

Nietzsche's Early Political Thinking: "Homer On Competition"

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Abstract

The paper is a close reading of Nietzsche's early essay, "Homer on Competition". It explores the understanding of nature as strife presented in that essay, how this strife channels itself into cultural or state forms, and how these forms cultivate the creative individual or genius. The article concludes by asserting that Nietzsche's central point in "Homer on Competition" concerns the contest across the ages that is fought by these geniuses. For Nietzsche, therefore, competition has a political significance — the forging of the unity and identity of a particular community — and a transpolitical significance — the forging of a "republic of geniuses" on the part of artists and philosophers across the expanse of the tradition.

Nietzsche sent "Homer on Competition" and four other essays to Cosima Wagner as a birthday gift in December 1872. Having declined the Wagners' offer to spend Christmas in Bayreuth, the essays, under the collective title *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books*, were also to serve as a substitute for Nietzsche's presence. It would seem that they were a poor substitute. According to Cosima Wagner's diaries, the essays arrived by mail during the first week of January 1873. They arrived at the beginning of what Cosima describes as a "gloomy phase" in the life of the Wagners. "Prof. Nietzsche's manuscript," she adds, "does not restore our spirits, there are now and again signs of clumsy abruptness, however deep the underlying feelings" (163).

“Homer on Competition” is apparently a clumsy, abrupt fragment. Like the other Prefaces of the group, it points beyond itself to an unwritten book, to a message Nietzsche could not, for whatever reason, fully express publicly. It is a short and enigmatic work, and apparently it did not appeal to Cosima Wagner. However, these apparent flaws should not deter us from attempting to discern its profound, if not explicitly written, messages. As a point of departure for deciphering these profound riddles, we could say that the essay gives us an insightful summary of Nietzsche’s early political thinking. “Homer on Competition” presents Nietzsche’s understanding of the nature of existence as strife and of how this natural strife unfolds itself in human institutions and regimes. The essay provides the early Nietzsche’s most thoughtful articulation of the relation between nature and culture or convention — *phusis* and *nomos* — the distinction, which lies at the very roots of Western political philosophy. Before turning to Nietzsche, let us remind ourselves of what this distinction meant at the commencement of the Western tradition so that we can more properly situate Nietzsche’s response to that commencement.

Western thinking began with the Greeks, and that thinking began by asking what is nature (*phusis*). Aristotle calls the first philosophers “those who discourse on nature.” He distinguishes them from those “who discourse on the gods.” By nature, the Greeks originally meant the character or way of being of a thing. We can speak, for instance, of the character or way of fire, of trees or of clouds. We can also speak, however, of the character or way of different tribes of humans. The Greeks recognized these two different

manners by which a thing can have a character. In so doing, they made a further distinction within their understanding of “way” or “character”: distinguishing nature (*phusis*), on the one hand, from convention or law (*nomos*) on the other. For instance, while humans are able to speak in accordance with their nature, humans speak different languages in accordance with their conventions (Strauss and Cropsey 2-3).

Classical political philosophy was founded on certain questions that were raised by this distinction. The Greeks came to wonder, for example, whether every determination of the just and good life is merely a product of convention, or is there a notion of justice and the good that is in accordance with nature, or the nature of humanity? (Strauss and Cropsey 4). We know that the defence of the natural notion of right is formulated most powerfully in the dialogues of Plato, with Socrates providing the defence. We can also find the conventionalist position defended in Plato’s dialogues, with Thrasymachus (in the *Republic* 336-54) and Callicles (in *Gorgias* 481-527) providing the most famous defences. Nietzsche is often placed in the conventionalist camp. According to this determination of his political thinking, Nietzsche follows Callicles in assuming that nature and law are radically opposed as standards for human endeavour. Laws, customs and social constraints are merely means by which the weak come to rule and restrict the full, natural expression of the individual’s creative energies — what he would later call “will to power.” Nietzsche, according to this view, is to be set on one side and Socratic political rationalism, which finds in rational laws a fulfilment of nature, is to be set on the other. One example of such an interpretation is that of Gilles Deleuze, which makes the

explicit link between Nietzsche's conception of will to power and the position of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*. For Deleuze, "Nietzsche is close to Callicles and ... Callicles is immediately completed by Nietzsche. Callicles strives to distinguish nature and law. Everything that separates a force from what it can do he calls law. Law, in this sense, expresses the triumph of the weak over the strong." Deleuze goes on to oppose this Nietzschean-Calliclean position to that of Socrates, who "replies to Callicles that there is no way of distinguishing nature and law; for the weak can only prevail if, by banding together, they can form a stronger force than the strong. Law triumphs from the point of view of nature itself" (1983, 58-9). At stake here are two opposed conceptions of nature and of the nature of humanity. On the one hand, with the Sophists (Thrasymachus and Callicles), we see the view that human nature is ruled by terrifying passions; humans, according to this view, should live in accordance with nature's only law: the preservation of one's own interests. On the other hand, with Socrates, we see the belief that human nature is fundamentally noble and rational. As such, the good life for humanity is the one lived in accordance with traditional conventions of goodness. I want to show that Nietzsche's early political thinking does not fit within this simple opposition. According to Nietzsche's interpretation of the early Greeks, this distinction between the two ways in which we can see our nature, and between *phusis* and *nomos*, is to be embraced as a locus of questioning and dialogue, not to be resolved in fixed, opposed positions.

We have said that the foundations of Greek political philosophy lie in the distinction between *phusis* and *nomos*. If we speak of "nature" in itself, rather than of the "nature of

a thing,” we are speaking of the way or character of being as a whole. We have noted that “Homer on Competition” is a delineation of nature (*phusis*) as strife (*eris*) — a delineation of the way or character of being as a whole as strife. In this essay, I will undertake a close reading of Nietzsche’s “Homer on Competition” — exploring this understanding of nature as strife, how this strife channels itself into cultural or state forms, and how these forms cultivate the creative individual or genius.

D) Nature as Uncanny (paragraphs 1-2)

“Homer on Competition” opens by addressing the “uncanny” character of nature, as that which is secret as well as open to view. It does so within the context of a guiding question, which we could phrase as follows: what is the relation of humanity and its projects to nature, or to being as a whole? While we usually think of the concept of humanity such that it “*separates* man from nature,” for Nietzsche there is “no such separation: ‘natural’ characteristics and those called specifically ‘human’ have grown together inextricably.” Human projects, conventions and arts are not an imposition on nature, but an aspect of nature itself: “Man, in his highest, finest powers, is all nature and carries nature’s *uncanny* dual character in himself” (my emphasis) (paragraph 1).

What is “uncanny” about nature, and about humanity as that which springs forth out of the “fertile soil” of nature? Nietzsche does not give us an explicit answer, so we must look more closely at the words Nietzsche uses and to their context. Nietzsche speaks of nature’s “uncanny dual character” (*unheimlichen Doppelcharakter*). Sigmund Freud has given us a useful exegesis of the word “*unheimlich*.” It would seem, says Freud, that this

is an obvious enough term. *Unheimlich* is “the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning ‘familiar’; ‘native,’ ‘belonging to home’” (154). Equally obviously, *unheimlich* is what is frightening because it is the unknown and the unfamiliar. However, there is another range of meanings for the word *heimlich*; in addition to meaning the familiar, it also means that which is secret or concealed (156). It is within this domain of signification, Freud points out, that Schelling can say that everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. Ultimately, Freud’s intention is to show that this linguistic play of the concealed and the familiar is a proof of psychoanalytic theory, that this experience of the foreign which is also strangely familiar is a result of something repressed which returns (166).

Nietzsche did not have the psychoanalytic notion of the uncanny in mind when writing this passage. We could say that Nietzsche’s use of the word uncanny (*unheimlich*) here is ontological rather than psychological. Existence as a whole is an uncanny play of concealment and unconcealment. Nietzsche was a student of Greek and knew that nature (*phusis*), in addition to meaning the way or character of a thing, is that which grows or emerges (from *phuein*: to grow or make to grow; Heidegger 1959, 14). In growth, while a certain potential emerges, comes to light and endures in presence, the beginnings and ends of the process withdraw into concealment. It is perhaps for this reason that Heraclitus can say “nature loves to hide itself” (Fragment 123). As we have noted, nature names being as a whole, or being as a whole in its truth. The Greek word for truth

(*alētheia*) gives us another clue to understanding nature as “uncanny” — for it too points to an essential play of concealing and revealing.

Alētheia, if literally translated, means “unconcealedness.”¹ The Greek word directs us to an awareness that concealment is an essential component of truth within the primordial Greek experience. Truth is the “suspension or cancellation” of concealment (Heidegger 1992, 14). For this reason, “every endeavour to think *a-lētheia* [un-concealedness] in a somewhat suitable manner, even if only from afar, is an idle affair as long as we do not venture to think the *lethe* [concealedness, forgetting] to which, presumably, *alētheia* refers back” (1992, 11). We can also see that truth, as experienced by the Greeks, is an essential conflict or strife: “‘Truth’ is never ‘in itself,’ available by itself, but instead must be gained by struggle. Unconcealedness is wrested from concealment, in a conflict [*polemos*] with it” (1992, 17). Finally, this wresting from concealment that is truth is also experienced as a lighting process of sorts: “The light is the determining radiance, the shining and appearing. ... On the basis of Plato's ‘cave allegory’ we can immediately gather the connection between sun, light, unconcealedness, and unveiling on the one hand, and between darkness, shadow, concealedness, veiling, and cave on the other” (1992, 144). As an arising into unconcealment and this lighting process, then, *phusis* is *alētheia* (Heidegger 1976, 268-9).

