

INTRODUCTION: Nietzsche's Classical Education and the Influence of Socrates

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

From 1864 until 1868 Nietzsche studied classics with Otto Jahn and Friedrich Ritschl, who were considered to be among the leading philologists of the second half of the 19th century. Nietzsche's formal study of the classics ended in 1869 when, based upon the recommendation of his mentor, Professor Ritschl, he was offered a position as Professor of Classical Philology at Basel University at the unprecedented age of 24.² As a result, the University of Leipzig awarded him the doctoral degree, without his ever having to take comprehensive examinations or write a doctoral dissertation.

As a scholar, Nietzsche wrote several essays and lectures on Greek rhetoric, Latin grammar, Greek culture, and Greek philosophy, such as “Homer and Classical Philology,” (1869), “Socrates and Tragedy” (1870), “The Greek State” (1871), “Homer’s Contest” (1872), “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers” (1872), “Introduction to the Study of the Platonic Dialogue”

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

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

(1872), “Philosophy in The Tragic Age of the Greeks” (1873), and “Plato’s Life and Teaching” (1876). The extent to which Nietzsche was immersed in the classics helps us to appreciate the significance of his relationship to Socrates, and also provides important background information for understanding the nature of that relationship.³

Purpose

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

³ The thesis can be read as a commentary on a brief note written by Nietzsche in 1875: “Socrates, to confess it frankly, is so close to me that almost always I fight a fight against him.” This translation appears in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 398. Cf. “The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the 1870’s*, trans. David Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979). Breazeale’s translation of the same note reads: “Simply to acknowledge the fact: Socrates is so close to me that I am almost continually fighting against him” (127).

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

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

Nietzsche's view of Socrates has been studied at length by a number of scholars, and yet the accounts resulting from these studies, even when descriptively correct, have not given a full explanation of the relationship between the two philosophers. More specifically, they fail to clarify the proper connection between Nietzsche and Socrates in terms of fundamental aspects of Nietzsche's thought, especially in terms of his view of reason. The most influential interpretation of Nietzsche's relationship to Socrates comes from Kaufmann, who claims that Nietzsche's view of Socrates is one of pure admiration. More recently, scholars such as Nehamas have corrected Kaufmann's flawed interpretation. Although Nehamas has properly understood Nietzsche's view of Socrates to be one of ambivalence, his interpretation is wanting in that it provides only a partial explanation of this ambivalence.

Strategy of Argument

Let me now sketch the route I will follow in pursuing my goal of explaining Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates. In Chapter 1 I intend to review what commentators have had to say about Nietzsche's view of Socrates, revealing the shortcomings in the secondary literature on the topic and suggesting how my account will overcome these weaknesses. The task of Chapter 2 is to examine Nietzsche's first sustained treatment of Socrates, which appears in *The Birth of Tragedy*,⁶ where his antagonism toward the Athenian philosopher is readily apparent. Chapter 3 presents Nietzsche's treatment of Socrates in other works of the early and middle period, showing Nietzsche to be more sympathetic toward Socrates than he appeared to be in BT. In this way, Chapters 2 and 3 combine to show Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in earlier works. Chapter 4 addresses Nietzsche's second sustained treatment of Socrates, which appears in *Twilight of the Idols*, in an essay

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

highly critical of Socrates entitled “The Problem of Socrates.” In Chapter 5 I shall introduce more passages from Nietzsche’s middle and late period where we find his view of Socrates to be more positive, thus counterbalancing the mostly negative treatment of the Athenian philosopher in TI. In this way, Chapters 4 and 5 combine to demonstrate Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Socrates in later works.⁷ Having thereby shown that Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Socrates is a constant throughout his career, and having in the course of doing so given a precise account of the nature of this ambivalence, in Chapter 6 I will explain Nietzsche’s ambivalent attitude toward reason. Following this, I will conclude by showing the strict parallelism between Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward reason and his ambivalence toward Socrates, thereby defending my claim that the ambivalence Nietzsche has toward Socrates reflects, and is caused by, his ambivalence toward reason. As a result of this strategy I will be able to surpass previous scholarship not only by better defending the fact of Nietzsche’s ambivalence, but also by better explaining that ambivalence.

