

## **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.<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche originally began his study of Latin and Greek in 1851, while his more involved and disciplined study of the classics began in 1858 at the famous Pforta boarding school in Naumburg. Upon leaving the Pforta school in 1864 Nietzsche wrote his first philological study, in Latin, entitled “De Theognide Megarensi” (On Theognis of Megara).

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

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

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

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

(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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>3</sup> 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*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 398. Cf. “The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the 1870’s*, trans. David Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979). Breazeale’s translation of the same note reads: “Simply to acknowledge the fact: Socrates is so close to me that I am almost continually fighting against him” (127).

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

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

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*,<sup>6</sup> 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

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

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

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<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> Kaufman argues that Nietzsche regarded Socrates as his model of how a philosopher ought to conduct himself. Nietzsche is unwavering in his admiration for Socrates, says Kaufmann, because he wanted to imitate the integrity, honor, and sincerity displayed in the life Socrates lived and the tranquil manner in which he approached death.<sup>9</sup> Moving from BT all the way through to *Ecce Homo*, Kaufmann traces evidence that shows that Nietzsche's

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

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

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).<sup>10</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Thomas Jovanovski “Critique of Walter Kaufmann’s ‘Nietzsche’s Attitude Toward Socrates,’ ” *Nietzsche-Studien* 20, (1991): 329-358, 331. Like Dannhauser (to be discussed below), Jovanovski thoroughly criticizes Kaufmann for incorrectly arguing that Nietzsche purely admired Socrates. He very carefully exposes some of Kaufmann’s erroneous as well as speculative arguments about the relationship between the two philosophers. Jovanovski criticizes several other scholars for being either very confused about or unbalanced in their interpretation of Nietzsche’s view of Socrates. Yet Jovanovski himself all but ignores Nietzsche’s early lectures and manuscripts on the Greeks as well as his middle works where Nietzsche obviously displays admiration for Socrates. Jovanovski’s failure to give these passages their due is 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,<sup>14</sup> and explains what these different representations mean for Nietzsche.

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

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

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

<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> As Dannhauser states, Nietzsche's view of Socrates does not decisively lean toward admiration or contempt. Dannhauser demonstrates that Kaufmann's claim that Nietzsche purely admires Socrates represents a mistaken description of their relationship. He wants to show instead that there are passages *pro* and *con* throughout Nietzsche's works, which display an attitude toward Socrates that is thoroughly "ambiguous."

For Dannhauser, Nietzsche's thought as a whole is ambiguous, and this is 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

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<sup>16</sup> 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.’”<sup>17</sup> Nehamas reaches the conclusion of ambivalence

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<sup>17</sup> 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).<sup>18</sup>

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

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

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.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Nietzsche's Treatment of Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy***

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

### **2.1 Intellectual Background to BT**

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

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<sup>19</sup> See Kaufmann's "Introduction" to his translation of BT p. 13. I will not discuss the last ten sections of BT, because they have nothing to contribute to understanding Nietzsche's view of Socrates that isn't already articulated in sections 11-15.

Nietzsche's new preface to BT, written in 1886, he condemns the work as a whole for its being "badly written, ponderous, embarrassing, image-mad and image confused, sentimental, in places saccharine to the point of effeminacy, uneven in tempo, without the will to logical cleanliness ..." (BT P:3). Nevertheless, what he found unacceptable about Socrates in BT in 1872 is in keeping with what he says about Socrates in the new preface of 1886:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

disintegrating, negative force,” Nietzsche wonders whether the relationship between science and art could produce an “artistic Socrates” (BT 14).<sup>20</sup>

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

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

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<sup>20</sup> On the possibility of an “artistic Socrates” Kaufmann says, “The ‘artistic Socrates’ is Nietzsche himself. He looks forward to a philosophy that admits the tragic aspect of life, as the Greek poets did, but does not sacrifice the critical intellect; a philosophy that denies Socrates’ optimistic faith that knowledge and virtue and happiness are, as it were, Siamese triplets; a philosophy as sharply critical as Socrates’ but able and willing to avail itself of the visions and resources of art” (see Kaufmann’s “Introduction” to BT, p. 12).