According to Nietzsche’s interpretation of the Greeks, one aspect of the dual character of nature described here is that which is embodied in the “finest” aspects of humanity and its projects. Another aspect of nature manifests itself in human practices “which are terrible

and are viewed as inhuman.” What makes this essence of humanity terrifying as opposed to the finer aspects of our nature? Nietzsche answers this question concerning the uncanny ground of human existence in the second paragraph of the essay by referring to five examples provided in the texts of the ancient Greeks, five examples of their “tiger-like pleasure in destruction.” Nietzsche’s highlighting of the terrifying aspects of Greek existence here is in keeping with the rethinking of the Greek experience of existence that pervades much of his early writings. As opposed to the prevailing attitude of the classicists of his day, Nietzsche saw that the civility and artistic simplicity of the early Greeks were rooted in an experience of the primal horror and violence of existence. Greek culture only seems to be one of serenity and simple beauty; it is, in fact, founded on a horrible truth: “Greeks were superficial — out of profundity” (GS “Preface”, 4). This horrible truth was veiled out of necessity during the Greeks’ pinnacle of cultural creativity. The five examples of the Greeks’ “tiger-like pleasure in destruction” to which Nietzsche refers are from what we might term historical fact as well as from the realm of art. His first example resides in the domain of history; he refers to the time “(w)hen Alexander has the feet of the brave defender of Gaza, Batis, pierced, and ties his live body to his chariot in order to drag him around to the scorn of his soldiers.” This is a historical example, however, that crosses over into the realm of art in that it is a cruel repetition of a scene from the *Iliad*: it is “a nauseating caricature of Achilles, who abused the corpse of Hector at night by similarly dragging it around.” Nietzsche’s second example is again from the realm of history, this time from Thucydides: “With the same sensation, we observe the bloody and insatiable mutual laceration of two Greek factions,

for example in the Corcyrean revolution.” The third example is a general one, crossing both the realms of art and history: “When, in a battle between cities, the victor, according to the *rights* of war, puts the whole male population to the sword and sells all the women and children into slavery, we see, in the sanctioning of such a right, that the Greek regarded a full release of his hatred as a serious necessity.” The fourth example cites the plastic arts, and in doing so poses a question: “Why did the Greek sculptor repeatedly have to represent war and battles with endless repetition, human bodies stretched out, their veins taut with hatred or the arrogance of triumph, the wounded doubled up, the dying in agony?” The final example, again in the interrogative mode, refers to literary art and brings us back to the reference to the *Iliad* in the first example: “Why did the whole Greek world rejoice over the pictures of battle in the *Iliad*?” (“HC” paragraph 2).

The examples Nietzsche uses throughout the essay are carefully chosen, so we must pay close attention to them. In this instance, they tie together images of real and artistic violence in the manner of a chiasmus. Just as Nietzsche asserted at the beginning of the essay that the realms of nature and of human culture are intertwined, we can see that these examples too demonstrate the ways in which real and artistic violence have “grown together inextricably.” The choice of examples also points to an answer of sorts to the questions posed by those examples. That is, it is because art and nature are intertwined that the Greek sculptor must repeatedly “represent [*ausprägen* = stamp or mould] war and battles with endless repetition.” The artistic giving of form is not merely an aesthetic activity; it also implies a stamping or moulding of our nature as humans. Sculpture, or art

in general, is nature as destructive and violent strife channelling itself into a creative outlet, giving itself a form. Human nature is “uncanny” in that there is a terrifying element to our existence that ought to remain concealed. Aesthetic deception, for Nietzsche, is the chief manifestation of this concealment. The artistic concealment of the horror of our existence is proper to human nature and enables its highest achievements. This points to Nietzsche’s understanding of the tragic — wherein the horror and meaninglessness of existence are recognized but given an affirmative form or veil.

II) Nature and the Tragic (paragraphs 3-4)

Nature possesses a “dual character”: it reveals itself in both the terrifying and the noble dimensions of human existence. This dual character of existence is tied to what Nietzsche calls the tragic culture of the Greeks, most notably in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The first sentence of that work reads as follows: “We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality — just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations” (BT 1). For Nietzsche, this conflict of Apollo and Dionysus is the locus for a series of structural oppositions: civilization versus nature; medicine-arts (*technē*) versus natural fertility (*phusis*); sculpture versus music; restraint versus excess/intoxication; individualization versus unity (loss of self); beauty versus horror; and being versus becoming. The tragic experience is rooted in this “*Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality,” which reflects the “dual character” of nature itself, as both noble and terrifying. The

tragic experience is also rooted in the “uncanny” character of existence, as described above. That is, the Dionysian horror of our existence is “uncanny” in that it is strangely familiar to us; it is “not so very alien” to us when it peaks its Gorgon-like head out from behind the Olympian veils of beauty behind which it must be draped: “With what astonishment must the Apollinian Greek have beheld him! [the votary of Dionysus]. With an astonishment that was all the greater the more it was mingled with the shuddering suspicion that all this was actually *not so very alien* to him after all, in fact, that it was only his Apollinian consciousness which, like a veil, hid this Dionysian world from his vision” (my emphasis) (BT 2).

The tragic experience, then, is tied to the dual and uncanny characters of existence. This tragic experience is also, we shall see, tied to the conflictual essence of the truth (*alētheia*) of being as a whole; both are founded on the strife of concealment and unconcealment. Nietzsche felt that the tragic experience of the Greeks resulted from the productive combination of two artistic impulses, which are in constant strife. Nietzsche points out, in the first sentence of *The Birth of Tragedy*, that all art is based on the “perpetual strife [of the Dionysian and Apollinian art impulses] with only periodically intervening reconciliations.” If we want to understand this strife, we should note, on the one hand, that the acts of reconciliation do not end the strife as such; the strife is “perpetual.” We should also note, on the other hand, that the strife is not purely negative; the strife is not based on pure opposition: “periodically intervening reconciliations” are possible. We can take from this, then, a preliminary sense of how, for Nietzsche, the

Greeks understood conflict and strife. That is, Dionysus and Apollo (*phusis* and *nomos*; nature and culture) are in tension, but are not radically opposed for Nietzsche. Culture is the completion of nature's ends. As a product of nature, culture is tied to nature's Sphinx-like dual character. This dual character reveals itself in the "predatory aspect of the Sphinx of nature who, in the glorification of the artistically free life of culture, so beautifully presents the torso of a young woman. Culture, which is first and foremost a real hunger for art, rests on one terrible premise" ("GSt" paragraph 5). Nature stretches forth the beautiful "torso" of culture in order to achieve a deliverance of sorts in art. Nature produces culture and the deceptions of art in order to overcome itself. One of the chief means used by nature to reach this goal is the state: "then all this indicates how enormously necessary the state is, without which nature might not succeed in achieving, through society, her salvation in appearance, in the mirror of genius" ("GSt" paragraph 9). Art is not opposed to nature; rather, art is the salvation of nature. It is in this sense that Nietzsche asserts, "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*" (BT 5).

We can already see that Nietzsche's early political thinking does not entirely accord with the "conventionalist" position represented by Callicles. For Nietzsche, the realm of *nomos* (culture, social constraints, law, state etc.) is not merely that which separates one from what they can do by nature (*phusis*); it is not merely a set of restrictions imposed by the weak on the strong, the many on the few, in order to prevent the latter from completely fulfilling their natural ends. Rather, social and cultural institutions are means

that nature creates for itself in order to reach its own fulfillment. As Leo Strauss points out, for Nietzsche, *nomoi* are grounded in *physis*: “Over against the ruinous permissiveness of anarchism Nietzsche asserts that precisely long lasting obedience to unnatural and unreasonable *nomoi* is ‘the moral imperative of nature’ [BGE 188]. *Physis* calls for *nomoi* while preserving the distinction, nay opposition of *physis* and *nomos*” (1996, 196-7; see also Lampert 1996, 66-8).

A genuine or authentic culture, then, is not completely divorced from nature. It is in this vein that Nietzsche contrasts Hellenic and Roman culture: “There are two types of culture, *Hellenic* and *Roman*: the former, a natural product that in all its structures and elements continually reproduces the essential form in a playful manner ... the latter, a noble convention and decoration, with borrowed, perhaps even misunderstood forms, but which are reinterpreted so as to be splendid and opulent or ornamental. Once the life of a people has come under the dominance of either the Greek or the Roman mode of art, then we speak of the culture of this people: ... in one instance this art is nature, in the other instance convention” (Nb 24.11-12; see also Nb 29.168). This is Nietzsche’s ground for critically evaluating cultures and states — not all cultures are equally proficient in the completion of nature’s ends. Culture must be rooted in nature and its standards; it must further nature’s ends: the production of the creative individual or genius. The goal of humanity can only lie “*in its highest exemplars*” (UMb 9; see also UMc 3, 5-6). The Greeks in the tragic age, for instance, achieved a genuine culture inasmuch as they were able to maintain both the Apollinian and Dionysian impulses in equal measure; the Greek

application of an Apollinian veil of artistic deception was rooted in Dionysian nature and created the soil for the production of the creative individual.

This profound, tragic culture of the Greeks met its end, according to Nietzsche, in the form of Socratic optimism, the inauthentic culture to which we are heirs. For us, in the shadow of Socrates, existence is rational and knowable. This optimism does not recognize the Dionysian absurdity. Obviously, bearing in mind his interpretation of the demise of the tragic culture of the Greeks, Nietzsche could not be called a Socratic anymore than a Calliclean. That is, although an authentic culture, along with its institutions, laws and determinations of right and wrong, is one that is rooted in nature, that nature is not a rational, knowable whole. Nature is the terrible basis, not rational basis, upon which culture is constructed. Further, nature does not offer itself up to human reason and manipulation; nature loves to hide itself. For this reason, a discourse (*logos*) on nature is always a partial account, an account of the particular un-concealment (*aletheia*) of being as a whole to which a historical people bears witness. This consciousness of the limited character of their institutions, standards and accounts of what is the good life — this awareness that culture is an Apollinian veil placed over a Dionysian nature — is the tragic wisdom that Nietzsche uncovers in the texts of the early Greeks.

