. When one reads the definition of color, one knows only an abstraction. Almost ironically, this is because the definition of color seems intent upon describing the nature of color in itself, rather than in terms of how we experience it.

[65] E.g. Gonzalez (58-59 *et passim*); Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy*; Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues*.

[66] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 3.

Plato (and Socrates) was not ignorant of the weakness of the definitions. Socrates first defines shape as "that which alone of existing things always follows color."[67] It is immediately obvious that this definition does not suffice, but only explains how someone like Meno or Socrates, namely those who are not blind and can distinguish colors, would experience it. After all, a blind interlocutor would experience shape differently. A room that has no light whatsoever will have one (or no) color. And yet the shapes one feels of the various objects in that room will not follow color, but will turn about heedless of the uniformity of color. Ostensibly blind to the failures of his definition, Socrates continues, "I should be satisfied if you defined virtue in this way."[68] Such a statement by Socrates is suggestive, especially given the weakness of the definition. But the weakness cannot be separated from its usefulness, for it helps one to remember (recollect) shape only insofar as one can see. Or, put another way, its usefulness for the dialogue partners is the cause of its failure as a universal definition. As Roochnik says about dialectic: "Because it is dialogical, dialectic is 'site-specific'…[I]t requires an 'appropriate' response (*to prepon*) to a particular occasion (*kairos*) constituted by specific individuals, time, and place."[69] Socrates' practice of philosophy reflects, in a way that is not merely coincidental, the veiling/revealing nature of Socratic irony: its weakness (not being universally understandable) makes it seem erroneous, but that is its strength (its appropriateness for eliciting a kind of "vision"). For a sign points to something, and a sign that is obviously bad can serve an important function in that one will less easily confuse the sign for the

[67] *Meno* 75b

[68] *Meno* 75c.

[69] Roochnik, *Beautiful City*, 144.

thing to which it points. Of course, the one who confuses the sign for the answer will find that sign lacking.

Meno confuses the sign with the (wrong) answer, and so presses back on Socrates, and in fact describes something approaching blindness: ignorance of what color is. Socrates reprimands him, suggesting that he is acting like the "disputatious debaters,"[70] and in turn claims that they should discuss the topic as friends. He continues: "By this I mean that the answers must not only be true, but in terms admittedly known to the questioner."[71] That the terms must be known to the questioner suggests that the answer must be provided in a manner so that it is useful to the questioner. And Meno's question about color resembles that of a "disputatious debater" in that he knows what color is—or, more importantly, can envision what Socrates has said—but pretends as if he does not for the sake of argument. He does not want a definition of shape that is appropriate and useful for him, but one that is appropriate and useful for all people. And so he declares Socrates' answer "foolish,"[72] claiming that he should give a new one that would be understood by one without knowledge of color. Socrates, after a short lecture, gives in to Meno's demand[73] and offers a definition of shape that avoids the use of color. In so doing, the definition becomes less problematic but also loses some of its visual fecundity.

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[70] *Meno* 75c.

[71] *Meno* 75d.

[72] *Meno* 75c.

[73] Barring the beginning, in which Socrates steers the topic from the question of whether virtue can be taught to the question of what virtue is, Socrates consistently gives in to Meno's demands. This is a reflection of Meno's various failed definitions of virtue that it is about power to acquire what one wants (78b-c) and ruling over others (73d). Again, this shows that Meno is not virtuous and that, more importantly, the very direction of the conversation is directed by lack of virtue. We should then find that the further we move from what Socrates wants to discuss to what Meno wants to discuss, that we are travelling further and further from (a useful understanding of) virtue.

The idea of visual knowledge is noted directly or hinted at throughout the Meno. In the movement from Socrates' first definition of shape to his definition of color, we are given clues that these definitions seem to be moving further and further from a kind of visual knowledge. Between the first and second definitions of shape, Meno acts as those "disputatious debaters" and demands a definition that excludes color. Does Meno know color, at least in terms of being able to visualize it and point it out? Surely. But he wants a definition that avoids the contingent nature of the present dialogue, and so suggests a response appropriate if "someone were to say that he did not know what color is."[74] Socrates says that his answer was a true one,[75] and that they should discuss as friends using "terms admittedly known to the questioner,"[76] despite what someone as picky about words as Prodicus might demand.[77]

Socrates avoids the use of the word "color" in his second definition of shape, to which Meno immediately responds, "And what do you say color is, Socrates?"[78]

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[74] *Meno* 75c.

[75] Regarding Socrates' use of the word "true": DeMoss references the issue of Plato's possible epistemological confusion in his equation between knowing what x is and knowing x. Nehamas offers the answer that knowing the essence of something is to know it, while others argue that this arises from a confusion between propositional and direct knowledge. See David J. DeMoss, "*Episteme* as *Doxa* in the *Theaetetus*" in Robert M. Baird et al., eds., *Contemporary Essays on Greek Ideas: The Kilgore Festschrift* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1987), 33–54. While I am arguing for something similar to direct knowledge over against propositional as the goal of Socratic philosophy, I do not think that there is a confusion between these two forms of knowledge in Plato. Rather, given that one form of knowledge is not a matter of a state of knowledge, but a practice of dialectic, and the other (the method of hypothesis), while capable of arriving at an end state that answers its questions, really has use only as a part of dialectic, propositional knowledge of and knowing x are closely related. To put it another way, for something to be knowledge, it must be hypothetical knowledge (based on the method of hypothesis as a terminal practice of philosophy) or must be grounded in a knowledge that goes beyond propositions. And so the proposition is true insofar as it serves and is recognized as a sign pointing beyond itself. Thus, when Socrates says that his answer is a true one, I believe he means that it is a sign that serves its function of pointing beyond itself.

[76] *Meno* 75d.

[77] *Meno* 75e.

[78] *Meno* 76a.

Socrates again reprimands Meno, and at this point brings up the example of knowing about Meno even while blindfolded.[79] And following the aside about Meno's bossiness and good looks, Socrates gives his Meno-approved definition of color. This definition of color can be understood by someone blind, just as someone could know about Meno even if blindfolded. But the blind person who understands this definition is akin to Frank Jackson's Mary prior to leaving her black-and-white room. She understands things about color that most of us could not begin to grasp, but can she envision color? Imagine that Mary was not simply in a black-and-white room, but was rather blind. In such a case, she may know all the same things about what the experience of color does to our brains and so forth, and she may very well understand Socrates' Gorgias-like definition of color. In turn, his definition of shape as that which follows color will be completely useless to her. It is useful only to those with sight and the ability to distinguish colors.

But is the more universal definition useful to Mary, or to anyone? That depends on the meaning of useful. In this study, I mean understand the term "useful" to mean something like "to elicit vision." When Socrates says that the definitions, or perhaps the first definition, of shape are better than that of color, he means that they are more useful. In terms of accuracy and universal agreement, the definition of color improves upon the definitions of shape. But usefulness as I use the term has one very important qualification: Such speech that elicits vision can only be useful to those who know that to which the terms refer. Applying this to virtue, one lacking acquaintance with the virtue being discussed will be incapable of acquiring the vision. And so, too, that one will be forced to use the method of hypothesis and Gorgias-like definitions to speak about that which they cannot recognize.

[79] *Meno* 76b.

I think Alcibiades explains the deceptiveness but usefulness of the apparent simplicity in Socrates' arguments best in his encomium in the *Symposium*. To quote him at length:

> …even his ideas and arguments are just like those hollow statues of Silenus. If you were to listen to his arguments, at first they'd strike you as totally ridiculous; they're clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He's always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners; he's always making the same tired old points in the same tired old words. If you are foolish, or simply unfamiliar with him, you'd find it impossible not to laugh at his arguments. But if you see them when they open up like the statues, if you go behind their surface, you'll realize that no other arguments make any sense. They're truly worthy of a god, bursting with figures of virtue inside. They're of great—no, of the greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man.[80]

To look at Socrates' words themselves, they are not as beautiful as that of a great speaker like Gorgias. Neither do they stand up to the test of universality and rational accuracy. In fact, in speaking of grand things, Socrates is always "going on about pack asses" and so forth. But Alcibiades claims that one must look through these words. The words are images that one must break open to see the divine wisdom inside them. Of course, the foolish and those unfamiliar with Socrates will laugh, for the words are not useful for those who refuse to engage in a conversation with Socrates as a friend, but interact with him or his ideas as "disputatious debaters." Such people get caught up in the words themselves, pursuing the obsession of Prodicus on exact meanings, and fail to see the wisdom within. Put another way, they seek to come up with definitions that cause others to praise the speaker or are unassailable for the purpose of never losing an argument. But these answers do not elicit a vision of that about which they are talking.

[80] *Symposium* 221e-222a.

Alcibiades' speech tells us more about Socratic irony. Socrates' words are unrefined, and lack the glitter of Gorgias,[81] but they are only deceptive to those who are foolish or unfamiliar with Socrates. To those who have some kind of wisdom or who are friends with Socrates, the words also reveal something. That is, the words used, which in the case of the *Meno* are used for Meno as a friend, elicit a vision of that of which they are speaking. And so Socrates' words embody his irony: they both conceal and reveal. Therefore, his words may deceive or elicit vision depending on if one is, to use Gordon's language, on the inside or not,[82] or, to use Socrates' language, "if they are friends as you and I are"[83] or "disputatious debaters."

To follow Gonzalez in regarding *dianoia* as that kind of thought which focuses on the images of language, one sees here a possible parallel to Socrates' critique of the tragedians and other mimetic arts in *Republic* X. Just as the pursuit of images in words in the method of hypothesis arises from lack of virtue, so the pursuit of the images in poetry arises from a lack of virtue. In turn, just as the belief that the images that are words can guide one into knowledge of the nature of virtue is a dangerous confusion, so also the belief that the images that make up poetry can guide one into knowledge of virtue is dangerous enough to be banned from the just city.

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[81] Socrates' foolish words, even for those who are unfamiliar with him, still often contain a kind of enchantment. Consider Alcibiades' claim early in his speech that Socrates' words—"this satyr's music"—has a powerful effect on many (*Symposium* 216c). In Plato's works, one sees various responses to Socrates' words. Anytus may represent one response—Socrates' words causing hatred. Alcibiades may be a second—a kind of enchantment that has little effect. A third may be Meno, who does not hate Socrates but seems little moved or changed by his words. The last may be Plato himself, who seems moved and changed by Socrates' words. And so, while Gorgias promises positive results (in terms of winning arguments and moving crowds to support your particular cause), Socrates' words offer no consistent effect. In that way, the effect of his words, too, reflects the vision that fails to be propositional knowledge that Socrates has through his dialectic—a kind of enchanting, erotic, tragic way of knowing.

[82] Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy*., 128.

[83] *Meno* 75c. Of course, we find that Meno is not on the "inside," but this is his own fault, due to his lack of virtue, or foolishness.

One last parallel arises from the strange dissonance present in that an imitation called a "dialogue" critiques imitation. One should not overlook the oddity of the suggestion that the method of hypothesis can lead astray, even as we see Socrates using it. This critique of mimesis can lead one to ignore the literary elements of Plato's writings, treating them rather like treatises with an unfortunate excess of words. But, just as Plato writes a Socrates who critiques writing in the *Phaedrus*, so he imitates a Socrates who critiques imitation. Plato surely wanted his readers to catch this tension. And we are not without resource in dealing with the tension. Socrates' complaints about the method of hypothesis, that is the use of the images of words in determining truths about things, hints toward a solution. Again, only after Meno fails consistently to act and pursue the question of virtue virtuously does Socrates give in to pursuing the question of the teachability of virtue. And he does so through the method of hypothesis—but not without bookending the discussion with complaints about the relative impropriety of this method.[84] Indeed, his critique of the method of hypothesis at the end of the dialogue echoes his critique of Meno's desire to know the teachability of virtue at the beginning of the dialogue. Compare: "We shall have a clear knowledge of this when, before we investigate how it comes to be present in men, we first try to find out what virtue in itself is";[85] and "If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses? Or do you think that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these?"[86]

[84] *Meno* 86d-87b, 100b.

[85] *Meno* 100b.

[86] *Meno* 71b.

Socrates, therefore, only begrudgingly participates in the method of hypothesis. And even then he throws doubt on the conclusion at which they arrive. In the *Meno*, they agree ultimately that virtue is not knowledge, because it is not taught, and so not teachable, but that it also guides correctly and does not come by nature.[87] Therefore, it must be true belief and is acquired only by divine inspiration.[88] Given their apparent confidence, why then does Socrates take time to talk about what one would be like that could teach virtue?[89] Surely, Socrates is hinting toward what he is trying to do himself. Like the image of the cave, Socrates not-so-subtly suggests that he "alone retain[s] his wits."[90] The idea seems clear: The method of hypothesis will not suffice to understand something. And, importantly, if Socrates (or Plato) uses the method of hypothesis, he will always give hints that it is inadequate, that is, that it becomes needful due to the lack of virtue of the interlocutors.

So, Socrates (and Plato) do not hold the method of hypothesis as bad in itself, but as inadequate for knowing best the nature of something. It continues to benefit those who see through the images to what lies behind them. But those who lack virtue, like Meno, seem incapable of doing so. And, if we are to attribute to Socrates wisdom and good motives, then we must also suggest that even in his failure to see beyond the method of hypothesis, Meno has gained some benefit from it. The dialogue ends with Socrates saying, "You convince your guest Anytus here of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you succeed, you

[87] *Meno* 98d-e.

[88] *Meno* 99b-c.

[89] *Meno* 99e-100a.

[90] *Meno* 100a.

will also confer a benefit upon the Athenians."[91] Importantly, Socrates does *not* say "in order that he may be virtuous." Given the conversation between Socrates and Anytus that took place in the dialogue, and the threatening manner in which the latter spoke and his role in the trial of Socrates, one gets a sense that the conclusion arrived at in the dialogue would be useful to open up a better dialogue. The conclusion is by no means useful for making one virtuous. Indeed, how could it be? If virtue cannot be taught and is simply divinely inspired, then it is only by the whim of the gods that one becomes virtuous. Such a suggestion will perhaps reduce Anytus' animosity toward Socrates, which was focused on his belief that Socrates was "slandering" him and other statesmen.[92] But that is its limit of usefulness, unless Anytus considers that small doubt that this understanding of virtue is not quite adequate, that indeed it may be that some enlightened kind of person can teach virtue.

The method of hypothesis does, therefore, offer some benefit, even if one is not on the "inside." But this benefit is minimal, and might even blind the one who settles in it. Consider if a nation were to simply accept that virtue is something one acquires by luck. The result would be something comparable to the paralyzing effect of Meno's "debater's argument." After giving evidence of recollection, Socrates says: "I would contend…that we will be better men, brave and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it."[93] But if virtue is simply right belief, acquired by the roll of the die, are we not in a situation where we cease to

[91] *Meno* 100b.

[92] *Meno* 94e-95a

[93] *Meno* 86b-c.

pursue it? Yes, but only if we accept the conclusion offered by the method of hypothesis—something that, despite its possible benefit in reducing the enmity of Anytus, Socrates hints that we should not accept as sufficient.

The inadequacy of the method of hypothesis explains Socrates' ostensibly false claim that one cannot know things about Meno without knowing Meno, and his later claim that someone could know things about Meno without even seeing him. This, in turn, explains the difference between the definitions of shape, most clearly the first of the two, and that of color. When Socrates claims that he could know nothing about Meno if he does not know Meno, he is speaking in terms of a richer kind of knowledge than that which can be acquired through the method of hypothesis. The method of hypothesis allows a kind of knowledge about the topic that is universally accurate,[94] but it inspires no vision. On the other hand, Socrates' "coarse" language inspires vision, but is not universally accurate.

To describe virtue in the way that Meno wanted may require one of two options: Either something relatively uninformative and unhelpful, or an eternity of describing every possible instantiation. That virtue is right belief rather than teachable knowledge proves relatively useless. This claim, again, may help someone like Anytus be less belligerent, but also threatens to enervate our pursuit of virtue (and, in fact, is a result of the failure to pursue virtue). So, too, we had an example of the attempt to define virtue by its various instantiations in Meno's, and many other of Socrates' interlocutors', first responses:

> …the virtue of a man is…the virtue of a woman is….the virtue of a child, whether male or female, is different again, and so is that of an elderly man…or if you want

[94] By "universally accurate," I mean a definition that is accurate from all perspectives, rather than useful relative to those involved in the conversation.

> the virtue of a free man or a slave. And there are very many other virtues….There is virtue for every action and every age, for every task of ours and every one of us…[95]

The first definition of shape, of which Socrates said "I should be satisfied if you defined virtue in this way"[96] is neither useless to those who speak together as friends, nor an endless listing of qualifications that will cover every possible instantiation in order to avoid the possibility of a counter-example. Rather, unlike the definition of color, for Meno and Socrates, if they are speaking as friends who seek to understand one another, it serves as a means of eliciting a vision of shape. Socrates would be "satisfied" if Meno could offer a definition that would elicit, rather than inhibit, a vision of virtue. The inhibiting arises from too much concern over the words, rather than an attempt to proceed "up to a first principle" that goes beyond the words.

The unwillingness[97] to go beyond the words results in either poor or a complete lack of vision. If, in trying to describe Bob to Jenny, Susan lists off his characteristics, Jenny could easily fail to envision Bob. Jenny may become confused because, in order to make sure she understands Bob's properties that Susan lists off, she may need a host of qualifiers. Susan may say that Bob has a good sense of humor. But what kind of sense of humor? Even in describing this sense of humor in detail, Susan may not be able to

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[95] *Meno* 71e-72a. See Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 164, in which he claims that Socrates has a problem with definitions that break what is being discussed into pieces. The failure, of course, is not simply that the topic will take so long to discuss, it is that we have left the topic to some extent. Just as in the multiple instantiations of virtue listed by Meno, so if the servant had given the length of the side of the square that contained twice the area of the two by two square, they would have had a property of the side, not the side itself. Granted, the original question was about the length of the side, but surely Socrates (and Plato) knew well that the question was unanswerable when he asked it. The conversation was then forced by necessity to the recognition of the side, rather than an account of a property of the side.

[96] *Meno* 75c.

[97] It seems the failure to do so is more of an unwillingness than an inability, insofar as virtue and lack of virtue are the results of choices, since in the *Meno*, it is lack of virtue that causes the emphasis on the words.

communicate with Jenny her vision of Bob's sense of humor. But if, instead of listing off these more accurate properties of Bob, Susan decides to compare him to a mutual acquaintance (Jeff) with whom he has important similarities, Jenny may acquire a more useful vision of Bob. Susan may lay out a list of accurate characteristics of Bob, but it is difficult to see how these unite in the person of Bob, and indeed Jenny may become trapped in attempting to understand the properties and their relation to one another, and never see past them. In pointing to Jeff who has complexities irreducible to a list of characteristics, Susan may elicit a vision in Jenny of the complex unity that is Bob. In the same way, virtue is not the collection of all its instantiations,[98] nor a whittling down of the properties of those instantiations[99] to those that are similar and describable, but is something other.

But did Socrates offer to Meno something that could give someone a vision of virtue? Perhaps more importantly, one might ask if Plato has offered a vision of virtue to his readers? I believe that Socrates did, and even made hints toward it that Meno apparently missed. Meno's failed definitions keep returning to the power to obtain one's desires[100] or to rule over others.[101] Socrates, of course, leads Meno to realize that these are incorrect. In turn, throughout, Socrates references Meno's attempt to control him.

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[98] Compare *Republic* X, 597c-d, in which Socrates claims that the god made the one truly real bed, instead of multiple beds—for whatever unites the various instantiations is the one true bed. The same could be said here of virtue—the multiple instantiations cannot be virtue itself.

[99] Vaught argues that the nature of Plato's metaphysics is such that the instantiations have a similarity to the forms in a manner that does not require the possession of common properties. In doing so, Plato can avoid the third man argument, and, more importantly for this work, suggests that the form may be something that no sign or instantiation, nor any number of signs or instantiations, could capture wholly. See Carl G. Vaught, "Participation and Imitation in Plato's Metaphysics" in Robert M. Baird et al., eds., *Contemporary Essays on Greek Ideas: The Kilgore Festschrift* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1987), 17-31.

[100] *Meno* 78b-c.

[101] *Meno* 73d.

His most direct criticism takes place when Meno presses him to leave the question of the nature of virtue and to move into the method of hypothesis. Socrates says the following:

> If I were directing you, Meno, and not only myself, we would not have investigated whether virtue is teachable or not before we had investigated what virtue itself is. But because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule over me…[102]

This statement not only condemns Meno, but gestures toward Socrates' own self-control as an image of virtue—one that would apply to all people in all circumstances.[103] Insofar as justice in the *Republic* is comparable to virtue in the *Meno*, then self-control, or moderation (*sophrosune*) is important.