### CHAPTER 3: Nietzsche's Treatment of Socrates in Earlier Works

The goal of this chapter is to present Nietzsche's view of Socrates in other works from his early and middle period. By doing this I will show aspects of Socrates' personality and philosophy that the early Nietzsche admired and appreciated.<sup>21</sup> I accomplish this goal by dividing the chapter into three different sections, each section focusing on a particular work by Nietzsche and placing special emphasis on passages pertaining to his view of Socrates. In section 3.1 I examine excerpts from Nietzsche's unpublished<sup>22</sup> manuscript "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers with Interpretations of Selected Fragments."<sup>23</sup> In section 3.2 I discuss passages from Nietzsche's unpublished essay on "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks." Following this I introduce a passage from Nietzsche's HH in section 3.3. Finally, in section 3.4 I briefly conclude by discussing Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in his early and middle period as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3. The goal of this chapter, then, is to show that there is also a positive view of Socrates in Nietzsche's earlier works, thereby counterbalancing the more antagonistic depiction of the Athenian philosopher found in BT.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. section 544 of *Daybreak* where Nietzsche makes very approving comments of Socrates' use of dialectics. For other positive references to Socrates in Nietzsche's early works see UM II:6, UM III:6, HH 361; and section 72 of *The Wanderer and his Shadow*.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche's unpublished essays, manuscripts, and notes are usually referred to as the *Nachlaß*. The *Nachlaß* consists of material never published by Nietzsche himself, and probably would never have been authorized for publication by Nietzsche in their present form. It is very important to keep this in mind when comparing Nietzsche's published works with unpublished miscellanea. I am of the opinion that if what is found in the *Nachlaß* contradicts or is in conflict with the published material we must side with Nietzsche's published works. However, if the material in the *Nachlaß* complements and substantiates what is found in Nietzsche's published works, it can and should be regarded as supplementary evidence for his considered view on the matter under investigation.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Whitlock xxii-xxiv. According to Whitlock, Nietzsche's lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers were first offered in the winter of 1869-70 and subsequently delivered in the summers of 1872, 1873, and 1876. It should be noted that some disagreement exists about the actual date when Nietzsche first delivered these lectures. Whitlock agrees with Karl Schlechta that Nietzsche actually delivered a lecture series on the pre-Platonic philosophers during the winter of 1869-70, while Kaufmann believes the lectures were first delivered in the summer of 1872. Even so, it appears that both Whitlock and Kaufmann agree that the manuscript for the lecture series was almost certainly completed in 1872 with few alterations to come in the years that followed. Hereafter, I will cite this manuscript as "PP."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now I introduce further evidence of Nietzsche’s admiration toward Socrates in his early and middle period. I will basically list the only two excerpts from PTAG<sup>24</sup> where Nietzsche mentions Socrates, and then provide commentary on how they reflect Nietzsche’s admiration toward Socrates.

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

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

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

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<sup>24</sup> According to Whitlock: “Though far better known, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is in most ways completely different from, and in some ways far less successful than “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers.” The lecture series approaches the pre-Platonics out of interest in doctrines. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is more concerned with the personalities of the pre-Socratics” (see Whitlock’s “Preface” to PP pp. xxvi-xxvii). Nietzsche only makes passing comments about Socrates in PTAG. He examines the personalities of Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Anaxagoras in great detail. He doesn’t treat the personalities of Pythagoras, Democritus, Empedocles, or Socrates at any length worthy of mention, his thought on Socrates being largely contained in the passages that I discuss above. From a philosophical perspective the PPP lecture series is much richer in content than PTAG and includes scholarly discussions of Anaximenes, Leucippus, Xenophanes, and the Pythagoreans— individuals who are hardly mentioned or receive no mention at all in PTAG.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER FOUR: Nietzsche's Treatment of Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols* (1888)

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Nietzsche's essay "The Problem of Socrates" in TI in order to grasp the precise nature of the "problem" that Socrates holds for Nietzsche in this work.<sup>25</sup> It will be especially important to ask whether the problem of Socrates is rooted in another problem that Nietzsche has with the traditional methods of western philosophy. More specifically, is the problem of Socrates another way for Nietzsche to explore the problem of reason, which may be his real target for criticism?<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche treats Socrates as the best exemplar of the philosophical rationalist, and perhaps the best way to undermine the traditional use of reason in philosophy is to begin with a critique of the practices of its chief proponent.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides background information on TI; the next three sections examine Nietzsche's view of the distinguishing features of Socrates' character as well as the various ways in which, according to Nietzsche, he attempted to elude *décadence* through his unrelenting confidence in the power of reason.<sup>27</sup> In section 4.1 I provide details concerning both the circumstances of Nietzsche's life as TI was being written and his primary aim in writing that text. Section 4.2 discusses Nietzsche's blatant

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<sup>25</sup> Nehamas (137) rightly notes that the essay "The Problem of Socrates" is Nietzsche's attempt "for the first and last time" to explain *the way* in which and *the reason* why Socrates places so much faith in the power of reason.

