

**A Solution to “The Problem of Socrates” in Nietzsche’s
Thought: An Explanation of Nietzsche’s Ambivalence Toward
Socrates**

by

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Abstract

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.

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.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I use the standard abbreviations for Nietzsche's published works as practiced in the English-language Nietzsche literature. The letters "P" and "F" are used to refer to Nietzsche's prefaces and forewords.

BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
D	<i>Daybreak</i>
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HH	<i>Human, All Too Human</i>
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
UM	<i>Untimely Meditations</i>

I use the following abbreviations for Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts, lectures, and notebooks:

PP	"The Pre-Platonic Philosophers"
PTAG	"Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks"
WP	"The Will to Power"

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