In addition, one who lacks virtue asks the wrong kinds of questions and demands the wrong kind of answers about virtue. I believe that Socrates' approach to discussions arises from virtue, and exemplifies virtue. Thus, Socrates uses both the words of the discussion and his approach to the discussion as means of showing virtue. Socrates uses words, with numerous caveats and limitations given, avoiding lecture and eristic and treatise-like forms, choosing rather to dialogue in a way that treats the partner as a friend who shares experiences and knowledge with him. Socrates' practice of philosophy cannot be separated from his pursuit of virtue.

It is no wonder, then, that Plato did not write treatises himself, but wrote dialogues, in which the words serve as only part of what is taking place. To get caught up in the words is to fail to grasp the truth in the same way that those who admire the poets fail to grasp the truth. But if one sees through, or inside, the words, and sees in action the virtuous pursuit of Socrates, one may be led to a vision of the truth. In reading

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[102] *Meno* 86d.

[103] See the discussion of *sophrosune* in *Meno* 73bff.

the dialogues one takes the place of the interlocutor, and should do so as a friend.[104] The reader is therefore forced to ask herself whether she is approaching the dialogue in terms of eristic, trying to force the words into clear Gorgias-like definitions, or whether she is willing to join Socrates in the act of doing philosophy. As the title of Gordon's book, *Turning Toward Philosophy*, suggests: Plato does not write these dialogues to list out the information he has acquired through doing philosophy, and therefore answer the questions once and for all about the various topics. Rather, he writes to encourage his readers to become philosophers.[105]

Therefore, the aporetic dialogues do not serve as prolegomena in the sense of ridding readers of assumed doctrines that may get in the way of the doctrines Plato would have them believe. Rather, the aporetic dialogues contain within them both a method of undercutting that propositional knowledge to which Socrates' interlocutors and Plato's readers may be attached, and at the very least a kind of image of virtue and the practice of philosophy in the actions of Socrates. *Aporia* serves a central, not just for the beginning of philosophy, but also whenever one participates in the method of hypothesis. For the method of hypothesis can be a part of Socratic practice of philosophy, dialectic, only insofar as each hypothesis suffers an aporetic fate—that is, only if the philosophy remembers that each piece of propositional knowledge concerning morality and metaphysics ultimately signifies something beyond itself, and so is never complete in itself.

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[104] Jill Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy*, emphasizes this point throughout. See e.g. 57, 83ff., *et passim*.

[105] See also Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 10: "By writing in the dialogue form Plato is able to distance himself from the positions presented and the arguments put forward for them. He does not present his positions from an authoritative position," thus encouraging the reader to take on the practice of philosophy.

Whereas, this chapter is not sufficient to make such an argument about all the dialogues, I have shown that this seems to be the case with the *Meno*. In the following chapter, I take what has been gathered from this section and attempt to offer a theory that shows how the various dialogues used in this study may relate. Though by no means conclusive in this regard, it will serve as a hermeneutical base for the discussion of *eros* in chapter seven.

Conclusion

Socratic irony plays a central role in my interpretation of Plato's works. Looking primarily at the *Meno*, I have argued that Socrates' is indeed ignorant in terms of having propositional knowledge about virtue and the forms. But this ignorance creates the opportunity to elicit a vision of the object discussed. For just as Socrates' ugliness of appearance allows people to more easily see the beauty of his words and character, in that they will not be caught up in his appearance, so Socrates' ignorance of propositional knowledge of ultimate things opens the way to see past the propositions and see the things in the only way they can be seen. I discuss the nature of this vision and its relation to *eros*, virtue, and the practice of philosophy in the following chapters. In chapter six, I apply the view of Socratic ignorance and vision to establish a theory of the relationship between the aporetic and constructive dialogues. As an example of applying this interpretation of Plato to a constructive dialogue, I briefly analyze the *Phaedo*. The chapter ends with a preliminary summary of Socrates' practice of philosophy. In chapter seven, I apply the conclusions of this and the following chapter to a discussion of *eros*, focusing primarily on the *Symposium*. I show the tragic nature of the erotic practice of

philosophy exhibited by Socrates and described by Diotima, and conclude by setting out Plato's tragic philosophical psychology.

CHAPTER SIX

Going Beyond the Hypotheses, Part 2: Coherence of the Dialogues as the Clue to Platonic Philosophy

Introduction

In chapter five, I argued for an ironic view of Socrates' claims to ignorance, and applied the dual roles of irony, concealing and revealing, to his practice of philosophy as seen in the *Meno*. I claimed that Socrates truly is ignorant of propositional knowledge of important matters, such as virtue and the forms, but precisely because of his awareness of this ignorance is able to acquire a vision of the same. In this chapter, I utilize these claims to suggest a theory of the coherence of the aporetic dialogues in relation to the constructive. While I have already explained the importance of an awareness of ignorance, and thus also the importance of *aporia*, I must yet interact with a constructive dialogue to show that my interpretation of Socratic philosophy holds throughout. To bolster my interpretation, I analyze the *Phaedo,* and from the resulting view of the coherence between the aporetic and constructive dialogues, I set up some preliminary claims about the tragic nature of Socratic (Platonic) philosophy.

Socratic Vision, Noesis*, and a Theory of a Coherence of the Dialogues*

I have argued that Socrates' practice of philosophy rests largely on the failure of propositions to convey the nature of virtue and the forms. This perspective, though derived mainly from the *Meno,* with some help from various other texts, will serve the purpose of this and the following chapter only if it can show how the constructive texts

may fit together with the aporetic. In this chapter, I focus primarily on the *Phaedo* to show this coherence.

I showed in chapter five that in the *Meno* Socrates clearly marks off the more constructive part of the dialogue as in some way inadequate. If my argument holds, and if the *Meno* can serve as a kind of paradigm, then one should find in the constructive (parts of) dialogues a weakness in argument. Further, Plato, whether in the voice of Socrates or in some other way, should give his readers hints as to the insufficiency of the conclusions. In short, the constructive aspects should be understood as fitting within the part of the divided line labeled *dianoia*, and should therefore be understood as the insufficient method of hypothesis. Of course, these should not be seen as completely useless—but they have a particular use that complements rather than supersedes the aporetic (parts of the) dialogues.

Using the *Meno*, I have argued that Plato seeks to encourage people to be philosophers by eliciting a vision of what is—whether this be courage, piety, justice, or, ultimately, the Good/Beauty. Of course, if this vision cannot be reduced to propositions that contain the various properties of the object of vision, then it is difficult to "know" what these things are. Such is the substance of Socrates' claims to ignorance. And so, in a meaningful way, those who know and speak of virtue are inspired. Gonzalez states: "The philosopher's inspiration consists precisely in his ability to use the sensible image as a reminder of an intelligible reality. This use of images must be characterized as inspiration because it transcends the deductive reasoning characteristic of the sane and sober mind."[1] This inspiration-like aspect of philosophy in Plato would make it difficult to hold the vision. Concepts in the forms of propositions are more amenable to our

[1] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 146.

memories than a simple vision, especially a vision of an intelligible object for which words are always insufficient. The best that can be done, as noted in the above section, is that two people who have shared a vision use descriptions and questions[2] that remind and elicit a vision. The maintenance of this vision lies within the part of the divided line labeled *noesis*, which I will translate as "understanding." The practice of dialectic maintains understanding. Dialectic uses *dianoia*, or "thought," insofar as one moves beyond the method of hypothesis that is the content of thought, and uses these hypotheses as "stepping stones" into understanding. A Socrates says in the *Republic*, dialectic

> does not consider these hypotheses as first principles but truly as hypotheses—but as stepping stones to take off from, enabling it to reach the unhypothetical first principle of everything. Having grasped this principle, it reverses itself and, keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on from forms to forms, and ending in forms.[3]

Dialectic moves beyond the hypotheses, by regarding them only as hypotheses, and in fact does away with (or "destroys"[4]) the hypotheses.[5] And so the one engaged in dialectic goes beyond the hypotheses, and in returning from this vision of the forms, proceeds to negate the hypotheses, to show their inadequacy.[6]

This negation is an essential part of the Socratic method. Dialectic utilizes the guidance into *aporia*, and the method of hypothesis functions as a part of dialectic

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[2] Descriptions help to point toward that which is being discussed, while questions—particularly Socratic questions—may help point away from those things that one may confuse with what is being discussed.

[3] *Republic* VI, 511b.

[4] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 238.

[5] *Republic* VII, 533c.

[6] When Socrates hints that there may be someone who could teach virtue at the end of the *Meno*, that he seems to be commencing the "destruction"—showing the insufficiency—of the conclusion wrought through the method of hypothesis.

provided the one participating in it understands the hypotheses as mere hypotheses, and so notes their insufficiency. The purpose, of course, is not simply to show the insufficiency of the hypotheses, and moving off to begin a new improved hypothetical pursuit. Rather, in order for the hypotheses to serve dialectic, they must be seen *through*, as talking about something that cannot be sufficiently described in language.

In turn, though, the method of hypothesis seems useful for creating "stepping stones" for the one pursuing understanding. They are arguably not just useful, but necessary.[7] If the discussion that Socrates has with Meno's servant serves as an example of dialectic practice, one can see the necessity of the method of hypothesis. Socrates begins with a question about a property of the side of a square double the area of a two by two square. The question of this property is never answered, but is left behind—surely due in part to the answer being an irrational number—but the side is recognized by the servant. And yet the recognition could not have happened without the original question being asked, and the various possibilities examined. Indeed, the simplest rational answers (four and three) were tried first and shown to fail, thus pointing toward an irrational answer—one not reducible to a graspable proposition.[8]

Having led the servant to *aporia* earlier in the discussion, Socrates says, "Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now,

[7] Gonzalez claims that they are necessary to rise toward the first principle.

[8] Benson argues that the *Meno* contains one of the best evidences for Socrates' "priority of definitional knowledge." Hugh H. Benson, "Problems with Socratic Method" in Gary Alan Scott, *Does Socrates Have a Method?: Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, ed. Gary Alan Scott (Pennsylvania State Univ, 2004), 101–113. See especially 111-113. Insofar as what is meant by "definitional knowledge" is the possession of a clear proposition, I have argued that the *Meno* offers no such support. Socrates does consistently ask for definitions, or forms/ideas. But the *Meno* offers examples of *how* Socrates would like responses to be given—that is, in a manner such that the definition is obviously deficient and yet evocative enough to elicit a kind of vision of the subject of the dialogue.

as he does not know, he would be glad to find out."[9] Such was surely Socrates' goal with Meno earlier in the dialogue, and I believe that remains the case in the last half of the dialogue as well. As noted in chapter five, Socrates casts doubt on the almost-useless description that they acquired of virtue—that it is right belief. Such doubt, if one rejects idleness and cowardliness,[10] allows one to consider that something may not be right about the conclusion of the method of hypothesis, and in turn open one up to the pursuit of understanding. So, again, if the constructive (parts of the) dialogues exemplify the method of hypothesis, done, like in the *Meno*, for the sake of the interlocutors who are lacking some sort of virtue, then one should see a weakness in the argument somewhere.

Chapter five focused primarily on the *Meno* because it contains aporetic and constructive elements. If what has been presented so far holds, then the metaphysics presented through Socrates eludes propositions. Given this, one may argue, as Roochnik has, that the forms are simply constructions that are necessary for rational dialogue and to which Plato has no "ontological commitments."[11] Whether Roochnik is correct or not, there is a sense in which this supra-propositional metaphysics presents a tragic understanding of the human striving toward knowledge. Not only so, but this tragic striving toward knowledge, insofar as it is a manifestation or *sine qua non* of virtue, suggests that human desire can be fulfilled only tragically. This tragic nature of human

[9] *Meno* 84b.

[10] Cf. *Meno* 86b-c.

[11] David L. Roochnik, "The Erotics of Philosophical Discourse," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (April 1, 1987): 125. I agree that Socrates (and Plato) believed that rational dialogue requires the forms. I am nevertheless not confident that Roochnik is correct to claim that Socrates (and Plato) were not committed to their actual existence.

desire, best described by Diotima in the *Symposium* as *eros*, and the nature of the incompleteness of human striving[12] will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Using what has been gathered so far in this and the previous chapter, I offer below a brief analysis of the *Phaedo* as an example of how Socrates' view of philosophy as described above allows for a coherence of the dialogues. In turn, this offers a preparation for the discussion of *eros*, which motivates Socrates' practice of philosophy, in chapter seven. The purpose in each of these brief discussions of some of the more constructive dialogues is to point out any indications that suggest that we should see as not entirely sufficient the conclusions at which they arrive. Some will then be said about how the discussion moves us toward understanding, though such will be kept brief.

The Role of the Constructive Dialogues: The Phaedo

The *Phaedo* is an essentially constructive dialogue. It is notable for a variety of reasons, not least because of the amount of emotion exhibited by Socrates' interlocutors (and experienced by the readers). Socrates, in the face of his impending death, maintains a calm demeanor in dramatic contrast to that of his friends—something Socrates makes clear is unbecoming. He goes to his death honorably, even in good spirits, but after drinking the poison says to his friends, "What is this…you strange fellows. It is mainly for this reason that I sent the women away, to avoid such unseemliness….So keep quiet and control yourselves."[13]

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[12] Hyland claims that the *Symposium* offers the following tragic understanding of *eros*: "Our erotic natures are such that we will forever strive for a completeness that we can never attain, and which in any case, if achieved, would redner us no longer erotic and in that sense no longer human." Drew A. Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 109.

[13] *Phaedo* 117d-e.

While those present with Socrates manifest an obvious lack of self-control an obvious failure of virtue on the level of character, though maybe not on the level of what Socrates hopes to instill. The lack of self-control in the *Phaedo* echoes Meno's lack of self-control, in response to which Socrates was forced to move to the method of hypothesis.[14] The failure of Apollodorus to control himself throughout the *Phaedo,* as well as the barely contained weeping of the others present, and even perhaps our own experience as readers, serves as important context for our understanding of what is said. As if to underscore the point, Socrates says, more than once, that attachment to the body—an example of which includes mourning over its demise—impedes wisdom and virtue.[15] These details are not unimportant dressing for something that could better be written in treatise form, but rather show Socrates speaking to the ones with whom he is speaking, in a manner appropriate to the situation. And so, arguably, he does not announce a universal truth, useful for all, but only for those who become like his interlocutors and speak to him as a friend.[16]

Thus, the mourning that lies in the background of the entire dialogue, and for which Socrates reprimands his friends,[17] serves as a hint that the conclusions develop within the method of hypotheses. There are other hints, including a rare reference to

[14] *Meno* 86d-e.

[15] E.g. *Phaedo* 72d-e.

[16] Interacting with Socrates as a friend increases the likelihood of strong emotions while reading (or experiencing) his death.

[17] Curiously, Socrates seems to praise the officer for weeping for him in a genuine way (116d). This is perhaps to be contrasted with Phaedo's confession: "I was weeping for myself, not for him—for my misfortune in being deprived of such a comrade" (117c-d). If this is the case, then the weeping of Phaedo and the others might be related to the discussion of the dangers of misology, which will be discussed below.

Plato to let us know that he was not present.[18] Plato's absence raises some sense of distance between what took place and his writing of the events. That is, we are perhaps being given a version of the scene that is not wholly accurate or sufficient to describe precisely what took place. Of course, the discussion is an important part of the scene, and so is also left to doubt.

Plato's absence becomes more pronounced in light of the persistent misunderstanding of Socrates' interlocutors the he knew things he claimed not to know. In fact, this misunderstanding casts a shadow over all of Socrates' positive claims, but even more so in a dialogue so filled with emotion and in which the author of the dialogue is explicitly announced as absent.[19] Furthermore, the narrator's claim to have felt "an unaccustomed mixture of pleasure and pain"[20] suggests that he held too tightly to the body, for Socrates notes almost immediately afterward the relationship between pleasure and pain as his bonds are removed.[21] Pain comes from bondage, pleasure from freedom from those bonds—Phaedo had both. I believe that Plato is directing the reader's attention to Phaedo's continuing bondage to the body (and the lack of virtue that arises from such attachment), together with his tasting of the freedom of virtue and philosophy. Thus Phaedo, the (apparent) conduit to Plato of the events, was faulty. And following this, Socrates uncharacteristically, with some apparent lack of certainty about a dream,

[18] *Phaedo* 59b.

[19] I am not suggesting that all other dialogues involved Plato acting as stenographer, or being present, or even that the discussions in the dialogues even took place. These elements of mourning, Plato's absence, etc. are, for our purposes, literary clues as to how we should interpret. Whether they are accurate to the events is beside the point—for if they are accurate, I believe they would raise the same doubts listed as they are intended to as literary devices.

[20] *Phaedo* 59a.

[21] *Phaedo* 60b-c.

has written some poetry.[22] Further, Socrates' final speech takes the form of a myth, speaking of guiding spirits and the shape of earth, Tartarus, and so forth.[23] He ends with the claim:

> No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation….if during life…he has seriously concerned himself with the pleasures of learning, and adorned his soul not with alien but with its own ornaments, namely, moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom and truth…[24]

Socrates' approves of this "noble risk" because it can comfort those who pursue virtue and philosophy, even in the face of death or poverty or exile. Though this speech plays an important role in the message of the dialogue, I believe Socrates' primary concern is that his interlocutors avoid becoming misologues due to the failure of arguments (and philosophers) in which they trust.[25] As Socrates claims, "There is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate reasonable discourse."[26] This central section, 88c-91c, contains much that is important for the point of the dialogue. It begins with the announcement by

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[22] *Phaedo* 60e-61a. It could be, as well, that Socrates' statement in 61d-e is a statement about all that is to come, and not just regarding the impropriety of suicide: "Indeed, I too speak about this from hearsay, but I do not mind telling you what I have heard, for it is perhaps most appropriate for one who is about to depart yonder to tell and examine tales about what we believe that journey to be like." Of course, this does not lessen the strength of the arguments, but is a hint that what is covered is driven by the context—Socrates' impending death—than by pure dialectic. That is, there is a kind of hypothetical cast to the discussion.

[23] *Phaedo* 107d ff.

[24] *Phaedo* 114d-115a.

[25] Socrates' claim in 64a that philosophy is practice for death and dying does not mean that philosophy's purpose is only to help one die well. Rather, philosophy is akin to dying in that it allows one to loosen the grip of the body in order to attain wisdom. In short, death is a benefit to philosophy, not the goal of philosophy. To illustrate: Let us say that studying chemistry is great practice for passing the chemistry tests and, in turn, getting a chemistry degree. But neither passing the test nor getting the degree is the goal. The goal is to be a good chemist, to do chemistry more fully than one can do in the class. So, too, philosophy is preparation for what is perhaps the greatest test of the philosopher—death—but passing that test is not the goal of philosophy. The goal is other than death.

[26] *Phaedo* 89d.

Phaedo that, due to the arguments that Simmias and Cebes gave against the immortality of the soul, those present with Socrates felt depressed and were filled with doubt over the topic and their own abilities as critical thinkers.[27] Echecrates then interrupts the retelling of the story, exclaiming, "By the gods, Phaedo, you have my sympathy, for as I listen to you now I find myself saying to myself: 'What argument shall we trust, now that that of Socrates, which was extremely convincing, has fallen into discredit?'"[28]

Echechrates' concern, like that of those present with Socrates, prepares the reader for Socrates' warning against becoming misologues. But first Phaedo describes the response thus:

> I have certainly often admired Socrates, Echecrates, but never more than on this occasion. That he had a reply was perhaps not strange. What I wondered at most in him was the pleasant, kind and admiring way he received the young men's argument, and how sharply he was aware of the effect the discussion had on us, and then how well he healed our distress and, as it were, recalled us from our flight and defeat and turned us around to join him in the examination of their argument.[29]

Phaedo notes here several important characteristics of Socrates. Socrates is courageous and inspires courage in others. In turn, his courage manifests in his fearless pursuit of the truth of things. Socratic philosophy is courageous. In addition, Phaedo refers to Socrates' attentiveness to the situation of his interlocutors. As argued above, Socrates does speak truth to no one in particular (that is, everyone in general), but speaks to those with whom he is speaking.[30] Of course, he does so to turn them toward the examination

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[27] *Phaedo* 88c.

[28] *Phaedo* 88c-d.

[29] *Phaedo* 88e-89a.

[30] Cf. Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy*, 2, in which she argues that Plato is doing a similar thing in that he is aware of speaking to limited human beings. That this is Plato's method of writing has this aspect of speaking to limited beings seems like the natural outgrowth of an understanding that Socrates

of an argument—toward philosophy. It would thus be a mistake to see Socrates' awareness of his interlocutors' lack of poise as merely incidental. Phaedo's praise of Socrates introduces the section in which the latter warns against the danger of misology—clearly something Socrates saw as a danger for those present. In this way, Plato shows an organic relationship between virtue (most importantly self-control) and the practice of philosophy.