<sup>26</sup> This question will properly be examined in chapter 6 of the thesis. There I present a detailed description and explanation of Nietzsche's view of reason. I have introduced this question here to serve as a temporary expedient to the reader so that they may: (1) gain a better understanding of why Nietzsche was so critical of Socrates in BT and continues his unfavorable commentary on the Athenian philosopher in TI, and (2) prepare themselves for the explanation of Nietzsche's view of Socrates to be rendered at the conclusion of the thesis.

<sup>27</sup> Socrates' daimonion is another aspect of the Athenian philosopher's character that Nietzsche views as a further indication of his *décadence*. Since Nietzsche only mentions it in passing and makes no other references to it again in "The Problem of Socrates," I don't discuss it in the body of the paper. Nevertheless, I consider his remark sufficiently relevant to the present discussion to be documented here. "It is not only the admitted dissoluteness and anarchy of his instincts which indicate *décadence* in Socrates: the superfetation of the logical and that *barbed malice* which distinguishes him also point in that direction. And let us not forget those auditory hallucinations which, as 'Socrates' *demon*', have been interpreted in a religious sense" (TI II:4).

contempt for what he deems to be Socrates' implicit belief that life is worthless. Section 4.3 presents Nietzsche's critique of Socrates' use of dialectic<sup>28</sup> as a form of *ressentiment*<sup>29</sup>. Following this, in section 4.4 I examine Nietzsche's rancorous attitude toward Socrates for his attempt to gain control over his instincts by subordinating them to the authority of reason. As a result of understanding Nietzsche's critical assessment of Socrates' philosophical ideas as well as his personal idiosyncrasies we will be able to conclude that Nietzsche's characterization of the Athenian philosopher in this essay as a *décadent*<sup>30</sup> is due to his misuse of reason which, as

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<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche's critical assessment of Socrates in TI deals primarily with the destructive and refuting elements of the method practiced by the Athenian philosopher in the early Platonic dialogues. Therefore, I consider it fair to say that what Nietzsche finds troubling in the case of Socrates when he speaks about dialectic is akin to what most scholars more accurately identify as the *elenchus*. Nietzsche's contempt for Socrates in TI is partially due to what he sees as the unyielding way in which the Athenian philosopher cross-examines his interlocutors in the belief that dialectic act as *the* determining factor in evaluating lives. By inviting his interlocutors to state premises that turn out to be inconsistent with each other, Socrates, in effect, proves that they must attain conceptual clarity about those terms that have a direct relation to that belief. In this way, Socrates employs the two primary characteristics of the *elenctic* method: (1) he cross-examines the knowledge claims of his interlocutors and (2) he shows that their inconsistent statements betray deficiencies in their beliefs.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche's understanding of the French term *ressentiment* has been treated extensively in the secondary literature. *Ressentiment* is the fundamental principle of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. For my purposes here *ressentiment* will be defined as the combination of frustration, envy, and resentment that acts as a stimulus for the powerless to vent their anger in revenge against the powerful, thereby manifesting their inability to live a self-actualized life. For secondary literature that addresses Nietzsche's view of *ressentiment*, see e.g., Rudiger Bittner, "Ressentiment," in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Bernard Reginster, "Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), 281-305; and Mark Migotti, "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen: A Reading of the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998), 745-779.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche always employs the term *décadent* in the original French to refer to, most notably, Socrates and Kant in TI, Jesus in *The Anti-Christ*, Wagner in *The Case of Wagner*, and himself in "Why I Am So Wise" in EH. Moreover, he consistently uses *décadent* in a derisive or negative fashion. From a literary perspective the term refers to a group of certain late 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, familiar to Nietzsche, such as Edmond and Jules Goncourt, Guy de Maupassant, Pierre Loti, Saint-Beuve, Flaubert and Octave Mirbeau who made disease and decay the focus of their writings by celebrating perversity and decline over the scientific positivism of the times. Cf. Nietzsche's comments on these and other French writers of the period at EH II:3 and in an appendix created by R.J. Hollingdale in his translation of Nietzsche's TI with *The Anti-Christ* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 203-204. Although Nietzsche shares some of the same concerns as the French *décadents*, they nonetheless lacked, in a manner similar to Socrates, what is crucial if they are to go beyond the nihilism that appears in their works. On this point Nietzsche says, "Exasperated pessimism, cynicism, nihilism, alternating with much boisterousness and good humour; I myself wouldn't be at all out of place there – I know these gentlemen inside out, so well that I have really had enough of them already. One has to be more radical: fundamentally they all lack the main thing – 'la force'." As it concerns Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates in TI, I will define a *décadent* as one who, for all intents and purposes, has inadvertently permitted a single instinct to lead them into psychological, moral, and physiological decline through the worship of "value-concepts" that are nihilistic or inimical to life itself. Cf. TI