⁷ For those who believe Nietzsche’s works can be divided into three periods with each successive period being more representative of Nietzsche’s thought than the last should consider Abbey’s apt observation: “The classification of Nietzsche’s works into three periods was coined by Lou Salomé, although this schema has become such a commonplace in Nietzsche scholarship that she is rarely credited with it. Salomé’s periodization is offered as a heuristic device only; she is too subtle and perceptive a reader of Nietzsche to suggest that each period represents a clean and complete ‘epistemological break’ with the earlier one. She points out, for example, that in his last phase Nietzsche returns to some of the concerns of his first, but approaches them in a different way. Thus it is possible to employ this schema while acknowledging that the boundaries between Nietzsche’s phases are not rigid, that some of the thoughts elaborated in one period were adumbrated in the previous one, that there are differences within any single phase and that some concerns pervade his oeuvre” (Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche’s Middle Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xii).

CHAPTER 1: A Critique of the Secondary Literature on Nietzsche's View of Socrates

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

1.1 Kaufmann's Explanation of Nietzsche's View of Socrates

In this section I examine Kaufmann's claim that Nietzsche is single-minded in his admiration for Socrates. According to Kaufmann, "Nietzsche's conception of Socrates was decisively shaped by Plato's *Symposium* and *Apology*, and Socrates became little less than an idol for him."⁸ Kaufman argues that Nietzsche regarded Socrates as his model of how a philosopher ought to conduct himself. Nietzsche is unwavering in his admiration for Socrates, says Kaufmann, because he wanted to imitate the integrity, honor, and sincerity displayed in the life Socrates lived and the tranquil manner in which he approached death.⁹ Moving from BT all the way through to *Ecce Homo*, Kaufmann traces evidence that shows that Nietzsche's

⁸ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 393. Hereafter, I will cite this text as "Kaufmann."

⁹ Kaufmann, 391, 393-394. Kaufmann supports this assertion by arguing, "Nietzsche, for whom Socrates was allegedly 'a villain,' modeled his conception of his own task largely after Socrates' apology." Kaufmann also refers to biographical material to support his view that Nietzsche admired Socrates. For instance, he says, "When Nietzsche graduated from school, he designated the *Symposium* his 'Lieblingsdichtung.' (Cf. his *curriculum vitae* in E. Förster-Nietzsche's *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches* I, 109.)" It should be noted that Kaufmann's essay is in some ways a response to previous Nietzsche scholars, who, following the view of Richard Oehler in his *Friedrich Nietzsche und die Vorsokratiker* (Leipzig: Durr, 1904), had argued that Nietzsche's view of Socrates is primarily negative. One scholar even goes so far as to claim, as Kaufmann notes in the text cited above, that, for Nietzsche, Socrates was "a villain." See Crane Brinton, *Nietzsche* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1941), 83.

admiration for Socrates is consistent throughout his works. When speaking about BT Kaufmann says,

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

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

When discussing one of Nietzsche’s early lectures, “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers,” Kaufmann states,

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

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

of the highest rank,” Kaufmann notes that “[a]pparently, Nietzsche himself derived his picture of the ideal philosopher from the *Apology*, and Socrates became his model” (Kaufmann, 398).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Accordingly, then, Nietzsche modeled his conduct as a human being and a philosopher on the model of Socrates as characterized in the *Apology*. Kaufmann maintains that Nietzsche revered Socrates, and, in a manner similar to his hero, he wanted, throughout his works, to play the gadfly on the neck of man in order to overcome the mediocrity he perceived in contemporary German culture (Kaufmann, 397). In this way, Nietzsche's style of self-mockery, jokes, riddles, and satire were his strategy for living up to the image of his "highest ideal" as portrayed in the dialogues of Plato (Kaufmann, 399).¹⁰

Now I would like to turn to a critique of Kaufmann's assertion that Nietzsche displayed nothing but admiration for Socrates.¹¹ First of all, there are two aspects of Kaufmann's

¹⁰ Cf. Sarah Kofman, "Nietzsche's Socrates: 'Who is Socrates?'" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 15 (1991): 7-29. In a manner similar to Kaufmann, Sarah Kofman shows that Nietzsche wanted to imitate the wisdom and bravery displayed by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* (117c-118a), which is also mentioned by Nietzsche himself in GS 340. However, Kofman does not go as far as Kaufmann in claiming that Nietzsche purely admired Socrates. She recognizes that Nietzsche was as cruel towards Socrates as he was congenial, thereby effectively noting Nietzsche's ambivalence; deficiently, however, she does not give an explanation why this ambivalence exists.

