

Google, Grandfathers, and God(s):
Nietzsche and Plato on Ancestral Authority

by

Janice Freamo

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

The ever-changing technological landscape is shifting generational patterns of authority. Authority is grounded in knowledge. Knowledge—technical, moral, or otherwise—commonly proceeds from an older generation to a younger one. This is changing. Younger generations in the Western world are posing their questions to Google rather than Grandpa or God. Such challenges to the hierarchy of generational knowledge are not entirely novel though, and the history of Western political thought suggests that they are telling indicators of impending political change.

The study engages two examples, one in Nietzsche (“Second Treatise” of *On the Genealogy of Morality*) and one in Plato (“Book One” of *The Republic*), wherein lapsed generational authority is discussed alongside the topic of justice. In the texts, both authors proceed from a definition of justice associated with ancestral authority and described in the language of debt and credit. Justice is what is owed to one’s ancestors. Ancestral knowledge provides the first codification of duties or obligations. It is the first sense of law. It describes a clear division between the ruler (to whom one’s obligations are due) and the ruled.

To date, the vast literature on these authors has not yet considered how the precise concept of ancestral authority informs the political meaning of their works. This is particularly the case for Nietzsche. The contest that he invokes with Plato, his philosophical ancestor, requires meditation on the significance of this idea. This

comparative analysis meets this objective in two ways. First, it analyzes the selections to understand what happens politically and philosophically when the primary direction of intergenerational education changes. Second, it proposes that Nietzsche's politics of cultural formation should be understood as a non-nostalgic recovery of ancestral authority. This concept is central in Nietzsche's understanding of the shift from kinship-based models of justice to what he calls in §12 of the Second Treatise, "misarchism" or the "democratic idiosyncrasy" of being against the idea of rule itself. His account of justice describes the theological conditions that informed the shift from tribalism to universalism in the West, and, by this account, he forces an assessment of the limits of overwriting the grandfathers' generational knowledge.

Acknowledgements

A project of this nature is not an individual feat. I owe a great deal of gratitude to those who inspired it in the first place, those who sustained it over the course of its development, and those who saw it through to its present state of completion. Its muses were two. My paternal grandmother, Mary Mandryk, and my husband's grandfather, "Poppa" John Stelter (now deceased), loom large in the thoughts behind these pages. As I witnessed the societal reception of this generational cohort, and closer to home, the familial dynamics brought on by their advancing age and greater need of care, I began to think about intergenerational relationships, and whether or how they were changing. As a line in one of my daughter's books goes, "some questions are tricky and some hold on tight." This was such a question for me. I am fortunate enough to be married to a man who knows and appreciates the grip of such questions and the value of the intellectual endeavour and with whom I could repeatedly discuss and revisit the fundamentals of the project. It is impossible to do justice to my husband John's contribution in a sentence or even two. So, let it suffice to say that I could not be more grateful that he was the one to share the highs and lows of this journey with me.

I am also fortunate to have built a broader community of such friends, and mentors, included among them my supervisor Tom Darby and committee members Marc Hanvelt, Robert Sibley, and Geoffrey Kellow. I imagine that it is often difficult for a supervisor to strike the correct balance between liberty and guidance with students, but this was something that Tom was able to achieve in our relationship, and I am grateful

for it. Beyond my committee, the project was developed with, or portions of it read by, the following people: Nicole Van De Wolfshaar, Denis Madore, Larissa Atkinson, Colin Corder (for assistance with Greek), Gillian Bose (for assistance with German), Megan Pickup (for assistance with life!), Caleb Chaplin (for our writing exchanges), and my mother, Mary Rudyk-Papadogonas, who braved reading my commentary on Nietzsche. Additionally, over the course of the project's development, I had the opportunity to study at the University of Chicago with the Fulbright Canada program. During that time the project benefitted immensely from the guidance of Martha Nussbaum, Nathan Tarcov, Heinrich Meier, Demetra Kasimis, and Brian Leiter. Last, the project was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) as well as the Ontario Graduate Scholarships (OGS) program.

These acknowledgements themselves confirm one of the central arguments in the pages that follow. Humans, including political philosophers who seem to claim god-like capacities, are not self-sufficient beings. We do, and we must, exist with others. This is not something to be disparaged. It is part of the beauty of what it means to be human. It is part of the chaotic beauty of love and friendship that informs who we are as political animals, that I hope to be able to help my daughter, Marian, to see as she grows up in this messy, but wonderful, and all-too-human world. That is a promise to her that I will be honoured to keep.

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INTRODUCTION

Google, Grandfathers, and God(s): Nietzsche and Plato on Ancestral Authority

“But,” said the accuser, “Socrates taught his companions to abuse their fathers by persuading them that he made them wiser than their fathers.”

— Xenophon, *Memorabilia*

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

— Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

In the past there were always some elders who knew more than any children in terms of their experience of having grown up within a cultural system. Today there are none. It is not only that parents are no longer guides, but that there are no guides, whether one seeks them in one’s own country or abroad. There are no elders who know what those who have been reared within the last twenty years know about the world into which they were born.

— Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment*

Mobile phones, satellite television, and the Internet have allowed the newer generations to associate, connect, and debate on a “peer-to-peer” basis rather than through a top-down, authoritarian system of knowledge transmission. The young feel less strongly bound to patriarchal customs and institutions...

— Olivier Roy, “The Transformation of the Arab World”

Researchers found that older generations are being replaced by Google, Wikipedia and YouTube, with their grandchildren not asking them basic questions that they can look up themselves.

— *The Telegraph*¹

The Problem: Lapsed Generational Authority

In middle school, when my English teacher was struggling to have our class embrace a particular point about a novel we were reading, she mentioned to the class

¹ The *Telegraph* reported on the results of a poll taken of 1,500 grandparents that indicated younger generations were requesting less advice or knowledge from them than previous generations. Less than one in four had advice requested of them, and ninety-six percent indicated that they requested more advice of their grandparents when they were young. See “How Grandparents are being replaced by Google,” n.p.

that she understood our reluctance. Not long ago she had lived by the maxim “don’t trust anyone over 30.” She was now past the threshold of that age and asking us to trust her, and the text and its author, who were surely much older than that. At the time, I took it for granted that she should even feel the need to make that plea to a room full of pre-teens.

The following study considers the political and philosophical consequences when the primary direction of intergenerational education changes. In its broadest sense, it asks: of what significance is it that children learn more from each other than from ‘those over 30’? Intergenerational education refers to the way in which knowledge—technical, moral, or otherwise—is commonly seen to proceed. This is typically understood in a linear fashion. It proceeds from an older generation to a younger one. This is changing. Specific language has been adopted to describe the challenger to this model. In classrooms,² governments,³ and private sector enterprises, the “peer-to-peer”⁴ networked model exemplifies this change in generational priority. Peers are equal participants in the network. This is contrast to “command-and-control” models wherein hierarchical structures determine the decision-making processes, and

² As an example, see Topping, “Trends in Peer Learning,” 631–45.

³ The Government of Canada has been pursuing this through their Blueprint 2020 and Workplace 2.0 initiatives. See Clerk of the Privy Council, *Twentieth Annual Report to the Prime Minister*, 8.

⁴ “Peer-to-peer” (P2P) describes a computational structure, wherein “peers” are the computer systems that connect to a network (Internet) and act simultaneously as clients and servers (or senders and receivers of data) eliminating the need for a centralized server that distributes data. As Baker describes, “The P2P model can be used to reframe the concept of organizational leadership and organizational architecture. It enables us to take a fresh new look at the authoritarian and centralized notions of current organizational leadership approaches. While traditional hierarchies place emphasis on a certain chain of command, P2P architecture places emphasis on the organizing and indexing of data (both archival, real-time inputs), so that nodes in the organization act as both servers and clients (senders and receivers) of the data. In this model, the network itself becomes the leader as it constantly computes raw data and turns it into actionable information.” See *Peer-to-Peer Leadership*, n.p.

place greater or lesser value on its members based on their rank in the order.

Younger generations in the Western world are posing their questions to Google rather than Grandpa or God. The ever-changing technological landscape challenges traditional structures of authority. While it may be benign to use a food blogger's recipe for chocolate chip cookies instead of Grandma's, this process of knowledge transmission and its reconfiguration deserves reflection. This is particularly the case when we turn from matters of technical knowledge to moral or ethical codes and to the political structures associated therewith. In other words, it is one thing to understand how authority is construed in the sharing of a certain expertise among friends, and it is another thing to understand its moral, political and educational dimensions. This is notable because these peer-to-peer exchanges propose to answer the question of what is best. They advise new parents of the best home remedy for their child, or foodies of the best taco stand in the city, or citizens of the best candidate for political office. Digital forums amplify peer-exchanges and, in the process, diminish the voices of experts, in part because there is a collective loss of trust in what had constituted expertise. All opinions are validated, or at least so the idea of relativism proclaims. Post-truth conditions are pre-conditions for political upheaval.

Such challenges to the hierarchy of generational knowledge are not entirely novel though. The history of Western⁵ political thought confirms that they are telling indicators of impending political change. The following study will take up two

⁵ One of the epigrams that open this introduction makes reference to the Arab world. I include this to allude to the idea that the discussion of intergenerational dynamics is not one that is limited geographically and should be properly considered alongside questions concerning globalization.

examples, one in Nietzsche (“Second Treatise”⁶ of *On the Genealogy of Morality*⁷) and one in Plato (“Book One” of *The Republic*⁸), wherein lapsed generational authority is discussed alongside the topic of justice. It does so to better understand Nietzsche’s charge against Plato’s Socrates that he might be held responsible for setting forth the conditions of relativism that undermine traditional orders. Nietzsche accuses Plato’s Socrates⁹ of democratizing the power of dialectics so that “the rabble gets on top.”¹⁰ Indeed, it is Plato and his Socrates that Nietzsche polemically charges with “dogmatism,” with “the invention of the pure spirit and the good as such,” and with laying the groundwork for democracy to adopt a political-theology in the form of the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹¹ Or, using the language of the *Genealogy* Plato’s Socrates is accused of creating the conditions for “the slave revolt in morality”¹² in Western history. In the voice of the Athenian accusers, Nietzsche charges Plato’s Socrates with corrupting the youth, undermining the gods of the city, and setting forth a tradition of rationalism ripe for universalization. He displaces the poetry of the ancestors and places a new value upon the practice of dialogue among friends. He privileges philosophic peers. And he

⁶ Herein “Second Treatise” will be referenced as *Genealogy II*.

⁷ The title will henceforth be abbreviated as *Genealogy*. References to passages will be denoted by Roman and then Arabic numerals.

⁸ Herein the title will be shortened to “*Republic*” and its corresponding part (e.g., *Republic I*).

⁹ While I will also comment upon the depictions of Socrates by Aristophanes and Xenophon over the course of this study, its focus will be upon Plato’s Socrates, insofar as this is the character with whom Nietzsche engages most consistently.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, “Socrates,” in *Twilight of the Idols*, §2.

¹¹ Nietzsche, “Preface,” in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

¹² Nietzsche’s actual accusation at *Genealogy*, I.7 and *Beyond Good and Evil*, §195 is that the Jewish tradition is the cause of the slave revolt in morality. The claim here is that the accusation that Nietzsche levels against Plato is not that he “caused” the revolt, but that he created its conditions. That is, he created the conditions wherein philosophy could be ruled by religion, and wherein religion could create new moralities.

inverts the order of knowledge transmission in the process. For Nietzsche, the death of God begins here. He writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Could Socrates have been the corrupter of youth after all? And did he deserve his hemlock?”¹³ Nietzsche’s critique of Plato’s legacy, and his Socrates, thus suggests that a certain parallel might be read between the intergenerational effects of technology and those engendered by the practice of philosophy—or, specifically, of the democratization of philosophy—as Plato stands accused.

Nietzsche’s critical eye towards Plato’s legacy, and the democratic¹⁴ order he associates it with, can offer a different perspective on the political problem of a peer-to-peer world. To access this critique, the project acknowledges that these charges are primarily concerned with the kind of political theology that emerges from the philosopher’s practice. It takes Nietzsche’s claim that “Christianity is Platonism for ‘the people’”¹⁵ seriously and suggests that the vulnerabilities he identifies in the liberal democratic order issue from this metaphysical foundation. To elaborate, in one of the few places in the *Genealogy* where Nietzsche directly references democracy, he makes a methodological argument against “the prevailing instinct and fashion” which he later associates with the *civilizing* tendency of “democratic idiosyncrasy”:

The democratic idiosyncrasy of being against everything that dominates and wants to dominate, the modern *misarchism* (to coin a bad word for a bad thing) has gradually shaped and dressed itself up as intellectual,

¹³ Nietzsche, “Preface,” in *Beyond*.

¹⁴ The question of a democratic Plato invites its own controversies, which for the sake of focus will not be elaborated upon here. Suffice it to say though that this is the regime in question, and its success is part of the critique Nietzsche levels against Plato’s Socrates.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

most intellectual, so much so that it already, today, little by little penetrates the strictest, seemingly most objective sciences, and is allowed to do so; indeed, I think it has already become master of the whole of physiology and biology, to their detriment, naturally, by spiriting away their basic concept, that of actual activity.¹⁶

The promise of Christian-democracy, it would seem, is its capacity to tame without “tamers” (or at least without acknowledging their presence). It would efficiently regulate activity without masters or rulers. He does not choose the word “anarchism.” This would imply the lack of rule. Rather, he formulates “misarchism” to suggest the idea of being against rule itself. To use a familial metaphor, it is as if parent and child equally rule one another. To use an economic metaphor, it is like the ideal of a free-market where honest exchanges between creditors and debtors exist and punitive measures are not required to enforce contracts. Or, to speak to a real-world economic example, it draws upon ideas that underlie the sharing economy, insofar as they harness peer-to-peer relationships in their exchanges and undercut the role of the regulator. Creditor and debtor are equal participants in the model. The roles of creditor and debtor are exchanged with ease.

Many a good modern liberal would take issue with Nietzsche’s characterizing of “misarchism” as a “bad word” and a “bad thing.” Indeed, should it not represent the progress of democracy towards greater inclusion and freedom? Could it not be celebrated as the triumph over outmoded orders of hierarchical and patriarchal classification? Perhaps. Who provides the answer to the question of “how to live the best

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.12.

human life” is the issue at hand. Do we learn best from our peers? Will our children teach us the proper answer? Or do we have something true to pass along to our children? Who has a just claim to an authoritative response?

In what follows, I suggest that Nietzsche uses economic and familial metaphors in *Genealogy II* to (1) draw out these questions, (2) raise the spectre of their political implications, and (3) speak to his most worthy rival, Plato. As he shows, theology provides one set of answers and much of the way in which the Western world is ordered reflects the priority of those answers. When he refers to the authority of the ancestral,¹⁷ he does so to establish that the Judeo-Christian God’s authority is akin to that of a creditor. That is, God possesses authority because humans owe him compensation for their existence. Reverence for the creditor is embedded in the concept of the “ancestral constitution.”¹⁸ It is an idea that is constructed upon the intersection of these same two relational metaphors, that of the parent—and specifically the father—to the child, as well as the creditor to the debtor. It describes a combined moral and political inheritance and a sense of indebtedness to one’s predecessors.¹⁹ The “aged parent” is the “paternal

¹⁷ Ibid., II.19.

¹⁸ B. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 25.

¹⁹ Burke’s reflections on the French Revolution exemplify the close connection between these ideas: “To avoid therefore the evils of inconstancy and versatility, ten thousand times worse than those of obstinacy and the blindest prejudice, we have *consecrated* the state, that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution; that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion; that he should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country, who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces, and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds, and wild incantations, they may regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father’s life.

Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure—but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken

constitution," the inherited "contract" that transcends one's specific place in time and history, genealogically binds one to one's predecessors, and prescribes one's place in the order of things.²⁰ These metaphors are used to describe the pious authority evoked by the state. The way in which the state itself becomes a source of reverence because it provides the conditions for the flourishing of its people. They are expressions of the concept of political theology. Piety, in this sense, refers to the idea of dutiful reverence, and such reverence is reserved for unquestioned authority. Political theology, in its broadest sense, is an idea that describes to whom reverence is owed and is enforced by the political community. Its power resides in the all-encompassing way in which it demands obedience, and such obedience is grounded in its "truth of faith."²¹ Its idea suggests that the various domains of human life, including the social, moral, religious and political, are not hermetically sealed, but that the answer to the question "how ought I live?" is primarily informed by an idea of divine law. That is, the ancestral, as oldest, as closest to the divine, is best able to provide knowledge of the good life. The state though, as the site of politics, is also the place wherein opinions concerning the good life are contested. When married with theology, as the study of the nature of God

up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place." Burke, *On Reflections on the Revolution in France*, §150–74.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem*, 85.

or religious belief, political theology describes the attempt to articulate an idea of the best way of life according to the nature of the divine or God. The parameters of the contest are described in theological terms, and thus the “father of all fathers” is understood as the underwriter of the contract of the political community. This contractual art is a political art, but with a divine dimension. To return to the idea of Nietzsche’s accusation of Plato, he accuses him of fathering a political-theology or of being a founder of the contract of the Western political order. This Platonic-Christian-democratic order though, he claims, is productive of “misarchism.” It no longer recognizes the authority upon which it was founded. Nietzsche’s language in the *Genealogy* is thus deeply engaged with ideas of political theology.

Further, this contest with Plato becomes clearer, if we understand Nietzsche to be using the same terms of reference. Specifically, he draws on the “polis-oikos analogy,”²² an analogy also favoured by Plato. The analogy, as popularized by ancient Greek literature²³ and philosophy, is a prime example of the way in which the premise that “oldest is best” is explored and tested.²⁴ The pious affirmation of family and state are conditions upon which a way of life is transmitted forward and this piety offers a source

²² B. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 45. The *polis* (πόλις) is the “community of men sharing a way of life and governing themselves, waging war and preserving the peace.” See Bloom, “Notes,” 439n1. *Oikos* (οἶκος) likewise describes a social grouping, but is more particular. It is closest in meaning to “family,” but in the Attic context could also convey “house,” “property,” “lineage,” “progeny” or “persons within a household.” See also *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 33-4.

²³ To name only a few examples from the theatrical world, we can consider Aristophanes’ comedies *Clouds* (423 BCE & 420 BCE), *Wasps* (422 BCE), *Knights* (424 BCE) and *Birds* (414 BCE) or the tragic examples of Euripides’ *Hippolytos* (428 BCE) and Sophocles’ *Antigone* (c. 440 BCE) as representing elements of this generational conflict.

²⁴ It is also used to understand the natural world. This analysis of human nature contributes to the pursuit of an understanding of nature more broadly understood.

of political stability. Heinrich Meier²⁵ explains how these ideas are reflected in the concept of an ancestral constitution and ancestral law. The “ancestral” alludes to the authority that undergirds that law. This authority is derived from stability through time, or described in another manner, the ability to transcend the boundaries of the mortal life span and be replicated in generations to follow. From this sense of stability, the default answer to the question of “what is good” becomes “what is oldest.”

These ideas are expressed in a favourite trope of 5th century Athens—that of intergenerational conflict between a father and his son.²⁶ The charge of corrupting the youth levelled against Socrates, and other sophists, reflects this concern. When the son is made his father’s equal²⁷ or exceeds him in virtue, the traditional hierarchies that associate age and wisdom falter. In this way, the disorder of the household represents disorder in the city. Barry S. Strauss notes the way that Athens, in particular, tried to reconcile this, “In democratic Athens, father-son ideology balanced an emphasis on tradition (for example, democracy as a *patrios politeia*, that is, the traditional—literally,

²⁵ He writes, “For their own good, they need a good law and they strive for it.... They find a foothold in the ancestral, in that which they are most familiar and which is dearest to them. The primordial identification of the good as the ancestral has a rational core, ‘rational’ in the sense of an orientation towards the good... that which has been passed down by the ancestors has withstood the test of time and accumulated and absorbed the collective experiences of the commonwealth in which it proved itself. On the other hand, it promises stability.... The commonwealth preserves its identity by virtue of the special order and way of life prescribed by the ancestral law....” See Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem*, 35.

²⁶ The father-son relationship was an “important and efficacious Athenian ideological symbol.... A part of everyday life within the domestic unit, fathers and sons played a significant role in the Athenian communal and religious rituals too, and were frequently the subject of Attic tragedy and comedy.” See B. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 32.

²⁷ The Athenian democratic regime, and its practice of selecting offices by lot, reflects the application of this idea. Age is no longer a title to rule nor a criterion for good rule.

paternal—regime) with admiration for the vigor of youth.”²⁸ Yet as the political circumstances of the *polis* evolved in relation to the extended Peloponnesian War, the balance between these perspectives was put into direct conflict. Most explicitly, at the war’s end, oligarchs battled democrats about the content of the renewed ancestral constitution that was to be put in place in Athens following her defeat by Sparta. The literature of this period, and its use of this familial metaphor, is steeped in these political circumstances.

The idea of household management persists a way of judging the management of the political community.²⁹ The symbol of the authoritative father speaks to the tension between the *natural* authority of the household and the *conventional* authority of the city and opens the question as to whether the best political regime is one that is modelled upon the natural hierarchy of the household or whether the convention of the city can or should meet with the nature of the household. A good manager of a household knows how to properly “give to each what is owed.”³⁰ This means that he possesses knowledge of making proper distinctions. Such knowledge constitutes the earliest form of law and, as previously described, finds its bearings in the premise of a natural order. The idea of debt in this context also functions as a way to express familial duty or obligation (i.e., the answer to the question: to whom is obedience justly expressed?) and as a way to express

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁹ This discourse is perhaps more prominent in the American context where “family values” candidates place a great deal of emphasis on the structure and role of the family in society. That said, it is also voiced in the Canadian context in works such as William D. Gairdner’s *The War Against the Family: A Parent Speaks Out*. See also Cathy Gulli, “The collapse of parenting: Why it’s time for parents to grow up,” *MacLeans*, January 7, 2016, <http://www.macleans.ca/society/the-collapse-of-parenting-why-its-time-for-parents-to-grow-up/>.

³⁰ Plato, *Republic I*, 331e.

the transmission of moral inheritance (i.e., the answer to the questions: To whom do I owe my understanding of right and wrong? Or, from whom do I derive my moral judgment?). The polis-oikos analogy is thus a means to question paternal piety and the authoritative structures associated therewith.³¹

If God—the father—is dead, though (i.e., if Christian-Platonism has run its course), what are the political-theological implications? Have the debtors become creditors? Have humans become their own moral gods? The “misarchism” to which Nietzsche refers is not limited to the politics of this world but rather encompasses the metaphysical component of the inquiry as well. The problem becomes one of where reverence is properly directed and where authority is justly assigned. If the answer is “nowhere,” as Nietzsche suspects it is in a democratic context, humanity seems to lose its capacity to distinguish the people, stories, and actions that are truly heroic, excellent and virtuous.

³¹ Likewise, these ideas resonated in Germany’s literature in the 19th and 20th centuries. Novelist Thomas Mann described the way in which these political queries are woven into the emotional fabric of our identity. He writes of the ease by which we come into this inherited framework when he relates Hans Castorp’s reflections about his grandfather: “the perceptions gained by his own calm, alert child’s eye were much the same—unspoken and therefore uncritical perceptions... which when they later became conscious memories retained their exclusively positive stamp, immune to all discussion or analysis.” See *Magic Mountain*, 23. Such is the binding and blinding nature of these attachments. Memory bonded with affection often leaves little room available to critically regard the sources of one’s self. The idea of ‘one’s own’ is fused with the idea of ‘the good.’ Julian Young writes of the “conservative romanticism” and “German nationalism” located within Mann’s writings by describing his admiration for Paul de Lagarde, a German biblical scholar whose 1873 work, *Über das Verhältnis des deutschen Staates zu Theologie, Kirche und Religion* (On the Relationship of the German State to Theology, Church and Religion), expressed a concern with the need to foster a new national religion to reclaim this sense of “one’s own.” As Young, describes, “he wanted a single, powerful, communal faith that would unite the German nation and determine its historical destiny.” The paternal reverence that Castorp expresses towards his grandfather likewise expresses a political desire for such reverence to be reclaimed by the state. See Young, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion*, 206-7.

The Objective: A Query into Nietzsche's Politics vis-à-vis Plato

The primary objective of this project is to understand Nietzsche's political critique of lapsed intergenerational authority by comparing and contrasting his presentation of justice in the *Genealogy* with that of Plato in *The Republic*. Both authors proceed from a definition of justice associated with ancestral authority and described in the language of debt and credit. Plato's *Republic* begins in this manner. When Socrates recounts his visit to the Piraeus, he begins with the account of justice offered by the elderly father, Cephalus. Justice is telling the truth and giving what is owed.³² This definition proves insufficient, however, and Cephalus removes himself from the scene. The central essay of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* likewise includes a notion of justice he associates with ancestral authority. It is the payment of the debt owed to one's ancestors.³³ This account of justice resembles Cephalus' version and is similarly subject to interrogation. In both cases, Plato and Nietzsche provide an image of the incompetency of ancestral authority next to the philosopher. Plato's Cephalus is the apparently pious but impotent interlocutor who must exit before the conversation can proceed. The worship of ancestors described by Nietzsche creates a metaphysical sense of debt, a burden that compounds in time, that, he argues, Christianity insufficiently absolves with the story of Christ. In each passage, the dominant theological perspective is revealed to be a veneer, an empty source of authority. The ancestral accounts of justice are shown to be inadequate for the philosophical account. In this sense, both appear

³² Plato, *Republic I*, 331c.

³³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.19-20. Though, like Cephalus' son, Polemarchus, Nietzsche picks up on the first part of the definition and leaves behind the second part: truth-telling.

guilty of the charge of turning the youth against their fathers, and thus over-turning the intergenerational order of education.³⁴

The opening scene of *Republic I* is an effective foil to Nietzsche's account because it clearly conveys how Socrates can be seen as guilty of the charge of undermining the father. But it also shows how Plato provides a "solution" to the accusation. Plato's solution involves his Socrates forging a friendship with Cephalus' son, Polemarchus, a democratic man who, by the end of their exchange, offers his loyalty to Socrates.³⁵ The solution, in other words, is for philosophy to forge a friendship with the political community to gain the protection of its practice. In this way, philosophy can be conducted among friends. As it is staged in the scene, the philosopher is a guest in the home of a "foreign" host and must in some way establish his utility to his host lest he be cast out. Socrates does this successfully by bringing Polemarchus over to his side. He takes the loyalty that the son expressed towards his father and directs it towards himself.

As Nietzsche writes about Plato's navigation of this dynamic in *Schopenhauer as*

³⁴ The parallel between the passages is not perfect, of course. The authors do not represent ancestral authority in the same way, nor do they even discuss the question of justice in the same format. They author their accounts differently and write them at different points in history. Plato's account requires one to consider the dramatic format of his dialogue, and specifically his use of character, to better appreciate the nuances of his presentation of the problem of justice. Nietzsche's account is delivered as a treatise. Rather than representing a dialogue between characters, he writes so as to create a dialogue with his reader. Also, Nietzsche's account of inherited justice differs from the one voiced by Cephalus because his does not include truth-telling. Yet the distinctions between these accounts do not overshadow the similar way in which they weave together "ancestral authority" and "creditor-debtor" relations in their discussions of justice. This work acknowledges these differences in the course of its analysis, but it places greater emphasis on the curiosity elicited by their common concerns. It purposively considers the possibility that they may have a common objective. In this sense, the dialogue this comparison produces between Plato and Nietzsche "rests not on the fusion of historical horizons but on the meeting of kindred natures." See Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem*, 65. Nietzsche, though a critic, was also a careful student of Plato.

³⁵ Plato, *Republic I*, 336a.

educator, "It almost looks now as though Plato really did achieve something."³⁶ The assessment in short is that Plato's success created not the conditions for the protection of philosophy but its downfall. By opening the possibility that the philosopher could be at home in the political world, philosophy loses its sting. The appalling idea that it could turn sons against their fathers is made palatable, appealing, and even necessary.

Nietzsche understood, according to Walter Kaufmann that, "The philosopher, however, must always stand opposed to his time and may never conform; it is his calling to be a fearless critic and diagnostician."³⁷ In a manner of speaking, the practice of philosophy relies upon the existence of an authoritative "Cephalus" — the embodiment of generational knowledge, from which the process of questioning can begin.³⁸ By masking the greatness of the philosopher and the philosophic pursuit, Nietzsche's political charge against Plato goes beyond his famous opening of *Beyond Good and Evil*.³⁹ As Kaufmann summarizes, the charge is that he created conditions wherein, "[i]nstead of vying for distinction, men nurture a *ressentiment* against all that is distinguished, superior, or strange."⁴⁰ Equality is promoted over hierarchy. The problem thus emerges, for Nietzsche, that the truly superior life, the life of philosophy, loses the ground upon which to distinguish itself. It becomes one way of life among many, no better and no worse than the other choices available.

³⁶ Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as educator," 183.

³⁷ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 405.

³⁸ Or, as Socrates puts it in the context of the guardian's education, it relies on the existence of false speech (i.e., *mythos*) before the pursuit of true speech can take place. See Plato, *Republic II*, 377a.

³⁹ Nietzsche, "Preface," in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

⁴⁰ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 405.

The Question

In one sense, the question with which the project engages is methodological. It seeks to establish and defend the validity of drawing upon the tradition of Western political thought to better understand the political and social circumstances of our time. Considered in this manner, the question becomes two-fold: How does Nietzsche's charge of Plato's Socrates intergenerational injustice offer new ways of understanding the intergenerational politics of the present day, and do Nietzsche's writings produce or diagnose these politics?

Secondarily, I attempt to do justice⁴¹ to Plato, and his Socrates, by seeking to understand the nuances at play in one of the rare depictions of him over-throwing the authority of the father in the scene.⁴² By setting up the comparison between *Republic I* and *Genealogy II*, the project thus seeks to understand why both authors surround their discussions of justice with the paired metaphors of "ancestral authority" and "creditor-debtor" relations on their own terms. They speak in the same metaphorical language, but do they have the same reason for doing so? Why are they respectively concerned with what is owed to the father? What does this reveal about the political quality of their philosophy?

⁴¹ The implication, of course, is that Nietzsche's polemics do a certain amount of injustice to Plato's Socrates, a charge to which Nietzsche freely admits: "Plato, for example, becomes a caricature in my hands." See *Will to Power*, §374.

⁴² This dramatization should be held in contrast to the content of Socrates' arguments in *Crito* or *Euthyphro*, for example, where he argues in favour of pious affirmation of the familial order.

The Proposed Answer

It is necessary to address the latter question before returning to the former. The idea of justice that Nietzsche and Plato both articulate is primarily concerned with the political circumstances that will enable the possibility of the best human lives. Such lives, for both, are the lives of philosophers. Both are concerned with giving the possibility of human greatness its due, and the passages are concise expressions of the contest over the authoritative answer to this question. The evidence from the passages suggests that such language is a diagnostic tool that intends to describe an enduring political problem that arises in attempts to segregate politics from morality and the latter's basis in mythological or religious frameworks.

The two depart on the question of the exact nature of the philosopher's political role. For Plato, philosophic education is largely concerned with the virtue of prudence.⁴³ Prudence is the virtue that enables the philosopher to forge friendships with political men. These friendships permit the interrogation of the political order to take place in such a way that protects each party from the threat of the process. *Republic I* establishes this clearly with the way in which Socrates wins Polemarchus' friendship in the argument. Plato's classical approach is thus sensitive to the existential threat that exists both for the philosopher and for the *polis*. For Plato, the greatest risk is losing the capacity to have a dialogue concerning the good. The recognition of this risk is also the

⁴³ Prudence (*phronesis*) pertains to practical wisdom as opposed to theoretical wisdom (*theoria*) and has to do with knowing and acting with a keen sense of one's possibilities and limitations. It is closely related to the Platonic virtue, moderation (*sophrosyne*), which pertains to self-control, and a sense of proportion, balance, and hence harmony. The aim of both virtues is similar—the avoidance of “over-reach”—though they express the means to that aim in slightly different ways. Thank you to Tom Darby for his helpful elaboration on the subtle differences between these terms.

recognition of human fallibility and limit. Socrates' pause⁴⁴ at the end of *Republic I* reflects this idea well. He concludes by affirming the idea of human wisdom, which is no more and no less than the awareness of his ignorance. His (temporary) silence reflects the striking of a truce with the political (and moral) men present.

For Nietzsche, the greater risk is losing the capacity to promise or to act politically entirely. Such are the politics of capitulation to the forces of history.⁴⁵ Prudence is not a virtue, but a signifier of capitulation. It signifies the appropriation of the philosophic practice by politicians and moralists. Whereas Plato's *Republic* begins with the question of "why justice,"⁴⁶ the question of *Genealogy II* is "whose justice"? To whom should one exhibit duty and obedience? He seeks to reinvigorate the tension between the philosopher and the political community and to advocate for the justice of the immoralist—his philosopher. He seeks to make the philosopher dangerous once more, to reinvigorate the existential risk that he accuses Plato of diminishing. Plato made philosophy too safe. He gave it a home. Nietzsche's restatement of the charge against Plato's Socrates recalls the idea that philosophy should be at odds with the political community. Plato's efforts to poeticize the philosophic account have been too successful.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Republic I*, 354c.

⁴⁵ Indeed our politics are often expressed in such terms. In an effort to distinguish modern politics from the political world of ancient Greece, Oswyn Murray writes of our contemporary situation: "For us, politics is the study of forms of domination and control, of organization for effective action, and of conflict between power groups, or their reconciliation with the interests of the whole. These groups are often permanent and institutionalized; they have a history from which we cannot escape. Our politics is therefore about conflict and compromise in a historical situation which prevents us from acting rationally: we cannot escape the irrational force of history." See "Cities of Reason," 20-21.

⁴⁶ One cannot discount that the question of "whose justice" is also present in the opening of *Republic I*. We note that Socrates and Glaucon had made their travels down to the Piraeus to witness a festival to a foreign goddess. Arguably though, the dialogue is more animated by the question of "why justice," as this becomes the central challenge to Socrates after Glaucon and Adeimantus revive Thrasymachus' argument in *Republic II*.

A monolithic and dogmatic conception of good diminishes occasions for wonder by presenting “ready-made” solutions to questions. It makes the philosopher a tool of the city.

Nietzsche advocates for a renewed practice of political philosophy, but in contrast to Plato, this practice makes the “will” the central feature of man’s political nature. By implication, that idea of justice that we possess is the product of the human will. The means that we have used to reinforce it (cruelty, ritual, regulation) are powerful only insofar as they act as reminders of our obligations to the ancestral (and, by proxy, the divine). But, the ancestral is not the primary condition of man. It is a persistent persuasive story. And, like all narratives, it has been subject to change in time. It may have happened this one way, but that does not mean that the future is beholden to the past. Our future might still be written in a number of ways. To write a better story, though, it is necessary to understand why we are the way we are and to probe the enduring qualities of the human being. By emphasizing the historical quality of justice, Nietzsche emphasizes its malleability. Whereas Plato places more emphasis on limitation, Nietzsche places more emphasis on possibility. His respective conclusion to *Genealogy II* with its (temporary) silence thus also needs to be read with a close eye to the language that precedes it wherein he evokes his Zarathustra and the possibilities that a “more future one” might engender.⁴⁷

The contest that Nietzsche invokes with Plato, on the one hand, reinforces the

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II. 25.

premise of the peer-to-peer paradigm: it diminishes the value of the association between “oldest” and “best” when it suggests that Plato, and perhaps specifically Christian-Platonism, is something to be overcome or reversed. On the other hand though, it is able to do something with which the peer-to-peer world struggles greatly: it is able to acknowledge the greatness of its old sparring interlocutor. It is able to express the value of reading untimely works and sparring with untimely figures. The “peer” priority is an iteration of the historicist impulse. It limits the measure of greatness to one’s time.⁴⁸

Nietzsche is no conservative nostalgic longing for days long ago wherein children respected their elders, and revered the traditions within the state. His contest with father Plato recognizes both the wisdom and folly of history. In acknowledging that such greatness was possible, he sets forth the value of intergenerational and specifically *untimely* dialogue. History is not about overcoming, about progress, but about becoming, and becoming can only take place by understanding who one is. The condition that Nietzsche reveals in *Genealogy II* is that such self-understanding is masked in the political-theology of noble lies, which tell the story of a merciful and redeemed humanity, who reform and repress their animality in and over time, such that the distinction between ruler and ruled, higher and lower, begins to no longer make sense.

⁴⁸ In a crude materialization of this, the gospel of social media suggests that one’s value or *worthiness* is denoted by “likes” and “shares” and the immediacy of peer approval.

Assumptions

This study does not claim that Nietzsche “foresaw” peer-to-peer computing technology. Nor is it drawing a direct line through history from Plato to Nietzsche to the present day. It is suggesting, though, that certain parallels can be established across time, namely that there is a certain degree of consistency to intergenerational anxiety provoked by the democratic principle of equality. In general, it proceeds on the basis of four main assumptions: the generational priority expressed in the idea that “oldest is or knows best” is undermined by new modes of networked technologies, Nietzsche’s main interlocutor on questions of political philosophy is Plato, the themes of Nietzsche’s works remain consistent, and the tradition of political thought can be informative to contemporary concerns.

First, I acknowledge that there is an extensive debate in political science literature already taking place between “techno-enthusiasts” and “techno-skeptics” on the topic of the political dimensions of generational use of technology. This debate seeks to understand the causal relationship between technology adoption and challenges to political authority. At present though, this debate has not extended much beyond the specific consideration of social media. This is not a debate with which I seek to directly engage.⁴⁹ I reference it here only to establish that sufficient evidence has been gathered to support the claim that the social and political landscapes are changing on account of networked technologies. These debates suggest that there is adequate evidence for the

⁴⁹ For example, in the context of the analysis of the Arab Spring uprisings, Alexa Robertson nicely defines the scholarly debate between these two camps in her article, “What’s Going on?”

idea that these technologies are reconfiguring generational priorities. This is not to suggest that “technology” writ large is the lone cause of this change, but rather to indicate that this causal relationship has been studied elsewhere. The project makes no attempt to empirically substantiate this reconfiguration but takes it as something that is sufficiently and readily observable.

Second, I proceed from the assumption that Nietzsche saw Plato as his most important interlocutor.⁵⁰ This assumption also rests on the idea that Nietzsche understood Plato, and the consequences of his thought, quite differently than those who preceded him in the Western tradition. I take his interest in him to be well documented, if not entirely well understood. To maintain the focus of an already unwieldy topic, the project will proceed with this interest and the importance placed upon it, as given.

Third, I hold to the assumption that the themes of Nietzsche’s works remain consistent over time. As such, I do not employ the division that prominent readers of Nietzsche, like Karl Löwith, use in the process of their interpretation. Specifically, Löwith argues that there are three periods (early, middle and late) into which his writings should be grouped. The first period encompasses his early works, such as the *Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations*. The second period encompasses his middle works, such as *Human All-too-Human*, *Day Break* and the *Gay Science*. The last period includes works that speak to his idea of Eternal Recurrence, such as *Zarathustra* and *Ecce*

⁵⁰ To speak but briefly of a few illustrative examples of this prioritization, I have already mentioned Plato’s central position in the “Preface” to *Beyond Good and Evil*, but Nietzsche also bookends “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth” in *Twilight of the Idols* with mention of Plato, and plays upon prominent Platonic metaphors with the landscape imagery that he employs most notably in *Zarathustra* (up and down-goings, caves, mountains, etc.).

Homo. The stronger contention Löwith makes is that this third period contains Nietzsche's true philosophy.⁵¹ While this division can prove useful, it risks diminishing his earlier works. Rather than reading his writings as culminating in an ultimate or "final" philosophy, I seek to understand them as a consistent engagement with themes that do not substantially change over time.

Last, the project will proceed on the premise that the history of political thought is not merely an antiquarian exercise. Rather, it is assumed that the debates of the past remain relevant to the present. This methodological assumption posits that a connection between our contemporary experience of intergenerational anxiety and the philosophic dialogue between tradition and innovation is feasible; moreover, an understanding of the connection is desirable. Perhaps, in its own way the project is guilty of the bias that "oldest is best." It respects the longevity of these authors' works and their continued relevance to the process of questioning our own circumstances. It is grounded in the idea that their writings retain a living⁵² voice or at least have set forth a space wherein dialogue continues to take place. Of these assumptions, this is the only one that will receive further and dedicated attention over the course of the project.

⁵¹ Löwith, *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen*, 25-31.

⁵² This idea of a living quality will be examined further in the first chapter. I note this here because it supports the contention of the third assumption that there is no "final" philosophy for Nietzsche. A "final" philosophy suggests a kind of summative statement on the teaching that one imparts to the world. This drifts into the territory of dogma or to the attempt of making truth immortal. In the closing aphorism of *Beyond Good and Evil*, §296, Nietzsche concludes with a sort of eulogy to the thoughts that he has placed upon the page: "We immortalize what cannot live and fly much longer." Such a eulogy is cautionary. Do not presuppose the immortal and unassailable truth of these written words. Rather, be prepared to contest them. I credit Geoffrey Kellow for drawing my attention to this passage again.

The Literature

The project engages primarily with three bodies of literature, two which are often read alongside one another, and a third, which exists separately and engages in the diagnosis of the political world by referring to the generational exchange of knowledge using the metaphor of household management. The first two sets of literature attempt to understand Nietzsche's project, and the split between the two can be crudely summarized by the priority they place on either understanding his philosophic or political legacy. The literature concerning his philosophic legacy is largely where the idea of Nietzsche's stance towards Plato and his Socrates is located. This idea extends into the second set of literature concerning Nietzsche's politics but is focused primarily on arguments concerning Nietzsche's adaptation or adoption of the Platonic noble lie, insofar as it focuses upon the idea of the political (i.e., popular) presentation of his work in the form of political theology. The last set departs from interpretations of Plato and Nietzsche, and is concerned with providing an account of intergenerational anxiety. These accounts come from different disciplines (e.g., psychology, anthropology, philosophy, sociology) but they treat a similar theme in that they address the societal disquiet produced by the breakdown of traditional orders. At the intersection of these various studies exists a gap concerning the way in which the political component of Nietzsche's writings have been approached. Indeed, the elusive quality of his politics could be said to arise from a lack of attention to the intergenerational dynamics at play in his work and, specifically, to the way in which Plato exists simultaneously for Nietzsche as a father figure and peer.

I. How Nietzsche read Plato and his Socrates

Martin Heidegger's four-volume study *Nietzsche*, particularly his five chapters on Platonism in *Volume One: The Will to Power as Art*, pioneers the study of the relation of Nietzsche to Plato's writings and indeed expresses the sheer novelty of Nietzsche's understanding of Platonism. His assessment of Nietzsche's Platonism concerns the status of the relationship between poetry and philosophy or of art to truth. It is here that he articulates the idea of Nietzsche's asceticism and its relation to the way in which truth is disclosed. Most importantly for the purposes of this undertaking, it is here that Heidegger emphasizes the idea of Nietzsche's project as one of "*inverted Platonism*."⁵³ In its basic rendering, the idea of inverting Platonism demands that truth be located in the world once again. It suggests that the gravest consequence of Platonism is the way in which truth becomes other-worldly. He writes that "the 'above and below' define the formal structure of Platonism"⁵⁴ and the denigration of the truth of the sensuous "below" to mere appearance is the first stage in the advent of nihilism in that it sets forth the negation of this life in favour of a future life beyond the impurity of this world.⁵⁵ Heidegger writes, "Here a new interpretation of Platonism emerges. It flows from a fundamental experience of the development of nihilism. It sees in Platonism the primordial and determining grounds of the possibility of nihilism's upsurge and of

⁵³ In this reference, he is quoting Nietzsche's own language, which he says is derived from "among the early sketches (1870-71) for his first treatise." See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 154.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵⁵ Heidegger's reading of "How the 'Real [True] World' at last Became a Myth [Fable]" from *Twilight of the Idols* is particularly informative here. See *Nietzsche*, 203-8.

the rise of life-negation.”⁵⁶ He defines Platonism as a cause of nihilism. Further, Heidegger suggests that Nietzsche’s phrase proclaiming the death of God should be read alongside this reinterpretation of the Platonic tradition.⁵⁷ Heidegger’s analysis of Nietzsche’s philosophy, as a philosophy of inverted Platonism, sets the stage for renewed readings of both authors, wherein the similarities and tensions between their projects are tested.

Stanley Rosen’s study *Ancient and Moderns* and, specifically, his concluding chapters on Nietzsche’s revolutionary politics and reversed Platonism, continues the investigation set forth by Heidegger. He evaluates this both from the perspective of the philosophic importance of this project, as well as its political importance, which will be treated in the next section. On its philosophical importance, Rosen distinguishes his reading from Heidegger⁵⁸ by emphasizing the extent to which Nietzsche denies the truth of Being.⁵⁹ In plainer language, he wants to distinguish that for Nietzsche “life itself is an illusion.”⁶⁰ What this means, though, is that there is no inherent or natural order. Everything has been created. The human world is a product of art, and in particular, an

⁵⁶ Ibid., 159.

⁵⁷ He writes, “The phrase ‘God is dead’ is not an atheistic proclamation: it is a formula for the fundamental experience of an event in Occidental history. Only in the light of that basic experience does Nietzsche’s utterance, ‘My philosophy is inverted Platonism,’ receive its proper range and intensity.” See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 156.

⁵⁸ Like Heidegger, Rosen also turns to “How the ‘Real [True] World’ at last Became a Myth [Fable]” to establish the narrative of modern decadence and decline, which he says Nietzsche attributes to the combined influence of “Platonism, Christianity, and modern science.” See Rosen, *Ancients and Moderns*, 200-201.

⁵⁹ He admits his continuation of Heidegger’s thought, though places a caveat upon the extent of his rehabilitation of this argument by saying, “I do not, however, agree that Nietzsche’s Platonism consists in an unconscious acceptance of Being as presence.” See Ibid., 215.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 198.

art that masks its chaos.

Werner J. Dannhauser's *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* focuses more explicitly on the way in which Nietzsche develops Plato's Socrates into an antagonist, but he also acknowledges the way in which "when he [Nietzsche] attacks, it is a proof of his benevolence and even of his gratitude; he honors his opponents by attacking them."⁶¹ In doing so, he draws out the complex relationship that Nietzsche has with Plato's Socrates. They are rivals, but he designates him as a worthy rival, as a measure of what it means to be a philosopher. He also notes the extent to which Plato and Socrates become the same figure for Nietzsche. To illustrate this, he points to §274 and §412 of *Will to Power*. At §274, Nietzsche writes, "since Socrates is the attempt to bring moral values to sovereign authority [*Herrschaft*] over all other values" and then at §412, "since Plato, philosophy is under the sovereign authority [*Herrschaft*] of morality."⁶² Their names are interchanged such that "it no longer matters whether Socrates is a creature of Plato's imagination or Plato the disciple who brings his master's project to fruition."⁶³ Dannhauser is thus able to successfully argue that Nietzsche's writings are defined by this repeated confrontation with Plato's Socrates. He concludes on the note that Nietzsche's victory in this confrontation is left as questionable. He asks whether or not the true victor in the contest is actually Socrates, insofar as his moderation and protection of the "canons of public responsibility" are made evident when contrasted

⁶¹ Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates*, 235.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 238.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 239.

with Nietzsche's willingness to "violate all canons of public responsibility."⁶⁴ In an odd sense, then, Dannhauser's argument ends with the thought that Nietzsche's project reverses Platonism by renewing Socratism.