Nehamas argues, “is both a symptom and a result of his effort to escape the ‘disease’ ” of *décadence*.<sup>31</sup> In this way, the *reason* why Nietzsche considered Socrates to pose such a serious problem to his thought, at least in TI, is explained.

#### 4.1 Intellectual Background to TI

Nietzsche’s TI was the second to last book he finished for publication.<sup>32</sup> It was swiftly written in three to four months and, after some editorial changes, the manuscript was sent to the printer in October 1888, and published in January 1889. The original title of the book, *A Psychologist’s Leisure, or The Idle Hours of a Psychologist*, changed after some urging from his clerk, housemate, and friend Peter Gast. In response to Gast’s insistence, Nietzsche changed the title of the work to *Twilight of the Idols*, which is a caricature of composer Richard Wagner’s *Twilight of the Gods*.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, Nietzsche lost the use of his intellectual faculties just a few weeks after the publication of TI and was never to realize the impact his philosophy was to have around the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nietzsche doesn’t mince words regarding the aim of TI. In the “Foreword” to the text he claims that the work is a “grand declaration of war,” not on the idols of the age, but “eternal idols,” those he considers to be “*the most believed in*.”<sup>34</sup> As Nietzsche see it, there are “more

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V:5; EH I:1; EH IV:4; EH VII:7. For secondary literature concerning Nietzsche’s understanding of *décadence* and his relationship to the French moralists of his day and earlier periods, see Daniel R. Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1995), esp. Chap. 3; Asti Hustvedt, *The Decadent Reader* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); George E. McCarthy, *Dialectics and Decadence: Echoes of Antiquity in Marx and Nietzsche* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); and Brendan Donnellan, *Nietzsche and the French Moralists*.

<sup>31</sup> Nehamas, 137.

<sup>32</sup> EH was the last manuscript Nietzsche sent to his publisher as a completed manuscript, but one he was to never see published since he died in 1900 and the text was subsequently printed in 1908.

<sup>33</sup> See R.J. Hollingdale’s “Note on the Text” in the “Translator’s Note” of his translation of Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols with The Anti-Christ* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1968), esp. 26-27.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. EH XII:1: “That which is called idol on the title page is quite simply that which has hitherto been called truth. *Twilight of the Idols*—in plain terms: the old truth is coming to an end....” For Nietzsche, these idols

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

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

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

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

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

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include figures, concepts, and movements that have appeared throughout history and have become sacrosanct at the forefront of human culture. For example, Socrates, Jesus, the faculty of “reason,” Christianity, the “real world,” the theory of causation, free will, God, and morality, are just a few of the eternal idols Nietzsche confronts in TI.

*be estimated*” (TI II:2). In order to put a value on life one would have to be situated outside of life itself. In other words, one would have to have a God’s-eye view of the world in order to know what value man should place upon it, and a view from above is an inaccessible one. Therefore, ethical statements of the objectivist kind that concern life, in the manner uttered by Socrates, according to Nietzsche,

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

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

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

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

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

Socrates' ugly face is an outward reflection of the total chaos within. Reason is just his means of keeping that chaos at bay. His face reflects an anarchy of instincts, a civil war ... that resulted in tyranny, not peace.<sup>35</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>35</sup> Nehamas, 139.

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

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

Here Nietzsche claims “being sick is itself a kind of *ressentiment*” and to participate in any type of revengeful act is the psychic invalid's “most natural inclination.” The invalid's inability (1) to attain moral and intellectual independence without malice toward others and (2) to passionately channel his or her instincts unencumbered by even a modicum of resentment is due to their “vexation, morbid susceptibility,” and “thirst for revenge.” According to Nietzsche, this compels the invalid to behave in a most heinous manner. Socrates, being the prototypical invalid, used dialectic to take revenge upon his interlocutors by forcing them to confront their intellectual shortcomings, while he, the one suffering from the most wretched form of decay, was conveniently able to overlook his own non-intellectual imperfections (TI II:11).<sup>36</sup> As a result, Socrates' use of dialectic is a form of *ressentiment* that further demonstrates, at least in Nietzsche's eyes, that the Athenian philosopher was truly a *décadent*.