Echecrates interrupts Phaedo's narration again at 102a, which serves as a kind of bookend of some of the central points in the dialogue. The first being the warning against misology, and after easily overcoming Simmias' comparison of the soul to a harmony, Socrates begins to deal with Cebes' concern with a discussion of the forms. Socrates begins his discussion of the forms by complaining of the failure of the different kinds of knowledge to make sense. He discusses the problem of simple addition and division. As Gonzalez notes, Socrates shows an unwillingness to reduce unity or plurality to one another. "The result in both cases is that the nature of 'duality' is 'broken up' into units in terms of which it then cannot be explained for what it is….What seems required in contrast is an explanation that would relate a thing's unity to its plurality in such a way as to avoid reducing the one to the other."[31]

Socrates then explains why he came to his theory of the forms. Fearing becoming blind through looking too much into the nature of things, as one who stares at an eclipse, he decides to "take refuge in discussions [*logoi*] and investigate the truth of things by

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carries out a discussion with his interlocutors in mind, and that we are called in our reading to take the place of the interlocutors, rather than reading as no one in particular, *sub specie aeterni*, you might say. Socrates' practice of philosophy gives evidence of Plato's manner of writing, which directs us to pursue philosophy Socratically.

[31] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 191.

means of [them-*ekeinos*]."[32] Comparing the *Meno*, one sees that blindness could arise from a variety of things. Plato does not speak of looking directly at the sun, but of an eclipse. The imagery suggests that what he sees both reveals and hides, and in the process of looking upon it, he courts blindness. Given the earlier concern of Socrates to find a unified understanding, it may be that the variety of explanations and causes are part of this blinding. This concern is echoed throughout Socrates' consistent complaints about his interlocutors giving a host of examples rather than giving a single definition of the topic being discussed—there are too many things to see them all, too many possibilities, too many contradictions possible (as in Zeno's paradoxes), and so forth. But in addition to those kinds of complex descriptions, surely the images of things, which he notes in the following sentence, are blinding. A person appears a head taller than another, and people seem to grow by eating, two appears to come from the addition of one to another one, and so forth. These "facts" [*erga*] are the things we perceive that are deceptive. They are a kind of eclipse—both blocking the sun and driving us to blindness. Socrates takes refuge, then, in words (or rational discourse)—these are akin to looking at an image of an eclipse. He is quick to state, though, that words [*logoi*] are no more images than facts, or things.[33] Nevertheless, there is something safer about the use of words than merely contemplating the things. This safety relates to the use of hypotheses: "However, I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis in each case the theory that seemed to me the most compelling, I would consider as true…"[34] From there, he pursued

[32] *Phaedo* 99e.

[33] *Phaedo* 99e-100a. Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 194 argues that both words and "facts" are images of the "truth of things" (99e), namely the good.

[34] *Phaedo* 100a.

ideas, testing them against this "most compelling" hypothesis, saying what is true and untrue based on agreement or disagreement with the hypothesis. This method describes perfectly the method of hypothesis given in the *Meno*, and accords with the section of the divided line labeled "thought" (*dianoia*), dealing with the nature of things through the use of words. The same limitations apply as well, in that this is the use of images, an affirmation of what seems to be the strongest hypothesis, and drawing conclusions based on that hypothesis. There is no movement toward a first principle, which takes place only in dialectic, as long as one refuses to go beyond the method of hypothesis. One may argue *from* a principle, but not toward one.[35]

One can see that the method of hypothesis, as described in the *Phaedo*, can offer at best necessary conditions for the truth of something. Given that one has acquired the most compelling hypothesis possible, one does not therefore arrive at the truth of things insofar as one stays within the method. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable for one to believe that the answer to the What-is-x? question will not contradict that which proceeds from the strongest hypothesis. The conclusion in the *Meno*, for example, is that virtue is right belief, rather than knowledge. I have argued that this is not terribly helpful—in particular, it is not sufficient for even the pursuit of virtue. But it seems that virtue, strictly speaking, cannot be something that would not be classified as a form of right

[35] Socrates explains further that he begins with the assumption of "the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest" (*Phaedo* 100b). Though surely these refer to the forms, they are assumed as hypotheses, and so are argued *from*, not *toward*. And so, too, that which eclipses the sun and blinds, refers to looking toward an image (that which stands before what really is) in a manner that confuses it with the thing itself. In doing so, one becomes blind to the forms, confusing them with that which blocks one's vision of them. The "safer" route is to use the method of hypothesis, *realizing that it is the method of hypothesis*, so that one is not blinded by the images upon which one comes. The method of hypothesis may be known to be the method of hypothesis through rational discourse (*logoi*), dialogue—particularly, dialogue between friends, as Socrates says.

belief. Further, though, this is all within the bi-conditional agreed upon by Meno and Socrates:

x is knowledge if and only if x is teachable[36]

Insofar as this bi-conditional is in question, and Socrates suggests at the end of the *Meno*, as well as in offering the vague notion of "teach" given after showing that all learning is recollection[37] that it may be, virtue may not necessarily be right belief. To be precise, virtue is not teachable in the manner of the kinds of knowledge that someone like Meno or Euthyphro claim to possess, but may be a different kind of knowledge that is teachable in some other manner.

Socrates explains two responses to the challenging of one's hypothesis: "If someone attacked your hypothesis itself, you would ignore him and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another."[38] Socrates contrasts here the method of a debater from that of the method of hypothesis. One should not respond to a challenge of the hypothesis itself until one has tested the consistency of its consequences. Inconsistency or contradictions in the consequences should give one pause in accepting the hypothesis. And so, after examining such, one may then respond to the challenge. But if "you must

[36] This is derived from two claims upon which Socrates and Meno agree. The first is "men cannot be taught anything but knowledge" (*Meno* 87c), that is If x is teachable, then x is knowledge. The second is "if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught" (*Meno* 87c). That is, if x is knowledge, then x is teachable. Socrates therefore makes the bi-conditional claim above.

[37] Compare how Socrates reprimands Meno for using the word "teach" while the former is talking about recollection (*Meno* 81e-82a) and Socrates' casual dismissal of the difference within the method of hypothesis (*Meno* 87c).

[38] *Phaedo* 101d. This sentence above could be translated thus: "If someone should cling to your hypothesis itself, you would dismiss him and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another" (Plato, *Plato Complete Works*, 87 n. 13). This alternative translation does not impact the interpretation, except that it is perhaps a bit more conducive to it, for clinging to the hypothesis is the very danger against which Socrates warns. Nevertheless, either translation works, and so I will not argue for a particular one.

give an account of your hypothesis itself, you will assume another hypothesis, the one which seems to you best of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable."[39] The context suggests that this "higher" hypothesis remains a hypothesis, and so cannot lead one past images to that which they are imaging. That is, this discussion takes place within the method of hypothesis, and this hypothesis, though "higher," remains a hypothesis.[40]

"Higher" can be a kind of better hypothesis in a variety of ways. It could be further up a deductive line of reasoning. Of course, as Gonzalez states, "there are clearly other ways of accounting for the hypothesis: it could be made clearer by being reformulated, its presuppositions could be made explicit, or it could be shown to be equivalent to something that the interlocutor already accepts."[41] That is, a higher hypothesis, which is used to give an account of your present hypothesis, need not be a deductive proof. It is rather that which is most helpful for your interlocutor to see the strength of the hypothesis.[42]

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[39] *Phaedo* 101d-e.

[40] Gonzalez argues that we should not understand this "higher" to be moving beyond images unless there is no other possible interpretation. Given that there are other possible interpretations that remain within the images, there is no reason to understand "higher" to be some sort of ontological category (*Dialectic and Dialogue*, 198). Nevertheless, given that Socrates refers in 100b to hypotheses that include the forms, it may seem that these hypotheses are indeed the things themselves. But these are words—important words, to be sure—but simply words that signify the forms themselves. In turn, Socrates argues *from* these rather than to them, suggesting that the argument that discovers the rational relationship of these words to other words. When one leaves this method of hypothesis behind and moves toward those principles—the forms themselves—one will also leave behind the words, moving toward a vision.

[41] Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 198.

[42] One does this only after having accepted the hypothesis as the "most compelling" and testing its consequences for consistency. Of course, it may be that the interlocutor will notice something that weakens the hypothesis. Such a possibility lies in Socrates' warning against misology and opens the door for discovering a better hypothesis.

This understanding of a higher hypothesis being one on which you and your interlocutor can agree describes Socrates' usual activity. In the *Meno*, as soon as Socrates begins the method of hypothesis, he seeks agreement with Meno over the bi-conditional from which they then discuss whether virtue is teachable. Further, immediately following talk of acquiring a higher hypothesis and moving back to the difficulties with the topic of immortality of the soul, Socrates pursues agreement with Simmias on which he may construct proofs of his belief.[43] The content of this agreement concerns the forms and causality. Socrates first asks for Cebes to grant him the existence of the Beautiful and Good and so forth, so that he may talk about the kind of causality between these forms and the things of the world. He then says directly to Simmias regarding the causality of the forms: "My purpose is that you may agree with me."[44] From this agreement about the forms, one can eventually arrive at the immortality of the soul.

Socrates described the proper use of hypotheses at least partly in order to guard against misology. It is eristic, rather than rational discourse working toward both truth and agreement, that leads to misology—and misology, in turn, leads back to eristic sophistry. Not unimportantly, Socrates compares the lack of trust arising out of failed arguments to the lack of trust in friends who betray the friendship.[45] Socrates seeks meaningful, rational discussion, and as argued regarding the *Meno*, this is not possible

[43] Using agreement is at the heart of all of Socrates' discussions—if all learning is recollection, then agreement is the most obvious method of having people come to awareness of some truth. But this section is not simply a matter of seeking agreement on every statement, but about bringing agreement on a hypothesis, from which further ideas proceed.

[44] *Phaedo* 102d.

[45] *Phaedo* 89d-e.

with "disputatious debaters" but only with those who speak truthfully and use terms that are "admittedly known to" each other.[46]

The method of hypothesis, the threat of misology, and the grounds for rational discourse all accord well with the understanding of *eros* in the *Symposium*. Though this topic will be discussed further in the following chapter, I will note a few points here. The first is that *eros* constantly desires its object, Beauty,[47] never quite acquiring it. Each bit of resource (*poros*) is met with a lack (*penia*), and so, unlike Aristophanes' description of *eros*, never finds fulfillment to the point of cessation. Like the hypothesis, if one believes that some particular circumstance fulfills the desire of *eros* (in Aristophanes' story, sex), then that one never arrives at Beauty, that is, to the "place" in which one can give birth to true virtue. Thus, that irony that permeates Socrates' philosophy reflects his view on the propositions arrived at through the method of hypothesis as well as the beautiful objects that we often confuse with the Beauty that *eros* desires. Socrates' irony expresses the "art of love," that of seeing the object and realizing that it is not real knowledge, and moving beyond. The erotic philosopher realizes that the lower levels, the propositions and other images, never constitute knowledge of the thing itself. Socrates is therefore ignorant in that he does not know any proposition that is truly knowledge, just as he appears entirely un-erotic because he knows no beautiful object that is truly the fulfillment of *eros*. But he does know, in that he practices philosophy—dialectic—and thus has glimpses of the Beautiful/Good that is the ground of everything and the object of our desire. He does not know what people usually define as knowledge, and yet has the

[46] *Meno* 75d.

[47] As I discuss in chapter six, though Beauty can be said to be the object of *eros*, Beauty is not the object in terms of something to be acquired, but rather one's *eros* drives him/her to be in the presence of Beauty so that s/he may give birth in Beauty.

only knowledge that can be had by a human.[48] He is un-erotic relative to what people usually understand as beautiful, and has glimpses of the Beauty that is the only true fulfillment of *eros*. And these two are not just similar or parallel paths, but rather one and the same, for *eros* drives the philosopher toward knowledge, and the Beautiful/Good is the ultimate object of knowledge.

In the *Phaedo*, the method of hypothesis seems to conclude with the idea of the immortality of the soul, while the originating hypothesis is that of the forms. The doctrine of the forms is a strong hypothesis, because it lacks the failure of all the other views of causation, the confusion of which threatened to blind Socrates.[49] If this is the case, then one should find that the immortality of the soul is a relatively contentless idea[50] that has a use for those who lack some kind of virtue, but not much use beyond that. Whether Socrates himself believes it with the amount of confidence he shows is another

[48] Cf. *Apology* 20d-e, in which Socrates claims to perhaps have human wisdom, while others who claim to be able to teach on virtue and so forth must have a "wisdom more than human."

[49] In chapter 2, I suggested that Nietzsche's idea of the will to power as a metaphysical notion is essentially an attempt to whittle away everything that is unnecessarily interpretive. That all is the will to power is the furthest "down" we can go in explaining the world. All other causation and explanation should build upon this—if it does not, it fails to explain. We cannot go further, perhaps because we cannot say anything beyond the will to power. I would suggest that the theory of the forms serves much the same function as described in the *Phaedo*. The forms as the fundamental form of causation is necessary for language to have any meaning—for without the forms, the meanings of terms are free-floating, and rational discourse collapses. The forms do not go far in explaining, but every explanation that attempts to go further must be in concord with the theory of the forms, otherwise language will lose its grounding. Of course, the forms and the will to power are not very much alike, but this practice of attempting to step back to the barest, most fundamental explanation is an important similarity between the two philosophers.

[50] By this, I mean that belief in the immortality of the soul tells us little about what that entails—not only in terms of what happens after death, but what the nature of this immortality is. If we look into the *Symposium*, Socrates (in the voice of Diotima) speaks of immortality in terms of the birth of ideas or physical offspring (206e-207a, 208d and ff.). He even states: "The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he" (212a-b). Earlier, the remembering of honorable acts was considered a form of immortality (208d-e). Could we not understand the memory of Socrates, in the writing of Plato, as a means of the latter honoring the worthiness of the former's virtue to give him immortality? This is not a settled conclusion by any means, but shows that there are various ways to understand immortality, even within Plato's corpus (and even in the dialogues that are normally grouped as early or middle). This suggests that the idea itself is vague and relatively contentless.

question—compare his statement on postmortem existence in the *Apology*.[51] Nevertheless, "it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls."[52]

Plato has shown us that those present in the *Phaedo* lack the virtue of self-control. That the idea of the immortality of the soul lacks content seems evident enough, for it is difficult to imagine a life separate from the body. Nevertheless, Plato makes it more obvious to us by using myth to give it content. Socrates, breaking from his normal rational discussion, begins describing the structure of the earth, the various paths of souls after death, and other related ideas.[53] If indeed the myth is used to add content and those present lack at least some form of self-control, then what is the benefit of the idea of the immortality of the soul? In the *Meno*, Socrates notes that Anytus would become more amenable from learning what Meno learned.[54] Anytus and Meno both seem to lack the willingness to participate in philosophical discussion. Meno tended toward eristic, and Anytus appears terribly sensitive about insults toward statesmen like himself.[55] The method of hypothesis benefits them in that it encourages them to be more open to philosophy, specifically discussion about virtue. In the *Phaedo*, another danger seems to have arisen. Socrates, "a man who, we would say, was of all those we have known the best, and also the wisest and the most upright"[56] is about to die because of these very

[51] *Apology* 40c-d.

[52] *Phaedo* 114d.

[53] *Phaedo* 110b-114c.

[54] *Meno* 100b.

[55] *Meno* 94e-95a.

[56] *Phaedo* 118a.

virtues. His pursuit of wisdom and virtue has led him to execution by the city he was hoping to help. The failure to achieve success in the *polis* and the apparent overcoming of Socrates by simple force may serve as the most powerful temptation to become misologues. From one perspective, philosophy has failed Socrates. Unless, of course, the soul is immortal and philosophy improves the lot of the soul following the death of the body.

If one considers the most famous quotation of Socrates from the *Apology*, one get a slightly different picture. He claims that "the unexamined life is not worth living."[57] Given that in the *Apology*, Socrates shows a slightly more "open" view of death—it may be nothingness or some kind of reward for the good[58]—one should understand this idea of death to include the various options. That is, it would be better to cease to exist than to live a life without philosophy. But in the *Phaedo*, Socrates is surrounded by those suffering from grief and the imminent loss of a friend and philosophical mentor. Given their lack of self-control, they are in danger of losing faith in philosophy and the virtues. Thus, they would benefit from the conclusion that the soul is immortal—"it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one."[59] The virtuous may agree with the Socrates of the *Apology*, that without philosophy life is not worth living, and so need no argument about the immortality of the soul. But for those who lack self-control, and so may surrender to fear of the power of the *polis*, death, and other bodily concerns, belief in the immortality of the soul can give courage to practice philosophy.

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[57] *Apology* 38a.

[58] *Apology* 40c-d.

[59] *Phaedo* 114d.

Therefore, the constructive aspects of the *Phaedo* match the description of the method of hypothesis as derived from the *Meno*. I have shown that there is a sufficient amount of distance created between the reader and the conclusions, both in terms of the possibility that this may not be a completely faithful rendering of events, and in terms of the unavoidable context of grief and fear. Socrates himself notes the lack of self-control of his interlocutors, both in terms of their weeping and by implication in his warning against becoming misologues. Further, the conclusion is relatively contentless, but useful for the particular lack of virtue within Socrates' interlocutors.

One final thought comparing the *Meno* and *Phaedo*: In both, Socrates, through the method of hypothesis, encourages his interlocutors to practice philosophy. But neither he nor his interlocutors describe the nature of virtue. Instead, in both dialogues, Socrates himself exemplifies virtue. Indeed, the manner in which he goes about doing philosophy manifests virtue. He is courageous and kind in the face of the confrontation of Simmias and Cebes, and courageous in facing death. He shows self-control in both dialogues, not giving in to sadness or frustration or fear, indeed even carrying on his beloved rational discourse into his last hours. He does not discuss the issues to win, but to encourage others to take up the practice of philosophy. In the *Meno*, Socrates teaches virtue by offering a vision of it.[60] And in the *Phaedo*, he is the "best, and also the wisest and the most upright"[61] of all men they have known.

The *Phaedo* serves an example of a constructive dialogue in which the method of hypothesis is predominant. Two indicators of the method of hypothesis noted above are the presence of interlocutors who lack some virtue and indications that the conclusion

[60] *Meno* 99e-100a.

[61] *Phaedo* 118a.

reached is not adequate. The lack of virtue has been made evident. The possible inadequacy of the conclusion is indicated in a variety of ways: The distance of Plato from the events, the possible inadequacy of the some of the arguments,[62] and the way in which the discussion is bookended with poetry and myth. Of course, not least in importance is the statement of Phaedo at the end of the dialogue: "Such was the end of our comrade"[63]—a jarring statement given the amount of ink spilled proving the immortality of the soul. Though perhaps not much should be made of this, it seems similar to that hint at the end of the *Meno* that there may be someone who can teach virtue.[64] Not a clear, direct statement to the contrary of the conclusion, it nevertheless sounds a note of dissonance that should cause the reader to re-evaluate what has been said. Indeed, it might be a hint toward "doing away with hypotheses,"[65] and thus be an encouragement toward understanding (*noesis*) over against thought (*dianoia*).

A Hint from the Clitophon*: Plato and the Call to Practice Philosophy*

This chapter, along with chapter five, has offered a means of relating the aporetic and constructive dialogues that does not relegate the former to mere prolegomena, but rather as important and instructive parts of dialectic. Importantly, lack of virtue causes Socrates' interlocutors to focus on the constructive aspects of the dialogues as if these

[62] It is generally agreed that Socrates' arguments are, at the very least, not quite satisfying, though some have worked to support his argument, e.g. Dorothea Frede, "The Final Proof of the Immortality of the Soul in Plato's 'Phaedo' 102a-107a," *Phronesis* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1978): 27–41. Even Simmias, after agreeing that he has "no remaining grounds for doubt," says "nevertheless, in view of the importance of our subject and my low opinion of human weakness, I am bound still to have some private misgivings" (*Phaedo* 107a-b). If we readers are to be reflected in Socrates' interlocutors, it may be expected that we too will still have misgivings.

[63] *Phaedo* 118a.

[64] *Meno* 99e-100a.

[65] *Republic* VII, 533c.

offered the answers for which they are looking. In turn, they condemn him for being an annoyance—one who asks questions just to confuse people, rather than simply telling them what he believes. In these two chapters, I have argued for a rich account of the Socratic claim to ignorance and the concealing/revealing nature of Socratic irony that can explain the relationship between the various kinds of dialogues and serves as a response to those who might condemn Socrates as his interlocutors do.

