The Birth & Re-Birth Of Philosophy Out Of The Spirit Of Poetry:

An Analysis Of The Poetic & Parabolic Styles Of Plato & Friedrich Nietzsche

In the light of the silent stars that shine on the struggling sea,

In the weary cry of the wind and the whisper of flower and tree,

Under the breath of laughter, deep in the tide of tears,

I hear the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of Years...

One with the flower of a day, one with the withered moon,

One with the granite mountains that melt into the noon,

One with the dream that triumphs beyond the light of the spheres,

We come from the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of Years.

Alfred Noyes, from *The Loom of Years*

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CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations:

Birth – The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings, Ronald Speirs (trans.), (London: Cambridge University Press) 1999

GS - The Gay Science with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs, Walter Kaufmann (trans.), (New York: Vintage Books) 1974

Human - Human, All Too Human, Marion Faber (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd.) 2004

LL - Various authors, *Literature And Life: Addresses To The English Association,* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd.) 1948

Letters - Selected Letters Of Friedrich Nietzsche, Christopher Middleton (ed.), (Indiana, U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing) 1996

OED - Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Judy Pearsall (ed.), (London: Oxford University Press) 2002

OL - The Outline Of Literature, Vol. I & II, John Drinkwater (ed.), (London: George Newnes Limited) [Date of publication not given]

Twilight - Twilight Of The Idols & The Anti-Christ, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd.) 1972

Will - The Will To Power, Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), (New York: Vintage Books) 1968

Zara. - Thus Spoke Zarathustra, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd.) 2003

INTRODUCTION

Whilst human kind
Throughout the lands lay miserably crushed
Before all eyes beneath Religion - who
Would show her head along the region skies,
Glowering on mortals with her hideous face -
A Greek it was who first opposing dared
Raise mortal eyes that terror to withstand,
Whom nor the fame of Gods nor lightning's stroke
Nor threatening thunder of the ominous sky
Abashed; but rather chafed to angry zest
His dauntless heart to be the first to rend
The crossbars at the gates of Nature old.
And thus his will and hardy wisdom won;
And forward thus he fared afar, beyond
The flaming ramparts of the world, until
He wandered the unmeasurable All.

Lucretius, from *Concerning The Nature of Things*

> "Let us suppose that we are rather short-sighted men and are set to read some small letters at a distance; one of us discovers the same letters elsewhere on a larger scale and larger surface: won't it be a godsend to us to be able to read the larger letters first and then compare them with the smaller, to see if they are the same?"[1]

The worlds of philosophy and poetry are intrinsically bound together. Plato concedes that "there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry." (Plato, *Republic.*, p.351) This paper proposes an alternate perspective upon the old altercation in an attempt to counter the antiquarian contretemps and resolve both sides of this war of words towards a common purpose in the pursuit of knowledge. Deviating slightly from the usual focus of analytical philosophy, this paper will be predominantly concerned with the *style* in which Plato and Nietzsche present the central tenets of their philosophies. As Schopenhauer explains, "Style is the physiognomy of the mind, and a safer index to character than the face."[2] Thus, by considering the style in which these two great thinkers present their philosophies, valuable insight may be gleaned into their minds, characters and conceptions.

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[1] (Plato, *The Republic,* Desmond Lee (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003) p.55

[2] Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The Art of Literature,* T. Bailey Saunders (trans.), (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004) p.11

We shall begin with an examination of the primitive origins of poetry which highlight the intimate relationship between poetry and human cultural and emotional history. This will be followed by an analysis of the Ancient Greek attitude to poetry as both entertainment and the infrastructure of education. We will continue by highlighting a *lack* within the Greek poetic education and an interpretation of the Platonic role of philosophy in *The Republic* as a specialised form of literary criticism relating specifically to the praxis of Greek life. After a dissection of the unique style of *The Republic,* particularly the parabolic motion of its characters, we shall continue by reviewing the Platonic antithesis presented by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* his philosophical *tours de force,* which is also parabolic in style. This paper concludes that Nietzsche deliberately presents a parabolic inversion of Platonic philosophy, including its latter day Christian overtones and associations, in order to *practically* return the spirit of mankind to a condition akin to that of Homeric Greece. Considering the ramifications of the old dispute between philosophy and poetry and the antithesis between Plato and Nietzsche, we shall proceed by the Platonic method of discussing each part in its turn so that we may gain perspective upon any relationship that there may be. As an aid we shall invoke Nietzschean scrutiny and italicisation. Each chapter begins with a song borrowed from the poets to premeditate and illustrate the argument. Thus, "if we proceed by mutual agreement, as we have done so far, we can ourselves be both counsel and jury." (Plato, *Republic*, p.30)

CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGINS OF POETRY AND LITERATURE

With a measure of light and a measure of shade,
The world of old by the Word was made; (...)
O never while shadow and light are blended
Shall the world's Word-Quest or its woe be ended[.]

A. E. Waite, from *The Morality of the Lost Word*

> "The history of literature really begins long before men learned to write. Dancing was the earliest of the arts. Man danced for joy round his primitive camp fire after the defeat and slaughter of his enemy. He yelled and shouted as he danced, and gradually the yells and shouts became coherent and caught the measure of the dance, and thus the first war song was sung. As the idea of God developed, prayers were framed. The songs and the prayers became traditional and were repeated from one generation to another, each generation adding something of its own."[3]

This quotation from, *The Outline of Literature,* summarises a plausible theory concerning the primitive origins of versified communication. These traditional "songs and... prayers" were passed down orally from generation to generation and became the annals of human history and legend. They were remembered and recited at appropriate occasions by the first poets. These traditional "songs and... prayers" became the first poems.