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

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

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. EH I:1: “My readers perhaps know the extent to which I regard dialectics as a symptom of *décadence*, for example in the most famous case of all: in the case of Socrates.”

pathologically conditioned: likewise their estimation of dialectics” (TI II:10). As the tragic age of Greece was reaching its final stages “Socrates understood that all the world had need of him—his expedient, his cure, his personal art of self-preservation ...” (TI II:9).<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, as discussed in the previous section, Socrates’ philosophical method was unwelcome amongst the more “principled” and “righteous” citizens of Athens; on the other, the youth of Athens found dialectic to be a resourceful method for the exploration of concepts, ideas and themselves. As Nietzsche sees it, Socrates and his associates had little choice to be “rational or not”: “it was *de rigueur*,” and “one had only *one* choice: either perish or—be absurdly rational” (TI II:9). In Socrates’ time to be taken seriously one had to be as rigorous as possible in order to “counter the dark desires by producing a permanent daylight—the daylight of reason” without deference to non-rational elements, that is to say, the instincts (TI II:10). Socrates and his “invalids,” in Nietzsche’s view, believed “one must be prudent, clear, bright at any cost: every yielding to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads *downwards* ...” (TI II:10). In other words, Socrates was the primary initiator of a “turn” that marked the transition from the archaic to the classical period in Greek thought and signaled a decline in the value assigned to the instincts. It was this feature of Socrates’ character that agitated Nietzsche the most:

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

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. TI X:2: “Greek philosophy as the *décadence* of the Greek instinct; Thucydides as the grand summation, the last manifestation of that strong, stern, hard matter-of-factness instinctive to the older Hellenes. *Courage* in face of reality ultimately distinguishes such natures as Thucydides and Plato: Plato is a coward in the face of reality—consequently he flees into the ideal; Thucydides has *himself* under control—consequently he retains control over things....” Cf. TI X:3: “But the philosophers are the *décadents* of Hellenism, the counter-movement against the old, the noble taste (—against the agonal instinct, against the *polis*, against the value of the race, against the authority of tradition). The Socratic virtues were preached *because* the Greeks had lost them: excitable, timid, fickle, comedians every one, they had more than enough reason to let morality be preached to them. Not that it would have done any good: but big words and fine attitudes are so suited to *décadents*....”

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

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

Nietzsche’s criticism here targets the peculiar way in which Socrates set reason up as a “counter-tyrant” against the tyranny of the instincts prevalent at the end of the archaic period of Greece. Nietzsche holds that Socratism, Socrates’ outlook on life, can be formulated as follows: “reason = virtue = happiness” (TI II:4). In other words, Socrates lived by a thesis that we can reduce to the following moral principle:

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER FIVE: Nietzsche's Treatment of Socrates in Later Works

The objective of this chapter is to present Nietzsche's view of Socrates in later works outside of "The Problem of Socrates" from TI.<sup>38</sup> I will introduce passages from *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil* that disclose Nietzsche's admiration toward Socrates. An analysis of these passages will reveal a more sympathetic attitude toward Socrates than what we encountered in TI. In section 5.1 I offer Nietzsche's most explicit remark concerning his admiration toward Socrates in GS. Following this, in section 5.2, I examine a passage from BGE which displays Nietzsche's assessment of Socrates as a great philosopher based upon his attempt to challenge the haughtiness and narrow-mindedness of his contemporaries; in the course of doing so, Nietzsche speculates on whether greatness of the kind is still possible today given the sentiments of the present age. As a final point, in section 5.3 I sum up by discussing Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in later works as established by chapters 4 and 5. The objective of this chapter, then, is to establish Nietzsche's more favorable view of Socrates in later works in order to counterbalance the harsh remarks stated by Nietzsche in TI and thus demonstrate once again Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates.

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

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

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<sup>38</sup> In his late works the majority of Nietzsche's remarks about Socrates have a tendency to reflect his contempt for the Athenian philosopher in a manner similar to that expressed in BT and TI. But cf. BGE 191 and GM III:7 where Nietzsche's remarks about Socrates are rather ambiguous.