The *Clitophon*, though of questionable authorship, explains well the issue that Socrates' interlocutors, as well as contemporary readers, may have with Plato in general. The dialogue ends thus:

> For I will say this, Socrates, that while you're worth the world to someone who hasn't yet been converted to the pursuit of virtue, to someone who's already been converted you rather get in the way of his attaining happiness by reaching the goal of virtue.[66]

The entire dialogue is an explanation of this problem that Clitophon has with Socrates' practice. The critique in fact seems directed toward the maieutic[67] nature of his practice: Socrates does not give ideas or give any clear means of getting the answer. Clitophon complains, "Are we to believe that this is all there is, and that it is impossible to pursue the matter further and grasp it fully?"[68] He goes on complaining that Socrates only leaves them the task of pursuit and converting others to the pursuit, but never quite attaining the end of virtue.

The analogy used is something like this: If the end of justice is a good city, the end of medicine is health, and so forth, then there must be an end to virtue. Socrates fails

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[66] *Clitophon* 410e.

[67] *Theaetetus* 150b-151c gives Socrates' account of his role as a midwife.

[68] *Clitophon* 408d.

to instruct on reaching this end, but simply encourages people to begin the pursuit. Could it be, though, that virtue, in a strange sort of twist, simply is the pursuit of virtue? Or, more precisely, the pursuit of virtue requires a vision of the Good that cannot be grasped in propositions, but only in the practice of philosophy. Therefore, the practice of dialectic gives the vision and the vision is what gives the direction—but, given the nature of this vision, the direction never materializes into a state of affairs that one enters, an object one acquires.

I have argued that Plato's purpose, as presented through his character Socrates, involves calling his readers into the practice of philosophy, the pursuit of virtue. Plato cannot allow, then, that one has grasped the end or ends of virtue and philosophy, for such a grasp constitutes a failure to understand both virtue and philosophy. In fact, *eros*, which lies at the root of the pursuit both of philosophy and virtue, is of such a nature that one will never grasp the end without destroying *eros* itself. The following chapter will be dedicated to an examination of this fundamental desire.

Preliminary Conclusion: The Practice of Philosophy in Nietzsche and Plato

Nietzsche and Plato share some key ideas in the practice of philosophy. Most importantly, the inability to establish a conclusive, propositionally defined, final object of knowledge and desire leaves human knowledge and desire in a tragic state. Yet, out of this tragic state, philosophy and virtue grow. For Nietzsche, tragedy offers an unstable ground out of which one may create and, not clinging too tightly to a particular system, affirm life as a whole—for tragic disappointment affirms the possibility of creativity out of individual empirical existence. Plato, as I argue in the following chapter, though not deriving this creativity out of the will to power, works to show how the practice of

philosophy arises out of the most empirically obvious human desire: *eros*. And, indeed, the ultimate desire of *eros* is to give birth, to create. And it is capable of doing so by virtue of its participation in both resource (*poros*) and lack (*penia*)—that is, the tragic nature of *eros* grants it a creative power.

Thus, I have already hinted toward many of the broad aspects of the nature of human desire in Plato's works. I argue in chapter seven that e*ros,* at the heart of human nature, has no particular state of affairs that will fulfill it, thus bringing it to cessation. Rather, its goal is to be in the presence of Beauty itself, which is something that cannot be held like a proposition or a beautiful body. Indeed, *eros* is fulfilled only in a constant moving toward something that it cannot grasp, just as philosophy is a pursuit of that which can never be put into an image, and so never held so that one may cease in the pursuit. Such incompleteness is the tragic nature of philosophy and *eros*. I now turn to a more detail description of *eros*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Plato's Tragic Philosophy and Moral Psychology

"There's something really divine about this place, so don't be surprised if I'm quite taken by the Nymph's madness….I'm on the edge of speaking in dithyrambs."

– Socrates, *Phaedrus* 238c-d

Introduction

In his book *The Art of Living*, Alexander Nehamas asks rhetorically, "If, as we should, we take [Socrates'] disavowal of knowledge seriously, how can we describe his actions except by saying that he became accustomed (no one knows how) to doing the good and acted well without knowing the reasons he himself considered necessary for such behavior?"[1] The early dialogues, he claims, show Socrates without an explanation as to how he could be steadfastly virtuous. Plato attempts, therefore, in the middle and late dialogues to explain Socrates' virtue. Nehamas insists that Plato felt that this unwavering virtue could only arise through the possession of some knowledge that can be put into language. And so, he presents a more Socratic Socrates in the early dialogues, whom we are incapable of understanding, followed by a more Platonic Socrates in the middle and late dialogues, who makes more sense. The theory of the forms takes center stage in these two different versions of Socrates—a metaphysic that supports the virtue of the Platonic Socrates. In an important sense, Nehamas' view of Plato reflects Nietzsche's view of Socrates in the drive to be "absurdly rational." To maintain virtue, according to Nehamas' Plato, requires a steady and unshakable reasoning that is communicable in

[1] Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 96.

language, and so teachable and even provable. The late Nietzsche, in turn, sees Socrates as having an anarchy of instincts, and so used reason as a tyrant to bring them order.

I argue for two important points in this chapter. The first involves the relationship between the two cities in the *Republic*, and the way in which the distinction between the healthy and feverish sheds light on what I believe is a misunderstanding of Plato shared by Nehamas and Nietzsche. The second point involves a description of *eros* and its role in Socratic practice, particularly as presented in the *Symposium*. Both of these points offer us an image of Socrates, and of Plato's philosophy that shares key elements with Nietzsche's philosophical practice, specifically in terms of the nature of desire and its relationship to virtue. I argue that Socrates did not have an anarchy of instincts tyrannized by reason, but rather had a rich sense of virtue directed toward a vision of the good that both informed his practice of philosophy and gave to him the ability to affirm life in a manner that is free from Nietzsche's criticism of nihilism.

An Extended Irony: The Healthy and Sick Cities in the Republic

Nehamas does an excellent job plumbing the depths of Socratic and Platonic irony in the dialogues. Nevertheless, he may push too far in claiming that Plato is also taken by the irony of his character. Irony, Nehamas argues, does not simply serve as a means of veiling and revealing, but may represent as well the uncertainty of the ironist. According to Nehamas, Plato does not know how Socrates can be virtuous, seeing no clarity of reason underlying his actions, and so uses irony in a manner that manifests his own failing attempts to understand Socrates. Nehamas goes on to say:

> Only in Plato's later works, beginning with the *Gorgias* and the *Meno*, do we find an attempt to account for Socrates, a set of views and theories he never had expressed before designed to explain how he could have lived as virtuously as he

> had. The first effort explicitly to display Socrates' depths, to expose what he is like inside, is made by Alcibiades in his speech in the *Symposium*….But when Alcibiades opens Socrates like the statue of Silenus, he is still confronted with a mystery: how, after all, did the beautiful statues find their way inside? How did Socrates become the virtuous man he was?[2]

I have rejected the developmental view, and thus have offered an interpretation of Socratic irony in a manner that draws together both the aporetic and constructive dialogues. In this interpretation, Plato uses Socratic irony to make an important point central to his philosophy: Socrates' virtue arises not out of the knowledge many of his interlocutors believed they had, but out of a different kind of knowledge that rises beyond the hypotheses. Of course, this does not mean that Plato knows all that is taking place within his character or can articulate reasons for what he does—indeed, much of Socrates' life must appear instinctual. As Nehamas argues, irony can hide ignorance as well as knowledge. Irony surely serves to make Socrates a three-dimensional character, inscrutable enough to seem more than a character of fiction,[3] but also serves to direct the readers' attention to a form of knowledge that is incommunicable in any image, whether in any of Socrates' particular actions or the words of the dialogue.

The more important question that Nehamas asks relates to whether we understand the irony that is taking place in the dialogues. Contrary to Nehamas' claim, I argued in the previous chapters that Plato does not see propositional knowledge as the final goal of philosophical pursuit, but rather seeing propositional knowledge, or any other image, as the goal arises from a lack of virtue. I believe Roochnik correctly describes dialectic in Plato:

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[2] Ibid., 67–68.

[3] Ibid., 92–93.

> I find Plato as ever exploring, through the lens of techne, the nature of the extraordinary moral knowledge he seeks. Nontechnical moral knowledge, which would make us happy, is not a theory. It is a Doric harmony of word and deed, a way of life spent seeking wisdom and urging others to do the same. It is a life spent turning a searching eye inward and therefore turning away from the external objects that become the subject matters of the ordinary technai.[4]

The turning of "searching eye inward" suggests a variety of things. It hints at the complexity that arises from trying to portray Socrates in a manner faithful, not necessarily to the man, but to his practice of philosophy. Further, it suggests that the nature of Socratic (moral) philosophy as a practice is primarily concerned not with metaphysical or even epistemological claims, but the nature and objects of human desire. Plato does not seem to present a Socratic practice of philosophy that is the pursuit of propositional knowledge. Plato may have anticipated Kierkegaard, who said through the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, "This [kind of conclusion] seems to be a paradox. But one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow."[5] Though I have not defined Socratic "knowledge" of the Good/Beautiful as paradox, it would be an appropriate designation, given that "paradox" means that which is different from the average opinion—the opinion of Socrates' interlocutors. This "paradox," this kind of "knowledge" that is not the propositional knowledge in which most take pride, is the object of the passion of this most extraordinary of philosophers. Irony plays a central role in this passionate pursuit of the paradox.

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[4] David Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 176.

[5] Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus□: Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol 7*, trans. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 37.

The *Republic* offers a detailed picture of the nature of justice, injustice, the soul, the primacy of reason, and so forth. Nehamas understands the *Republic* as one of Plato's monumental attempts to discover how Socrates could have such unflagging virtue.[6] There are important hints, though, that the dialogue serves a different function, a kind of extended irony. The ironic nature of the book, though, is not a simple deception or confusion, but is rather what allows the whole to function in terms of dialectic.[7]

Given the chaotic background of Athens during Socrates' lifetime, and given the violent and angry misunderstanding of Socrates, it is not difficult to imagine that he was never quite able to articulate his view fully.[8] As in the *Meno*, we have important clues in the *Republic* that what we are about to hear is not sufficient for wisdom. It is not that all the detailed discussion of the city is some extended joke, but it is ironic. In fact, Nietzsche's description of Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols*—as offering reason as a tyrant over drives gone wild[9]—comes close to describing the possible benefit of the *Republic*, even if Nietzsche failed to understand the whole of Plato's point: When virtue fails, one does better to surrender to reason than to allow vice to create chaos.

What signs are there, then, that the *Republic* is an irony driven by the failure of virtue of Socrates' interlocutors? There are many. According to Dionysius of

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[6] Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 90.

[7] The dialectical nature of the *Republic* is the subject of Roochnik's short study on the dialogue: David Roochnik, *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's "Republic"*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). The dialectical nature specifically includes support for things that are not explicitly stated. For example, Roochnik claims that within the *Republic* there is a kind of defense of democracy (2, 78ff.). This is indeed a kind of irony—a veiling and revealing—given the criticism of democracy as one of the most degraded forms of a *polis*.

[8] As has already been noted, I do not believe that Socrates' view is able to be fully articulated, though some of his practice of philosophy can be described.

[9] *TI* II, 9-10.

Halicarnassus, Plato had reworked the beginning of the *Republic* many times.[10] The details of the beginning were obviously important. The dialogue is introduced through an interaction between Socrates and his interlocutors. Socrates is forced to stay in Piraeus by his interlocutors, who will not even listen so as to allow the possibility of being persuaded otherwise.[11] In the *Meno*, Meno's tyrannical attitude toward Socrates is evidence of his lack of virtue, specifically self-control. The same tyranny appears as the reader is introduced to the characters in the *Republic*. This evident lack of virtue of the interlocutors signals that, in what follows, Socrates will speak in a way so as to benefit them as best he can. Again, the animosity of the interlocutors contrasts with Socrates' self-control, again evincing their lack of virtue. Though its brevity relative to the size of the dialogue can be deceptive, Socrates' interlocutors immediately reject his description of the healthy city, claiming that it is fit only for pigs.[12] He responds: "The things I mentioned earlier and the way of life I described won't satisfy some people, it seems…"[13] The way of life in the healthy city is not enough for those who lack virtue and self-control. Comforts and delicacies must be added to satisfy them, and this leads inexorably to the need even for war.[14]

It is telling how comfortably and easily Socrates shifts the conversation from the healthy to the feverish city. He seems quite accustomed to these shifts to accommodate his interlocutors' own feverishness. He even offers an apologetic for the shift: from the

[10] Jacob Howland, "Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology," *Phoenix* 45, no. 3 (October 1, 1991): 202.

[11] *Republic* II, 373a.

[12] *Republic* II, 372c-e.

[13] *Republic* II, 373a.

[14] *Republic* II, 373e.

description of such a feverish city, the origins of both justice and injustice may be discovered.[15] But, as Peterson has effectively argued, Socrates hints many times over that the feverish city being built in speech belongs not to him, but to Glaucon and Adeimantus.[16] It is, in effect, a long elaboration of a hypothesis offered up by the brothers.[17] Nevertheless, as I argued in the previous chapters, Socrates speaks to those with whom he is speaking whether they are virtuous or not. The *Republic* reflects this practice.

Following rejection of the healthy city, Socrates notes that they are about to describe fails the test of health: "Yet the true city, in my opinion, is the one we've described, the healthy one, as it were."[18] And, with that, the enormous task of describing the city, the soul, justice and injustice, begins again, driven by the lack of virtue of Socrates' interlocutors. The conclusions of the discussion are well-known, including: the kings must be philosophers, poets must submit their works to rational scrutiny or be expelled from the city, and the just soul is the one in which the rational part is in authority over the appetitive and honor-loving, designating their proper places and holding them in check.

[15] *Republic* II, 372e.

[16] Sandra Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 118–9, 147.

[17] That the hypothesis is offered by the brothers is not sufficient to prove that Socrates rejects the hypothesis. Indeed, the irony I am noting in the *Republic* does not suggest that Socrates rejects the hypothesis. The hypothesis is simply a hypothesis—true perhaps—but beyond which one must go to achieve true knowledge.

[18] *Republic* II, 372e.

Nietzsche criticizes the conclusion that the rational part of the soul controls the other parts.[19] When speaking of *sophrosune* ("moderation" or "self-control") in book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates describes it thus: "...isn't the expression 'self-control' ridiculous? The stronger self that does the controlling is the same as the weaker self that gets controlled, so that only one person is referred to in all such expressions."[20] He goes on:

> Nonetheless, the expression is apparently trying to indicate that, in the soul of that very person, there is a better part and a worse one and that, whenever the naturally better part is in control of the worse, this is expressed by saying that the person is self-controlled or master of himself.[21]

He then applies this to the city: "Take a look at our new city, and you'll find one of these in it. You'll say that it is rightly called self-controlled, if indeed something in which the better rules the worse is properly called moderate and self-controlled."[22] Such moderation is a form of harmony, in which all parts act their proper roles. And this harmony obtains through the control of the rational part (philosopher-kings/reason) over the lesser parts.

As noted above, Nietzsche heavily criticizes the conclusion that the rational part should control the other parts of the soul, thus making the person just. And yet, Socrates may not wholly support such a view of justice. It is unclear how precisely this feverish but just city compares to the healthy city. Indeed, looking only at the introduction of the city as feverish, one should question whether this really is how justice should function. Comparing the *Meno* discussion from chapter four, one can see the extensive discussion

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[19] *TI* II, 9-10.

[20] *Republic* IV, 430e-431a.

[21] *Republic* IV, 431a.

[22] *Republic* IV, 431b

of justice in the feverish city as not quite sufficient to understand justice, just as the description of virtue as right belief and therefore unteachable is not quite sufficient to understand virtue.

But Socrates never gives a complete description of justice in the healthy city, for its elaboration was interrupted by Glaucon,[23] and so he never clarifies how "healthy justice" would compare in its fullness to the "feverish justice" described in the bulk of the dialogue. Nevertheless, one can see some important similarities even in the little that Socrates says. Both the feverish and healthy forms of justice are a kind of harmony, in which each person does what they do best. Yet, the healthy city does not contain a description of a hierarchy, perhaps because a hierarchy is not necessary, or perhaps because Socrates was not given the opportunity to describe it. The feverish city requires such things like kings, the noble lie, the exclusion of (most) poets, and so forth. And the reason these two cities and descriptions of justice diverge is obvious. It is the fulcrum on which the dialogue shifts, that point in which Socrates is forced to stop speaking of the healthy city and turn to discussion of the feverish: The people in the city are to have more than what is sufficient for a healthy life. "[T]hey should recline on proper couches, dine at a table, and have the delicacies and desserts that people have nowadays."[24] The justice of the feverish city is therefore built upon a lack of moderation. Therefore, though the feverish justice is a kind of harmony, that harmony must be enforced through authority and (noble) dissemblance. And so the harmony of feverish self-control involves the controlling by a better part of the other parts.

[23] *Republic* II, 372d.

[24] *Republic* II, 372d-e.

Because Glaucon's ironic comparison of the citizens to pigs cuts short the description of the healthy city, one cannot be certain whether some kind of authority structure or noble lies, etc., would be necessary for healthy justice. Nevertheless, moderation and justice may be closely united in the healthy city in a way not possible in the feverish. Given that those in the city are satisfied with only what is necessary, they will not pursue more than necessary. So, too, it seems they would not demand more than what is necessary, and would not seek vocations beyond their abilities—which arguably arises from seeking more than what is necessary for your comfort.

In such a situation, would it be necessary for "the naturally better part [to be] in control of the worse"[25] as in the feverish city? At the very least, one should question whether any authority would need to be set up. Socrates cannot give us the answer because of the immoderation of his interlocutors, and is forced to speak of a city in which justice and moderation are incapable of being united in a way that may be possible in the healthy city, for in the feverish city moderation must be enforced through power and even deception. The healthy city as an image of the one who is just and moderate relates to what is perhaps the central problem in Nehamas' *The Art of Living*: How Socrates, without knowledge, without therefore the rational controlling the lesser parts of his soul, was able to be consistently virtuous. Importantly, for the feverish one who to be just and self-controlled, the rational must be a kind of tyrant over the other drives, using the honor-loving aspect to help keep the drives in order. And, of course, the rational is precisely about knowledge—knowledge understandable in terms of reasoning, propositions. It is knowable, teachable, and enforceable. But Socrates claims ignorance, at least ignorance of this kind of teachable, propositional knowledge. And so the rational

[25] *Republic* IV, 431a.

part of Socrates could not be a tyrant over the rest of his drives. He is like the healthy city, in which the various parts within him did not demand more than what is required.

Revisiting the Problem of Socrates

Nietzsche's criticism, and praise, of Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols* seems primarily directed at the use of intense rationality to overcome the anarchy of instincts evident in Athens and in Socrates himself. Nietzsche sums up both the good and bad about Socrates for Athens:

> When people need *reason* to act as a tyrant, which was the case with Socrates, the danger cannot be small that something else might start acting as a tyrant. Rationality was seen as the *saviour*, neither Socrates nor his 'patients' had any choice about being rational,-it was *de rigueur,* it was their *last* resort…they had only one option: be destroyed or – be *absurdly rational*…[26]

Excluding the claims about Socrates, this need for rationality in a place of anarchy may have been Plato's point in the *Republic*. Among interlocutors, and indeed an Athens, that lacks the ability to recognize virtue, Socrates must give them not the justice of the healthy, but the justice of the feverish. And this feverish justice can only be had through the tyranny of reason, lies, myths, and so forth. So, for Socrates' interlocutors: "Everywhere, instincts were in anarchy…'The drives want to act like tyrants; an even stronger *counter-tyrant* needs to be invented.'"[27]

The feverish city requires a tyrant to acquire a semblance of moderation. The healthy city arguably does not require one. It may be that Plato's understanding of healthy justice as harmonious moderation is close kin to that of Nietzsche's view of "virtue." Rather than rational consciousness ruling the other drives, one should "'give

[26] *TI* II, 10.

[27] *TI* II, 9.

style' to one's character – a great and rare art!"[28] Of course, Nietzsche and Plato do not advocate precisely the same kind of virtue. In his attempt to release human desire from the grip of utility in any form, Nietzsche rejects any metaphysical object for desire. Plato does not go as far as Nietzsche in his rejection of teleological metaphysics. And yet in many ways he is closer to Nietzsche than the latter believes, specifically in the rejection of metaphysical objects that can be understood propositionally, as a place at which one's reason, driven by *eros*, can find cessation from its desire.