The tribal origins of poetry intrinsically link this mode of communication with human cultural history. The occasions which catalysed man dancing "for joy round his primitive camp fire" are those great occasions which make up the history of a culture. Presumably, new songs were often added to the traditional ones in order to mark new occasions of joy. It is also safe to assume that songs were added to mark occasions of sorrow as well. So, poetry originates from the rhythmically versified account of the great joys and sorrows of human culture - the song of human history. But why was it sung? Why not spoken in a similar style to the ordinary speech patterns which comprise the greater part of man's linguistic communication? Might versified communication have some advantage over more traditional styles of storytelling? After all, storytelling is another style of recounting the great events of history and passing knowledge across the generations. There are many possible answers to the latter question. Nietzsche suggests, "men remember a verse much better than ordinary speech."[4] This is an accurate observation. The rhythm in which a particular line of verse is

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[3] *The Outline Of Literature, Vol. I,* John Drinkwater (ed.), (London: George Newnes Limited) p.3

[4] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs,* Walter Kaufmann (trans.), (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) p.138

crafted will be similar in some way to the line which follows. If a rhyme scheme is involved then this also acts as an aid to human memory. Repetition of certain memorable images and phrases also performs this function, such as Homer's repetition of the phrase, "Dawn appeared, fresh and rosy fingered."[5] Stylistic memory aids such as these are necessary if the history of humanity is to be accurately preserved in an era before the invention of writing. Versified communication is more useful as a medium for the trans-generational communication of knowledge in a pre-literate culture than any other style of speech. This helps to answer the question that Nietzsche poses in *The Gay Science:*

> "If we assumed that utility had always been venerated as the supreme deity, how could we possibly account for poetry?" (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.138)

Nietzsche, of course, admits that "in this case I side with the utilitarians." (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.138) Poetry was extremely significant in pre-literate cultures. Utility was certainly one reason for this. It was the most useful method of passing historical knowledge from one generation to the next. However, poetry retained its revered status even *after* it was usurped in this regard by the invention of writing.

> "As man slowly grew more civilized, he was compelled to invent some method of writing by three urgent necessities. There were certain things that it was dangerous to forget... It was often necessary to communicate with persons who were some distance away... and it was necessary to protect one's property by marking... So man taught himself to write, and having learned to write purely for utilitarian reasons, he used this new method for preserving his war songs and prayers." (*OL,* Vol.1, p.3)

As literature was born from necessity in the written style in which we think of it today it should, by all rights, have made poetry obsolete. Writing satisfied the same needs of human culture from which poetry had developed and was a much more reliable method of recording and bequeathing historical knowledge. It served as an extremely effective counterbalance to the fallibility of individual and collective human memory. A written account can be checked again at the source by re-reading it. So why did man continue to put effort into an obsolete, unnatural, 'poetic' style of communication?

> "In order to predict the behavior of ordinary men, we must assume that they always expend the least possible amount of intellect to free themselves from a disagreeable situation."[6]

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[5] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Emile Victor Rieu & D. Christopher H. Rieu (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003) p.55

[6] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Human, All Too Human,* Marion Faber (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2004) p.243

However profoundly this statement may describe other aspects of human development, it is not true in regard to poetry. The problems of bequeathing historical knowledge to the next generation - man's "disagreeable situation" - had been resolved by the development of writing. Man would surely have expended "the least possible amount of intellect" by writing his history in prose, the style of written communication which best reflects his style of spoken communication, rather than the unnatural rhythms and repetitions of verse. Why did poetry survive? Indeed, why did it retain its significance as one of the most revered styles of communication and one of mankind's proudest achievements? This question is harder to answer. The solution, however, may be as simple as observing that man enjoys the rhythm, rhyme, and repetitions of poetry in a way similar to primitive man enjoyed the rhythmical excitement as he "danced for joy round his primitive camp fire." It may even be simpler. At its origins poetry was connected to man's *emotions*. Those great occasions which were recorded in "songs and... prayers" were occasions of *joy or sorrow,* as well as triumph or defeat. The poetical account of such events was crafted to invoke not just to the *memory* of the event but also the *emotion* man felt as a consequence. Poetry, therefore, is not simply a record of the events of human history, but also an account of the emotional reaction to those events. For the most part, this helps to explain why 'good' literature should engage with its audience both intellectually *and* emotionally.

Man's development was, from this stage onwards, intrinsically bound up with poetry. This phenomena of human evolution served to preserve man's knowledge of himself both historically and emotionally. Poetry is the *educational* song of man's most beautiful and wretched moments.

> *"Come here, thou worthy of a world of praise,*
> *That dost so high the Grecian glory raise,*
> *Ulysses! stay thy ship, and that song hear*
> *That none passed ever but it bent his ear,*
> *But left him ravish'd, and instructed more*
> *By us, than any ever heard before.*
> *For we know all things whatsoever were (...)*
> *And whatsoever all the earth can show*
> *T'inform a knowledge of desert, we know.*

(Homer, *Odyssey, BK 12,* from *the Siren's song*)

CHAPTER TWO

GREEK LIFE & THE IMPORTANCE OF POETRY

When with my throngs of men and women I come
To thriving cities, I am sought by prayers,
And thousands follow me that they may ask
Where lies advantage and the better way.

Empédoclês, from *The Divine Philosopher*

European literary history begins with the works of Homer and the poetry of Ancient Greece.

> "In a survey of Greek poetry, epic, lyric, and dramatic, we [see], in each successive phase, it was the voice of Greek life. The very word 'literature' is fraught with associations which tend to obscure this fact. Writing was, indeed, the instrument by which the poems were preserved and transmitted... But it belonged to the very essence of all great poetry that it appealed to hearers rather than readers. [7]

Writing did not develop as a universal faculty in man. There were probably very few members of early communities that could, in fact, write or read. Even though writing was a valuable tool for preserving knowledge, it was useless if those who could not read wished to enjoy poetry - the rhythmical experience of preserved knowledge - without the aid of an interpreter. However, the illiterate public could definitely *hear* this knowledge, provided that such an interpreter - a poet - was present to read or to recite from memory the various emotional and cataclysmic events of man's history.