In “Homer on Competition,” Nietzsche points to the tragic experience of the Greeks — as rooted in this uncanny strife of the Apollinian and Dionysian impulses — without

explicitly mentioning it. Nietzsche contrasts the Homeric (Apollinian) world with the pre-Homeric (Dionysian), as reflected in Hesiod's Theogonic myths.² In the *Iliad*, Homer uses artistic deception to place a veil of meaning and form over the meaningless and limitless violence of his war-like subject matter. "But what lies *behind* the world of Homer, as the womb of everything Hellenic? For in the *former*, we are already lifted beyond the purely material fusion by the extraordinary artistic precision, calmness and purity of the lines: its colours, through an artistic deception [*Täuschung*], seem lighter, gentler and warmer ... but where do we look if we stride backwards into the pre-Homeric world, without Homer's guiding and protecting hand? Only into night and horror, into the products of a fantasy used to ghastly things." Nietzsche then points out that the kind of "earthly existence" these pre-Homeric myths reflect within the thick Boeotian "atmosphere of Hesiod's poem" is one of a "life ruled by the *children of the night* alone, by strife, lust, deception [*die Täuschung*], age and death" ("HC" paragraph 3).

Nietzsche refers to two types of artistic deception (*Täuschung*) here, which parallel the two art impulses of nature discussed above. One is Dionysian, a child of Night: deception (*die Täuschung*). The other is that Apollinian deception linked to Homeric art: "an artistic deception (*Täuschung*) [that makes things] seem lighter, gentler and warmer." One belongs to the realm of natural, limitless and aimless violent strife — strife that belongs to the laws of the earth, wherein blood calls for blood in endless repetition:

It is but law that when the red drops have been spilled
upon the ground they cry aloud for fresh
blood. For the death act calls out on Fury
to bring out of those who were slain before
new ruin on ruin accomplished. (*The Libation Bearers* 400-404)

The other deception is that of an art which allows a veiling of the first.

Faced with the terror of existence, the Greeks had two basic responses: resignation and creative affirmation. The latter response, creative affirmation, is made possible by the union of the two types of artistic deception described above. Resignation is the un-Hellenic, and thus inauthentic, tendency that manifests itself in the “names of Orpheus, Musaeus, and their cults.” This is a tendency leading “to a nausea at existence, to the view of existence as a punishment to be discharged by serving out one’s time, to the belief that existence and indebtedness were identical.” The Greeks in the tragic age, however, also formulated an authentic response to the terror of existence: “Greek genius acknowledged the existing impulse, terrible as it was, and regarded it as *justified*: whereas in the Orphic version there lay the thought that a life rooted in such an impulse was not worth living” (“HC” paragraphs 3-4). The tragic culture of the Greeks is authentic, then, because it allowed this creative affirmation of existence; it is a culture, which permitted the appearance of creative individuals. On the other hand, a culture founded on the tendency to renounce this world does not support the development of creative individuals with the power to act. To be an agent, to act in this world, requires limits on knowledge. It may be true that existence is meaningless and terrifying, but we cannot live and cannot

act with this knowledge, this knowledge is “true but deadly” (UMb 9). For Nietzsche, this is highlighted by the tragic situation of Hamlet: “In this sense the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion” (BT 7).

We have seen, through an examination of the first four paragraphs of Nietzsche’s essay, that nature has a dual and uncanny character. In this way, it does not correspond with either the Sophistic or Socratic definitions. That is, there is an aspect of our nature that is terrifying, in accordance with the views of the Sophists; however, there is also an aspect of our nature that consists of the veiling of the former aspect — leading to an overcoming of our nature and allowing creative agency. This tragic experience, as the veiling and limiting of a certain natural chaos, is the key to understanding the Greek experience of nature as a primordial strife and how this strife channels itself into social institutions based on limited competition.

III) Hesiod’s Two Eris-Godesses (paragraph 5)

For Nietzsche, nature as destructive, Dionysian strife could be said to channel itself, limit itself, or give itself an Apollinian form. In this way, strife takes on a positive character. Social and cultural forms are judged, as we have seen, by their ability to support the progress toward nature’s goal: the creative individual. What does this mean with respect

to social and cultural forms? How do they turn the natural violence of blood lust, for example, into a positive conflict productive of the creative state, society and individual? We will see that the answers to these questions involves a recognition of the difference between two types of strife — with destructive strife becoming positive through the addition of an appropriate measure.

Nietzsche refers to these two types of strife in the fifth paragraph of “Homer on Competition”: “When the traveler Pausanias visited the Helicon on his travels through Greece, an ancient copy of the Greeks’ first didactic poem, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, was shown to him, inscribed on lead plates and badly damaged by time and weather. But he still saw this much, that in contrast to the usual copies it did not carry that little hymn to Zeus at the head, but began straight with the assertion: ‘There are *two* Eris-goddesses on earth.’” Again, Nietzsche’s example is carefully chosen. He refers not to the usual commencement of Hesiod’s work, the hymn to Zeus. He refers to an example in which the reference to Eris precedes the gods themselves. So too, in Heraclitus’s Fragment 53 we find a reference to an ontological, primordial or “cosmological” notion of strife, that is, a strife which precedes and determines even the gods: “War (*Polemos*) is the father of all, king of all: some it shows as gods, some as men; some it makes slaves, some free.”

But what does “war” (*polemos*) and “strife” (*eris*) mean according to Heraclitus, and can it help us understand the notion of strife Nietzsche is trying to communicate in his essay? Martin Heidegger’s interpretation of Heraclitus’s *polemos* is instructive: “The *polemos*

named here is a conflict that prevailed prior to everything divine and human, not a war in the human sense. This conflict, as Heraclitus thought it, first caused the realm of being to separate into opposites; it first gave rise to position and order and rank. ... In the conflict a world comes into being. (Conflict does not split, much less destroy unity. It constitutes unity, it is a binding-together, *logos*. *Polemos* and *logos* are the same)" (1959, 62; see also 1959, 131, and 1992, 17-18). Two things should be noted: first, according to this interpretation, *polemos* and *eris* are names for being as a whole. Strife is a name for the process whereby beings arise through differentiation and attain their limits. Second, this ontological strife is seen as that which forges unities or wholes — only those beings which confront one another in the tension of this essential strife can come to belong together in a whole. In contradistinction to Heidegger's ontological interpretation of Heraclitus's notion of strife, it is also possible to interpret Fragment 53 as a statement concerning a limited region of beings as beings: i.e., war is the father of certain social orders, but obviously not of "all" beings. Thus, two interpretations present themselves for consideration: "Either war reigns supreme in a political sense alone, establishing social distinction, or war is the source of the coming to be of all things, political and otherwise. In the latter, metaphysical, sense, 'war' would denote some essential conflict among beings ... through which each being comes defined as what it is. Each being becomes, as it were, a foil for all others by taking a stand in its own existence and thereby forcing others to do the same" (Fried 25). As substantiation for the view that Heraclitus's notion of strife is ontological, we should keep Fragment 80 in mind: "One should know that war is common, that justice is strife, that all things come about in accordance with strife and

with what must be.” Fried refers to this fragment and points out that war, in the limited, political sense of the term, is “a manifestation, one more easily recognized by mere mortals, of the cosmological principle of strife. The gods and humans and the free and enslaved mentioned in Fragment 53 do not constitute a mere list or compilation of those affected by war; gods and humans, free and enslaved *exist as opposites* because war has its roots in the cosmological nature of strife” (24).

In “Homer on Competition,” Nietzsche is referring to a strife that precedes even the gods, a strife that allows beings to arise within certain limits. Nietzsche underlines the primordial nature of this strife by means of his reference to Pausanias’ account of Hesiod’s poem, which, in contradistinction to the standard version of the poem, begins with a discussion of *Eris* rather than the hymn to Zeus. Yet why does Nietzsche refer to Hesiod here? It would appear from the discussion above that Heraclitus’s description of *eris-polemos* could just as easily have suited Nietzsche’s needs. What distinguishes the two versions of *eris* according to Nietzsche? Nietzsche gives us an interpretation of Heraclitus’s notion of strife in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, another work of the same period: “The strife of the opposites gives birth to all that comes-to-be; the definite qualities which look permanent to us express but the momentary ascendancy of one partner. But this by no means signifies the end of the war; the contest endures in all eternity. Everything that happens, happens in accordance with this strife, and it is just in the strife that eternal justice is revealed.” Obviously, for Nietzsche, Heraclitus’s notion of strife is cosmological; the “war” that Heraclitus underlines in Fragment 53 is not solely a

political phenomenon; it is primordial in the same sense that the strife spoken of in Pausanias' account of Hesiod's poem is primordial. In fact, Nietzsche explicitly links this Heraclitean notion of strife with that of Hesiod: "Only a Greek was capable of finding such an idea to be the fundament of a cosmology; it is Hesiod's good *Eris* transformed into the cosmic principle; it is the contest-idea of the Greek individual and the Greek state" (PTG 5; see also PP 63-6).