¹¹ Kaufmann, 398. Kaufmann makes a clear distinction between Socrates and Socratism, a mistaken distinction, but one that allows him to claim that Nietzsche was single-minded in his admiration for Socrates: "Now we have previously admitted that some distinction must indeed be made between Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates and Socratism, although it is false to say that Nietzsche abominated Socratism, if the latter is taken to mean the outlook Socrates embodied. Quite generally, Nietzsche distinguishes between (a) men whom he admires, (b) the ideas for which they stand, and (c) their followers" [*sic*]. Kaufmann's claim that Nietzsche (a) admired Socrates and (b) despised Socratism is misleading and far-fetched, to say the very least. For Nietzsche, Socratism is just the basic view behind Socrates' approach to doing philosophy, and those who were later to emphasize the importance of reason over the instincts were doing no more than what Socrates himself did in

analysis that I agree with: (1) Nietzsche admired Socrates because he played the gadfly on the neck of man, thereby challenging him to be more demanding of himself when it came to ethical matters; and (2) Nietzsche viewed Socrates as the first *Lebensphilosoph*, a thinker who made man, not metaphysics, his first priority in doing philosophy. Although I agree with Kaufmann on the two points mentioned above, I still find his description of Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates somewhat implausible.¹²

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

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

Kaufmann here acknowledges that a "critical note" exists in BT, but he is unwilling to permit the negative criticisms of Socrates to taint Nietzsche's allegedly overall positive attitude. Had he done more justice to these criticisms, he would have come close to recognizing Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in this early work as later Nietzsche scholars such as Tanner and Nehamas have done. Instead, he downplays the passages critical of Socrates in order to

antiquity. That is to say, Socratism is an outlook on life that recognizes unaided reason as the only medium through which one might obtain the moral principles Socrates thought necessary to arrive at *eudaimonia*.

¹² For example, one of Kaufmann's assertions depends more upon pure speculation than any evidence found in Nietzsche's texts, specifically, his claim that Nietzsche's EH mirrors Socrates' appearance before the Athenian court in Plato's *Apology*. Kaufmann relies on evidence from EH that does not adequately support his view.

maintain his thesis that Nietzsche purely admired Socrates. For instance, Nietzsche not only calls Socrates a “despotic logician” and a “monstrosity *per defectum*,” but also credits the Athenian philosopher with causing the death of tragedy (BT 13,14).

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

Thus, Kaufmann’s contention that Nietzsche unequivocally admired Socrates is inadequate because he underestimates the degree to which Nietzsche was hostile toward Socrates. Kaufmann offers only a brief and strained discussion of the only two sustained treatments of Socrates in Nietzsche’s works, those in BT and TI, which are, for the most part, highly critical of Socrates. For this reason, he fails to give a correct description of Nietzsche’s attitude toward Socrates because he fails to do justice to all of the evidence found in Nietzsche’s texts.¹³

¹³ Cf. Thomas Jovanovski “Critique of Walter Kaufmann’s ‘Nietzsche’s Attitude Toward Socrates,’ ” *Nietzsche-Studien* 20, (1991): 329-358, 331. Like Dannhauser (to be discussed below), Jovanovski thoroughly criticizes Kaufmann for incorrectly arguing that Nietzsche purely admired Socrates. He very carefully exposes some of Kaufmann’s erroneous as well as speculative arguments about the relationship between the two philosophers. Jovanovski criticizes several other scholars for being either very confused about or unbalanced in their interpretation of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates. Yet Jovanovski himself all but ignores Nietzsche’s early lectures and manuscripts on the Greeks as well as his middle works where Nietzsche obviously displays admiration for Socrates. Jovanovski’s failure to give these passages their due is partly responsible for the very disappointing and unacceptable conclusion he reaches that Nietzsche viewed Socrates as a “destructive phenomenon of world-historical proportions.”

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

In what follows I review *Nietzsche and Greek Thought*, a little known monograph written by Victorino Tejera. Tejera is important to my study because he attempts to solve the problem of Socrates in Nietzsche's thought by way of a careful examination of the many different depictions of Socrates in antiquity. Tejera explores Socrates as seen through the eyes of Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, and Diogenes Laertius,¹⁴ and explains what these different representations mean for Nietzsche.