Metaphysics in this Platonic form creates a variety of effects: First, it opens up the possibility of the metaphysical objects being the "known" in a broader manner, that is, as a kind of experience of the whole person. Second, those objects cannot be known to be the same for all people. And so, too, virtue cannot be known to be uniform among all individuals. Third, and perhaps most importantly, these indefinable objects, if they constitute the highest vision and so are the objects of human desire in its richest form, cause human desire (in its richest form) to be non-instrumental: there is no object that one may acquire to fulfill desire, but it is "fulfilled" in the practice of moving toward, or acting in the presence of, an ungraspable object (Beauty, Good). Michel Despland says it thus:

> What Plato has just accomplished [in Diotima's speech] is a redefinition of eros. What initially has been conceived of as a desire, a desire to own, has in the end turned out to be an aspiration. Desires can be satisfied. An aspiration is capable of transcending the satisfactions awarded by obtained objects. An aspiration sees the inadequacy of these much desired objects and renews the impetus of desire towards new areas. If eros is still to be labeled a desire, let it be a desire for all really good things, a desire for happiness, and thus an educable desire.[29]

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[28] *GS* IV, 290.

[29] Michel Despland, *Education of Desire: Plato and the Philosophy of Religion* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 236.

I do not think the shift from the language of "desire" to that of "aspiration" is required, nor even the idea of *eros* being educable. Rather, I believe Plato shows us in this speech what our fundamental desire, *eros*, truly wants, and invites us to examine ourselves to see if he is right.

If the discussion above is correct, then we have seen from the *Republic* that lack of virtue demands the tyranny of reason—a claim strikingly similar to that of Nietzsche in *TI*, "The Problem of Socrates." It is yet to be argued that human desire, specifically those human desires that can be considered the most irrational, are directed toward those kinds of objects that bring about virtue. The *Republic* seems very critical of *eros*, at least as described in the feverish city. As Roochnik notes a clash takes place between erotic philosophy and the order of the feverish city that suppresses the kind of philosophy that takes place between Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Republic*-including everything from the regulation of sexual activity to the disallowance of philosophy for people under age thirty.[30] The suppression of *eros* in the feverish city suggests that this city serves the role of a hypothesis, a step in the practice of dialectic, which must be passed by. *Eros*, properly understood, drives one beyond the hypotheses, up the ladder of ascent, one might say. To offer a more robust understanding of *eros* and its relation to dialectic and virtue, I now turn to the *Symposium*.

[30] See the discussion on *eros* in Roochnik, *Beautiful City*, chapter 2.

Eros *and Philosophy in the* Symposium

The *Symposium* remains a fascinating philosophical work tying together desire, philosophy, and metaphysics. An early favorite of Nietzsche's,[31] it accomplishes something similar to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which also had a significant impact on Nietzsche's early thinking. It is not surprising that the philosopher destined to call himself "a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus"[32] would appreciate a dialogue that contains so much of the Dionysian. The dramatic setting is the celebration of the victory of Agathon in the Dionysian tragic festival. Though slow in coming, wine eventually flows freely. In the person of Alcibiades, Dionysus appears near the end to pronounce a kind of judgment. And, of course, the topic is *eros*.

Alcibiades talks about that most notable characteristic of Socrates: the unwavering nature of Socrates' virtue. But he does not speak of some knowledge that supports Socrates' constancy. And Socrates does not claim to have some kind of knowledge, but rather the only thing he claims to know is a practice, the "art of love" (*ta erotika*).[33] If being erotic is essential to being what a human is supposed to be,[34] as even Aristophanes would agree, then the "art of love" is nothing more than the "art of being (a good) human"-that is, this art is virtue itself. By the end of Socrates' speech, the "art of love" or "erotics" has been clearly identified with philosophy. Further, Socrates does not claim to know some set of doctrines, but only a practice. In turn, I believe that *eros* does

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[31] Walter A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 393, fn. 3.

[32] Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: A Self Portrait from His Letters*, 71. (*EH*, Preface, §2)

[33] *Symposium* 177d.

[34] See e.g. Drew A. Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogueses* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 109.

not oppose, nor need the control of, the rational. In fact, Socrates' speech may embody a perspective of rationality that reflects that of Nietzsche, in which reason is another form of desire, not something standing over against desire.

Eros *in the First Five Speeches*

The speeches on *eros* begin because of the apparent desire of Phaedrus for praise to be given to the god. The first three speeches find something bad within *eros*—human virtue achieves its height through a division of human desire against itself in some way. The second three speeches show *eros* as undivided and beneficial for virtue. In a sense, though, Socrates' speech incorporates the ideas of all the speeches that precede his. That is, while agreeing that *eros* is undivided and leads to virtue, he does not ignore the vice that often arises from it.

Notably, Phaedrus' own speech begins with a praise of *eros*, but in the end shows it as almost a limit to human virtue. "A lover is more godlike than his boy, you see, since he is inspired by a god. That's why they gave a higher honor to Achilles [a beloved] than to Alcestis [a lover], and sent him to the Isles of the Blest."[35] Love is therefore inspired by the god, but the acts of sacrifice of those lacking inspiration deserve greater praise—so those motivated by something other than *eros*, or indeed are even passive,[36] are better than those motivated by *eros*.

Pausanias speaks of two kinds of *eros*, the heavenly and common. One should pursue the former and avoid the latter. Thus, human desire is divided into warring factions that fight for supremacy over us. While Pausanias avoids the removal of *eros*

[35] *Symposium* 180b.

[36] Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 3rd ed. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's's Press, 1999), 53.

from the virtues that deserve the highest praise, he nevertheless shows that a chaotic element remains within us and requires that we give authority to a higher element for the purposes of suppressing the lower. Pausanias' speech reflects the tyranny of reason over the lesser parts presented through the method of hypothesis in the *Republic*.

Eryximachus, taking the place of Aristophanes who seems to have lost control of himself, speaks of love as a kind of harmony. In this description, one hears the echoes of justice and moderation as described in the *Republic*. Eryximachus maintains that there are orderly and disorderly kinds of love, and that "our object is to try to maintain the proper kind of Love and to attempt to cure the kind that is diseased."[37] To properly nourish order, one must be like a doctor. Having acquired the proper *technê,* one can know which desires are orderly and disorderly, and act to nourish the former and limit the latter. Again, this echoes the feverish justice in the *Republic*, an order brought about through a *technê*—the ability to rule and know the place of all those in the city. The desires themselves do not achieve a harmony, but a harmony must be enforced, "something in which the better rules the worse."[38]

When Eryximachus offers the floor to Aristophanes, the latter pokes fun at the method of achieving hiccup-free harmony, through forcing a disorderly sneeze. In the *Symposium*, Aristophanes is consistently linked with disorder—his speech, hiccups, implicit connection with Alcibiades and the drunkenness and mobs that follow the latter. This disorder, though, is not mindless. Instead, Plato offers us a well thought out Aristophanic speech that relates closely to his critique of Socrates in the comedy *Clouds*. In his speech, Aristophanes tells a myth in which *eros* is a desire for wholeness—a

[37] *Symposium* 188c.

[38] *Republic* IV, 431b.

wholeness lost due to the arrogance of the powerful, un-erotic humanity who sought to make war on the gods. Zeus cut them in half, reducing their power, and bringing about an intense desire for re-union-intense enough that many died prior to *eros* being at least momentarily sated through sexual intercourse.[39]

It is perhaps a clue toward the comedic nature of Aristophanes' speech that it includes several references to interpreting it as humorous, or even ridiculous.[40] The pursuit of *eros*—this confused intercourse, seeking a re-union into one—seems less than noble. Pausanias and Eryximachus muse on a rich, noble *eros* in opposition to a common, disorderly form. Aristophanes unites the two under the common form, but showing a kind of noble purpose behind it, a kind of humility—a noble purpose that most simply do not understand. And, in fact, it may not even be understood by Aristophanes, who presents it in the form of a rather ridiculous myth.

In *Clouds*, a central concern of Aristophanes *vis-à-vis* Socrates was the loss of the classical virtues present in Greek society. Strepsiades, seeking the help of Socrates in order to get out from under crushing debt, eventually enrolls his son Phidippides-chosen because his powers of recollection transcend his father's-to learn from the philosopher. The plan backfires, and when his son returns from the "thinkery," Strepsiades finds him arrogant and even violent toward his elders and their virtues. His arrogance derives largely from his rejection of the gods and replacing them with the clouds and the whirlwind. Strepsiades, horrified and repentant, goes to burn down the "thinkery," while

[39] *Symposium* 191c-d.

[40] *Symposium* 189a-b, 193c.

crying out: "Revenge! Revenge for the injured gods! Remember what they did! Revenge!"[41]

The *Apology* gives further evidence that Aristophanes' saw Socrates as a blasphemer, for the latter mentions him as part of the reason for the indictment.[42] Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* is largely an attack on Socrates. The un-erotic circle people who assaulted the gods reflect Socrates—he is the blasphemer who appears utterly un-erotic. Aristophanes offers a view of *eros* that should bring the philosopher down to earth—to cease the questioning and criticism and support the virtues and gods of earlier generations. Acting upon an ignoble *eros* keeps one safe, or at least safer, from arrogance.

The speech of Agathon is in an important sense the opposite of that of Aristophanes. *Eros* in Aristophanes' speech is rather ignoble—the *eros* of the lover, who seeks sexual fulfillment in the beloved. *Eros* in Agathon's speech is the beauty of the beloved—it is not a drive within the lover, but a pull within the beloved. But Agathon's speech lacks clarity. Socrates, in his familiar interrogative manner, exposes some of the problems within Agathon's self-serving speech prior to giving his own.[43] Nevertheless, Socrates did not question the important issue of the relationship between *eros* and virtue in Agathon's speech. Of course, with the failure of *eros* to be as Agathon said, the remarkably poor reasoning he used to show the perfect virtue of *eros* collapses as well. Socrates, like Agathon and Aristophanes, sees human desire as linked in some important

[41] Aristophanes, *Lysistrata, The Acharnians, The Clouds*, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein (New York, Penguin, 1973), 174.

[42] *Apology* 18c, 19c.

[43] *Symposium* 199c-201c.

way with virtue. The reasoning in Agathon's speech reaches its lowest point in his discussion of *eros* as virtuous. Importantly, Socrates does not deal with this point, perhaps not simply because fixing one's understanding of *eros* will take care of the issue, but also because he wants that link between *eros* and virtue to remain.

Eros *in the Speech of Socrates*

The speeches previous to that of Socrates all present perspectives that fail to show an acceptable relation between *eros* and virtue. Either the link is too close, allowing *eros* to simply act erratically and still cause one to be virtuous (Aristophanes and Agathon), or *eros* is not, in itself, directed toward virtue (Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus). If *eros* directs one toward virtue and philosophy, and so toward some sort of happiness, then neither claim is sufficient: one should not pursue the chaos of one's desire, nor should one reject the direction of one's desires. Socrates, through the story of Diotima, charts a course for *eros* that avoids the Scylla of the first three speakers and the Charybdis of the last two.

Eros is the offspring of *Poros* and *Penia*—of resource and poverty—conceived on the day of Aphrodites' birth. And so *eros* stands between having and not having, and this lack and resource is linked somehow with beauty. Beauty is the goal of *eros—eros* pursues beauty, grasping for a moment, but unable to possess. And this pursuit of beauty reflects *eros*' place between mortality and immortality, and so too *eros*' place in the practice of philosophy. The nature of *eros* is summed up thus:

> He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal. But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies—all in the very same day. Because he is his father's son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then anything he finds his way to

> slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich.[44]

Eros cannot be kept down, and yet cannot possess that which he acquires. His grasp is always tenuous, and yet he unwaveringly pursues his goal. He is resourceful (*poros*)[45] and yet being without resource (*aporia*) is his common experience.

Socrates claims early in the dialogue to know only "the art of love," or "erotics." Such is the practice of philosophy. The famous ladder of Diotima[46] is perhaps the most obvious clue that this dialogue is not less philosophical than other dialogues, but rather may be the clearest description of Socrates' view of philosophical practice. At the bottom of Diotima's Ladder, we find love of a single beautiful body,[47] which then moves into richer realizations of the relationship between the different kinds of beauty, eventually leading to the form of the beautiful, described in 210e-211d. The form is what we would expect of a Platonic form: singularly beautiful, unchanging, beautiful at all times in every way to all things, being the source of beauty of all other things but without being affected in any way.

Diotima ends her description thus: "So when someone rises by these stages…and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal….so that in the end he comes to

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[44] *Symposium* 203e.

[45] Carl Hausmann sets up a clash between *agape* and *eros*, arguing that the latter arises out of a desire to overcome a lack, while the former arises out of a kind of fullness. See Carl R. Hausmann, "Philosophy and Tragedy: Flaw of Eros, Triumph of Agape," in *Tragedy and Philosophy*, ed. N. Georgopoulos (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). If he is right, this establishes *eros* as a kind of reverse of Nietzsche's view of the will to power, a sense of fullness of which gives way to life affirmation. Nevertheless, Diotima does not declare, like Aristophanes, that *eros* is simply a lack, but that he is also full of resource. This dual aspect—fullness and lack—is central to the practice of philosophy and the nature of human virtue in Plato.

[46] *Symposium* 210a-211a.

[47] *Symposium* 210a.

know just what it is to be beautiful."[48] The language of making a beginning of a vision, and that this moves one *near* the goal (*telos*) is suggestive. Diotima never claims that one can go beyond this. She ends her speech with the claim that one who does "see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed…but…the divine Beauty itself in its one form"[49] would give birth to true virtue, and "if any human being could become immortal, it would be he."[50]

Taking note of just this description, one might understand Diotima to be gesturing toward a philosopher—notably Socrates (or Plato). But this remains a discussion of "the art of love," and so remains within the discussion of the nature of *eros*. The description of the one who sees the Beautiful itself is a hypothetical, at least in terms of one having acquired a grasp of the Beautiful that is unwavering. *Eros*, the one with and without resource, cannot keep hold of the Beautiful. And, insofar as knowledge differs from right opinion in that the former is like a tied down statue of Daedalus,[51] *eros* can never tie down knowledge. Socrates' claims to ignorance should be interpreted quite literally in this regard—he has not acquired knowledge of the Beautiful, but only of the art of love. He does not possess correct doctrine, but correct practice.

Diotima, though, does not claim that one acquires knowledge of the Beautiful itself. She uses terms of sight, her penultimate sentence driving this home: "...when he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen—only then will it become possible for him to give birth to images of virtue (because he's in touch with no images),

[48] *Symposium* 211b.

[49] *Symposium* 211e

[50] *Symposium* 212a

[51] *Meno* 97e-98a.

but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty)."[52] In this pregnant sentence, understood in the context of the discussion of *eros*, one finds an excellent summary of Socrates' practice of philosophy. The Beautiful cannot be seen through images, which as discussed in the last chapter, includes the images of words. Images allow a grasping, steady but insufficient for the matter. Images belong to the method of hypothesis—that less than ideal method that, within dialectic, should be nothing more than a stepping stone toward understanding. The hypothesis helps to point one toward the vision of the object of the dialogue. Getting caught up in the images traps one outside the bounds of the art of love—for one moves to a goal, acquires it, and the pursuit and desire cease. This is decidedly un-Socratic and, as he understands it, un-philosophical.[53]

True virtue is virtue without images. Plato presents Socrates as consistently virtuous, "a man who, we would say, was of all those we have known the best, and also the wisest and the most upright."[54] Socrates exhibits virtue, so that in the *Euthyphro* he is an example of piety before the obviously impious Euthyphro; he exhibits moderation and virtue in general before the immoderate Meno; he exhibits the harmony of character that is justice and moderation in the *Republic*; he exhibits courage in the *Laches*; and so forth. Inasmuch as Socrates' interlocutors lack virtue, Socrates stands as a contrast. And, insofar as Socrates' philosophy focuses on virtue, character is a key element. As Gordon states: "Because moral character is an integral concern for Plato philosophically, his medium for expressing this philosophical concern must focus on character portraiture and

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[52] *Symposium* 212a.

[53] For a detailed discussion of the use of words, see the chapter "The *Cratylus* and the Use of Words" in Francisco Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 62–93.

[54] *Phaedo* 118a.

development."[55] This giving "birth not to images of virtue…but to true virtue"[56] may in fact be a claim that, to be virtuous, one must be ignorant, or have a loose grasp, of propositional knowledge about virtue. One leaves behind the images—after all, the vision is always more than the images, and so all images will be found insufficient—and in so doing becomes virtuous. Again one sees the importance of rejecting the images of the method of hypothesis as sufficient for true virtue; that is, one sees the role of dialectic, showing the inadequacy of all the conclusions of the method of hypothesis. In fact, as I argued in chapter five, Socrates offers notoriously bad "definitions" of shape in the *Meno* in order to avoid attachment to a hypothetical image. The definition of color as "an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived"[57] exhibits technical excellence, as well as relative uselessness for stirring up a vision of that which they are discussing.

Socrates is virtuous, and for his interlocutors to get caught up in definitions and not see his virtue shows their confusion, and even their vice. Euthyphro, the impious son, seems to believe that some kind of definition will answer Socrates' interrogation, and further show that Euthyphro is in fact pious. And yet, if "the art of love" is applied in this dialogue, one could interpret Socrates' purpose as showing that no matter how much knowledge Euthyphro gathers, it is insufficient for knowledge of piety and pious action. Surely, this reflects the depths of ignorance, decried by Socrates in the *Apology*, to be caught up in what one knows, thinking that one's knowledge is sufficient. Or, more

[55] Jill Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy: Literary Device and Dramatic Structure in Plato's Dialogues* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 113.

[56] *Symposium* 212a.

[57] *Meno* 76d.

specifically, the worst kind of ignorance is the belief that the knowledge that one has is sufficient to make one virtuous.

Socrates does not simply work to bring those who insist upon definitions to *aporia*, but he himself serves as an image of the things they discuss. Of course, he also offers a kind of "second best" to those who will not see the erotic, dialectical richness of *aporia*; a second best as found in the feverish justice of the *Republic*. Yet the best justice, healthy justice, is not found in the feverish city but in the healthy city rejected by Socrates' immoderate interlocutors. And so Socrates never describes healthy justice in a way that one can understand the steps that one must take to become just. One can read the *Republic* and know how to become feverishly just: in Nietzsche's words, be "absurdly rational." But the steps to becoming a just person akin to the healthy city remain purposely unclear. Plato grants a sort of vague vision of healthy justice, but no explanation about how such a city is possible or how one is to become like that city. Moving toward healthy justice is a matter of what Brewer appropriately calls "dialectical activity." In the pursuit of being a just person, or speaking more broadly, the pursuit of being a virtuous person, there is no set of ideals laid out propositionally. In turn, one cannot act to bring about a state of affairs that causes those propositions to be true and thus fulfills the desire. Rather, the healthy justice, though unclear, offers some general sense that, to be just, one's desires must not demand more than what they require, and that in so doing one's richest desires will be fulfilled. Being just therefore seems less a simple state—such as the ascete or hedonist may bring about—and more a kind of moving balancing act, in which one must come to know oneself and so make ever clearer the application to oneself of this harmonious relationship of the desires to one another.

Indeed, bringing out this balance as a means to enter the presence of Beauty. Plato seems to echo (anachronistically) Nietzsche: "'give style' to one's character-a great and rare art!...fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason."[58] Socrates claims to know the "art of love." But if one is to carry out this art, one is necessarily incapable of acquiring a knowledge that one can hold. Like the side of the square with twice the area of a two by two square, one can recognize it, but can never lay out precisely the length. So, too, erotic philosophy obtains a vision, recognizing virtue itself, but cannot possess it in the form of a proposition, or any other image. The virtue that comes from erotic philosophy must appear to others to be instinctual.[59]

Diotima's claim that the one who "begins to see this beauty…has almost grasped his goal"[60] points us to her belief that the real goal of *eros* is not Beauty itself, but giving birth in Beauty. "'You see, Socrates…what Love wants is not beauty, as you think it is.'"[61] One desires Beauty because it is a divine kind of harmony that allows the mortal to touch immortality. Diotima speaks clearly about the importance of beauty as a harmony and its relation to giving birth. The harmony found in beauty and the resulting possibility of giving birth in beauty are a means of the mortal to touch the immortal:

> All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth. Now no one can possibly give birth in anything ugly; only in something beautiful. That's because when a man and a woman come together in order to give birth, this is a godly affair. Pregnancy, reproduction—this is an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do, and

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[58] *GS* IV, 290.

[59] Thus Nehamas' claim, discussed above, that Plato did not understand how Socrates was consistently virtuous in Nehamas, *The Art of Living*.

[60] *Symposium* 211b.

[61] *Symposium* 206e.