It would appear, then, that Hesiod and Heraclitus's notions of strife are similar, to a certain degree, for Nietzsche. However, Nietzsche's analysis of Heraclitus does underline certain differences. First, Hesiod's *eris* emphasizes the dual and uncanny character of existence as strife — as both destructive and productive, terrifying and noble — there are "two Eris-goddesses on earth." On the other hand, for Nietzsche, the essential strife evoked by Heraclitus is merely "Hesiod's good *Eris* transformed into the cosmic principle." The terrifying aspect of strife seems to be forgotten in Heraclitus's account. By referring, then, to Hesiod's rather than Heraclitus's notion of strife at this point in "Homer on Competition," Nietzsche is continuing to emphasize the themes raised in the first four paragraphs of the essay: the dual, uncanny and tragic nature of existence. A second distinction between the two notions of primordial strife presents itself. Heraclitus's notion emphasizes the Oneness or Unity that is essential to existence as strife. Nietzsche saw that, for Heraclitus, all "contradictions run into harmony, invisible to the common human eye" (PTG 7). He saw that, for Heraclitus, all things are *united* behind the apparent conflict. "Listening not to me but to the account [*logos*], it is wise to

agree that all things are one” (Fragment 50). In fact, Heraclitus rebukes Hesiod for not perceiving the underlying unity of things beneath their apparently violent differences: “A teacher of most is Hesiod: they are sure he knows most who did not recognize day and night — for they are one” (Fragment 57). For Heraclitus, Hesiod is one of those who “do not comprehend how, in differing, it agrees with itself — a backward-turning connection, like that of a bow and a lyre” (Fragment 51). By privileging Hesiod here, rather than Heraclitus, Nietzsche would seem to be saying that in its essence, being is not a unity or a whole. Rather, the whole is radically heterogeneous.³ Although the realms of *phusis* and *nomos* are tied and belong together in their tension, *phusis* (as being as a whole) is not a univocal whole. By means of the Apollinian impulse and its veils, the fiction of the individual as a “whole” is created; however, the “whole” which presents itself most clearly for rational discernment is that of the *polis* — it is the whole which shows itself in “larger letters” (*Republic* 368d). The *polis*, like the individual, arises out of the Apollinian impulse; it arises out of the political fictions that draw a horizon around a community and call it one (BT 21). These “wholes” exist in the limited sphere of strife ruled by the gods of a particular *polis*. Thus, by privileging Hesiod, Nietzsche gives us a dual *eris*: an ontological strife, which is a name for the terrifying chaos and heterogeneity of existence itself; and a political strife, which forges communities and social institutions (the “finest” achievements of humanity). In short, a Dionysian and an Apollinian strife.

This dual character of strife and of existence serves as the “gate of entry to Hellenic ethics.” Nietzsche quotes Hesiod at length in order to describe the two types of strife

involved. Hesiod begins with the description of the destructive aspect of strife, the one that “promotes wicked war and feuding, the cruel thing! No mortal likes her, but the yoke of necessity forces man to honour the heavy burden of this Eris according to the decrees of the Immortals. Black Night gave birth to this one as the older of the two.” We should note that in the original Hesiod text it is the gentler Eris that is the eldest daughter, but Nietzsche claims that the destructive, violent strife is the “older of the two.” Zeus placed the younger and gentler strife “on the roots of the earth and amongst men as a much better one.” The destructive, “older” strife is that which is contemporaneous with existence itself; it harkens to an older world of pre-Olympian gods and natural forces; it is the strife that marks the character of being as a whole. The younger, positive strife belongs to the civilized, Olympian gods and to the Greek *polis*. In this way, the “competitions” which proliferate in Greek social and political life are limited in time and place. Greek competition has as its upper limit the gods themselves. This is the significance of the fact that Zeus places it on earth. Here, then, social standards and limits rest on a mythical or religious foundation. It is this religious limit that draws the sacred rings around the Greek *polis* and allows it to arise out of the chaos of existence.

A fragment of a satyr play that has been left to us may shed some light on how this was viewed by Nietzsche. It was supposedly written by Critias, Plato’s uncle, although some contend it was written by Euripides. The speaker is Sisyphus and he describes what appears to be the origin of laws (*nomoi*) and belief in the gods:

There was a time when human life had no order
but like that of animals was ruled by force;
when there was no reward for the good,
nor any punishment for the wicked.
And then, I think, men enacted laws
for punishment, so that justice [*dikē*] would be the ruler [*tyrannos*] ...
and hubris would be its slave ...
Next, since the laws
prevented people only from using violence openly,
but they continued to do so secretly, then I think
for the first time some shrewd, intelligent [*sophos*] man
invented fear of the gods for mortals ...
With such stories as these
he introduced the most pleasant of lessons,
concealing the truth with a false account [*logos*]. ...
With fears like these he surrounded humans,
and using them in his account he settled
the divinity nobly in an appropriate place
and extinguished lawlessness [*anomia*] with laws [*nomoi*]. (in Gagarin 260-61)

The “noble lie” that Sisyphus describes here bears a likeness, obviously, to that mentioned in Plato’s *Republic*, but also to Nietzsche’s notion of the necessary concealments performed by art and philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks. For Nietzsche, like Sisyphus, this concealment of the truth has as its goal the common good of the political community. In serving this common good, this fiction also furthers nature’s ends. The fictional standards of the community are, however, always those of a particular cave, or “anthill,” not those of being as a whole — which presents no uniform standard: “I consider it false to speak of humanity’s unconscious aim. ... Perhaps one can

speak of the unconscious aim of a city or a people: but what sense does it make to speak of the unconscious aim of *all the anthills* on earth!” (Nb 19.160).

IV) Potter against Potter (paragraph 6)

Hesiod describes how the younger, political strife stimulates humanity to its highest achievements. “She drives even the unskilled man to work; and if someone who lacks property sees someone else who is rich, he likewise hurries off to sow and plant and set his house in order; neighbour competes with neighbour for prosperity. This Eris is good for men. Even potters harbour grudges against potters, carpenters against carpenters, beggars envy beggars and minstrels envy minstrels” (paragraph 5). Nietzsche points out that modern scholars feel that this invocation of trade-jealousy in Hesiod’s poem is out of place; they feel it belongs to the destructive *eris*: “The two last verses, about *odium figulinum* [potters’ hatred], seem to our scholars incomprehensible in this place. In their judgement, the predicates ‘grudge’ and ‘envy’ fit only the nature of the bad Eris.” For us, this form of envy leads to social faction rather than unity and cohesion. A society, for us, cannot be founded on this type of hatred and strife. This interpretation, however, is the product of modern value-judgements: “But another ethic, not a Hellenic one, must have inspired them to this.” For Nietzsche, then, there is “a gulf of ethical judgment ... between us and [the Greek]!” (paragraph 6). This gulf of ethical judgement brings clarity to another point. Earlier in the essay Nietzsche states that he feels we may never be able to understand this Greek understanding of the human condition because we can only approach it “with the emasculated concept of modern ‘humanity’” (paragraph 2). Our concept of humanity is “emasculated” (*weichlichen*), then, in lacking a masculine limit.

We are separated by a gulf from the Greek concept inasmuch as we see conflict and strife as destructive because our trade competition is that of the “money-makers” (see UMc 6 and “GSt” paragraph 12). Modern trade competition manifests itself as the limitless outdoing of others, wherein the only measure of achievement is the potentially endless accumulation of commodities.

Book 1 of Plato’s *Republic* raises the same question concerning whether or not the trade envy discussed by Hesiod is in fact good. The main argument of the *Republic* begins with the question of justice: What is justice? What constitutes the properly just life? After arguing against the definitions of justice provided by Cephalus and Polemarchus, Socrates engages in a battle of sorts with Thrasymachus. We could say that Socrates manifests humanity’s “finest” and most noble achievements; he manifests the sway of the *logos* in human nature. Thrasymachus, on the other hand, manifests the most “terrifying” aspects of our nature. Thrasymachus enters the discussion by springing on Socrates “like a wild beast, as if he wanted to tear [Socrates and the others] to pieces.” As a result, “Polemarchus and [Socrates] were panic-stricken” (336b). Thrasymachus offers a different definition of justice: the interest of the stronger. By this he means that laws and conventional determinations of what is good are imposed by and serve the interests of the strongest party in the *polis*. In the course of the battle, Thrasymachus uses as an example the shepherd who protects and fattens his flock. Ultimately, says Thrasymachus, the shepherd does so for the his own and his master’s benefit, not that of the sheep. Thus, for Thrasymachus, the pursuit of self-interest is natural, right and the best course for the

individual. What would conventionally be termed “injustice,” this pursuit of self-interest at any expense, is human excellence or virtue: “we see that injustice, given scope, has greater strength and freedom and power than justice ... that justice is the interest of the stronger party, injustice the interest and profit of oneself” (344c).

Socrates argues against Thrasymachus by saying that the art of shepherding has its own standards of achievement, as does any *technē*: “no profession or art or authority provides for its own benefit but ... provides and orders what benefits the subject of which it is in charge, thus studying the interest of the weaker party and not the stronger” (346e). By hoping for a certain profit or reward, the shepherd is using the standards of another art, the art of moneymaking. Socrates then associates Thrasymachus’s notion of “injustice” with trade competition, with wanting “to get the better [*pleon echein*] of another” (349b). For Socrates, the just artist or professional tries to achieve what is good according to the standards of his art. He is not motivated by Hesiod’s *odium figulinum*: “Then does one musician who is tuning a lyre try to do better than another, or think that he ought to outdo him in tightening or loosening the strings?” (349e). For Thrasymachus, on the other hand, the natural disposition of man is his self-serving advancement, which means a limitless competing and outdoing, without a standard. “Thrasymachus represents the immoral man as having no *skopos* standard, by reference to which he can determine what action is the right one He is not trying to achieve a standard, and competing with others only in that endeavour; he has no standard and competes for competition’s sake” (Mitchell and Lucas 12). Again, Nietzsche seems to stand between Socrates and the Sophist. For him,

as for Thrasymachus, human nature is founded on a self-interest, which manifests itself in terrifying, limitless strife. However, Nietzsche also, like Socrates, posits that humanity aims at certain standards and measures proper to the various arts. The difference being that, for Nietzsche, it is the competition itself that forges these standards and limits. This self-emergence of limits and order is in accordance with the good strife that governs, for Heraclitus, being as a whole. Sun and moon contest, for instance, over rule of the sky; however, “the sun will not overstep its measure, otherwise the Furies, ministers of justice will find it out” (Fragment 94).