Catherine Zuckert's *Postmodern Platos* also takes up the concept of reversed Platonism and nicely surveys the way in which it has been taken up by thinkers following Nietzsche. It begins with Nietzsche, extends to Heidegger, and then into the works of Gadamer, Strauss and Derrida. In essence, Zuckert makes a distinction between those who emphasize Plato's ontological arguments and those who emphasize the Platonic argument for philosophy as a way of life. By perhaps placing more emphasis on the latter, she tempers Rosen's revolutionary claims concerning Nietzsche's rhetoric.

Other authors have challenged the premise of the Nietzschean inversion and have instead focused on the compatibility of Nietzsche and Plato. Pierre Hadot, in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*; Horst Hutter, in *Shaping the Future*; Laurence D. Cooper, in *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche*; and Alexander Nehamas, in *The Art of Living*,⁶⁵ accomplish this by stressing the asceticism in works of both thinkers. In this way, the practice of philosophy as a process of self-knowledge or self-legislation is privileged above its ontological aims, as otherwise defined as knowledge of the whole or wisdom. These works err towards the side of the similarity rather than differences between Plato

⁶⁴ Ibid., 273.

⁶⁵ Nehamas, in his discussion of both Plato and Nietzsche, emphasizes the idea that the philosopher is primarily concerned with self-making and self-inquiry rather than the building of the political community, and thus promotes the perspective that each are individualistic thinkers. See *The Art of Living*, 12-15.

and Nietzsche's philosophical projects. To do so, they generally emphasize the individualistic philosophical education (i.e., philosophy is of service to individuals not communities). From this perspective, the actions of the philosopher are held to be just *because* he does not interfere with the city or political community. Such arguments elaborate upon the practice of spiritual health that both advocate.

While I am sympathetic to these arguments, I am explicitly interested in the political⁶⁶ quality of Plato and Nietzsche writings and do not want to downplay their respective significance by resigning either author to the self-help book stacks. I suggest that neither Plato nor Nietzsche understood philosophy as a practice removed from the political situation in which it is embedded, as a practice focused only on the individual. It is imprudent to imagine that the individualistic aspects of their philosophy have nothing to do with their politics or to call them anti-political thinkers.

II. Nietzsche's Politics

Nietzsche has been understood as a reactionary against the 18th century Enlightenment ideals and their corresponding spread of democratic sentiment and as a romantic⁶⁷ who wished to restore the political quality of the human being by recalling the virtues of the Homeric age. Further there is the Nietzsche that is read as the German

⁶⁶ Kaufmann might also be included here, insofar as in attempting to absolve Nietzsche of any responsibility for the rise of National Socialism, he is guilty of diminishing the political quality of Nietzsche's writings. In his "Epilogue," he states this explicitly by saying "We have tried to show that Nietzsche opposed both the idolatry of the State and political liberalism because he was basically '*anti-political*'." See Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 412.

⁶⁷ Kaufmann emphasizes this point in his "Prologue." He notes how Ernst Bertram's *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie*, which was published in 1918, greatly influenced the literature that followed and helped to foster this connection between Nietzsche's writings and the German romantics. See Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 12-15.

nationalist. This is a Nietzsche that wanted to restore Germanic greatness and develop a master race. Indeed, Nietzsche's writings are still implicated in the Volkish⁶⁸ thinking that was predominant in Germany in the early 20th century. Julian Young discusses these ideas of the Volkish tradition:

As the First World War approached, Volkish thinkers were thus disposed to contrast Germany as a nation of 'Helden (heroes)' with England—which they saw as epitomising the degeneracy of atomised, materialistic modernity—as a nation of 'Händler (traders)'. As an organism of the human body is made up of different organs, some subservient to others, so Volkish thinkers wished to preserve social differences, more specifically social hierarchy.⁶⁹

It is this element of Nietzsche's writing that implicated him in the rise and spread of National Socialism in Germany. Walter Kaufmann's landmark study, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ* indeed might be best understood as an apology, in the Socratic sense, for this perception. It is largely an attempt to redeem him of those charges. This study can also be credited with softening the North American distaste for Nietzsche in the post-war environment and with allowing his works to become serious objects of study.

Since the publication of Kaufmann's redemptive work, Nietzsche's politics, like Plato's,⁷⁰ have generated a regular industry of interpretation. Tracy B. Strong discusses the way in which Nietzsche has appealed to both those "on the progressive democratic

⁶⁸ This Anglicized adjective is derived from the German "Volk," which means "nation," "people," "folk," or "tribe." See *Dict.cc*. George Mosse coined the term in this form in his study *The Crisis of German Ideology*.

⁶⁹ Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, 5.

⁷⁰ Julia Annas comments, "Plato has been seen as a revolutionary, a conservative; a fascist, a communist; a fiercely practical reformer and an ineffective dreamer." See *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 1.

(left) side of the political spectrum"⁷¹ as well as those who understand Nietzsche as a "man of the right, the greatest of the moderns in that he takes up the challenge of the ancients, the thinker who dares to raise again the old political questions of rank, domination, character, and nobility against the levelling dynamics and easy egalitarianism of liberalism."⁷² Likewise, Rosen comments on the way in which he is taken as the authority for, "progressive liberals, existentialist theologians, professors, anarchist speculators, left-wing critics of the Enlightenment and bourgeois society, propounders of egalitarianism and enemies of political and artistic elitism, the advance guard of women's liberationists, and a multitude of contemporary movements."⁷³ Such a wide range of interpretation perhaps should be expected when approaching the philosopher credited with fathering the postmodernist movement, but here I will focus on four specific approaches to the question of his politics rather than attempt to detail and justify these divergent perspectives.

First, there are those who deny that Nietzsche was a political thinker. Most notably, in reaction to the popular resurgence of studying Nietzsche in the late 1990s, Martha Nussbaum argued that Nietzsche does not meet the criteria of a serious political theorist.⁷⁴ She sets forth seven criteria that should be met by those who deal seriously in political thought and argues that Nietzsche only sufficiently participates in one of the

⁷¹ Strong, "Nietzsche's political misappropriation," 126.

⁷² Ibid., 129. With this reference, Strong is pointing to Allan Bloom's influential *The Closing of the American Mind*, and Werner Dannhauser's *Nietzsche's View of Socrates*.

⁷³ Rosen, *The Ancients and the Moderns*, 190.

⁷⁴ Nussbaum, "Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*. 5.1: 1-13.

seven criteria: a grappling with the moral psychology of human beings.⁷⁵ She concludes by conceding that Nietzschean scholarship might be beneficial in this area but that efforts to understand liberalism might be better directed if they took up the thinkers of the liberal Enlightenment or its “communitarian critics.”⁷⁶ Her polemic in many ways is not directed at Nietzsche per se, but at those who would turn to his writings to justify their own attacks on liberalism. She writes, “In short, Nietzsche's attack on egalitarianism is the fashion of the hour, the view of poverty that has recently taken over our country.”⁷⁷ In this sense, her overt criticism of the resurgent interest in Nietzsche’s writings is a criticism of the politics that they bring about, whether or not they are grounded in a comprehensively articulated political theory. This is perhaps a measure of her Aristotelian *phronesis*, but it risks trivializing the seriousness of the Nietzschean diagnosis rather than engaging it directly.

Second, there are those such as David Owen and Keith Ansell-Pearson who treat Nietzsche as a reformer of liberalism. Owen’s *Nietzsche, Politics & Modernity* and Ansell-Pearson’s *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* both reach similar conclusions as to the nature of Nietzsche’s critique and concerning the types of “solutions” he offers. On the nature of the critique, the authors share the analysis that liberalism “undermines our capacity to sustain a commitment to human nobility”⁷⁸ or, in Ansell-Pearson’s terms, that it denies the “traditional means for legitimating

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics & Modernity*, 132.

authority.”⁷⁹ In both, the premise of what is noble or best that had previously legitimated political rule is severely put to question. Ansell-Pearson calls Nietzsche’s “aristocratic radicalism”⁸⁰ (or in Owen’s terms, his “agonistic politics”⁸¹) a response to this situation. It is through a revival of contestation (i.e., by putting a plurality of goods in contest with one another), that the culture of decadent liberalism can be reformed.

Third, and in contrast to the respectively dismissive and hopeful accounts of Nietzsche’s politics, Rosen establishes the seriousness of Nietzsche’s diagnosis of Western civilization, and speaks to his profound influence on the disposition of modern politics. By his account, the “fundamental political result of Nietzsche’s teaching” is that it issues an “appeal to the highest, most gifted human individuals to create a radically new society of artist-warriors.”⁸² The rhetorical strategy he employs in the process, a “unique mixture of frankness and ambiguity,” is the risk he takes to access these “highest” individuals.⁸³ Like Ansell-Pearson and Owen, Rosen also recognizes the problem of “nobility” that Nietzsche poses. Rather than speaking to the possibility of political pluralism though, he focuses upon the dangerous chaos elicited by the text. Nietzsche’s rhetoric casts a wide net even though it might only be aimed at a few. Rosen describes the political consequence as follows: “A radically new society requires as its presupposition the destruction of the existing society; Nietzsche succeeded in enlisting countless thousands in the ironical task of self-destruction, all in the name of a future

⁷⁹ Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist*, 86.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸¹ Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics & Modernity*, 131.

⁸² Rosen, *The Ancients and the Moderns*, 190.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

utopia.”⁸⁴ In short, Rosen’s assessment is that Nietzsche succeeds all-too-well in making the philosopher dangerous once more.

Last, in his work, Tracy B. Strong repeatedly confronts the question of Nietzsche’s politics and provides an analysis of them as based in the possibility for transfiguration or transformation.⁸⁵ Though he does not use these words himself, Strong’s approach does well acknowledging that what is “political” in Nietzsche is “cultural.” The politics of transfiguration thus are not simply an individual endeavour, but also speak to the transformative relationship between philosophy, poetry, and the political community. Specifically, Strong engages well with questions concerning Nietzsche’s understanding of the Greeks and the significance or centrality of tragic poetry to their political culture. The poetry of the tragic theatre, in his analysis, served as a communal source of authority. He writes, “It is ... a political matter when the question ‘Who am I?’ can only be answered in the context of an answer to the question ‘Who are we?’”⁸⁶ The lapse of authority is the lapse of the possibility for this kind of shared identity. Strong summarizes Nietzsche’s charge against Socrates as one where he destroys this source of identity by being unable to be part of the audience of the tragic theatre (i.e., political community). He writes in 1988: “Socrates, for instance, by his (and Euripides’) inability to be a member of an audience and by his insistence that authority be grounded in a manner transcendent to human activity, ends up destroying

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ These ideas are treated in his book-length study *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, but are also developed in articles and chapters such as “Nietzsche’s Political Aesthetics,” “Nietzsche’s political misappropriation,” and “Philosophy of the Morning.”

⁸⁶ Strong, “Nietzsche’s Political Aesthetics,” 158.

authority.”⁸⁷ And, then he comes back to this idea again in 2010: “This is the gist of Nietzsche’s accusation against Socrates: his desire for rational explanation made it impossible for him to be a member of an audience.”⁸⁸ Strong places emphasis on the idea that Nietzsche understands Socrates to be the beginning of a “redemptive” tradition. To use the “theatrical” language Strong employs, Socrates does not sit among the audience members and experience with them the senselessness and purposelessness of the suffering upon the stage of existence. Rather he begins a tradition wherein suffering is to be *redeemed* and given a purpose. Strong writes that for Nietzsche, “That the solution to the problems of the world should depend on the sudden appearance of a man who has remained totally outside the world was impossible.”⁸⁹ In this way, Strong’s analysis of Nietzsche’s politics is based in an understanding of how cultural authority is formed and how Nietzsche is responding to the history of a Western tradition that is based on the politics of redemption.

Of the above-mentioned authors, this project is perhaps closest in spirit to the pursuit of Strong. Whereas Strong places greater emphasis on Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, and its discussion of the Greeks in terms of the tradition of the tragic theatre, this project focuses on the other side of the Greek inheritance with which Nietzsche engages—Plato and his Socrates. In doing so, I seek to test the similarities and differences between Plato and Nietzsche’s projects by understanding their use of the earlier identified relational metaphors and how these metaphors relate to the

⁸⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁸⁸ Strong, “Philosophy of the Morning,” 55.

⁸⁹ Strong, “Nietzsche’s Political Aesthetics,” 166.

philosopher's interaction (and integration) in the political community. Both are aware that the possibility for philosophy and its practice is intimately connected to the political circumstances that surround it. We might consider how both are purposively ambiguous about the nature of their political theologies (i.e., as attempting to guard against dogmatic readings). In this ambiguity perhaps lies the true practice of political philosophy. Notably, each respectively conclude the sections in comparison with silence or an admission of ignorance. These admissions set the stage for further questioning and invite the questioning of others, which is ultimately what is required for the inheritance of the philosophic practice.

III. Intergenerational Anxiety

Questions of lapsed authority are certainly not new. Perhaps the best one could say of the way that they are currently expressed is that they are brought into sharper focus with the embrace of the technological imperative combined with its ideology of progress. While these questions have been engaged from various disciplines, I'll raise but three predominant examples of their treatment by philosophy, anthropology and psychology from the 20th century.

In 1958, George Grant alluded to a connection between an understanding of history as progress and a rising sense of intergenerational anxiety:

We see this in the terrible sadness about old age in this continent. The old person is coming to an end of being part of history; he has probably come to an end of his ability to shape history. Old people are no longer good administrative, economic, or sexual instruments. Therefore, old age is more and more seen as an unalleviated disaster, not only by those people who are outside of it but by those people who are old themselves. We sometimes treat old people kindly, but we patronize them. We do not see

age as that time when the eternal can be most realized, and we therefore pity the aged as coming to the end of historical existence.⁹⁰

Grant's concern was not simply that we lose respect for the elderly. It is that the shift from veneration to denigration of the elder represents a more fundamental shift in political orientation. Specifically that the natural authority of our elders, parents, and tradition diminishes while the perception of ourselves as a product of history increases. Whereas our elderly once represented the wisdom of experience, and were venerated on these grounds, Grant points to the growing perception of aging as burdensome or, put more severely, of the aged as useless. Veneration is tied to an understanding of excellence or virtue. Consequently, his remark suggests that virtue is redefined in modernity.

Such concerns are echoed by Simone de Beauvoir when she comments in her ethnological analysis of the elderly that, "the old play a less important part among those nations that are sufficiently advanced to not believe in magic and to think the oral tradition of no great consequence."⁹¹ In essence, as peoples shed their mythological identities and come to believe in a progressive sense of themselves wherein the past represents a time of ignorance, and the present, a period of growing enlightenment, the figures who embody the idea of authority in the past becomes objects of ridicule rather than respect.

Margaret Mead's landmark anthropological study *Culture and Commitment* also

⁹⁰ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 23

⁹¹ Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age*, 72.

treads in this sentiment. She writes, "From one point of view the situation in which we now find ourselves can be described as a crisis in faith, in which men, having lost their faith not only in religion but also in political ideology and in science, feel they have been deprived of every kind of security. I believe this crisis in faith can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that there are now no elders who know more than the young themselves are experiencing."⁹² Veneration, by this account, is accorded based on the authority of the educator. It is accorded based on whose knowledge can be trusted. Mead concludes her study by suggesting that the way forward might look less like a peer-to-peer world and more like a child-to-parent world. For her, there may be greater opportunity for older generations to learn from the younger, and this reversal of traditional knowledge transmission may be the better way forward rather than trying to recuperate a lost past.⁹³

Last, in 1932, Sigmund Freud published a study, *Moses and Monotheism*, the immediate aim of which was to discuss the figure of Moses in terms of the heroic archetype and relate this figure to the "origin of monotheistic religion in general."⁹⁴ While this may seem like a sharp departure from the other authors noted above, this work contains a sustained analysis of the symbolism of the father-son archetypal story and the psychological importance of this intergenerational metaphor. Importantly, Freud relates it not only to individual psychology, but also to expressions of collective

⁹² Mead, *Culture and Commitment*, 81-82.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁹⁴ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 24.

psychology in the form religion.⁹⁵ He writes of the significance of Moses, “When Moses gave to his people the conception of an Only God it was not altogether a new idea, for it meant the re-animation of primæval experience in the human family that had long ago faded from the conscience memory of mankind.”⁹⁶ The “primæval experience” is the rebellion of the sons against the father or, as Freud summarizes, “I have no qualms in saying that men have always known—in this particular way—that once upon a time they had a primæval father and killed him.”⁹⁷ Freud’s contribution, controversial as it is, is to draw attention to the narrative pattern of Abrahamic religious thought and to suggest that this pattern provides the essential groundwork for coming to know ourselves individually and collectively. Ronald Beiner summarizes Freud’s analysis in this way: “Our major challenge as individuals is to put the Oedipal Complex behind us, and the same is true of ourselves as a civilization or as a species—namely, to outgrow our collective Oedipal Complex in relation to the Divine Father, and this is precisely what the death of God represents: long-delayed adulthood.”⁹⁸ The intergenerational dynamics at play in Freud’s account turn religion into some kind of collective neurosis, a product of human psychology to be cheerfully surpassed.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Ibid., 129, 151, 160, 208.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 204.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁹⁸ Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 372.

⁹⁹ B. Strauss contrasts Freud’s psychoanalytical approach with that of Lacan. He notes that Lacan sets aside Freud’s anthropological claims concerning primæval ancestry and focuses on the symbolic importance of the father-son story in terms of the way in which it informs the development of social order, language, law and taboos. Commenting on this theory, he writes, “the infant’s admission to society and its laws comes through the symbol of the father. For the infant, the father may represent the authority that separates him from his mother’s breast and creates the rules of civilization.” See *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 22 and 27.

Taken together, these works describe the way in which the question of generational authority has been a persistent feature of cultural dialogue in the contemporary context. Grant comes closest to making the connection to Nietzsche's philosophy by emphasizing the way in which historicism factors into the shaping of these perspectives, but his analysis of historicism focuses upon its indebtedness to Marx. Shifting the perspective to Nietzsche, in 1987, Allan Bloom draws some of these threads together when he issues an indictment against Nietzsche, accusing him of the corruption of American culture:

In politics, in entertainment, in religion, everywhere, we find the language connected with Nietzsche's value revolution, a language necessitated by a new perspective on the things of most concern to us. Words such as "charisma," "life-style," "commitment," "identity," and many others, all of which can easily be traced to Nietzsche, are now practically American slang, although they, and the things to which they refer, would have been incomprehensible to our fathers, not to speak of our Founding Fathers.¹⁰⁰

Bloom places the blame upon Nietzsche. But, as will be considered here, Nietzsche places the blame upon Plato's Socrates. What is going on in this shell game of guilt? Bloom's attention to Nietzsche establishes that he should at least be understood as a central figure in this question of lapsed authority whether or not the accusation of his corruption is entirely just.

The Gap: Nietzsche's Plato & the Contest of Authority

Not unlike Freud, I stress the symbolic endurance of metaphors of ancestral

¹⁰⁰ Bloom, "How Nietzsche Conquered America," 85.

authority. And, similar to Dannhauser's analysis, I take Nietzsche's quarrel with Plato's Socrates to be a central feature of his work, but instead of describing it in terms of heroes and villains as Dannhauser does,¹⁰¹ I argue that it should be understood in terms of the son's rebellion against the father. Such a perspective is somewhat entertained by Strong when he suggests that Nietzsche's "understanding of the past [is] made in metaphors drawn from the family."¹⁰² But whereas Strong reads Nietzsche's primary engagement with the Greeks as tied to his understanding of the tragic tradition, I suggest that his primary Greek interlocutor is Plato's Socrates and that the familial metaphor is informative to understanding the political consequences of the contest that he sets up with "father" Plato.

The Process

These issues will be explored in four stages. First, I seek to identify the challenges of reading Plato and Nietzsche by consulting passages within the *Phaedrus* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that concern the role of the reader. This chapter forwards three methodological contentions: both are dialectical authors seeking dialectical readers; both present their writings in such a way as to limit the possibilities of their systematization; and last, the practice of philosophy for both involves the limits and possibilities of character formation. This methodological analysis places this study in the context of

¹⁰¹ "For Nietzsche, the quarrel with Socrates is part of a vast historical drama which he recounts and which features Socrates as the first villain and Nietzsche himself as the final hero." See Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates*, 272.

¹⁰² Strong, "Oedipus as Hero," 312.

others that engage these authors either individually or together and looks to define the idea of the practice of political philosophy according to Plato and Nietzsche. In one manner, it credits Nietzsche with reviving an interest in Platonic scholarship. His charges of Platonic dogmatism set the stage for a whole new generation of readers to query that charge and question its validity. In another way, it attempts to make clear that important differences do exist between Plato and Nietzsche's practice of political philosophy and that such differences are expressed in their writings. This understanding extends from Kaufmann's landmark study *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, which suggests that Nietzsche is a serious philosopher who partakes in the tradition of the practice as modeled by Socrates. Like Socrates, Nietzsche is concerned with examining the boundaries of human nature. Yet, I will establish that Kaufmann's apology for Nietzsche glosses the more dangerous elements of his writing. Nietzsche is concerned with new possibilities, specifically with the possibility for political action. He introduces a greater liberality, or stresses the greater potential of human convention, and in doing so, emphasizes the political or active component of the philosophic practice. I end this chapter by suggesting that a re-consideration of Plato's classical alternative offers a more prudential model because it holds to a conception of nature that acknowledges limit: "Only by becoming aware of what is beyond human mastery can we have hope."¹⁰³ The chapter, in many ways, challenges the very premise upon which Nietzsche proceeds, but it does so in order to show that his writings also create the

¹⁰³ Strauss, "Intro to Heideggerian Existentialism," 43.

possibility for this reconsideration to take place.

The project next turns to Nietzsche's *Genealogy*. It locates his use of the relational metaphors of the "ancestral" and creditors and debtors in *Genealogy II*. It shows how he uses these metaphors to tell the story of the transformation of forefathers into gods. I suggest that he does this to articulate the genealogical pathway taken by Christianity wherein divine law is established in time. Unique historical events, influenced by the presence of a singular omnipotent god, are thus reflected in political conditions and the intellectual structures that support them. Nietzsche's genealogical account of the Christian idea of sacrifice takes issue with the communal and symbolic functions of rituals that use the language of economic exchange. Like Plato, he observes the way in which a universalized notion of community, and even family,¹⁰⁴ extends from religious practice and mythology. His central concern in II.19 to II.21 is the severity of the development of our ascetic practices in light of an idea of "a *debt* that is continually growing."¹⁰⁵ This debt is not borne by a particular community, but by all of humanity. Its interest compounds with time and history to the point of "*Christianity's* stroke of genius: God sacrificing himself for the guilt of man, God himself exacting payment of himself, God as the only one who can redeem from man what has become irredeemable for man himself—the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor."¹⁰⁶ Jesus, the god-man, dies out of his love for mankind. He becomes a symbolic payment, and through this

¹⁰⁴ "Our Father who art in Heaven ..." in addition to the Adam and Eve, or the principal characters in *Genesis*, function as common ancestors (i.e., offer a mythology of a universalized genealogy).

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, II.21.

“payment” a community of equals is established. For Nietzsche, though, the acts of faith required by this community reinforce the sense of guilt the debtor must bear for the god dying on his behalf. This guilt is moralized and translated into the practices he must continue to perpetuate to seek absolution from his creditor, “the ‘father,’ the primal ancestor.”¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche identifies that the faith in this ancestral account is waning, and thus questions what will take its place.¹⁰⁸ God is dead, but is the guilt also? Ancestral authority is presented here not only as a veneer, but also as an idea that is pervasive in its integration into our psyches. Indeed, he suggests that the very idea of “political contracts” that we imagine to be free of metaphysical premises, are in fact interwoven with an idea of debt derived from this human-divine contract. In this way, Enlightenment morality is but an extension of Christian morality. It is also over-extended. If the authority that underpins the Christian account is waning, so too will the authority of the Enlightenment account lose its bearings. This moral forecast is what makes it imperative to understand the origins of ancestral authority.

The third section raises *Republic I* as a foil to Nietzsche’s account in *Genealogy II*. It questions the strange and short interaction between Socrates and Cephalus in *Republic I*. It observes the dramatic composition of Cephalus—a metic and businessman, a man garbed in religious attire but of questionable moral status, a man who carries a mythological namesake that ties him to the autochthonous account of the Athenians yet who will never gain citizenship status in the *polis* because of his foreign birth—and seeks

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., II.22.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., II.20.

to understand the content of their exchange by placing this characterization in the foreground. I argue that Plato employs the character of Cephalus as a representative of the debate concerning the revival of the ancestral constitution (*patrios politeia*) that was supposed to be enacted by the Thirty Tyrants when they assumed power in Athens at the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War. His presence at the beginning of the dialogue recalls this historical debate and the civil political warfare that pitted oligarchs against democrats. Further, this character expresses the loss of Athenian identity insofar as it had once been established upon the moral association of its autochthony and its way of life. The “good” was understood in relation to “one’s own,” and the boundaries of “one’s own” were determined by the mythological account of Athenian autochthony. Cephalus’ character demonstrates the seriousness of Plato’s task because he helps establish the weakness of the autochthonous Athenian account of themselves and of their justice. From the earliest sentences in *Republic I*, we must ask: Can justice be more than a veneer?

Additionally, the opening scene accomplishes two distinct tasks that should influence our reading and understanding of the *Republic* as a whole. First, Cephalus’ exit, and the endurance of his legacy in the room in the form of his sons, suggests that Plato is prudentially depicting a stalemate between the philosopher (Socrates) and the moral *mythos* of the city. Second, by taking note of Cephalus’ mythological namesake, and understanding this subtle reference in relation to his exchange with Socrates concerning the generation of his wealth, we see Plato emphasize the idea of cyclical pattern change in the form of intergenerational relationships. This suggests that the

study of political upheaval is also a study of the generational pattern of human interaction. Conflict is inherent in this account of human nature, peace a temporary state. Human nature is not one that is easily satisfied. Plato does not appear to diminish the human desire to intervene in this nature, though I will argue that, as with his stalemate with *mythos*, he also lays out the human limitations concerning the possibilities for intervention in this opening scene.

Indeed, like the poetic presentation of the character of Cephalus himself, I establish that Plato uses this polyphonic character to express the desirability of unity within multiplicity. That is, the very possibilities for human greatness, which he would define on the grounds of the capacity to practice political philosophy, rely on the possibility for competing conceptions of the good to be put into dialogue with one another. This chapter thus seeks to ascertain how the practice of political philosophy is depicted in the scene and how new interpretative considerations might arise from careful attention paid to Plato's Cephalus, a character containing a myriad of apparent contradictions. In this sense, the chapter seeks to both develop the truth of Nietzsche's charge against Plato, while suggesting that the opening scene might be read as a microcosm for how Plato guarded against such charges.

Last, the two authors will again be considered next to one another. In this final comparison, I seek to elaborate upon the idea of the political that emerges from their respective use of these relational metaphors. It specifically engages with Cephalus' legacy in terms of advancing the idea of taming *eros* with *techne* as well as in terms of advancing the virtue of money-making for taming the desires of the city. This

concluding section builds upon my claim in the first chapter that both authors write so as to limit the possibility of the systematization of their thought. It attempts to show the justice of Nietzsche's quarrel with Plato, while also suggesting that Plato may very well have accounted for the charges levelled against him.

Conclusion

While it may be popular to follow Bloom's analysis and suggest that the present intergenerational anxiety is the product of Nietzsche's introduction to North America, I do not cast Nietzsche as a villain.¹⁰⁹ I seek to understand him as an informant. I examine how Nietzsche's writings attempt to diagnose the condition of lapsed authority by focusing on the way he charges Plato's Socrates with creating the conditions for intergenerational injustice. By taking the Nietzschean perspective, I hope to lend a different understanding to the intergenerational politics of the present day. I aim to show how these politics are an extension of one of the most epic contests in the history of Western political thought—that of Nietzsche against Plato's Socrates. Further, to understand this contest one must use the intergenerational terms and symbols that Nietzsche uses to express it, namely that of sons and fathers, before it is possible to understand the peer-to-peer dialogue he invokes with Plato's Socrates.

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche perhaps would not object to an accusation of criminality though. See, for example, §30 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

CHAPTER ONE

Philosophy, Poetry, and Politics

It seems to me that Plato mixes together all forms of style; he is therewith in the matter of style a *first décadent*.

— Nietzsche, *Twilight of Idols*

Introduction

Writing captures and preserves. It is the product of an author and evidence of his craft.¹ It offers the potential to communicate beyond one's present context and permits authors the liberty to write with attention to posterity. It is memory inscribed in text. An author writing in this manner is aware that his words become fixed when placed upon the page. In the Platonic dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes to the young interlocutor after whom the work is named that written words lose the flexibility of oral communication.² The author cannot make in-the-moment adaptations or come to the defence of his words. The text becomes a parentless child. This issue of fixity, and the future reception of the text, appears to be of common concern to Plato and Nietzsche, who each write in a manner so as to retain the living quality of their words. This concern is expressed both in the selected form of their writings and in the use of metaphorical representation, image, ambiguity, and aporia.³

¹ "Craft" is used here to convey that intention and self-conscious knowledge are involved in the process. It also is meant to recall an example of speech that "artfully repudiates artfulness" that Plato uses in the *Protagoras*. See Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 129.

² Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275e.

³ Aporia, from Greek, literally means "without passage." It refers to an irresolvable contradiction.

Plato writes in one style.⁴ Nietzsche writes in many. Plato writes dramatic dialogues; Nietzsche writes treatises, aphorisms, and essays.⁵ Within these respective forms, each employs rhetorical devices that impede the systematic rendering of their thought.⁶ Such rhetorical devices may indeed be the way in which the parent tries to protect his child. But, what might be the purpose of these defences? Are they primarily philosophical, pedagogical, or political? And do Plato and Nietzsche use them in the same manner? In what follows, I consult a selection from Plato's *Phaedrus* along with "Of Reading and Writing" from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*⁷ as a means of examining the authors' reflections on the limitations of the written word and likewise as a means of understanding why they still ultimately chose to communicate in writing. I propose that the works, though different in form, share two dialogical functions.⁸ They each seek to turn their reader towards philosophy. The form of these works meets the task of their function by replicating the living quality of philosophic dialogue and by attempting to

⁴ Plato's letters are a notable exception to this but are excluded here on account of trying to represent the public writings of the authors. I also wish to avoid tarrying in the long-standing debate concerning their authenticity.

⁵ Alexander Nehamas accounts for Nietzsche's multiplicity of styles as a philosophic question in its own right. See *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 18-19.

⁶ This is not to claim that systematic accounts are not possible or have not been derived, but more to emphasize what appears to be the authors' self-conscious inclusion of rhetorical devices that have the express purpose of at least complicating any effort to derive a system of beliefs from the works.

⁷ The title will be shortened henceforth to "*Zarathustra*." Specific passages from Nietzsche's writings will be cited by Roman numerals followed by Arabic numerals to correspond with the chapter/major part and then sections, rather than the page number.

⁸ I am attaching the label "dialogical" to Nietzsche's writing on the premise their function rather than their explicit form.

turn their reader into an interlocutor. Likewise, they also represent the limits of writing as a *techne*,⁹ and of deriving a moral *techne* from philosophical writing, in particular.

While these dialogical aims are shared, their philosophic premises differ.

Nietzsche prioritizes the understanding of falsehood over truth: “The story of philosophy, in short, is the history of the errors and lies found necessary or useful by the titans of thinking.”¹⁰ Whereas the lack of possession of the truth is treated differently by Plato. The *Phaedrus* is a beautiful exemplar of the erotic quality of the philosophic practice. It is the love of something that is not in one’s possession. Such self-knowledge inclines one towards moderation rather than excess.

This chapter sets the stage for the readings of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* and Plato’s *Republic* that are to follow. It does so by addressing two questions: what defines dialogical writing for Plato and Nietzsche? And what approach to reading is best suited to this manner of writing? Each will be treated in turn. First, I study passages from *Phaedrus* and *Zarathustra* as a way to discuss and define dialogical writing. This involves considering this style of writing in relation to oral dialogue and questioning the extent to which both authors see themselves addressing what they characterize as deficiencies of the written word. This includes questioning whether and when a philosophic reader must “go beyond the dialogue.”¹¹ That is, I seek to address how the selected form of writing requires sensitive meditation on contextual elements, both with respect to the

⁹ *Techne* refers to “a thorough, masterful knowledge of a specific field that typically issues in a useful result, can be taught to others, and can be recognized, certified, and rewarded.” See Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom*, 1.

¹⁰ Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*, 33.

¹¹ Hyland, “Why Plato Wrote Dialogues,” 40.

author and his reader. Next, I place these considerations in the context of contemporary methodological discussions to elaborate upon the issue of where one should place emphasis when reading. The comparative advantages of an analytic or argument-focused analysis will be weighed against a hermeneutical and literary analysis.

I offer three propositions that suggest an approach sensitive to the literary qualities of the work is better suited to a dialogical form of writing. First, the primary purpose of dialogical writing is to effect introspection. That which is “extralogical” produces this effect. In this sense, the form points beyond itself.¹² Philosophy is not the product of pure rationality. Its aim is reason, but its practice is initiated by an emotional disposition. A purely analytic method may overlook these extralogical considerations. Second, I reject the notion that the writings of Plato or Nietzsche are primarily dogmatic.¹³ This is not to say that they contain no positive teaching, are not pedagogical in nature, or do not express unity of thought, but rather to emphasize the tools both authors employ to guard against the systematization of their beliefs. This places greater stress upon the number of ambiguous meanings, the use of aporia, myth, metaphor, and image. Their use of such devices is intentional and should be incorporated into an overall understanding of their projects. Last, and somewhat akin to the first point, if we place the emphasis on dialogue as a philosophical activity, then we must consider what

¹² Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy*, 4.

¹³ Particularly in reference to Plato, this claim proposes an against-the-grain reading. The tradition of political thought generally depicts Plato as the father of systematic political theory. Indeed when Nietzsche pronounces, “I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity” (*Twilight*, I.26), the reader is not incorrect in suspecting an allusion to Plato in the statement. Part of the intention of this work is to better understand the complexity of the dialogue between Nietzsche and Plato. Their common use of literary devices to impede the systematic rendering of their thought is a starting point for such an analysis.

this experience entails. For both Plato and Nietzsche, it is an activity that informs one's character and necessarily operates in relation to the political community of which one is a part. Ultimately, it is a political activity. The limits and possibilities of this character formation for both authors, particularly in reference to the presence and persistence of tradition and ancestral authority, will be maintained as a question throughout this project.

Simply stated, the intention of this chapter is to speak to the challenges of reading both of these authors and offer a way forward. A hermeneutical analysis that is sensitive to the problematic qualities of their texts (inconsistencies, absences, aporia) and attentive to the character development (in and out of the text) that they elicit, yields a richer and more textured analysis of their works, and helps inform how we understand the distinction between inherited authoritative knowledge and philosophical practice. As the analysis of *Phaedrus* and *Zarathustra* will show, both authors are seeking a dialectical reader. They are looking to retain the living quality of their words by creating conditions in which the pursuit of philosophy can be passed forth. Thus, their particular manners of writing ultimately serve a pedagogical purpose. In this way, they share a common aim. Nietzsche is indebted to Plato (and his Socrates) while remaining his most serious competitor.¹⁴

¹⁴ Nietzsche's debt to Socrates is more often discussed, as opposed to his debt to Plato. For example, Nehamas discusses Nietzsche's ambiguity towards Socrates. He contrasts his view, that Nietzsche ultimately has difficulty reconciling his debt to Plato's Socrates and that this makes his disposition towards him ultimately ambivalent, against that of Kaufmann, who argues that Nietzsche models his philosophic task after Socrates' apology, and that of Dannhauser, who suggests that "the quarrel with Socrates is part of a vast historical drama which he recounts and which features Socrates as the first villain and Nietzsche himself as the final hero." See *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 30.

Part One

1.1 *Dialogical writing*

Plato's *Phaedrus* and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* each offer reflections about the inherited written word, the role and voice of the author, and their relation to a *healthy* philosophic pursuit. They permit reflection on the relationship of this pursuit with the tradition and historical context in which it is enacted and is defined against. Their respective explorations of the written word begin with the premise of an unhealthy soul. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates encounters the young man, after whom the dialogue is titled, and is enticed out of the city with the promise of hearing a recounted speech. Socrates describes himself and Phaedrus as sick with the desire for speech.¹⁵ In Part One of *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra also observes a sickness in lovers of speeches when he indicates that another century of readers will cause the spirit to stink.¹⁶ These passages are not the only instances wherein the authors reflect on writing, however they are most informative when read next to one another because their diagnoses reveal a relationship between philosophy, the written word, the healthy disposition, and the healthy society.¹⁷ Phaedrus' illness is the result of misplaced love. It is an erotic ailment. He is drawn out of the city by the artistry of Lysias' written speech, but Socrates seeks to redirect this affection away from the words to the pursuit of wisdom. Likewise, we might imagine

¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 228a-c.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

¹⁷ Lampert's *Nietzsche's Teaching* points to the connections between *Phaedrus* and *Zarathustra* (45), as does Rosen's *The Mask of the Enlightenment* (99), though in the latter the connection is made on the basis of the chapter, "Of the Tree on the Mountainside," which follows "Of Reading and Writing." There is otherwise little scholarship regarding the connections between these two works.

that the healthy disposition of Plato's philosophic reader may also be defined in relation to the object of his affections. The readers Zarathustra chides are diagnosed with an ailment of spirit. Nietzsche does not use another character to express this illness and does not point to another text as its cause. He speaks to the unknown reader of *his* words and berates this reader. In other words, he points to us—his readers—as the infirm. We are like Phaedrus and Socrates enamoured by words on a page, but we are unlike them in that we have lost the intimacy they share with the text. Nietzsche attributes the illness of the reader to the democratization of the written word. He further mocks the indisposition of his reader by exhibiting the greater strength, courage, and stature of his voice. The polemical quality of the passage and its direct address effect a visceral response—does one flee or fight? Like Plato's Socrates, the philosophic reader is directed to an introspective analysis of his emotive response to the text. Unlike Plato's Socrates, such introspection is not in the service of love but of honour. Where Socrates seduces, Nietzsche incites. Each, however, demands an account (*logos*).

These initial observations suggest that Plato and Nietzsche appeal to their reader in different ways. This contrast is made clearer by reflecting on their use of character. With whom are we in dialogue? Plato is not present in his dialogues. There is no character named "Plato," and though it may be tempting to assume that Plato is voicing his thoughts through the character of Socrates,¹⁸ it is necessary to account for Plato's

¹⁸ This is often referred to as the "mouthpiece theory." Nails is helpful in outlining the various arguments in favour of a "mouthpiece" analysis and showing how these ultimately lead one astray from the key philosophical questions of the works. She offers an excellent example of the difficulty of this theory by reflecting on who of Jane Austen's characters might be presumed as her mouthpiece because Austen, like

indirect communication. *Zarathustra* is Nietzsche's only work wherein, like Plato, he uses a dramatic hero.¹⁹ Even with this device, Nietzsche speaks forth both directly and indirectly. At times, he emphasizes his direct communication with the reader by speaking directly to "you," or establishing camaraderie with "we." If a diagnosis is occurring, how is it occurring? And, who is it addressing?

As a starting point, the dialogical text is defined as that which issues forth a response from its reader. To achieve this effect, it must proceed under the assumption that one does not read entirely objectively.²⁰ This grants permission to the text to engage or shape one's perspective. Nussbaum describes this quality of the Platonic text in relation to the tragic models that preceded it:

We see an active on-going discussion, rather than a list of conclusions or a proclamation of received truths. Furthermore, the dialogue sets up, in its open-endedness, a similarly dialectical relation with the reader, who is invited to enter critically and actively into the give-and-take, much as a spectator of tragedy is invited to reflect (often along with the chorus) about the meaning of the events for his own system of values.²¹

Each writer appears to borrow from the theatre. Introspection is spurred when one takes seriously the questions that arise from observing the staged performance. Written works may be equally performative in this sense. Employing this same metaphor, we might

Plato, similarly mixes "biography and imagination." See "Mouthpiece Schmouthpiece" in *Who Speaks for Plato*, 15. Similarly, Rosen summarizes "Just as Homer is and is not Achilles, Odysseus, Helen and Andromache, so too Plato is and is not Socrates, Alcibiades, Protagoras, and Diotima." See *Quarrel*, 11.

¹⁹ Rosen, *Mask*, 17.

²⁰ Gadamer describes the persistence of the idea that man is historically situated and how such contextual consciousness is not something that can be alleviated to render oneself absolutely objective. He states, "Research in the human sciences cannot regard itself as in an absolute antithesis to the way in which we, as historical beings, relate to the past. At any rate, our usual relationship to the past is not characterized by distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather, we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process." See *Truth and Method*, 282.

²¹ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 126.

make one further but important distinction. For Plato, the reader can remain an audience member. He is not addressed directly. Presented with the questions of the play, he may choose to take them up or not. Mixing the metaphors of health and theatre, Plato forces the reader to self-select for treatment. But what sort of treatment is this, if not doctrinal? Plato's central character Socrates is renowned for his irony, particularly in the sense of saying less than he means.²² The Platonic dialogue is then usually an imitation of Socrates' dialectical conversations, which are often further layered by dramatic devices such as narration and memory. The reader must in some way already be predisposed to follow the path of the Socratic dialectic and already be open to the possibility that Socrates knows more than he lets on. Such is what appears to be the calmness²³ of this mode of seduction. Conversely, Nietzsche breaks the barrier of the stage and text by often addressing his reader directly: "You look up when *you* desire to be exalted. And I look down, because I am exalted."²⁴ The distance and calm of Plato's dialogues is quite unlike the immediacy and hyperbole of Nietzsche's pronouncements. We are being addressed directly. We are being called to account. Nietzsche entreats his reader not to

²² Socrates' irony is well known and it enjoys a great depth of scholarly study. Many authors have taken up the more extensive questions as to the qualities and purpose of Socrates' irony. These considerations arise in the philosophic tradition through the writings of Hegel (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato*), Nietzsche ("The Problem of Socrates" in *Twilight of the Idols*) and Kierkegaard (*The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*). More recently, debates have been informed by reactions to Vlastos' affirmation of Socrates' "complex irony" or Strauss' analysis of irony as an esoteric device. See *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 31 and *City and Man*, 51, respectively. Lane gives a fairly comprehensive overview of these arguments and the interpretative issues surrounding the presence of irony in the dialogues. Specifically she questions whether the association of the historical Socrates with irony has been overstated and whether irony should be considered essential or coterminous with the philosophical practice. See "Reconsidering Socratic Irony," 239.

²³ Nussbaum speaks of Socrates' insistence on calmly engaging the interlocutor in her analysis of Plato's *Protagoras*. See *Fragility*, 130.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* I.7; emphasis added.

imitate but to act. In this manner of direct address, readers are told that they are ill and are commanded to account for that illness.

The second marker of the dialogical function of a text is the compact use of imagery. Somewhat akin to the above description of irony, this involves allowing things to remain unsaid. It might seem contradictory to assign to Nietzsche an economic mode of expression, particularly in his hyperbolic mode, yet his use of image and aphorism exemplify this tendency. The symbolic function of this use of language²⁵ inserts pauses into the text. It slows the reader.²⁶ It creates landmarks. Commenting specifically on Nietzsche's use of the aphorism, Babich notes that the "aphorism begins historically in ... Hippocrates, that is, maxims in place of a handbook."²⁷ The physician uses them as an aid to his memory, to allow for quick recall in urgent circumstances. Their brevity makes them easy to remember, and "one is able to *get* some bit of the point, even if one finds, in retrospect that one has missed the half or more."²⁸ Such language then, provides a gateway to continued and repeated reflection. Plato does not write aphoristically, but he does use his fair share of imagery, metaphor, and myth for similar purposes. He also uses them prescriptively and in response to the needs of the interlocutors in the text and perhaps in response to those outside the text as well.

²⁵ Kofman's analysis takes this much further. She describes Nietzsche's use of metaphor in relation to the metaphysical system of understanding that he attributes to Plato. That is, this metaphysical system (and the scientific system that is erected upon it) conceals its reliance upon metaphor by seeking to falsely differentiate the conceptual from the metaphorical. See *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 13-17.

²⁶ In the Preface to *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes, "A book like this, a problem like this, is in no hurry; we both, I just as much as my book, are friends of *lento*. It is not for nothing that I have been a philologist, perhaps I am a philologist still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading: – in the end I also write slowly."

²⁷ Babich, "The Genealogy of Morals and Right Reading," 179.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

So what does it mean to write dialogically for Plato and Nietzsche? Provisionally, this manner of writing may be understood as possessing two qualities (beyond a strict analysis of its form): the ability to produce responsiveness and the compact or economical use of imagery and language. As I will elaborate in the comparison of the myth in *Phaedrus* and the metaphors in “Of Reading and Writing,” by paying attention to the devices the authors use to enable or restrict this responsiveness, it is possible to gain a better appreciation of how they perceive the interaction between the text and the conduct of philosophy.

1.2 Plato's *Phaedrus*

Near the conclusion of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates makes a distinction between the living speech and those that “remain in complete and solemn silence.”²⁹ The dual capacity of writing to speak and be silent is brought forth. The concluding exchange (274b-279c) between Socrates and Phaedrus depicts three qualities of the written form which describe its limitations and possibilities and which provide an entry point into the comparison with Nietzsche's “Of Reading and Writing.” First, the Myth of Theuth raises the idea of the written word as a reminder. Next, consideration is offered to the capacity for the speeches to “bear seed” or provide fertile ground for questioning and engagement. Last, these considerations are all made within the form of a dialogue

²⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275e.

written by Plato. The critical commentary on writing is itself contained within a written work. Taken together, these elements demonstrate Plato's dialogical writing.

Just before Phaedrus and Socrates part ways and make their way back to the city, Socrates introduces the Myth of Theuth in their concluding exchange. To this point, the speech that drew them out of the city has induced an exchange on rhetoric, love, mythology, and the nature of reason. That speech, a composition by Lysias,³⁰ concerns the relation of lovers and beloveds and offers praise to the non-lover. The non-lover in the speech is but a potential lover who offers a sober and rational account of the ways in which he could be of benefit to the beloved. The speech expresses a desire to eliminate risk and render these human affairs determinable by self-interest and probability. The relation of *eros*, *logos* and *techne* contained within the speech drives the nature and direction of the surrounding dialogue.³¹ Whereas *eros* involves risk or action into the unknown, *techne*, as an applied art, seeks to master contingency and offer a predictable outcome. *Logos*, as reflected in the written word, attempts to preserve the argument or place boundaries around it. Socrates' muse-inspired account of madness, love, and the immortality of the soul near the center of the *Phaedrus* depicts the height of tension between *eros*, *logos*, and *techne*. Here, he describes the "source of true knowledge"³² as a

³⁰ This is the same Lysias who is Cephalus' son and is also present, but silent, in *Republic I*.