> it cannot occur in anything that is out of harmony, but ugliness is out of harmony with all that is godly. Beauty, however, is in harmony with the divine.[62]

The idea of "an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do" echoes the place of *eros*—standing between the mortal and immortal. Indeed, *eros* is a spirit, who delivers messages between gods and humans.[63] The spirit nature of *eros* further clarifies the relatively unhelpful conclusion that virtue is "right opinion" and divinely inspired in the *Meno*: "virtue would be neither an inborn quality nor taught, but comes to those who possess it as a gift from the gods which is not accompanied by understanding."[64] As was noted in previous chapters, Socrates hints toward the inconclusiveness of this conclusion, suggesting that it may be possible to teach virtue—something, it seems, only reserved for knowledge. In Diotima's speech, one sees how it might be taught and how it differs from the teaching of the normal kind of knowledge. For what is being taught is not knowledge—*eros* never possesses that which it is seeking—but "the art of love," a practice in which one comes to a vision of the Beautiful and so is able to give birth to virtue before the Beautiful.

Virtue, therefore, cannot be known in some universal form. One could form the feverish justice into detailed universals, for the tyranny of the rational allows for a kind of homogeneity in the virtue of all or most humans. One might solve the problems of morality through the categorical imperative, or perhaps through a measure of general pleasure and pain. But healthy justice is a harmony of the various drives within someone.

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[62] *Symposium* 206c-d.

[63] *Symposium* 202e-203a. I believe there may be cause to understand Socrates' divine messenger (e.g. in *Apology* 40a-b) as *eros*, insofar as he has come to understand and direct his *eros* further up the ladder of ascent, and has become accustomed to the more truly beautiful things, it is possible that his desire has drawn back from that which is bad/ugly, and allows him to move forward in those activities that lead him further into the practice of philosophy.

[64] *Meno* 99e.

And one cannot know whether the harmony within one individual will be like that of another.[65] Indeed, various people give birth to different things, achieving at least a form of virtue and immortality—whether it be through childbirth, ideas, or the divine virtue of Socrates.

The Beauty that *eros* pursues is a divine harmony. And it is in this divine harmony that one can give birth. One is already pregnant—that is, one is already poised to participate in an act of immortality. Virtue achieves this immortality—"The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he."[66] In a sense reflective of Nietzsche's strong who can affirm all of life, the mortal human becomes something more than a mere mortal, called to "become what you are."[67] And, again, reflecting Nietzsche's idea of giving style to one's character,[68] the virtue of erotic philosophy establishes a beautiful harmony within oneself.[69]

More will be said below about the importance of this sense of harmony, how it relates to Nietzsche's philosophy, and the manner in which this connects with Brewer's broad critique of the moral psychology of contemporary ethics. But Alcibiades has yet to have his say, and his speech affects the way in which one approaches Socrates' speech.

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[65] Like Aristotle's view of the mean in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, there is no guarantee that this virtuous balance or harmony will be the same for everyone. In fact, it seems likely that virtue will differ from person to person.

[66] *Symposium* 212a-b.

[67] The subtitle of his last published work, *Ecce Homo*, is "How to Become What you Are."

[68] *GS* IV, 290: "It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye."

[69] There are obviously some important differences between Nietzsche and Plato on these topics. These will be discussed below and in the final chapter.

Beautiful or Erotic? Philosopher or Midwife?: Socrates in Alcibiades' Speech

One should take note when Socrates fails to have the last word in a dialogue. The *Symposium* contains very little in the way of dialogue, but instead the reader is carried along through a series of speeches all of which, at first reading, may feel convincing. This alone sets up a question mark over Socrates' speech: Should we be convinced by the speech of Socrates? And why? That Socrates' speech is not the final one seems a useful way to get us to focus on that question. In fact, given that the final speech contains not a praise of *eros*, but rather an exposé of Socrates himself, the question mark over his speech becomes more apparent: Does Socrates know anything about *eros*? Is philosophy really a fulfillment of a desire as powerful and troublesome as *eros*?[70]

The dull sobriety of the gathering prior to the arrival of Alcibiades gives further reason to question whether anyone in the gathering understands *eros*. In a collection of men seeking to praise *eros*, one sees remarkably little *eros*. The real test of Socrates' claims, which are in the form of a speech rather than his usual elenchus,[71] comes from the one who is obviously in the throes of *eros*. Indeed, Phaedrus, whose desire motivated the speeches, seems less concerned with *eros* than simply speech-making.[72] His own speech even suggests that *eros* can limit the praiseworthiness of a person. Though an odd beginning to the stated purpose of the symposium, it seems appropriate for a gathering of

[70] The manner through which Plato has the *Symposium* transmitted should also raise questions: two men who seemed to have an almost embarrassing obsession with Socrates—Apollodorus and Aristodemus.

[71] Of course, Socrates engages in his normal manner of dialogue briefly with Agathon, and his speech recounts such a dialogue in which Diotima takes on the Socratic role with him.

[72] Phaedrus is noted for his love of speeches, most evident in the dialogue named for him.

sober, self-aggrandizing[73] speeches. Though Socrates' speech differs significantly from those that came before, his speech still contains a description of *eros* that honors his own pursuits. In addition, Socrates appears, at least at first glance, un-erotic. Plato would have been remiss to end the *Symposium* with the loud applause following Socrates' speech. Someone who is clearly overwhelmed by *eros* should enter "to be the judge of [their] claims to wisdom."[74]

Of course, this judgment cannot arrive through the normal discursive reasoning. Rather, Plato encourages the reader to see Socrates and, like Alcibiades, test our own experiences, in part in relation to Socrates, to see if he really is speaking about *eros*. And, in fact, one does not need Alcibiades' speech to see a kind of internal probing of the nature of *eros*. Socrates' usual questioning of some unfortunate interlocutor (in this case, Agathon) takes up little space in the *Symposium*. Rather, one hears of a fictitious priestess—perhaps, in her wisdom and role as a messenger of the gods an image of *eros* itself[75]—questioning and leading Socrates to an understanding of *eros*. Is Plato presenting a false humility in Socrates, in his appeal to a teacher? I believe it is more likely that the form of Socrates' speech is meant to exhibit his own struggle to learn of *eros* within himself.

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[73] All the speeches contain self-serving claims. Phaedrus, the beloved, is more capable of virtue. Eryximachus, the doctor, praises doctor-like harmony. Pausanias, the lover who is perhaps losing Agathon, speaks of life-long dedication between lover and beloved. And so forth. If Socrates' interchange with Agathon involves a reasonable conclusion, then we have a strong suggestion that each of the speakers before Socrates (with the possible exception of Aristophanes) had described something other than *eros*.

[74] *Symposium* 176a.

[75] I believe there is good reason to understand Diotima as Socrates' *eros*. A number of clues are present in the *Symposium*. One clue is her priesthood, as messenger of the divine, that is evidenced by her accurate predictions (201d). In addition, a further clue may be found in her city of origin (Mantinea), which is alluded to by Aristophanes anachronistically as one of the cities divided by the Spartans (193a). That Aristophanes speaks of love as a desire for wholeness, and as Socrates speaks of love in a wholistic manner, perhaps Diotima is an image of love. Nevertheless, though this assists in my argument, it is not requied.

Alcibiades joins the gathering as an image of Dionysus: drunk and ready to crown Agathon with a wreath for his victory in the tragedy contest. His speech is a conflicted mix of praise for and frustration with Socrates, reflecting his conflicted view of *eros*. Alcibiades serves to bring one down from the lofty ideas at the end of Socrates' speech, and to force one to examine one's own *eros*. That is, Alcibiades awakens one from the reverie of a brilliant speech, and forces her to engage not only the words but the content. As Long states: "Alcibiades' appearance is grounding insofar as it draws us back to the concrete world of lived experience and the eros for individual persons after the speculative heights reached by Diotima."[76]

Alcibiades is one of the most notable of Socrates' failed interlocutors. His lack of (moral) virtue is infamous, as is his desire for power and glory. He played a troubled game of betrayal and his life finally ended by assassin. Alcibiades is attractive, and Socrates had been quite taken with him for some time. In many ways, Alcibiades is the image of the erotic man—one who has experienced *eros* as both subject and object. In this regard, his comments about Socrates are announced as personal and so invite us to engage our own experiences in interacting with Socrates' claims. In fact, these personal claims, at minimum, should show why Alcibiades would declare: "I hope you didn't believe a single word Socrates said: the truth is just the opposite!"[77] The order of speeches, the use of a priestess as the source, and the manner in which Alcibiades seems to try to argue against Socrates' claims all suggest that the reader should indeed attend to experience—both Alcibiades' and one's own—before accepting Socrates' account of

[76] Christopher Long, "Is There Method in This Madness? Context, Play, and Laughter in Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*" in *Philosophy in Dialogue: Plato's Many Devices*, ed. Gary Alan Scott (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 181.

[77] *Symposium* 214d.

eros. Alcibiades appeals to his audience on the basis of their experience with "the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy."[78] The speech of Socrates gives rise to a kind of frenzy, and now one must test this to see if *eros* does indeed seek the Beautiful and therefore serve as a source of virtue. Again, a portion of Nietzsche's, and I think Brewer's, approach to philosophy and ethics appears starkly: Attendance to experience as an essential component to understanding desire and its goal.

In chapter five, I noted a variety of elements of Alcibiades' speech in relation to Socratic irony, his claims to ignorance, and the manner in which Socrates reverses both the lover-beloved and teacher-student relationships: he is the ugly beloved and the ignorant teacher. With this implicit understanding, Alcibiades shows himself to know Socrates better than the others present. And so he declares, "none of you really understands him. But…I'm going to show you what he really is."[79] Given the repeated offer for Socrates to interrupt if anything he said was not true,[80] Plato gives the reader further reason to trust Alcibiades' speech. In fact, Plato seems to have gone out of his way to give us good reason to believe Alcibiades' speech—more even than the reasons for believing Socrates's speech. But no real philosophical argument stands between Socrates and Alcibiades. Instead, Alcibiades' speech describes an experience with Socrates, while Socrates' speech describes *eros* and the practice of philosophy.

Alcibiades begins his encomium of Socrates with an image. In fact, he claims that he will "have to use an image,"[81] thus encouraging his listeners to look past, or rather

[78] *Symposium* 218a-b.

[79] *Symposium* 216c-d.

[80] *Symposium* 214e, 217b.

[81] *Symposium* 215a.

through, the image to see that to which it points. The image itself demands that the reader look past what is most easily grasped: the statue of Silenus which, filled with divine statues.[82] That which contains the divine can also be deceptive. So, too, Socrates and his arguments can be deceptive. I argued in chapters five and six that these images in Alcibiades' speech give clues to the interpretation of the dialogues, particularly the central role that irony plays in Socrates' practice of philosophy.[83] To grasp only the external appearance leads one to ignore what lies within, or beyond. The ugly statue/Socrates filled with beautiful things reflects the ignorant Socrates whose understandable language hides images that cannot be acquired simply by grasping the external images, the words, themselves.

Upon speaking of Socrates' ironic obsession with beautiful boys, Alcibiades claims that he once saw Socrates in a moment that was not ironic. He gives little description of this moment, saying only the following: "I once caught him when he was open like Silenus' statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing—that I no longer had a choice—I just had to do whatever he told me."[84] Here Socrates reflects the form of the Beautiful as described by Diotima, both in terms of the heights reached in description and the relative unhelpfulness for stirring up a vision in those who have not had the experience.[85] Nevertheless, Alcibiades makes it clear that there is more to Socrates than

[82] *Symposium* 215a-b, 216d, 221d-e.

[83] "In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game—a game of irony" (*Symposium* 216e).

[84] *Symposium* 216e-217a.

[85] Socrates' comparison to the form of the Beautiful is further evidenced in how unusually attractive he was for the feast (174a). In addition, the maieutic practice of Socrates may further suggest his similarity to the form of the Beautiful—he, like Beauty, is the one in whose presence others give birth to

irony. Indeed, the non-ironic Socrates contains that which is divine, beautiful, enough that the obviously erotic Alcibiades "no longer had a choice…[but] had to do whatever he told [him]."[86]

This vision of the non-ironic Socrates serves as a reflection of the form of the Beautiful. Precisely how it reflects is not as clear, though. At the very least, Alcibiades saw Socrates' virtue, which insofar as "all good things are beautiful,"[87] participates in the form of the Beautiful. Socrates' virtue was not ironic. Indeed, though his interaction with his interlocutors is largely ironic, when one sees virtue fairly clearly in Socrates. But this glimpse of Socrates shows the erotic nature of his irony, and how irony is inextricably linked to his understanding of philosophy. Irony, as discussed in chapters five and six, is more than simple dissembling, but includes a revealing. In interpreting Socratic irony, one finds ideas that cannot be proven entirely through words. Like *eros*, one must be content without possession. And so cannot build a claim of knowledge from the words of Socrates. Even more, the object of *eros* must never be acquired, for when the object is acquired, *eros* ceases. Indeed, if the object is acquired and the desire ceases, that desire must not be the child of *Poros* and *Penia*, but some other desire.

Nehamas notes the difficulty of irony, suggesting that this lack of knowledge is not just the problem of the reader, but perhaps also of Socrates and even of Plato:

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ideas. Further, consider that one in the presence of Beauty ceases to give birth to just images of virtue. Rather, the presence of Beauty helps to clarify and prove whether the virtue birthed is true virtue, just as Socrates helps to clarify and prove the idea birthed to be phantoms or realities (*Theaetetus* 150a-b). In fact, Socrates introduces his maieutic role in the *Theaetetus* by claiming that he is the son of Phaenarete, which means: "She who brings virtue to light" (Plato, *Plato Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 165 n. 3), which may hint toward a kinship between Socrates and Beauty.

[86] *Symposium* 217a.

[87] *Symposium* 201c.

> To think that irony can always be deciphered, or that ironists are themselves always in clear possession of a truth they are holding back, is often just to miss the point. It is to fail to notice that irony does not always hide an unambiguous truth and that it can be directed toward oneself as well. There is, as Enright writes, an irony that "doesn't reject or refute or turn upside down, but quietly casts decent doubt and leaves the question open: not evasiveness or lack of courage or conviction, but an admission that there are times when we cannot be sure, not so much because we don't know enough as because uncertainty is intrinsic, of the essence."[88]

In this sense, I can agree with Nehamas' claim that Plato may not understand Socrates. Insofar as one accepts Nehamas' view that Plato's understanding of Socrates requires rational explanation of his knowledge and steadfast virtue, I believe Plato could not gain this understanding. Indeed, in terms of rational explanation, Socrates could not understand himself. Socrates practices "erotics," not the tyranny of the rational necessary for the feverish. Alcibiades caught a glimpse past the irony, but as is the case with *eros*, is unable to reduce it to knowledge or possess it. This uncertainty, inability to be sure of one's knowledge in the sense of possessing it, "is intrinsic, of the essence." Multiplying propositions will not supply what is lacking.

Though Alcibiades caught a glimpse of a non-ironic, beautiful Socrates, he did not become a philosopher. The reason for his failure is clear: Alcibiades, upon seeing this beauty in Socrates, believes that if he would let Socrates interact erotically with him, then "he would teach me everything he knew."[89] Alcibiades wanted to acquire the "figures [Socrates] keeps hidden within,"[90] believing this could be achieved through the handing down of ideas. I have argued that Socrates does not possess this kind of knowledge. Rather, he knows only "the art of love," a practice drawn on by a

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[88] Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 67.

[89] *Symposium* 217a.

[90] *Symposium* 216e.

propositionally-unclear "vision," rather than the possession of knowledge. Alcibiades thus serves a critical role in the dialogue in directing our attention toward both good and bad practices of philosophy.

Socrates had just given his speech, recounting how he learned, arguably from his own *eros*, the nature of *eros* and its *trajectory* of desire. Alcibiades' plays the role of an obvious erotic judging Socrates, and perhaps the rest of the group. Given the hints in Aristophanes' speech that Socrates' lack of *eros* borders on blasphemy,[91] Alcibiades' speech encourages judgment of Socrates from one's own experience of *eros*. Alcibiades barges in among the sober[92] speeches reminding us of the often chaotic ways of *eros*. Whereas previously, such things as "Diotima's Ladder" may sound inspired, one is now confronted with an *eros* that refuses to climb. Compared to Alcibiades' *eros*, the Socrates of his encomium appears decidedly un-erotic.

The juxtaposition of the Alcibiades-disorderly *eros*, and the Socrates-philosophical *eros* encourages the self-examination of the reader. Alcibiades does not, therefore, only serve as an example of *eros* gone wrong. He does serve this latter role, but it is not so much in his pursuit of *eros* in an irrational manner, but in his attempts to use whatever power he had at his disposal to acquire possession of what Socrates appears to possess. Alcibiades' *eros* had a clear object that he believes he can acquire by his good looks.[93] Frustrated, he perhaps falls deeper into his chaotic life because of his inability to seduce Socrates into giving him his "knowledge." Indeed, insofar as Socrates

[91] Comparing Aristophanes' speech to his play *Clouds*, it is relatively obvious that he views Socrates as at least impious, even blaspheming against the gods. Given his understanding of the importance of erotic fulfillment in one's other "half" and Socrates' general failure to do this, we can see that his belief that Socrates was impious is related to Socrates apparent aloofness vis-à-vis *eros*.

[92] Sobriety may have been avoided by Aristophanes, as evidenced by the hiccups.

[93] *Symposium* 217a.

serves as an image of the Beautiful in the *Symposium*, Alcibiades has an erotic relationship with him. And his refusal to be in a proper relationship to Socrates seems directly related to his inability to seduce him and therefore possess what he appeared to possess: Alcibiades, like *eros*, both has and does not have Socrates. And Alcibiades is not happy about this. In his speech, Alcibiades compares the beauty of Socrates and his inability to seduce him to Socrates' arguments. Socrates' arguments, too, appear to promise something divine that many sought to master in order to possess these beautiful things within. Alcibiades fails to acquire what Socrates possessed, not because he lacks the tools and skills required to seduce, and not because Socrates is insensible, but rather because what he thought he could acquire could not be given. Alcibiades sought to possess these divine images, Socrates' beautiful wisdom. But Socrates only knew "the art of love," the practice of philosophy. There is no object to possess, only a practice to learn. Perhaps in the same way, interpreters of Plato try to understand Socrates' arguments, but rather than using attractiveness to acquire the knowledge he appears to have, they use the coaxing of reason—that is, the method of hypothesis. Alcibiades' obvious vice results in frustrated attempts to possess knowledge. His desire to possess the Beautiful arises from a misunderstanding of *eros*—the leader not leading rightly. *Eros* cannot possess the Beautiful. Nor indeed does want to possess the Beautiful. *Eros* is the desire to give birth in Beauty. Had Socrates been less virtuous, Alcibiades may have acquired something from him. But this acquisition would not have satisfied *eros*, at least not as Diotima described it.

Alcibiades, the obvious erotic, serves as an example and an encouragement. He is an example of seeing *eros* as something other than that described by Diotima, and he

serves to encourage the reader to examine his/her own *eros* to determine if Alcibiades' approach is more true to *eros* than that of Socrates. And yet Alcibiades' speech does not close the *Symposium*. The final dialogue and seating give important hints as to how we should approach Socrates' claims. A brief discussion of their role and implications follows.

Socrates' Unexplainable Perspective

Christopher Long in his article "Is There Method in This Madness?"[94] writes of the message of the seating in the *Symposium*. Agathon, the meaning of whose name ("the good [man]") is noted early in the dialogue through Socrates' play on words,[95] is separated from Socrates by Alcibiades. Following the ribald speech of Alcibiades, Socrates attempts to move between him and Agathon. Alcibiades, on the other hand, wants a compromise, to have Agathon sit between them. Socrates claims that this compromise is "impossible,"[96] and they proceed to shift positions according to Socrates' preference. The move is foiled, though, by the entrance of a drunken mob.[97]

Long notes the importance of the imagery in this scene. Alcibiades had already praised Socrates, and so Socrates wants to move between Agathon and Alcibiades in order to praise the former. Agathon "the most beautiful man at the party, the man whose

[94] Christopher Long, "Is There Method in This Madness? Context, Play, and Laughter in Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*," in *Philosophy in Dialogue*, ed. Gary Alan Scott, 174–192.

[95] *Symposium* 174b.

[96] *Symposium* 222e.

[97] *Symposium* 223b. I believe this entire scene depicts the structure of Socratic dialogue. A suggested move that Socrates shows is impossible, the dialogue partners then shift according to Socrates' maieutic direction, and then fail to get there due to the injection of vice.

name evokes the good itself"[98] is the object of contention for Alcibiades and Socrates. Socrates seeks to praise him, to speak clearly and honestly of him. Insofar as Agathon reflects the Beautiful and evokes the Good, Socrates' attempts to situate himself next to him and to speak of him manifest his desire to speak clearly of the Good and the Beautiful. And, like in the *Republic* and the *Meno*, as Socrates seems close to speaking clearly of these things, the "anarchy of human eros"[99] interrupts, and he cannot draw near to or speak clearly of the Good/Beauty. Alcibiades remains between Socrates and Agathon, a wall separating Socrates from (speaking clearly of) the Good/Beauty. And so Socrates never speaks his praise of Agathon, never describes Beauty, even if he indeed he has ascended to Beauty. The *Symposium* ends in disappointment. Like *eros*, the reader never acquires (a clear description of) Beauty.