Hesiod’s good *eris* is not the limitless outdoing (*pleonektein*) described above; rather, it is a stimulus to human achievement. Nietzsche says, in this respect, that “Aristotle finds no offense” to Hesiod’s reference to trade jealousy or envy. We have seen how Nietzsche’s examples are carefully chosen and sometimes reveal hidden meanings. So, let us be vigilant and not skip over this example too quickly. Nietzsche is referring to Aristotle’s discussion of envy in the *Rhetoric*: “So too we compete with those who follow the same ends as ourselves: we compete with our rivals in sport or in love, and generally with those who are after the same things; and it is therefore these whom we are bound to envy beyond all others. Hence the saying: ‘Potter against potter’” (1388a11-15). We should note that this discussion of envy is supplemented by a discussion of “emulation” in the next chapter of Aristotle’s work: “[Emulation] is therefore a good feeling felt by good persons, whereas envy is a bad feeling felt by bad persons. Emulation makes us take steps to secure the good things in question, envy makes us take steps to stop our neighbour

having them” (1388a34-6). It would seem that Aristotle, like Socrates, does find a problem with trade envy. So why would Nietzsche refer to Aristotle here if the latter does not necessarily support his point? What is clear is that, even if Aristotle does not support Hesiod’s notion of strife in an unqualified manner, he does flesh out certain nuances of Nietzsche’s argument. That is, for Aristotle, there is no competition or strife of unequals: “we feel [envy] towards our equals; not with the idea of getting something for ourselves, but because the other people have it. We shall feel it if we have, or think we have, equals; and by ‘equals’ I mean equals in birth, relationship, age, disposition, distinction, or wealth” (1387b23-26). As Lester Hunt points out, the “contest is only possible if the contestants are of comparable status; a *Wettkampf* is, literally, not just any sort of fight (*Kampf*), but one that is equal or even (*wett*)” (62). In fact, in the same paragraph as his reference to Aristotle, Nietzsche stresses this notion that strife is always of those on the same field. For instance, humans can only compete with one another, never with the gods: “This idea does not estrange his gods at all from him: on the contrary, their significance is made manifest, which is that man, having a soul which burns with jealousy of every other living thing, *never* has the right to compete with them.” In the destructive consequences of hubris we see “the terrible opposition of the two forces which ought never to fight one another, man and god.” The gods themselves, as noted above, provide the limit to the contest. It is a divine limit that separates the unlimited, destructive *eris* from the positive *eris*

V) The Anxiety of Influence (paragraphs 7-9)⁴

The word “*agon*” is etymologically tied to the Greek verb “*ago*,” meaning to lead, bring or guide. Originally an *agon* was a “bringing together,” of ships or people, for example. Nietzsche’s reference to good *eris* is to that form of *agon* that brings together or forges a community. How do we get from destructive, ontological strife to this limited horizon of political strife? Nature as strife limits itself, according to Nietzsche, by creating artistic and state forms. These forms lead to limited competitions; the limitless violence of primordial nature is sublimated, so to speak, into productive and limited competitions. The limited competition of artists and of actors in the state brings together the various players and places them on the same field: it forges, in this way, the social cohesion that is essential to the *polis*. This process is dramatized, for example, in Aeschylus’s *Oresteian Trilogy*, wherein the violence of blood strife (based on natural bonds) is transformed, limited and institutionalized into a conflict within the law-court. The law-court, the theatre and the assembly were ways in which the Greeks channelled the violence of natural strife into socially productive forms. In all three, the conflict of blood becomes the conflict of accounts [*logoi*] of what is just or good. Each account is put into its proper limit through this conflict; the partial nature of an argument is highlighted in its confrontation with another argument. Tragedy, through the use of ambiguous words, or words with multiple levels of meaning on different semantic registers, highlights the conflicts between characters and within nature itself. “The dramatist plays on this to transmit his tragic vision of a world divided against itself and rent with contradictions” (Vernant 1990b, 113; see also 1990d). It is for this reason that the tragic culture of the

Greeks can be said to be founded on their experience of the conflictual essence of truth [*alētheia*]: “‘tragedy’ itself has its single source in the conflictual essence of *alētheia*” (Heidegger 1992, 90). That is, the Greek experience of cosmological strife — as the co-limiting and defining of beings (sun and moon, light and heavy, cold and hot etc.) — manifested itself in the conflicts of accounts of what is just in the court, theatre and assembly.

The conflict or *agon* takes place across the expanse of time and of the tradition as well. “Aristotle once made a list of such hostile competitions in the grand style: amongst them is the most striking example of how even a dead man can excite a living man to consuming jealousy. Indeed, that is how Aristotle describes the relationship of the Kolophonian Xenophanes to Homer” (“HC” paragraph 7). Upon counting Nietzsche’s sentences — the essay consists of ninety-one in total in the *Kritische Studienausgabe* edition — we realize that we’re dealing here with the very centre of Nietzsche’s essay. Nietzsche’s reference to Xenophanes quoted above is the forty-fifth sentence; Nietzsche’s reference to Plato in this regard occurs in the central, forty-sixth sentence: “We do not understand the full strength of this attack on the national hero of poetry unless we take into account the immense desire to step into the shoes of the overthrown poet himself and inherit his fame, something which is later true of Plato, too.” Whereas earlier in the essay it appeared as though Homer’s “competition” was most fundamentally revealed in his contest with Hesiod, the centre of Nietzsche’s argument deals with Plato’s contest with Homer. Artful writers often hide key points in the centre of their texts, “the least exposed

part” in comparison with the beginning and end (Strauss 1952, 13). So let us read this passage and Nietzsche’s examples carefully.

Nietzsche again cites Aristotle as evidence for this notion of the *agon* with the tradition. The list of conflicts referred to here does not appear in Aristotle’s writing proper. It is reported to us by Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of the Philosophers* II.5.46). If we turn to Aristotle’s own works we find that, rather than support Nietzsche’s point, he provides a direct refutation. In the *Rhetoric*, in the same chapter on envy to which Nietzsche refers his readers in the previous paragraph, Aristotle asserts that “we do not compete with men who live a hundred centuries ago, or those not yet born, or the dead, or those who dwell near the Pillars of Hercules, or those whom, in our opinion or that of others, we take to be far below us or far above us” (1388a8-11). By directing our attention to this chapter of the *Rhetoric* in the previous paragraph, it seems as though Nietzsche wants to highlight this contradiction to the careful reader. But what could Nietzsche be indicating to us here with this oblique reference? We have seen that Nietzsche does use Aristotle’s claim that strife is only of equals, of humans on the same field. Nietzsche wants to extend this to those on the same field within the poetic or philosophic tradition, but Aristotle does not seem to support his argument. The contradictory reference to an Aristotelian list that includes a reference to the Kolophonian Xenophanes seems to be the key, so let us return to the *Rhetoric* for a moment. A little further in that work from the section just quoted we find Aristotle’s only two references to Xenophanes in the *Rhetoric*. Both occur in Book II, Chapter 23 (1399b6 and 1400b6). The references occur in the section (Chapters 23 and

24) wherein Aristotle makes a list, in the “grand style,” so to speak, of various “lines of argument.” This points to another potential list of conflicts to which Nietzsche could be referring. That is, Nietzsche is pointing to types of conflict wherein accounts [*logoi*] or arguments differ, not armed combatants or athletes. It is in this sense that the poet or philosopher must engage in an ongoing *agon* with the tradition — in terms of their differing accounts and arguments concerning what is good and just. Nietzsche’s last example in the paragraph is instructive in this regard: “How very typical is the question and answer, when a notable opponent of Pericles is asked whether he or Pericles is the best wrestler in the city and answers: ‘Even if I throw him he will deny having fallen and gets away with it, convincing the people who saw him fall’” (paragraph 7). In the *polis*, the conflict of persuasion and argument is the ultimate manifestation of the community, and this conflict also occurs with those past geniuses who tower over the community in the present. As Nietzsche points out, this is one way of seeing the battle Plato wages with Homer. For us, we can perhaps see Nietzsche’s engagement with Plato as this type of agonistic struggle with a precursor. Of course, the poet-philosopher shares much with the precursor, but must hide or veil their similarities and debts, while engaging in battle on the same field.

Turning to the next paragraph, we see that Nietzsche also interprets the Athenian practice of ostracism in reference to this agonistic impulse. “If we want to see that feeling revealed in its naïve form, the feeling that competition is vital, if the well-being of the state is to continue, we should think about the original meaning of *ostracism*” (paragraph

8). This is Nietzsche's first reference in the essay to the "state" (*Staates*), to the fact that the social foundations of the community are tied to the Greek experience of conflict. We should note here that Nietzsche's point is supported by Aristotle — even though Nietzsche does not explicitly refer to Aristotle here: "If, however, there be some one person ... whose virtue is so pre-eminent that the virtues or the political capacity of all the rest admit of no comparison with his or theirs, he or they can be no longer regarded as part of a state; for justice will not be done to the superior, if he is reckoned only as the equal of those who are so far inferior to him in virtue and in political capacity. Such an one may truly be deemed a God among men" (*Politics* 1284a 3-11). It is for this reason, says Aristotle, that "democratic states have instituted ostracism" (1284a 19).