³¹ The Greek terms *eros*, *logos*, and *techne* are used here to convey the following meanings: *eros* as desire, yearning or the erotic passion of love; *logos* as speech or reasoned argument; and *techne* as a "masterful knowledge," usually of a specific craft that is useful, teachable, and repeatable. See Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom*, 1. It should also be noted that *techne* (from τεκν, to generate) denotes a "bringing forth."

³² Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247d.

“place outside of heaven”³³ and contrasts the access men and gods have to this knowledge. The soul recalls this journey. Knowledge attained over its course is accessed through reminders. Socrates’ poetic image describes the madness of *eros* and the sobriety of recollection and calculation as coterminous with the philosophic pursuit. The tensions are therefore necessary; they are part of man’s nature.

With these tensions exposed, Socrates recounts for Phaedrus a tale he heard concerning Theuth, the Egyptian god of writing, numbers, and geometry. As Socrates tells it, “Theuth showed all his arts and said that they must be distributed to the rest of the Egyptians, but [the King of Egypt] Thamus asked what benefit there might be in each art.”³⁴ The myth commences with the god imparting a gift to mankind. His gift is his collection of arts. Thamus, representing the interest of his people, inquires as to the specific utility of each art. Is the art of benefit or detriment to the political community? Whether this gift is good for his people is first examined through the lens of utility. Subsequently, “Theuth explained the merits of each, Thamus censured some and praised others, depending on whether Theuth seemed to speak beautifully or not.”³⁵ In the second instance, Theuth’s capacity to produce a beautiful speech about the art determines the grounds for its acceptance or rejection. Rhetorical persuasion provides the grounds for entry. If the art was spoken of well, it was praised. If it was spoken of poorly, it was harshly criticized. When they came to the topic of writing, Theuth boasts, “this branch of learning, my king, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their

³³ Ibid., 248a.

³⁴ Ibid., 274d.

³⁵ Ibid.

memory. The drug for memory and wisdom has been discovered!"³⁶ Writing—the technical wonder—is offered as an art to cure man of his ignorance and forgetfulness. Thamus replies prudentially. He responds to “the greatest of technicians,” Theuth, by indicating that the god has misrepresented this art as a result of his fondness for it.³⁷

Theuth’s gift of the written word is an “apparent, not a true wisdom.”³⁸ Thamus argues,

For this will produce a forgetting in the souls of those who learn these letters as they fail to exercise their memory, because those who put trust in writing recollect from the outside with foreign signs, rather than themselves recollecting from within by themselves.³⁹

A distinction is made between the inner (*eso*) and the outer (*exo*). As Nietzsche describes, “the exoteric approach comes from the outside and sees, estimates, measures and judges from the outside, not the inside.”⁴⁰ The written word can function as a prompt or reminder but is insufficient as a means to wisdom on its own. The myth is an appropriate choice for Phaedrus. His love of the written word set the dialogue in motion. The myth, intended as a corrective, seeks to redirect the object of Phaedrus’ affections. Wisdom and not words should be the object of his pursuit. Like Theuth’s overabundant love of his progeny, Phaedrus’ vision is obscured because of a misdirected love.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 275a.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, II.30.

Logos needs to question itself to “reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and the unjust.”⁴¹ If writing captures discourse or preserves the argument, to what extent can the pronouncement open itself to questioning? Following the Myth of Theuth, Socrates discusses two kinds of speeches. The first is described as “analogous to painting.”⁴² The written words of this speech “signify only one thing, and always the same thing.”⁴³ Further, it has “no idea to whom it should speak and to whom it shouldn’t.”⁴⁴ In contrast, the second kind of speech is, “living and ensouled.”⁴⁵ The implication is that this kind of speech is spoken. Socrates continues to distinguish between the two. He indicates that the living speech is “written with knowledge in the soul of one who understands...it knows when and to whom it should speak, and when and to whom it shouldn’t.”⁴⁶ A living dialogue possesses a greater capacity to respond to the individual needs of its interlocutor. It can be custom fit. Beyond the depiction of the form of the speeches, the division of the two types also concerns the status of knowledge and one’s account of one’s knowledge. In the manner in which they are presented, the second speech—the living speech—appears as the only option wherein a knowledge claim rightly exists. In the first instance, the teaching or knowledge in the speech is shown to be subject to ill treatment. It needs its creator to defend its original intent. In the second instance, the speech is animated and responsive. It is not an undefended

⁴¹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, I.ii.1253a14-15.

⁴² Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275e.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 276a.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

relic, but a discourse in motion. Phaedrus introduces a definitive distinction between the two types of speech when he paraphrases Socrates' explanation of the living speech: "you are referring to the speech of the person who knows, a living speech and ensouled, the written version of which would justly be called the image."⁴⁷ Here the distinction between speaking and writing is made explicit. The written word is depicted as but an image of the oral conversation. The implication of this division is that a speech of "written knowledge in the soul" is only possible to convey orally. Education, in this first stage of division, privileges listening over seeing, or listeners over readers.

Though Socrates first affirms Phaedrus' manner of categorizing the two speeches, a third category of speech later arises. Written speeches are subdivided. There are those that are composed with or without art.⁴⁸ The subdivision is anticipated by a discussion of the possibility for fertile speech. Specifically, the image of a farmer employing his art to sow seeds in the proper soil is used to speak to the conditions for education and the means by which education can take place. Socrates describes this philosophic farmer as engaged in the practice both for his own sake and for the sake of others:

But he sows his gardens of written words, it seems, in the joy of play and he will write, whenever he does write, to build up a treasure trove of reminders both for himself in case he reaches forgetful old age and for all who walk down the same path, and he'll take pleasure in watching the tender shoots in the garden grow.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 277b.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 276d.

The written words are signposts that stand out along the way for those who follow the philosophic farmer's path. Fertile discourse, or writing imbued with life, relates to the condition of the philosophic pursuit insofar as it can only ever attain partial knowledge of the whole. As such, the pursuit seeks interlocutors with whom the endeavour can be engaged. In the knowledge of one's ignorance, the pursuer or lover of wisdom must be both teacher and student. The practice, of which the written dialogue is an image, is the dialectical art.⁵⁰ Conferring the title of art or *techné* to this practice reinforces its knowledge claim. It implies that knowledge of the art can be taught or passed forth, though the teaching itself can never be complete. Philosophic education is possible, if limited. Speeches imbued with art "are not fruitless but bear seed from which other speeches, planted in other fields, have the means to pass this seed on, forever immortal."⁵¹ Artful speech is not able to give a full account, but it can create the conditions for the provision of partial accounts. Further, it can lay a trail of reminders⁵² for its author or his reader whose possession of knowledge is limited by his memory. Knowledge is an intergenerational pursuit. No one person (or generation) is wise, but the aim and collective pursuit remains valid and choice-worthy over time.

While the written word is still an image of "living, breathing discourse," Plato still chose to create these images.⁵³ The author is ever-present in the backdrop, yet never speaks in his own voice. So what is the relationship between the author and reader in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 276e.

⁵¹ Ibid., 277a.

⁵² In this way Plato indicates that, "A reminder of real philosophical searching, even if it is only that, can still be valuable." See Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 126.

⁵³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276a.

the form of the written dialogue? The reader is not spoken to directly. His role is not scripted. In fact, the discourse proceeds as a transcript of a conversation long past. The reader is an onlooker, not a participant. Yet the dramatic form of the dialogue captures decisions, actions, and choices. Pauses, silences, pronouncements, and exhortations mark a pathway. It creates the conditions for speech that “knows when and to whom it should speak, and when and to whom it shouldn’t.”⁵⁴ The text permits itself to be questioned, but it is not left without defences. In this sense, the reader is entreated to be a participant, albeit one that must approach the text with humility that recognizes one’s lack of knowledge, and courage that accepts the open-ended nature of the pursuit. The dialectical art is passed forth on these grounds. It needs to be passed forth because it is incomplete, because it is human. As depicted in the central myth of the immortal soul, the philosophic pursuit seeks knowledge that is stable and constant.⁵⁵ The preservation of *logos* in writing mirrors this desire for constancy, yet the erotic nature of the pursuit must keep the dialogue in motion. Thus, Plato describes the limitations and possibilities of writing in relation to the philosophic pursuit in the voices of Theuth, Thamus, Socrates, and Phaedrus.

Before returning to the city, Plato’s Socrates prescribes a course of action for Phaedrus that preserves this tension. Like Thamus’ remarks in reference to the art of writing and the benefits and detriments to the regime, Socrates applies this same caution at the level of the individual. The young man must heed the warning of Thamus and not

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 245c-248c.

imagine that the written word can cure ignorance and forgetting. It should not be mistaken for wisdom. In this manner, Socrates requests prudential judgment and moderation of Phaedrus in the attempt to direct the young man's desires towards philosophy. Politically, the philosopher is shown as providing responsible or reasonable guidance. The artistry of the philosopher is revealed in the capacity to direct or inform *eros*, in his defence of philosophy as a means to this direction, and in his creation of the conditions for the pursuit to persist.

1.3 Nietzsche's Zarathustra

In "The Problem of Socrates," Nietzsche questions the ability of dialectical art to create the conditions of living speech. He states, "With Socrates Greek taste undergoes a change in favour of dialectics: what is really happening when that happens? It is above all the defeat of a *nobler* taste; with dialectics the rabble gets on top."⁵⁶ Considered in another manner, he accuses Socrates' dialectics of becoming a true *techne*, a useful art. It obtains this credential by way of Plato's artistry. Philosophic knowledge is democratized. Theuth's gift of writing—the drug for memory and wisdom—renders discourse, written or otherwise, infertile. Order is imposed over freedom; unity over chaos. Such is the nature of the accusation against Plato, the author. In short, Nietzsche accuses him of philosophical tyranny, of legislating himself as philosopher king.⁵⁷ And,

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, II.5.

⁵⁷ Zuckert expands on Nietzsche's re-reading of Plato in *Post-Modern Platos*. Here, a clear case is made that Nietzsche viewed Plato as having tyrannical ambitions and saw his writings as creating the conditions

as the founder or originator of the “Western tradition,” he accuses him of sowing the seeds of its nihilism.

The following analysis of Nietzsche’s “Of Reading and Writing” seeks to test the honesty of these accusations. It will suggest that Nietzsche’s relationship to Plato’s Socrates is more ambiguous than it might appear. In many ways, Nietzsche remains indebted to him. Both take the soul and its education as the site of political reform. The philosophic “turn” is not only an exercise in introspection, but it also serves the practical and political end of shaping moral character. Both rely on a dialogical quality in their writings to effect such changes. And both endeavour to defend the nobility of the philosophic life. Socrates, the rabble-rouser, the gadfly, the playful “buffoon” who gets himself taken seriously,⁵⁸ thus remains informative to the type of dialogue that Nietzsche effects with his reader. The dialogical quality of Nietzsche’s work partakes in the same system that he writes against.

“Of Reading and Writing” draws out three considerations regarding the dialogical quality of Nietzsche’s writing. First, Zarathustra makes a distinction between readers (lovers of text) and thinkers. Next, in a description of esoteric writing, he repositions the perspectival axis. Whereas the description of foreground and background (horizontal perspective) is commonly applied to denote the layered dimensions of the text, Zarathustra describes a vertical perspective. He locates the esoteric teaching in the highest heights. Last, he expands on the nature of love as it

both politically and philosophically to support such an objective. In other words, the philosopher is a moral legislator.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, II.5.

relates to the philosophic pursuit, a pursuit to which he is trying to attract future philosophers. Taken together, these considerations support the conclusion that Nietzsche appropriates the style he locates in Plato to renew the philosophic pursuit, but he does this by announcing that this is in fact what he is doing. He pronounces his “secret.” In doing so, he shares Plato’s judgment that philosophy is a way of life and the highest pursuit. But more fundamentally, he calls attention to the function of art in the pursuit of knowledge. “Of Reading and Writing” offers an access point to each of these observations.

In one manner, “Of Reading and Writing” rests comfortably among the dramatic action of the narrative. Zarathustra has come down from his cave on the mountain and has spoken to the townspeople. He gained his first disciple in the figure of the tightrope walker who falls to his death when a buffoon in motley disturbs the tension in his rope. He then leaves the town with the corpse of the tightrope walker and gives him a grave in a hollow tree. The Prologue ends with the recognition that he cannot keep company with the dead; he needs the companionship of creators. Part One then turns to the process of seeking creators and contains a series of speeches to accomplish this objective. The section ends with Zarathustra taking leave of his new disciples. He asks them to lose him and find themselves but promises to return again. Part One can be said to concern the formative power of speech, its educative capacity, and its seductive qualities.

“Of Reading and Writing” is the seventh discourse of Part One. Its title suggests that its primary concerns should be the relationship between the reader and writer and the respective actions of reading and writing. The chapter bears this out, despite only

referring to “reading,” “writing,” “the reader” or “that which is written” ten times in the first eight lines of a thirty-seven line passage. Put in another manner, only the first twenty percent of the chapter treats reading and writing explicitly. Further, to this point in the narrative, Zarathustra has only ever communicated orally with his followers. “Of Reading and Writing,” breaks the barrier of the narrative within the broader scale of the work and within the chapter itself. Nietzsche, rather than his Zarathustra, speaks to the reader directly. This schism invites the reader to question his engagement with the text. It probes after the “reading idler.”⁵⁹ It also repositions the reader as a potential Zarathustrian student. That is, it calls attention to the potential for philosophic education to be offered by way of the text.

The chapter begins, “Of all writings I love only that which is written with blood. Write with blood: and you will discover that blood is spirit.”⁶⁰ Not all writings are the same. Whereas in the *Phaedrus* writings were divided between those composed with and without art, here a more visceral categorization is offered. Two categories are created: those written with blood and those not. “Blood,” Zarathustra describes, “is spirit.”⁶¹ Yet spirit is described as undergoing a change: “once spirit was God, then it became man, and now it is even becoming a mob.”⁶² Spirit, once divine, then embodied, is now democratic. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is playfully Hegelian in this description. Blood/spirit is made manifest in history. The relationship of the written word to

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

philosophy and knowledge appears more clearly when placed next to the earlier depiction offered in the *Phaedrus*. It will be recalled that writing imbued with life is defined by its capacity to overcome the limitation of addressing everyone. Further, artful writing is determined in relation to knowledge of the “truth about each of the things he speaks and writes about.”⁶³ Writing artfully acknowledges different soul types and does not permit everyone equal access to the truth contained in the writing. Such speech resembles oral discourse in its ability to discern its audience. Blood, in Zarathustra’s image, appears to take the place of truth in the Platonic depiction. Blood as knowledge/truth is embodied. In other words, it can be made manifest. The democratization of knowledge, or the project of the 18th century Enlightenment, sought such embodiment. In doing so, it deemed knowledge a universal good that should be accessible to all and opposed the rank ordering of human beings. Against such a setting, Zarathustra laments, “that everyone can learn to read will ruin in the long run not only writing, but thinking too.”⁶⁴ The danger expressed here may be read in at least two manners. Either greater literacy brings the practice of esotericism to light and to the masses, such that secret teachings are widely exposed. Or readers take Theuth’s gift of writing at face value as a drug for memory and wisdom and cease to be participants with the written word. Charmed by the technical wonder they cease thinking.

⁶³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 277b.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

Zarathustra continues, “he who writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read, he wants to be learned by heart.”⁶⁵ Memory, knowledge, and the written word appear together once more. Whereas Socrates turns Phaedrus away from his attempt to commit Lysias’ speech to memory, Zarathustra beseeches his followers to learn by heart. Yet, Zarathustra qualifies his statement by indicating that he “does not want to be read.”⁶⁶ Like Socrates, he points to the lived pursuit of knowledge or philosophy as a way of life. Insofar as embodied truth is “written with blood,” the call to “be learned by heart” is not a call to readers, but a call to living learners to embody the same truth that Zarathustra embodies. “Aphorism” comes from the Greek verb *aphorizein*, which means “to define.” Aphoristic statements relate to the extent to which an element of truth is captured and defined. Those who adopt Zarathustra’s call to learn by heart are set upon a path wherein the truth of the aphorism is gained in the lived and active pursuit. In this way, they come to possess the truth claim of the aphorism as their own. As Lampert describes, “in the effort of understanding, intimacy is established; the understanding reader becomes an accomplice in the things understood by sharing in their discovery.”⁶⁷ The aphorism is then a tool that filters accomplices in the pursuit of wisdom. It grants and restricts access. As *Beyond Good and Evil* §30 states, “our highest insights must—and should—sound like follies and sometimes like crimes when they are heard without permission by those who are not predisposed and predestined for them.” Aphorisms attract and repulse. They sort.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching*, 45.

Baiting the pride of his potential followers, Zarathustra provides an image of the aphoristic form. He indicates that “aphorisms should be peaks, and those to whom they are spoken should be big and tall of stature.”⁶⁸ They are for giants among men. By naming aphorisms the highest peaks, he calls out to the boldest and most daring. As with the earlier depiction of the aphorism as a tool for attraction and repulsion, the imagery of mountain heights seeks to distinguish between those with and without the desire to climb. Attraction occurs at the level of pride and envy. Zarathustra depicts his own courage as so exceptional that it “wants to laugh.”⁶⁹ Such pronouncements tempt the impetuous and headstrong—the men likely to become warriors. As a result, an eristic or combative ascent is alluded to, in place of an erotic or Socratic ascent.

Whereas a reader’s engagement with a text is usually described from a horizontal perspective (foreground and background), Zarathustra describes a distinctly vertical perspective.⁷⁰ The layers of a written work are typically understood in relation to the idea of visual depth, but here the depth of near and far is rearticulated as high and low. The esoteric is not in the background but at the height of mountain peaks.

Similarly, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche makes a distinction between the esoteric and exoteric by stating, “the exoteric approach sees things from below, the esoteric looks

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Hutter also notes Nietzsche’s vertical emphasis: “[his writing] represents a departure from the distinction [between esoteric and exoteric] as it is inherited from virtually every religious and philosophical tradition. Usually the focus is on a line drawn between an inside and an outside.” See Hutter, “Nietzsche’s ‘Doctrine,’” 53. The distinctly vertical perspective may also be intended to purposively recall what Heidegger described as the “formal structure of Platonism” the “above and below.” See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 201.

down from above.”⁷¹ Inner and outer are determined in relation to upper and lower. This repositioning accomplishes three related tasks. First, it permits the comparison with man’s nature as understood as that in-between a beast and a god. Second, in the selected imagery of mountain peaks, man’s highest knowledge is located in this world and described as of this world. Günzel elaborates on this point, “The peak of a mountain is in no way a godlike viewpoint, but just a protrusion of the earth from which a certain surrounding can be observed. Like the path of the bird’s flight, the sum of all peaks would constitute the addition of particular viewpoints from certain heights.”⁷² Last, the high and low or noble and base are retained along a vertical axis, though the virtues ascribed to the high are redefined in relation to the courage of the bird’s eye perspective.

In the Prologue, Zarathustra had described man horizontally as “a rope, fastened between animal and Superman—a rope over an abyss.”⁷³ In “Of Reading and Writing,” he also remarks on a horizontal route. He describes the shortest route in the mountains as “from peak to peak,” but such a route is limited to those with long legs.⁷⁴ A long-legged man replaces the rope from the earlier image as a way to cross the chasm. Instead of employing an image that represents the tension of the metaxical or in-between existence of man, Zarathustra here employs an image of a god-like man.⁷⁵ Such a titanic

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, II.30.

⁷² Günzel, “Nietzsche’s Geophilosophy,” 89.

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I.7.

⁷⁵ The status of man as existing in the in-between persists here, though in the image man is juxtaposed with gods rather than beasts. This metaxical state is important as it informs the poetic and legislative capacity of man. As Rosen notes, “the law-giving function of the philosopher is possible because man is the not-yet-complete animal; this is a corollary to the pervasive thesis that creation is destruction.” See *Ancients*, 196.

entity is able to transgress the natural barriers of the mountain range with ease. The tension of the earlier image is not eliminated by this replacement; it is transposed into the reader. It demands that the reader provide an account of himself next to that giant of a man. It forces an upward glance. It turns the eye. In demanding that “those to whom [aphorisms] are spoken should be big and tall of stature,” Zarathustra provides a measure and demands that the reader account for himself on the basis of that measure.⁷⁶ This new scale internalizes the outward image of the tightrope provided from the Prologue. It is an inward account prompted by an upward glance.

Mountain peaks are the highest points of natural elevation. They are of this world and formed by this world. That aphorisms “should be peaks,” and such peaks describe the height of knowledge, restrains a desire to transcend that height in a search of otherworldly knowledge. It defines knowledge as part of this world and formed in the world. This depiction of knowledge stands against the location of knowledge in the *Phaedrus* as from a “place outside of heaven.”⁷⁷ Zuckert describes this in terms of Nietzsche’s reading of Plato:

Nietzsche’s reinterpretation of Platonic philosophy brings out the affirmative conclusion of his own reinterpretation of Western philosophy and makes it more concrete. If there is no incorporeal, eternal, unchanging “truth,” all meaning, wholeness, or completeness must assume a particular, emphatically corporeal and historical form: That is, it occurs and can only occur in an individual human being.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

⁷⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 248a.

⁷⁸ Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, 10-11.

The focus on the individual and particular in place of the universal and eternal is reflected in the character of aphoristic knowledge itself. It opens itself to individual interpretation. It permits the reader to claim the truth of the aphorism as his own, when in the process of interpretation he “discovers” the author’s intent. Truth is adopted. More specifically, it is also created and legislated. It becomes historical.

Zarathustra now begins speaking directly to the reader by shifting to the pronoun “you.” Reinforcing the sense that he is looking down⁷⁹ from above, he states, “You look up when you desire to be exalted. And I look down, because I am exalted. Who among you can at the same time laugh and be exalted.”⁸⁰ To exalt elevates. It makes noble. Noble and base are placed along the vertical axis. Zarathustra defines himself as noble and extends this invitation to those who “can at the same time laugh and be exalted.” He positions himself “upon the highest mountains” or at the height of the aphorism.⁸¹ Read in conjunction with the statement in *Beyond Good and Evil* §30 regarding esotericism and exotericism, that the esoteric looks down and the exoteric sees things from below, Zarathustra’s depiction of exaltation implies that the conditions of esoteric access are determined on the basis of a comedic spirit.⁸² In other words, a

⁷⁹ Rosen remarks that *Zarathustra’s* peculiar style, “a cross between two species of Oriental writings: revelations of a prophet and adventure stories in the form of parables,” has implications with respect to its message. By speaking through Zarathustra, a Persian prophet, “Nietzsche claims to view Western civilization from an external and higher perspective.” See *Mask*, 8. This outsider’s perspective is reflected in the imagery Zarathustra employs in “Of Reading and Writing” and is explicit in the sense of him looking down upon the world.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² One might conceive of the difference between comedy and tragedy in this fashion as well. Comedy looks down from on high, whereas tragedy looks up from below.

challenge is laid out to the prideful to overcome the perspective from below and gain the perspective from above. Thomas Pangle elaborates:

What is more, the noble or beautiful can no longer be conceived to be a participation in or emanation from some "idea of the noble" or some "idea of reason", or some Godhead before which we are called upon to subordinate or sacrifice all our "needs". The noble always has its ground in a *human* need, a need for or belonging to the noble.⁸³

The language Zarathustra employs in reference to himself and in praise of the aphoristic form of writing places his follower/reader in the position of justifying his place among the noble. Like the masks of Socrates, Zarathustra "sows disquiet in the soul of the reader, leading it to a heightening of consciousness."⁸⁴ Unlike this Platonic pedagogical tool though, he does not ironically feign ignorance. Instead, he flaunts and makes envious. He sets out the measure, the highest standard, and demands an account of how one measures next to it. Correspondingly, Nietzsche describes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "there is an *instinct for rank* which, more than anything else, is a sign of a *high rank*; there is a delight in the nuances of reverence that allows us to infer noble origin and habits."⁸⁵ The esoteric, the highest, is something to strive after, and such striving is portrayed as the most noble pursuit. This ascension is a self-overcoming.

The ascension from low to high calls to mind Platonic descriptions of the erotic ascent.⁸⁶ In this sense it also recalls the only art form to which Socrates claimed expertise:

⁸³ Pangle, "The 'Warrior Spirit'," 155.

⁸⁴ Hadot, *Philosophy*, 149.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, IX.263.

⁸⁶ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 248d-249d; *Symposium*, 210b-211e.

ta erotica.⁸⁷ For Socrates, there is a “goal of Loving,” or an object to which the pursuit is directed.⁸⁸ The lover’s goal is wisdom. “Of Reading and Writing” reverses this role of the lover. Zarathustra declares, “Untroubled, scornful, outrageous—that is how wisdom wants us to be: she is a woman and never loves anyone but a warrior.”⁸⁹ Wisdom loves and is not simply the object of love. In making this proclamation, Zarathustra once again agitates and appeals to pride or egoism of man. He suggests that the courtship of wisdom to this point has been misguided.⁹⁰ Implicit in these claims is the idea that education or reform of *eros* or love may not be the proper approach of soulcraft.⁹¹ Zarathustra describes the status quo: “we love life, not because we are used to living but because we are used to loving.”⁹² His approach in this chapter—to induce courage—partakes in the previously described ascension of overcoming. Here, one must turn inwards to self-assess whether one possesses the qualities desired by Wisdom. In making this inwards turn, a different animating factor is described. The striving of the

⁸⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 257a.

⁸⁸ Plato, *Symposium*, 210e.

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

⁹⁰ The Preface of *Beyond Good and Evil* should be considered in conjunction with this depiction of wisdom as a woman. Specifically, the question is posed there if “there are not grounds for suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women?” This passage also recalls Machiavelli’s characterization of Nature (*fortuna*) as a woman, wherein he judges that “it is better to be impetuous than cautious” and “she is friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity.” See *Prince*, XXV. Like the repositioning towards Nature suggested in Machiavelli, Nietzsche’s metaphor is suggestive of a new philosophic enterprise. Such an enterprise requires the youthful spirit of the bold and impetuous and suggests that the current spirit of the pursuit has become “late born” and overly prudent. The fact that the characterization of the pursuit occurs within a chapter on reading and writing is revealing of a dual dynamic in Nietzsche’s rhetoric. It pronounces itself to be esoteric in the midst of an incitement to action.

⁹¹ In “On the Prejudices of Philosophers” Nietzsche writes, “I do not believe that a ‘drive to knowledge’ is the father of philosophy; but rather that another drive has, here as elsewhere, employed understanding (and misunderstanding) as a mere instrument.” See *Beyond*, I.6.

⁹² Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

ascension is not labelled on the basis of a lack and a desire to fulfill that lack, as in Socrates' erotic knowledge of his lack of wisdom.⁹³ Rather, striving is described in terms of superiority, a display of strength, and the imposition of will. The inwards turn is part of a process of willing oneself or self-making. Wisdom loves the one who is "untroubled, scornful, outrageous." Zarathustra is providing a benchmark, a portrayal of wisdom's beloved. Such a benchmark stands as the example of wisdom gained through living and willing. Strength, and its assertion, is placed in dialogue with the philosophic pursuit. This section can be described as laying the preparatory ground for the further elaboration of "will to power"⁹⁴ that follows later in the narrative.

The balance of "Of Reading and Writing" adds dimension to the previously articulated vertical perspective by speaking in terms of mass, or heaviness and lightness. Zarathustra questions poetically, "What have we in common with the rosebud, which trembles because a drop of dew is lying upon it?"⁹⁵ Life is weighty. But Zarathustra reminds his followers to "not pretend to be so tender."⁹⁶ Burden is inherent. In using the language of weight, "Of Reading and Writing" recalls the capacity of the written word to capture discourse or to give form to the spoken word. Again, the nature of the philosophic pursuit as seeking truth that is stable and constant and its attempt to

⁹³ Cooper examines the distinctions and commonalities between the Platonic notion of *eros* and the Nietzschean notion of will to power and proposes that each is a central educative tool. This suggestion is borne out in the idea that these notions are used to define the definitive psychic force that then provides the basis to assess "high and healthy and low and sick" by the manner in which the force manifests in the individual. See *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche*, 196.

⁹⁴ Preliminarily, "will to power" is understood as encompassing the drive expressed in §13 of "On the Prejudices of Philosophers" in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength—life itself is *will to power*."

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

nominalize such truth in the form of writing, which itself is stable and constant is drawn out in this depiction of weight and mass. Writing, insofar as it determines boundaries, creates weight.

In *Zarathustra's* first reference to "will to power" from "Of the Thousand and One Goals," he states, "A table of values hangs over every people. Behold, it is the table of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power."⁹⁷ The "table of values" is a written product, a piece of philosophic-poetic-political legislation. Philosophy, here, is concerned with moral phenomena. As these passages from *Zarathustra* suggest, Nietzsche's concern is with self-legislation of morality. Consequently, this articulation of the drive or motivating factor of the philosophic pursuit questions the characterization of the pursuit as driven by love and suggests that it is actually driven by will. Rosen elaborates on this implication in Nietzsche: "philosophy is the will to power at both the conscious and the unconscious levels. All values, old as well as new, have been created by fiat—let it be so!—and hence by the conscious intention of the philosopher."⁹⁸ The philosopher is a legislator, a poet, and a master rhetorician. Weight or gravity is the expression of the order of these values imposed over freedom. Zarathustra's "light, foolish, dainty" language is then a playful call to arms against the "serious, thorough, profound, solemn" Spirit of Gravity.⁹⁹ In the guise of a comedic warrior, he declares, "One does not kill by anger but by laughter. Come, let us kill the Spirit of Gravity!"¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.15.

⁹⁸ Rosen, *Ancients*, 216.

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

The tragic weight is treated with comic levity. The creation of fertile ground for philosophy concerns the possibility for such poetic reformation. "Of Reading and Writing" considers the groundwork for the reintroduction of the lightness of a musical or lyrical quality. The playful tones of this passage though should also be considered with some seriousness to the extent that creative capacity is shown as reliant upon a coming battle for which these warriors will be required.¹⁰¹

Insofar as "Of Reading and Writing" is a commentary on the form of Nietzsche's approach, it also provides an access point to understanding the substance of his work. This analysis focused on three primary observations: the distinction between readers (lovers of text) and thinkers, the repositioning of the esoteric perspectival axis, and the rearticulation of the philosophic pursuit as playful courageousness. Each of these observations helps define the nature of Nietzsche's living speech. In essence, the living speech is defined by its use of concise and precise language and imagery to turn the reader inwards. In this manner, it offers a model of the highest heights and demands that its participant self-legislate. The text is open to questioning, but, more importantly, it directs the reader to question and reform himself. It performs a philosophic function in the sense that it creates the conditions for an inwards turn.

The qualities of the living speech in Plato and Nietzsche bear some resemblance to one another. "Of Reading and Writing" departs though from the shared notions of

¹⁰¹ Rosen comments on the dual quality of Nietzsche's writings: "All fundamental ambiguities in Nietzsche's writings stem from his efforts to balance the destructive and liberating aspects of his central vision by means of a double rhetoric, Nietzsche destroys in order to create; the problem is that he must destroy those whom he wishes to persuade that they are creators." See *Mask*, xiv.

living speech in its treatment of self-knowledge as the product of art. This inwards turn sees man as a product of art. Self-understanding would then entail one making and willing oneself. “Of Reading and Writing” is a starting point towards an understanding of the new practice of philosophy as an artistic endeavour. To quote Nehamas at length:

Nietzsche exemplifies through his own writings one way in which one individual may have succeeded in fashioning itself—an individual, moreover, who, though beyond morality, is not morally objectionable. This individual is none other than Nietzsche himself, who is a creature of his own texts. This character does not provide a model for imitation, since he consists essentially of the specific actions—that is, of the specific writings—that make him up, and which only he could write. To imitate him directly would produce a caricature, or at best a copy—something which in either case is not an individual. To imitate him properly would produce a creation which, making use of everything that properly belongs to oneself, would also be perfectly one’s own—something which is no longer an imitation.

Nietzsche’s effort to create an artwork out of himself, a literary character who is a philosopher, is then also his effort to offer a positive view without falling back into the dogmatic tradition he so distrusted and from which he may never have been sure he escaped. His aestheticism is, therefore, the other side of his perspectivism.¹⁰²

Part Two

1.4 Analytics and Hermeneutics

The preceding examination of the *Phaedrus* and “Of Reading and Writing” sought to locate within the author’s own accounts how they understood the limits and potential of dialogical writing and its relationship to philosophical practice. Each speaks to the deficiencies of the written word, particularly as it concerns the reader’s

¹⁰² Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 8.

susceptibility to mistake the author's words for wisdom. Wisdom does not accrue, like books on library shelves. Nussbaum elaborates the Socratic side of the argument:

Real philosophy by contrast, as Socrates saw it, is each person's committed search for wisdom, where what matters is not just the acceptance of certain conclusions, but also the following out of a certain path to them; not just correct content, but content achieved as the result of real understanding and self-understanding. Books are not this search and do not impart this self-understanding.¹⁰³

By writing dialogues, Plato guards against the persistence of this confusion. He imparts a pathway for a reader to follow, and a central character for a reader to study, but allows for the persistence of devices such as myth and memory to complement and complicate the pathway. By writing in multiple formats, Nietzsche also guards against this confusion. Yet the confusion he writes against extends beyond the mistaking of text for wisdom and includes the historicity of texts.¹⁰⁴ Does wisdom accrue over time? A text is a record of knowledge. If knowledge can be recorded, reproduced, and extended in time, can it not be collected, distributed, and disseminated? The text not only captures one memory but many, and if it can do this, can it not *progress* and become not only the memory of one person, but also of a whole people—a *civilization*? If wisdom is understood as complete knowledge, does this mean that it has an origin and thereby an end? These questions point to the extent to which philosophy, as a search for wisdom, becomes a *textual* tradition and likewise becomes historical. Theuth's boast that "The

¹⁰³ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 125-6.

¹⁰⁴ This observation is largely made in reference to Nietzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*.

drug for memory and wisdom has been discovered"¹⁰⁵ takes on additional meaning with this historical consciousness. However, like the books it consists of, history does not impart self-understanding. With this dimension added to the fray, Nietzsche provides Zarathustra (and in other works, himself) to the reader as a character study. He writes him as Plato wrote Socrates, as a new dramatic hero. In their own way, each offers a starting point to consider the distinction between the practice of the philosopher and that of a tradition that imparts knowledge onto its inheritors. This starting point is crucial for understanding the treatment of ancestral authority as it is expressed in the idea of inherited knowledge in Plato's *Republic I* and Nietzsche's *Genealogy II*.

The question remains: What approach to reading is best suited to a dialogical style of writing? And further, how does one extract wisdom from a text that is written to guard against this error? The question—how are we to read?— is a question about what it means to practice philosophy. Is it possible to treat the text in a technical manner yet appreciate its resistance to the imposition of a system? At the same time, is it possible to wander in the depths of textual ambiguity without being drawn to the opposite conclusion of incoherence or absurdity? What does the dialogical quality of Plato and Nietzsche's works imply for their reader? The direct answer to these questions is that it requires the reader to participate in the dialogue and become an interlocutor. It requires that one appreciate the pathway and the process of questioning and not mistake the text, or the collection of texts over the course of time, as wisdom. The process or practice

¹⁰⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274d.

necessarily relates to a whole or, if one insists, a system. But it operates on the premise that philosophy is truly a love of wisdom. In loving wisdom, one does not possess it. Thereby the philosopher is limited to human wisdom—the knowledge of one’s ignorance. The writings of Nietzsche and Plato draw one into this philosophical practice by evoking these questions and inviting their readers to reflect upon the emotional disposition that is enlivened when confronted with the limits of human knowledge.

Nietzsche might be credited with drawing out these issues for the interpretation of Plato. Indeed, reading Plato alongside Nietzsche requires sensitivity to the interpretative approaches that have been shaped by the postmodernism the latter inspired.¹⁰⁶ The modern methodological debate contends both with the traditional account of Plato and with the possibility that Nietzsche radically re-interprets Plato and his Socrates.¹⁰⁷ In this latter reading, he reconsiders how the limits to human reason

¹⁰⁶ Loosely cast, the postmodernist approaches are labelled “Continental” to contrast them from the generally more analytic or argument-focused approach of the “Anglo-American” schools. “Continental” predominately captures the French and German responses to Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche and Plato. Apart from Nietzsche, Heidegger is the intellectual figure who looms in the background of the “methodological” divide. In France, as Leonard describes, the works of Jean-Pierre Vernant, Claude Lévis-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray, and Jacques Derrida participate in a return to “the Greeks” as part of the reconsideration of origins or genealogy that begins in Nietzsche. See *Athens in Paris* 3; 6. Those who were students of Heidegger or in his proximity also pursue a return to the Greeks. This includes Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who are grouped together by political theory historian John Gunnell as the “German émigrés” and labelled “inimical to the American account of liberal democracy,” for their differing accounts of the tradition of political philosophy that emerge from their reconsideration of the origins of the tradition. See “History of Political Philosophy as a Discipline,” 64-65.

¹⁰⁷ The “Problem of Socrates” in *Twilight of the Idols* best encapsulates this re-reading, and though a summative diversion would be appropriate here, it is beyond the scope of the argument at hand. Suffice to say, it is in this text that Nietzsche speaks to the multiple dimensions of the “problem.” There is the problem of the world-historical figure Socrates, the problem Socrates faced, and the problem of Plato’s Socrates. The conflict largely looms between the problem of the Socrates constructed by a tradition, particularly a Christian tradition, which places its emphasis on the rational, optimistic, progressive, and life-denying qualities of Plato’s Socrates, and that of the problem Socrates faced (i.e., how to be a philosopher in a city or a political philosopher). Last, we are confronted with the ambiguity in the meaning of the word “problem” itself and must also consider whether all problems require resolutions.

inform the philosophic pursuit. Here, at the limit of the rational account, Nietzsche suggests that an act of will takes place. Plato is reintroduced as a masterful philosopher. He is like Nietzsche's "genuine philosopher," a commander and legislator, a knower by dint of creation rather than imitation, and one who has overcome his past.¹⁰⁸ The truth he represents is not discovered, but created. It is created because it ultimately relies on fallibilism. It relies on the acceptance of knowledge even though it cannot be proved with certainty. Knowledge, created as such, enters history. It becomes a historical entity, a poetic creation. This reading of Nietzsche's Plato opens the way to considerations of the creative component of philosophy and its historical dimensions.

Such emphasis on creative gestures stands in contrast to the imitative qualities of the philosophic pursuit commonly featured in the more argument-focused interpretative approaches. There, following the theory of Diogenes Laertius, Socrates is generally understood as Plato's mouthpiece. The arguments that he makes are taken to represent Plato's views. The purpose of the dialogues is then to convey "Plato's thought"¹⁰⁹ through the character of Socrates. This directs one's focus to the "propositions, arguments, premises, and conclusions"¹¹⁰ of the dialogues, which are imitations of the Ideas of which they are in pursuit. The contrast Nietzsche's re-engagement with Plato introduces concerns the relative status of poetry and philosophy. Is philosophy the capstone of poetry, or poetry of philosophy? Is the poet or philosopher the superior type?

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, VI.211.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon, *Turning Towards Philosophy*, 5.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The challenge for the would-be reader is thus to attempt to preserve what is proper to Plato and Nietzsche, while at the same time taking seriously the poetic and historical dimensions to philosophy that Nietzsche identifies. In this way, one is required to navigate like “Odysseus between the Scylla and Charybdis” of two attitudes: “The first (the attitude of would-be objectivist absolutism) takes the written text too seriously, uncritically carving its literal expression into the shrine of cultural memory; the second (a wide-open relativism) takes it too lightly, ending up by emptying it of meaning.”¹¹¹ With this challenge front of mind, I suggest a hermeneutical analysis of these works informed by the interaction between poetry, philosophy, and politics that is supported by the authors’ own musings on the limitations of the written word. Three ideas inform this approach to Plato and Nietzsche. First, both authors reveal that philosophy is not the practice of pure reason. It involves the “extra-logical,” and its endeavour is animated by this quality. Therefore reading these philosophic texts should not be mistaken as an overly technical endeavour. It must also take into account the way in which one’s emotional disposition is being engaged and even shaped. The “extra-logical” is a requisite component of the philosophical pursuit. Second, when an author takes care to insert ambiguity, it is incumbent upon the reader to read that ambiguity with as much care as one reads the statements that are clearly pronounced. This suggests that one should place greater emphasis on following the pathway of the arguments rather than seeking to render or recreate a doctrine. The task of the reader is to pose

¹¹¹ Desjardins, “Why Dialogues? Plato’s Serious Play,” 123.

questions of the text and of the tradition that has defined its purpose or historical significance. Last, if we place emphasis on the dialogical quality of these texts, then it is necessary to acknowledge not only their pedagogical but also their political function as well. Like a conversation with a good teacher, they function to challenge and provoke the opinions of their reader. They start with opinion. They require opinion, and in this sense, the reader must also be sensitive to the political and historical contexts in which he reads and the author writes.

Working in reverse order, it is first necessary to acknowledge that as readers we operate within a philosophic tradition that is often dogmatic in its presentation of the truth of its prophets. This can obscure the dialogical qualities of texts by treating their questions as propositions or the work itself as an artifact. Like a naval historian inspects a 5th century trireme to marvel at how it would have been innovative for its time but no longer sees its relevance to modern boat building because its technology is outdated or outmoded, so too do political theorists often treat texts like artifacts of past wisdom that has been succeeded or improved upon by successive generations of thinkers. The texts no longer have anything relevant to say to the present because they were attempts of the past. They were propositions that have been succeeded by superior logic. As the earlier interpretation of *Phaedrus* and "Of Reading and Writing" attempted to show, however, it is precisely against such an attitude that a living or dialogical text is written. It is written with questions and not answers in mind. In this way, both Plato and Nietzsche draw attention to the errors we mistake for wisdom. They each ask to be read with sensitivity to the prevailing attitudes and opinions of their time (and of our own), so that they may

be read as testing the cogency of these opinions.¹¹² Opinion is the common starting point in the pursuit of knowledge. And the crucial opinion each test is that of the best way of life. They are concerned with living but, more importantly, with *how* one lives. A “way of life” is that which is shared in common by a political community. It is reflected, supported, and replicated by the laws of that community. A way of life, in this sense, is culturally and politically authoritative. Plato and Nietzsche’s texts, insofar as they function as an extension of a trans-historical dialogue on the question of the best life, require that they be read in relation to their political and historical authoritative context, as well as our own.¹¹³

1.5 Authority

Plato and Nietzsche have become adopted as cultural and political authorities.¹¹⁴ They are part of a tradition of Western political philosophy and often envisioned as the representatives of its beginning and end (if the syllabi of introductory courses in political

¹¹² Griswold comments, “Plato’s doxic starting point is a virtue, not a vice. Opinion is not an axiom or theoretical construction; it gives us an already intelligible, but non methodological, ‘beginning’ for our philosophizing. Thus, for Plato, opinion is not a starting point that can ever be left behind.” See “Plato’s Metaphilosophy,” 165.

¹¹³ This rests on the assumption that there is something constant or identifiable in the human experience that can be communicated or put in dialogue that is not rendered incomprehensible over time or across languages. Speaking of Plato, Griswold observes, “Plato’s wager is, I think, that the ‘political’ dimension of human experience is more or less stable throughout history. Hence his portrayals of it can function as mirrors in which we can recognize, and be reminded of, our own moral intuitions.” See “Plato’s Metaphilosophy,” 166. Likewise, Nietzsche also presumes he can write in an untimely way. For the latter, this challenges the overly relativistic or nihilistic interpretations of his work and suggests that his written reminders offer something recognizable and trans-historical in the human experience. Each are wagering on something consistent in the human experience. Like Griswold, I suggest that this assumption of consistency is best derived from an understanding of the political quality of human nature.

¹¹⁴ Interestingly, but perhaps not unexpectedly, they have been read as authoritative across the political spectrum (e.g., there are conservative, liberal, radical, feminist, existentialist Platos and Nietzsches).

philosophy are any indication). The traditional interpretative starting point, particularly with Plato, is to demonstrate the emergence of this authority in his dialogues. This places emphasis on his metaphysics or suggests that the dialogues taken together represent a systematic account. Gordon challenges this traditional disposition:

Plato's project aims at the turning of souls toward the life of philosophy and it accomplishes this through what we have come to consider "literary devices." But this is not at all the usual view of Plato. More commonly, scholars derive from Plato's dialogues a great metaphysical system, a moral theory, or a political plan. By viewing Plato in his capacity as writer and by paying special attention to his use of dramatic and literary devices that contribute to the ambiguity of the texts and that mitigate Plato's own philosophical authority, I hope, at the very least, to obscure in a general fashion whether we can in fact derive such moral theories, political blueprints, or metaphysical systems from his works or whether we are even meant to do so.¹¹⁵

Gordon's work participates in the debate concerning the extent to which Plato's dialogues express a unified message and/or a systematic and comprehensive doctrine. She questions the Neo-Platonic and Christian interpretations of Plato and emphasizes the elements of his texts that complicate the rendering of such a doctrine. This approach is informative because it alerts readers to the many devices Plato employs to distance his authoritative voice from the text. It suggests a distance between Plato and Platonism. Further, it suggests that Plato may have accounted for the very accusation that Nietzsche levels against him. In other words, he may have been all too aware of the problem of a philosophic-legislator or of the fundamental tension that exists between the philosopher and the city.

¹¹⁵ See *Turning Toward Philosophy*, 133.

A question of the interpretative tradition also exists in Nietzsche studies. The starting point differs, though. It is more common to start from the premise that he does not exhibit a unified theory or system of thought.¹¹⁶ Nietzsche's use of various styles contributes to this assumption. Further, the way in which his aphorisms are gathered and grouped in different works creates the challenge of understanding whether or not a structure or order to the ideas is present.¹¹⁷ Nehamas accounts for these interpretative issues and associates them with Nietzsche's desire to resist dogmatism: "Nietzsche's stylistic pluralism, then, is his solution to the problem involved in presenting positive views that do not, simply by virtue of being positive, fall back into dogmatism."¹¹⁸ To guard against dogmatism though, he risks nihilism.

The problem that both Plato and Nietzsche seem keenly aware of is that when philosophy becomes the political authority it ceases to be philosophical. The way of life of the philosopher exists in tension with the way of life of the city. Simply stated, the tension results from the philosopher suspecting the authority of the commonly held opinions about the best way of life. I suggest that this tension is replicated in the dialogical manner of writing that I attribute to both authors. It puts into dialogue the possibility that the way of life one has identified as "one's own" may not be the same as "the best." More questions are posed than answers offered. Philosophic writing understood in this manner guards against the systematization of belief. It becomes

¹¹⁶ This position is also presented in Kofman's *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, Derrida's *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, and Danto in *Nietzsche as Philosopher*.

¹¹⁷ A notable exception to the pluralistic or perspectival account is Leiter, who argues for a unified reading of Nietzsche's naturalism in *Nietzsche on Morality*.