Following the chaos that ensues with the entrance of the drunken mob, Alcibiades appears to be replaced by Aristophanes,[100] who is now between Agathon and Socrates. Socrates talks with them, declaring that "the skillful tragic dramatist should also be a comic poet."[101] Socrates' speech on *eros* forms a kind of marriage of the speeches of Agathon (the tragic dramatist) and Aristophanes (the comic poet)—for the former presents an *eros* that acts out of its own fullness of Beauty, while the latter presents an *eros* that acts out of emptiness. Socrates speaks of the son of *Poros* and *Penia*.[102] I

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[98] Long, "Is There Method in This Madness?," 182.

[99] Ibid., 182.

[100] The link between Aristophanes and Alcibiades, noted above, is evidenced partly by this, but more importantly by their similar approaches to *eros*: What Aristophanes says, Alcibiades lives.

[101] S*ymposium* 223d.

[102] An easy comparison may be made to Nietzsche here, whose will to power gives rise to action out of fullness rather than a lack.

believe this The tragic nature of philosophy has already been made clear in the separation of Socrates from Agathon by the "anarchy of human eros." Alcibiades' replacement by the comic poet is suggestive. Long states:

> The erotic search for the good that animates human life must always be tempered by a humble, indeed a comic, recognition of human finitude. The darkness of this latter recognition gives way at the end of the dialogue to the hope that perhaps even through comedy something of the good may be weaved into the fabric of human community.[103]

And, indeed, the tragic and the comic are bound together in the *Symposium* and relate directly to the human pursuit of the good.

Long does not pursue the parallel of Alcibiades and Aristophanes as much as seems justified, though. Whereas he claims that the comic is a means through which "something of the good may be" brought among humans—specifically, by the philosopher who stands tragically removed from the Good/Beautiful—so also Alcibiades is not simply something that stands between but is also a path through which the philosopher may come to the vision of the Good/Beautiful. This point was made above, in that Alcibiades encourages the reader to examine her/his own *eros* and so to test Socrates' claims, and so to begin the practice of philosophy. It is even more evident here in that one cannot approach the Good/Beautiful without passing through the *eros* that is exhibited in Alcibiades and the drunken mob. There is no pure, clear, rational path. And, perhaps, in time as one learns to step through this *eros*, one finds the humor in humanity's tragic inability to transcend the human situation of ignorance. And in so doing, one may begin to give birth to virtue. Not the "virtue" of the feverish city, which attempts to subordinate Alcibiades and Aristophanes, believing that reason is sufficient to understand the Good/Beautiful, possessing it in knowledge. Indeed, seeing the feverish

[103] Long, "Is There Method in This Madness?," 182.

conclusions of the *Republic* as anything more than a second-best reflects the seducing activity of Alcibiades—it is an attempt to possess that which cannot be possessed, bound for failure. The method of hypothesis offers structure in the midst of the chaos of *eros* gone wild, but can never fulfill *eros*, only subordinate it. But the virtue, the harmony, of the healthy city, under the authority of no tyrant and so having no subordination, arises out of *eros*, not from the top-down hegemony of reason. And the order given by a rightly leading *eros*, known by its virtuous fruit rather than by outside knowledge, that is reason's judgment upon it, of what it should be like, arises from within the person, that pregnancy of virtue that allows humans to touch immortality.

Socrates cannot speak of the Good/Beautiful clearly in a manner that inspires vision, despite his desire to do so. Human limitations constrain him, both in terms of the lack of virtue of interlocutors and in terms of the inability of humans to acquire divine knowledge. Socrates' erotic practice of philosophy, tragically coming close to Beauty/the Good but never gaining possession, provides the best that humans can do. One may believe that one can acquire a goal that brings a cessation to one's desire—either the fundamental human desire of *eros*, or the desire for knowledge of ultimate things that is required to know how to fulfill *eros*. But this belief, resulting from a misunderstanding of the fundamental human desire, manifests in inquiry within, and activity based upon, the method of hypothesis. Humans are erotic, and so human desire and human knowledge is tragic. It finds no cessation, but is ever fulfilled in the practice of erotic philosophy. And yet, in the face of tragic philosophy, one should not become a misologue, but rather be encouraged to continue in the practice of philosophy. For one to think otherwise signifies a lack of virtue.

The Practice of Philosophy as the Fulfillment of Human Desire

One of Socrates' more difficult claims is that people only desire the good, for one desires not harm but good, and the good is what is beneficial.[104] Confusion leads people to pursue what is not good. Insofar as *eros* is the fundamental human desire,[105] the *Symposium* may give the most important argument supporting his claim. What does it mean to desire the good, or the Good, in the context of the *Symposium*?

First, it is clear that, though the Beautiful and the Good draw *eros*, they are not really its objects. Immortality, an unceasing-ness, through giving birth is the goal of *eros*. The acquisition of the forms, through knowledge or some other means, is never the goal. Those who pursue these forms through propositions, ever failing to acquire them, betray a lack of virtue, and are threatened with a chaos of drives that can only be handled by the tyranny of reason.[106] The vicious believe that the Good and the Beautiful must submit to their power, just as Alcibiades believes that Socrates should submit to his seduction, thus granting him the Good/Beautiful within Socrates. When his interlocutors lack virtue in this way, Socrates directs them toward the most orderly of the powers: reason. But that is the order, the moderation and justice, of the feverish, not of the healthy. For those who cannot find a balance for their *eros*, that is who cannot see the vision of Beauty, reason must become the tyrant, allowing them to give birth, not to real

[104] See for example Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, "Socrates On How Wrongdoing Damages The Soul," *The Journal of Ethics* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 337–8.

[105] I believe that this is the part of *eros* that Aristophanes has right, even though his account of *eros* is truncated.

[106] If we were to judge the history of philosophy through this lens, the tyranny of reason most often manifests as simply the hatred and ignoring of drives through the glorification of reason and its ends.

virtue, but to images of virtue. Images of virtue like that of the feverish city, in which a tyranny[107] becomes the image of harmony.

But in the speech of Diotima, it is not reason that is the leader, but *eros*. Her enigmatic phrase "if the leader leads aright"[108] leaves us with the question of how to determine if it is right. This question was avoided in the above, but the beginnings of an answer were offered in discussing the importance of experience. Insofar as one must examine one's own *eros* to evaluate Socrates' claims, so also one can only know the leader is leading aright through having followed it beyond the initial steps toward the form of the Beautiful. Can it be proven through reason that one's desire is for a particular object? No. Reason alone cannot prove anything here—the desire itself needs to be examined. Reason plays a role, but the desire determines its own goal. So, too, one can reason along with Diotima, but one cannot know that *eros* has led to its own goal until one reaches the goal and finds that this is precisely what *eros* desired.

"[We] must try to follow if [we] can"—and only in that way can we "be initiated into these rites of love."[109] This language evokes religion, experience, rather than rational inquiry.[110] And it seems that following along the ladder up to Beauty constitutes

[107] In the *Republic*, "tyrant" does not refer to the philosopher-kings, but to those whose desires are in anarchy. But, as noted in chapter five, I believe that (ironically) Nietzsche and Plato may agree on this irony in the *Republic*: For the tyrannical person is one who is in a chaos of desires, and so reason (the philosopher-kings) becomes a tyrant over the other desires. And the use of deceit, strict enforcement against poetry, control of familial and sexual relationships—all these suggest that there is something unnatural about the authority of reason. It is not in harmony with our desires, but must force them into submission, just as in the tyrannical person, whatever desire happens to be the strongest forces the others into submission.

[108] *Symposium* 210a.

[109] *Symposium* 210a.

[110] David Roochnik, *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 12–17, sets up a distinction between the mythical/religious descriptions of Hesiod's *Theogony* against the advent of philosophy in terms of the former setting up chaos as the

an initiation into the rites. One begins to know *eros* when one has climbed to the top and had the vision of Beauty. To arrive at the vision of the form brings not the end, but the beginning of understanding *eros*, and so also the beginning of giving birth to true virtue. Alcibiades believes the acquisition of those divine images within Socrates to be the end, as Meno feels that knowing whether virtue is teachable is the, or a worthy, end. They misunderstand because of their lack of virtue. This erroneous perspective on the goal of *eros* is Aristophanic: the goal of the desire is a state of being joined with an object. Socrates presents an *eros* that is a continual movement and creativity,[111] with the goal being no less than immortality. There is no particular object of *eros*, though the place to which *eros* leads us is beautiful. There is simply the giving birth in the beautiful of that with which one is pregnant. Though in a broad sense this giving birth to that with which one is pregnant constitutes virtue, yet there seems to be a highest or purest form of virtue. The one who "looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen" can give birth to "true virtue" rather than images.[112] Such a person practices erotic philosophy, like Socrates.

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fundamental structure of the world, driven along by *eros*, while the latter sees the world as arising out of something that can be understood through reason and driven by the *logos* that arises out of that *archê* (e.g. water for Thales). Roochnik admits that this is a bit of an oversimplification. Nevertheless, it is a useful approach, and given that approach we should see some aspects of myth being reintroduced in Socrates' practice of philosophy insofar as *ta erotika* is virtue. For the world, in being crafted in such a way as to be good for humans, will show itself to have aspects that are therefore attuned to *eros*. Hyland is right in saying that "[o]ur erotic natures are such that we will forever strive for a completeness that we can never attain, and which in any case, if achieved, would render us no longer erotic and in that sense no longer human" (Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogueses*, 109). Therefore, though the world should open itself to us as we come to understand and live "the art of love," it will never give itself up to us completely in a manner that can be held as knowledge or any other object that brings the pursuit of knowledge or *eros* to an end.

[111] Recall the complaints in the *Clitophon* from the conclusion of chapter three: Will Socrates only offer pursuit and not full understanding? Of course this is all he will grant because the goal is the pursuit.

[112] *Symposium* 212a.

The difference between those who are pregnant in body and those who are pregnant in soul is that the former have a goal that can largely be achieved,[113] while the latter are incapable of ever resting in the completion of their work. The latter are more truly like *Eros*, who never comes into firm possession of what he desires. Those pregnant in body are perhaps described best in Aristophanes' speech, pursuing one another and believing that they have fulfilled *eros* in their moments of joining together. Those pregnant in soul act more purely in accordance with the nature of *eros*, for the leader has led them rightly to the form of the Beautiful and the giving birth to true virtue.[114]

Pregnancy in body is reflective of the method of hypothesis, particularly as used in the *Meno*. Just as Meno asked a question—Is virtue teachable?—that could not really be answered without first answering the more fundamental question—What is virtue?—so those pregnant in body pursue what they think will fulfill *eros* without really knowing what *eros* is, what *eros* desires. In turn, Meno lacked the self-control necessary to pursue the important question fully, and so demanded that his secondary question be answered. I argued in chapter five that the answer to this secondary question answer fails to be adequate, remaining unhelpful for one seeking virtue. But the answer gave Meno some

[113] This may not be precisely true. If one achieves immortality through childbirth, such immortality can only be achieved in the perpetuating of one's line through the birth-giving of one's offspring. So, insofar as one would have one's line last eternally, the goal is never achieved.

[114] It may be that we have in Diotima's speech a division of kinds of "pregnancy" that reflects the tripartite soul in the *Republic*: pregnant in body (*Symposium* 209b), those who have done honorable deeds (*Symposium* 209d-e), and the one pregnant in soul (*Symposium* 209a). It could be argued that these are related, respectively, to the appetitive, spirited, and rational parts of the soul as described in *Republic* IV. While this seems an obvious parallel, each of these individuals are driven not by reason, but by *eros* itself. The former two require the tyranny of reason due to the disorderliness of their *eros*, which arises out of *eros* never coming to the form of the Beautiful and giving birth to virtue. (This is another way of stating that the method of hypothesis is formed for those who lack virtue.) But the one pregnant in soul and being led rightly by *eros* does not require the tyranny of reason. It is here that the parallel breaks down, for the philosopher who gives birth to true virtue is described more clearly by the healthy city than the feverish.

sense of fulfillment. So, too, do the pursuits of those pregnant in body, who never get to the goal of *eros* and so achieve true virtue, but acquire a sense of fulfillment, even a sense of virtue.[115] These are the images of virtue, the very material of the method of hypothesis, rather than true virtue, practiced by erotic philosophers.

The Moral Psychology of Platonic Eros

Eros, when it leads aright, draws the individual toward the form of the Beautiful, something that cannot be grasped in images. And in the presence of Beauty, one gives birth to true virtue, rather than images. Perhaps the most glaring aspect of this philosophical task is that there is no clear object or end toward which it moves. Like *eros* itself, it moves toward something, but can never grasp it or tie it down, and so make it knowledge. There is no end to the philosophical task.

Not only so, but this lack of end is inextricably linked to virtue. The method of hypothesis, the *eros* of Alcibiades, the immoderation of Socrates' interlocutors—these all drive one to a clear end, a possession that purports to fulfill their desire. But they misunderstand their desire. *Eros* is not fulfilled in the acquisition of any particular thing. Rather, the "object" of *eros* is a kind of activity. To be in the presence of Beauty and to give birth is the goal of *eros*. Creative activity is the "object" of *eros*. Believing fulfillment is found in the possession of knowledge, or sexual intercourse, or money and fame arises from the same misunderstanding of *eros* as a desire to possess something, that is, a desire to bring about a state of affairs. *Eros* desires to create in the presence of Beauty. All other pursuits, when understood as leading to human fulfillment, instead lead

[115] Aristophanes' description of *eros* and its relation to virtue is, therefore, not completely in error. Those who are unable to be philosophers do find virtue in being with another who is beautiful. Even Diotima hints toward this (*Symposium* 209b-c). Nevertheless, we note again the danger of unfulfilled, disorderly *eros* and its need for reason as a tyrant.

to disorder and immoderation, and therefore require the stern tyranny of reason to form a semblance of moderation.

Just as, therefore, the Beautiful (and the Good) cannot be put into images, including words, so the object of *eros* cannot be an object (state of affairs) itself, and so also virtue is a creative act with no clearly defined limitations on what counts as creativity and what does not. I do not mean that there are no limits, only that these limits are not clearly defined. Most importantly, no image defines these limits, including those images that are the material of reason, such as ethics derived from a rationally conceived metaphysics. Thus, virtue, like the healthy city in the *Republic*, remains incompletely described: Insofar as *eros* has brought the person into the presence of Beauty, that which is within one is born in a creative activity. There are no rebellious, selfish, disorderly parts. After all, *eros* is where it desires to be. And every part of the person does what it was meant to do, demanding no more and receiving no less than it desires.

True virtue, therefore, is determined by the order that is appropriate to the individual. That kind of virtue that can be determined by rulers and can be applied to all people, or to groups—these can be nothing more than images of virtue and harmony. We know what moderation and justice are, speaking broadly in a completed image of a city. But the city in which moderation and justice are unified in a virtue is that city whose description is unfinished, and the places of whose people are unclear. On the other hand, the application of the feverish but just city is fairly clear for all people. But the healthy city, insofar as it was described, is not so clearly applied to various individuals. It is less a stable and clear image, and more of a stirring up of a vision—akin to Socrates' definitions of color in the *Meno*—that is helpful only insofar as one can attend to one's

desires and gain an unclear but inspiring vision as to how they might be formed in such a healthy manner. Hyland says something similar:

> We can now see why so little is said directly about the Good. We do not, cannot, know it directly, but can only *intimate its presence and power*, and talk, not of it itself but of its effects, in the light of our intimations. That is not "knowledge of the Good" or wisdom, but it is not ignorance either.[116]

This not-knowledge that is also not-ignorance constitutes *eros*, the fullness and the lack that join together to drive philosophy and the pursuit of virtue. Socrates therefore does not announce that the fundamental human desire, *eros*, can be fulfilled in any state of affairs that brings that desire to cessation. *Eros* is fulfilled in dialectical activity. Zuckert summarizes well the call of Socrates:

> Consisting in the search for wisdom rather than the possession of knowledge, Socratic philosophy could not constitute pure pleasure. It involved effort and entailed disappointment, at least temporarily. As Socrates had reminded his auditors in the *Symposium*, morals cannot gain or retain anything – intellectual or physical – permanently. *The* question posed by Socrates' example as well as by his speeches was why human beings should keep trying to acquire wisdom.[117]

This question—why humans should keep trying to acquire wisdom—I have worked to answer: The pursuit of wisdom constitutes the fulfillment of our deepest desires, and thus allows us to become what we are meant to be, that is, virtuous. And, again, it follows from this that the richest of human desires, that which drives every action insofar as every action finds its *telos* in a reaching for immortality, has no simple state of affairs at its end, but is non-instrumental and dialectic in nature.

Plato writes a Socrates who practices the art of love, philosophy, a tragic activity. Socrates never acquires knowledge, but his steadfast virtue suggests that he gives birth to true virtue and therefore sees Beauty in the only way it can be seen. The way of seeing

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[116] Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues*, 192.

[117] Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers*, 768.

Beauty is through the practice of this erotic and tragic philosophy, always pursuing and never possessing. One cannot settle, having achieved the end of virtue or philosophy. True philosophy and true virtue are dialectic—in a way that encompasses the meanings of both Brewer and Plato. And, in being dialectic, philosophy and virtue are also tragic—in a way that closely resembles the tragic philosophy of Nietzsche. Philosophy and virtue do not rest on a rationally defined metaphysical ground, nor do they seek a metaphysics that is rationally known. Rather, they arise from a desire, a desire to create in harmony—to "'give style' to one's character"[118] and from that to make all the activities that make up one's life into a work of art, delightful to *eros*. Plato's erotic philosophy and Nietzsche's tragic philosophy share significant elements, applicable to Brewer's critique of contemporary ethics. In the final chapter, I underscore these similarities and out of them offer suggestions for the practice of contemporary ethical philosophy, including the nature of human moral psychology.

[118] *GS* IV, 290.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Tragic Moral Psychology of Nietzsche and Plato

Introduction

Brewer, following the criticisms of Anscombe and MacIntyre, argues that contemporary ethics needs to turn to the ancients (primarily Aristotle) to rediscover a moral psychology capable of encompassing all the range of human desires—particularly, the desire for virtue. I have presented interpretations of the kind of philosophy in which Nietzsche and Plato engaged that show their perspectives of human desire. Both of these thinkers, Nietzsche in his own practice of philosophy, and Plato in his character Socrates, practice philosophy in a manner that constitutes an ongoing fulfillment of what they believe to be fundamental human desire.

Though there are significant differences in both the ideas and practices of philosophy in these two thinkers, some of the key agreements are useful for contemporary ethics. The differences, too, can serve as important considerations for the formation of contemporary ethical theory. This chapter will conclude this study by presenting both the similarities and differences, and offering some preliminary comments on the use of Nietzsche and Plato for contemporary ethics. The similarities include a respect for a phenomenological approach, an understanding of human virtue as a balance between the various desires, philosophy as a practice that serves dialectically as both a result of such balance and as a means to help find that balance, and fundamental human desire as non-instrumental. The dissimilarity lies primarily in their view of metaphysics. They share a rejection of rationally graspable metaphysics, but they differ in that

Nietzsche wholly rejects teleological metaphysics while Plato sets up an approach to metaphysics that never allows a knowable, even theoretically knowable, state of affairs that will serve as a *telos* to human desire.

Know Thyself: Phenomenology and Philosophy

What might be a kind of beginning positive relationship between Nietzsche and Plato is the central place of phenomenology in their practices of philosophy. Phenomenology, as I will be using it for this discussion, is an attentiveness to human experience so as to divine the nature of human actions and happiness as well as the desires that lie under both. How exactly phenomenology functions in the practices of philosophy of these philosophers differs to some extent. Nevertheless, this phenomenological tone gives their understanding of human desire a richness that is lacking in contemporary ethics.

The significance of phenomenology is most obvious in Nietzsche's thought. Even in his Schopenhauer-laden works, phenomenology played an important role. But it was only in his qualified acceptance of positivistic practice that it took central place. Nevertheless, Nietzsche was no Paul Rée. Unlike the latter, Nietzsche did not simply want to know what made humans do what they do. As Meysenbug said of Nietzsche: "[U]nlike Rée, you are not born to analysis: you need to create artistically and though you strain against it, your genius will lead you to the same thing as *The Birth of Tragedy*, only with no more metaphysics."[1] Not only was Nietzsche driven to create, but to understand the act of creation, of that giving of value to something that previously had little or none. That is, he did not simply desire to analyze, but to understand how an analyzed humanity

[1] Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 274.

may be able to affirm life—that is, how when one comes to understand oneself in all one's inglorious all-too-human-ness, one can still be a creator.