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

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

As we can clearly see from this passage Nietzsche pays homage to Socrates for three reasons, tersely stated as follows: (1) the courage he demonstrated by defying conventional methods of thinking; (2) the wisdom he exhibited through his method of dialectic, which turned out to be a new approach to education; and (3) the irony, humor, and what some refer to as false humility made prominent through the discussions he had with his friends and interlocutors. Although Nietzsche called Socrates the “wisest chatterer of all time” and “equally great in silence” he claims that he would have belonged to a “still higher order of spirits” had he refrained from uttering those very famous last words, “O Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius” (GS 340).<sup>39</sup> As Nietzsche sees it, Socrates' admission that he owed a debt to the god of medicine was an indication that he had been cured of a disease. In view of the fact that Socrates was on the verge of death and his last words alluded to a deity worshipped for his healing powers, Nietzsche concludes that the disease Socrates suffered from was life itself.

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

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<sup>39</sup> Here, as in our discussion of TI in chapter 4, Nietzsche interprets Socrates' last words as being an indication of his disgruntled attitude towards life.

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

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

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

According to Nehamas' reading of this passage, Nietzsche

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

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

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

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

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

## Chapter 6: Nietzsche on the Use and Misuse of Practical Reason for Life

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

The aim of this chapter is to show that Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates is a reflection of his ambivalence to the role of reason in human life. Toward that end, I must here investigate Nietzsche's view of practical reason. But preliminary to that investigation, I offer in section 6.1 some general remarks about the character of Nietzsche's *ad hominem* attacks against philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Descartes, which will allow us to appreciate how Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates can be understood as a reflection of his ambivalence toward reason. Following this, I present Nietzsche's view of practical reason in earlier and later works in sections 6.2 and 6.3. Finally, in section 6.4, I review the most salient features of Nietzsche's ambivalence toward practical reason that emerge when the preceding two sections are taken together. The aim of this chapter, then, is not only to clarify Nietzsche's view of practical reason; it also aims to show the way in which Nietzsche's ambivalence toward practical reason is due, on the one hand, to the positive role practical reason can play as a filtering mechanism to assist us in living the type of life we aspire to through the suppression, restraint, and, also, the release of the instincts (*Instinkts*) or drives (*Triebe*)<sup>40</sup>, and, on the other hand, the common *misuse* of practical reason as the *one and only* perspective through which

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<sup>40</sup> Conway claims that Nietzsche uses these terms interchangeably throughout most of his career. For a more in-depth discussion of Nietzsche's "roughly synonymous" use of *Instinkt* and *Trieb* until 1888, see Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 30-34.

we can understand ourselves and the world we occupy—a practice refined and adhered to by Socrates and the vast majority of later philosophers.<sup>41</sup>

### 6.1 Nietzsche's War Tactics: From *Ad Hominem* Attacks to an Analysis of Concepts

In this section I explain Nietzsche's strategy for his very well known personal attacks against his philosophical predecessors. In so doing, I show why investigating his view of practical reason can elucidate Nietzsche's attack on Socrates. The very last manuscript Nietzsche sent to his publisher C.G. Naumann was EH. This is the only text where Nietzsche reflects on the significance of his past works, the influence of his parents, and the life circumstances that cultivated and shaped the man he became. Besides being a parody of those who write autobiographies as well as a reflection on Nietzsche's own life, the work provides the careful reader with Nietzsche's strategy for understanding his polemics against thinkers who preceded him. In the first essay in EH, "Why Am I So Wise," Nietzsche says that he is warlike by nature.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he states that "[t]he strength of those who attack can be

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<sup>41</sup> Nehamas, besides the contradiction between the view of "reason" he attributes to Nietzsche as just another "instinct" and his view that the instincts are "more or less unselfconscious" but can be acculturated through "effort and practice," is, in my opinion, confused about the discussion of self-mastery in Nietzsche's works. Briefly, to identify the main problem of his view, if reason is "no less an 'instinct'—a natural feature and development—than the rest of our impulses and faculties," and all instincts are "more or less" unselfconscious, then Nehamas' claim that the instincts can be acculturated through "effort and practice" is highly questionable, see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), esp. chapters 5 and 6. Brian Leiter offers a more plausible interpretation of Nietzsche's talk of self-mastery: "The fact that one masters oneself is *not* a product of autonomous choice by the person, but rather an effect of the underlying type-facts characteristic of that person: namely, which of his various drives happens to be strongest. There is, as it were, no 'self' in 'self-mastery': that is, no conscious 'self' who contributes anything to the process. 'Self-mastery' is merely an effect of the interplay of certain drives, drives over which the conscious self exercises no control (though it may, as it were, 'take sides')," see Brian Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche," in B. Leiter & J. Richardson (eds.), *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 281-321, 318. For Nietzsche's own discussion of the relationship between self-mastery and the drives (*Triebe*), see sections 109, 119, 221, and 553 of *Daybreak*. For other arguments in support of the view that Nietzsche is a naturalist, see Brian Leiter, "One Health, One Earth, One Sun: Nietzsche's Respect for Natural Science" *Times Literary Supplement* (October 2), 1998: 30-31; and Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> I take Nietzsche to mean "war" in the figurative rather than literal sense. Throughout his works Nietzsche wages a tireless campaign against, among other things, conventional thinking, mediocrity, and complacency. War, in this sense, then, is both an internal struggle with oneself and an attack against idols of the age rather than physical violence against others.