¹¹⁸ Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 40.

incumbent upon the reader to acknowledge the manner of the author's writing and question his use of literary devices. Similarly, it becomes necessary to proceed with caution before ascribing a doctrine to the author. Or, at the very least, it becomes necessary to question the manner in which such doctrines have been assigned. Such caution seems well counselled and needs to be attendant to a secondary danger that the texts "will say whatever each reader asks of it unless we are able to determine the author's intention."¹¹⁹ This is to say, the argumentative pathways that are provided (and the devices used to obscure them) should be considered purposive, and thereby the result of a self-conscious author whose writings may not be systematic in the sense of offering a comprehensive doctrine but still capable of conveying meaning, or knowledge, or a positive teaching.

The great potentials and limitations of philosophic practice are also conveyed by a dialogical style of writing. It is an expression of a distinctly human activity. It requires that one account for that which one does not know and, beyond this simple accounting, be motivated to pursue the knowledge one lacks. Plato and Nietzsche's writings respectively include elements that enable the reader to reflect upon the extent to which philosophy involves, and requires, extra-logical elements. The complete psychology¹²⁰ of the reader is in play. Cooper elaborates,

¹¹⁹ See Rosen, *Mask*, xvi.

¹²⁰ In contemporary studies of both Plato and Nietzsche, the extra-logical elements of the philosophic pursuit are largely discussed from a psychological perspective. French psychoanalytic interpreters of Plato, such as Lacan or Irigaray, take seriously the introspective elements of the philosophic pursuit. Drawing on the legacy of Freud, the unconscious and unstated become as significant, if not more so, than that which is conscious and pronounced. Particularly in Lacan, Plato and his Socrates are treated more like patients than models. Their "death drives" and erotic impulses are analyzed in the language of modern psychoanalysis.

Both philosophers' political teachings are far more than just a statement of principles and proofs. They are *poetic*: they educate the heart and spirit along with the mind and thereby prepare readers, as nothing else could, to apprehend and judge their underlying conceptions of eternity.¹²¹

The poetic qualities of their writings enable this reflection and the introspection required to weigh the claims made concerning the place and function of these psychic motivators –will or *eros*.

Looking to Plato first, in *Republic X*, philosophy competes with this poetic charm. It strives to show itself as superior to poetry on account of its ability not to stir the emotions but to suppress them in favour of reason.¹²² In the *Phaedrus*, however, Socrates apologizes for his first speech on love and proceeds to offer a second wherein he praises the madness of the lover's soul.¹²³ *Eros*, as it is connected to and expressed by poetry, has an ambiguous status. Rosen accounts for this by contrasting the public and private nature of these dialogues. On Socrates' public role in the *Republic*, he states,

See *Transference*, 11. While Lacan's sensitivity to the unspoken elements of the text (its staging, comedy, characters and their respective emotional and erotic dispositions), alerts the reader to the extra-logical qualities at play in the philosophic pursuit, it also risks anachronism for its reliance on modern terms in rendering its diagnosis. That said, to the extent that the psychoanalytical approach recognizes the interconnectedness between the structure of text and the structure of the unconscious it can alert the reader to some of the more persistent elements of human consciousness. In analyses of Nietzsche, the psychoanalytic approach has tended more towards psychobiography. Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* and Safranski's *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* exemplify this tendency. Because Nietzsche points to himself in his writing, and speaks about himself, such an approach in many ways seems to be required. He asks for the psychological analysis of philosophers and does not exempt himself. Further, it is through his expressions of illness that he acts as both doctor and patient. His expressions of self-torture, affliction, alongside the actual illnesses he endured, partake in his philosophical diagnoses. For example, Magnus et al. suggest that Nietzsche's account of modern nihilism is reminiscent of Freud's account of melancholia: "nihilism is essentially a form of melancholia: humanity's unresolved grief at the loss of the primary object of its affection—the self." See *Nietzsche's Case*, 213. Nietzsche's own caution must be heeded, though, when engaging in this type of approach, because while he sets forth an idea of philosophy as a kind of biography (a writing of one's self), he also aimed at the significance of the "untimely."

¹²¹ Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau and Nietzsche*, 302.

¹²² Plato, *Republic X*, 606d.

¹²³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 243b-257a.

If Eros is associated with hybris and tyranny, then it is important for Socrates, as the public defender of the political responsibility of philosophy, to minimize the connection between Eros and philosophy. Eros, as the striving by the individual for completion, leads him away from and beyond the city and political justice. Eros, like tyranny, encourages the individual to disregard *nomos*, and so it encourages the individual to treason. Philosophy, which begins in the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, exemplifies treasonable Eros.¹²⁴

Plato acknowledges the erotic nature of the philosophic pursuit but is simultaneously aware of the political responsibility of the philosopher. Like the poet, he is an educator. In the interest of preserving this role, he must create the conditions wherein philosophy can be reproduced without giving itself over to the tyrannical impulse to become god-like. This impulse to become god-like is expressed in a desire for perfect wisdom or perfect justice, about which the *Republic* offers an instructive image. By this measure, Plato is no “philosopher king,” but rather keenly aware of the deeply human, political, and emotional dimensions of his pursuit. As Griswold observes, “exhortations to have courage may be necessary precisely because there is no rational justification for the philosophical enterprise. Courage seems to be a substitute for the possession of wisdom.”¹²⁵

Whereas Plato sees a need to “camouflage the hybristic character of philosophy,”¹²⁶ Nietzsche elaborates upon its tyrannical quality. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes,

¹²⁴ Rosen, *Quarrel*, 108.

¹²⁵ Griswold, “Plato’s Metaphilosophy,” 158.

¹²⁶ Rosen, *Quarrel*, 107.

But this is an ancient, eternal story: what formerly happened with the Stoics still happens today, too, as soon as any philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise. Philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the “creation of the world,” to the *causa prima*.¹²⁷

Each respectively seeks to account for the motivation of the philosopher and how this motivation interacts with the world around him. The questions in common are as follows: What animates the pursuit of wisdom? Does this pursuit impose upon the world or discover it? The answers to these questions entail an introspective turn. Plato and Nietzsche require their readers to diagnose themselves and to consider all parts of themselves when doing so. In this way, the poetic function of their language serves the ultimate pedagogical purpose. It partakes of the philosophical directive of the Delphic Oracle to “know thyself” as a means to psychic health.

Conclusion

Whereas the preceding analysis only treated the conclusion of the *Phaedrus*, it is now necessary to understand how it begins to bring together this chapter’s two-stage argument concerning dialogical reading and writings.

The *Phaedrus* begins with Socrates asking, “where have you been? And where are you going?”¹²⁸ In one sense his questions are those of common courtesy. They are observations of a coming and going and the expression of a benign curiosity. In another

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, I.9.

¹²⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 227a.

sense, though, they link together time and space. Where were you? Or what space did you previously occupy? And where are you going? Or what space will you occupy? Socrates poses these questions of Phaedrus on the way out of the *polis*. The *polis*, of course, is the home of *doxa*, of opinion. Phaedrus is smuggling a particularly well-crafted opinion out of the *polis* when these questions are asked of him. As many have noted, the *Phaedrus* is unusual among Platonic dialogues for taking place outside of Athens' city walls. It occupies a strange space. Yet its distinctively private setting provides the very conditions necessary for the type of dialogue that will ensue between Socrates and Phaedrus. It is the dialogue that houses Socrates' unusual mania and his apology to Eros. It reveals Plato's sensitivity to the idea that the philosophical pursuit is not a purely rational endeavour. It is also a dialogue full of myth and metaphor and typically deemed problematic for seeming disjointed. Rhetoric and love are positioned together in a way that can read strangely. The strange qualities of the text are the very things that alert the reader to the spaces he occupies while reading. It is both intimate and public. The text is a space for philosophic education, which requires the intimacy of self-knowledge. At the same time, by its very nature of being memorialized in writing, it is also accessible as a public space.

The questions posed at the beginning of this chapter were the following: What makes a work dialogical? And how should one read such a work? Two qualities of a dialogical work were set forth: it enables responsiveness and employs imagery and language economically. These provisional answers might now be considered together. The second is the condition for the first. Philosophic poetry is architectonic: it builds

spaces. That is, the artistry of the author's language reflects his desire to create a space wherein his reader can engage in the responsiveness necessary to the philosophic pursuit. With the creation of such a space, an author is wagering that there is something consistent about his readers that changes little, if at all, over time.

"Of Reading and Writing" and the *Phaedrus* each provide instances wherein the authors reflect on the written form and on the spaces they construct in text. The philosopher's relationship to the written word points to questions concerning the nature and role of political philosophy. And these questions ultimately concern the possibility for, and nature of, philosophic education. When coupled with contemplation of the written word they seek to understand not only the substance of the education but also its form. The form is not arbitrary: "One must pay as much attention to the How as to the What... one must even pay greater attention to the 'form' than to the 'substance,' since the meaning of the 'substance' depends on the 'form'."¹²⁹ On the basis of these reflections, a commonality can be observed. The *Phaedrus* presents the highest or healthiest kind of writings as those that "possess the flexibility, or adaptability of oral communication."¹³⁰ Nietzsche shares this appraisal. This common ground describes a preference for writing that creates the space for living speech. Using this commonality as a starting point, this chapter established that "Of Reading and Writing" is demonstrative of Nietzsche's response to a written tradition exemplified by Plato. However, Nietzsche's approach stands apart in one important sense. As the chapter in *Zarathustra*

¹²⁹ Strauss, *City and Man*, 52

¹³⁰ Ibid.

alludes, the flexibility of the written word opens the way to an understanding of the world as interpretation, which creates the conditions for truth to be relative. Put in another manner, the spaces that are erected (or the lies that are told) are more important than the dialogue that occurs within them.

All said, Plato and Nietzsche share the philosophic goal of creating spaces for the philosophic way of life to continue. They also share the means to those goals by writing to engender the pursuit of self-knowledge as a step towards philosophy. But the projects produce distinctive political implications. If knowledge is the product of art, the lines between philosophy and rhetorical triumph are blurred.¹³¹ If writing simply becomes the means for the promulgation of persuasive rhetoric that proclaims itself wise, then it fulfills the promise made by Theuth regarding the power of his art. Art becomes truth, and truth becomes interpretation. Last, if education is the “only answer to the always pressing question, to the political question par excellence, of how to reconcile order which is not oppression with freedom which is not license,” Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* errs towards license.¹³² He tempts the immoderate and reaches beyond the careful reader. To the contrary: “The Platonic Socrates...is characterized by *phronesis*, by practical wisdom. He is so far from being blind to political things that he has realized their essential character, and he acts consistently in accordance with this realization.”¹³³

The *Phaedrus* and “Of Reading and Writing,” both writings on writing, could just as easily be said to be writings on reading and the expectations one has of the reader of

¹³¹ Rosen, *Mask*, xi.

¹³² Strauss, *Persecution*, 37.

¹³³ Strauss, “Problem,” 162.

the work. When authors create spaces with the deliberate use of language, the reader is tasked with the responsibility of understanding what it means to live within them. That is, it is the reader's responsibility to read the "way of life" that the author inscribes. Responsiveness is the task of the interlocutor. When Nietzsche's Zarathustra states that he "hates the reading idler," the subject of his contempt is a passive reader, an onlooker.¹³⁴ An active reading of the text presumes not only the possibility of careful readers, but also a capacity to follow the path of the author—to live his questions and to occupy the space that he has built, to be a guest in his home. The second question this chapter posed was "how should one read?" The question "how" presumes a "way." And, in posing this question about the ways available to reading, I suggested that this fundamentally becomes a question concerning the practice of philosophy, which itself seeks to understand the best "way of life" and, as such, often enters into conflict with the shared "way of life" as it is defined by the political community.

In response to the second question three proposals for a philosophical reading were put forth: to appreciate the extra-logical elements involved in the philosophic pursuit and thereby in its writing, to see purpose in a writer's choice to employ metaphor, myth or aporia, and to recognize the political, historical and contextual elements that inform the author's writing and the reader's reading. Taken together, these proposals might be considered against-the-grain or counter to the tradition of political thought, but it is precisely that quality that enables them to offer an effective

¹³⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7.

way to live within the spaces built by these authors and, in doing so, to live their questions in the world that we have built. For both Plato and Nietzsche, philosophy is a human activity and a pursuit they consciously chose to communicate and replicate in writing. It is an activity that, when placed in writing, has political, poetic, and pedagogical consequences. Writings in this spirit deserve to be read then with sensitivity to the types of spaces they construct and with an eye towards the challenge they pose to our present disposition. If the space leads to aporia, we can either choose to see that as an end or a new beginning.

CHAPTER TWO

Debt and Bad Conscience: The Problem of the Ancestral in *Genealogy II*

The fact that something has grown old now gives rise to the demand that it be made immortal; for when one considers all that such an antiquity — an ancient custom of the ancestors, a religious belief, an inherited political privilege — has experienced during the course of its existence, how great a sum of piety and reverence on the part of individuals and generations, then it must seem arrogant or even wicked to replace such an antiquity with a novelty and to set against such a numerical accumulation of acts of piety and reverence the single unit of that which is evolving and has just arrived.

— Nietzsche, *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*

‘To honour father and mother and to do their will even from the roots of the soul’: another people hung this table of overcoming over itself and became mighty and eternal with it.

— Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

The fortunateness of my existence, its uniqueness perhaps, lies in its fatality: to express it in the form of a riddle, as my father I have already died, as my mother I still live and grow old.

— Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

Introduction

The title of Nietzsche’s treatise, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*), betrays a concern with the story of humanity. A genealogy traces one’s ancestry. It maps the way in which we are connected to our past. It is the history of how we came to be as we are now. It operates under the historical assumption of an “origin” and an “end point.” That is, from the perspective of the “end point” we can reflect on how we arrived at our present condition. This backwards glance does not assume that the way things are now *had* to be this way though. Genealogical tracing captures the presence of contingency in time. At any given point along the genealogical line, a number of courses

were available, but a specific course was followed. This tracing implies that “a given system of thought...was the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends.”¹

Genealogical tracing is a practice that, of course, pre-dates Nietzsche’s use of the term. With animals, it is a means of determining the purity of a breed. It relates to the idea of “pedigree.”² With humans, it largely refers to one’s recorded ancestry. Such records were generally the reserve of nobility. Genealogy provided proof of well-born status. It was necessary for the maintenance of an aristocracy (rule of the best).³ The proximity to the past, and specifically to a “distinguished ancestor”⁴ was a factor in determining one’s value to the present and, specifically, one’s value to the political community. It was a means of distinguishing fitness for political power. Natural talent for leadership was equated with one’s lineage or bloodline. Genealogy, in this sense, justified who was owed what.

Nietzsche draws out these associations between ancestry, history, and politics in a rather curious manner in *Genealogy II*. He uses them to offer an economical⁵ presentation of the history of justice in Western civilization. His account begins with the idea of the permission to promise. This might also be understood as the permission to establish an obligation that something is owed to someone. He writes in the first line:

“To breed [*heranzüchten*] an animal that is *permitted to promise*—isn’t this precisely the

¹ Gutting, "Michel Foucault," n.p.

² Leiter, *Nietzsche*, 134-35.

³ With the implication, of course, that the best men are born and not made.

⁴ Leiter, *Nietzsche*, 135.

⁵ Economical, in both senses of the word: referring to brevity and to economics.

paradoxical task nature has set for itself with regard to man? isn't this the true problem of man?..."⁶ To breed is to intervene in the reproductive process to produce a specific end.⁷ It describes a specific type of applied knowledge that is able to render controlled results. In the language of the previous chapter, it refers to a *techne*. The result that Nietzsche describes is that of an animal who is permitted to promise. The art of breeding allows this quality to be replicated in future generations. In this way, the treatise begins its exploration of ancestry. It begins with the suggestion that art is applied to nature; art intervenes in nature with the objective of achieving memory (or the condition upon which promises can be made). A comparison is being made between the interventions undertaken with animal natures (e.g., the domestication of livestock or the segregation of a breed), and the moral interventions that are replicated generationally in human nature. The question can thus be understood as attempting to discern the transition in human nature affected by such moral breeding.

In the analysis that follows, I suggest that this paradox of the promising animal frames the balance of Nietzsche's discussion in the treatise and that he uses it to direct his reader to evaluate contrasting ideas of promising or, more pointedly, the breeding or

⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.1. Translators Clark and Swensen note the challenge of translating this first line, which in the original German reads as follows: "Ein Thier heranzüchten, das versprechen darf — ist das nicht gerade jene paradoxe Aufgabe selbst, welche sich die Natur in Hinsicht auf den Menschen gestellt hat?" The problem concerns the modal verb "dürfen" (often rendered as "may" or "is able to"). They emphasize Nietzsche's choice of a normative or "value-laden" term, whereas translators like Kaufmann and Smith avoid the normative connotation ("with a right to" or "which is entitled to make promises"). See "End Notes," Clark and Swensen, 139. Their emphasis is warranted, considering the way in which this section of the *Genealogy* in particular questions normative arrangements.

⁷ The idea of breeding also raises questions concerning the systematic quality of Nietzsche's political thought, for example, if "eugenics" is to be understood literally or figuratively. I raise this as a point for further inquiry, but one that is beyond the scope of the present analysis.

moral civic education that informs what kind of promises are made, to whom, and why they should (or should not) be kept. This contrast is most evident in the way that he sets up Homer's polytheistic world⁸ as a counterpoint to democratic orders that imagine themselves free, or in the process of becoming free, of their monotheistic Christian origins. This contrast focuses on expressions of guilt and debt and the way in which these concepts interact with the capacity for political action. The paradox precedes specific political orders but informs their outcomes. It queries the capacity of these differing moralities of custom to civilize or un-civilize human beings. In doing so, it also asks for reflection on what "civilizing" means.

To follow Nietzsche's argument and then specifically question his use of the ideas of debt and ancestry, this analysis will first expand on the methodological considerations from the previous chapter by focusing on the naturalist/postmodernist debate as it applies to reading the *Genealogy*. I will then engage the central terms of the argument—memory, debt, credit, bad conscience, and ancestry—and discuss how they function in the work. Last, these central terms will be placed in dialogue with Nietzsche's forward-looking conclusion to *Genealogy II* in reference to the Greek gods. Taken together, I argue that the ideas of debt and ancestry in *Genealogy II* serve the function of exposing a moral horizon. This treatise, then, is not about reclaiming or re-enacting the past, but acknowledging that we need not limit the conception of ourselves to historical and/or metaphysical beings, that another kind of consciousness has existed

⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.23.

in the human story, and perhaps another iteration might yet exist again. Nietzsche is looking towards the future.

2.1 Approach and Assumptions

To address the intention and purpose of “ancestry” and “debt” in *Genealogy II*, this chapter focuses its analysis on II.19-II.22 but draws on other sections from the *Genealogy* as a whole and Nietzsche’s other works as necessary. It is guided by two assumptions. First, how Nietzsche writes is as important as the content of his argument. Second, he is more of a naturalist than a postmodernist.

The reading presented here will follow those, such as Clark, Leiter, and Janaway in their assessment of Nietzsche’s naturalism.⁹ That is, his work treats the origins of morality as based in this world (as opposed to a transcendental world). More specifically, though, it concurs with Dannhauser’s suggestion that for Nietzsche, “Man is revealed as the animal who is able to create horizons.”¹⁰ Humans live under, and operate

⁹ In her introduction to the *Genealogy*, Clark writes of Nietzsche’s method that “it treats morality as a phenomenon of life, as a purely natural phenomenon, one whose existence is to be explained without any reference to a world beyond nature, a supernatural or metaphysical world.” See “Introduction” in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, xxii. See also Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, and Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche’s Genealogy*. By grouping these authors together I am not suggesting that their arguments concerning Nietzsche’s naturalism are identical or even that they draw the same conclusions in their interpretations, only that they share this fundamental assumption about the question of nature.

¹⁰ Dannhauser writes, “Thus Nietzsche does not deny the insight that horizons are the creations of men; he attacks historicism as a particular interpretation of that insight. He attempts to transcend the apparent deadliness of the historicist insight by interpreting it nobly. If it is a fact that the values by which men have lived have been their own creations or fictions, it is an ambiguous fact. Nietzsche moves in the direction of viewing this insight as a revelation of man’s creativity and therefore his power. Man is revealed as the animal who is able to create horizons.” See “Friedrich Nietzsche” in *History of Political Philosophy*, 834.

in relation to, the horizons that they draw around themselves.¹¹ In short, human nature is historical. But what exactly does that mean? Nietzsche's historicism thus needs to be placed in dialogue with his "naturalism." This in part helps to distinguish his project from other "naturalistic" thinkers of the period.

I contend that Nietzsche's methodology begins with nature, and with statements concerning truths of human nature, but the conclusions he draws from these truths, contain the possibilities for the most stark type of post-modernism. With this understanding, I think it is more fruitful to begin where he begins. In this spirit, I approach *Genealogy II* as a work wherein his story of humanity is a study of its nature. By giving such prominence of place to the role of history though, I extend the argument that the plasticity Nietzsche identifies in man, or his ability to be shaped by convention, is precisely what lends to the understanding of the world as interpretation, or which creates the conditions for truth to be relative, and indeed, nihilistic. The way in which Nietzsche's argument proceeds in *Genealogy II* anticipates this outcome. It weaves together the argument in stops and starts. It forgets and recollects. The structural elements of *Genealogy II* expand upon the tension he wishes us to recall—that between nature and convention.

¹¹ Nietzsche, "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life," 63. See also Strauss' discussion of Nietzsche's historicism in *Natural Right and History*, 26.

2.2 Related Matters

Nietzsche subtitles this section of the *Genealogy*, "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and Related Matters." We have two subjects clearly demarcated, but the third is less transparent. In German, the third term he uses is *Verwandtes*, which translates merely as "related." "Related Matters" is a catch-all phrase. Though not reputed for his humour, perhaps Nietzsche is being coy with this term. Like in English, this is the same adjective that one would use in German to describe a kinship with someone else, and its verb form is also predominantly used to describe familial relations. Thus, rather than understanding the third point of the title as a general descriptor or a catch-all phrase, it might be understood in connection with one of the central terms from the overarching title of the work—*genealogy*. Likewise, it also points towards his emphasis on ancestry later in the treatise. Read in this manner, the title conveys a consistency in the theme of the overall work. It speaks to the familial chain of ideas, not in the typical manner one might approach a family tree (with the positive valuation associated with "pedigree" transmitted directly from one generation to the next), but by seeking to understand the transmission of a "relatively permanent"¹² element over the course of time. The title is the first clue to the contents.

Attention to the consistency of Nietzsche's emphasis on the genealogical quality of his study supports the further contention that the treatise itself should be read by tracing the strands of his argument rather than attempting to delineate its stages.

¹² This language is borrowed from Leiter, *Nietzsche*, 138.

Genealogy II consists of twenty-five aphorisms. The logic of the argument weaves in and out of these aphorisms and is not presented in an entirely linear manner. Whereas others have attempted to consolidate Nietzsche's argument into stages,¹³ I argue that his pauses and the moments wherein he advises the reader that a diversion¹⁴ has taken place are purposeful elements of his writing and risk being glossed over when trying to simplify the logic of the argument.¹⁵ In an effort to respect the function of these diversions and to trace the development of the argument, I treat the treatise as a microcosm of the genealogical approach writ large. This is to say that the argument expresses moments of contingency and limitation. However, it can be read as a whole. And, as a whole, it also expresses something constant and consistent. This manner of writing thus itself seems to be employed as a way of understanding the relationship between history and nature in the formation of the human being.

With the broad strokes of the treatise understood in this manner, I propose a reading of the treatise that follows the "strands" rather than "stages" of the argument.¹⁶

¹³ For example, Risse suggests that Nietzsche uses two argumentative stages in *Genealogy II*: the first describes an early form of indebtedness, and the second speaks to the idea of internalizing this perception of debt and, when internalized further through Christianity, guilt arises. See Risse, "The Second Treatise," 55-81. Somewhat similarly Leiter argues for a three-stage approach: (1) we acquire a conscience because of our ability to remember our debts, (2) indebtedness is met with the internalization of cruelty, (3) guilt arises out of this internalization. See Leiter, *Nietzsche*, 179.

¹⁴ For example, II.8 "to take up the train of our investigation again" or at II.13 "—To return to our topic, namely to punishment."

¹⁵ This is most evident in Leiter's account. He says of II.9-11 "on the nature of justice, is actually irrelevant to the core argument of the Second Essay" and of II.12-15 that it is "is somewhat tangential to the argument." Leiter, *Nietzsche*, 179-80. While this may be the case, I want to suggest that Nietzsche's self-conscious writing style would imply that we should try to understand the way that these diversions operate with the argument, rather than dismissing them as diversions.

¹⁶ This aligns with Clark's general argument concerning the structure of the work as a whole. She treats the *Genealogy* as operating along three major conceptual strands that each defines a partial element of moral thought. These strands correspond to each of the treatises and the following three questions: First, "What are the qualities or traits of a good or virtuous person?" Second, "What is my duty? What do I owe others?"

In this manner, Nietzsche describes the problem with contemporary morality by weaving together the ideas of memory, debt, guilt, punishment, bad conscience, and god(s). Crudely summarized, memory (or the understanding of oneself as a historical animal) is the condition upon which promises can be made. Promises allow one to project into the future and are obligations of future action. This historical sense and the capacity for symbolic thought that accompanies it allows for the possibility of indebtedness (or the projection of a future payment). Failure to render payment as promised creates the condition for punishment. Guilt appears when one deems oneself worthy of punishment. Bad conscience is the internalization of this judgment of oneself (i.e., that one is the rightful recipient of suffering). Last, the compounded effect of the capacity to remember and for symbolic thinking (i.e., the capacity to take on debt) creates the conditions necessary for metaphysical thinking (wherein ancestors become gods and the debts owed become eternal). The problem with such eternal indebtedness is that it perpetuates bad conscience and wills the negation of the human. In other words, it assumes a deadly and nihilistic course.

2.3 *The Question of Nature*

To understand the problem of *Genealogy II* as one concerning the state of the human presupposes that Nietzsche writes with a stable conception of the human in mind. That is, the problem that he is expressing concerns human nature, and as such,

And, third, “What is the ultimate point and value of human life?” In this way, she suggests that it is possible to read the strands in isolation of one another, but a comprehensive reading must then “recognize the possibilities for re-weaving the strands.” See “Introduction,” xxvi-ii.

must begin from the premise that such a nature is discernible. This is a short but loaded premise. In what follows, I intend to elaborate upon one of the central assumptions that I have already indicated informs my reading of the *Genealogy*. The question as to whether Nietzsche is a naturalist or postmodernist is a common point of contention in Nietzsche scholarship. Further engagement with this question is necessary, particularly because it will influence the way in which we understand his language concerning ancestry in the treatise. Namely, if we affirm that there is no real or true world and that truth is an empty category (i.e., completely perspectival), then we see the extent to which we might categorize Nietzsche's discussion of these matters as nihilistic. But his emphasis on the Socratic question of the better and worse ways of life suggests that we cannot consider him a pure nihilist (everything is not equal, and therefore everything should not be permitted). The question of the good life is not a question for the nihilist.

I agree with Leiter's assessment that Nietzsche is more of a naturalist than a postmodernist. It is necessary to concede, however, that this naturalism creates the conditions for the perspectivism or post-modernism that Nietzsche's thought is generally credited with fathering. Whereas Leiter's reading primarily concerns itself with Nietzsche's epistemology, I want to acknowledge that, at a much more basic level, Nietzsche's exploration maps a tension between nature and convention. His doing so acknowledges that the category of nature is not merely a historical construction, but that there may be qualities of what it means to be human *by nature* that are enduring. Specifically, I suggest that the story that Nietzsche tells in the treatise by way of the imagery of ancestral authority and creditor-debtor justice describes a branch point in the

Western genealogical tree wherein bad conscience morphs into guilty conscience, and in the process of so becoming, human nature is itself moralized. It is moralized in the sense that the natural instinct for rank provokes guilt rather than honour. Like in the process of the domestication of animals, art is used to intervene and reshape nature to the point wherein the nature of the domesticated animal is mistaken for its true nature. This argument contends with Risse's reading of *Genealogy II*, where he suggests that this pivotal point occurs with the rise of Christianity and specifically with the popularization of the Christian God.¹⁷ Risse's reading correctly observes that our ancestry contains the possibility of a human existence wherein guilt and bad conscience are not necessarily co-terminus. But Christianity is not itself the cause of the movement away from that possibility. *Genealogy II* points to issues with our causal thinking, and, perhaps more drastically, it suggests that the moral art that humans have employed to guide our natures has led us to mistaken assumptions about human nature itself and thus requires a wholesale reconsideration.

Nietzsche speaks directly to this problem at II.12. He begins this section by suggesting that he will speak to "the origin and purpose of punishment."¹⁸ In what follows, though, he elaborates on a methodological error of "previous genealogists of morality."¹⁹ Their error is described as one wherein the purpose of a given phenomenon is taken as its primary cause. This brief diversion is a compact argument against a teleological understanding of causality, which would assign primary importance to the

¹⁷ Risse, "The Second Treatise," 55-81.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

purpose or *telos* of a given thing. This pattern of thought produces the conclusion, as Nietzsche argues that the eye²⁰ was “made to see.”²¹ It thus speculates that the origin of the organ matches its purpose. Clark summarizes Nietzsche’s counter argument as follows:

the eye’s usefulness does not explain why it originally came into existence, but only why, having somehow or other come into existence, it had a greater chance of surviving and being passed on to heirs. To explain how the eye came into existence would be to trace it back through a whole series of previous forms, and transformations of these forms by means of new variations, to something that lies ‘worlds apart’ from it, say a simple nerve that is particularly sensitive to light.²²

Extending this analogy to the ideas of morality and punishment, Nietzsche also demonstrates a separation between the present utility of a thing and its origins. This other type of causal understanding per the “English psychologists” assumes that man’s “softer affections” came into existence because of their utility.²³ This kind of argument suggests that the present usefulness of moral qualities provides the explanatory grounds for why such qualities exist and for assumptions concerning human nature to be made. Nietzsche is targeting thinkers, such as Hume,²⁴ who consider the basis by which character traits are deemed virtuous or vicious. So while Nietzsche’s approach to the causal understanding of morality more closely resembles the naturalism of the British

²⁰ Nietzsche’s example of the eye and his naming of Herbert Spencer as an interlocutor in this section suggest that he is engaging directly with the social and political implications of Charles Darwin’s publications on evolution. Notably, in the *Origin of Species* Darwin specifically uses the example of the eye to address the challenge to his theory that an organ of such perfection could not come to be in the process of historical contingency and chance, but rather would have required a divine maker. See “Organs of Extreme Perfection and Complication,” in *Origin of Species*, 190-94.

²¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.12.

²² Clark, “Introduction,” xxiv.

²³ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

²⁴ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.6.

moral philosophers that precede him than that of Aristotelian teleologists, insofar as it seeks to derive an account of morality based in human psychology and without reference to metaphysical elements, it differs from them through his suggestion that they confound the idea of present purpose of a thing with its original purpose.

To further explain this difference using the example that Nietzsche provides, he highlights the transformation of a thing in time: a “nerve that is particularly sensitive to light” is transformed to an “eye.” Nietzsche asks that this process of transformation not be confused with “an ever more purposive inner adaptation to external circumstances,”²⁵ but rather that adaptation be considered from the perspective of “reinterpreting, reordering and formative forces” — that is, the principle of *will to power*.²⁶ Thus, even at the level of an organ of an organism its present function is not to be equated with its origin. Its function changes over the course of time. It was not necessary that the nerve transform into the eye. The nerve was not progressing towards its *good*, but rather arrived at the state of an eye through a course of chance and contingency.²⁷ The purpose of the eye in the present thus cannot be equated to the purpose of the nerve in the past.

What does this anatomical example imply for the kind of naturalism he uses to discuss morality? Simply put, nature is subject to history. In the course of time, the light-

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.12. This statement should be considered against Darwin’s use of the word “adaptation” in his works on biological evolution. This connection and contestation between Nietzsche and Darwin’s thought has been elaborated upon by authors such as Johnson in *Nietzsche’s Anti-Darwinism*, Richardson in *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, and Moore in “Nietzsche and Evolutionary Theory,” 517–31.

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.12.

²⁷ To quote Nietzsche, “The ‘development’ of a thing, a practice, an organ is accordingly least of all its *progressus* toward a goal...but rather the succession of more or less profound, more or less independent processes of overpowering that play themselves out in it,” in *Genealogy*, II.12.

sensitive nerve changed into an eye. As Nietzsche summarizes, “the form is fluid but the ‘meaning’ even more so.”²⁸ To expand on this logic, a few points must be made. First, nature is not rendered entirely historical. Some consistency to the natural or original form remains even if the meaning is subject to change over time (i.e., an eye remains a light-sensitive nerve). Second, the problem that he points out concerns the process of imparting meaning upon the form (i.e., the purpose of an eye is to see) and equating its present purpose with its original purpose. When this takes place, as he suggests that it does with the British moral philosophers, a moral nature is ascribed to the form and is conflated with its origin (i.e., the purpose of an eye is to see well; therefore, the organ originated to become a well-seeing eye). In short, value is inscribed upon the object (i.e., a good eye is a well-seeing eye). Third, in Darwinian language, the object bearing the “good” characteristics survives, and these “good” characteristics are qualities inherited by the generations to follow. Adaptations of the form are the progressive actualization of its “good.” Combined with a utilitarian sensibility, since the “softer affections” of human beings are useful, and thereby good, such affections will “naturally” grow with the species. This line of thinking when applied to human considerations suggests that morality is the story of a progressive adaptation towards *the good*. Nietzsche’s argument against this type of historical methodology is that it renders questions concerning the nature of human morality merely “administrative nihilism.”²⁹ If we affirm that the purpose of the human animal is to act well and/or grow its softer affections, then we

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

imprint an assumption on human nature, wherein history will progressively eliminate, through the process of adaptation, those people that do not meet this criterion. Further, by understanding this as an adaptive process, we understand ourselves as merely behaving in the world and not as *actors* or beings who express their will. Such a methodology encourages one to forget the creative capacity of human beings insofar as it has one forget the moral valuation that takes place in the causal understanding that leads to this outcome.

What then does this imply for the kind of naturalism Nietzsche uses to discuss morality? It implies that his naturalism seeks to speak to the origin of a thing before its moral valuation (i.e., to distinguish the light-sensitive nerve from the well-seeing eye) and, further, that it seeks to challenge the progressive or cumulative historicism present in other naturalist accounts. This understanding of his theoretical approach helps to clarify the balance of his analysis in *Genealogy II*. Nietzsche focuses on the idea of the *ancestral* in combination with his analysis of creditor-debtor justice to demonstrate the way in which payback becomes a moral, historical, and metaphysical concept. Clark nicely summarizes his theoretical premise in his argument:

The clearest example of such a pre-moral notion is the idea of debt. Nietzsche's account of how this pre-moral notion of owing was transformed into a moral notion of guilt is at the same time an attempt to show that the whole world of moral notions of right and wrong, obligation and duty, justice and fairness developed as transformations of a set of pre-moral ideas and practices.³⁰

³⁰ Clark, "Introduction," xxxi.

Thus, coming back to the original question, as to whether Nietzsche should be read as a postmodernist or naturalist, the foregoing discussion has established that the emphasis should be placed on his naturalism. Human beings are not without nature by this account per the postmodernist inclination. Instead, our misunderstanding of human things, including our morality, has contributed to mistaken assumptions about human nature. In sum, we require the historical or genealogical analysis to defamiliarize ourselves with ourselves, to escape the burden of fatalistic thinking by reminding ourselves that history did not have to unfold in the manner that it did. Things could have been otherwise. On this basis, it becomes necessary to reinterrogate ourselves and our understanding of how the human being is a composite of nature and convention.³¹

2.4 Promising

Nietzsche's reinterrogation of our assumptions concerning justice begins with a question concerning the animal ancestor to the human. As we recall, he begins the *Genealogy II* by asking, "To breed an animal that is *permitted to promise*—isn't this precisely the paradoxical task nature has set for itself with regard to man?"³² The meaning of this question and its paradox is illuminated by our foregoing considerations of the overtures to naturalist theory in his writing. As already noted, "breeding" is an intervention in the reproductive process to produce a specific end. Darwin's *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* makes a notable distinction between

³¹ Nietzsche begins the "Preface" to *Genealogy* with "We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers: and for a good reason. We have never sought ourselves—how then should it happen that we find ourselves one day?"

³² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.1.

the selective art of breeding (the process by which humans select desirable traits and breed for them) and natural selection (the process by which nature permits the succession of some traits over others).³³ Nietzsche's language suggests that, for this question, he is focusing on the latter type of breeding, that which occurs by nature, though it seems equally probable that he may be referring to a tendency within human nature. At the very least, he allows some ambiguity to remain on the question "who or what" is doing the selecting. When we consider again his example of the eye in II.12 (e.g., distinguishing the light-sensitive nerve from the well-seeing eye), however, it would seem that human intervention in the understanding of the object and its valuation appears to be given precedence. The question that begins the treatise focuses on the task of breeding. Framed in another manner, it can be understood as attempting to discern the transition in human nature affected by such breeding. That is, *when does the non-historical animal become the human being who promises?* Or when do humans distinguish themselves from animals? The condition upon which this transition is made is the permission *to promise*, which itself is contingent upon humans having a distinct sense of history and time.

A promise requires historical and temporal thought. The person who promises must be able to think in terms of the past, present, and future. They must be able to understand what the future fulfillment of their promise looks like. They must be able to distinguish this future fulfillment from their present promising (i.e., the arrangement of

³³ Darwin, *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, 15-48.

the contract), and last, they must be able to understand that the promise that they make in the present will become a past obligation (i.e., they must be able to reflect on the contract made).

Promising introduces the possibility for reliability and calculability in the domain of human action, which is otherwise unpredictable and uncertain. Arendt describes the importance of the act of promising to our very understanding of what constitutes the human being. She writes the following:

This unpredictability which the act of making promises at least partially dispels is of a two-fold nature: it arises simultaneously out of the “darkness of the human heart,” that is, the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and out of the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act.³⁴

The promise, as Arendt describes it, is an *intervention* in human nature. It is a means of regulating something that is otherwise uncertain. That which is uncertain is the character of men and their possibilities for action. We might note that promising, like breeding, is a means to try and foretell future outcomes.

By this account, promising seems to be distinctly human. Because, as Nietzsche alludes, it is only possible in a context wherein risk and true action are possible. Put another way, a promise would not be necessary in a context where the future outcome was already known. The known-quality of the outcome would render the promise meaningless. Nietzsche alerts his reader to such meaninglessness by calling the breeding

³⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 244.

of the promising animal a “paradoxical task.”³⁵ He expands upon this in II.2, where he writes, “the task of breeding an animal that is permitted to promise includes, as condition and preparation, the more specific task of first *making* man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable.” The promise is the act that is used to help regulate behaviour, but the implementation of this act over time negates the very meaning of the act because it transforms that which is unpredictable into something that is predictable in the process. It tames. It places limits on the possibilities present. The paradox, in short, is that humans distinguish themselves from animals by way of the capacity to promise, but such capacity ultimately transforms them into animals again.³⁶ The *civilizing* act of promising contains the potential to *uncivilize* human beings by ultimately removing their capacity for action.³⁷

With the problem outlined as such, Nietzsche then directs his reader to consider the types of promises humans make and how those promises are reinforced. In II.2, he expands upon the idea of calculability. Human beings make themselves and each other more calculable. There is intention behind the intervention. The intention, simply put, is to foster the conditions wherein promises can be kept. Indeed, there is no point to making a promise if the future outcome is entirely random or incalculable. Some measure of predictability must thus be present for a promise to be rational. In this way,

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.1.

³⁶ Cast in another manner, the human disappears into the cycle of patterned change in nature (of birth, life, and death) and is thus indistinguishable from the animal.

³⁷ Cf. with his discussion of breeding and taming in “Improvers” from *Twilight of the Idols*. In §5, he concludes, “we may set down as our chief proposition that to *make* morality one must have the unconditional will to the contrary.”

the more general task of “breeding an animal that is permitted to promise” is preceded by the “more specific task of first making a man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable.”³⁸ Some measure of behavioural consistency is required if one’s word is to stand as a guarantee for a future state of being.

When detailing this more specific task, Nietzsche clarifies the earlier ambiguity concerning who or what was performing these tasks. Here, we learn that the tasks are “the true work of man on himself.”³⁹ The changes to human nature must thus be understood as something driven by human nature. This distinction is also supported by Nietzsche’s clarification that such work commences before humans become historical animals. He writes, “The enormous work of what I have called “morality of custom” [*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*]... his entire *prehistoric* work, has in this its meaning, its great justification—however much hardness, tyranny, mindlessness, and idiocy may be inherent in it: with the help of the morality of custom and the social straightjacket man was *made* truly calculable.”⁴⁰ Man works upon himself by nature. It is an element of his nature that precedes his history.

The goal of such work is to make ourselves more calculable or to “improve” ourselves. As Nietzsche writes in the *Twilight of the Idols*:

In all ages one has wanted to ‘improve’ men: this above all is what morality has meant. But one word can conceal the most divergent tendencies. Both the taming of the beast man and the breeding of a

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

certain species of man has been called 'improvement': only these zoological termini express realities...⁴¹

Nietzsche directs his reader to examine the character of the task or work that humans perform upon themselves—whether it is a breeding or a taming, whether it is an improvement or enhancement over a previous state of being.

Nietzsche's use of the phrase "morality of custom" is made clearer when read in conjunction with his discussion of it in *Daybreak*, as he asks the reader to do.⁴² There, we learn that it refers to the obedience to the law most frequently and in the most difficult circumstances.⁴³ "Morality of custom" extends upon the idea of the promise in the sense that it sets forth expectations for behaviour. He emphasizes the idea by repeating it twice in the quoted sentence and twice again in the sentence that follows.⁴⁴ The heavy repetition is not a stylistic error. Rather, its symmetrical presentation points to a transition in his thought. Whereas he had previously been discussing the paradox of promising from the perspective that it risks over-regulating action to the point of eliminating the possibilities for action and only allowing for animalistic behaviour, he now shifts to another possibility. He uses the term and its mirrored arrangement to show the other side of the problem, or paradox. The morality of custom also provides

⁴¹ Nietzsche, "Improvers," in *Twilight of the Idols*, §2.

⁴² Nietzsche asks the reader to consult *Daybreak* I.9, I.14, and I.16.

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, I.9.

⁴⁴ The first instance occurs in the *Preface*, §4 where Nietzsche asks the reader to compare what he says with what is said by Rée on the origins of morality.

the conditions for the “autonomous and supermoral” individual or, as he writes, “the human being who is really *permitted* to promise.”⁴⁵

Who is this individual? And, moreover, what makes him *really* permitted to promise? Nietzsche addresses these questions at the end of the passage. This individual—“this sovereign human being”—is such because he possesses and can identify “his *conscience*.”⁴⁶ One’s conscience is that faculty or, as Nietzsche terms it, “the dominant instinct” that aids one in distinguishing the better from the worse, or right from wrong.⁴⁷ It is the faculty that permits judgment.

Socrates’ exchange with Cephalus in *Republic I* is helpful in illuminating this point. Towards the conclusion of their exchange, Socrates objects to the definition of justice derived from their conversation, which calls justice the practice of telling the truth and paying one’s debts. In his objection, he uses the example of a madman with a weapon and says that it surely would not be just to return the weapon to its owner while he was in such a state of mind. In sum, even though a contract had been established, wherein the weapon on loan was promised to be returned, it is preferable to lie to the man when he comes to collect what is owed for his own safety and that of others. In this sense, justice is not located within the morality of custom, the terms of the contract, or the previously established promise, but can only be recognized in the action freely chosen by the individual. The sovereign individual, or the one who acts according to self-rule, is a product of the morality of custom insofar as it informs the conditions of his

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

choice. His actions are defined against the prevailing promises that otherwise define the assumption of good or bad action. Again, considering the case of the madman requesting his weapon be returned, the terms of loan would dictate that the borrower should fulfil the conditions of the loan and return the weapon. This is the general expectation. But, of course, this would not be the most prudent action.⁴⁸

Considerations of the morality of custom also establish that the sovereign individual is not, and cannot be, a product of anarchy or isolation. To elaborate, the promise against which his action is defined is a form of exchange. He *gave* his word to the other man. To give one's word is a form of exchange. It requires more than one person: at minimum, a speaker and a receiver. The paradox from this perspective is that the truly conscionable action is defined against the arrangement of promises that otherwise constitute the morality of custom (or the conditions of human sociability). *The individual who is truly permitted to promise must be an oath-breaker.* In the example from *Republic I*, he is a liar.⁴⁹ Of course, this runs counter to the moral bounds necessary for the establishment of community and thus implicitly undermines the sanctity of the act of promising.⁵⁰ Yet it is precisely within this type of individual that we see the transition

⁴⁸ We might note the extent to which this discussion of promising also plays upon the same tension expressed in *Republic I* in the example of the madman. We want the best law to be universal, unchangeable, or fixed; however, we also want the law to be flexible or applicable to individual situations.

⁴⁹ The notion of truth-telling being a condition of justice disappears when Cephalus exits the scene. When Polemarchus picks up his father's argument, he only maintains the second half of the definition: "that it is just to give to each what is owed." See Plato, *Republic*, 331e.

⁵⁰ Havas notes the extent to which this sovereign individual's action places him outside of the community or as a challenger to it. See *Nietzsche's Genealogy*, 182. In stronger terms, Thiele argues that "The Nietzschean hero, like his classical counterpart, is a breaker of taboos and custom" and that the strife (between himself and the community) he effects is what ultimately produces new virtue. See *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*, 18.

from *mere* animality to *human* animality. The human being who is truly permitted to promise is thus someone who recognizes the “extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*” and who is able to make an assessment of right or wrong beyond the prescribed practices of the community. The problem is as follows: those who are really permitted to promise are those who must ultimately break their promises. The breaking of such promises is grounds for being cast out of the community, yet the human animal requires the community to truly be human. What a paradoxical task, indeed, nature has set for man!

Nietzsche leaves the implication of this paradox unstated. The reader though should infer that the problem to which Nietzsche refers in the second half is that of the tension between the philosopher and the political community. Further, if the individual who is truly permitted to promise is the philosopher, this would imply that he holds greater responsibility for preserving the conditions for action than he does preserving the conditions of predictability. This is an acknowledgment of the distinctly political nature of the practice of philosophy.

The introduction of this treatise, from II.1 to II.2, thus sets forth its exploration of the moral development of humans by describing the paradox of the promising animal in two ways. First, the pursuit of predictability diminishes the possibility for true action. Second, and much more subtly, the moral bond of the community is contrasted with the moral responsibility of the individual. In effect, Nietzsche describes the manner in which conscience arises, and the political problem inherent within its notion, before speaking to its corrupt form or, what he will otherwise term, “bad conscience.”

2.5 Punishment and Bad Conscience

As with his discussion of the promise, Nietzsche's consideration concerning the corruption of the human conscience also begins by reflecting upon its temporal or historical quality. He expands upon his earlier argument that conscience is something that comes into being when humans form political contracts (i.e., political communities) to specifically consider the origins of *bad* conscience. Indeed, he posits a trajectory wherein the ideas of bad conscience and punishment are woven together in the relationship of man to his political community (political), to himself (psychological), and to the whole (metaphysical).⁵¹

For the first movement of his diagnosis—the promise of the political community—and its role in bad conscience, Nietzsche's comments about *Genealogy II* from *Ecce Homo* provide a helpful starting point:

The second essay gives the psychology of the *conscience*: it is *not*, as is no doubt believed, 'the voice of God in man'—it is the instinct of cruelty turned backwards after it can no longer discharge itself outwards. Cruelty here brought to light for the first time as one of the oldest substrata of culture and one that can least be thought away.⁵²

His brief summation of the essay speaks to three points that are articulated in II.3. First, conscience or man's ability to reason about right and wrong is not divinely inspired.