The problem of Nietzsche's relation to "Socrates" could not be solved as long as "the problem of Socrates" itself stood unresolved. The problem of Socrates, then, is a result of the unmonitored conflation of D. Laertius's and Xenophon's "Socrates" with Plato's "Socrates" and the historical Socrates, idiosyncratically or traditionalistically imagined.¹⁵

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

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

¹⁴ For more on Nietzsche's relationship to Diogenes Laertius, see Jonathan Barnes, "Nietzsche and Diogenes Laertius," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 15, 1986:16-40.

¹⁵ Victorino Tejera, *Nietzsche and Greek Thought* (Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library, No. 24), 131.

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

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

According to the former passage, the Platonic Socrates is considered to be “great in silence,” and is equally admired for his courage and wisdom, while in the latter passage he is accused of bringing about “the death of tragedy,” which Nietzsche considered to be an art-form of great value. These passages refer solely to the Platonic Socrates; yet, even though the one presents us with one of the greatest compliments any philosopher has ever bestowed upon Socrates, the other provides us with one of the most critical assertions ever directed against the Athenian philosopher. In other words, the contradiction produced by comparing these passages is sufficient to undermine Tejera’s suggestion that we can resolve the problem of Socrates in Nietzsche’s texts by the hypothesis that Nietzsche’s positive and negative remarks are directed towards different representations of Socrates by different writers in antiquity. For Tejera’s argument to meet the objectives that he prematurely assumes it does Nietzsche’s remarks on a particular “Socrates” from antiquity would have to be consistently negative or consistently positive in all of his texts. If his argument met these standards, then it could well be an adequate explanation of Nietzsche’s relationship to Socrates. But, be that as it may, the discovery of only one instance of Nietzsche’s contradictory remarks about Socrates in a single author is more than enough to refute Tejera’s claim. Hence, since we find in Nietzsche contradictory remarks about the Socrates presented in one and the same writer from antiquity,

Tejera's explanation that Nietzsche's *pro* and *con* comments refer to different depictions of "Socrates" in D. Laertius, Xenophon, and Plato fails to account for Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates.

1.3 Dannhauser on Nietzsche's Ambiguity Toward Socrates

Let me now turn to Dannhauser's *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* in order to assess his account of the relationship between the two philosophers. According to Dannhauser, "Nietzsche's image of Socrates ... is ambiguous. Provisionally, it can be said that for Nietzsche the Socratic life is somehow both a great temptation and something to be rejected."¹⁶ As Dannhauser states, Nietzsche's view of Socrates does not decisively lean toward admiration or contempt. Dannhauser demonstrates that Kaufmann's claim that Nietzsche purely admires Socrates represents a mistaken description of their relationship. He wants to show instead that there are passages *pro* and *con* throughout Nietzsche's works, which display an attitude toward Socrates that is thoroughly "ambiguous."

For Dannhauser, Nietzsche's thought as a whole is ambiguous, and this is partially due to Nietzsche's own experimental style. Most scholars agree that Nietzsche engaged in some form of experimentalism in his writing, which included short essays (*The Untimely Meditations*); aphorisms (as in *Human, All Too Human*); poems, songs, and riddles construed in the broadest possible sense (as often in *The Gay Science*); biblical parody and speeches (as in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*); *ad hominem* arguments (as, for example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*); and extended disquisitions (as in *On The Genealogy of Morals*). In addition to Nietzsche's writing style, his "desire to be as provocative as possible" presents special problems for interpreting his work (Dannhauser, 20). "As a result of Nietzsche's

¹⁶ Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 20. Hereafter, I will refer to this text as "Dannhauser."

experimentation, innovation, and pyrotechnics, his thought comes to view as tantalizingly ambiguous” (Dannhauser, 20).