Nietzsche's phenomenology then is impacted by a rejection of positivism's claim that "'There are only *facts*'…[Rather], facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations."[2] As discussed in chapter four, Nietzsche's rejection of facts goes hand in hand with his rejection of the self and metaphysics. All that remains to know when one has left behind the belief in substance, the self, and metaphysics in general is the experience of drives. Nietzsche is therefore a kind of phenomenologist of human drives, or, as he calls himself, a psychologist.[3] This psychological approach has important implications for both his practice of philosophy and the conclusions at which he arrives.

In chapter four, I noted how Nietzsche's rejection of a self and the existence of drives alone forces one to assert that the cessation of the drives is nothing other than death. Certainly there are drives that are directed toward a state of affairs, and so clearly Nietzsche was not simply looking to discover the nature of drives, but to understand the way to find meaningfulness in life, that is, a way to affirm life. An affirmed life does not seek its own end, and so it must be an organization of the drives such that they never acquire a state of affairs that brings about their complete cessation. If life acquires meaning through a state of affairs that fulfills the drives, then there is no meaning in life itself, but only in the acquisition of an after-life set of circumstances. And so life as a whole could not be affirmed, and indeed given our general powerlessness over the whole of circumstances, it would be the rare individual who could even acquire such meaning—which is, Nietzsche believes, the reason for the escape into religion and metaphysics. As

[2] *WP* III, 481.

[3] E.g. *EH* "Books," 6.

in Kant, God has the power over all circumstances and can bring about the *summum bonum*. But, to Nietzsche, such a metaphysical focus constitutes nihilism, the despising of life.

Rather than seeking solace in teleological metaphysics as he understands it, Nietzsche draws on his previous work on the marriage of Dionysus and Apollo and the formation of meaning (and virtue) within Greek tragedy. He replaces the metaphysical Dionysus (*a la* Schopenhauer) with the claim that there are only interpretations, and so whatever the substance of the world may be, we have no access to it. The meaning of the world is open-ended, left to those who can give value to offer it—that is, those who would form the Apollonian in the midst of the Dionysian. As long as one tries to establish value solely through the pursuit of some state of affairs, one desires death. But if one finds fulfillment not in any particular state of affairs, but rather in the act of creating and giving value, in the possibilities that arise out of the experience of disappointment, then one can affirm all of life. Tragedy provides the structure of the meaningfulness of life. In the same way that a complex piece of art both fulfills and increases desire, so our drives should be structured "until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye."[4] The nagging question of what orders these drives is therefore at least halfway answered: Do not look for a self or some kind of ethic, but rather look for the means of ordering the drives such that they are always fulfilled in a manner such that they never cease. Put another way, look toward life (that is, the continuation of the drives) as the ordering principle, and do not believe that any set of circumstances (in this life or another) will fulfill life. This phenomenology of the drives results in an understanding of virtue that is particular to each person and that is life-

[4] *GS* IV, 290.

affirming in that it requires that each person continually, actively, form value. One can look upon life and see in every aspect of it a piece of beauty, a value.

For Nietzsche, then, the rejection of teleological metaphysics was an essential part of the development of his philosophy, and became a necessary piece of his understanding of tragedy, disappointment, and life affirmation. Though I have argued that Plato is similar in many respects, he does not reject metaphysics in the same way Nietzsche did. Platonic metaphysics is not, I contend, what has classically been understood of them. There is a phenomenological aspect to his metaphysics, in that dialectics is to stir up in us a vision of virtue or the good—a vision that is not reducible to propositions, but arises from human desire. The nature of this vision is such that it is perfectly suited to *eros*. The unflagging striving of *eros*, which stands in the middle-ground between knowledge and ignorance, is precisely the image of the desire that acquires some sense of fulfillment and yet never ceases. There simply is no state of affairs achievable that will satisfy *eros* to its cessation. It is perhaps this very point at which Aristophanes and Socrates clash. Aristophanes' speech presents *eros* as fulfilled in a particular state of affairs (namely, in the sexual act), after which it disappears for a time and returns.[5] Socrates claims, rather, that *eros* never ceases, and that finding fulfillment in that state of affairs means that one has misunderstood *eros* and, as a kind of corollary, also fails to understand virtue, becoming distracted by what can be grasped.

There would perhaps be some state of affairs if the object of *eros* were reducible to propositions that one could wish to either be true or false, for then the world could be crafted (either by humans or some divinity) in such a way as to give the satisfaction that

[5] Implied, of course, is either that *eros* was not really fulfilled or that the world, as understood by Aristophanes, is not crafted in a manner that can allow a lasting fulfillment of *eros*. This implication plays well to Socrates' description of *eros*.

brings the cessation of the desire. But the object of *eros* is the content of understanding (*noesis*), that is a vision that cannot be possessed but only glimpsed by means of dialectic, constitutes the object of *eros*—"the only way that Beauty can be seen."[6] If the object of a desire cannot be reduced to propositions, then there is no propositional state of affairs in which that object is acquired. Not only so, but it is only by the vision acquired by following *eros* to its object that one can become truly virtuous. Such is the object of the most powerful of our desires—to give birth to virtue in Beauty.

The objects of the understanding are within that vision acquired by means of dialectic, and so are unable to be structured into abstract formulae and systems that function simply in relation to laws that are just as abstract. The Good, the Beautiful—these are objects of vision, to be seen by those whose "eyes" may be opened through dialectic. For example, for those who can see and attend closely to the nature of their desire—particularly *eros*—will notice that it too desires the Beautiful as a place in which to give birth to virtue. It is this shift away from a purely rational or propositional metaphysics that Nietzsche and Plato share. And both partly replace this form of metaphysics with a phenomenology of desire and virtue, in that their respective practices of philosophy are directed toward the constant fulfillment-without-ceasing of desire. Obviously, an important difference arises, which will be discussed below, in that Nietzsche rejects teleological metaphysics while Plato re-casts it.

They agree, though, that there is no state of affairs that brings a cessation of the richest desires. While Nietzsche relates the richest desire to that desire for life, Plato offers the richest desire as a desire for immortality through giving birth. As I have argued, life is a central concern for both, and life is lived not through the pursuit of some

[6] *Symposium* 212a.

end—either in this or another world/life—but through the active pursuit of that which will never be captured fully. Nietzsche describes the drive of this pursuit as the will to power, while Plato offers us Diotima's *eros*. While there are significant differences between these two concepts, an important connection is the lack of a clear state of affairs to which they strive and so also their "fulfillment" in never ceasing in their strivings. Further, for both, virtue, becoming what one is, arises from attentiveness to one's desires and then living in such a way as to provide the greatest continual fulfillment.

The Practice of Philosophy in Nietzsche and Plato

Brewer claims that our richest desires, and particularly those desires related to the pursuit of virtue (and philosophy), are not "world-making"—that is, they are not primarily about the creation of a state of affairs that will bring the desire to cessation-fulfillment. Rather, we take pleasure not simply in some state of affairs to which our fundamental desires point, for we often have little or no idea as to what that end is, but we take pleasure in the action itself. Within both Nietzsche and Plato is the possibility of arriving at a full-bodied understanding of human desire that avoids the truncation and implausibility of contemporary moral psychology that must perceive all human desire as "world-making." But it is not simply the conclusions at which the two thinkers arrived, but, as in Brewer, it is their practice of philosophy that also forms in relation to their understandings of human desire, the nature of its fulfillment, and metaphysics.

Nietzsche's Development

I believe that Nietzsche's practice of philosophy is best seen through tracing the development of his views, as these shifts in his perspective are ultimately a kind of

development of his understanding of tragedy into a "Dionysianism without metaphysics." In turn, his practice of philosophy involves a significant amount of reflection on his development and how it is part-and-parcel with the effort to become what one is. I offered a perspective on his development in chapters three and four that linked to his broad understanding of himself as a tragic philosopher, as discussed in chapter two.

Nietzsche, throughout his development, speaks of coming into a clearer understanding of himself. Self-understanding is not simply a kind of conclusion to be arrived at, but is at the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical practice. In turn, philosophy as tragedy is essential to this practice, not just the conclusion. The philosopher as tragic chorus functions as the one who presents the Dionysian in the garb of the Apollonian. In the realization that the Dionysian is simply that disordered, meaningless "substratum" of all phenomena, one cannot rest on some nicely ordered perspective. Nietzsche rejects any ultimate ordered perspective: "I distrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity."[7] A system is precisely this comfortable structure upon which one can rest and so need no longer experience tragedy, and its result, disappointment. A system disrupts self-knowledge and virtue.[8] Through tragedy one comes to know oneself—not the early Dionysian sublime tragedy of Schopenhauer, in which comes to resign oneself, but Nietzsche's mature tragedy. Both Nietzsche's philosophy and his life were tragic—constant bouts of pain, the loss of friends, the flight from his greatest comfort in Wagner and Schopenhauer, etc. These incidents were not simply painful, but most often either encouraged a further examination of himself or were

[7] *TI* I, 26.

[8] The word for "integrity" is "Rechtschaffenheit," which can also be translated as "virtue" or even "uprightness."

in fact a result of that part of his philosophy that was crafted to destroy the deceptive comfort of systems. The destructive, as Nietzsche claims often, must precede the creative—one cannot form new tragic Apollonian heroes without first coming to know the Dionysian chaos.

Nietzsche's practice of philosophy does not simply work out different ideas, but persistently tests these against the Dionysian ground. The Dionysian stands as a permanent question mark for every belief structure, every apparently solid belief. To adopt Gonzalez's description of *dianoia*, the Dionysian shows all systems and orderings that claim to be absolute to be only hypotheses. Systems serve a function, but ultimately lying beyond them is the unknowable, and so uncontrollable or possess-able, Dionysian. The philosopher offers claims and arguments, but does so in constant reverence to that great question mark that is Dionysus. Of course, such an endeavor possesses no conclusive *telos*. One delights in creating (the Apollonian) when one comes to understand oneself. One comes to understand oneself through tragedy, the disappointment of the Dionysian. One practices philosophy, therefore, as one comes to know oneself. And one never hands off to others a set of conclusions, but only a persistent question mark that drives others to the same self-knowledge, creativity out of one's desires to the ordering of the same—that is, virtue and the tragic practice of philosophy.

Plato's Dialectic

The Socratic method is the persistent asking of questions. Among much of the traditional scholarship, this is understood as an attempt of Socrates (or Plato) to give his interlocutors the awareness of their ignorance so that he might be able to give them better

answers. I argued in chapters five, six, and seven that, with regard to those dialogues covered for this study, the aporetic elements in Plato do not only serve to "clear the decks" to make way for better answers. Instead, the aporetic should show that his interlocutors the wrong *kinds* of answers. Socratic questioning should redirect the minds of his interlocutors away from propositional knowledge to a vision, ultimately of the Good and the Beautiful.

Nietzsche's Dionysian question mark echoes the aporetic elements in Plato: persistent questioning should lead one to examine one's life and coming to an understanding of one's desires and the nature of one's virtue. Euthyphro's simplistic understanding of piety showed its uselessness in his obvious lack of piety. Meno's Gorgias-esque understanding of virtue showed its uselessness in his obvious lack of virtue. And the list could go on, for most of Plato's dialogues illustrate the interrelationship of character and worldview. Before each of these claims stands Socrates like a large satyr-like question mark, a Dionysian undermining of those systems that keep the interlocutors from integrity. Socrates' claim of ignorance reflects and drives this Dionysian undermining, but his ignorance, which forms a persistent question mark, leads him to acquire a vision of the Good, the Beautiful. And this vision of the Good/Beautiful arises because he is no longer blinded by all the claims to knowledge around him. Ignorance allows self-knowledge, and this in turn allows one to see the object of one's desires, the Good/Beautiful, in the only way that it can be seen.

Dialectic incorporates such Dionysian questioning. Dialectic moves constantly toward a better knowledge, all the while realizing that this knowledge will never be enough. It is like trying to remember someone's face by means of stating characteristics

and then proceeding to criticize those, thus pointing, in an often painstaking manner, toward the memory of the face. Plato's philosophy rests on the claim that we are already acquainted with the Good/Beauty. We recollect,[9] we do not learn new things. Understanding comes from rich reflection, a powerful attentiveness to ourselves as we live in the world. Socrates, too, was an enemy of any systematizing that threatened to blind one to self-knowledge through the comfort of intelligent-sounding words and ideas. It is then most appropriate that Socrates is closely linked to Dionysus in the *Symposium*, being compared to a satyr and to Silenus—both followers of Dionysus. His erotic philosophy shares the tragic nature of Nietzsche's. Nevertheless, a significant disagreement remains between these two philosophers, the nature of desire and its "object."

Fullness, Lack, and Metaphysics: Eros *vs. the Will to Power*

Though I have worked to show important parallels between Plato and Nietzsche that may be useful for contemporary moral philosophy, particularly in terms of a philosophy of psychology, I would be remiss if I did not note the key differences between these two thinkers and the implications of these differences. The fundamental difference lies in the *Penia* (lack) element of *eros*, which appears to be missing from Nietzsche's life affirming will to power. The lack within *eros* allows for, perhaps even demands, metaphysics within Plato's view of philosophy, even while the *Poros* (resource) element of *eros* disallows a clear, rational object.

[9] Recollection may be a kind of self-reflection, in that we learn about what we desire. In a sense, we are already acquainted with the objects of our desires, because we could not desire that which our desires are not crafted.

Nietzsche's mature philosophy flirts with a kind of metaphysics in his claims, which he arguably turns away from in *A*,[10] that all is the will to power. By the end, his strongest metaphysical claim is simply that there is no substratum knowable by us, and therefore none in which we might establish some sort of meaning.[11] All we have are our experiences.[12] And, as I argued in chapter four, the collapse of metaphysics is linked directly with the collapse of the self-as-cause. The self is not the cause but the effect of the drives. Put another way, the drives are not things added to the substance that is the self.[13] Why does Nietzsche feel the need to go so far as to completely reject metaphysics and the self-as-substance? I believe it is because he saw metaphysics and the belief in the self-as-substance as always slipping into a moral system. In such a case, two things arise. The first result is a homogenization of virtue through ethical principles—ascetic resignation (Schopenhauer), or the categorical imperative (Kant) finally makes every person "virtuous" insofar as they act, without any modification from the empirical world

[10] See *A* 2, in which Nietzsche seems to suggest that there are things that do not stem from the will to power.

[11] E.g. *TI* IV.

[12] *GM* Preface, I.

[13] "Self" may be a more meaningful term for Nietzsche in that perhaps only humans who are able to overcome themselves have become who they are. The process through which one comes to know oneself and thus become an individual, rather than submitting to any kind of system (whether physical or metaphysical) was described in chapter two as disappointment. Prior to this, one is similar to an animal, though humanity's growth in cleverness has clearly caused humans to become, as Zarathustra claims, "a rope, tied between beast and overman" (*Z* I, "Zarathustra's Prologue," 4). It is because of "the priestly form, that man has at all developed into an *interesting animal*…man's superiority over other animals up to now!" (*GM* I, 6). Thus, these clever humans have misunderstood the self and have settled into not becoming who they are by virtue of submitting to systems rather than experiencing disappointment. Nevertheless, it is their cleverness that has made the possibility of disappointment possible. In addition, there are different aspects of the self within Nietzsche's thought, as noted well in Robert Miner, "Nietzsche's Fourfold Conception of the Self," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 54, no. 4 (2011): 337–360. His view of the four different ways of using the word "self" in Nietzsche fits well, I believe, with the arguments I have made in this study. But, in this particular sentence, I am speaking primarily of the "self" as it is normally understood in terms of having a will that gives birth to the drives, and Nietzsche's rejection of that claim.

or their empirical selves, precisely the same. The second result of metaphysics and self-as-substance is the positing of a distinct end toward which all actions should drive—whether the *summum bonum* (Kant) or a kind of Buddhist bliss-as-lack-of-drives acquired through the dissolution of the self through resignation (Schopenhauer). The homogenization, produced as a result of the "universality" of rationality, removes any need for attentiveness to experience—one need only the system and its rationally-derived prescriptions. And the distinct end found in metaphysics creates nihilism—the loss of value in the activity of living itself. Indeed, Nietzsche's rejection of nihilism is almost precisely his desire to see value in desires beyond simply their end.

But it may be that Nietzsche pushed further than necessary. I have argued that Plato offers a metaphysics that rids us of neither the need for a kind of phenomenology, particular virtue arising from this understanding, nor that fundamental desire of humanity for activity that has value in itself as well as in an end.[14] The Good is not applied to humanity through some list of ethical principles, but is approached through *eros* in moments of vision. It is in the individual's *eros*-driven encounter with the Good/Beautiful that one begins to create through giving birth to virtue—that is, to what was already within the individual. Virtue is thus particular to the individual—though surely there are broad labels such as courage—and one becomes virtuous through the creativity that arises from what is within one.

Though possessing significant similarities, Plato and Nietzsche, arrive at these similarities through distinct paths. Insofar as metaphysics and the self-as-substance are tied together, Plato can have both. One's desires are ultimately not about achieving some end, but in becoming one whose knowledge, desires, and abilities all unite to the end of

[14] E.g. *Republic* II, 358a, in which Socrates describes justice as precisely this kind of good.

creating *in the presence of* the Beautiful/Good. It is not the Beautiful/Good that *eros* wants, but to be able to give birth in its presence. Thus, the "object" of *eros* is essentially the "object" of the will to power: to create out of one's virtue.

Nevertheless, certain limits constrain the act of creating in Plato's thought: the presence of the Good/Beautiful. This constraint of the Good/Beautiful constitutes a lack within *eros*, something toward which *eros* drives. In Plato, the fundamental human desire contains both fullness and lack. In Nietzsche, the fundamental human desire contains only fullness. I contend that Nietzsche feared any kind of lack within the desire for life because the fulfillment of the lack would ultimately be determined within the bounds of what can be known. That is, when a lack is encountered, systems form to clarify the state of affairs that will fulfill that lack. In so doing, these systematizers lose attentiveness to the fulfillment-without-ceasing of creativity. Plato agrees, but faults not systems but the lack of virtue of those who form them. Nietzsche claims that the will to power, a fullness, is the desire for life that therefore gives it meaning. Plato claims, on the other hand, that *eros*, both a fullness and a lack, is the desire for life that therefore gives it meaning. Socrates claims in the *Republic* that the good or activity that is loved both for itself and for its end is superior to those that are loved for only either its end or itself, and says that justice fits within the category of superior activities.[15] *Eros*, having both fullness and lack, can find fulfillment only in these superior activities. A knowable, rational metaphysics would weaken, even negate, fulfillment in the activity, as Nietzsche feared. But Plato does not drop teleological metaphysics altogether, choosing rather to rework it so that the *telos* is not a cessation and so, too, cannot be reduced to a state of affairs describable in propositions. Nietzsche, rejecting any metaphysical *telos*, still sets

[15] *Republic* II, 357b-358a.

forth constraints, attacking both the ethical and the undisciplined,[16] hinting toward the Beautiful in his use of aesthetic categories as a means of ordering one's drives. He even claims that one should work to make all of life a work of art. And so Nietzsche has an (unclear) end in mind, but his rejection of any form of metaphysical *telos* makes his approach a bit more torturous than that of Plato.

Conclusion: Aesthetics and Continuing Pleasure

Through these distinctions, one can see a more fundamental unity between Nietzsche and Plato: the place of aesthetics. The Beautiful, the tragic, plays an important role in the thought of both philosophers, and offers a clear example of the kind of pleasure that is both toward some end and yet not deriving its value solely, or even primarily, from that end. *Eros* and the will to power both desire to create, most importantly, they desire to create beautiful things. Insofar as the creation of beautiful things constitutes human virtue, these thinkers hint toward the usefulness of aesthetics for ethics. Most importantly, aesthetics offers a much richer account of human desire.

An approach to ethics that draws from a rich aesthetics that holds a view of beauty as well as the nature of creativity will likely fare much better than the instrumental understanding of human action present in contemporary ethics. Of course, to reverse the impact, an ethical theory that is informed from a vigorous phenomenology may in turn inform aesthetics in a helpful manner. That such is possible and warranted is suggested by these two thinkers. No matter future studies, though, there is much to be gained for contemporary ethics from attention to the moral psychology of Nietzsche and Plato. And not only in terms of their conclusions, but also their practice of philosophy which is

[16] E.g. *GS* 290. Note also the claims of Zarathustra (noted above) in which humans are a midway between beast and Übermensch—the latter is not the former.

organically united to the ideas they held. Indeed, it may be that the contemporary practice of philosophy, and our attempts to press these forms on earlier thinkers, is organically united with that sense of having the unaligned jaw about which Anscombe wrote.[17]

[17] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1, 1958): 2.

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