Second, by implication, it is delimited by the bestial or violent components of the human

⁵¹ It is perhaps his concern with the last of these relationships that most informs his analysis. Indeed, looming in the backdrop of these questions is Nietzsche's pronouncement from five years earlier that, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, III.125. For God to have died, he must have entered history. Death is something that takes place in time. If the promises that had previously been established were established upon the premise that God would be the guarantor, the one to justly distribute reward and punishment, then we are entreated to consider how and whether moral and legal frameworks can exist in a world wherein God can no longer fulfill that role.

⁵² Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic," in *Ecce Homo*, 84.

animal. And third, it is this threat of violence that makes the collective conscience (morality of custom) temporal.

Let us concentrate on the third point. Violence or cruelty is the means by which promises are etched into the (individual and collective) psyche. As expressed in *Genealogy II* this is a necessary condition for law. Violence, or at minimum its threat, creates memory. Once again, memory is the critical component that distinguishes the human animal from the mere animal. Here, though, the emphasis is placed upon the means by which a more specific form of promising is made temporal (given a past, present, and future). This form of promising is that of the “thou-shalt-nots,” which comprise the morality of custom.⁵³ Nietzsche is referring to the distinct manner by which political communities and cultures come into being. Culture, in this sense, might be simply rendered as the collective agreement upon which actions are to be accepted and which forbidden. Culture is that which delineates firm boundaries for inclusion in (and exclusion from) the community. Punishment is the means by which these boundaries are enforced.

By discussing collective conscience in this manner, Nietzsche draws the reader’s attention back to the first type of promising he discussed: the promise that regulates or makes predictable. He suggests that it is by way of all manners of harsh punishment that “Germans have made a memory for themselves.”⁵⁴ To illustrate, he raises the example of the German people and their present self-regard as not a “particularly cruel or hard-

⁵³ The implication is that all law is human law.

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.3.

hearted people” and contrasts this self-regard with the rather brutal measures that were part of previous penal codes (quartering, flaying, stoning etc.). He writes, “with the aid of such images and procedures, man was eventually able to retain five or six ‘I-don’t-want-to’s’ in his memory, in conjunction with which a *promise* had been made.”⁵⁵ The force of the promise is only as strong as its consequences (imagined or actual), and right action is defined against those actions that were subject to the application of cruelty.

By this account, the collective memory or morality of custom is forged in the blood of previous transgressors (e.g., the criminal that is subjected to the flaying or quartering). That memory serves to reinforce the “sacredness of [one’s] promise” the “duty” and “obligation” of the debtor to his creditor, which is another way of saying of the citizen to their political community.⁵⁶ The morality of custom, insofar as it defines the boundaries of obligation, forms the identity of a people (who they *are* versus who they *are not*) and acts as the basis for the community’s constitution or its earliest framework of law. Most notably, Nietzsche introduces the term *die Opfer* [the sacrifice] in II.3.⁵⁷ Sacrifice is used here as an example of the kind of action taken by a community to inscribe into its collective conscience the promises that are necessary “in order to live within the advantages of society.”⁵⁸ As alluded, the discussion of sacrifice then is also one of criminality. This idea is elaborated in II.9, where he writes, “the criminal is above all a ‘breaker,’ one who breaks his contract and word *with the whole*.” The criminal is the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., II.5.

⁵⁷ It occurs twice in II.3, again in II.14, then in II.19, and finally in III.20.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.3.

one who gave his word but did not fulfill his promise. He is a liar. Criminality is thus only possible over and against an established morality of custom (i.e., against the collective promise). The law's promise of order (i.e., predictability) is upheld by way of the prescribed punishments—sacrifice, “mutilations,” “the cruellest ritual forms of all religious cults,” or, as he says, “the entirety of asceticism.”⁵⁹ These are the means by which promises are encouraged to be kept.

Once again the reader is brought back to the idea of the human as the promising animal. On the idea of the collective contract, he writes that, “here there are *promises* made; precisely here it is a matter of *making* a memory for the one who promises.”⁶⁰ It, or the contract, is the condition upon which peace and security may be sought within the political community, but the trade that the human animal must make for these goods is whatever prior claim he had to the complete sovereignty of his conscience and the freedom of his spirit.⁶¹ He allows another to become his master or ruler and, in doing so, accepts the limitations on his freedom imposed upon him, including consenting to punishment should he betray the terms of the contract. At II.16 Nietzsche elaborates: “I take bad conscience to be the deep sickness into which man had to fall under the pressure of that most fundamental of all changes he ever experienced—the change of finding himself enclosed once and for all within the sway of society and peace.” Bad conscience, on this measure, is inseparable from human political existence, and we

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., II.5.

⁶¹ I use the term “spirit” here as the English equivalent for the Greek idea of *thumos*, which refers to the prideful component of the human being, the seat of anger and vexation.

might also consider the extent to which it could be the precondition for conscience rather than the other way around.

When Nietzsche explicitly re-engages the question of the origin of bad conscience in II.16-17, he emphasizes the suddenness of this change in state of being and describes the manner in which the external political circumstances become mirrored internally. First, the acquisition of memory is like an awakening that lacks the possibility of a return to sleep. It is a wholesale change in state of being. Or, as he likens it, it is like evolution's cruel challenge that required water animals to become land animals.⁶² Second, such a change is not voluntary, as it might appear to be in the arrangement of contracts. And while the earlier sections (II.4-5) do not discount power when they describe indebtedness as a condition of the political community, in II.16-17 Nietzsche sees the need to forcefully re-assert this premise. In doing so, he seems to contradict his earlier reasoning by suggesting that the language of political beginnings in contracts is euphemistic at best: "It is in this manner, then, that the 'state' begins on earth: I think the flight of fancy that had it beginning with a 'contract' has been abandoned."⁶³ Rather such contracting is the imposition a greater power's force over a lesser power. In the process of contracting, "form" is impressed upon the lesser power. This conquering act is what he credits as the beginning of the state and, simultaneously, of bad conscience.⁶⁴

To recap, bad conscience only emerges when the societal contract is formed, and punishment, or the threat of its possibility, is a precondition for the establishment of

⁶² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.16.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, II.17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II.11, and II.17.

such a contract. The concepts are thus linked. Nietzsche takes a further step though by distinguishing what we might call *originary* bad conscience from *guilty* bad conscience. He offers two avenues to make this distinction. The first is by further considering the notion of punishment and its purpose, and the second is by contrasting the ideas of guilt and indebtedness.

To the first idea, when Nietzsche returns⁶⁵ to the discussion of punishment in II.13, his language focuses on its utility. He presents twelve variants on the interpretation of punishment, included among which are the following: “Punishment as rendering-harmless;” “Punishment as payment to the injured party;” “Punishment as instilling fear;” and “Punishment as making a memory.” II.14 begins with the statement that “obviously punishment is overladen with utilities of all kinds.” The question that he demands of the reader here recalls his supposed diversion at II.12 wherein he pauses to reflect upon the method of his analysis. We recall that it is there that he writes, “for from time immemorial one had thought that in comprehending the demonstrable purpose, the usefulness of a thing, a form, an arrangement, one also comprehended the reason for its coming into being—the eye as made to see, the hand as made to grasp.” Likewise, at II.14, the reader is being asked to question whether they are confounding the present purpose of a thing with its original purpose. Punishment and its purpose are put to question. Nietzsche elaborates, “All the more reason to subtract from it a *supposed* utility that admittedly counts in popular consciousness as its most essential one,—precisely the

⁶⁵ After II.4, the discussion focuses more so on the idea of “cruelty” than of “punishment” and at II.13 he advises the reader that he is making a return to the topic of punishment.

one in which belief in punishment, teetering today for several reasons, still finds its most forceful support. Punishment is supposed to have the value of awakening in the guilty one the *feeling of guilt*.”⁶⁶ The claim here is that our understanding of punishment is informed by the idea that its very purpose is to remind the transgressor of his guilt.

This re-evaluation of the purpose of punishment seems to contradict Nietzsche’s earlier claims in his discussion of punishment as the enforcement of the societal promise. Yet, he is actually being entirely consistent. In his earlier discussion, punishment was characterized as a means to forge a memory. The memory was either collective (from the perspective of the morality of custom) or individual (from the perspective of the criminal). In the collective sense, we recall that he claimed that it was by witnessing cruelty (stoning, quartering, etc.) that people remembered “one’s *promise* in order to live within the advantages of society.”⁶⁷ In the individual sense, he remarks at II.9 that the criminal “is now reminded *how much there is to these goods*.” Guilt is not part of this equation. It is not yet a factor in the collective sense. The implication is that the community is not concerned with the guilt or innocence of the contract-breaker per se but more concerned with the evocation or reminder of their collective good. Likewise, for the criminal, Nietzsche suggests that punishment intends to address the feeling of indebtedness to the community, to have the criminal recall his debt to his creditor. On this basis, he draws his reader’s attention to the possibility that the *guilty* bad conscience may be distinct from the ordinary bad conscience, even though it emerges out of it.

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II.3.

2.6 Debt, Credit, and Guilt

The origins of the human political animal also create the conditions for internal or psychological politics. Nietzsche writes, “All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn themselves inwards*—this is what I call the *internalizing* of man.”⁶⁸ When one cannot become lord over another, one becomes lord over oneself. He continues in II.16:

The man who, for lack of external enemies and resistance, and wedged into an oppressive narrowness and regularity of custom, impatiently tore apart, persecuted, gnawed at, stirred up, maltreated himself; this animal that one wants to “tame” and beats itself raw on the bars of its cage; this deprived one, consumed by homesickness for the desert, who had to create out of himself an adventure, a place of torture, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness—this fool, this longing and desperate prisoner became the inventor of “bad conscience.”

In somewhat Platonic language, the city provides the conditions for the soul. Perhaps most notably, the city precedes the soul. It is a condition upon which the human being can become conscious of his conscience.

In this next stage of the analysis, we will examine the way in which Nietzsche begins to distinguish between bad conscience as *guilt* and bad conscience as *indebtedness* from the psychological perspective. Indeed, from *Genealogy II* it would appear that it may not have been necessary for bad conscience to express itself as guilty conscience; rather, this is a permutation made possible by the originary framework of law that speaks in the language of debt, credit, and valuation and that entertains the notion of *responsibility* for indebtedness. As Leiter notes, the puzzle of the treatise “is how a

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.16.

capacity to feel 'in debt' turns into a capacity to 'feel guilty.'"⁶⁹ He notes three dimensions in which the consciousness of debt differs from the consciousness of guilt. Summarized, these are (1) debts can arise from ethically permissible conduct, (2) debts do not necessarily presuppose free agency underlying the circumstances of the debt (as in the debt that one feels towards the family one is born into), and (3) debts do not necessarily reflect a failure of character.⁷⁰ To understand how Nietzsche accounts for this permutation of bad conscious, I will focus on the manner in which he links debt and guilt in three movements: in their initial introduction in II.4, in the discussion of measure and value in II.8, in reviewing the utility of punishment in II.14.

Nietzsche sets forth II.4 with a question: "how then did that other 'gloomy thing,' the consciousness of guilt, the entire [*das ganze*] 'bad conscience' come into the world?" The question suggests that bad conscience becomes complete or whole (i.e., rather than partial) with the consciousness of guilt. It is in this passage that he introduces the etymological connection between guilt and debt. In German, both terms are expressed by the word *die Schuld*. Guilt and indebtedness linguistically share a common origin. The importance that Nietzsche attaches to this etymology becomes apparent when he discusses the origin of the idea of justice as described in the language of the contract. He continues in II.4 and requires his reader to be attentive once more to the distinction between the ideas of present purpose and originary purpose:

⁶⁹ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 189.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The thought, now so cheap and apparently so natural, so unavoidable, a thought that has even had to serve as an explanation of how the feeling of justice came into being at all on earth — “the criminal has earned his punishment *because* he could have acted otherwise [*der Verbrecher verdient Strafe, weil er hätte anders handeln*⁷¹ können]” — is in fact a sophisticated form of human judging and inferring that was attained extremely late; whoever shifts it to the beginnings lays a hand on the psychology of older humanity in a particularly crude manner.

In other words, Nietzsche is asking the reader to reconsider the truism that punishment is earned. To earn is to obtain or receive something deservedly. The parameters of what would constitute deserved payment are established in an exchange and formalized by a contract. The idea of earning punishment because other courses of action were available speaks to the ideas of responsibility and agency; ideas that are also reflected in the Christian idea of free will. Without fully entertaining a diversion at this time to elaborate on this idea, it suffices to say that part of the Christian doctrine concerns the notion that humans are endowed with a will, and that that will allows for the freedom to turn towards or away from God. The direction of one’s gaze is self-directed. In other words, one is inherently *responsible* for it. In the above statement, Nietzsche implies, though, that this idea of the freedom of the will (or justified guilt) should actually be considered a later historical development. He continues, “Throughout the greatest part of human history punishment was definitely not imposed because one held the evil-doer responsible for his deed, that is, not under the presupposition that only the guilty one is to be punished: — rather, as parents even today punish their children, from anger over

⁷¹ The verb “handeln” in German has multiple meanings. It not only means to act, but also plays upon the economic theme that Nietzsche establishes in the aphorism by equally suggesting “negotiating,” and/or “bargaining.”

an injury suffered, which is vented on the agent of the injury.”⁷² Thus, like we saw in our earlier discussion of punishment, we note the way in which Nietzsche questions the idea that the punisher may be inherently justified in his action. He questions the idea that cruelty is something earned.

To break this idea down further, the human animal had to become conscious of its capacity to promise and what it means to fulfil one’s promises before it was able to truly become human. Nietzsche elaborates on this in II.5, when he writes of the debtor’s pledge to his creditor: “his promise, to impress repayment on his conscience as a duty, as an obligation, the debtor—by virtue of a contract—pledges to the creditor in the case of non-payment something else that he ‘possesses,’ over which he still has power.” By way of establishing this contract, the creditor and the debtor make an arrangement in the present that speaks to its fulfillment in future terms. To be fulfilled in the future, a memory of the arrangement must be maintained. Thus, like his earlier example of the tortuous German penal codes, an element of cruelty is involved in etching this memory. He writes, “the creditor could subject the body of the debtor to all manner of ignominy and torture, for example cutting as much from it as appeared to commensurate to the magnitude of the debt.”⁷³ The creditor is paid back not materially, as with the flesh of his debtor, but spiritually in the sense that he attains a “feeling of satisfaction that comes from being permitted to vent his power without a second thought on one who is

⁷² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II.5.

powerless.”⁷⁴ Justice, in this sense, is concerned with the idea of giving due, or perhaps, more aptly cast from the perspective of the creditor, it is about “receiving due.” It is retributive. It is expressed in the satisfaction of the exercise of power and not in the material receipt of payment due.

The connection he reveals in II.4 between bad conscience, debt, and guilt is that further to the act of becoming indebted, man’s conscience (or the faculty that judges right and wrong action) can accept the terms of the contract and, in doing so, justify the creditor’s cruelty. The debtor recognizes the creditor’s right to inflict punishment. This recognition reflects a judgment or assessment of right and wrong action, wherein the debtor judges himself to be in the wrong. The contract is moralized, and the debtor’s promise creates the conditions in which he internalizes guilt. In sum, guilt appears when one deems oneself worthy of punishment. The moralized contract allows the debtor to recognize himself as a transgressor and thus someone worthy of the punishments prescribed by the contract. Yet, this story is not complete.

In II.8, Nietzsche returns to the material relationship between buyer and seller that he raised in II.4, but here he discusses it in terms of the idea of measurement and evaluation. The central contention is that human thinking is characterized by, and perhaps preoccupied with, comparisons and measurements. This aptitude is, of course, expressed in the economic sense of buying, selling, and trading. More importantly though, as we have already seen Nietzsche allude in the example of a pound of flesh, the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

expression of justice is less concerned with material equivalences and more concerned with spiritual ones. He writes, "here that oldest kind of acumen was bred, here likewise we may suspect the first beginnings of human pride, man's feeling of pre-eminence with respect to other creatures."⁷⁵ His discussion in II.8 recalls that from earlier in the *Genealogy*, wherein he describes "the pathos of nobility and distance, this lasting and dominant collective and basic feeling of a higher ruling nature in relation to a lower nature, to a 'below.'"⁷⁶ In the first instance from II.8, Nietzsche is still making a distinction between the mere animal and human animal. The discussion of pride here is connected to the capacity to even make that distinction. In the second instance from I.2, we note that the *pathos of distance* does not only apply to the distinction between mere animal and human animal, but also expresses the political desire to differentiate between the ruled and the ruling. Pride is an estimation of self-worth that is made in comparison to others wherein one elevates oneself above others. The *pathos of distance* is an expression of the degree of this estimation and, indeed, elevation. Nietzsche also argues that it is the origin of the opposition "good" and "bad."⁷⁷ The creditor is responsible for bad conscience insofar as he is the one who initially cements these categories. He imposes a greater power over a lesser power, calling his power "good." He defines his good against the bad of the debtor and, by creating these categories, reinforces the distance between himself and the debtor.

⁷⁵ Ibid., II.8.

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I.2.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Nietzsche expands upon this idea in II.14 in the discussion of the “supposed utility” of punishment. As we recall, punishment is supposed to awaken the transgressor to their guilt.⁷⁸ But, he argues that it does not have this effect: “the prisons, the penitentiaries are *not* the breeding places where this species of gnawing worm most loves to flourish.”⁷⁹ The reason for this is that the prisoner, or the recipient of punishment, measures his transgression against that of those inflicting his punishment. If a thief steals an apple and is threatened with the loss of his hand as a penalty, he is not awakened to the sense of guilt, but rather observes a forbidden action being used in the name of justice. Nietzsche continues as follows:

For let us not underestimate the extent to which precisely the sight of the judicial and executive procedures prevents the criminal from feeling his deed, the nature of this action, as *in itself* reprehensible, for he sees the very same kind of actions committed in the service of justice and then approved, committed with a good conscience...⁸⁰

The judge or the one executing the punishment thus does not condemn something like the act of theft outright. Indeed, if the consequence is the loss of one’s hand, the transgression of the thief is met with robbery of another sort. The essential point here is that bad conscience, as a guilty conscience, does not emerge from the one who imposes the punishment. He is not concerned with the sting of conscience. His retributive acts resemble the criminal’s actions. Again, the distinction between the actions, whether they are classed as good or bad, is determined by the judge, by the one imposing a greater power over the lesser power. The actions, as such, are not moralized.

⁷⁸ Ibid., II.14.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Earlier I claimed that the debtor's promise to the creditor was necessary for the appearance of guilt, that the debtor needed to deem himself worthy of punishment. From where does this sense of responsibility arise though? To address this, it is helpful to briefly consult Ridley and Risse's exchange concerning the precise origins of guilt. Risse argues that bad conscience arises in stages.⁸¹ This aspect of his interpretation seems accurate. Bad conscience does not begin as guilty conscience but develops into it. It begins in indebtedness. Risse identifies the shift to guilt as one that happens "when this older form of the bad conscience merges with an indebtedness to ancestors or gods,"⁸² and specifically, "through the interaction of Christianity with the early form of bad conscience."⁸³ He establishes this argument by focusing on Nietzsche's language in II.21 and the idea contained therein that bad conscience becomes "pushed back" or entangled with the concept of God. Risse suggests that the moralization of bad conscience takes place in this movement.

While Christianity is certainly implicated in the spread and popularization of bad conscience itself, it is not the source of the mutation towards guilt. Rather, like Ridley argues, "Guilt, then, as one of the many products, or potential products, of the internalization of man, is most likely to be invented by the most internalized, the most repressed—by the slave."⁸⁴ Slavishness, as we come to understand it from *Genealogy I* is connected to Christianity, but before it. Following the logic of Nietzsche's presentation

⁸¹ Risse, "Nietzsche on the Origin of Bad Conscience," 58.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁴ Ridley, "Guilt Before God, or God Before Guilt?," 37.

of bad conscience in *Genealogy II*, like Ridley, I suggest that the political and psychological conditions precede the metaphysical ones. The key transition for this problem then is not located in the questions concerning god(s), but rather in the movement from the city to the soul. That is, it is located in the politicization of the soul.

Punishment itself is not the cause of the politics of the soul, nor is it the internal focus of man. Rather the cause is the power dynamic that surrounds it. To clarify, Nietzsche's argument is preoccupied with the function or utility of punishment. In II.16, he writes, "Hostility, cruelty, pleasure in persecution, in assault, in change, in destruction—all of that turning itself against the possessors of such instincts: *that* is the origin of 'bad conscience.'" The possessors of such instincts are the ones who effect judgment. They are the ones who rule. The claim in the above quote is that at some point the actions of punishment become moralized rather than simply representing the payment of debts. Ridley argues that the sense that one is worthy of the punishment they are to receive includes the "thought that one's deed, the type of one's action *as such*, is reprehensible."⁸⁵ The thief must judge his robbery to be something shameful. He must judge the act of stealing *tout court* as shameful. In this way, the thief would also judge the consequence of his crime (the "theft" of his hand) as morally wrong. The justice of his judges is thus considered an evil. Without the capacity to overpower the judges though, the thief is left to direct his condemnation inwards. His anger cannot be expressed against his judges. It becomes expressed against himself. The human becomes

⁸⁵ Ibid.

a self-reformer, a self-punisher.⁸⁶ With this, the earlier proposed definition can be entertained once more: guilt appears when one deems oneself worthy of punishment. It is the product of self-evaluation or self-measurement; it is self-directed anger for the action committed. Distinctly, this judgment is self-inflicted.

Before turning to the metaphysical implications of this internalization, it is necessary to place a caveat on Nietzsche's judgment of the idea of bad conscience. At II.18, he cautions readers: "One should guard against forming a low opinion of this entire phenomenon just because it is ugly and painful from the outset." The political conditions that Nietzsche describes as informing this psychological outcome are ugly and painful. Politics is inherently cruel. Yet, couched in the midst of this exposition of self-inflicted suffering, Nietzsche describes bad conscience as "the true womb of ideal and imaginative events, ... beauty *itself*."⁸⁷ It is the psychological condition upon which the "*instinct for freedom*" can be identified.⁸⁸ It is the condition upon which true self-consciousness occurs. As Risse describes, "The development of this early form of inner world also provides the foundations for *reflectiveness*."⁸⁹ In this way, we might also understand Nietzsche to be saying that the very possibility of philosophy, a practice based in self-knowledge, was contingent upon the appearance of bad conscience.

Philosophy required the political act—the distinguishing between ruler and ruled—to

⁸⁶ Leiter elaborates on this point, "Nietzsche's account, like Freud's, depends crucially on the premise that instinctual energy does not simply vanish: it must be continuously discharged somehow. When the instinct for cruelty of some people is denied external discharge ... the instinctual energy has no alternative but to find 'internal' discharge." See *Nietzsche on Morality*, 186.

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.18.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Risse, "Nietzsche on the Origin of Bad Conscience," 60.

come to be. Politics, complete with its morality of custom, provides the conditions for the “autonomous and supermoral” individual or, “the human being who is really *permitted* to promise.”⁹⁰ The recognition of boundaries placed upon freedom awakens the instinct for freedom.

To summarize the claims thus far: first, the internal or psychological state of bad conscience is itself a commentary on the political nature of human beings. Nietzsche’s observations concerning the ruling and ruled extend inwards in his assessment that the soul likewise becomes split along these lines. Second, the transition from bad conscience to guilty conscience takes place when the slave, or unfree person, moralizes their punishment. The guilty one must not only come to see themselves as worthy of their punishment, but must also come to see that punishment, which is conducted in the name of justice, as immoral. Lacking the power to overcome the immorality of the master, the slave turns inwards to address his own immorality, to rule over the bad or transgressive aspect of himself. By becoming “ruler” over himself, the “self” becomes a new site of “ruler” and “ruled.” This turn produces the last point, that the very politics of the soul that gives rise to guilt also gives rise to the conditions necessary for philosophy.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.2.

⁹¹ This recalls *Beyond* §229, which Nietzsche concludes by writing, “in all desire to know there is a drop of cruelty.”

2.7 Ancestors and God(s)

Let us immediately add that, on the other hand, with the appearance on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, something so new, deep, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and *full of future* had come into being that the appearance of the earth was thereby essentially changed. Indeed, divine spectators were necessary to appreciate the spectacle that thus began and whose end is still by no means in sight—a spectacle too refined, too wonderful, too paradoxical to be permitted to play itself out senselessly-unnoticed on some ridiculous star!⁹²

Towards the conclusion of *Genealogy II*, Nietzsche re-engages with the question of the origin of the guilty conscience from bad conscience and builds on the distinction between indebtedness and guilt by discussing the metaphysical expressions of these feelings. He once more presents a kind of origin story as a means of understanding the possible historical trajectories of these expressions. He does this by adding the idea of the “ancestral” to the already established “creditor-debtor” framework. As we recall, he used the creditor-debtor framework to introduce his initial considerations concerning human beings as promising animals and to set forth the conversation concerning justice namely from the perspective of just punishment. When the idea of ancestry is layered upon these ideas, a further problem is raised: there is the possibility that debts can transcend the mortal life span. The issue, then, is not with indebtedness per se, but rather arises when this sense of indebtedness becomes confounded with guilt *and history*. Further, by suggesting that the guilty conscience is but one possible manifestation of bad conscience and not an essential outcome, Nietzsche implies that there is a distinction to

⁹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.16.

be made between the historical trajectories that are possible from emphasizing either the feeling of indebtedness or the feeling of guilt. These trajectories are respectively represented in his analysis by his reference to the metaphysics of the Greek tragedians and Christian religion. When guilt dominates the sense of indebtedness and manifests itself in time, as he argues it does with the rise of Christianity, it transforms into an eternal or unpayable debt that ultimately wills the negation of the human. With reference to the Greek gods though,⁹³ Nietzsche implies that there is no historical necessity to the existential guilt of the Christian god. Thus, he presents the possibility that political and moral frameworks can exist beyond those construed under Christian monotheism and may yet come into existence after Christianity.⁹⁴

The argument begins well before Nietzsche explicitly speaks about “ancestors” or “the ancestral” [*die Vorfahren*]. It starts when he elaborates on the connection between god(s) and festivities in II.6 and II.7. These sections ask the reader to reflect upon the purpose of rituals and celebrations. In II.19-21, the idea of debts to deities is raised again, but here the ancestral is explicitly mentioned along with the idea of living to one’s

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.23.

⁹⁴ Fukuyama takes this point to heart in his study, *The Origins of Political Order*. He notes a clear distinction between Western European political development and that which took place in other parts of the world. In Fukuyama’s words “kinship” and its management is the distinction between different kinds of political developments. To quote him at length: “The only part of the world where tribalism was fully superseded by more voluntary and individualistic forms of social relationship was Europe, where Christianity played a decisive role in undermining kinship as a basis for social cohesion. Since most early modernization theorists were European, they assumed that other parts of the world would experience a similar shift away from kinship as part of the modernization process. But they were mistaken. Although China was the first civilization to invent the modern state, it never succeeded in suppressing the power of kinship on social and cultural levels... In India, kinship interacted with religion and mutated into the caste system, which up to the present day has proved much stronger than any state in defining the nature of Indian society. From the Melanesian wantok to the Arab tribe to the Taiwanese lineage to the Bolivian ayllu, complex kinship structures remain the primary locus of social life for many people in the contemporary world, and strongly shape their interaction with modern political institutions.” See *The Origins of Political Order*, 78.

ancestors. Finally, in II.23, he contrasts the “holy God” with the Greek gods to bring together the different ways in which bad conscience is expressed. This pattern of argumentation has psychological, historical, and philosophical functions. First, it establishes the idea that while the Christian moralization of conscience builds upon previous mythologies of indebtedness, it profoundly changes human psychology because it makes these debts eternal and, perhaps most importantly, it makes humans responsible for them. Ultimately, mankind’s debt to God is not absolved with the death of Christ. His death amplifies this sense of indebtedness because of the extraordinariness of the action.⁹⁵ Christ’s death does not bring absolution. It burdens humankind with the guilt of knowing that the saviour died for humanity’s sins. Further, the God’s payment of his debt to himself with himself suggests that Christianity’s dying or suffering God suffers justifiably: the “guilty God” comes to see himself worthy of punishment. Second, as already alluded, it alerts the reader to the idea that this is but one possible expression of bad conscience. Bad conscience may be natural, insofar as human beings are political animals, but it need not result in the nihilistic impulse. Last, this concluding argument of *Genealogy II* provides the philosophical context for the last essay of the work “What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?” It brings together the political, psychological, and metaphysical components of his analysis of bad conscience to begin to entertain the question of the valuation of life itself.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche concludes II.21 with palpable disbelief: “God sacrificing himself for the guilt of man, God himself exacting payment of himself, God as the only one who can redeem from man what has become irredeemable for man himself— the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of love (is that credible? —), out of love for his debtor!”

To understand how this argument develops it is necessary to return to his earlier discussion of promising. The idea of the promise was used to explore the creditor-debtor relationship and then was extended to include the individual's relationship to the community. In the last section, I established that it was internalized in a particular manner, as in a promise sworn to oneself to conduct oneself in a certain fashion. Towards the conclusion of the treatise, this act extends outwards once again. There are promises that we inherit, that we are born into. We are not the original "social contractors," but over time a memory has been established that supports one's obligation and duties to the political community. When Nietzsche raises the idea of the ancestral, he is referring to this kind of promising.

Nietzsche forges a connection between cruelty, festivity, and that which is "oldest and most pervasive" in II.6 and II.7. This begins his exploration of the deification of the "oldest." Both sections share a nearly identical conclusion. II.6 ends with the statement that "in punishment too there is so much that is *festive!*—" And, with nearly the same language, II.7 concludes, "in great *punishment* too there is so much that is festive!..." In the second conclusion, Nietzsche has added the qualifier "great," shifted the emphasis indicated by italics from "festive" to "punishment" and changed the closing punctuation from an em dash to ellipses. These apparently minor changes are actually quite revealing. Their similarities suggest that the sections should be read closely together. Their differences suggest a subtle contrasting of ideas. Namely, II.6 is still focused upon the pleasure derived from punishment in terms of the *pathos of distance*. It follows upon Nietzsche's discussion of contract relationships from II.5 and

builds upon the idea introduced there that in lieu of material payment, “the creditor is granted a certain *feeling of satisfaction* as repayment and compensation.” This spiritual satisfaction arises from “the enjoyment of doing violence.”⁹⁶ The central focus of II.6 is thus upon the pleasure and cruelty *in this world*.⁹⁷ Part way through this section, though, Nietzsche indicates that he “pointed a cautious finger to the ever-growing spiritualization and ‘deification’ of cruelty that runs through the entire history of higher culture (and in a sense even constitutes it).” With this indicator, he marks a shift between “human-all-too-human”⁹⁸ cruelty and human-made-divine cruelty.

His “cautious finger” points the reader to four passages from earlier texts.⁹⁹ Of these, *Daybreak* 18, which is titled “The morality of voluntary suffering,” concisely establishes the metaphysical implications of his argument. Here he writes, “Cruelty is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind. Consequently it is imagined that the gods too are refreshed and in festive mood when they are offered the spectacle of cruelty — and thus there creeps into the world the idea that voluntary suffering, self-chosen torture, is

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.5.

⁹⁷ This worldliness is revealed in the first line of II.6: “In this sphere, in contract law that is, the moral conceptual world “guilt,” “conscience,” “duty,” “sacredness of duty,” has its genesis—its beginning, like the beginning of everything great on earth, was thoroughly and prolongedly drenched in blood.” Likewise in the original German, Nietzsche uses the term *die Erde* to express the earthly or “grounded” quality of these ideas: “In dieser Sphäre, im Obligationen-Rechte also, hat die moralische Begriffswelt „Schuld“, „Gewissen“, „Pflicht“, „Heiligkeit der Pflicht“ ihren Entstehungsheerd, — ihr Anfang ist, wie der Anfang alles Grossen auf Erden, gründlich und lange mit Blut begossen worden.”

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.6.

⁹⁹ He points to *Beyond* §229: “We should reconsider cruelty and open our eyes... That ‘savage animal’ has not really been ‘mortified’; it lives and flourishes, it has merely become—divine.” And, he raises three passages from *Daybreak*. §18 is cited above, and alongside this he points to §77 and §113. The latter of which includes: “The triumph of the ascetic over himself, his glance turned inwards which beholds a man split asunder into a sufferer and spectator, and henceforth gazes out into the outer world only in order to gather as it were wood for his own pyre, this final tragedy of the drive for distinction in which there is only one character burning and consuming himself.”

meaningful and valuable." Gods measure and value like human beings. Witnessing human suffering elevates them. Like the political relationship between ruling and ruled, god(s) as creditors distance and distinguish themselves from the humans who are in their debt.

If gods are heightened by the *pathos of distance*, humans appraise themselves against those heights. II.7 focuses on this human perspective, the upwards glance. The incompleteness of the human being is contrasted with the completeness of the god. This incompleteness, which comprises human vulnerability, is set forth as a deficiency or, worse, as an object of disgust. Nietzsche writes that man, "disapprovingly catalogues his repulsive traits ('impure begetting, disgusting nourishment in the womb, vileness of the matter out of which man develops, revolting stench, excretion of saliva, urine, and feces')." ¹⁰⁰ The god-like state becomes the object of longing. Specifically, gods do not suffer. Their lack of suffering is contrasted with humanity's continual suffering. It is precisely the question of one's disposition towards suffering that introduces his first reference to the Greeks in *Genealogy II*. He continues, "Now, when suffering is marshalled forth as first among the arguments *against* existence, as its nastiest question mark, one would do well to remember the times when one made the reverse judgment because one did not wish to do without making-suffer and saw in it an enchantment of the first rank, actual seductive lure *to* life." ¹⁰¹ In saying this, he contrasts the Christian and Greek dispositions towards suffering. The counter point that Nietzsche introduces

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.7.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

here is that expressions of cruelty were a means by which humans elevated themselves or made themselves closer to gods.

The idea of the Greek hero is raised in this context. Nietzsche asks, "What was the ultimate meaning of Trojan wars and similar tragic horrors?"¹⁰² Wars, he answers, are "*festival games* for the gods."¹⁰³ The suffering of the hero is given meaning because it is witnessed by the god(s). In this way, the public realm of humanity's political existence is extended metaphysically. The hero is a public figure not only because his actions are witnessed by men, but also because they are performed for the gods. Heroic virtue required this public component and, specifically, these divine witnesses. The emphasis placed on the word "punishment" at the conclusion of II.7 has the reader consider the purpose or utility of punishment, as in the conduct of war against an enemy. The word "great" is added as the qualifier for punishment in this conclusion, and it is now possible to see from where this measure of greatness is derived. The greatness of the hero is measured by his proximity to godliness or immortality. This proximity is, of course, sung or acknowledged by the poet. Achilles is not Achilles without Homer. Thus, Nietzsche writes that the spectacle of cruelty is not simply for the gods, but "insofar as the poet is in this respect more 'godlike' than other humans, probably also festival games for the poets."¹⁰⁴ With this consideration, we get closer to the

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

psychological dimension of our mythological framework to which Nietzsche calls attention.¹⁰⁵

Poetry maintains the magic of the ritual. It is also the means by which the ruler is made more god-like. Further, rituals (or “festival games”) are connected to a collective psychology. They emerge because of the recognition of vulnerability, of profound human impotence in the face of the unknown, and the fear of the lack of predictability. Rituals are expressions of promises. They are interventions in nature that arise from the desire for order.¹⁰⁶

The poet’s power is to ease the psychological burden of humanity, to alleviate some of the existential fear by providing meaning to the distribution of rewards and punishments. To this end, Nietzsche speaks of the necessity of divine spectators in II.16. Yet, we note from Nietzsche’s language throughout *Genealogy II* that these “divine spectators” are not disengaged observers. The issue that he has identified early on is that they are also treated as creditors, or those who receive the payment of debts, and thus

¹⁰⁵ Baring and Cashford offer the following analysis of the idea of war as an extension of the ritual of sacrifice in their discussion of Bronze Age mythologies, which complements Nietzsche’s observations. To quote them at length: “The apparently endless and otherwise gratuitous conquest of territory must have come to serve the ritual purpose of securing the surrogate sacrifice of ‘the other’ in place of oneself or one’s group. This was an ominous extension of the Neolithic idea that ritual sacrifice would ensure the continued life of the community and the renewal of world order. On this hypothesis the wholesale extermination of other people—now designated the ‘enemy’—became a new way magically to avoid death, and the blood of the enemy shed in battle was thought to ‘fertilize’ the life of one’s own tribal group, and even increase the ‘divine potency’ of the king himself. Since fear lies at the heart of sacrificial rituals, it follows that communities that feel threatened, either by natural forces or by attack from outside, will experience relief from fear in the sacrifice of others.” See *Myth of the Goddess*, 167. Emphasis my own.

¹⁰⁶ In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes, “All orgiastic cults aim at discharging the *ferocia* of some deity all at once, turning it into an orgy, in order that the deity should feel freer and calmer afterward and leave man in peace.” See “On the origin of poetry,” 138.II.84.

also those who interact with their debtors by arranging contracts and levelling punishments in lieu of missed payments.

The idea of the ancestral meets most explicitly with the idea of creditor-debtor justice in II.19 wherein he describes practices of ancestor worship, including “sacrifices... festivals, shrines, tributes and above all obedience.”¹⁰⁷ By this, Nietzsche suggests that the authority of the ancestral is reinforced, and perpetuated, through the public practice of ritual, and that these rituals are an extension of the creditor-debtor framework. He writes as follows:

The civil-law relationship of the debtor to his creditor, of which I have already spoken at length, was once again—and indeed in a manner that is historically exceedingly curious and questionable—interpreted into a relationship in which it is for us modern humans perhaps at its most incomprehensible: namely the relationship of *those presently living* to their *ancestors*.

In the above statement, Nietzsche acknowledges that he is layering a concept upon the creditor-debtor framework. Additionally, he suggests though that this idea of “living to their ancestors” is something “incomprehensible” for “us modern humans.”

To approach the ideas in II.19, it is necessary to begin with the latter and return to the former. The incomprehensibility he notes is part of his broader diagnosis of the problem of bad conscience facing us moderns. He begins II.19 by speaking in the language of diagnosis: “It is a sickness, bad conscience—this admits of no doubt—but a sickness as pregnancy is a sickness.” We recall that the previous section also opened with a caveat on the valuation of bad conscience. In II.18 he warned: “One should guard

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.19.

against forming a low opinion of this entire phenomenon just because it is ugly and painful from the outset." Just as the pain of childbirth produces the beauty of new life, so too does he imply that bad conscience can serve a productive (and potentially, reproductive) function. Yet, the incomprehensibility of this is precisely the problem that he sees in modernity. In sum, the diagnosis of incomprehensibility contains the claim that humanity has grown barren. To this point, he has not yet indicated the cause of this infertility, but following the logic of his argument we are led to understand that it begins with how human beings interpret their relationship with god(s) through the creditor-debtor framework.

He suggests that the understanding of god(s) as creditors begins with primeval humanity. The story he tells in II.19 is of the transfiguration of ancestors into gods. He writes, "With the original clan association—we are speaking of primeval times—the living generation always acknowledges a juridical obligation to the earlier generation, and particularly to the earliest one, which founded the clan." On a smaller scale, this is somewhat akin to acknowledging the debt of one's existence to one's parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Those various human connections had to come together in the way that they came together so that the person that you are today could come to be. What he suggests is distinct or more pronounced in the primeval expression of this ancestral worship is the enduring consciousness that one owes one's existence to one's predecessors. Further, one's predecessors also understood this enduring obligation and sought to repay this debt of existence with "festivals, shrines, tributes, above all

obedience.”¹⁰⁸ To this point, though, the debt is not yet cumulative. The ritual repetition of repayment, enacted by each generation, follows a cyclical pattern. This pattern is interrupted though when the clan increases its power, and “fear of the spirit of the founder” grows.¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche writes, “does one ever give them enough? This suspicion remains and grows: from time to time it forces a great redemption, lock, stock and barrel, some enormity of a counter-payment to the ‘creditor’ (the notorious sacrifice of the firstborn, for example; blood, human blood in any case).”¹¹⁰ The great redemptive payment is made in fear of the consequences or punishment that may be levelled by the founder or the original creditor. Nietzsche follows this logic through to its end: “finally, through the imagination of growing fear the progenitors of the most powerful clans must have grown into enormous proportions and have been pushed back into the darkness of a divine uncanniness and unimaginability:— in the end the progenitor is necessarily transfigured into a *god*.” Bad conscience as indebtedness, as the fear of one’s creditor, is thus also the womb of gods.¹¹¹

The Christian God is no exception. II.20 expands upon the political articulations of this existential fear: “development toward universal empires is also always development toward universal deities.” This universalization is an enlargement of the idea of the powerful clan. The seed for this idea is contained in the previous section, where he writes: “The fear of the progenitor and his power, the consciousness of debts

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.19.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ This conclusion is similar to the way he spoke of heroes (and poets) in II.7, as becoming more god-like.

towards him necessarily increases, according to this kind of logic, to exactly the same degree that the power of the clan itself increases."¹¹² The clan that is victorious in its conquests thus becomes more fearful of its gods. As its gods are credited with the expansion of the clan, so too they become acknowledged for their "shrewdness," "foresightedness" and "presence as power."¹¹³ In this way, the clan's debt towards them grows and its repayment likewise increases in scale.

Yet, as Nietzsche elaborates in II.21, fear is not the only motivator in this movement towards universalization. He begins II.21 by suggesting that he has "intentionally left aside the actual moralization of these concepts."¹¹⁴ The concepts being *Schuld* and *Pflicht*. Whereas Clark and Swensen have opted to translate *Schuld* in this instance as guilt, it is evident from the preceding analysis that he is still speaking about debt and that this is more likely the intended connotation of the word. As Leiter notes in his analysis "to 'moralize' the concept of 'debt' is precisely to turn it into 'guilt.'"¹¹⁵ Thus, debt needs to be distinguished from guilt here to maintain the logic of the argument. The primeval peoples to whom he refers as indebted do not yet possess guilty consciences. The balance of the argument in II.21 supports this, as Risse correctly observes that this section is pivotal because it is where "Guilt arises when this older

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.19.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ The first line of II.21 in German reads: "Dies vorläufig im Kurzen und Groben über den Zusammenhang der Begriffe „Schuld“, „Pflicht“ mit religiösen Voraussetzungen: ich habe absichtlich die eigentliche Moralisation dieser Begriffe..."

¹¹⁵ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 190.

form of the bad conscience merges with an indebtedness to ancestors or gods.”¹¹⁶ As in the previous discussion of punishment, a transition takes place between one’s feeling of indebtedness and one’s feeling of guilt in the consideration of justice as a human-to-human affair, so too is a transition now taking place in the consideration of justice as a human-to-divine affair. In the language of the Christian account, humans are indebted to God on account of Original Sin, but the complete moralization of this debt takes place with Christ’s crucifixion. Nietzsche concludes II.21 by focusing on the specific meaning of this act:

we stand before the paradoxical and horrifying remedy in which tortured humanity found temporary relief, *Christianity’s* stroke of genius: God sacrificing himself for the guilt of man, God himself exacting payment of himself, God as the only one who can redeem from man what has become irredeemable for man himself—the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of *love* (is that credible? —), out of love for his debtor!...

The creditor’s action intends to relieve the sense of indebtedness but it creates a sense of guilt in its place. Humanity is guilty of the death of Christ. The Saviour had to die for the sins of man; human nature is too corrupt, too defective, for any other payment. The human debt towards God is thus moralized in this way. God is good and man is evil.

As with the political expression of bad conscience, with the feeling of guilt arising from the slave towards his master, this account of gods and men reaches a similar conclusion. The master is able to create the conditions in which the slave finds himself reprehensible, wherein he must politicize his own soul to attempt to become a master of himself. When gods are layered upon this, Nietzsche suggests that human

¹¹⁶ Risse, “Nietzsche on the Origin of Bad Conscience,” 58.

beings adopt an additional sense of “psychic cruelty”¹¹⁷ and extraordinary existential guilt. In II.22 he writes: “In ‘God’ he captures the most extreme opposites he can find to his actual and inescapable animal instincts; he reinterprets these animal instincts themselves as guilt before God (as hostility, rebellion, insurrection against the ‘lord,’ the ‘father,’ the primal ancestor and the beginning of the world).” Human beings are universalized as “father-beaters.”¹¹⁸ The very existence of humanity is thus something against the natural order. Unlike in previous mythologies,¹¹⁹ “father-beating” is not the source of a new beginning or the violent establishment of a new order, but rather it presupposes a desire to eliminate this violence or channel it into self-punishment or self-negation.

To clarify these distinctions, Nietzsche interrupts his genealogical investigation of the Christian tradition with the suggestion that the gods of Greek mythology were better able to avoid or mitigate the nihilistic expression of this existential guilt. He writes in II.23 that “For the longest time these Greeks used their gods precisely to keep ‘bad conscience’ at arm’s length, to be able to remain cheerful about their freedom of soul: that is, the reverse of the use which Christianity made of its god.” He draws out two

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.22.

¹¹⁸ When Nietzsche references the death of his father in the line from *Ecce Homo* quoted at the beginning of this section, its significance might also be understood in this context. Considered from the standpoint of mythology, his father has died, and his mother remains. Nietzsche as “his mother” adopts the uniquely feminine capacity for pregnancy and childbirth. We understand from II.19 that he reads pregnancy and bad conscience alongside one another. Nietzsche’s sickness, his bad conscience, thus also might refer to reproductive potential. He does, however, refer to his mother growing old, which might refer to the natural limits of this reproductive potential as well.

¹¹⁹ We recall, for example, the pattern of “father-beating” that is established in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Cronus usurps his father Sky at the behest of his mother Earth (III.154-210), and likewise Zeus defeats his father Cronus to become “master over gods and men” (VIII.453-506).

components of the Greek tradition that enabled humans to live with some of the more cruel aspects of their animal nature. First, he returns again to a description of the Olympian spectator. The divine spectator in this instance not only confers meaning upon suffering, but also provides an account of why that suffering took place. Human ignorance is the cause of suffering. As such, the gods do not express anger towards humanity, but rather pity. He writes, “far from being angry at them for this and from thinking evil of them: ‘how *foolish* they are!’ so he thinks in the face of the misdeeds of mortals... foolishness, *not* sin! do you understand that?”¹²⁰ The vulnerability of the human condition is not moralized in the same way that is in the Christian account. Second, and perhaps more importantly for the argument concerning guilt, Nietzsche describes the way in which the Greek gods took on the guilt of men. Dodds’ study *The Greeks and the Irrational* helps to expand this point:

Closely akin to this agent of *ate*¹²¹ are those irrational impulses which arise in a man against his will to tempt him. When Theognis calls hope and fear “dangerous daemons,” or when Sophocles speaks of Eros as a power that “warps to wrong the righteous mind, for its destruction,” we should not dismiss this as “personification”: behind it lies the old Homeric feeling that these things are not truly part of the self, since they are not within man’s conscious control; they are endowed with a life and energy of their own, and so can force a man, as it were from the outside, into conduct foreign to him.¹²²

When human beings do unspeakably cruel things, the locus of blame is not attached to the person himself, he is not innately evil, but rather it is placed upon the god(s). As

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.23.