measured in a way by the opposition they require: every growth is indicated by the search for a mighty opponent—or problem; for a warlike philosopher challenges problems, too, to single combat” (EH I:7). Nietzsche unravels this statement in what he dubs his “practice in war” which he claims can be “reduced to four propositions” (EH I:7).

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

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

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

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

The four propositions stated above supply us with the much-needed context to understand Nietzsche’s *ad hominem* attacks against Socrates. However, the most important of these propositions for the present study is [C]. In [C] Nietzsche makes two things abundantly clear: first, his attacks upon Socrates, Descartes, and Kant, just to name a few, are a means to an end. That is, at least as he implies here, the vitriolic disapproval that he shows for these philosophers is a direct reflection of the philosophical views they defend. Second, the problem that Nietzsche is trying to address requires the assistance of those whose philosophical position exemplifies that problem. Let me offer three examples that more clearly articulate the implications of Nietzsche’s strategy in [C]: (1) if Nietzsche were concerned that the method of dialectic made famous by Socrates is somehow dishonest and misleading he might consider attacking the Athenian philosopher, who is arguably not only the most remarkable philosopher in the history of the western canon but the philosopher who, according to Nietzsche, placed an

exceptional amount of faith in dialectical reason; (2) if he believed that the mind-body problem so prominent in philosophical circles today represented a false dichotomy he would do well to attack Descartes, whom most designate as the father of modern philosophy; and (3) if Nietzsche wanted to launch an assault against objectivism in ethics he might be inclined to attack Kant, whom many consider to be the most important ethical objectivist of the modern period. Not surprisingly, these three philosophers share a common trait—they all believe in the supremacy of reason. Socrates claimed that unaided reason was necessary to attain *eudaimonia*; Descartes's indignation toward the senses in favor of cognitive reason became legendary once he uttered that most famous phrase *cogito ergo sum*; and Kant's belief in the authority of reason to usurp the influence of the passions in order to provide the moral foundation necessary for the type of deontological ethics he envisioned was made explicit in his categorical imperative. In this way, the most celebrated ancient and contemporary champions for the supremacy of reason over the passions act as both a "strong magnifying glass with which one can make visible a general but furtive state of distress which is hard to get hold of," and an ideal target for Nietzsche's war on what he calls "*eternal idols*" (TI:F). Thus, on the basis of these considerations concerning Nietzsche's polemics, we can see that Nietzsche's critique of Socrates is likely to be a means to undermine what he considers long-standing philosophical position that have yet to be challenged.

## 6.2 Nietzsche on Practical Reason in Earlier Works

Now I want to turn to an examination of Nietzsche's view of practical reason in his earlier works. Throughout his works Nietzsche displays ambivalence toward reason—favoring one form of practical reasoning, criticizing another.<sup>43</sup>

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

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

**T1** is the form of practical reason<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche makes use of from BT to TI. That is, **T1** is the form of practical reason Nietzsche employs to bring about a “revaluation of values” (TI:F). In Nietzsche's philosophy **T1** becomes a method for declaring war on what he believes are some of the most life negating concepts and practices inherited from ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The most problematic of these practices, Nietzsche holds, is to view reason as the *one and only* mechanism for understanding the human condition. This is the conception of reason outlined in **T2**. In what follows I introduce Nietzsche's ambivalence toward reason as outlined above and conclude by clarifying that ambivalence.