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

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

1.4 Nehamas on Nietzsche’s Ambivalence Toward Socrates

Now I examine Nehamas’ claim, as stated in his *The Art of Living*, that “Nietzsche’s attitude toward Socrates was ... fundamentally ambivalent. Socrates was neither his ‘model’ nor his ‘villain.’”¹⁷ Nehamas reaches the conclusion of ambivalence

¹⁷ Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 155. Hereafter, I will cite this text as “Nehamas.”

by attempting to understand whether Socrates, in the spirit of Schopenhauer and Wagner, was one of Nietzsche's educators: "Did Socrates play anything like the role Schopenhauer and Wagner played in Nietzsche's thought, or was he simply his enemy?" (Nehamas, 132). For Nehamas, then, an understanding of Nietzsche's view of Socrates can be reached by an approach that examines the ways in which Nietzsche accepted and rejected the philosophy of Socrates in his own life and work.

Nehamas insists that, given the very thorough nature of Socrates' infiltration into the life and mind of Nietzsche, Socrates turned out not only to be his educator, but his competitor, nemesis, ally, and, a lifelong problem never to be resolved.

Was he perhaps, Nietzsche must have asked himself, part and parcel of the philosophy from which he wanted to dissociate himself? Was Socrates perhaps not part of the opposing tradition but Nietzsche's ally? And if he was an ally, what did that say about the originality of Nietzsche's project? Can one be liberated from philosophy or from Socrates as long as one is still writing about them, even if only to condemn them? (Nehamas, 155)

Nehamas claims that: "The problem of Socrates was for Nietzsche the problem raised by all these questions, and he could never resolve it to his satisfaction" (Nehamas, 155).

In Nehamas's view, Socrates was Nietzsche's "constant problem, forever gnawing at him, that he could never be sure that Socrates' ugly face was not after all a reflection of his own" (Nehamas, 155). As a consequence, Nietzsche's view of Socrates is fundamentally ambivalent and "Nietzsche's vehemence, in this as in almost everything else about him, was never unqualified, never without ambivalence" (Nehamas, 129).¹⁸

In a manner similar to Dannhauser, however, Nehamas is unsuccessful in providing us with a proper account of Nietzsche's view of Socrates because he fails to explain the way in which Nietzsche's ambivalence emerges from basic ideas in his thought. Nehamas understands

¹⁸ Cf. Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14. Tanner reaches exactly the same conclusion as Nehamas on Nietzsche's view of Socrates when he says: "The image of Socrates was never to let Nietzsche free; as with all the leading characters in his pantheon and anti-pantheon, his relationship with him remains one of tortured ambivalence." By acknowledging that Nietzsche's view of Socrates is one of ambivalence Tanner reaches the preliminary step in what I consider the best strategy for describing their troubled relationship, yet he stops short of explaining that ambivalence.

to some extent that Socrates' denial of the instincts and his emphasis upon reason is a problem for Nietzsche, but he doesn't go on to independently investigate Nietzsche's view of reason, which, if done carefully enough, could solve the problem of understanding Nietzsche's relationship to Socrates. Instead, Nehamas chooses to focus on the extent to which Socrates is Nietzsche's educator, competitor, nemesis, and ally. Although all of these things may be true they still ignore the deeper significance that Socrates holds for Nietzsche's life and his approach to doing philosophy.

1.5 A More Adequate Explanation of Nietzsche's Ambivalence Toward Socrates

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

My argument will take the following form. I will first establish in Chapters 2-5 (A) Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates. Then, independently of that discussion, I will reveal in Chapter 6 (B) his ambivalence toward reason. The strict parallelism between these two manifestations of ambivalence in Nietzsche will permit me to make the claim that (B) explains (A). By this analysis I will demonstrate that Nietzsche is not only positive and negative in his assessments of both Socrates and reason, but that he is ambivalent to both for the same reasons. More specifically, for Nietzsche, Socrates' emphasis upon dialectical reason as *the one and only* medium for attaining *eudaimonia* is ultimately nihilistic. It stands as a singular example of the variety of nihilistic practices that emphasize one perspective over all others; and to deny

perspective, is, for Nietzsche, to deny life itself. Thus Nietzsche understands such practices, among which he includes Christianity, ethical objectivism, and Plato's metaphysics, as a *misuse* of reason. However, the appropriate *use* of reason involves experimenting with other modes of expression such as aphorisms, the performing arts, and poetry, which grant the individual as much moral and intellectual freedom as necessary so that they may affirm life in the manner they find most satisfying and rewarding. Hence, it is only through a thorough investigation of Nietzsche's view of reason that his ambivalence toward Socrates can be fully understood, namely, as a manifestation of his ambivalence to reason.