> The Greeks of the classical age were eager listeners and talkers: they delighted in lively conversation and subtle discussion, but they were not great students of books." (Jeb, p.252)

As Nietzsche agrees, "The Greeks (or at least the Athenians) liked to hear people speak well," and they were often wary of the value of written communication.(Nietzsche, *GS*, p.134) Writing was at once removed from the kinetic form of communication encountered during "lively conversation and subtle discussion." It was at once removed from reflecting the motion of *life*, a quality which the Greeks felt that the communication of knowledge should both possess and engender. The Greek opinion of written communication is articulately voiced by the character of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus:*

[7] Jebb, R. C., *The Growth And Influence of Classical Greek Poetry,* (London: MacMillian and Co.) 1893) p.252-253

> "I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence."[8]

As Plato explains, writing may possess "the attitude of life," however, it does not engender inquiry into the validity of the knowledge that it communicates and instead maintains "a solemn silence" when questioned. This cautious attitude to writing goes some way towards explaining Plato's stylistic choice in writing philosophical dialogues, a style of writing which closely reflects the intellectual repartee of spoken communication.

> "[W]e are to say that if their compositions are based on knowledge of the truth, and they can defend or prove them, when they are put to the test, by spoken arguments, which leave their writings in poor comparison of them, then they are not only poets, orators, legislators, but worthy of a higher name... lovers of wisdom or philosophers is their modest and befitting title." (Plato, *Phaedrus*, p.91)

Any spectacle of public speaking will inevitably elicit a response from the public in regard to the speaker. There would conceivably be much discussion concerned with questions such as whether or not the speaker spoke well; whether or not the speech was relevant to the speaker's intentions; what the meaning and intentions of the speech might be; and many other questions. The same is true of the public exhibition of speech in a specifically poetic style. The recitation of poetry would thus facilitate both the transmission and analysis of the preserved knowledge of human history in a style that was, at the same time, accessible to the public and enjoyable. How accessible, enjoyable, or knowledgable any particular instance of poetic communication was, however, would be decided by public scrutiny of the individual style of a particular poet or poem. As far as the Greeks were concerned:

> "A style might be novel and bold in any degree that the poet's faculty could reach; but at least it was required to have in it the pulse of life; it would be repugnant to his audience if they perceived the artificial outcome of mechanical formulas, a style that sought to impress or surprise by mere tricks of phrase, having no vital relation to his thought." (Jeb, p.254)

But the need for the poet's style to possess "the pulse of life" and a "vital relation to his thought" has another aspect. The style must also possess a "vital relation" to the thought of the poet's audience and their "pulse of life". When these aspects are well developed the poet's style will be regarded as sincere and reflective of the life and mind of both artist and audience.

> "When the work of the composer failed to be vital and sincere, this, the unpardonable fault, was described by the expressive word *ψυχρός*, *frigid.* The composition was then no longer a living thing, which spoke to the hearers, and elicited a response. It was stricken with the chill of death." (Jeb, pp.254-255)

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[8]Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus,* Benjamin Jowett (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993) p.88

Thus, it was as necessary for the poet to be in tune with the life of his audience as it was for them to relate to the vitality of the poem.

> "[T]he Greek poetry of the great age was not merely inspired by life; it was regulated by life; the instinct of the hearers was a restraint operating upon the poet, a safeguard against affectation or unreality." (Jeb, p.255)

The public reception of a poem, or the style of a particular poet, was a communal act of early literary criticism. Of course, apart from style, there was also the poetic *content* to consider. In this way, poetry catalysed public discussion of poetically structured concepts and images which reflected historical events in "vital relation" to the life and society of the poet and their audience. This phenomenon greatly served to facilitate the communication and development of human knowledge relating to the emotional events of life and history.

> In the case of people with the unique gifts of the Greek race,- their obedience to reason, and their instinct for beauty,- the critical value of their collective impressions was exceptionally high. Their poets were subject to a test which, while leaving them the largest freedom, also warned them, with unfailing accuracy, when they were in danger of going wrong." (Jeb, p.256)

Such an intellectual "test" constituted a major stage in the development of what we now refer to as literary criticism. It further strengthened the relationship between literature and the life and knowledge of man. The development of literary criticism allowed audiences not only to experience poetry, but to *learn* from it as well through analysis of that "vital relation" between the poem's style, historical content and the current events of their lives.

> "And what about life? Is not that a function of mind?" (Plato, *Republic*, p.39)

The poetic style constitutes easily remembered instances of the enjoyable communication of knowledge. This, in turn, facilitates the discussion and analysis of such knowledge, i.e., the images, concepts, and the emotional and historical events of the poem in relation to the current events of life. All this makes poetry extremely well suited for the purposes of *education*. This attitude was felt to be true throughout Antiquity and was not a view that was developed exclusively by the Greeks.

> "Plutarch gives still more forcible expression to the same sentiment: poetry, he says, is a kind of twilight,- a soft light in which truth is tempered with fiction,- to which the young are introduced in order that their eyes may be gradually prepared for the full sunshine of philosophy." (Jeb, p.257)

CHAPTER THREE

PHILOSOPHY CONCEIVED AS LITERARY CRITICISM IN PRAXIS

I travelled thro' a land of men,
A land of men and women too;
And heard and saw such dreadful things
As cold earth-wanderers never knew.

William Blake, from *The Mental Traveller*

"But is not philosophy the same thing as the love of knowledge?" (Plato, *Republic*, p.65)

Most philosophers would agree with Plato's statement. Philosophy is, in a very general sense, "love of knowledge." Knowledge, however, exists in many forms. Two major forms of knowledge which could be identified are *practical knowledge*, the knowledge which teaches an individual not to stick their hand in a fire twice, and *theoretical knowledge*, the kind of knowledge that teaches an individual not to stick their hand in a fire at all. To say that the former derives directly from experience and the latter does not is not true. All the phenomena of man's life are, in some sense, forms of experience. However, it could easily be argued that theoretical knowledge derives from practical knowledge in one of two ways. Firstly, mediated by language, the man who practically learnt not to stick his hand in the fire twice could impart this knowledge to another as theory. Secondly, the man who did not learn practically about the fire, or have theoretical knowledge concerning fire communicated to him by another, may have practically learnt not to touch hot things in another way. For example, he may have burnt his feet walking across desert sands on a scorching day. Mediated by his reason and his sense of self preservation, this man may deduce theoretical knowledge concerning the fire from his practical knowledge concerning the sand. Since both the sand and the fire were 'hot' and he burnt himself by touching the sand, he reasons that if he touches the fire it will also burn him, ergo, he should not stick his hand in the fire. This latter process of theoretical *reasoning* based on the practical knowledge already gained in a *different* but *similar* regard is the much prized faculty which allows man to derive more knowledge, or to apply his current knowledge to more numerous situations, than would ordinarily be possible with only the first two forms of knowledge acquisition at his disposal. This faculty is best titled *reason.* However, all three forms of knowledge acquisition, or *learning,* are without importance if they do not relate back to practice in some way. If the

man does not learn to resist sticking his hand in the fire then his knowledge, practical or theoretical, is useless.