Similarly, Nietzsche refuses to mention Heraclitus by name in connection with this reference to ostracism, although Nietzsche quotes one of his fragments: "'Amongst us, nobody should be the best; but if somebody is, let him be somewhere else, with other people' [Fragment 121]" (paragraph 8). As with the references to Aristotle earlier, Nietzsche is using an example which on the surface supports his argument but which, upon digging a little deeper, we ultimately discover to be a refutation of his argument. Both are examples which point to a more profound or nuanced point that Nietzsche seems to be making. The quote from Heraclitus's Fragment 121 is partial; the full fragment reads: "The Ephesians deserve to be hanged to the last man, every one of them: they should leave the city to the young. For they expelled Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying: 'Let no one of us be best: if there is such a man, let him be elsewhere and

with others.” Heraclitus, far from praising this practice of ostracism, is denigrating it in the harshest terms. With this in mind, we can see why Nietzsche may have omitted reference to both Aristotle and Heraclitus in his discussion of ostracism. For both Aristotle and Heraclitus, ostracism is seen in terms of its justice or injustice with respect to the ostracized one; both look at the practice “down from above,” so to speak. For Aristotle, ostracism is proper from the perspective of the ostracized one because he would not be able to live and share values with a community of inferiors: “for justice will not be done to the superior, if he is reckoned only as the equal of those who are so far inferior to him in virtue and in political capacity. Such an one may truly be deemed a God among men” (*Politics* 1284a 8-11). For Heraclitus, the Ephesians were unjust to the greatest man among them, Hermodorus. According to Nietzsche’s argument, the ritual and its justice or injustice are to be seen in accordance with the healthy competition of the community itself, not with respect to the exceptional figure who is ostracized; it is to be seen “from below.” Ostracism promotes the competitive community by ensuring that all are on the same field; it draws an upper limit on those who can participate. Later in the essay, Nietzsche looks at the practices of the political community from the perspective of the exceptional individual. Since in this paragraph his perspective is that of the community, Nietzsche leaves Aristotle and Heraclitus as notable omissions.

The horizon of the community is delimited in two directions. Jean-Pierre Vernant ties this tradition of ostracism to the scapegoat rituals of Athens. Both are means by which the *polis* is set into its proper limits. “In the person of the ostracized one the city expels

whatever it is in it that is too high and that embodies the evil that can fall on it from above. In that of the *pharmakos* [scapegoat], it expels whatever is most vile and embodies the evil that threatens it from below. Through this double and complementary rejection it sets its own limits in relation to what is above and what is below. It takes the true measure of man as opposed on the one hand to the divine and the heroic and, on the other, to the bestial and the monstrous” (Vernant 1990b, 135). For the Greeks, this limitation is essential to their identity, limiting themselves off from the bestial and from the godly. The scapegoat (*pharmakos*) and ostracism rituals are ways of setting those limits through the elimination of those who are outside the specific determination. Dionysian insight occurs when one sees the arbitrary nature of these limits and transgresses them: “in Sophocles, the superhuman and the subhuman meet and become confused within the same figure. When man decides, like Oedipus, to carry the inquiry into what he is as far as it can go, he discovers himself to be enigmatic, without consistency, without any domain of his own or any fixed point of attachment, with no defined essence, oscillating between being the equal of the gods and the equal of nothing at all. His real greatness consists in the very thing that expresses his enigmatic nature: his questioning” (Vernant 1990b, 139). The tragic artist-philosopher is the one who puts Apollinian limits around this Dionysian wisdom. This can be seen in Nietzsche’s analysis of the development of tragic form, but also in the tragic experience of *catharsis*: as an habituation and a putting into limit of excessive, socially disruptive emotions (cf., *Poetics* 49b 25-7; *Politics* 1342a 1-18).

After this discussion of ostracism, Nietzsche situates Greek education in relation to the agonistic impulse: “Hellenic popular teaching commands that every talent must develop through a struggle: whereas modern educators fear nothing more than the unleashing of so-called ambition. Here, selfishness is feared as ‘evil as such’” (“HC” paragraph 9). As opposed to the modern conception, Nietzsche asserts that this agonistic education did not arise from or result in the selfish desire of the individual to overcome all others. That would be characteristic of the destructive *eris* that precedes and exists outside of social arrangements; it is also the *eris* that Thrasymachus praises in the unjust man. Rather, Greek agonistic education, being based on the productive *eris*, aims at the “well-being of the whole, of state society. For example, every Athenian was to develop himself, through competition, to the degree to which this self was of most use to Athens and would cause least damage.” This is a critique of the modern liberal state, according to whose logic, the means (money, education etc.) to the satisfaction of private ends become the only common virtue or end. The standards or goals of these modern citizens are not limited by a common conception. For the Greeks, by way of contrast, “[i]t was not a boundless and indeterminate ambition like most modern ambition: the youth thought of the good of his native city when he ran a race or threw or sang; he wanted to increase its reputation through his own” (paragraph 9).

VI) The Republic of Genius (paragraphs 10-11)

In the next paragraph, Nietzsche returns to his earlier example of the artistic-philosophic *agon* in the tradition: “What, for example, is of particular artistic importance in Plato’s dialogues is mostly the result of a contest with the art of the orators, the sophists, the

dramatists of his time, invented for the purpose of his finally being able to say: ‘Look: I, too, can do what my great rivals can do; yes, I can do it better than them. No Protagoras has written myths as beautiful as mine, no dramatist has written such a lively and fascinating whole as the *Symposium*, no orator has composed such speeches as I present in the *Gorgias* — and now I reject all of that and condemn all imitative art! Only competition made me a poet, sophist and orator!’” (paragraph 10). In contrast to the description of agonistic education in the preceding paragraph, Nietzsche does not present his Plato as hoping to win honour for the betterment of Athens. Rather, the artist-philosopher is presented as somehow outside the limits and concerns of a particular *polis*. He participates, we could say, in a “republic of genius”: “Thus all of them together form what Schopenhauer in contrast to the republic of scholars has called the republic of creative minds: each giant calling to his brother through the desolate intervals of time. And undisturbed by the wanton noises of the dwarfs that creep past beneath them, their high spirit-converse continues” (PTG 1). In this republic, individuals form “a kind of bridge across the turbulent stream of becoming” (UMb 9).

In his discussion of ostracism and agonistic education, Nietzsche’s focus was on the political whole or the community; with the reference to Plato here, he focuses on the great individual who surpasses the political community and enters a community of geniuses. Plato, as a poet-philosopher of tragic wisdom, sees the arbitrary nature of the standards of any particular *polis*. In this way, he transcends the local competition of the community. This transcendence by the great individual is not without its dangers:

“Unfortunately, this phenomenon appears quite often when a great figure was suddenly withdrawn from the competition through an immensely glorious deed and was *hors de concours* in his own judgement and that of his fellow citizens. Almost without exception the effect is terrible; ... he was not able to bear fame without further competition or fortune at the end of the competition” (paragraph 11). An example of an individual who has surpassed the limited competition of the community is Miltiades: “After the battle of Marathon he became the victim of the envy of the gods. And this divine envy flares up when it sees a man without any other competitor, without an opponent, at the lonely height of fame. He only has the gods near him now — and for that reason he has them against him. But these entice him into an act of hubris, and he collapses under it” (paragraph 11).

Plato, like Miltiades, somehow surpasses the limits of the community. Unlike Miltiades, however, he finds another level of competition: with Homer, with the tradition. Rather than be destroyed by the hubris which destroyed Miltiades, Plato and the other poets and philosophers of the tragic age are able to transcend the limits of the community without engaging the gods in conflict, that is, without destroying the limits of their humanity. Seen from the perspective of the genius, this competitive dialogue across the expanse of history is a way of finding a shelter of sorts from the dangers of hubris and from the paralysing prospect of the infinite. In this shelter, the genius finds a new community and home. The competition that occurs on the higher field of the tradition forges a cohesion between these geniuses. For this reason, they must be understood in relation to one

another: “Observing a series of philosophers one after the other is like being in a portrait gallery: they are not at home in the house in which, for the sake of comparison, we give them quarters; that is why they so often appear so arbitrary and like a luxury, like the creations of characterless artistic hacks. By contrast, the task should be merely to tell about them in the same way as they told about their predecessors and about their points of contact; that is the *struggle* among them” (Nb 26.8).

The genius’s goal is not knowledge in itself, but the advancement of nature, the advancement of life through its highest specimens. The genius is the one who recognizes that the whole, being as a whole, is unknowable. For Nietzsche, as for Plato, “human wisdom is knowledge of ignorance: there is no knowledge of the whole but only knowledge of parts, hence only partial knowledge of parts, hence no unqualified transcending, even by the wisest man as such, of the sphere of opinion” (Strauss 1964, 20). This knowledge (that there is no unqualified knowledge; that there is only opinion), is a dangerous knowledge and must be kept from the many, the “dwarfs.” In this way, the artist and the philosopher serve to limit the drive to knowledge. This is also why “Plato needs the lie for his republic” (Nb 19.180).

VII) State Contests (Paragraph 12)

In the last paragraph of Nietzsche’s essay, we leave that higher community of geniuses and return to the city-state, this time to discuss inter-state conflicts. In his excellent essay on “City-State Warfare” (1990a, 29-53), Jean-Pierre Vernant, like Nietzsche, ties the “political” manifestations of state conflict to the deeper Greek experience of existence as

a whole as strife: “the spirit of strife that set the city-states against each other was simply one aspect of a much vaster power at work in all human relationships and even in nature itself.” Vernant, again like Nietzsche, links this experience of strife to the texts of Hesiod and Heraclitus: “In individual relationships between families, as between one state and another, in the competitive Games, in lawsuits, in the debates of the Assembly, and on the battlefield, the ancient Greeks recognized under various names – *Polemos*, *Eris*, *Neikos* – that same power of confrontation that Hesiod places at the origins of the world and Heraclitus celebrates as the father and king of the whole universe” (1990a, 29).