Let us now turn to Nietzsche's pro attitude toward critical reason in earlier works. In HH Nietzsche writes, “school has no more important task than to teach rigorous thinking, cautious judgment and consistent reasoning” (HH I:265). As Nietzsche sees it, Socrates is the philosopher we ought to thank for discovering the “antithetical magic, that of cause and effect,

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<sup>43</sup> Here I am focusing only on Nietzsche's ambivalence toward practical reason as it relates to Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates. Be that as it may, there is much to say about Nietzsche's view of theoretical reason as well as his own positive attitude toward practical reason.

<sup>44</sup> I use “practical reason” in two senses: first, reflective reason directed to the general problems of human life, and second, deliberative reason directed toward action in specific circumstances, T1 is a form of practical reason in the first sense.

of ground and consequence” (D 544). For Nietzsche, quoting Goethe, “the [most supreme] powers of man” are “reason and science” (HH I:265). Indeed, Nietzsche argues that the most profound demonstration of these powers can be found in the discipline of philology. “It was *only* when the art of correct reading, that is to say philology, arrived at its summit that science of any kind acquired continuity and constancy” (HH I:270, [my emphasis]). According to Nietzsche, the “greatest advance mankind has made lies in its having learned to draw correct conclusions” (HH I:271). For Nietzsche, then, one arrives at the “height of [their] powers” as a “logical, mocking, playful, and yet awesome spirit” when they learn how to both utilize reason as an instrument to appreciate their experiences and sublimate and freely express their drives.

At this time I want to discuss Nietzsche’s antagonistic attitude toward practical reason in earlier works. What Nietzsche finds most objectionable about constructive reason is its adamant denial of the passions. By way of *ad hominem* attacks against Euripides and Socrates in BT we get a glimpse of Nietzsche’s animosity toward constructive reason. According to Nietzsche, the “rationalistic method” employed by Euripides purged Greek tragedy of the emotional and mystical components most clearly represented in the tragic plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Yet it was Socrates’ influence on Euripides that prompted the tragedian to abide by the Socratic principle that “to be good everything must be conscious” (BT 12). That is, everything must be subject to measurement, calculation, and logical deduction. For Nietzsche, the emphasis on making *everything* conscious through the elevation of a single drive (in this case the drive for “dialectical investigation”) to the exclusion of all others is tantamount to moral and intellectual bankruptcy (UM III:6). In view of the foregoing, Nietzsche takes issue with constructive reason because of the “*optimistic* element in the nature of dialectic, which celebrates a triumph with every conclusion and can breathe only in cool

clarity and consciousness ...” without properly considering the affective aspects of the human condition. (BT 14).

### 6.3 Nietzsche on Practical Reason in Later Works

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

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

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

Put simply, **P1** denies that critical reason is a valid means to guide one’s actions, while **P2** goes even further by denouncing popular opinion unhelpful to the objectives of constructive reason. As Nietzsche understands the history of ‘reason’ in philosophy, philosophers became bewitched by what he dubs the “metaphysics of language” due to overreliance on constructive reason. As a result of their fascination with constructive reason philosophers came to believe in such things as the “lie of unity, the lie of materiality, of substance, of duration” as well as the so-called highest concepts of “being, the absolute, the good, the true, the perfect, ...” and “the

will” (TI III:2,4,5). Nietzsche argues that these lies are not the consequence of the evidence of ordinary sense-experience, but our interpretation of that evidence that allows these lies to subsist (TI III:2). He views constructive reason as an unsatisfactory means to understand the human condition, because it falls short of accounting for ordinary sense-experience. If Nietzsche is correct the concept of God—the “thinnest” and “emptiest” of concepts—becomes insignificant, and along with the concept of God we must also dispense with the continuing fascination with the apparent world/real world distinction. According to Nietzsche, we need to see “reason in reality—not in ‘reason’ (TI X:2). In section 507 of WP Nietzsche writes:

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

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

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

In this chapter I have shown how Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward practical reason endures from his early to late works. As we have seen, then, Nietzsche is ambivalent toward practical reason (i.e., critical and constructive reason). More specifically, Nietzsche holds, the *misuse* of practical reason occurs when we neglect the existential dimension of human experience in favor of theories and systems (i.e., constructive reason). Conversely, we learned that the proper *use* of practical reason requires that we treat our own lives as scientific experiments. That is to say, we should make use of multiple perspectives in both our theoretical inquiries as well as our practical pursuits to achieve a desired end (i.e., constructive reason).

## **CONCLUSION: Nietzsche's Ambivalence Toward Practical Reason as a Reflection of His Ambivalence Toward Socrates**

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

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

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