> "And so a philosopher's passion is for wisdom of every kind without distinction?"(Plato, *Republic*, p.197)

It is not so easy to find an answer to this question. One is unlikely to survive very long if one solely seeks practical knowledge in the sense described above. For example, by the time one has practically learned not to eat large quantities of deadly nightshade it is too late for the knowledge gained to be of very much use to the individual in question. But, on the other hand, it would be almost impossible to reason theoretically from one's practical knowledge of other herbs and berries to the conclusion that one should not consume large quantities of deadly nightshade. The median between these two extremes is the communication of practical knowledge in a theoretical form which is mediated by language, as mentioned above. This, sadly, is of little use to the man who first ate large amounts of deadly nightshade. His wife, however, may have observed his demise and communicated to her children the theoretical knowledge that they should not eat deadly nightshade. The children then put this theoretical knowledge into practice towards the greater preservation of themselves and mankind in general. So, once again, the issue at hand is one of *education*. As Socrates explains, "it will all be quite easy, provided we take care of the... "sufficient condition"... The system of education and upbringing." (Plato, *Republic*, pp.124-125 - ?)

The previous chapter explained how poetry is amongst the forms of communication best suited to education. Tying this conclusion in with the remarks concerning knowledge above, it is clear to see that poetry is generally of the form of knowledge which is derived from practice, mediated by language, and imparted from one person to another. To extend the analogy further, human history is the man who ate large quantities of deadly nightshade, the poet is his wife, and his audience are her children. There is a possibility that the wife, however, may have seen her husband eat large quantities of several things that day. Or, as her husband experienced strange visions and convulsions shortly after eating the deadly nightshade, she might have interpreted his death as a punishment from the gods. No mother would deliberately mislead her children, but her knowledge of the events in question may very well be inaccurate. This analogy is also true in regard to poets and the knowledge that they impart which facilitates the education of their audience. A poetical education might very easily be detrimental as opposed to beneficial.

> "Then it seems that our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest. We shall persuade mothers and nurses to tell our chosen stories to their children, and by means of them to mould their minds and characters which are more important than their bodies. The greater part of the stories current today we shall have to reject." (Plato, *Republic*, p.69)

Plato's *Republic* is widely regarded as the keystone in the foundation of Western philosophy. Socrates, the character representing Plato's ideal philosopher, begins outlining his conception of the ideal state, which is also a macrocosmic illustration of the ideal individual, by engaging in what would be unmistakable regarded in today's world as an occurrence of literary criticism focused specifically upon poetry. Poetry, the best medium for the preservation and communication of human knowledge, is most definitely not perfect. The children *must* question the validity of the knowledge imparted by their mother in relation to their father's death and the events, or practice, of their own lives. This questioning of validity constitutes and reveals an intrinsic aspect of the "vital relation" between man and poetry. Only in tandem with the inquiring, critical methods of philosophy can theoretical, literary knowledge work practically towards the general benefit and the greater survival of mankind.

> "Unlike any other discipline, literary criticism arose in hostility to the object of its study. It has a precise moment of origin in Plato's arguments towards the banishment of the poets from the ideal city... To comprehend the urgency of the *Republic's* critique, though, we have to remind ourselves that before Plato there were no firm distinctions between myth and truth, imaginative literature and rational thought, ethics and literature. Within primarily oral cultures, literature was not an aspect of cultural knowledge but its repository."[9]

The practical value of the knowledge imparted by poetry to the Greeks, who based their system of education around it for the reasons outlined above, cannot be underestimated. Poetry, once derived from the events of life, returned to influence the lives of those who experienced it. Individuals might emulate the great heroes of history, for example. Or they might hear of a practice which has unfortunate consequences and desist from engaging in that practice. Thus, Plato is not mistaken in underlining the vital importance of poetic knowledge to man, both individually and generally, by writing that, "the music and literature of a country cannot be altered without major political and social changes." (Plato, *Republic*, p.125) Or, as Shelly puts it, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[10]

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[9] Burke, Seán, *The Ethics Of Writing: Authorship And Legacy In Plato And Nietzsche,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) p.25

[10] Shelly, Percy Bysshe, in *Romanticism: An Anthology,* Duncan Wu (ed.), (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) p.1199

Literature, as the imperfect "repository" of knowledge which forms the basis of man's education, is the primary point of focus for utopian Platonic philosophy. After all, if one loves a thing then one wishes only the best for it and because of it, and the philosopher loves knowledge. It is therefore true to say that; "literature, as a document of human experience, is rich in philosophical implication."[11]

On the other hand, might literature be important to philosophy in a sense other than its role as the imperfect record of man's practical, emotional and historical knowledge? Cooksey argues that:

> "Literature also provides philosophy a means of expressing things where language and logic are unable to tread, to *say* what is too deep for words. It is this evocative aspect of literature that makes many philosophers most uncomfortable, since it is here that language seems to touch what we might call the irrational or the mystical. For this very reason, however, it offers philosophy a route to the deepest aspects of our being and the human condition." (Cooksey, p.5)

Literature, as a descriptive phenomenon, is allowed a certain leeway in the accuracy of its descriptions. This liberal aspect of literary description is often referred to as 'poetic license'. In a sense, this aspect of literature occurs when the wife (as in the above analogy) misleads her children, perhaps by adding the description 'evil' to the nightshade instead of more accurately describing it as 'deadly'. However, 'poetic license' is both a curse and a boon for the communication of knowledge. It allows the human mind to experience aspects of knowledge which are not easily communicated. It does so by employing analogy, an illustrative comparison between two *different* but *similar* things, for the purpose of explanation or clarification. As Cooksey points out, "Even Socrates feels compelled to tell stories or parables in order to point his would-be disciples to enlightenment." (Cooksey, p.6) Employing the device of analogy, Socrates is partaking of the poetic ability of literature to *reasonably* guide lovers of knowledge towards more accurate knowledge and, consequently, more sound practice. Yet, the poetical account of knowledge is very often misleading. The issue for philosophy, then, is one of reasoning out when to follow poetic knowledge and when to discount it. As Nietzsche points out, poetry wielded by philosophy could well be described as a 'double-edged sword'.