Greek city-state warfare was a contest with certain limits, rules and standards: war “in classical Greece is an *agon*. It takes the form of an organized competition that rules out both the fight to the death to annihilate the enemy as a social and religious being, and conquest designed to absorb him totally” (Vernant 1990a, 42). The limited nature of state warfare acts as a sublimation of the limitless violence of natural or destructive strife. The limiting and forming of this destructive strife underlines, for Nietzsche, the “mysterious connection between the state and art, political greed and artistic creation, battlefield and work of art.” That is, the state is tied to the artistic giving of form described earlier: “we understand the state only as the iron clamp producing society by force: whereas without the state, in the natural *bellum omnium contra omnes*, society is completely unable to grow roots in any significant measure and beyond the family sphere. Now, after states have been founded everywhere, that urge of *bellum omnium contra omnes* is concentrated, from time to time, into dreadful clouds of war between nations and, as it

were, discharges itself in less frequent but all the stronger bolts of thunder and flashes of lightening” (“GSt” paragraph 11).

Just as the Greek individual cannot exist without conflict, so too, without the conflict of peer city-states, the Greek states decline into limitless violence and disorder: “Let us also mention that even the finest Greek states perish in the same way as Miltiades when they, too, through merit and fortune have progressed from the racecourse to the temple of Nike. Both Athens, which had destroyed the independence of her allies and severely punished the rebellions of those subjected to her, and Sparta, which, after the battle of Aegospotamoi, made her superior strength felt over Hellas in an even harder and crueller fashion, brought about their own ruin ... through hubris” (“HC” paragraph 12). The Greek state, like the individual, can commit hubris; it can fly too close to the sun and try to touch the gods. We are reminded, then, that the Greek community has the limits of its competition instituted by the gods and that these sacred limits are essential for it: “This proves that without envy, jealousy and competitive ambition, the Hellenic state, like Hellenic man, deteriorates. It becomes evil and cruel, it becomes vengeful and godless, in short, it becomes ‘pre-Homeric’” (“HC” paragraph 12).

In stressing the necessity of the conflicts between the Greek city-states, Nietzsche is opposing the Kantian vision of “perpetual peace” or of a universal world government. Such a world government or culture would efface the co-defining tensions and contests essential to cultural identity. Without this mutual differentiation through conflict there

remains only the uniformity of the “standard-issue.” In fact, Nietzsche’s last words of the essay point to the decline of Greek culture with the advent of the cosmopolitanism, of sorts, of Hellenism: with the fall of Sparta and Athens, “Alexander, the rough copy and abbreviation of Greek history, now invents the standard-issue Hellene and so-called ‘Hellenism’” (paragraph 12).

The Greek city-states thrive on their conflict, but the healthy state is not excessively militaristic and violent. This type of “military encampment” marks the hegemony of the Apollinian impulse: “For to me the *Doric* state [Sparta] and Doric art are explicable only as a permanent military encampment of the Apollinian. Only incessant resistance to the titanic-barbaric nature of the Dionysian could account for the long survival of an art so defiantly prim and so encompassed with bulwarks, a training so warlike and rigorous, and a political structure so cruel and relentless” (BT 4). On the other hand, the healthy state cannot be excessively Dionysian either, or the political instincts and institutions themselves would dissolve: “After all, one feels in every case in which Dionysian excitement gains any significant extent how the Dionysian liberation from the fetters of the individual finds expression first of all in a diminution of, in indifference to, indeed, in hostility to, the political instincts. Just as certainly, Apollo who forms states is also the genius of the *principium individuationis*, and state and patriotism cannot live without an affirmation of the individual personality” (BT 21). The Greeks of the tragic age achieved the necessary balance between the two art impulses and, thus, achieved the necessary balance between these political and hyper-political instincts.

This proper balance allowed the Greek state to blossom and produce its fruit of genius. In a note written between 1870 and 1871, Nietzsche criticizes the expansionism of the ancient Romans (and implicitly the contemporary Prussians): “A state that cannot attain its ultimate goal usually swells to an unnaturally large size. The world-wide empire of the Romans is nothing sublime compared to Athens. The strength that really should go into the flower here remains in the leaves and stem, which flourish” (1954, 32). For Nietzsche, the goal of the state, its “flower” as it were, is not its own security and growth. The state and the society it forms are merely the stem and the leaves. To understand what the “flower” of this social activity would be, we need to read the passage quoted above in conjunction with “The Greek State,” another of the Prefaces that Nietzsche presented to Cosima Wagner. Nietzsche tells us in that essay how Greek city-state warfare, as a channelling of the continuous, destructive strife of nature, allows intervals which give “society time to germinate and turn green everywhere, so that it can let the radiant *blossoms of genius* sprout forth as soon as warmer days come” (my emphasis) (paragraph 11). In this way, we return to the question of the genius and the republic of geniuses. Nature forges the state and ensures, by means of its competitive institutions, that the good of that political whole is secured. It is for this reason that Nietzsche sees the Greek institutions of ostracism and education from the perspective of the many which constitute the political community. Ultimately, however, nature forges for itself these state institutions in order to facilitate the creation of the superior individual, the genius that can advance the species. This genius must continue to have an *agon* in order to reach his

perfection. The genius finds his *agon* in the republic of geniuses — a competitively instituted whole of a higher order. In this way, the genius is not the end of the line of nature's evolutionary impulses; geniuses within that higher republic will always urge one another to overcome themselves: "A people is a detour of nature to get to six or seven great men. — Yes, and then to get around them" (BGE 126; see also UMc 5-6). The fruit of the state and its violent struggles is this higher republic.

VIII) Nietzsche's Esoteric Doctrine

We began with the distinction between *phusis* and *nomos*, and between the Sophist and Socratic responses to that distinction. Let us return to that question while keeping in mind what we have learned from Nietzsche's essay. The *Laws* includes a good summary of the Sophist position and implicitly provides the Socratic opposition. The Athenian presents the Sophist belief that laws are not founded in nature and insists this position leads to ethical relativism. The Sophists assert, like Sisyphus in the fragment quoted above, "that the gods have no real and natural, but only an artificial being, in virtue of legal conventions, as they call them, and thus there are different gods for different places, conformably to the convention made by each group among themselves when they drew up their legislation." As we have seen, Nietzsche highlights the essential role of the gods in relation to the health of a community. They set the limits of the community's competitive institutions. Like the Sophists, however, Nietzsche feels that these divine fictions are only locally valid; they act as a limit to and standard for human life within a particular political community, but they do not govern being as a whole — the primordial strife that precedes the gods themselves. The Athenian then points out that the Sophists

“actually declare that the really and naturally laudable is one thing and the conventionally laudable quite another, while as for right, there is absolutely no such thing as a real and natural right, that mankind are eternally disputing about rights and altering them, and that every change thus made, once made, is from that moment valid, though it owes its being to artifice and legislation, not to anything you could call nature.” Again Nietzsche lies somewhere between the Socratic and Sophistic positions in this regard. The laws (*nomoi*) and standards of a society are variable and only locally valid; however, they are rooted in *phusis*. Despite the heterogeneity of *phusis*, we have a critical basis from which to judge various laws and political institutions: the extent to which they foster the production of genius and, thus, the overcoming of our terrifying, Dionysian existence. This is what prevents Nietzsche from slipping into the ethical relativism feared in the *Laws*. The Athenian then goes on to describe an aspect of the Sophist position which is reminiscent of Thrasymachus’s position in the *Republic*: “hence the factions created by those who seek, on such grounds, to attract men to the ‘really and naturally right life,’ that is, the life of real domination over others, not of conventional service to them” (*Laws* 889e-890a). As we have seen, Nietzsche does assert, in contradistinction to Socrates, that envy, competition and a desire to outdo and dominate others is essential to social relations; however, in contradistinction to Thrasymachus, he also believes that this competitive impulse creates standards and limits through the mutual recognition and differentiation that occurs in the contest.

We can think of Nietzsche, in this sense, as tied to Plato — tied, perhaps, by their *agon*. Plato, too, seems to be somewhere between Thrasymachus and Socrates. Both are masks for Plato's views. As Leo Strauss points out in his interpretation of Farabi's Plato, the "Platonic way ... is a combination of the way of Socrates with the way of Thrasymachus; for the intransigent way of Socrates is appropriate only for the philosopher's dealing with the elite, whereas the way of Thrasymachus ... is appropriate for his dealings with the vulgar" (1952, 16; see also 1964, 123). Nietzsche, like Strauss, saw another Plato behind the Socratic exterior. He felt that Plato was, in essence, an artist. He felt that the expulsion of the artists from Plato's "city in speech [*logos*]" reflected a Socratic message, not Plato's true views. Interestingly, in the *Laws*, the only dialogue in which Socrates does not appear, the necessity of poetry for good legislation is underlined. This question of the place of poetry in the *polis* arises in the context of the dichotomy between philosophy and politics. With Socrates, the gap between philosophy and the exigencies of the political community seems to be unbridgeable. Perhaps, however, Plato showed "how that gap could be bridged by means of his poetry in the *Laws*. ... The singular absence of Socrates from the *Laws* leads us to ask whether Plato indicated the way in which he thought the opposition between philosophy and politics could be overcome, by seeking gradually to alter the opinions of one's readers through writing rather than by directly challenging the opinions of the political elite" (Zuckert 156, 158; see also Strauss 1959, 153).

Political philosophy is an art of concealment. The political philosopher, like the tragic artist or tragic philosopher, for Nietzsche, must provide concealments and must limit the drive for knowledge in a certain way. Nietzsche's own essay, as we have seen, conceals its more profound arguments; perhaps it is for this reason that Cosima Wagner felt it showed "signs of clumsy abruptness." Nietzsche, like all great writers, demands that we read him carefully. To read Nietzsche's essay carefully, we need to view the literary work, like all of nature's works, as a series of necessary concealments — not as a cognitive reflection or revelation of a state of affairs. In this way, Nietzsche's essay is an example of the type of poetic, indirect discourse Plato used. Nietzsche, like Plato, is speaking to the few who take the time to read him carefully and are up to his challenges.