¹²¹ Dodds earlier describes *ate* as “a state of mind—a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness.” See *Greeks and the Irrational*, 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 41.

Nietzsche writes of the Greek rationalization, "A god must have beguiled him."¹²³ In this way, the god takes on the guilt of human's action because the human is neither conceived of as wise or free enough to have acted individually. The poet's craft, as defined here, is an act of apology. It provides an account for the evils that humans express and an outlet for them to be expressed.

In this last movement of the essay, Nietzsche returns again to the paradox that began the exploration. When the human animal assumes full responsibility for his promises, when he claims freedom of will and the ability to "vouch for itself,"¹²⁴ he also must adopt a guilty conscience. Gods cannot mitigate this feeling of guilt. Cruelty is not excused or tolerated. Rather, the very desire to act cruelly or vengefully becomes a source of self-shame.

Conclusion: From Debts to Democracy

The Socratic school, on the contrary, turned to these activities,¹²⁵ which to the Greeks were prepolitical, because they wished to turn against politics and against action. To them, legislating and the execution of decisions by vote are the most legitimate political activities because in them men "act like craftsmen": the result of their action is a tangible product, and its process has a clearly recognizable end. This is no longer, or rather, not yet action (*praxis*), properly speaking, but making (*poiēsis*), which they prefer because of its greater reliability. It is as though they had said that if men only renounce their capacity for action, with its futility, boundlessness, and uncertainty of outcome, there could be a remedy for the frailty of human affairs.¹²⁶

¹²³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.23.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, II.2.

¹²⁵ The activities of "legislation and foundation." See Arendt, *Human Condition*, 195.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

In the above-quote, Arendt describes a transition that took place in Greek thought, away from the Homeric world of action and towards the Socratic world of political philosophy. The essential idea she expresses helps conclude this investigation of Nietzsche's *Genealogy II* and prepares us for *Republic I*. This idea is that the Socratic school created the conditions in which the *polis* became the site in which making was emphasized over action. The *polis* encompassed the idea of promising. Reliability and predictability are preferred over the open-endedness of action. Promising intervenes with human nature to address its unreliable and unpredictable elements. Further, such promising is treated as a craft (*techne*) wherein effective statecraft could render more predictable and reliable results.

The puzzle of *Genealogy II*—the problem of the origins of bad conscience and its mutation from indebtedness to guilt—is one that focuses on the question of the nature of human beings and what interventions are made to shape or change this nature. The foregoing analysis began by arguing that Nietzsche's concern with the truth of this nature suggests that he is more appropriately read as a naturalist rather than as a postmodernist. His argument is grounded in the idea of what makes humans distinctly human. The distinctly human is a question of nature. Nature is the material with which conventions interact. Placing these reflections in the context of Arendt's quote, his concern is located in the tension between the human being as a maker (of promises, of contracts, of cities, of himself) and the human being as a political animal (as a ruler, a master, a slave, an evaluator, a conqueror), and specifically with the paradox that the civilizing act of promising un-civilizes the human being. The human, on this diagnosis,

requires a healthy outlet for the political aspect of his nature. In other words, he requires the ability to act without being overladen with guilt. This is the case because without such an outlet or with the active denial of this component of the human being, the human being fundamentally morphs into another sort of being. At II.11 he writes, "A legal system conceived of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the battle of power complexes, but rather as means *against* all battle generally...would be a principle *hostile to life*, a destroyer and dissolver of man, an attempt to kill the future of man, a sign of weariness, a secret pathway to nothingness." The human being as maker thus assumes a certain capacity to remake his political nature, but so much so that this remaking is not like an exercise in military conditioning, but rather all-out warfare. The political component is not eliminated by remaking it is only redirected. But, as with the idea of acting in the public realm, its redirection likewise produces unforeseen consequences. One consequence is, however, always certain, as Nietzsche alludes. Unrestrained warfare leads to death, to nothingness, whether this warfare is conducted among nations or within the psychology of human beings.

The creditor-debtor framework in Nietzsche's argument helps to further establish this distinction between social and economic behaviour and political action. The making of contracts, and the valuations contained within those contracts, is pre-moral. Throughout the treatise, Nietzsche describes the way in which debts become moralized and turn into guilt. Whereas the idea of indebtedness implies that one is worth something, or one can "vouch" for themselves and their debt, the idea of guilt demeans the capacity of this worthiness. The emotion of guilt is like the feeling of

worthlessness. When the moralization of debts extends into the politics it limits political action because such action is labelled or understood as worthy of guilt rather than worthy of greatness. Nietzsche's concluding references to the Greek gods, and to his Zarathustra,¹²⁷ suggest that there have been ways in which this guilt has been mitigated and may be mitigated again. Indeed, at the conclusion of the last section, we discussed the way in which the Greek gods adopted human guilt. They were the spectators who conferred greatness upon the acting and striving humans, but when those same actions (like warfare or cruelty) produced undesired outcomes, they took on the blame, and the guilt.

The reference in Nietzsche's conclusion to one who is "free to choose"¹²⁸ points back to the beginning of the treatise and the one who is "really *permitted* to promise, this lord of the *free* will, this sovereign." Considered in light of the above conclusions, his opening paradox has come full circle. Restated, the paradox was two-fold. First, it concerned the extent to which the civilizing act of the promise un-civilizes the human being. Second, it reflected on the conditions of greatness, insofar as the individual who is truly sovereign, or truly permitted to promise, must ultimately be an oath-breaker. Earlier I speculated that the way in which Nietzsche described the problem of this paradox suggested that he was more concerned with preserving the conditions for action (or greatness) than those of predictability. His concluding words underscore this

¹²⁷ In the concluding aphorism, II.25, he writes, "At this point there is only one thing fitting for me, to be silent: otherwise I would be laying a hand on that which only a younger one is free to choose, a 'more future one,' a stronger one than I am—which only *Zarathustra* is free to choose, *Zarathustra the godless...*"

¹²⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.25.

dangerous potential. Without diminishing the inherent risk of these words, a small observation concerning his conclusion must be noted. He judges that the only fitting conclusion to the treatise is silence.¹²⁹ After pronouncing so much, he points away from himself. He points to a philosophic figure of whom he is the author; he points to Zarathustra. With this “cautious finger,”¹³⁰ he indicates a measure of prudence. So while, this authorial device is still preceded by loud pronouncements of the breaking of oaths,¹³¹ taken together, it would still appear that the primary concern of *Genealogy II* is a call to reflect on the problem and paradox of the promising animal.

¹²⁹ At II.25, he writes, “At this point there is only one thing fitting for me, to be silent.”

¹³⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.6.

¹³¹ Just before the conclusion, at II.24 he writes, “So that a sanctuary can be erected, a sanctuary must be shattered: that is the law—show me a case where it is not fulfilled!”

CHAPTER THREE

Promises, Piety, and Paternity: The Problem of Cephalus in *Republic I*

Surely we have from childhood convictions about what's just and fair by which we are brought up as by parents, obeying them as rulers and honouring them.

— Plato, *Republic*

For know well, Socrates... when a man comes near to the realization that he will be making an end, fear and care enter him for things to which he gave no thought before. The tales told about what is in Hades—that the one who has done unjust deeds here must pay the penalty there—at which he laughed up to then, now make his soul twist and turn because he fears they might be true. Whether it is due to the debility of old age, or whether he discerns something more of the things in that place because he is already nearer to them, as it were—he is, at any rate, now full of suspicion and terror; and he reckons up his accounts...

— Plato, *Republic*

Introduction

Plato's *Republic* opens in a setting of new gods and commercial transactions.

Creditors and debtors of all sorts are present in the Piraeus, the port of Athens. In the first line of the dialogue, Plato attunes his reader to the notion that promises, and the rituals that surround them, are worthy objects of study. They are that which Socrates “wanted to observe” with Glaucon, his young interlocutor.¹

This implicit concern is made explicit, when justice becomes the topic of conversation for evening. Promises, and their upkeep, first enter the dialogue in Socrates' exchange with Cephalus.² Actions premised upon unwritten promises are then

¹ Plato, *Republic I*, 327a.

² The presentation of the characters' names follows their more Latinized rendering (e.g., Polemarchus rather than Polemarchos and Cephalus rather than Kephalos), as captured by the Bloom translation, because

staged shortly after this when Polemarchus interjects to defend his father's honour. Polemarchus, the good son, steps into the conversation with Socrates and inherits an argument that, like his father, appears close to death.³ Cephalus, content to pass his argument down to his son, and despite professing a growing love for speeches,⁴ leaves before the evening's conversation begins in earnest. Though Cephalus and Polemarchus interact relatively briefly with Socrates in *Republic I*, the nature of their characters and their exchanges with him provoke questions concerning the status of inherited knowledge in the balance of the dialogue, and indeed, the status of Athenian⁵ moral knowledge. Alongside the sheer strangeness of Socrates permitting an interlocutor to exit before an argument has truly been tested, the scene captures the intergenerational dynamic of moral authority that Socrates was accused of undermining, or even corrupting.⁶ With that accusation in mind, Plato's authorial decision to begin the *Republic* with the definitions of justice derived from father⁷ and son takes on a greater

the analysis that follows is primarily based upon this translation. The alternative, more Greek presentation appears in the chapter, but only when citing the work of other authors.

³ Plato, *Republic I*, 331d.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 328d.

⁵ As will be further elaborated, Cephalus' metic status requires particular attention. The first definitions of justice in *Republic I* are voiced by non-Athenians.

⁶ Aristophanes' *Clouds* depicts Socrates as a natural philosopher who is ignorant of the consequences of his teachings, namely that they enable youth to understand themselves as, if not equal to their fathers, superior to them on account of their rational capacities. This is illustrated most effectively when Pheidippides returns from Socrates' thinkery and confronts his father with the argument that it is in fact just to beat him (1410), and more than this, that he would also be justified in beating his mother (1445). Plato refers to the charge of encouraging "father-beating" in the *Apology of Socrates* (25a), and Xenophon also records it in the *Memorabilia* (I.ii.49).

⁷ Baracchi discusses the *Clouds* and *Republic* as respective commentaries on "the seriousness of the centrality of the figure of paternity, namely, of authority and instituted power. The *Clouds* depicts fatherhood in its dejection and loss of credibility. What this caricatured remnant of paternity signals is the simultaneous collapse of the orders of the divine, of ancestral authority, and of legality. This is the plexus of problems taken up in the Platonic dialogue. But the question of decay and the dying of the city mark the opening of the dialogue in a rather inconspicuous, even unapparent way. In the *Republic*, all terms are

significance. The speakers not only bear a family resemblance, but their arguments do also. Polemarchus' inherited argument is a variation of his father's. Both consider justice transactionally. Father and son respectively provide the first definitions of justice, which both focus on an idea of giving due. In other words, the first accounts of moral knowledge in the *Republic* are situated intergenerationally and bear the common trait that the primary concern of justice is the distribution of what is owed.

The loyalty Polemarchus exhibits towards his father and the poetic authorities⁸ that he and his father call upon in the discussion of justice recall the locus of most people's first exposure to the idea of justice—the household (*oikos*). This is the place where the idea of “one's own” (*oikeion*) is most distinctly generated. It is the place where children are civilized for their eventual participation in the public sphere. Here, they are taught that truth-telling, returning the property of others, and obeying one's parents are all admirable actions. The tales used to reinforce the lessons they learn at play introduce them to the politesse of society. They define which actions are acceptable, honourable or forbidden. These first limitations form opinions and perceptions of the good life (*eudaimonia*) and guide children to act accordingly. Parental authority guides these

reversed. Indeed, the rendition of paternity one finds in the *Republic* is virtually opposite to the risible father of the comedy. Here, a dignified old man commanding respect seems to safeguard the integrity of the family, and hence the stability of the polis, both in its intrapolitical-juridical structures (regulating communal interaction) and in its relation to the gods, to its beyond. Yet, in spite of this inversion, it will become apparent that paternal authority has become an empty simulacrum. Simultaneously, the relation to the gods has become mere commerce, ancestral authority is invoked as a rhetorical device, and the preservation and enforcement of the law rest on a reflective vacuum surrounding the question of justice.” See “Beyond the Comedy and Tragedy of Authority,” 152.

⁸ Here, like Plato, I wish to emphasize the idea of one's earliest ethical education. See *Republic I*, 377a. Nussbaum takes note of the tendency of the interlocutors to choose these sources when engaging in dialogue with Socrates: “Plato's interlocutors, when in search of illumination about virtue or choice, turn naturally to the words of Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, Pindar, the tragic poets; rarely, if ever to the words of anyone whom we list as a philosopher.” See *Fragility*, 124.

choices and extends in a singular direction: from the older generation to the younger.

Imitation of this sort comprises most children's first moral education. The young model the old. The authority of the older generation is implicit in this relation. It does not require justification. It is given.

Attuned to the generational dynamic of Socrates' first two interlocutors in the *Republic*, I seek to question the significance of Cephalus' departure, the legacy he imparts to his son, Polemarchus, and the legacy he imparts to the text. His strange and amusing exit is an invitation to the reader to reflect on the relation between the practice of political philosophy and inherited modes of authority. It sets forth considerations of the relationship between the moral authority pronounced in the *oikos*, the conventional⁹ or legal authority of the *polis*, and the role of the philosopher. In doing so, it permits reflection on what the practice of political philosophy entails and how it interacts with the ways of life in the city. Specifically, I argue that the Socrates-Cephalus exchange not only contains the legacy of Platonism that Nietzsche writes against, but that it also demonstrates an awareness of the trappings of dogmatism and legalism by bringing out the tension between the desire for the best law to be unchangeable, and the desire for that law also to be flexible. It does all of this with overtures to the *patrios politeia* debate.

Cephalus' departure¹⁰ alerts us to these questions by alluding to the now infamous "quarrel of philosophy and poetry"¹¹ that informs much of the thrust of the

⁹ For example, the conventions of the city may promote decent law-abiding behaviour, like that depicted by Cephalus, but do they produce truly good or just citizens?

¹⁰ As Nussbaum comments, "We are more than once confronted with a scene in which someone wants to leave or drop out of the argument, or says that he does not trust or care about arguments. The ways of

dialogue. The poetic authorities cited by Cephalus do not satisfy Socrates and he is not subtle about his dissatisfaction. If Socrates is the model of *the* political philosopher, what does his interaction with Cephalus and his implied role in the elderly man's exit reveal about the practice of political philosophy? *Is it abusive towards the father?* Socrates' cheeky, yet serious, treatment of Cephalus appears to be a prelude to the comic and tragic composition of the enlightened gerontocracy complete with its erotic revisions that the dialogue will later entertain, which should be reason alone for trying to understand the depth of the scene. This chapter thus seeks to ascertain how the practice of political philosophy is depicted in the scene and how new interpretative considerations might arise from careful attention to Plato's use of this particular character with the myriad of apparent contradictions that he contains.

The chapter will conclude by highlighting Plato's Socrates' political moderation following Cephalus' exit. Socrates is not guilty of corrupting the youth. They have already been corrupted. As Voegelin writes, "The *Republic* gains its specific meaning in the historical situation of Athens from the fact that there is a younger generation in search for the right order which it cannot find in the surrounding society."¹² The intergenerational dynamic of this first scene raises the paradoxical possibility that philosophy may be necessary to restore a lapsed order of authority, yet this is precisely what it cannot do. At best, it can defend the merit of pursuing the question of authority,

dealing with and motivating such an interlocutor show us directly why we should go on doing the hard work required to do what we are doing, reading this dialogue." See *Fragility*, 127. Note, however, that Socrates permits the departure here rather than trying to convince him to stay and continue the hard work.

¹¹ Plato, *Republic X*, 607b.

¹² Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle. Volume III: Order and History*, 51-52.

which is ultimately the question of the best way of life. Plato's response to this quandary is best illustrated by Socrates' ability to forge a friendship with Cephalus' son, Polemarchus. By befriending the son, philosophy can inform the practice of politics, so that this question may be asked, and the merit of its asking might be acknowledged.

3.1 Approach and Assumptions

Cephalus' status in the dialogue is a persistent puzzle, not least of all because Plato wrote him in part from a historical person. A minor, yet much disputed character, his role and interaction with Socrates have largely been accounted for on the basis of emphasizing one of his attributes at the expense of the others. This happens predominantly along three lines, with emphasis placed on the content of his remarks, his appearance and staging in the scene, or his historical occupation. Emphasizing the content of his remarks yields a sympathetic portrait. His age is associated with wisdom. He is an elderly, contented man freed from the youthful burden of desire. Socrates is respectful and deferential to him.¹³ Others primarily define his character based on his age and piety,¹⁴ but rather than praising the authority he represents, Socrates' interaction with him is thought to be subtly mischievous. This creates an impression that he is a "limited and complacent man"¹⁵ or a false or insufficient authority figure.¹⁶ This

¹³ See Reeve, *Philosopher Kings*, 6; McKee, "A Lesson from Cephalus," 361; and Cross and Woosley, *Plato's Republic*, 2.

¹⁴ See Strauss, *City*, 65; Strauss, *Natural Right*, 84; Bloom, "Interpretative Essay and Notes," 312; and Pangle, "Interpretative Essay," 381.

¹⁵ Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 81.

¹⁶ Baracchi, "Beyond the Comedy and Tragedy of Authority," 152.

emphasis has also been used to suggest that Plato's representation of Cephalus may be intentionally designed to undermine the generational order of authority at all.¹⁷ Lastly, it has been suggested that his character is not intended to represent ancestral authority, but rather the politically salutary maxims of justice derived from his historical occupation as a money-maker. The justice he stands for is that of the contract-abider, the businessman.¹⁸ It is grounded in conventional maxims, which indicate that truth telling and fulfilling contracts are good and useful practices. He has no use for Socrates and the discussion of justice that is just beginning because he has the means to purchase justice.

As I will establish in what follows, the multi-faceted nature of this character on the basis of his actions, age, wealth, and citizenship status is a purposive puzzle. This assumes that Plato wrote with careful attention to the literary elements of his work, which include his cast of characters and the dramatic action of the dialogue. I suggest that Cephalus and, in particular, his departure, functions as a prelude to the puzzle of the *Republic* as a whole, which ultimately demands that we give care and attention to "the habituation"¹⁹ of our lives. He primarily satisfies this role and permits reflection on the political function of philosophy by introducing the proximity of one's private, moral life to one's public, political life.

Plato achieves this kind of moral introspection with this character by using him to press the boundaries between customary and natural law. This is evident when we consider the historical and mythological allusions of his name. He possesses a historical

¹⁷ Steinberger, "Who is Cephalus?" 176.

¹⁸ Silvermintz, *Socrates in the Marketplace*, and Dobbs, "The Piety of Thought in Plato's *Republic*," 671.

¹⁹ Plato, *Republic X*, 620a.

and mythological namesake in addition to his role in *Republic I*. His historical namesake testifies to the high stakes of his sons' moral inheritance in relation to their involvement in Athenian politics. His mythological namesake ties him to Athenian religious and ritualized practices. When factored into his presentation in the *Republic*, the tensions that run through his character point to an idea of political philosophy that tests the boundaries between private and public and between nature and convention, with the aim of deriving moral knowledge.

Socrates' interaction with Cephalus and his role in his exit, suggests a playful, yet serious testing of these limits. He disrupts the natural authority of the household by calling into question the veracity of Cephalus' account of his good character.²⁰ This also calls into question Polemarchus' moral inheritance. Will the morality and wealth he inherits from his father provide the sufficient conditions for a good life or for the goodness of his character? The dialogue suggests that they will not. Polemarchus' moral education must be further developed among friends, as a pursuit shared in common. The absence of his father is the permissive condition for such peer-to-peer friendships to grow. Indeed, at the conclusion of his exchange with Socrates, he proclaims this newfound loyalty: "I, for one," he said, "am ready to be your partner in the battle."²¹ This proclamation suggests the possibility that the way of life claimed as "one's own" may not equate with "the best." It points towards the necessity of the critical

²⁰ This might be cast as Socrates replacing Cephalus as the elder role model.

²¹ Plato, *Republic I*, 336a. This scene also parallels the nature of the argument made in *Republic IV* in the example of Leontius wherein the virtue of spirit (*thumos*) becoming the ally to speech or reason is expressed.

examination of one's moral education. It does so with trust in the assumption that this is a worthwhile pursuit. This is the habituation of the political philosopher, a habituation that develops among friends, with peers sympathetic to the philosophic pursuit.

To address these conflicting understandings of the intention and purpose of Cephalus' character in the *Republic*, this chapter engages in a hermeneutical analysis of the Socrates-Cephalus exchange as it unfolds from 328b–331e. It is guided by two primary assumptions about how to read the text that extend from those expressed earlier: its dramatic elements should be read in correlation to its philosophic argument, and the text should be understood in relation to its cultural and historical context.²² With these assumptions in mind, this analysis will be conducted in three stages.

The exploration of Cephalus' character and his relevance to the dialogue must begin by considering *who* he is before considering *why* his disappearance matters. Plato bases this character on a famous metic (*metoikos*),²³ who played a fairly significant role supporting Athens in the Peloponnesian War and whose sons later play a significant role in the politics that follow the war's end. Cephalus also has a mythological eponym, which while prevalent in 5th century Athens, is understandably overlooked in the many varied analyses of this character. It is difficult to establish the cultural connotations of the myth for the Athenian people with any certainty. Nor do I claim to be able to do that

²² Wolfsdorf, *Aporia in Plato's Charmides, Laches and Lysis*, xi.

²³ His immigrant status permitted him civil, but not political rights ("metic" n.p.). He was not a citizen of Athens, nor could his sons hold citizenship. They did own property though in the Piraeus. According to Nails, there were three houses in Cephalus' family as of 404 BCE. See Nails, *The People of Plato*, 84. This family would have been considered exceptionally wealthy, and it is indeed likely that they were "certainly the wealthiest *metics* in Attica." See Nails, *The People of Plato*, 251.

here. Rather, I modestly suggest that from the evidence available (that the myth was in popular rotation during Plato's lifetime), its perspective should be brought to bear on the analysis, if only as a thought experiment. It does seem plausible that part of the function of Cephalus' character is to attune the reader to the very problem of defining ancestral authority itself by employing a character who is famously a non-citizen, yet whose mythological namesake connects him to one of most significant ways in which Athenian citizenship was conferred—through bloodlines.

After due consideration of the composition of Cephalus' character, I will consider his remarks and actions in the dialogue. How is he introduced? How is his exit prefigured? This analysis extends Klein's contention that in Plato's dialogues "the falsity or rightness of an opinion is not only argued in words but also in the character, behavior and the actions of the speakers themselves."²⁴ Here, I examine the comedic elements of the Socrates-Cephalus exchange and ask how they align with the practice of political philosophy. Socrates encourages Cephalus' departure. He does so by light-heartedly challenging the association between age and wisdom and suggesting that Cephalus' wealth is the necessary condition for his virtue. He shows Cephalus to be an *impure* representative of ancestral authority. In this exploration, it becomes apparent that the pious money-maker's²⁵ practice of justice as giving due and truth-telling are connected

²⁴ Klein, *Commentary on Plato's "Meno,"* 18.

²⁵ Thoughts on the conventionality of the *polis* appear to coincide with the rise of a monetized economy in Greece. Seaford's study *Money and the Early Greek Mind* argues that as money began to be systematized in the 6th century, it provided the conditions to reconsider the naturalness of the community and the ability to think in greater terms of abstraction. He extends this argument to consider the way in which presocratic philosophy and tragedy develop alongside the rise of Greek currency, and the extent to which the ideas of the divine are shaped and challenged by this interaction. Whereas ritual used to "mediate social relations by

to a cosmological worldview. The images of sacrifice that bookend Cephalus' participation in the dialogue draw out this idea by depicting his efforts to intervene in causality to alter his fate. He is looking to purchase reconciliation, so that he may die a just man. Such efforts at intervention suggest his elderly character is a stepping stone to the sophistic arguments that later follow in the *Republic*. Cephalus attunes the reader, as well as the interlocutors, to this distinction between being and appearing just. His impurity shows the extent to which the sophistic schools co-opted ideas from the poetic tradition. Glaucon and Adeimantus will use this distinction in *Republic II* to demand that Socrates defend justice for its own sake without the benefits accrued from its appearances. Cephalus is a prelude to this challenge.

Last, the Socrates-Cephalus exchange reveals the limitations of the inherited ethical order. Cephalus' authority is shown to require questioning. The act of questioning moral inheritance seeks to uncover his apparent piety. This might read as if Plato's Socrates will replace one dogma with another. And, as has already been suggested, this is precisely the spirit of the charge that Nietzsche levels against Plato. However, seeking to do justice to Plato, I suggest that the *Republic* should not be read dogmatically, but as a representation of skeptical engagement with conventionally accepted principles grounded upon the merit of the pursuit of questioning better and worse ways of living. The Socrates-Cephalus exchange provides a model of the type of

providing a detached, easily recognized, symbolic paradigm that depends on collective confidence and persists through everyday vicissitudes, bringing order to numerous potentially uncontrollable transactions" (8), money begins to take over this role, particularly as it becomes embedded and supported by the polis. As it fulfills this role, it becomes conflated with the "transcendent power" of the divine (161), and develops the notions that "human power and divine favour" are "goods that seem to depend on money" (164).

skeptical engagement necessary to the pursuit of philosophy. It is a scepticism that resists the dual attractions of relativism and dogmatism. It acknowledges one's ignorance of an unknown good and accepts the pursuit of such a good as worthy and desirable for its own sake.

3.2 *Related Matters*

In his first words to Socrates, Cephalus entreats, "Now do as I say: be with these young men, but come here regularly to us as to friends and your very own kin."²⁶ Cephalus welcomes Socrates to be like family. The metic, a permanent guest in Athens, is playing a good host. Under Athenian law, he will never share in the blood-based membership of her citizens, but he extends this welcome and invites Socrates to act as if such distinctions could be easily recast. Further, he is expressing the idea that Socrates has an obligation to these young men, an obligation comparable to one defined on the premises of friendship and kinship. These words provide a subtle introduction to the idea and problem of ancestral authority by having the reader reflect on the philosopher's obligation to his kin and friends, the people who compose his political community. As well, these welcoming remarks blur the distinction otherwise present in the scene, and the dialogue as a whole, between those who are considered proper citizens of Athens and those who are foreign residents. The first three interlocutors of *Republic I* are all non-

²⁶ Plato, *Republic I*, 328d. Socrates' words in Plato's *Apology* also resonate here: "I will not immediately let him go, nor will I go away, but I will speak to him and examine and test him. And if he does not seem to me to possess virtue, but only says he does, I will reproach him, saying that he regards the things worth the most as the least important, and the paltrier things as more important. I will do this to whomever, younger or older, I happen to meet, both foreigner and townsman, but more so to the townsmen, inasmuch as you are closer to me in kin." See 29e-30b.

Athenian. After that point, the rest of the dialogue becomes entirely Athenian.²⁷

Cephalus' status as a metic obscures the distinction between "one's own" and "other" that the dialogue otherwise preserves. He asks that he and his sons, all foreign residents, be treated like kin. Who is in and who is out defines the boundary of political communities, a basic rule to which Athens proves no exception. Plato curiously engages with this boundary by having Cephalus (an outsider who is treated like an insider) represent the ancestral authority of Athens.

A brief examination of the historical Cephalus is useful here to set out the political context, the boundaries of which Plato was testing. As Cephalus' son Lysias recounts, Pericles invited his father to come to Athens as an economic immigrant. He was born in Syracuse²⁸ and settled in Athens in the late 450s BCE and continued to live there for another thirty years.²⁹ He was well established in the Piraeus, and, as a wealthy metic, he had the means necessary to establish his shield-making company, which prospered under Pericles' policies in the lead-up to the Peloponnesian War.³⁰ This business continued to prosper during the war when armour for the hoplite soldiers would have been in high demand.³¹ By 404 BCE,³² the large-scale family business

²⁷ Strauss, *City*, 85. There are two notable exceptions to this observation. Namely, the brief reappearances of Polemarchus at 449b and Thrasymachus at 450a-b.

²⁸ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 84.

²⁹ See Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 12.4; Nails, *The People of Plato*, 84.

³⁰ Gifford, "Dramatic Dialectic in Republic Book I," 55-6.

³¹ Hanson writes, "Aristophanes, the brilliant comic dramatist, argued that the nonending war made the farmers broke, the male leaders silly, the generals bloodthirsty, the poor too reckless, and the arms sellers rich—and nevertheless trusted that Athens was more right than wrong." See *A War Like No Other*, 18.

³² Plato writes the Republic in 380 BCE, but places it during the war (431 BCE to 404 BCE). The issue of its exact dramatic dating though is persistent. 421 BCE, at the start of the Peace of Nicias, has acquired much scholarly support. But even with textual cues like that of Socrates' reference to the religious festival

employed more than one hundred slaves.³³ The foreign-born Cephalus we meet in the *Republic* is friendly with Athens' elite, is at the height of his wealth, and has increased his inherited fortune because of the insatiable demands of war. He and his family are exemplars of the fruits of Athenian imperialism. Hanson writes the following:

The population of Athens grew at over 2 percent per annum for most of the decades preceding the Peloponnesian War. And Athens, unlike Sparta, crafted a more inclusive society, whose critics complained that to the naked eye slaves, metics, and citizens were nearly indistinguishable in such a crass culture—in opposition to the more utopian efforts at Sparta to create a republic of virtue among a smaller and more static number of citizens."³⁴

Cephalus' foreignness is not distinguishable in the scene. He passes as an Athenian elite, though his bloodline would indicate otherwise.

The family's fortunes, and status within Athens, would be reversed at the conclusion of the war. Lysias provides the primary account of this reversal of fortunes in his speech *Against Eratosthenes* of 403/2 BCE, which accuses Eratosthenes, a former member of the Thirty Tyrants, of his brother Polemarchus' death by hemlock.³⁵ The

in the opening line of the dialogue, no precise date has been settled. Historical records exist of this first state-sponsored festival because it required a decree of the *demos* to sanction its activities. However, the dating of the decree is not precise. Garland notes that it only places the event between 432/3 and 411 BCE. See *Introducing New Gods*, 111. This date range covers the period between the start of the Peloponnesian War and the establishment of the oligarchic rule of the Four Hundred. Other scholars have tried to lend further precision to the date by considering the political dynamics of the festival. Nails notes that the festival was likely held to court the favour of the Thracians to support the Athenian war effort. As such, it was probably held earlier in the war rather than later. She supports a date of either 424 or 421 BCE, noting that these dates correspond to intervals of peace during Thargelion (May-June) when the festival would have been inaugurated. See *The People of Plato*, 324. Additionally, Cephalus is thought to have died between the years 421 and 415 BCE, which is also the period spanning the Peace of Nicias. Again see, Nails, *The People of Plato*, 84. It is sufficient to note that it is set over the course of the war and before Sparta's installation of the Thirty Tyrants. The dialogue occurs before Cephalus' family is subject to the consequences of the rule of the Thirty.

³³ See Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 12.19.

³⁴ Hanson, *A War Like No Other*, 27.

³⁵ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 192.

Thirty, as Xenophon describes in the *Hellenica*, was a group of men chosen by the people “to frame the ancient laws into a constitution under which to conduct the government”³⁶ after Athens was defeated in the war by Sparta. Nails notes that they “were expected to be more than a drafting committee; they were actually to *govern* Athens as well, at least until a new constitution (or a new interpretation of the ancestral constitution, the *patrios politeia*) could be reformulated.”³⁷ Understood in this manner, theirs was to be a temporary government meant to restore Athens to a *politeia* informed by ancestral values. Exactly what comprised these values was subject to debate.³⁸ On this debate, Ober describes that in the context of 5th century Athens: “It was generally agreed by all those engaged in the *patrios politeia* debate that it was right to conform to the ways of the ancestors. The questions remained—which ancestors, and what were their customs?”³⁹ The politics of the oligarchic Thirty were an expression of Athenian nativism in the parameters of this debate. These politics were framed as an effort to address the immoderate democracy of recent times by drawing moral and political inspiration from previous generations of Athenians, but expressed their own immoderation by staking out distinct claims regarding citizenship.

The Thirty quickly abused the power allotted to them. As Xenophon recounts, they arrested and brought to trial men who were “offensive to the aristocrats” or

³⁶ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, II.iii.2.

³⁷ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 113.

³⁸ Strauss notes that “both sides in the late-fifth century debate on the Athenian constitution, oligarchs and democrats alike, claimed to be proponents of the ‘ancestral’ – literally the ‘paternal’ – constitution, the *patrios politeia*, an agreeably emotion-laden and vague term.” See *Fathers and Sons*, 25.

³⁹ Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens*, 146n54.

supporters of the democracy,⁴⁰ men like Lysias and Polemarchus. Over the span of their eight-month rule in 404/3 BCE, they “executed some fifteen hundred Athenians, ruined the family of Cephalus and put to death several of the men present in the *Republic*.”⁴¹ Indeed, they sought the arrest and execution of Cephalus’ sons because of their democratic allegiances. Once in power, they justified the punishment of democrats by suggesting that they were “hostile to the new constitution.”⁴² Lysias further implies that the cause of political caution was really only a mask for greed: “This would provide an excellent pretext for appearing to punish them while in reality making money, because the city was completely impoverished, and the regime needed cash.”⁴³ The wealth of Cephalus’ family proved a desirable target. In addition to taking Polemarchus’ life, they expropriated “silver and gold, bronze and ornaments, and furniture and women’s clothing,” slaves, and the family shield factory.⁴⁴ Lysias barely escaped the demand for his own execution.⁴⁵ The Thirty’s moral cause and politics of citizenship in this view were efforts to re-establish the wealth of the Athenian *genos* (bloodline).

The history of Cephalus’ family and their entanglement in the political affairs of their chosen home layers the dramatic quality of the *Republic*’s timing and setting. The Piraeus was the source of Athens’ wealth and resilience during the war. Access to the sea allowed the city to sustain itself when the Spartans otherwise limited its access to the

⁴⁰ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, II.iii.12.

⁴¹ Howland, “Plato’s Reply to Lysias: Republic 1 and 2 and Against Eratosthenes,” 179.

⁴² Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 12.6.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., and Nails, *The People of Plato*, 191.

⁴⁵ Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 12.8-16.

surrounding agricultural land. As the war went on, it became a democratic stronghold. Gifford notes that Athenian politics during this period were expressed geographically. Following the death of Pericles in 429 BCE the Piraeus housed the democratic loyalties of Athenians. The “men from the city” and the “men from the Piraeus,” respectively represented the oligarchic and democratic factions that grew deeper over the course of the war.⁴⁶ Bloom also characterizes the Piraeus as the “center of the democratic party,” and “the stronghold of resistance against the despotic ... ‘Thirty Tyrants’.”⁴⁷ The strife of the war extended beyond the battlefield and was expressed internally in the politics of the city. Gifford remarks that “the bloody stasis between oligarchs and democrats—which, we should recall, a 25-year old Plato found himself in the thick of—represented a horrific failure on the part of the Athenians to resolve peacefully the outstanding question about political justice that was then confronting every Greek city-state.”⁴⁸ The setting of the dialogue alludes to this internal political instability. It also helps to situate Cephalus. This is where he gained wealth and status (alongside Athens) and where his debts to the city will be paid with the political sacrifices of his sons in defence of Athenian democracy. Taken together, the details Plato offers about the setting lend it a “haunted” quality.⁴⁹ Plato’s contemporary readers would have been familiar with the story of this family and this setting, particularly on account of the popular reception of

⁴⁶ Gifford, “Dramatic Dialectic in Republic Book I,” 59n31.

⁴⁷ Bloom, “Interpretative Essay and Notes,” 440n3.

⁴⁸ Gifford, “Dramatic Dialectic in Republic Book I,” 59n31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

Lysias' *Against Eratosthenes*.⁵⁰ However, the interlocutors in the dialogue are not yet aware of the political magnitude, and sheer bloodiness, of the pursuit of a *patrios politeia*.⁵¹ Plato's fictionalization of his historical counterparts weaves their life stories and the political history of the *polis* into the narrative to emotionally engage his reader in the stakes of the dialogue.

3.3 *The Mythic and Ancestral*

Fiction also enables Plato to extend beyond the limitations of the historical account. It welcomes allusion. Cephalus' mythological eponym should also inform an understanding of the Cephalus we meet in *Republic I* to the extent that it also confronts the problem of defining a *patrios politeia* by alluding to the mythology of autochthony.⁵²

⁵⁰ Howland makes a persuasive argument that Plato is using *Republic I* and *II* as a response to Lysias' *Against Eratosthenes*. He argues this by suggesting that Socrates' exchange with Polemarchus might actually be targeted to the silent Lysias (he is present during the course of the *Republic* but does not speak). Lysias' speech is a call for revenge or retributive justice, whereas Socrates will convince Polemarchus that it is never just to harm anyone (335d). Though not noted by Howland, there is also a measure of Socrates' own self-interest at play here. The justice of revenge is also used as a justification in Socrates' own trial and execution.

⁵¹ Perhaps such high-stakes politics are what Nietzsche has in mind when he writes in *Zarathustra*: "Write with blood: and you will discover that blood is spirit." See I.7.

⁵² Kasimis writes, "Athenians propagated the notion that the demos was a *genos* most famously through the myth of autochthony, which marriage, inheritance, and citizenship laws also reinforced. Erichthonios, the Athenians' founding figure, was *autochthonos*, or born (in Attica) from the earth itself. Unbroken kinship to Erichthonios established one's Athenianness and, consequently, qualified one for citizenship. As a network of brothers (and sisters) with an uninterrupted and uncorrupted tie to Mother Earth, Athenians claimed they were the Greek world's only genuine citizens. How was this case? They claimed they descended from a long line of people who stayed put.... Other cities were populated by citizens in *name*, not nature, a belief Ion will also attribute to Athens. Other cities' ancestors' mobility meant they were really metics, not citizens." See *Drawing the Boundaries of Democracy*, 14.

In at least one rendition of the tale, the mythological Cephalus and his love, Procris, are placed at the intersection of the autochthonous⁵³ account of the Athenian people.⁵⁴ Procris is said to be the daughter of Erechtheus, one of the first kings of Athens.⁵⁵ Cephalus is presented as the son of Herse and Hermes⁵⁶ and grandson of Cecrops, the earliest king or founder of Attica.⁵⁷ The founder is said to have a “serpent-shaped”⁵⁸ lower half of his body and to be “sprung from the earth.”⁵⁹ Their marriage brings together the two lines of the heroic founders of the city. This account most clearly connects their story to the foundation of Athens.⁶⁰ The story and its offshoots provide an example of the relevance of genealogy in mythology to the politics of the city.

⁵³ The Cephalus-Procris story was prominent during the dramatic date of the dialogue and well established at the time of Plato’s composition. It was even an inspiration to Sophocles, the first named poet of the *Republic*, who wrote a tragedy named *Procris* of which one line survives. It is not surprising that, as a playwright, he would draw on popular Attic mythology for his Athenian audiences. See Broadbent, *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, 245.

⁵⁴ The connections to Athens may have evolved as the tale grew in popularity in the Attic region. Broadbent explores this evolution in her study of the history of the Attic *genos* of the *Kephalidai*. See *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, 240-335.

⁵⁵ See Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 443. Broadbent also notes that, “when Procris was first made the daughter of Erechtheus, her father’s name stood, as in Homer, for early Athens in general without any indication of date.” See *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, 265. This speaks to the idea that her association with Erechtheus recalls the origins of Athens.

⁵⁶ Broadbent, *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, 330.

⁵⁷ Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 442-3.

⁵⁸ The serpent has its own rich history in mythology, but for the purposes of this exploration, it is sufficient to note that its image bears connection to the ideas of old age and renewed life. As Frazer notes, the Latin word *senecta* applies both to “old age and to the cast skins of serpents.” See *Footnotes*, III.12n18. The immortality of kings and heroes is evident in the “belief that kings and heroes regularly turn into serpents after death. The same belief possibly explains the association of Erichthonius or Erechtheus and Cecrops with serpents at Athens.” See Frazer, *Footnotes*, III.12n41.

⁵⁹ Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 442.

⁶⁰ As with all genealogical tracing in mythology though, it is not possible to claim that this is the authoritative version of their respective origins. For example, Broadbent notes that there are at least four different accounts of the identity of Cephalus’ father. See *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, 2.

Like most good myths, the story of Cephalus and Procris reflects the oral tradition that largely carried it forth. As such, there are different iterations of the tale.⁶¹ Poets including, but not limited to, Pherekydes (5th century BCE), Apollodorus of Athens (2nd century BCE) and Ovid (1st century CE) each bring together elements of the story as it has been transmitted to the present. Though, as Fowler notes in his study of Cephalus as an aition (explanatory tale), generally the “disagreements in the various sources relate only to inessential details or the order of events.”⁶² As such, the brief presentation of the myth that follows tries to gather together what appear to be the consistent aspects of its telling.

The story of Cephalus begins when he becomes the object of Eos’ affections. Eos, the goddess of the dawn, falls in love with him, but he refuses her advances. His love is claimed. He has sworn loyalty to his wife Procris. Undeterred, Eos plants the suggestion in Cephalus’ mind that Procris has been unfaithful to him and offers to help him prove the infidelity by disguising him as another man. She suggests that while in disguise, he tempt Procris with a golden crown. Cephalus follows through on the plan and discovers that his wife is easily seduced. Her infidelity is all the licence he needs to commit his own. Eos wins her man. Under the duress of shame, Procris flees Athens and arrives in Crete. Here, King Minos seeks her love by gifting her a hound that never fails to catch its

⁶¹ Broadbent’s study of the literary treatment of the eponym “Kephalos” breaks these down into four categories: “the orientalizing, the Aiolizing, the Atticizing, and the westernizing.” See *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, 251.

⁶² Fowler, “The Myth of Kephalos as an Aition of Rain-Magic,” 29n2.

prey and a spear that never fails to hit its mark.⁶³ Desiring the gifts, but not the king's affections, Procris escapes Crete with the magical items in the disguise of a young boy. Making her way back to Athens while still in disguise, she finds herself on a hunting expedition alongside Cephalus. He is fascinated by her dog and spear and tries to negotiate for them. Procris agrees to a trade, in return for his love. Under these strange circumstances, husband and wife are reconciled. Their reconciliation vexes the goddess of the hunt Artemis, who seeks revenge upon the couple. This time Procris is made to suspect Cephalus' loyalties. At dawn the next day, Procris shrouds herself and follows Cephalus out on his hunt to the spot on the mountain where she is told that he had been overheard calling for "Nephele."⁶⁴ Hearing a rustle in the bushes close to him, Cephalus reflexively hurls the magical spear. The weapon does not miss its mark. When he goes to retrieve his prey, he discovers his impaled wife. Cephalus, disgraced, is banished from the city for her murder.⁶⁵

Punishment in the form of banishment occurs twice in the tale. Both times it is necessitated because the boundaries defining the love of one's own have been transgressed. Banishment from a community requires the clear identification of the boundaries of that community. It requires a clear sense of place, membership, and belonging. The fated morning when Cephalus kills Procris, he is said to be on Mount

⁶³ These gifts may also come from Artemis, depending on the source.

⁶⁴ *Nephele* also means "cloud." See Fowler, "The Myth of Kephalos as an Aition of Rain-Magic," 29.

⁶⁵ Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 299-300, and Fowler, "The Myth of Kephalos as an Aition of Rain-Magic," 29.

Hymettos.⁶⁶ Fowler argues persuasively that the Cephalus-Procris story is an aition for the practice of rain magic on this Attic mountain. The story's details, including the use of magical disguises, gift giving, Cephalus' banishment, and "above all the summoning of a cloud," draw on elements found in other stories related to fertility and reproduction.⁶⁷ He observes that evidence derived from the sacred calendar of Thorikos supports this contention. The calendar dates to c. 430 BCE and prescribes "sumptuous sacrifices" for Cephalus and Procris with reference to the locales mentioned in the myth.⁶⁸ Cephalus' actions in the last segment of the story, in particular, appear to be connected to a practice of magical intervention. He climbs the mountain to summon a cloud, accidentally spills his wife's blood, and then is forced into exile. His wife's death and his exile are respectively the sacrifices that are "owed" to the gods, the ancestors of Attica, to regenerate the crops and the land.

Not unlike Nietzsche's description of the debts owed to the ancestral, the myth partakes in the idea that such "sacrifices...festivals, shrines, tributes" are owed to the "progenitor" of the community.⁶⁹ Fowler describes the presence and prevalence of the ritualizing of magical beliefs:

In engaging in such activities [weather magic] the Greeks were no different from other pre-industrial societies all over the world. When the

⁶⁶ This Attic mountain range divides the south end of the plain of Athens from that of the Mesogaia in the east. Its "bare summit" appears to have been used in antiquity, as it still is presently, to gauge the change in weather patterns based on the cloud formations. The mountain range is used as a vantage point to observe the fluctuation in the weather patterns which, for a largely agricultural society, are key determinants of regeneration. See Eliot, "Hymettos, Mt. Attica, Greece," n.p.

⁶⁷ Fowler, "The Myth of Kephalos as an Aition of Rain-Magic," 32.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.19.

growth of crops and the flourishing of life are completely at the mercy of nature, magical devices are one's only hope. The gods are cruel. In our insulated age (or more correctly, in our insulated Western civilization) we have forgotten what it is like to lose half our children to death, to starve in the winter, or to suffer the devastation of plague. Consequently we think there are no gods...The surviving indications of weather-magic—and of other kinds of magic, especially fertility magic—from Greece surely represent only the smallest fraction of the ancient reality. General probabilities overwhelmingly suggest that every Greek farmer used such devices constantly, and every Greek community carried out such rites on behalf of all its members.⁷⁰

Ritual is used as a restorative or preventative measure. The story of Cephalus and Procris speaks to a human proclivity to perceive cosmology as a reciprocal affair.

Rendering the gods their due permits the propagation and continuation of “one’s own.”

Whereas the historical Cephalus is a foreigner, the mythological Cephalus shares the blood of Athens’ autochthonous founders. The Attic tale partakes in the process of origin tracing.⁷¹ It functions both as a mythological genealogy and potentially as an aition. Each function reinforces the authority of the eldest by instituting practices and perceptions that help to define one’s membership in a particular political community. Blood connects people to a place and stories of that lineage entrench that identity. When these functions of the mythological Cephalus are understood alongside the *homelessness* of the historical metic, Plato’s Cephalus appears mired in contradiction. Yet this contradiction is purposive.⁷² Plato’s Cephalus is an impure representative of ancestral

⁷⁰ Fowler, “The Myth of Kephelos as an Aition of Rain-Magic,” 33.

⁷¹ Of note, the tale’s genealogy intermixes with the Attic *genos* (bloodline) of the *Kephalidai*, a “clan-society” and “religious body” in Athens. See Broadbent *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, 241.