[11] Cooksey, Thomas L., *Masterpieces of Philosophical Literature,* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006) p.1

> “Isn’t it rather amusing that to this day the most serious philosophers, however strict they may be in questions of certainty, still call on what poets have said in order to lend their ideas force and credibility?... For as Homer says: “Many lies tell the poets.”” (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.140)

Poetry, as the often inaccurate repository of man’s theoretical knowledge which is derived from his practical, emotional and historical experiences, *requires* philosophical inquiry into its validity *before* it may be allowed to feed back into practice towards the general benefit of mankind. Philosophy must serve to draw beneficial knowledge about life from its ambivalent poetical repository. The philosophical disposition is, at least in part, one of literary criticism in *praxis.* The main concern for those who love knowledge and wish to communicate it towards the general benefit of mankind is thus, “Does practice ever square with theory?” (Plato, *Republic*, p.191)

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *NEED* FOR PLATO & THE *DECADENCE* OF HIS STYLE

Life brings our all: long Time leaves nought abiding –
Name, form, or nature, good or evil tiding.

Plato, *Time the Changer*

> "But do you think, Glaucon, that if Homer had really been able to bring men the benefits of education, instead of merely representing it, he would not have had many enthusiastic followers and admirers?... Would the contemporaries of Homer and Heisod have let them continue as wandering minstrels, if they had really been able to make them better men?... We may assume, then, that all the poets from Homer downwards have no grasp of truth but merely produce superficial likeness of any subject they treat, including human excellence." (Plato, *Republic*, p.342)

When Cooksey spoke earlier of Socrates' "stories or parables" pointing his followers towards "enlightenment," he was, of course, speaking of "the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition[.]" (Plato, *Republic*, p.241) This "enlightenment" of the "human condition" is not simply the major goal of Socratic and Platonic philosophy, but of philosophy and the transmission of knowledge in general. The "human condition" is a universal in the philosophical sense. It is applicable to all instances of humanity be they individual or collective. The "human condition" changes, however, as the conditions in which man lives perpetually change around him or man changes within them. The "human condition" is in no way fixed and constant, just as man himself is in no way fixed and constant but continually evolving. As Nietzsche points out:

> "everything the philosopher asserts about man is basically no more than a statement about man within a *very limited* time span... They will not understand that man has evolved, that the faculty of knowledge has also evolved... everything has evolved; there are *no eternal facts,* nor are there any absolute truths." (Nietzsche, *Human*, pp.14-15)

What was the condition of humanity in the era of Socrates and Plato? What were the contemporary problems of the "human condition" which so concerned these two great thinkers?

> "In Plato's time the old Greek devotion to the state, to service for the commonweal, had degenerated into self-seeking. Rulers had grown corrupt. Politicians thought only of the "spoils." And with corruption had come ignorance. The leaders of the people were blind and selfish. The first essential was that the rulers should be educated, properly prepared for their positions." (*OL,* Vol. 1, p.138)

Plato's intentions were to alleviate the corruption and "self-seeking" which was prevalent in Greece during his lifetime. Nietzsche, however, describes the conditions of pre-Platonic Greek life in somewhat different, but essentially similar, terms:

> "I saw their strongest instinct, the will to power, I saw them trembling at the intractable force of this drive – I saw all their institutions evolve out of protective measures designed for mutual security against the *explosive material* within them."[12]

In Nietzschean terms there was a *need* for such "protective measures." As Nietzsche explains in his work *Human, All Too Human*:

> "Need forces us to do the work whose product will quiet the need; we are habituated to work by the ever-new awakening of needs." (Nietzsche, *Human*, p.254)

In pre-Platonic Greece there was a need for "protective measures" in order to counteract the corrupt "self-interest" which stemmed from and engendered "ignorance" and augmented the suffering of society and the deterioration of the "human condition". The Platonic solution to this need was the system of education outlined above - literature in tandem with critical philosophy - the ideal marriage of poetical theory and knowledgable practice. "For this world came into being from a mixture and combination of necessity and intelligence."[13] Nietzsche sums up the Greek necessity which was satisfied by Platonic intelligence in a sentence. "The Socratic virtues were preached *because* the Greeks had lost them[.]" (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.108)

But how was Plato to satisfy this need for reliable education? His answer was to idealise the philosophical method of his mentor, Socrates, and to immortalise this conception of the ideal philosopher in writing.

> "We often try to enter the spirit of an author; can an author enter ours?... Now, the kind of author we are discussing is an artist in words, a specialist in thoughts and emotions. After the practice of a lifetime, he has learnt how to give point and force to his feelings. He need not be a poet... Perhaps Plato is the best [example] of all. His influence depends on his power to call up a kindred mood in your mind. You think you are following an argument or an allegory. In reality you are learning to walk as he does – or rather, to fly."[14]

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[12] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Twilight Of The Idols & The Anti-Christ,* R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972) p.107

[13] Plato, *Timaeus,* H. D. P. Lee (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969) p.65

[14] Various authors, *Literature And Life: Addresses To The English Association,* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1948) pp.112-113

As has already been discussed, this "power to call up a kindred mood" in the mind of the audience or reader is the phenomena which, historically, is primarily associated with poetry and literature. Plato, in his philosophical "stories and parables" is seeking to counteract the potentially corrupting influence of a literary education by reference not simply to literature itself, but to literary and poetic devices as well.