Nietzsche refers to this method of political writing and interpretation explicitly in "The Greek State." At the very end of that essay, Nietzsche refers to Plato's *Republic* and to the "perfect state" it describes. Nietzsche starts by praising the work; it is "something greater than is believed by his warmest-blooded admirers themselves, to say nothing of the superior smirk with which our 'historically'-educated reject such a fruit of antiquity." He then discusses the role of the artist in Plato's *Republic*: "The fact that [Plato] did not place genius, in its most general sense, at the head of his perfect state, but only the genius of wisdom and knowledge, excluding the inspired artist entirely from his state, was a rigid consequence of the Socratic judgement on art, which Plato, struggling against himself, adopted as his own. This external, almost accidental gap ought not to prevent us from recognizing, in the total concept of the Platonic state, the wonderfully grand hieroglyph of a profound *esoteric doctrine* [*Geheimlehre*] of the connection between state

and genius, eternally needing to be interpreted: in this preface we have said what we believe we have fathomed of this secret script [*Geheimschrift*]” (paragraph 14).⁵

Nietzsche claims, as does Strauss, that Plato’s doctrine is indirect; it is an “esoteric doctrine” [*Geheimlehre*]. For something to be esoteric means that something about it is hidden. Ontologically speaking, the truth (*a-letheia*) of being as a whole is “esoteric”; it is uncanny, tied to concealment (*lethe*). There is, of course, another way in which a truth can be “esoteric.” There are “political truths,” that is, local truths, opinions, or accounts (*logoi*). Here, an “esoteric” truth refers to a tradition of writing wherein the full meaning of the text is hidden from the majority of readers (for the protection of both the many and the few); it refers to the mediation of philosophical *logoi* to the exigencies of the community. Aristotle is the first to refer explicitly to this type of writing; he makes a distinction between esoteric discourses meant for the initiated few and those discourses suited for the many, “discussions outside the school [*exoterikoi logoi*] concerning the best life” (*Politics* 1323a 23-4). It was left, however, to Strauss to recover the meaning of that tradition for the modern world (see 1952; and 1989, 63-71). We could say, then, that Heidegger most fully unpacks the meaning of the Greek experience of the truth of being as a whole, as tied to concealment (*lethe*); while Strauss most fully unpacks the political and ethical implications of this esoteric experience of truth. Since Nietzsche thinks both the ontological and the political aspects of the Greek experience of truth together, the approaches to Nietzsche presented by Heidegger and Strauss are not necessarily incongruous.

What is the meaning of this esoteric-exoteric distinction for Nietzsche? Why was it necessary? Nietzsche does not describe what he understands by this tradition in “The Greek State”; however, he gives us certain clues in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “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. The difference between the exoteric and the esoteric, formerly known to philosophers.” It is a tradition that was known to philosophers in times and places where “one believed in an order of rank and *not* in equality and equal rights ... the exoteric approach sees things from below, the esoteric looks *down from* above.” This also means that from the perspective of a certain, strong few the suffering of our tragic existence seems small and insignificant: “There are heights of the soul from which even tragedy ceases to look tragic” (30). The esoteric-exoteric distinction was necessitated, for Nietzsche, by the distinction in nature between, on the one hand, the strong few who see our tragic existence and can laugh at it and, on the other hand, the many who are weak and who cannot comprehend the insights of the strong. This parallels the distinction between the giants and the dwarfs mentioned earlier — the former being citizens of the higher republic of geniuses and the latter citizens of a particular political community. In the interests of the safety of both parties, the giants must temper their speech when speaking to the dwarfs: “What serves the higher type of men as nourishment or delectation must almost be poison for a very different and inferior type. The virtues of the common man might perhaps signify vices and weaknesses in a philosopher” (BGE 30). The giant’s

tragic insights into the meaninglessness of the dwarfs' existence and social standards are deadly. The giants of the tragic age of the Greeks, for this reason, veiled their Dionysian truths — their political, *exoterikoi logoi* act as this Apollinian veil for their esoteric truths.

Nietzsche's reference to rank here points to a tension in Greek political life. On the one hand, Greek competition arose out of a natural impulse to bring citizens together on the same field and resulted in a certain political equality (*isonomia*). On the other hand, there is an individual impulse in competition which aims at achieving the distinction, honour (*timē*) and rank due to the "winner" of the competition (Cartledge 19). Interpreters of Nietzsche have usually assumed that his philosophy calls for the cultivation of the latter impulse. And the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* quoted above seems to support that view. And because of this assumption of "elitism," "Nietzsche's political thought is often dismissed and ignored because it fails to conform to liberal and democratic sentiments which have prevailed over the last two hundred years" (Ansell-Pearson 1994, 2). However, as we have seen, Nietzsche's early political thinking sees both the communitarian and individualistic elements of the competition as essential. For Nietzsche, these seemingly contradictory impulses, in fact, belong together; each is appropriate according to the perspective taken. That is, when we look at the problem according to the needs of the many and their preservation, when we look "from below," we find that nature's competitive impulse preserves that balance of equality (*isonomia*) — since none of the weak citizens are able to dominate the others. On the other hand,

when we view the question from the perspective of the superior individual, when we look “down from above,” we see that the individual’s domination of a particular time and place must be restricted, or else it could lead to the destructive hubris of a Miltiades. This restriction occurs through the individual’s ongoing struggle with other competitors within the tradition. The Greek experience assumes “that there are always *several* geniuses to incite each other to action, just as they keep each other within certain limits, too.” For Nietzsche, this is “the kernel of the Hellenic idea of competition: it loathes a monopoly of predominance and fears the dangers of this, it desires, as *protective measure* against genius – a second genius” (“HC” paragraph 8).

For Nietzsche, therefore, competition has a political significance – the forging of the unity and identity of a particular community – and a transpolitical significance – the forging of a “republic of geniuses” on the part of artists and philosophers across the expanse of the tradition. The philosopher exits the cave of opinion that manifests itself in a particular *polis*. In doing so, he immediately enters, of necessity, another cave: the cave of opinion that manifests itself in the republic of genius. He does not return to the particular *polis* to become a philosopher-ruler in the strict sense or to share his wisdom openly. Nietzsche saw that, even in that exalted tragic age, “[n]one of the great Greek philosophers was a leader of the people” (Nb 23.14; cf. UMc 8). Rather, the philosopher artfully veils his Dionysian wisdom. The centre of Nietzsche’s essay concerns the struggle of Plato and Homer. But it also points to Nietzsche’s struggle to become the philosopher as artist in the shadow of Plato. Nietzsche and Plato: the tragic philosophers

who call into question the limits of the community, the tragic artists who combine the divine Socrates and the beastly Thrasymachus.

TEXTUAL NOTE AND ABBREVIATIONS

Textual note:

For “The Greek State” and “Homer on Competition,” I have used the translation by Carol Diethe (in Nietzsche 1994, pages 176-86 and 187-94 respectively). The German text of the two essays can be found in volume I of *Nietzsche. Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1988), p 764-78 and 783-93. Because of the short length of the essays, and to facilitate cross-reference with the original and with other translations, I have referred to these essays by paragraph number. For Nietzsche’s other works, I have used the appropriate section numbering as a reference – except in the case of Nietzsche’s early unpublished notes (Nb), which I have referred to by notebook and page number.

Abbreviations:

Dates in parentheses refer to year of publication or composition.

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), in Nietzsche 1966, 179-435

BT = *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), in Nietzsche 1966, 3-144

EH = *Ecce Homo* (1888), in Nietzsche 1966, 657-791

D = *Daybreak* (1881), Nietzsche 1982

GM = *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche 1994

GS = *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche ...

“GSt” = “The Greek State” (1871)

“GW” = “The Greek Woman” (1871), in Nietzsche 1964, 21-6

“HC” = “Homer on Competition” (1872)

HH = *Human, All too Human* (1878), Nietzsche 1986

Nb = *Unpublished Writings* (1872-74), Nietzsche 1995

PP = *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* (Course given 1872, 1873 and 1876), Nietzsche 2001

PTG = *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873), Nietzsche 1962

TI = *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), in Nietzsche 1954, 463-563

TZ = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5), in Nietzsche 1954, 103-439

UMa = *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer* (1873), in Nietzsche 1983, 3-55

UMb = *Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874), in Nietzsche 1983, 59-123

UMc = *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), in Nietzsche 1983, 127-94

WTP = *The Will to Power* (1883-88), Nietzsche 1967

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NOTES

¹ On the interpretation of the Greek experience of truth to which the word *alētheia* points, see Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962a, sect. 44); "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" (1962b); "On the Essence of Truth" (in 1977, p 114-41); and *Parmenides* (1992).

² On Homer as exemplifying the Apollinian impulse, see BT 2 and 4.

³ On this conception of the "heterogeneity of the whole," see Strauss: "It also remains true that human wisdom is knowledge of ignorance: there is no knowledge of the whole but only knowledge of parts, hence only partial knowledge of parts, hence no unqualified transcending, even by the wisest man as such, of the sphere of opinion. This Socratic or Platonic conclusion differs radically from a typically modern conclusion according to which the unavailability of knowledge of the whole demands that the question regarding the whole be abandoned and replaced by questions of another kind, for instance by the questions characteristic of modern natural and social science" (1964, 20-1). As noted above, and as opposed to Strauss here, Nietzsche asserts in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Socrates' optimism meant that he did not recognize the Dionysian heterogeneity of the whole.

⁴ In the title of this section I am referring to Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence as one of an agon between the poet and his poetic precursors in the tradition. I think it will be clear from what follows that this notion of poetic influence can perhaps be first seen, in its rough outline, in Nietzsche's essay. Bloom, in fact, acknowledges his debt to Nietzsche; however, he refers to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, not "Homer on Competition."

⁵ I have slightly altered the Diethel translation here: substituting "esoteric doctrine" (Mügge's translation [Nietzsche 1964]) for "secret study" (Diethel's translation).

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