⁷² This distinction between the study of the historical Cephalus and his mythological counterpart also brings to light the distinction between *mythos* and *logos*. *Mythos* is “telling a tale while disclaiming responsibility.” See Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, 3. Like gossip, it is

authority, akin to the impure state of ancestral authority in Athens. The historical Cephalus who profits alongside Athens from her cosmopolitanism, expansionism, and war, and whose sons stake their lives and wealth on the restoration of her democracy, intersects with the mythological Cephalus, who recalls an ancestral tradition of patrimony and sacrifice in a closed society. This intersection encapsulates the internal strife of Athens between those who desire the new ways and those who seek to recapture old.

3.4 *The Old and New*

We meet Plato's Cephalus seated in the centre of the room on a "cushioned stool" and having just returned from performing "a sacrifice⁷³ in the courtyard."⁷⁴ He is immediately established as the authority figure in the room on the basis of his age, religious garb, and physical position. His name aligns with his position. Literally translated, "Cephalus" stands for "head."⁷⁵ Silvermintz notes that "the enclosure formed by the chairs evokes the city walls" and Cephalus' central position among the men

often prefaced by the disclaimer that the story originated from someone else. In other words, *mythos* exists alongside the possibility of falsehood. The tales need not be true. In contrast, *logos* comes from *legein*, which means, "to put together" or gather evidence (Ibid.). It implies a pursuit of the true account. Each describes a different pattern of thought and a separate means of accounting for a phenomenon. As Burkert describes myth: "...[it] is the first and fundamental verbalization of complex reality, the primary way to speak about many-sided problems...." See *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, 23. Myth lacks precision, need not be true, but still offers a way to capture the human experience.

⁷³ Kasimis notes that, "Religion for the Athenians was a system ideologically committed to public, not private, affairs. Sharing in the *hiera* (or "sacred things") of the city constituted membership in the polis community and was therefore regulated according to a person's standing in the polis." She further notes that, "Although metic participation in city or deme cults was limited, they did take part in Athenian sacrifices (*thiasoi*) along with citizens." See *Drawing the Boundaries of Democracy*, 37n46.

⁷⁴ Plato, *Republic I*, 328c.

⁷⁵ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 137.

makes him appear like a “Homeric king.”⁷⁶ Blondell similarly observes, “his place at the center of the circle, crowned and enthroned, and his sacrificial role, locate him in a symbolic position of authority evocative of Nestor, the legendary archetype of the wise old patriarch. His advanced age further suggests that he deserves the respect that the Greeks accorded to age and tradition.”⁷⁷ His title to rule is based on this type of antiquarian authority. He is the eldest man and, as the father figure, also represents the oldest pre-political arrangement, the family. His presence speaks to the old order as it would be defined by the pious regard for one’s elders and the traditions maintained in the household. He also appears and speaks as if he were an Athenian by citing her cultural authorities⁷⁸ and recalling a story of one of her famed archons.⁷⁹ He resembles a “father-king” whose status is reinforced by the poetic tradition he cites during his exchange with Socrates.

Notably, Socrates does not seek Cephalus out.⁸⁰ He was not intending to stay in the Piraeus after observing the festival.⁸¹ Their conversation is prefigured by his playful

⁷⁶ Silvermintz, *Socrates in the Marketplace*, 12.

⁷⁷ Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato’s Dialogues*, 169. His precise position in the circle though is perhaps a matter of debate. The text only indicates that they sat beside (*para*) him.

⁷⁸ See *Republic I*, 329b; 331a. I count Pindar among these authorities, although he was a Theban.

⁷⁹ See *Republic I*, 329e. This reference is to Themistocles, who went into exile accused of treason.

⁸⁰ As a point of contrast, Aristophanes’ *Clouds* begins with the father-figure, Strepsiades, seeking out Socrates so that he can learn the art by which he can defraud his creditors. Aristophanes’ father-figure has no interest in keeping his contracts and is under the impression that the type of expertise Socrates possesses is just the kind he requires to escape his debts. When he arrives at the thinkery (*phrontisterion*), Socrates enters the room suspended in a basket on high, and tells Strepsiades that he is treading on air and contemplating the sun. The philosopher’s practice by this account appears like a magical ability. It puts men at the level of gods and endows them with the power to forget or forgive debts. It is a means of undermining one’s contracts. Later in the play, Strepsiades’ son, Pheidippides completes the training in argumentation that his father desires but is unable to do himself. With this newfound power of speech he justifies beating his father, and subsequently his mother, because he is wiser—he has surpassed his father in strength and wisdom. Pheidippides’ dominance in the household inverts its order and dismisses the

“arrest” by Polemarchus, while he and Glaucon sought to make their way back to Athens. This arrest recalls Polemarchus’ democratic sympathies. He, Adeimantus, Niceratus,⁸² and “some others”⁸³ persuade Socrates and Glaucon that the best action to take is in accordance with the majority and that they should delay their return to Athens to stay in the Piraeus a while longer. When the party arrives at Polemarchus’ residence, Cephalus’ other sons, Lysias and Euthydemus are noted as being present. The son of Aristonymus, Cleitophon, along with two non-Athenians, Thrasymachus and Charmantides, are also in their company. Of the named participants, non-Athenians comprise the majority.⁸⁴ The setting is both youthful and cosmopolitan. Blondell notes that, “This setting and *dramatis personae* establish a milieu that is Athenian, but outside of Athens proper, and as such beyond the limits of Sokrates’ usual haunts.”⁸⁵ At the same time, the group offers a fair representation of Socrates’ typical interlocutors:

authority of age and tradition. The work of Socrates’ comedic contemporary draws our attention to the popular equation of scientific inquiry with impiety and injustice. It also helps to contextualize Socrates’ reputation for impiety and gives us grounds to better consider the intergenerational dynamic at play in *Republic I*. Socrates’ impolite questioning of Cephalus bears some resemblance to Pheidippides’ assertion of his rhetorical power over Strepsiades. Cephalus appears as the natural authority, the ancestral patriarch. Socrates undermines the elderly man’s concept of justice and, in doing so, introduces the possibility that this inherited order is unable to meet the test of reason. Likewise, in both accounts, the son is depicted as superior to his father. Pheidippides and Polemarchus complete the arguments that their fathers cannot. Aristophanes and Plato are respectively drawing upon Socrates’ reputation for sophistry and its perceived consequences: young are made superior to old; sons superior to fathers; reason superior to piety. Aristophanes’ tongue-in-cheek charge against Socrates and the sophists is that their intellectual pursuits are corrosive to the social fabric. There are distinct political consequences for actions (and inquiries) that may have previously been presumed to be private. Plato’s evocation of this imagery suggests a familiarity with this charge and its political implications.

⁸¹ Plato, *Republic I*, 327a.

⁸² As Rudebusch notes, “Plato takes the trouble of having Polemarchus make his first appearance in the company of the silent character Niceratus, the son of Nicias—a person who receives no further mention in the dialogue, but whose main claim to remembrance was that he too, like Polemarchus, was executed by the Thirty.” See “Dramatic Prefiguration in Plato’s *Republic*,” 76.

⁸³ Plato, *Republic I*, 327c.

⁸⁴ Of the eleven named characters present at Polemarchus’ residence, six are non-Athenians and five are from Athens. It is not clear whether the “others” referenced at 327c are Athenian or not.

⁸⁵ Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato’s Dialogues*, 168.

youthful and sophisticatedly inclined. The group largely consists of students and their sophistic teachers. Charmantides, one of the silent observers of the dialogue, is a wealthy student of Isocrates.⁸⁶ Cleitophon,⁸⁷ who speaks only to defend Thrasymachus, is a well-known associate of both him and Lysias.⁸⁸ After Cephalus' exit, ten men will remain for the duration of the dialogue. The presence of ten men in the Piraeus examining regime types recalls the committee of ten who rule there under the direction of the Thirty.⁸⁹ Taken together with the staging of the scene, these details reinforce the tension between old and new speeches. The characters are positioned to observe customary deference towards Cephalus, yet presumably are more concerned with the power promised by rhetorical strategy.

Socrates abides by common custom and does not begin by engaging his typical youthful interlocutors. He first addresses the elderly Cephalus after being greeted and welcomed by him.⁹⁰ But, his social niceties end there. Ever the impolite dinner guest, he proceeds to rather rudely ask about his host's impending⁹¹ death and wealth. His frank questions lend the exchange a comic quality. He takes private matters and exposes them

⁸⁶ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 89.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸⁸ In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates also groups Thrasymachus and Lysias together. Here, he tells Phaedrus that he will not find the right approach to rhetoric if he follows the lead of either orator (269d). The historical record also supports the connection between Cephalus' family and the sophistic movement. As Silvermintz summarizes, "This association between Cephalus' children and the sophists is well attested to by sources outside of the *Republic*. Both Lysias and Polemarchus were sent as youths to Thurii in Sicily where it is believed they studied with Tisias, the successor of Corax and teacher of Thrasymachus." See *Socrates in the Marketplace*, 22.

⁸⁹ Bloom, "Interpretative Essay and Notes," 441n3.

⁹⁰ Plato, *Republic I*, 328c.

⁹¹ Following the dramatic dating of Nails (424 or 421 BCE), Cephalus' death is "impending," it is either a couple of years away or to follow later that year.

to public scrutiny. If Cephalus is insulted, he certainly does not betray it. The banter begins with Socrates' use of Homeric language to observe that Cephalus is at the "threshold⁹² of old age."⁹³ This abrupt observation is an allusion to the lamentation of Priam, a dispirited elderly king from Homer's *Iliad*.⁹⁴ Socrates asks for an account of how he is approaching death: "is it a hard time of life, or what have you to report of it?"⁹⁵ Cephalus handles the combination of this observation and question in good spirit, even though the boundaries of conventional respect have been crossed. Swearing by Zeus,⁹⁶ he offers his perspective and depicts himself as a moderate and just man, free of the tyranny of desire.

To support his point, Cephalus introduces the authority of the tragedian Sophocles to the dialogue. Here, moderation is defined by the absence of erotic inclinations.⁹⁷ Laughably he celebrates his impotence. He recounts a memory of the tragedian's response to a question regarding his sexual aptitude: "I was once present when the poet was asked by someone, 'Sophocles, how are you in sex? Can you still have intercourse with a woman?' 'Silence, man,' he said. 'Most joyfully did I escape it, as

⁹² Falkner describes the importance of the concept of "threshold" in his analysis of Homer's use of the term: "To view old age as a threshold is in keeping with the significance of thresholds cross-culturally and their prominence in Greek culture. To describe 'the threshold of old age,' far from being epic periphrasis, is to tap into its cultural significance, and that heroic poetry should describe old age as specifically liminal in character is to touch at a fundamental ambivalence in the poems. Where we might see old age as the final stage or even the culmination of a life, the heroic temper sees it as a passage away from real life and a diminution of its fullness." See "The End of the Odyssey," 34.

⁹³ Plato, *Republic I*, 328e.

⁹⁴ Homer, *Iliad*, XXII.69–73.

⁹⁵ Plato, *Republic I*, 328c.

⁹⁶ Zeus is the father-god.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 329b-c.

though I had run away from a sort of frenzied and savage master'."⁹⁸ Cephalus concurs with the poet, saying that Sophocles had "spoken well" and that he still holds the poet's account as authoritative.⁹⁹ Sophocles' portrayal resonates with his argument. If man can be freed of his tempestuous desires, he can exist in "peace and freedom" or contentment.¹⁰⁰ His language is specific: "it is possible to be rid of very many mad masters."¹⁰¹ *Eros* can produce a tyranny in one's soul, yet regime change is possible. Or, stating this in terms similar to those in previous chapter, this pronouncement depicts *eros* as something that enslaves the human. Over-throwing the master means overcoming *eros*.

Socrates' statement of wonder at 329d is the point at which he steers the conversation towards wealth and the appearance of virtue. This follows directly upon Cephalus' account of ridding his "many mad masters." Socrates' tact is curious. Instead of praising moderation, as he does at various times throughout the dialogue, Socrates speaks from the perspective of the many:

Cephalus, when you say these things, I suppose that the many do not accept them from you, but believe rather that it is not due to character that you bear old age so easily but due to possessing great substance. They say that for the rich there are many consolations.¹⁰²

Effectively, Cephalus' account of the possibility for order and contentment is called into question on the basis that the many would perceive his wealth as the necessary

⁹⁸ Ibid., 329c.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 329d.

¹⁰² Ibid., 329e.

condition for this type of self-sufficiency. Socrates brushes past Cephalus' attempt to collapse the question of aging into one of character in general.

Cephalus concedes that Socrates is correct in his assessment of the perspective of the many. He also gives up some conversational ground by granting that, "[the many] do have something there, but not, however, quite as much as they think."¹⁰³ To support his revised assertion, Cephalus tells a tale regarding Themistocles. Whereas he first drew on the authority of a poet, he now draws upon the authority of a political figure. He recounts that a Seriphian had maltreated Themistocles by calling his success a product of his city and not of himself. Themistocles responded to the man with a backhanded concession: "if he himself had been a Seriphian he would not have made a name, nor would that man have made one had he been an Athenian."¹⁰⁴ His circumstance, in this case his city's political regime, informs his virtue, yet his virtue transcends that of his city.¹⁰⁵ Themistocles would not have become an illustrious Seriphian because, he implies, Seriphos, as a place, is not conducive to making a great name. His illustriousness is a product of virtue and location. Cephalus applies the tale to his assessment of wealth and one's composure in old age. He states, "the decent man would not bear old age with poverty very easily, nor would the one who is not a decent sort ever be content with himself even if he were wealthy."¹⁰⁶ With this, Cephalus concedes that material things

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 330a.

¹⁰⁵ This account lays the ground for the city-soul analogy to follow in *Republic II*.

¹⁰⁶ Plato, *Republic I*, 330a.

matter. His wealth has played an important part, but he tries to maintain that his decency has truly made the difference.

Cephalus is endeavouring to show that wealth is secondary to character. But, while he speaks of himself in this way, his sacrifices to the gods reveal that he perceives “virtue ... as a gift from the gods.”¹⁰⁷ He is using his wealth to gain their blessing and, really, to avoid punishment. The virtue of moderation that Cephalus professes leads to his account of civic virtue, or justice. He first confesses, upon Socrates’ impolite prodding, that the greatest good that he has enjoyed on account of his wealth is the ability to ease the trepidations of his approaching death. In particular, this good is tied to his capacity to settle his debts, namely by making sacrifices. The trepidations he bears are those befitting his occupation. He is looking to leave the world with a clear balance sheet. That is, with his debts paid. By way of Cephalus’ description of squaring up his accounts, the words unjust and just enter the dialogue in that order. He is concerned with how his life will come to be judged once it is complete. By doing so, he is attempting to leave his sons a faultless legacy. Or, viewed in a more skeptical manner, he is attempting to purchase the retrospective judgment of a just life from the gods.

Socrates labels this account a “fine”¹⁰⁸ one and proceeds to derive from it the dialogue’s first definition of justice that appears to disregard entirely the cosmological

¹⁰⁷ Donohue, “The Dramatic Significance of Cephalus in Plato’s Republic,” 243. Socrates makes no mention of Cephalus’ sacrifices to the gods. In his remarks, Cephalus had spoken of justice and piety, but Socrates only takes up the question of justice.

¹⁰⁸ As Bloom explains, *kalon* connotes “true, correct, good, and fine, fair, or noble,” but something can be “good without being fine or noble, just as fine or noble speech is not necessarily good or true.” See “Interpretative Essay and Notes,” 443n19.

relevance of Cephalus' actions.¹⁰⁹ He humanizes the account when he asks, "shall we so simply assert that it [justice] is the truth and giving back what a man has taken from another, or is to do these very things sometimes just and sometimes unjust?"¹¹⁰ Before Cephalus can respond to the definition derived from his account, Socrates challenges the definition on the basis that one is justified in not returning a weapon to a friend who has gone mad and, further, one is justified in lying to that person if that is what the situation demands. Cephalus concedes that what Socrates describes is correct. With this concession, Socrates is then able to restate the definition so that it may be further clarified. He offers, "then this isn't the definition of justice, speaking the truth and giving back what one takes."¹¹¹ At this point, Polemarchus interjects on his father's behalf, presenting himself as the heir apparent.¹¹² Cephalus uses this as an opportunity to free himself from the conversation. He excuses himself to attend to his sacrifices. Cephalus' last contribution to the dialogue is laughter. He chuckles at his son's quip about his inheritance.¹¹³ With an air of levity, he ends his participation in the evening's discussion and does not return to the scene.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Plato, *Republic I*, 331b.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 331c.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 331d.

¹¹² Ibid., 331d-e. Kasimis writes that, "This substitution between Polemarchos and Kephalos—and for that matter, the inheriting or bequeathing that happens—parodies or mirrors what is supposed to happen only after a father's death. The dialogue may be performing Book Eight's claim that in a democracy a son gets used to being like his father and vice versa...Democracy's drive to blur the social distinctions looks like a perversion of the 'natural' order of things between father and son." See *Drawing the Boundaries of Democracy*, 108n165.

¹¹³ Plato, *Republic I*, 331d-e.

¹¹⁴ Cephalus' exit is abrupt and unusual. Socrates rarely lets an interlocutor leave.

In the account of justice attributed to Cephalus, two claims are made: one by Cephalus, the other by Socrates. In the first, Cephalus makes a claim as to the best way of life. At 329d, when he is describing the challenges of old age, he remarks that an “orderly and content” character is the cause of a good life. In the second, Socrates summarizes Cephalus’ account by suggesting that justice is characterized by honesty and repayment. The grave insufficiency of this definition of justice and of Cephalus’ self-assessed moderation is apparent within Socrates’ counterexample, which alludes to the source of the elderly man’s wealth. His wealth is derived from the growth of Athens’ military. If not for Pericles’ expansionist policies and the war itself, Cephalus would not have prospered as he had. Some of his wealth was acquired by inheritance, but most of it appears to have been gained by fulfilling his contract with the war-maddened city. Gifford perhaps overstates this by saying, “it may be that Plato also wants us to recall here the many innocents that Cephalus helped the Athenians to slaughter in the course of trying to satisfy their shared and pleonectic lust for wealth.”¹¹⁵ Cephalus may not have wielded a weapon during the war, but he produced them, and, on these grounds, he is considered complicit in the acts of war. He profited from warfare. The short exchange with Socrates is enough to reveal the disparity that exists between Cephalus’ ethical conception of himself and a philosophic standard of justice that includes self-knowledge.¹¹⁶ If the judgment of moral actions is left entirely in the hands of gods, then

¹¹⁵ Gifford, “Dramatic Dialectic in Republic Book I,” 82.

¹¹⁶ The question of whether or not it is ever just to harm anyone will be taken up shortly by his son, Polemarchus. See *Republic I*, 335b-d.

men can displace the responsibility for their actions. One can always run up a debt and pay down the tab later.

Cephalus' ethical ignorance is connected to what could be labeled the commonplace account that justice consists of abiding by the rules. As Bloom describes,

Practically speaking, as Cephalus' example shows, justice is law-abidingness. That is certainly what the city says it is; and even if there is a natural justice, it must be embodied in a code of political law in order to have real effect. The city always presents its laws as a constitutive part of itself, like the territory and the populace. But, in fact, those laws can vary as the territory and the populace cannot; they are a function of the regime, of the kind of men who govern the city. When the poor, or the rich, or the old families, or a tyrant take over the rule in a city, its laws change correspondingly.¹¹⁷

This idea coincides with Lysias' description of his father's law-abidingness in *Against Eratosthenes*. He states, "Neither he nor the rest of the family was ever involved in any litigation, either as prosecutor or defendant. We lived our lives under the democracy in such a way as to do no wrong to others and to suffer no harm from others."¹¹⁸ Civic virtue, by this account, is based on the fulfillment of one's contractual obligations. This brand of virtue also appears tied to his citizenship status. A contract is struck with the city that defines the conditions by which one may continue to reside within it. By Cephalus' account in the *Republic*, he has fulfilled his civic duties and is in the process of fulfilling his theological ones; he therefore meets the requirements of a just life. Yet, this contractual notion is dangerous. It makes the ethical claims of the democrats and oligarchs the same. Justice is equated to "a legal institutionalization of the harm-benefit

¹¹⁷ Bloom, "Interpretive Essay and Notes," 327.

¹¹⁸ Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 12.4.

principle.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, it is a prelude to Thrasymachus’ argument that justice is “the advantage of the stronger.”¹²⁰ Using the premises of the argument, the Thirty would have had just cause to murder Polemarchus because he would have been perceived as an enemy of the new regime.

The old and the new moralities intersect in Cephalus’ character. His appearance and dress align him with the traditional morality of ancestral Athens, but his argumentative style and its conventionalism belies his proximity to the sophistic school. Notably, he praises moderation, but we see that “he has ascribed more importance to appetite than he himself knows.”¹²¹ This contrast in his character helps to set up the challenge to which Socrates must ultimately respond: the defence of the idea that it is better to be just than to appear just, and that justice is worthy for its own sake.¹²² Cephalus appears just. He claims the virtue of moderation. By dint of his varied reception by scholarly interpreters, we see just how easy it is to take his claim at face value. Closer examination of his claim though, allows us to consider the stakes of the dialogue. The interlocutors are yet unaware of the death, exile, and turmoil that await them over the course of the extended war. With the risk of greater political turmoil in the historical backdrop, the moral drift towards Thrasymachus’ argument—that it is better to appear just while enacting injustice—needs to be abated lest it further exacerbate the disorder of the *polis*. As Gadamer notes, “The real object of Plato’s

¹¹⁹ Gifford, “Dramatic Dialectic in Republic Book I,” 96.

¹²⁰ Plato, *Republic I*, 338c.

¹²¹ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 138.

¹²² Plato, *Republic II*, 358d.

criticism...is the contemporary *morality* and *moral education* which had established itself upon the basis of the poetic formulations of the older morality and which, in adhering to aging moral forms, found itself defenseless against arbitrary perversions of those forms brought on by the spirit of sophism."¹²³ Cephalus' character demonstrates the seriousness of Plato's task. His proximity to sophists appears innocent, but it seems only to perpetuate and protect his ignorance. This ignorance becomes dangerous when it loses its capacity to make distinctions among the most important matters.¹²⁴ Notably, the understanding of justice as "to give to each what is owed"¹²⁵ means that a just person must seek the knowledge of what belongs to whom. In other words, it is the knowledge of what *belongs* or the knowledge of making proper distinctions.¹²⁶ The source of such knowledge in the political context is the law. Laws define *who* and *what* belong *where*. The old laws were complicit in the injustice of the Peloponnesian War, and, as shown in the character of Cephalus, they lost their grounding. They erred towards the idea that wealth could create contentment, whereas the pursuit of greater and greater wealth (i.e., an erotic desire for more) blurred all such distinctions.

¹²³ Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," 61.

¹²⁴ Voegelin makes a similar judgment: "The venerable elder who arouses our sympathy will be tempered by a touch of condescension, if not contempt, for his weakness. For the men of his type are the cause of the sudden vacuum that appears in a critical period with the break of generations, All of a sudden it appears that the older generation has neglected to build the substance of order in the younger men, and an amiable lukewarmness and confusion shifts within a few years into the horrors of social catastrophe." See *Plato and Aristotle. Volume III: Order and History*, 57.

¹²⁵ Plato, *Republic I*, 331e.

¹²⁶ This point is elaborated on further in the Socrates-Polemarchus exchange, wherein Socrates establishes the fallacy of defining justice as helping one's friends and harming one's enemies, if one does not *know* who is a friend and who is an enemy.

3.5 Exit the Father

With all three interpretative lenses (historical, mythological, and textual) in mind, I suggest that Cephalus' exit functions in the following ways: (1) it underscores the absence of Athenian ancestral authority (a common *patrios politeia*); (2) it reduces the importance of age and origin as criteria for hierarchical distinctions. Simply stated, it renders the setting thoroughly democratic.¹²⁷ Socrates is now present among men who consider themselves equals in the task at hand. Last, (3) it displays the normative stakes of philosophic engagement.

Since the first two points have already been discussed, the remaining analysis will focus upon the last point. This last point suggests that rather than detachment, Socrates presents the best way of life as in tension with, yet thoroughly enmeshed in, the concerns of the *polis*. The *polis* and its way of life provide the necessary conditions for the pursuit of moral knowledge. Its arrangement determines whether the philosopher's questions are permitted or forbidden. When Socrates replaces Cephalus as the head of the group, he proceeds to model the philosophic interaction with the highest human matters (the best way of life, justice, virtue, etc.). He models the pursuit of self-knowledge, a pursuit, it would seem, that Cephalus is incapable of. Cephalus' exit permits the space for this kind of examination. When he leaves, the idea that moral

¹²⁷ Cf. *Republic VIII*: "That a father," I said, "habituates himself to be like his child and fear his sons, and a son habituates himself to be like his father and to have no shame before or fear of his parents—that's so he may be free; and metic is on an equal level with townsman and townsman with metic, and similarly with the foreigner" (562e).

knowledge is the sole purview of the gods exits as well.¹²⁸ Moral knowledge becomes the purview of men. It becomes a matter that can be learned in discussions among friends. In the course of the dialogue to follow, the testing of regimes (and of souls) that takes place explores the possibilities for philosophical activity in the *polis* (and the man). This testing should be understood as Plato's assessment of the limits and possibilities for philosophic discourse in the democratic *polis*. Plato's Socrates youthfully challenges the elder and replaces the elder. In doing so, he reveals a preoccupation with the common good of the city, and its future direction, by concerning himself with the heirs of the city and by being an educator. He concerns himself with the question of how to educate men "who would honor gods and ancestors and not take lightly their friendship with each other."¹²⁹ In doing so, he acts politically and moderately.

Two further actions in the text support this understanding of Cephalus' exit. First, his exit is the necessary condition for Socrates and Polemarchus to become allies. Whereas their first interaction had been one that engaged in (albeit playful) questions of force and domination by the majority, at the conclusion of the Socrates-Polemarchus exchange, Polemarchus proclaims his loyalty to Socrates: "I, for one," he said, "am ready to be your partner in the battle."¹³⁰ A moral take-over of sorts is taking place. In their exchange, Socrates has helped Polemarchus acknowledge that he does not possess the kind of knowledge that he requires if he is to act politically. That is, he is not able to

¹²⁸ I'm indebted to Nathan Tarcov for noting that there are some later echoes of the idea, though they are not left as the sole judges (e.g., 352b, 612d-613b).

¹²⁹ Plato, *Republic III*, 386a.

¹³⁰ Plato, *Republic I*, 336a.

establish with certainty what is owed to whom, with the glaring exception of course, that the argument ultimately convinces him that he owes his loyalty to Socrates. The absence of his father is the permissive condition for this change in loyalty to take place. It suggests that a friendship can be built between the man with democratic loyalties and the philosopher, if the philosopher can establish the merit of his pursuit. The democratic man adopts a new philosophic father.

Plato's Socrates guards against the idea that the philosopher is the possessor of new moral knowledge, though. While *Republic I* is, justly, considered a prelude to the rest of the work, its conclusion should still be considered with care. It is here that Socrates states, "so that now as a result of this discussion I know nothing."¹³¹ He is pointing away from himself as the source of knowledge. We may, with Thrasymachus,¹³² take this to be another instance of Socratic dissimulation, or we might choose to understand it as an honest statement. Working with the latter idea, Socrates' statement affirms the kind of knowledge that he is lacking. It defines what kind of knowledge should be pursued. In doing so, it sets out the worthiness of the philosophic task and a renewed imperative for philosophic education. Reading this conclusion alongside his friendship with Polemarchus, Plato's Socrates has been able to define a space within the democratic *polis* for the pursuit of such knowledge to take place. He has set forth conditions for a new piety to take hold—the pious affirmation of truth. As the dramatic

¹³¹ Ibid., 354b.

¹³² Ibid., 338b.

qualities of the opening scene demonstrate, this space, and the new order it suggests (the priority of the philosophic life), is only possible once the father has departed.

Conclusion

The most immediate objection to the foregoing analysis is that it places undue emphasis on one very minor character and one very minor action. There is certainly the possibility that we obscure rather than broaden our perspective when we derive relevance so narrowly. Like a good director though, I imagine Plato would have told his cast that there are no small parts. This assumption belies my interpretative disposition, which argues that he drafted his characters with intention, and that the characters themselves are employed as a means to expand upon the themes explicitly raised in the dialogue.

Ascribing this kind of intention to the author presupposes that Plato is aware of his audience. With this awareness of the reader, the nuances of identity that he writes into his characters suggest that they are not mere intellectual puzzles, but are designed as objects of meditation. In Cephalus' case, he is presented to the reader as an exemplar of authority, specifically of ancestral authority, but in a form that is simultaneously non-Athenian and Athenian. His historical, mythological, and rhetorical features yield these contrasts. By offering this type of character early in the dialogue, Plato gives the reader a means to reflect upon the tensions of this multi-dimensionality. In reflecting upon these tensions, and then subsequently upon Cephalus' absence, the reader is offered a further step by inquiring into the effect this produces.

The Socrates-Cephalus exchange, and its representation of philosophy's engagement with tradition, is an extension of the *patrios politeia* debate. Plato's Cephalus reveals not only that the association between the oldest and the best persists, but also the way in which the idea of the ancestral can be a thinly veiled fabrication. In this way, examining the character of Cephalus helps us to reconsider the legacy of the *Republic* and its political function. Its political function is the collective exercise of self-examination. The dialogue is an introspective exercise that challenges its readers to question, "how the harms we witness might have been prevented."¹³³ Plato's selective use of Cephalus establishes the vulnerability of an account of justice overly invested in the idea of "one's own," yet it is attentive to the way that the love of "one's own" forms the basis of the promises of the political community. Indeed, as *Republic I* continues we see the reformulation of this idea in the sophist Thrasymachus' account of justice wherein "each ruling group sets down laws for its own advantage; a democracy sets down democratic laws; a tyranny, tyrannic laws; and others do the same. And they declare that what they have set down—their own advantage—is just for the ruled."¹³⁴ The innocent and all-too-human connection of the good and one's own implicit in Cephalus and Polemarchus' accounts is readily appropriated by the sophistic argument.

If Plato's Athens is to find itself again, to recover any of its ancestral legacy, it needs to do more than defend the interests of its ruling classes or potential ruling classes (as the democratic and oligarchic factions would have it). It needs to set forth a dialogue

¹³³ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, xxxviii.

¹³⁴ Plato, *Republic I*, 338e.

on the true character of justice, and it needs to lay bare how previous conceptions of justice have come to be.¹³⁵ Cephalus' mythological eponym points towards the founding of the previous conception. It recalls the pride of place the Athenians invested in their autochthonous account of themselves. His historical character and the setting point towards the appropriation of the ancestral identity by the political factions in the city. The political commentary embedded in all of this literary complexity is perhaps surprisingly simple. The success of the political community does not depend on the triumph of one of these factions; it depends on the creation of the space for political philosophy, a space wherein the violent and prideful attachments of one's own might be put aside for the pursuit of individual and collective self-knowledge.

¹³⁵ I am grateful to Demetra Kasimis for this idea. In her forthcoming book, *Classical Greek Theory and the Politics of Immigration*, she tackles the question of the *Republic's* setting as a metic-space and draws out some of these considerations concerning the dialogue's use of the idea of the metic as possessing the status of someone "in-between" (i.e., neither foreign nor local).

CHAPTER 4

The Problem of Plato's Socrates

Cruelty is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind. Consequently it is imagined that the gods too are refreshed and in festive mood when they are offered the spectacle of cruelty—and thus there creeps into the world the idea that voluntary suffering, self-chosen torture, is meaningful and valuable.

—Nietzsche, *Daybreak*

But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.

—Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Introduction

It is now appropriate to re-consider *Republic I* in light of *Genealogy II*. The purpose of this reconsideration is to elaborate on the political implications of Nietzsche's exploration of justice: If he understands Plato as the precursor to Christian egalitarianism, is he aiming to rebuild a lost order with the *Genealogy*—to restore ancestral laws? In pursuing this question, I do not mean to suggest that Nietzsche's *Genealogy II* is a direct response to *Republic I*. I do mean to suggest, however, that his use of the ancestral and economic metaphors is purposive. It recalls the tradition with which he wants to establish a dialogue, and it acknowledges that the idea of justice upon which this tradition is founded is based upon those metaphors as a way of defining the underlying authority of law. Again, laws define *who* and *what* belong *where*. Their underlying authority responds to the question *why*? The chapter is a speculative exercise

in that it seeks to understand how *Republic I* sets the conditions for the “misarchism” Nietzsche diagnoses in democracy. It tries to understand how Plato’s Socrates in *Republic I* re-sets the answer to the question *why* from the perspective of Nietzsche’s arguments in *Genealogy II*. Further, it tries to understand what that means for our understanding of Nietzsche’s political philosophy.

As the previous chapter established, Cephalus’ character discloses the problematic quality of the Athenian moral order in two ways, by revealing that: (1) the old order, as premised on autochthonous boundaries, was dissolving, and (2) that the new order, as premised on sophistic teachings, was reinforcing ethical ignorance. The chapter ended with the idea that Plato’s solution to this problem is dramatically depicted in the scene wherein Socrates forms a friendship with Cephalus’ son, Polemarchus. The philosopher befriends the democratic man once his father departs the scene. This action further dissolves the idea of the authority of the bloodline or kinship, because it places greater emphasis on the bond of friendship rather than family. (A similar move is undertaken in the New Testament¹ wherein Jesus asks that bonds of the universal family of God take precedence over the biological family of humans.) And it addresses the problem of ethical ignorance by putting forward an argument concerning the merit, and necessity, of knowledgeable rule. This reading of Plato’s solution to the problem of *Republic I* overlays well with the paradoxical quality of Nietzsche’s accusation against Plato’s Socrates. Socrates both fosters the conditions for the

¹ See *Matthew* 12:46-50. Taylor also comments upon this when he writes, “The New Testament is full of calls to leave or relativize solidarities of family, clan, and society and be part of the Kingdom.” See *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 62.

enchantment of Christianity and for the disenchantment of scientific-rationalism.

Friendship enchants, and it is based on the premise that the philosopher as friend has knowledge that is valuable to the political man. The philosopher's knowledge is useful. The knowledge that the philosopher possesses though disenchantments—it destroys the old myths and metaphors. In Nietzsche's language of promising, Plato's Socrates creates a promise that simultaneously civilizes and un-civilizes.

In a very modest way, this chapter seeks to sketch out how the *Genealogy* plays on these ideas and why, for Nietzsche, they become the defining political problem of modernity. Nietzsche's criticism of Plato's solution is that the Western world is living a life prescribed by Socrates (a father-beater²) that moralizes a life that resembles the last days of Cephalus, the dying father³ of the *Republic*. The life of the dying, un-erotic, metic moneymaker, who defines his virtue on the basis of wealth and chastity, is praised in the *Republic* on account of its ability to alleviate fear and guilt.⁴ Our peer-to-peer world is like Cephalus "keep[ing] up the old proverb,"⁵ of "like to like."⁶ The peers in these terms are "dying fathers"⁷ or "souls without longing."⁸ Nietzsche's frank assessment is that Western morality, from Socrates onward, moralizes the means to this end.

² Refer to the discussion in Chapter 2, where I had earlier made the claim that Nietzsche suggests that Christianity universalizes the guilt expressed in the metaphor of father-beating (155).

³ Cf. Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §8-9.

⁴ Plato, *Republic I*, 331b.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 329a.

⁶ Bloom, "Interpretative Essay and Notes," 441n13.

⁷ Nietzsche's understanding of the collective Western conscience thus varies distinctly from Freud's on this point. In the Introduction, I noted that, for Freud, the symbolism of the death of God, as it related to the father-son relationship, produced the *liberated* son, who could move into adulthood unencumbered. Nietzsche does not share this optimism.

To see how Nietzsche might have understood Plato as creating the conditions for this kind of peer-to-peer world, the analysis will proceed in three stages. First, it revisits *Republic I* to discuss Socrates' response to Cephalus' erotic liberation, which we will recall is one of wonder.⁹ This consideration is necessary because it suggests that Cephalus' laughable impotence was actually an inspiration for the political conversation that followed. The morality that replaces that of the father is based upon a soulcraft of erotic containment—a true *techne* of making human promises more predictable and reliable. Nietzsche's discussion of the emergence of bad conscience in *Genealogy II*¹⁰ partakes in this idea of the politicization of the soul. The divisions of the soul are overlaid with moral judgments (crudely, reason is good and appetite is bad). This is part of the moral legacy that Nietzsche assigns to Platonism, or what becomes Christianity. Next, the analysis moves from the soul to the city to speak more directly to Nietzsche's treatment of the economic metaphor of "what is owed." I will establish here that his critique of the Christian-democratic order appears to resemble the problem inherent in the "city of sows"¹¹ (for which, we might justifiably claim, Plato accounts). When equality and efficiency become gods of the city, and fathers and sons are collapsed into the category of workers, it becomes a city of pigs. There is no room for philosophy (or politics, for that matter), and, as such, by Nietzsche's account, no room for greatness.

⁸ Bloom had initially proposed this phrase as the title for *The Closing of the American Mind*, before his editors overruled him.

⁹ Plato, *Republic I*, 329e.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.16.

¹¹ Plato, *Republic II*, 372d.

Last, it will take up Nietzsche's concern with greatness by re-visiting the conclusion to *Genealogy II* and its references to the Homeric gods.

Each step of this concluding exploration should hold in mind his interaction with us, his reader. Rather than befriending his democratic reader while the God-the-father is dying, he engages in polemics, he tries to stir whatever honour is left. Should the reader be a good son, like Polemarchus, a defender of the dying Christian-democracy, or does Nietzsche demand another action entirely?

4.1 Exit Eros

In the concluding treatise of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche begins the first two sections by repeating the same question "*Was bedeuten asketische Ideale?*" (What do ascetic ideals mean or signify?). In the second instance of posing this question, he responds by offering the example of the composer, Richard Wagner, who, he says, in his old age paid homage to the virtue of chastity.¹² He further suggests that this homage represented the complete transformation of his character. Wagner changed into the opposite ("*Gegensatz*") of who he was.¹³ Rather than praising sensuality, he praised chastity. This reference to Wagner's transformation bears an important resemblance to Plato's depiction of Cephalus. Cephalus' piety appears to be underscored by a desire to redeem himself from the errors of his past, which he blames upon the "frenzied and savage

¹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III.2.

¹³ Ibid.

master" of *eros*.¹⁴ Cephalus' argument suggests that old age naturally causes a decline in erotic inclinations and leaves open the possibility that such order and contentment might also be available to the young. It becomes a matter of character formation.¹⁵ I suggest that Cephalus' legacy in the *Republic* is akin to Nietzsche's characterization of the ascetic ideal. It places emphasis upon the idea of disciplining and directing *eros*.

Character formation is not only a transformative process, but also one that is informed by the idea that human beings can be made or developed. The idea of "making" implies a certain relationship between human nature and the conventions that are imposed on that nature. Again, we recall the opening of *Genealogy II*, where Nietzsche refers to human beings as animals who are able to make promises. Promising, as described there, is an intervention into nature. It effects a change to make the unpredictable more predictable. It places boundaries around particular actions. In other words, it legislates and specifies when and why discipline and punishment might be required. With this idea in mind, I suggest that Plato's depiction of Cephalus sets forth the conditions for two of Nietzsche's claims regarding ascetic politics. First, the bad conscience emerges from these politics of character formation. Second, these politics overwrite the boundaries of kinship with boundaries determined by the law-giver.

To the first point, Cephalus' guilt appears when he begins to consider what might happen to him in the afterlife. The stories from his youth, to which he suggests

¹⁴ Plato, *Republic I*, 329c.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 329d.

that he paid little attention at the time, and at which he even laughed, now appear to haunt his conscience:

when a man comes near to the realization that he will be making an end, fear and care enter him for things to which he gave no thought before. The tales told about what is in Hades — that the one who has done unjust deeds here must pay the penalty there — at which he laughed up to then, now make his soul twist and turn because he fears they might be true.¹⁶

This confession is significant because it outlines that fear accompanies ignorance. In the absence of certain knowledge, the stories of the poets inform how that fear is channelled. Additionally, it expresses the idea of a moral universe. Morality is not only a human concern, but it is also a concern to the gods as well. This is the first indication in the *Republic* that the gods are concerned with the moral conduct of humans. To put this another way, Cephalus, a reformed believer, now holds that the gods must be just or fair in terms of rewarding those who do good things (who act morally) and punishing those (or at least not rewarding) those who do bad things (who act immorally). Their justice is derived from their knowledge. That is, the gods must be wise, and, as such, their knowledge of who and what belong where is infallible. Reading Cephalus' account of the tales of Hades alongside his earlier confession concerning the dangers of *eros*, I suggest the account that he offers of the justice in his own life becomes clearer. He has done bad things because he was a slave to love. Old age has freed him from that kind of mad love, and wealth has freed him from the consequences of his actions under its spell. The greatest benefit he says that he has derived from his wealth is that it "contributes a

¹⁶ Ibid., 330d-e.

great deal to not cheating or lying to any man against one's will, and, moreover, to not departing for that other place frightened because one owes some sacrifices to a god or money to a human being."¹⁷ His wealth is an insurance policy of sorts. He was unable to possess an orderly character in his youth, but at least he has the means to settle the debt he tallied.

In the earlier examination of *Genealogy II*, "bad conscience" was defined as the internalization of the guilty judgment of oneself (i.e., that one is the rightful recipient of suffering). It is a kind of existential guilt that Nietzsche suggests intensifies under Christianity.¹⁸ Expressed otherwise, it is the intensification of the feeling of a great debt that is owed. When describing bad conscience, I had also noted that Nietzsche emphasizes it as something that effects a transformation of the human being. He had compared its presence in human beings with the changes endured by water animals when they became land animals.¹⁹ It is a transformation on the scale of an evolutionary adaptation. Cephalus does appear to possess a guilty conscience (his attentiveness to his sacrifices support this contention). He also identifies a particular aspect of himself, or his soul, that he blames for this guilt. So, while he does not "make" bad conscience, he imparts a legacy to the *Republic* that provides the intellectual conditions for Christian bad conscience. After he has departed, his presence in the text lives on in three

¹⁷ Ibid., 331b.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.20.

¹⁹ Ibid., II.16.

conceptual²⁰ forms: the expressed danger of *eros* (which becomes the premise for the proper ordering of the city and soul), the inward turn toward the moral standard of god (which become the premise of the guardians' philosophic education), and the reconsideration of who qualifies as a citizen (which becomes the premise of the new noble *mythos*). Plato's Socrates, of course, is the one who develops these ideas, but each of them might be traced back to Cephalus, their dialogical ancestor.

These ideas come together in the final articulation of the city in speech in *Republic* V. The politics of this city resemble the politics of the soul, primarily on account of the distinction made between the parts of both that know and the parts that act. Arendt summarizes this as follows:

... it is obvious that the experiences on which the Platonic division rests are those of the household, where nothing would ever be done if the master did not know what to do and did not give orders to the slaves who executed them without knowing. Here indeed, he who knows does not have to do and he who does needs no thought or knowledge. Plato was still quite aware that he proposed a revolutionary transformation of the *polis* when he applied to its administration the currently recognized maxims for a well-ordered household. (It is a common error to interpret Plato as though he wanted to abolish the family and the household; he wanted, on the contrary, to extend this type of life until one family embraced every citizen. In other words, he wanted to eliminate from the household community its private character, and it is for this purpose that he recommended the abolition of private property and individual marital status.)²¹

The beautiful city of *Republic* V extends the love of one's own from the household, from the centre of kinship, outwards so that it encompasses the whole city. From Nietzsche's

²⁰ As distinguished from the actual genealogical traces he leaves in the dialogue through the presence of his sons.

²¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 223.

Genealogy III, we see that those who claim moral knowledge are the priests. They become the masters. Everyone else becomes the doers. Re-framed in this manner, the universalized²² household enslaves humanity to the moral rule of priests because they possess knowledge of good/god. These priests (philosopher kings) prescribe a common love, away from the particularities of the household, and towards the collectivity of the entire political community. Perhaps most distinctly though, the priest replaces the father as the head. Old men rule the city with great “fear and care”²³ for its tales, guarding over them and preventing them from being made laughable.

Indeed, the tradition of political philosophy seems to have largely accepted this account of “philosopher king” rule. It is this traditional reading to which Nietzsche is responding, and it is this reading that comes through in Arendt’s characterization of the beautiful city. She notes that the tradition errs in assuming that Plato wanted to eliminate the household. But she fails to note that it errs in another important way too. She claims that the masters are those who know but do not have to do. This is ultimately the problem in the beautiful city. The masters must be knowers *and* doers, philosophers *and* kings. They are the exception to the one-man one-art rule that the *Republic* earlier

²² The issue of universality versus particularity plays out in the questions concerning the boundaries of the city-in-speech. *Republic V* does specify that the city being founded is to be “Greek” (470e) and, in this sense, gives one clear criterion for citizenship, the treatment of barbarians, and the treatment of other Greeks (see 469b-471e). While this condition is being set, the interlocutors also imagine that their warriors would be the best fighters because they *would not* be able to tell who was kin and who was not. The rationale being that they would valiantly defend everyone on their side as if they were fighting alongside their brothers, fathers and, mothers. Of course, this is problematic. If the warriors are not able to recognize their kin, how are they able to tell the barbarians from the Greeks, or friends from enemies (334c)? What becomes the standard for Greek-ness or, simply, for admission into the city?

²³ Plato, *Republic I*, 330d.

defines.²⁴ Rather than trusting that Plato intended this as a political prescription, one should understand this penultimate version of the city-in-speech as highlighting the very problems that it claims to be solving. It does so to make us conscious of these problems and their boundaries, so that we might at least be aware of the very human material with which we are working. In this sense, the lesson of the beautiful city is a lesson in the pursuit of truth through self-knowledge and not the implementation of proclaimed moral knowledge.

4.2 Enter Efficiency

On the way to the fully transformed city-in-speech, Plato's interlocutors first confront the economic conditions of this new political experiment. When the thought experiment is first raised in *Republic II*, Socrates begins building the city with Adeimantus. It is intended as an exercise in pursuit of justice and, more specifically, in defence of justice. The city begins with the concept of necessity (which might otherwise be understood as what is needed by nature). Socrates states, "Our need, as it seems, will make it."²⁵ Socrates is beginning from the premise that human beings possess a distinct nature and that this nature is governed by certain necessities that can only be met by other human beings. Interestingly, though, Socrates does not begin with a family unit. Rather, he begins with "four or five men."²⁶ The social bond he starts from is friendship, not kinship. It is the bond of contractual and commercial obligations. Further, the bond

²⁴ Plato, *Republic II*, 370b.

²⁵ Plato, *Republic II*, 369c.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 369d.

is established because each man, by nature, possesses different skills and therefore contributes different goods to the community. This schematic makes clear *who* and *what* belong *where*. Each worker/doer contributes some good/thing to the whole. They are citizens by virtue of their deeds or by the contributions that they make to the whole.