> "Everyone knows that Plato attacked poets and poetry, and excluded poets from his ideal republic. It is not so generally known that he attacked them only for particular reasons and in particular contexts. He himself wrote poetry, and wrote very poetically in his prose works; and although there were qualities in much existing poetry of which he did not approve, it is clear from many remarks in the dialogues that, generally speaking, he found much pleasure in poetry... He banishes literature and the arts because they have no political utility, and may indeed exert an adverse influence on the particular virtues that must be fostered for the proper maintenance of his ideal commonwealth. He banishes the poets, but before doing so, he anoints them with myrrh and crowns them with garlands. He must banish them on political grounds, but honours them by other standards."[15]

As Emerson points out in *Representative Men,* "Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato... "He is intellectual in his aim; and therefore, in expression, literary."[16]

The style adopted by Plato in order to satisfy the educational need of his time is at once both literary and philosophical. His is an attempt to engender a method of criticising literature which is learnt primarily from philosophising upon and discussing his own written works and then applying the same philosophical methods to poetry and literature, and then to knowledge itself and the practice of life in a very general sense. To achieve this, Plato marries philosophical inquiry with poetical analogy, drawing upon poetic analogy where necessary in order to facilitate discussion and the "enlightenment" of the "human condition" of his era.

> "And so, my dear Glaucon, his tale was preserved from perishing, and, if we remember it, may well preserve us in turn[.]" (Plato, *Republic*, p.368)

The change in the "human condition" catalysed by Plato's poetic, philosophical style of literature was profound, and was instigated in order to counterbalance the social, moral and intellectual decline of Greek society. As has already been noted, however, Nietzsche viewed the Greek "human condition" in a contrary way to Plato - as "will to power" and "the

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[15] T. S. Dorsch (trans.), *Classical Literary Criticism,* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979) p.10

[16] Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures,* (Leipzig: Philips, Sampson, 1856) pp.28 & 55

explosive material within them." Nietzsche describes Plato and Platonic philosophy in the following way:

> "It seems to me that Plato mixes together all forms of style; he is therewith in the matter of style a *first décadent*[.]" (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.106)

Plato was intent upon engaging with poetry, as the Greek basis for education, in a philosophical way which related theory back to practice and he employed poetic methods in order to satisfy this intention. However, it would perhaps be an unfair stretch of the imagination to describe the Platonic dialogues as poetry, or describe Plato as a poet. As Emerson explains:

> "Every man who would do anything well, must come to it from a higher ground. A philosopher must be more than a philosopher. Plato is clothed with the powers of a poet, stands upon the highest place of the poet, and (though I doubt he wanted the decisive gift of lyric expression), mainly is not a poet because he chose to use the poetic gift to an ulterior purpose. (Emerson, p.30)

If it was claimed, however, that Plato did *not* employ poetic devices in communicating his philosophy, then the character of Socrates would quizzically chide:

> "But haven't we been painting a word-picture... In the same way the poet can use words and phrases as a medium to paint a picture of any craftsman[.]"? (Plato, *Republic,* pp. 190 & 342)

But then there is another important artistic issue that concerns the philosopher just as much as it should concern the poet and which "is always the most serious difficulty in such matters, how to find a suitable story on which to base what one wants to say." (Plato, *Timaeus*, p.38)

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POETIC PLATONIC PARABLE

He should be praised for climbing; yet
The other man comes always from a height
And lives where praise can never get –
Beyond your sight.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Higher Men*

> "Plato's *Republic* begins with one of the most famous opening lines in Western philosophy. "*Katébēn khthès eis Peiraia meta Glaukōnos* (I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon)" (327a). The first word, *Katébēn,* the verb "went down," marks the structure of the plot, but also a series of motifs that point to the central themes... The narrative is about going down on a number of levels, and correspondingly going up. Socrates *goes down* to the Piraeus in the same sense that one *goes down* town. At the same time, the movement from Athens to the Piraeus, the port that served Athens, involved a process of literally going down a hill to sea level... The narrative seems to commence near the end of the day, with the sun's *going down.* The conversation seems to run through the course of the night, ending finally as the sun *comes up*, and Socrates finally *going up* from the Piraeus back to Athens. The paired motifs of *going down* and *going up* link various themes." (Cooksey, pp.11-12)

As previously discussed, Plato's intentions in committing his poetically orientated, philosophically based method of literary and heuristic criticism to writing was so as to satisfy the Greek need for education. This education reconnected the theoretical knowledge found in the poetic repository of human experience with everyday practice in the life of the individual within society. When Plato's Socrates finally opens his description of the ideal society, he does so by quoting a poem written in tribute to Plato's brothers. Socrates then begins to consider the matter of *"justice (or right conduct or morality) in the individual*." (Plato, *Republic*, p.53) He does so by analogy, likening 'man' the microcosm, i.e., the individual, to 'man' the macrocosm, i.e., the collective society or ' the state'.

The recurrent motif of '*going down"* and "*going up,"* highlights several important Platonic themes within the *Republic.* As already mentioned, Plato employs the poetic motif of comparison by analogy in order to draw the attention of his pupils to various aspects of knowledge which are otherwise very hard to communicate. The Greek word for this method of comparing concepts through juxtaposition is *parabolē,* which possesses strong mathematical, as well as poetical, connotations:

> **parabola:** a symmetrical open plane curve... from Greek *parabolē* 'placing side by side, application'.[17]

Further, the form of a parabola is essentially similar to the movements of Socrates in the *Republic.* A parabolic motion will either move *up and then down,* or it will move *down and then up.* Thus, Plato derives the style of his written philosophy from an amalgamation of both poetic *and* mathematical methods of illustration. Incorporating a dialogic form which reflects the living style of oral communication and discussion, Plato structures his "stories and... parables" so as to enhance the critical analysis of knowledge, furthering his educational intentions in an effort to enlighten the "human condition" of his era. There is a significant clue to this pattern in the Greek root of both the words 'parabola' and 'parable':

> **parable:** a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson... from Greek *parabolē.* (*OED*, p.1033)

Thus, Socrates' description of the mathematical use of geometrical illustrations to highlight intellectual concepts which otherwise might be too abstract for comprehension, also serves as a reflection of Plato's own philosophical style and poetic imagery:

> "The actual figures they draw or model, which themselves cast their shadows and reflections in water – these they treat as images only, the real objects of their investigation being invisible except to the eye of reason." (Plato, *Republic*, p.239)

THE REPUBLIC

As discussed above, the *Republic* begins with Socrates "*going down*" at sunset:

> "I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon, son of Ariston." (Plato, *Republic*, p.3)

And ends with his "*going up*" at sunrise. The whole of the *Republic* is thus a Platonic parable incorporating both philosophical and poetical methods within an illustrative, mathematical structure. However, just as Socrates establishes the individual as the microcosm of mankind, so too is there a microcosmic parable within the macrocosmic parable of the *Republic* itself. Having said that, the pattern of this internal microcosmic parable is the *inverse* of the macrocosmic *Republic*. The internal 'Parable of the Cave' is specifically concerned with the ideal individual, Socrates' original point of focus. Thus, the microcosmic 'Parable of the Cave' corresponds with the microcosmic intention of the *Republic*, i.e., to describe the ideal individual. The macrocosmic parable which *is* the *Republic* itself corresponds with Socrates'

[17] *Concise Oxford English Dictionary,* Judy Pearsall (ed.), (London: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.1033

macrocosmic description of the ideal state. Thus, Plato employs as series of concentric, parabolic parables to promote his philosophical intentions. This style, derived from mathematics in tandem with poetry, analogously facilitates the literary based, philosophical education of the ideal individual as the basis for the ideal state intended to alleviate the Greek "human condition."

'THE PARABLE OF THE CAVE'

"'An odd picture and an odd sort of prisoner.'
'They are drawn from life.'"

(Plato, *Republic*, p.241)

In 'The Parable of the Cave', Plato's Socrates describes the ascent of a prisoner, who has lived his whole life in a cave, out into the upper world of sunlight and his subsequent descent back down into the cave in order to educate his fellow prisoners. This image is heavily metaphorical of Plato's own intentions to educate contemporary Greece. The parabolic form of this parable, i.e., the prisoner's *going up* and then *going down*, is the inverse of the parabolic movements of Socrates in the *Republic*. Socrates *goes down* to the Piraeus and subsequently *goes up* to Athens. Socrates himself admits the metaphorical nature of this parable in relation to the intellectual development of man:

> "And you won't go wrong if you connect the ascent into the upper world and the sight of the objects there with the upward progress of the mind into the intelligible region." (Plato, *Republic*, p.244)

The purpose of Plato's parables are, therefore, intrinsically linked throughout with the philosophical education of the individual in regard to both literature and life itself. Socrates describes this education as a "turning around of the mind." (Plato, *Republic*, p.245) In itself, this reflects the Platonic intention to guide the minds of his contemporaries toward a less corrupt, selfish and sensually irrational Greece.

> "Then this turning around of the mind itself might be made a subject of professional skill, which would effect the conversion as easily and effectively as possible. It would not be concerned to implant sight, but to ensure that someone who had it already was not either turned in the wrong direction or looking the wrong way." (Plato, *Republic*, p.245)

In both the *Republic* and the 'Parable of the Cave', Plato is seeking to influence his Greek contemporaries by means of a philosophical education and thereby "cut loose... all the

dead weights natural to this world of change and fastened on them by sensual indulgences... which twist their mind's vision to lower thing[.]" (Plato, *Republic*, p.246) At its zenith, concerning "the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition," this education is best communicated by an illustrative, poetic and parabolic parable. To better understand this, however, it is sensible to follow Socrates' own advice and (inserting Plato's name in the place of his brother, Glaucon):

> "In order to make clearer what I take to be Glaucon's meaning, we ought to examine the converse of the view he stated[.]" (Plato, *Republic*, p.47)

CHAPTER SIX

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE: PHILOSOPHER & POET

Thy Godlike crime was to be kind,
To render with thy precepts less
The sum of human wretchedness,
And strengthen Man with his own mind;

Lord Byron, from *Prometheus*

Nietzsche's style of writing is unique among the great thinkers of philosophical history. He wrote in a predominantly aphoristic form, including short essays, maxims, and lyrical verse.

> "For the young Nietzsche substance and style were not antithetical aspects of philosophy, rather he saw them as purposefully intertwined, especially in Schopenhauer's work."[18]

As a pupil of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche would have been familiar with his mentor's ideas concerning both philosophical and artistic style. Like Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation,* Nietzsche's philosophy does not seek to present a philosophical system. Rather, each aphorism could be said to present a single thought for the reader's consideration.

> "[A] *single thought,* however comprehensive, must preserve the most perfect unity. If, all the same, it can be split up into parts for the purpose of being communicated, then the connection of these parts must once more be organic[.]"[19]

Whether or not Nietzsche's aphoristic philosophy could be said to amount to a coherent whole is the subject of much heated debate within the contemporary philosophical world. Whether or not the transmission of its parts is "organic", however, is easier to answer. If there is any "*single thought"* with which Nietzsche is concerned, then this must surely be the over-arching theme and subject of his philosophical endeavours in general. That is, *life.*

> "Indeed, the Nietzschean concept of "life" (*das Leben*) in all its multiple and often conflicting forms stood as the determining measure by which everything, including style, must be compared." (Pettey, p.3)

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[18] Pettey, John Carson, *Nietzsche's Philosophical And Narrative Styles,* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) p.2

[19] Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World As Will And Representation,* E. F. Payne (trans.), (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969) p.xii

Just as in poetry, Nietzsche's philosophical style and content stand in "vital relation" to his life personally, as well as to life itself more generally.

> "[W]e have specifically to note that whatever its theme – and the range of its subject matter is, of course, practically unlimited – the true essay is essentially personal. Like its verse analogue, the lyric, it belongs therefore to the literature of self-expression. Treatise and dissertation may be objective; the essay is subjective."[20]

Nietzsche's style, therefore, reflects his view of life, a view which is arguably also "essentially personal." His is the philosophy of subjective "self-expression." It is also very rich visually, employing dashes and, like Schopenhauer, italicisation in order to highlight the author's emphasis and prevent the reader adding their own emphasis. Often, Nietzsche employs a questioning tone and, at times, leaves final sentences unfinished which engages his reader indirectly in an intellectual dialogue, although his style itself is not directly dialogic.