This city grows as the dialogue progresses, but Socrates describes it as complete at 371e. This early version of the city is based on the idea of efficiency. Efficiency “is and can only be measured as the progressively diminishing difference between those means and ends or causes and effects.”²⁷ The men that form this city have a systematic relationship with each other. Each contributes what another lacks. The aim of the city is to maximize the contributions of each to the whole so that the whole functions justly (that is, everyone receives what is owed to them). The system functions without a ruler or rulers. Natural distinctions between the men are made but only on the grounds of knowledge. They each possess a distinct art (*techne*) that they are to dedicate themselves to entirely.²⁸ They are equal participants or equal parts of the whole. They are true peers. Age certainly is not a title to rule. Indeed, this city itself reads as a-historical.

The kind of promise depicted in this early city is the promise of a well-functioning creditor-debtor system. Its justice is based on this premise and defended on this premise. Every man involved is both a creditor and a debtor. Exchanges are made, and one’s standing in the community is secured by the fulfillment of one’s promises. The human becomes calculable in this scenario in two ways. First, his behaviour is governed

²⁷ Darby, “On Spiritual Crisis,” 53.

²⁸ Plato, *Republic II*, 370c.

by the rational calculation of his interest. It is better to cooperate and contribute rather than lack goods necessary to survival.²⁹ Next, his time is devoted to the development and mastery of a particular skill. This regulates his interference with other members of the community and stresses a kind of individual focus. To perfect himself, he must perfect his craft. His craft is his entry point to the community and that with which he is able to trade for the other goods necessary to his existence.

Cephalus' early definition of justice thus becomes enacted in this first city-in-speech. Justice is honest and reciprocal trade. Human beings are transformed into economic men with no clear private *oikos*. There are no masters, only doers. They are equal artisans. They otherwise are not yet defined on a hierarchical scale. In a different context, Taylor speaks about the kind of virtue this city seems to be depicting. He writes,

“Le doux commerce” is contrasted to the wild destructiveness of the aristocratic search for military glory. The more a society turns to commerce, the more polished and civilized it becomes, the more it excels in the arts of peace. The impetus to moneymaking is seen as a “calm passion.” When it takes hold in a society it can help to control and inhibit the violent passions. Put in other language, moneymaking serves our interest, and interest can check and control passion.³⁰

The city is peaceful because the system that underlies it is complete and well-functioning. Indeed, Socrates later describes it as “a healthy city.”³¹ It is healthy on account of the absence of love and honour, in favour of the promotion of rational interest.

²⁹ Modern game theorists might consider this a sort of cooperation building tactic.

³⁰ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 74-5.

³¹ Plato, *Republic II*, 372e.

Politicians or statesmen and philosophers are noticeably absent from this healthy city. These men are transformed, but not into superior human beings. Glaucon characterizes the city as “a city of sows.”³² This characterization implies that this thought experiment has led them to the conditions for a city of fat female pigs.³³ Glaucon’s remark seems designed to provoke a manly response from his brother Adeimantus, who had otherwise been responsible for the crafting of this city with Socrates. Rather than engaging, Adeimantus steps back from the conversation and Glaucon takes over. The thought experiment continues and drifts away from this peaceful imagined community of traders and moneymakers and eventually concludes in the final image of the beautiful city discussed in the previous section.

Nietzsche’s thoughts seem to stay with the pigs in his answer to the question of the meaning of ascetic ideals. Whereas he began §2 of *Genealogy III* by discussing Wagner’s promotion of the virtue of chastity, he concludes it with four heavy-handed references to “*Schweine*” (pigs) in a short space. What connection is being made here? He implies that by setting up chastity and sensuality as tragic opposites, Wagner has “piggishly” promoted one at the expense of the other. Not mincing words, he implies that Wagner, himself, is a pig. He suggests that Wagner is praising the quality that he does not possess, the opposite quality that he possesses. In short, Wagner, a sensual

³² Ibid., 372d.

³³ This version of the city-in-speech also seems to loom in the background of Zarathustra’s condemnation of the last men: “Nobody grows rich or poor any more: both are too much of a burden. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both are too much of a burden. No herdsman and one herd. Everyone wants the same things, everyone is the same: whoever thinks otherwise goes voluntarily into the madhouse.” See Nietzsche, “Prologue,” *Zarathustra*, §5.

man, is driven to desire the elimination of his sensuality. More than this, as a composer, an artist, he is driven to share this praise of chastity with his impressionable audience. Nietzsche concludes this section by asking about the relevance of pigs to Wagner and to us (*Denn was giengen ihn, was gehen uns die Schweine an? —*). He uses a question to answer the question with which he led. So, taking the bait, we might ask again, what do ascetic ideals mean? From this account, they are a means of disciplining *eros* and are praised by erotic men who wish to be transformed to alleviate their suffering. Cephalus' liberation from the tyranny of *eros* appears to be equally desired by Wagner.

4.3 Heroes, Young and Old

It is said that Alcibiades did not emblazon his shield with his ancestral crest (*episêmon tôn patriôn*), but rather gave that place to the deity Eros "in ivory inlaid on gold."³⁴ Such a gesture stands in stark contrast to the expectations of the other sons in the city for whom the ancestral name gave them political standing.³⁵ If the story is true, his shield, unlike theirs, celebrates a youthful deity, "hardly the image of prudence cultivated by Pericles," and one who is "more at home in the bedroom than the political or military arena."³⁶ The truth of the story need not matter entirely. Even as a piece of gossip, it sufficiently highlights Alcibiades' complex relationship with Athens and the kind of public image he generated. He was the city's rebellious son.

³⁴ B. Strauss credits Plutarch's stories for this particular story. See *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 149.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

A full treatment of this controversial figure, a man considered by both Plato and Nietzsche in their writings, is not possible here.³⁷ He is necessary to mention, though, because his spirit and symbol are palpable in the intergenerational politics at play for both authors. Socrates' expression of wonder at the old man Cephalus' erotic freedom should indeed be understood next to the youthful Alcibiades carrying the crest of Eros onto the battlefield. Athens indulged Alcibiades for quite a long time, until they could no longer.³⁸ Accused of betraying the city and her gods, Alcibiades was driven into exile on more than one occasion. His expulsion from the city in 415 BCE though (following the disastrous Sicilian expedition, for which he lobbied) was heavily vested in intergenerational politics. Strauss writes of Alcibiades' exile that it "was not only a necessary step of purifying the city by ridding it of corruption, but also a way of announcing the end of the previously unfettered reign of youth. It marked the beginning of the restoration of the rule of the father."³⁹ Indeed, as the previous chapter made clear, Athenian politics would be dominated by the question of its ancestral constitution, or *patrios politeia*, in the years that followed.

The way in which *eros* is subordinated entirely to rational economic interest in *Republic II* and then channelled towards the city of *Republic V* suggests that Plato may have been trying to retrospectively redeem Socrates of his role in Alcibiades' education. By depicting Socrates as an erotic educator (i.e., tamer), Plato is able to show how

³⁷ Nails suggests that just an account of his political and military career would require a monograph. See *People of Plato*, 15.

³⁸ Not unlike the city's long indulgence of another erotic soul, and one of Alcibiades' famed teachers, Socrates.

³⁹ B. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 153.

philosophy might be useful to the city insofar as it might be able to guide the affections of its young people. He turns the old Socrates into a hero on this premise. The implicit claim in this apology is that philosophy is an art. It is an art that claims knowledge of the soul. *Eros* is defined as a component of the soul. He is no longer a god that acts from without, but rather something interior to the person. As something within the human being, it is a part of a whole. The whole human is considered primarily rational. If *eros* is made to be a part of the whole rational human, the claim that is set forth is that human rationality can comprehend this part of itself. Philosophy is presented as the way to this self-knowledge. As Nietzsche writes in *Twilight of the Idols*, Plato's apology was successful. It made something that was at odds with the political community become the aim of the political community: "With Socrates Greek taste undergoes a change in favour of dialectics.... Before Socrates, the dialectical manner was repudiated in good society: it was regarded as a form of bad manners, one was compromised by it. Young people were warned against it."⁴⁰ Rather than being an object of slander, philosophy becomes a respectable and respected way of life. It pays its dues to society and earns its place. It becomes an art worthy of entrance into the economic city designed in *Republic II*. Such is the charge levelled against Plato (and his Socrates⁴¹).

This reformation of *Eros* from a beguiling god to an aspect of human psychology within personal control is alluded to in Nietzsche's discussion of the "Greek gods" in

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, "The Problem of Socrates," *Twilight of the Idols*, §5.

⁴¹ Nietzsche writes in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Indeed, as a physician one might ask: 'How could the most beautiful growth of antiquity, Plato, contract such a disease? Did the wicked Socrates corrupt him after all? Could Socrates have been the corrupter of youth after all?'"

Genealogy II.23. We recall from the previous analysis of this section that he raises the gods of Greek mythology as a counterpoint to the Christian God. These gods, he suggests, were better able to avoid or mitigate the nihilistic expression of existential guilt. The gods were *outside* of human control. As such, they represented a boundary between what could be known and controlled and what was beyond human control (and therefore, beyond human responsibility and culpability). He suggests that the “self-crucifixion and self-defilement”⁴² that accompany belief in the Christian God are present because humans are made responsible for their *eros*. *Eros* becomes equated with the sinful nature of the human being. Once under human dominion, it is made a human responsibility, and justified guilt accompanies this notion of responsibility. We are responsible for what is in our charge. In *Genealogy I*, Nietzsche suggested that prudential politics emerges from the inwards-looking nature of this religious outlook: “A race of such human beings of *ressentiment* in the end necessarily becomes *more prudent* than any noble race.”⁴³ With *Eros/eros* in mind, one might also read this as Nietzsche equating prudential politics with a kind of politics that aims to eliminate or diminish *eros*, or the originary source of guilt.

Christianity, in these terms, goes beyond Plato’s erotic statecraft in the *Republic*. It does so because it makes the redemption of the human being for the sinful state of his existence a central tenet of its practice. It also universalizes this debt. All human beings are fallible on account of their *eros*. This commonality enables the political community to

⁴² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I.10.

extend beyond the strict limits of the kin group. The universality of the Christian family of god takes over the particularity of ancestral worship as it was tied to a specific kinship group. Such a shift allows for the development of more complex political structures because kinship is no longer the sole, or most important, criterion of belonging. Note that the prudential model of economic exchange represented in *Republic II* had also dramatically revised the parameters of citizenship in the political community. Individuals interacted with each other on the basis of their respective technical expertise. Skill, not blood or blood-based hierarchy, was the primary bond of this community. In either instance, emphasis is placed on the individual and his or her knowledge. When Nietzsche discusses the “use which Christianity made of its god,”⁴⁴ and contrasts this use with that of the Homeric gods, he is suggesting that the religion capitalized on individuating its adherents. It made them individually responsible for, and knowledgeable of, their guilt.⁴⁵

Understood in this manner, the portrait that Nietzsche paints of Christianity as a political theology is one that merges aspects from the cities of *Republic II* and *Republic V*. The suggestion is that these thought experiments were put into action, institutionalized, and used to guide the development of the human being. The virtue of the dying father formed the premise of the morality of custom on which promises are made in this

⁴⁴ Ibid., II.23.

⁴⁵ Taylor also acknowledges the change that takes place from models of ancestral authority towards Christian authority in terms of the growing focus upon the individual: “what I propose here is the idea that our first self-understanding was deeply embedded in society. Our essential identity was as father, son, and so on, and as a member of this tribe. Only later did we come to conceive of ourselves as free individuals first.” See *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 64-5.

“decaying, self-doubting present.”⁴⁶ Guilt is the primary instrument used in the making of this new human and the primary emotion fostered by the morality of custom. As Nietzsche summarizes in II.22, the monotheistic “holy God” stands as an ideal outside of the human being and next to which the human can only be “certain of his absolute unworthiness.” Or, as he writes at II.20, “The rise of the Christian god as the maximum god that has been attained thus far therefore also brought a maximum of feelings of guilt into appearance on earth.” Further, at II.22, Nietzsche suggests that these feelings of guilt arise on account of man’s “actual and inescapable animal instincts.” Though Nietzsche doesn’t use the Platonic term *eros* (and particularly *eros* as understood as the love of one’s own), it might be justly grouped with these instincts. If we return to the example of Alcibiades and the particular way in which he was exiled from Athens for being disloyal to his fatherland on account of his erotic and prideful nature (i.e., a distinct sense of his worthiness), Nietzsche’s reading would suggest that the Platonic remedy for such a problem over-corrects. In trying to prevent the erotic tyrant, it neuters the human by turning him into an impotent Cephalus.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Of course, Plato’s *Republic* does not conclude with the city of sows or the beautiful city. Nietzsche’s discussion in the *Genealogy*, though, seems to imply that these ideas, and the specific manner in which they discipline *eros*, form the political legacy that

⁴⁶ Ibid., II.24.

⁴⁷ Playing on Cephalus’ name, these cities produce rulers (heads) without heirs.

we are living. Indeed, to give Plato his due, we ought to consider the way in which these experiments raise to consciousness aspects of ourselves, not necessarily to eliminate them, but to better understand them, so that we might understand how they factor into the conduct of politics. As Leo Strauss writes about the city of sows, "Plato makes this experiment in order to show the essential limitations of society thus conceived. A society of this character may possess justice of some sort since its members exchange goods and services; it cannot possess human excellence: it is a city of pigs."⁴⁸ The city reveals the importance of excellence or human worthiness by depicting the lack of its presence.⁴⁹ Socrates even prefigures the full statement of the beautiful city with a number of reminders to his interlocutors that what they have asked of him is "ridiculous."⁵⁰ His response cannot help but be comedic. Like the city of *Republic II*, it also seems designed to test the boundaries of what it means to be human. In the same way that a caricature enlarges particular features for comedic effect, so too does the beautiful city enlarge and distort the idea of the household to test the boundaries of what can properly be considered one's own. It is comically experimental.

Nietzsche's *Genealogy II* suggests that the problem of our modern Western⁵¹ politics is that, over time, this comic experiment has been made tragic.⁵² When the

⁴⁸ Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 50.

⁴⁹ Fukuyama's comments on the development of political communities likewise support this kind of conclusion: "the desire for recognition ensures that politics will never be reducible to simple economic self-interest. Human beings make constant judgments about the intrinsic value, worth, or dignity of other people or institutions, and they organize themselves into hierarchies based on those valuations." See *The Origins of Political Order*, 45.

⁵⁰ For example, Socrates uses this language twice at 452a.

⁵¹ With his references to other moral codes like the Law of Manu, Nietzsche seems to acknowledge the Western/European quality of his commentary. Likewise, Fukuyama observes that the Christian moral order

Christian order replaces its ancestral predecessor (i.e., tribal or lineage-based authority) it is able to reframe the scale of justice (i.e., away from paying dues to one's grandfathers and towards paying dues to a singular god). Such a move creates the possibility for more elaborate political institutions and, in particular, institutions that recognize the merit of membership beyond that of kinship. This move does not eliminate the household from politics entirely. Fathers and sons are still dominant (metaphorically and otherwise) in patrimonial politics. But, as the earlier analysis of *Genealogy II* established, this idea is now primarily expressed metaphysically in Christian religion. The good of the father (who knows) is beyond this world. Humans (who do) are in this world, and their suffering can only be accounted for by their master/father. Further, they are to embrace their suffering because it is deserved. They are guilty by dint of their existence in the world. So while such a framework allows for one to recognize and love one's neighbour, the basis on which that love is being conferred is the mutual recognition of guilty conscience. His observations in the *Genealogy* tell the story of the political order of democracy that fails to see its genesis out of Christianity and, simultaneously, that fails to see its contribution to the destruction of Christianity.

At the beginning of *Genealogy II* Nietzsche had posed the question of the nature of human beings and what interventions are made to shape or change this nature. His

produced distinct political institutions from those in other parts of the world, particularly on account of its ability to overwrite the bonds of kinship: "The only part of the world where tribalism was fully superseded by more voluntary and individualistic forms of social relationship was Europe, where Christianity played a decisive role in undermining kinship as a basis for social cohesion." See *The Origins of Political Order*, 78.
⁵² Such a description is intended to recall Strauss' response to Kojève on the topic of the universal and homogeneous state. He writes, "If the universal and homogenous state is the goal of History, History is absolutely 'tragic.' Its completion will reveal that the human problem, and hence in particular the problem of the relation of philosophy and politics is insoluble." See "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*," 130.

concern was with the idea of what makes humans distinctly human. The distinctly human is a question of nature. Nature is the material with which conventions interact. His concern was located in the tension between the human being as a maker (of promises, of contracts, of cities, of himself) and the human being as a political animal (as a ruler, a master, a slave, an evaluator, a conqueror), and specifically with the paradox that the civilizing act of promising un-civilizes the human being. The human, on this diagnosis, requires a healthy outlet for the political aspect of his nature. In other words, he requires the ability to act without being overladen with guilt. This is the case because, without such an outlet or with the active denial of this component of the human being, the human being fundamentally morphs into another sort of being. At II.11 he writes, "A legal system conceived of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the battle of power complexes, but rather as means *against* all battle generally... would be a principle *hostile to life*, a destroyer and dissolver of man, an attempt to kill the future of man, a sign of weariness, a secret pathway to nothingness." The human being as a maker thus assumes a certain capacity to remake his political nature. The implication, though, is that Christian existential guilt turns this making into a remaking and all-out warfare. But, as with the idea of acting in the public realm, this remaking likewise produces unforeseen consequences, and may produce more violent outcomes because of the kind of psychological warfare at play.⁵³

⁵³ In one of his nods to Alcibiades, Nietzsche seems to suggest that bad conscience can have a productive capacity (perhaps when it is split from guilty conscience): "But when the opposition and war in such a nature have the effect of one more charm and incentive of life—and if, moreover, in addition to his powerful and irreconcilable drives, a real mastery and subtlety in waging war against oneself, in other

As Nietzsche alludes, one consequence is always certain. Unrestrained warfare leads to death, to nothingness, whether it is conducted among nations or within the psychology of human beings. Yet, Nietzsche does not conclude upon this note. He speaks in future terms. He allows for the possibility that, though bad conscience may be natural, it need not result in the nihilistic impulse. There may be another way, as there was another way with the Homeric Greeks. This other way needs, however, to account for broken promises without eliminating the need to promise altogether. His nod to Homer might be appreciated in this way. The poet is closest in proximity to the divine spectator, to the one who can provide an account of why suffering takes place and why promises are broken.

words, self-control, self-outwitting, has been inherited or cultivated, too—then those magical, incomprehensible, and unfathomable ones arise, those enigmatic men predestined for victory and seduction, whose most beautiful expression is found in Alcibiades and Caesar...” See Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §200. But we also note that the two names he offers in the passage are men who were feared for the tyranny they would impose on their people.

CONCLUSION

Past and Future

Why atheism today? — ‘The father’ in God is thoroughly refuted; likewise ‘the judge’, ‘the rewarder’.

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. —And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow too.

—Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

By way of conclusion, I would like to revisit the original observations from which this study began. It started by considering readily observable instances where the traditional mode of knowledge transmission (from the older generation to the younger) were disrupted or even inverted. It emphasized the idea that a peer-to-peer generational priority was becoming more and more prevalent. It suggested that this was not an entirely novel advent, but rather something that has been developing more intensely over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries in the Western world, as evidenced by its treatment in the literature. It also suggested the use and perpetuation of new technologies was raising this generational dynamic to common consciousness once again. Further, I introduced the possibility that we might come to better understand this dynamic if we viewed it through the perspective of Nietzsche’s contest with Plato and his Socrates. This was on account of the charges that Nietzsche levels against Socrates (that he corrupted the youth, Plato) and against Platonism (that Western liberal democracy owes its origins to the theological foundation of Christianity). Taken

together, these charges suggest that Platonism is ultimately productive of a democratic egalitarianism, in spite of its appearances.¹ To narrow the analysis, I suggested that Nietzsche's use of the idea of ancestral authority and creditor-debtor justice from *Genealogy II* bore significant similarity to Plato's use of these ideas in *Republic I* and that it might be possible to read these sections next to one another as a way to better understand the Nietzschean critique.

Nietzsche's *Genealogy II* offers an account of the way the political community overwrites the kinship bond (with its grounding in ancestral justice) and develops into democratic egalitarianism. He discusses the evolution of law, both in terms of the ancestral and the economic. By linking these concepts, he discusses the distinct way in which Christian theology legislates morality. The universal quality to the moral legislation is achieved by giving humanity a singular common ancestor ("our Father"), and the debt to that common deity is paid from the God himself, to himself. The particularity of love is extended, and it is extended on the premise of "giving due." More directly, the particularity of *any* love is overwritten by a universal love. The study also began by observing that *Republic I* is also expressly preoccupied with questions concerning dangerous and debilitating affection for one's own and the way that such love can produce indebtedness and injustice. It observed that in both texts, the authors reflect upon the beginnings of political communities premised on friendship, specifically the kind of friendship required for commercial exchange. Friendship entails trust. Trust

¹ These appearances being the clear class distinctions based upon the ruling aspects of the soul and otherwise mythologized in the myth of the metals. See Plato, *Republic III*, 414d-415d.

is developed in the process of honest reciprocal exchange. It serves as a foundation for promising. Such a community legislates beyond the imperative that the “oldest is best,” and beyond the politics of kinship.

I had also suggested that *Republic I* should be understood relative to its historical and cultural circumstances. Specifically, I had indicated that it offered a distinct perspective on the *patrios politeia* debate. Plato’s contribution to this debate is not to advocate to reinstate ancestral law, but to test the possibility that a political community can be forged on the friendship between philosophical and political men and to test the boundaries of justice established in economics. Nietzsche’s response from *Genealogy II* is that this experiment ultimately produces the modern democratic order, which for him is productive of no order at all. The extension of the polis-oikos analogy collapses fathers and sons into labourers. It produces the inability to rule. Peer-to-peer existence is prioritized, but these peers are his “last men” [*letzten Menschen*].²

Next, I took note of the possibility, advocated by authors such as Bloom, that our present circumstances of lapsed generational authority are better understood as a product of Nietzsche’s popular reception in North America. On this account, Plato did not create these conditions. Rather, Nietzsche is responsible for undermining authority by raising nihilism to popular consciousness. He left his own imprint on political culture by essentially destroying politics and culture. Indeed, his political irresponsibility is

² Hollingdale translates *letzten Menschen* as “Ultimate Man,” but this doesn’t seem to have the proper connotation in English. See Nietzsche, “Prologue,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, §5.

remarked upon by German émigrés like Strauss and Voegelin, authors who wrote in close proximity to the war that Nietzsche is credited with causing.³ Strauss writes that,

[Nietzsche] opposed the possibility of a planetary aristocracy to the alleged necessity of a universal classless and stateless society. Being certain of the tameness of modern western man, he preached the sacred right of “merciless extinction” of large masses of men with as little restraint as his great antagonist had done. He used most of his unsurpassable and inexhaustible power of passionate and fascinating speech for making his readers loathe, not only socialism and communism, but conservatism, nationalism and democracy as well. After having taken upon himself this great political responsibility, he could not show his readers a way toward political responsibility.⁴

Strauss’ condemnation is more visceral than that of Bloom, his intellectual heir, but they share the same conclusion: Nietzsche effectively dismantled belief in the inherent goodness of moral systems, not just the divine ones, but the secular as well (socialism, communism, conservatism, nationalism, democracy, etc.). By this account, Nietzsche is the breaker of traditions—the one guilty of corruption. He undermines the legitimacy of all orders (young and old) and devalues generational knowledge with the suggestion that the history this knowledge contains is no longer in the service of life.

This was where we began. Both philosophers appear guilty in one manner or another. The project purposively sought to draw out Nietzsche’s quarrel with Plato, though, to better understand the political statement contained within it and its implications for our understanding of the present intergenerational situation. In doing so, it necessarily distorted its perspective to align with Nietzsche’s charges. In my own

³ See Voegelin, “Nietzsche,” 177.

⁴ Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?,” 54-55.

way, I have tried to do justice to Plato's *Republic* throughout the course of this analysis to show the many ways that he might have accounted for the accusations levelled against him.

It is perhaps necessary to go back to one of the central premises though from which these charges have been laid. Broadly understood, the distinction between the classical and modern tradition concerns the relationship of nature and convention. This point was made at the beginning of this investigation in the context of the idea of household management. The analogy between a good household manager and a good statesman was part of the intellectual discourse in 5th century Greece. It corresponded to the question: Whether or should the order of the political community match the order of the household? The way this question is posed reflects the idea that the order of the household carried along with it connotations of a proper or natural order to the arrangement of human things. It further suggests that this natural order of human things offers a model for the ordering of other human things. The order was inherently perfect. It was something to emulate. The purpose of science was to understand that order. On the other side of this, Nietzsche's genealogical method reveals the extent to which such orders are not inherent or given, but rather are made. Masters rule the households, not loving fathers. Nature is but primordial chaos. Human structures need not have developed in the way that they had. There is no necessity or purpose to the process. The only necessity expressed is in the human rationalization of the process. Nature is something to be improved upon. Humans ascribe purpose. The function of science, and knowledge, becomes a way to improve our conditions and to express this

purposiveness. History describes the progress we make in implementing those changes. History and science, or more accurately, history and technology, describe human action in terms of *making*. Human agency or will is expressed in the ability to determine the meaning of our history and to shape ourselves and our environment by technological means. Stated simply, we are what we make. By returning to these premises, we see the extent to which Nietzsche makes Plato's Socrates more of a modern than an ancient. By making politics about the reshaping of personal character towards the goal of a good society, Plato gives politics a purpose and a moral aim (away from that inscribed in nature). In this sense, Plato's politics are about human cultivation.

It is also now an appropriate point to respond to an objection that might be levelled against this study as a whole. Why are questions concerning intergenerational relationships and the relative value of knowledge between the generations being considered politically? Many might object to the inclination of this study to approach these issues as political phenomena and might have carried that objection all the way through the course of this analysis to its conclusion. The argument from that perspective is that this is a cultural or sociological phenomenon and not a matter for political inquiry. But following the preceding analysis of Nietzsche's politics (and the implied characterization of Plato's politics), it should be evident that these categories are not so easily compartmentalized. For Nietzsche, politics are cultural. "Culture" is etymologically derived from the Latin *colere*, which means to tend or cultivate. At its roots it refers to a process of making, production, or artifice. That we can describe tradition, custom, or habit as culturally conditioned speaks to the manner in which

culture can be circumstantially developed or formed. Again, we recall the opening of *Genealogy II*. Nietzsche begins with a question of breeding. He uses the language of promising, making, and breeding to describe the cultivation of the human. Politics concern the kind of promises that are made, how they are made, and how they are enforced. The idea of the “political” is thus intertwined with Nietzsche’s characterization of the “morality of custom,” which describes the power of law-making and law-obeying. Politics are about (re)defining boundaries.

If we accept his premise that politics exist primarily as a cultural phenomenon, Nietzsche’s anti-liberalism demands that we give an account of the priorities our promises express. It suggests that these promises have been made over the course of time and therefore might be understood as historical objects. It forces us to provide an account, or apology, on its behalf for the failings that he has identified. The primary failing is that the liberal tradition is unable to account for its indebtedness to boundaries of Christian morality while at the same time undermining those boundaries from within. Grant’s remarks should be reconsidered in this light:

We see this in the terrible sadness about old age in this continent. The old person is coming to an end of being part of history; he has probably come to an end of his ability to shape history. Old people are no longer good administrative, economic, or sexual instruments. Therefore, old age is more and more seen as an unalleviated disaster, not only by those people who are outside of it but by those people who are old themselves. We sometimes treat old people kindly, but we patronize them. We do not see age as that time when the eternal can be most realized, and we therefore pity the aged as coming to the end of historical existence.⁵

⁵ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 23

When the authority of the elder is displaced from the immediacy and particularity of kinship and made universal and transcendental, the elder loses the prestige of the particularity of his connection with the primeval ancestor.⁶ The value placed upon the generational knowledge of the elder in that circumstance is no longer a given. It is accorded value on the same basis of other kinds of knowledge—based on its utility to the community. Strong also observes that for Nietzsche,

Authority is not guaranteed... Socrates, by his effort to ground authority in a manner transcendental to human activity, destroys authority. (The same push to the transcendent is at the source of Nietzsche's comments critical of the Jews). Socrates, however, is the temporally inevitable culmination of tragedy in the same sense that metaphor must over time change into 'truth'; tragedy develops into Socratism. We live now in the shadow of that development.⁷

Likewise, the remnants of intergenerational discrimination are shadows of a form of social organization that pre-date the rise of Christianity. Such shadows provide some distinction. They may be able to retain their presence through sheer habituation, but they have lost the depth of their significance. Nietzsche's pronouncement that "God is dead" is not a flippant atheistic remark.⁸ It is playful, yet it proclaims with all

⁶ Fukuyama's *The Origins of Political Order* considers this move to be a necessary condition to the building of political communities, and in the work he discusses the different ways in which civilizations have made this move. He, like Nietzsche, observes that the way that this happened with Western civilization is distinct because of the role of Christianity and, specifically, the church. He puts forward the argument that for Europe, "states were formed on top of societies in which individuals already enjoyed substantial freedom from social obligation to kindreds. In Europe, *social development preceded political development.*" See *Origins*, 231.

⁷ Strong, "Aesthetic Authority and Tradition," 1002.

⁸ Voegelin recognized the importance of the religious dimension in Nietzsche's thought. He writes, "Nietzsche never denies the reality of religious experiences; on the contrary, he sees in their strength one of the causes of the decline of a Christianity that can no longer satisfy a strong religious instinct; but he understands the history of religious experiences and symbols as a theogonic process in the course of which Gods can be born and Gods can die. Moreover, he is perfectly conscious of the theogonic character of his own work." See "Nietzsche and Pascal," 159.

seriousness that we have made a significant institutional investment in an idea that undermines the very premises of its own authority.

Nationalism, Nostalgia, and Patriarchy

This analysis of cultural nihilism contained in the father-son metaphor could be taken in two further directions that both stem from the polis-oikos analogy. The parameters of the project did not permit the exploration of these related ideas, but I take note of them here as a means of demonstrating the kind of dialogue that the project might set forth.

First, as a way to round out the discussion of Nietzsche's politics and the implications of his political thought, the idea of his treatment of generational knowledge sets the stage well for an analysis of his treatment of nationalism, national identity, and its accompanying theology. Next, as a way to think more comprehensively about the sociological implications of his writing, it would also be fruitful to discuss how Nietzsche's borrowing of the language of the polis-oikos analogy functions alongside his notoriously loathsome remarks about women. These two avenues for further research will each be described briefly.

Throughout the course of this analysis, I have referred to ideas like the kinship bond or the bond of the bloodline. I have done so because the idea of ancestral law is premised upon this kind of association. Readers, of course, will be sensitive to the way in which all of these ideas, when acted upon politically, have produced horrific consequences. This kind of tribalism is active in race-based politics. Voegelin notes the

way that the National Socialists appropriated Nietzsche's thought in the 20th century. He writes, "The question of the misuse has become of more than ordinary importance because Nietzsche is today interpreted generously as a Founding Father of National Socialism, by the critics who wish to stigmatize him by this relation as well as by National Socialists who wish to acquire a dignified intellectual ancestry for their movement."⁹ As referenced in the Introduction to this study, part of that movement was explicitly concerned with recapturing the idea of the fatherland and, as such, its underlying racial politics (empowered by technology) justified the extermination of other peoples who did not meet the fatherland's mythology. Until Kaufmann's revival, Nietzsche's thought was largely said to be the cause of this kind of nationalistic-nostalgic politics.

Further analysis of the way that Nietzsche discusses intergenerational knowledge would help to clarify the justice of Kaufmann's redemption and might also lend clarity to present discussions concerning the conflict of national (or other identities considered as given) in a globalized world. Specifically, Nietzsche's writings enable us to better consider the contrast between *cultural* and *national* politics. "Nation" is derived from the verb *nasci*, which means, "to be born." Because we are born into a setting and a family, this concept introduces a greater sense of territorial and generational identification.¹⁰ In doing so, it places emphasis on the idea that the formation of one's

⁹ Voegelin, "Nietzsche," 201.

¹⁰ It is also appropriate to concede here that a greater exploration of the Christian content would likely help to further develop this study, specifically concerning Nietzsche's claim that, in effect, Christianity is the cause of globalization. In an effort to narrow the scope, I treated this content tangentially. I nevertheless

political identity is tied to manner in which the people of that setting have come to define themselves over generations as they have existed in a particular place.

Nationalism is one of the vehicles by which the kinship politics of the past are re-asserting themselves in the present.

Nietzsche's politics, however, are not about re-enacting the past. They are not nostalgic in this manner. They are about understanding how and why ancestral law had been formed, but more so as a means of understanding how and why it was/is decaying. As Strong argues, "Nietzsche did not want to return to ancient Greece; but he was interested to discover how Greece had become what it was and thought that the structural lesson might be of importance for his day."¹¹ In this sense, his references to ancestral authority are not intended to revive such authority, but to understand why it was present and how it has evolved.

Philosophically, his politics of nostalgia might also be better understood in the manner that Heidegger explains below.¹² They are connected to the idea of homecoming. Heidegger demonstrates the linguistic connection between convalescing (the recovery of

recognize that greater sensitivity could be paid to the division between the Old and New Testaments and their respective Judaic and Christian traditions. As someone who is not a religious person, and not fully versed in the texts of these traditions, I did not want to gloss this material and do it an injustice. Yet, if we consider, with Nietzsche, that the Western tradition is built upon the pillars of Greek and Christian thought, then this second pillar should also be addressed. Again, recalling Taylor's observation that, "The New Testament is full of calls to leave or relativize solidarities of family, clan, and society and be part of the Kingdom," it would be fruitful to pursue this specific connection in terms of national identities. See *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 62.

¹¹ Strong, "Aesthetic Authority and Tradition," 991.

¹² In doing so, I admit that I am fully aware of the irony of citing a self-proclaimed Nazi to defend Nietzsche against the charges of Nazi nostalgic-nationalism.

health) and homecoming in his discussion of "The Convalescent" from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

Toward the end of Part Three of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, there is a section called "The Convalescent." He is Zarathustra. But what does "the convalescent" mean? "To convalesce" (*genesen*) is the same as the Greek *néomai, nóstos*. This means "to return home"; nostalgia is the aching for home, homesickness. The convalescent is the man who collects himself to return home, that is to turn in, into his own destiny. The convalescent is on the road to himself, so that he can say of himself who he is.¹³

In Nietzschean language, it has to do with becoming who one is. Homecoming is a metaphor for the philosophical practice. It plays upon the idea of debt and credit. Indeed, it is linked to the metaphor of restitution that is implicit in the idea of sacrifice. Etymologically, sacrifice is derived from the Latin *sacer facere*, which means "to make whole or sacred" and suggests that it is necessary to restore that which has been taken from the whole back to it.¹⁴ The idea of homecoming and its relationship to the philosophic practice thus carries multiple connotations. Home can refer to oneself, one's political community, or one's ontological status.

Homecoming recalls the deeply political quality of the philosophic practice.¹⁵ It connects the practice to the political community in which it is rooted. The return home implies that an aspect of the philosopher's journey is philanthropic. It seeks to give back to that community from which it originally departed. It does not merely concern itself with the individual becoming who he is, but also that this becoming sets forth the conditions for the continuation of the pursuit itself by helping the community to

¹³ Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 412.

¹⁴ Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, 161.

¹⁵ It also recalls Plato's Allegory of the Cave in *Republic VII*.

understand itself as well. The argument implied is that the greatness of the political community (and perhaps even the civilization) depends on those able to conduct the journey. In his analysis of Nietzsche's philosophy, Stephan Günzel posits that "following the 'death of god,' philosophy no longer has a homeland, that there is no reference by which one can judge different moral attitudes in comparison with one's own."¹⁶ He contrasts this state of being with the way Kant employs the metaphor of the homeland:

In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had already identified the secure island with the (home)land of the faculty of understanding [*Verstand*]. In this setting, the sphere behind the turbulent and churning ocean is the land of ethics to which one can only embark after measuring one's own ground, the ground of understanding.¹⁷

His suggestion, in sum, is that the practice of modern philosophy is condemned to a nomadic existence. The philosopher cannot return home (and therefore cannot express his philanthropy) because the boundaries have dissolved. He cannot gain the perspective required for the proper judgment of morality. Is Günzel correct with his identification of Nietzsche's philosophy as a nomadic practice? Is this the basis for a distinction between his and Plato's philosophy? Or do they share a sense of the practice that portrays it like the hero's return from his sojourn away? And, if this sense is shared, how does it inform the philanthropic quality of their work? Such are the kinds of questions that arise from considering what defines home and the homeland and the significance of those concepts in Nietzsche's writings.

¹⁶ Günzel, "Nietzsche's Geophilosophy," 84.

¹⁷ Ibid.

It is also worth considering Nietzsche's proximity to Plato on the question of the definition of home, and the politics that surround the question itself. The way in which they both account for the philosophic practice and concern themselves with the possibility for greatness lends well to popular elitist¹⁸ misappropriation. Their political agendas become reduced to the cultivation of noble (even national) myths to form a sense of cohesion among a people. The elitism and social stratification implied appeals to those who wish to raise themselves above others or increase the value of their own self worth, like Nietzsche describes in his analysis of the *pathos of distance*. They become appropriated by those who wish to justify a strong sense of identity or culture without understanding what it actually means to be *cultured* or, rather, *cultivated*. The defence of philosophy as the best way of life (and the only life worth living) becomes a tool of politicians when philosophy is conflated with moralism. As a tool, it becomes a means to justify the lives of one people above others.

To the extent that both Plato and Nietzsche pay close attention to the spirited or prideful component of the human soul, I think both understand this danger. Yet they write—and risk misappropriation—anyways. They commit arguments to the page that seek to distinguish between different ways of life and seek to establish that some ways of life may be superior or inferior to others. Their arguments, perhaps paradoxically, lend to a reinforcement of the value of a kind of ancestral authority. They do so because obedience to the premise that “oldest is best” is the same kind of discipline that is

¹⁸ This is, of course, an oxymoron.

required of their readers if they are to respect the content of their works. This is the nature of the political risk that they must take if they are to maintain and distinguish the virtue, and in fact value, of the philosophic life. It has to be choice-worthy over and against other ways of life. Its value must not be relativized. It has to be understood as a good that is worthy of pursuit. The worthiness of the pursuit is a knowledge-claim. We might note the extent to which philosophy, as choice-worthy, appears safest in contexts where it looks like one way of life among many, in contexts where there is the freedom to choose different ways of life, where fathers and sons are placed on the same level. Plato and Nietzsche's politics exist on this fault line between democratic freedoms and the very real possibility that such freedoms devolve into tyranny.¹⁹

Last, in all this talk about fathers and sons, it is fair to ask, well, what of mothers and daughters? The female and feminine are the other side of the polis-oikos analogy. Indeed, the household does not get very far, nor does the name with which it is associated come to be recognized and generationally replicated, even in patrilineal societies, without the capacity of the mother. Those sympathetic to post-structuralism would suggest that following the text in this manner places undue emphasis on the prominence of the male quality in the relational metaphors. Further, that such emphasis merely re-inscribes a pattern of male dominance or patriarchy. This perspective perhaps raises a valid critique. The foregoing analysis focused on the masculine side of the

¹⁹ Plato, *Republic VIII*, 564a. Note also that these ideas take us back to the contentions made in the first chapter of this project, wherein I sought to establish that we might consider both authors as dialogical writers who both employed extralogical elements in their works to practice politics through the building of character.

analogy because it was the side of the analogy that appeared most prominently in the language used by the authors selected. However, it need not be the end point of the analysis. The present study might be considered a starting point for the sexual or gendered side of the metaphors of ancestral authority and economic justice. Indeed, this is particularly important for developing a further understanding of Nietzsche's politics because, whereas he does not seem to advocate for a patrimonial nationalism, his masculine language points towards a kind of patriarchal virtue in the revival of the warrior ethos.²⁰ The masculine still rules in this sense even after exposing the arbitrariness of the patriarchal structure.²¹

Inheritance: Future and Past Orientations

Löwith writes, "Nietzsche was still aware of being both a conqueror *and* an heir. In the perspective of history as a whole, an epoch is neither praiseworthy or blameworthy; each is both creditor and debtor."²² In the preceding statement, Löwith aptly expresses the way that Nietzsche may have understood the practice of philosophy itself as inherited and partaking in the generational structure communicated by the polis-oikos analogy. Such a practice recognizes oneself as part of a genealogical chain,

²⁰ Pangle outlines well the significant gap in the literature that exists around Nietzsche's discussion of the warrior ethos in his 2010 article, "The 'Warrior Spirit' as an Inlet to Political Philosophy of Nietzsche's Zarathustra." See 140-42.

²¹ Pangle elaborates, "the warrior is a product of what Nietzsche elsewhere terms a 'Great Tradition' (WM 729); and Zarathustra's admiration signifies, in the first place, acknowledgement of a treasured heritage which is on the path to extinction but which can and must be kept alive—as the basis for the eventual development of a radically new version of that heritage. Our first task, then, is to discover what it is that is missing or disappearing from modern society that may be preserved or resuscitated by a stress on the virtues or excellences of war." See "Warrior Spirit," 144.

²² Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, xvii.

but allows for the possibility of stepping outside the boundaries defined by that chain to interrogate the kind of knowledge it relies on to support its legitimacy and authority. Nietzsche's concluding lines in "On the Land of Culture" (*Vom Lande der Bildung*) might be understood in this context: "From all the mountains I look upon father and mother lands. But I found home nowhere: unsettled am I in all cities and a departure at all gates."²³ His self-assessment would imply that his circumstances prevent him from expressing his philanthropy. He doesn't have a home. I would like to close by suggesting that this self-assessment is not entirely true. In defending that suggestion, I will return to the main question from which the study departed: How does Nietzsche offer new insights on the intergenerational politics of today? The answer, in short, is that his writings attempt to re-invoke conditions wherein the *oikos* is regenerated in writing. Even though "there is something contradictory about a tradition of philosophy,"²⁴ his writings demarcate an authoritative space wherein the association between "oldest and best" is alive once more. They point towards the value of an education in great *old* books.

Nietzsche does have a home. His writings are spaces that he has constructed wherein a living dialogue can take place. *Genealogy II*, in particular, in its origin-tracing of the ideas of justice (and its correlates, in terms of the distribution of rewards and punishments) re-establishes a mythological impulse (the desire to tell a story of our

²³ Translation my own. The original German reads, "Von allen Bergen schaue ich aus nach Vater- und Mutterländern. Aber Heimat fand ich nirgends: unstät bin ich in allen Städten und ein Aufbruch an allen Thoren." See Nietzsche, "Vom Lande der Bildung," n.p.

²⁴ Tarcoy, "Tradition and Interpretation," 15. The balance of the line reads: "Tradition is the inheritance of things from others, whereas philosophy is the effort to know things through one's own reason."

origins), while at the same time placing this in dialogue with the philosophical imperative of the rational account. His method, or the form of his writing, should be understood as equally important as its content. One might say, it is the closest Nietzsche comes to establishing his own school or academy. It also locates Nietzsche among the Volkish-romantic²⁵ impulse of his historical circumstances on account of the way in which the form of his writing allows “allegorical glimpses of metaphysical and ethical truths.”²⁶ But there is an important caveat to place upon this categorization. Whereas the other Volkish writers sought the conditions to create a new mythology of the fatherland, that is, a mythology of popular, national appeal, Nietzsche is clear in *Genealogy II* that this is not his task.²⁷ His writings suggest that he is acting as an educator, but an educator in the poetic tradition. Writing in the manner that he does, Nietzsche partakes in mythologizing, but arguably not the crude mythology of those seeking to foment a national identity. His aphoristic and, as I have argued, dialogical, style allow for the possibility that his account of our human origins and the origins of our promising will be challenged, engaged, and perhaps even complemented by different perspectives that come into contact with it. Such a form of writing (and reading) acknowledges that there is value to the knowledge that precedes us. It is not to be easily overwritten and dismissed.

²⁵ Young names “Heinrich Riehl (1823-97), Paul de Lagarde (1827-91) and Richard Wagner (1813-83)” as the figures around whom the ideas of “conservative romanticism and German nationalism” coalesced as a Volkish movement. See *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion*, 206.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.25.

Nietzsche invokes a contest with his elder. He does so on the premise of Plato's strength and not his weakness. Part of that strength is expressed historically and institutionally: "that which has been passed down by the ancestors has withstood the test of time and accumulated and absorbed the collective experiences of the commonwealth in which it proved itself."²⁸ The ancestral has value because it expresses the origins of rational inquiry into the good. He is treating Plato, like Socrates treats Cephalus or, more precisely, like Socrates treats the poets whom Cephalus cites. Like Plato's Socrates, Nietzsche positions himself as a youthful challenger. His actions at least imply a certain respect for the elder with whom he is drawn into conflict. Nietzsche's method and selection of Plato as an interlocutor reinvigorates the philosophical imperative in this way.

To elaborate upon this insight, we see that what might be gained from Nietzsche's writing against Plato is that he forces us to question how we measure and understand greatness. Should Plato's contribution to the human endeavour be catalogued and compartmentalized in a textbook of political thought? Or was he truly a turning point? In the first sense, this is akin to making him one among many philosophers, each who contributed some knowledge to society, but then who each in turn were written over by their successor.²⁹ Imagining him in this way makes him part of a story of human progress. The generations of the past are succeeded by generations

²⁸ Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem*, 35.

²⁹ Strauss articulates the conditions of this situation well when he writes, "As it seems to me, the cause of this situation is that we have lost all simply authoritative traditions in which we could trust, the *nomos* which gave us authoritative guidance, because our immediate teachers and teachers' teachers believed in the possibility of a simply rational society." See *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 8.

of the future who improve upon their inheritance. In the second, it suggests that Plato took on the utmost political responsibility: he authored the tradition that the next generations would abide by for many generations to follow. In this sense, he becomes an enduring authority. Nietzsche's description of misarchism suggests that modern democracy, and the peer-to-peer valuation of knowledge that accompanies it, makes the former conclusion. That is, it regards itself as the result of the progressive realization of knowledge in time. In writing against this historical progressivism, Nietzsche could be understood as attempting to combat that tendency and to revive a certain respect for the association between oldest and best. As Strauss writes, "Liberal education reminds those members of a mass democracy who have ears to hear, of human greatness."³⁰ To demonstrate the significance of his philosophical project, Nietzsche needs to point beyond himself, to establish the worthiness of his adversary. He perhaps even needs to caricature his adversary, make him larger than life, more god-like than human.

Is Nietzsche emulating his opponent, Plato? Is he attempting to stir a slave revolt of his own? He claims frank speech when he writes, "Thus, to speak frankly: it is necessary for us to get really angry for once in order that things shall get better."³¹ Anger arises most distinctly, and most viscerally, when the value of something that is truly one's own is put to question or existentially threatened. If we are good liberal democrats, perhaps Nietzsche intends to stoke this anger. Those who respond to his provocations in a thoughtful way will be required to revisit the idols he slanders in his

³⁰ Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 5.

³¹ Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as educator," 152.

texts. He is inviting us home, directing us to the poetry of the old authorities, and asking us to account for our admiration or denigration of them. If, like Socrates in *Republic I*, we are left only with the recognition that we do not know, at least we are left with the question of what we ought to know. For Nietzsche, we ought to know what it actually means to be great.³²

³² It is of no small importance that, by contrast, Plato leaves his Socrates at the end of *Republic I* considering what it means to be just.

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