> "The linguistic naturalness, then, lies in its effect upon the perceiver; that is to say, even were the audible characteristics of language to be lost on the reader, their fluidity and function ought still be comprehended in the visual... One wonders how dashes, quotation marks, and underscoring become audible for readers, since they seem to be more the means for supplementing the lack of the "natural" movement in writing. The peculiarities and demonstrative nature of Nietzsche's punctuation supply primarily the eye (not the ear) with effects of the absent gestures[.]" (Pettey, pp.6-8)

Just as in the writing of Plato, Nietzsche's style incorporates various methods of "supplementing the lack of "natural" movement in writing," thereby compensating for the frigidity of prose in relation to verse as well as in relation to the ultimate subject of both - *life*.

There is little need to argue in favour of Nietzsche's title as poet as well as his title of philosopher. His work, *The Gay Science,* included a 'Prelude in Rhymes' and an 'Appendix of Songs'. However, his predilection for language reveals another aspect of the artistic disposition of this philosopher-poet.

> "Not only do poets possess this capacity, by their power over words, to invest the thoughts they express, whether new or old, with a heightened significance; words have on them, like colours on the painter or musical notes on the musician, a stimulating and exciting effect. More than one commentator, analysing some passage of Shakespeare, has pointed out how the seemingly chance occurrence of a particular word will start him off on a new train of thought, word suggesting word and image image, as the fission of an atom splits another atom and that another. Shakespeare is by no means the only poet who exemplifies this infective power of language." (*LL*, p.10)

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[20] Hudson, William Henry, *An Introduction To The Study Of Literature,* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1970) p.334

Marion Faber, who translated Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* into English, highlights the following tendency in the author's use of language which is akin to that of Shakespeare outlined above:

> "Nietzsche's play with words is integral to his art... the translator sometimes even has the feeling that the potential of the German language for making new words by adding or changing prefixes actually determined the direction of Nietzsche's thought - that the conceit dictated the conception, so to speak." (Nietzsche, *Human*, p.xxvi)

Both the style of Nietzsche's philosophy, as well as the philosophical content of his works, are often considered to be incoherent and irrational in light of the post-Platonic traditions of philosophy. After all, as already mentioned, often Nietzsche does not even complete the final sentence of his aphorisms. Nietzsche explains the reasoning behind this particular peculiarity of style as follows:

> "incomplete representation of a thought, or of a whole philosophy, is sometimes more effective than its exhaustive realization. More is left to the efforts of the viewer; he is incited to continue developing what comes so intensely lit and shaded into relief before him, to think it through, and to overcome himself the obstacle that hindered until then its complete emergence... one needs precisely a stimulating incompleteness as an irrational element that stimulates a sea for the listener's imagination." (Nietzsche, *Human*, pp. 118 & 122)

This stylistic catalysing of thought independent of the philosophy itself is much more akin to the traditions of poetry, rather than the traditions of systematic philosophy. As R. J. Hollingdale writes in his introduction to Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols:*

> "Nietzsche is a philosopher and he writes about the traditional subjects of western philosophy... He is a philosopher for philosophers, but he is to a far greater degree than any of the other great philosophers also a philosopher for non-philosophers. This is partly the effect of his literary quality, partly that of the 'open' texture of his books... The adoption of these short forms was in part, of course, dictated by the nature of his ideas, but it was also dictated by the nature of his style... in brief, to give to the writing of German prose the kind of attention devoted to poetry." (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, pp.10-11)

If Nietzsche's philosophy is truly reflective of his nature and of his conception of life, one must assume that his poetic style of philosophising developed from a *need* which Nietzsche felt was not satisfied by a purely rational style of philosophy alone. The ability of poetry to satisfy this need is alluded to in the 'Preface' to the 1886 edition of *Human, All Too Human.* Nietzsche explains that, "when I could not find what I *needed,* I had to gain it by force, to counterfeit it, or create it poetically." (Nietzsche, *Human*, p.4) So what is Nietzsche's opinion of poetry and of poets themselves?

> "Poets, insofar as they too wish to ease men's lives, either avert their glance from the arduous present, or else help the present acquire new colors by making a light shine in from the past." (Nietzsche, *Human*, p.104)

Thus, by directly incorporating poetry and poetic technique into philosophy, Nietzsche, like Plato, is seeking to avert the minds of his audience "from the arduous present," the contemporary "human condition." At the same time, this amalgamation of poetry with philosophy helps "the present acquire new colours by making a light shine from the past." The dramatic connotations of this latter claim will be more fully explored in a following section.

In contrast to Plato's major concern as regards writing, Nietzsche embraced the tyrannical nature of the written, as opposed to oracular, communication of knowledge. The character of Zarathustra who is representative of Nietzsche's ideal philosopher states that, "I am not one of those who may be questioned about their Why."[21] This is one of many Nietzschean inversions of Platonic philosophy to be discussed in a later section. Nietzsche consciously aligns himself, as the deliberately irrational philosopher-poet, in contradistinction to Plato who sought to philosophically censor the poetical communication of knowledge in a critically rational way.

> "Yet what did Zarathustra once say to you? That the poets lie too much? – But Zarathustra too is a poet." (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.149)

It is little wonder, then, that the author of *The Gay Science* (or *Joyful Wisdom*) should warmly embrace the style of "that delightful teaching which is the end of Poesy."[22] Reflective of the vitality of the best of Ancient Greek poetry, Nietzsche's philosophy is both immersed in, and illustrative of, that:

> "Momentary richness of experience [which] means also an intensity of experience. It will not be a richness that runs out in diffusion nor one that is amassed in confusion: it will come out of a life the conscious vigour of which may in any single moment be sensuous, emotional and intellectual all at once; all distinctly imagined, along with their fine radiations of significance and illusion, yet all combined in an inextricable harmony. That is why I emphasize the *personal* quality of poetic experience, in the elucidation of its greatness. For only a life centred in a white heat of exultant personality and power of self-knowledge *could* accept and fuse into single moments of experience – into single intuitions – the infinite wealth offered to it by every faculty of sense and mind and spirit.

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[21] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003) p.149

[22] Sydney, Philip, *An Apology For Poetry, or, The Defence Of Poesy,* Geoffery Shepherd & Robert W. Maslen (ed.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p.112

> That which any one moment of great poetry concentrates into its harmony would, in ordinary experience, be dispersed through a whole series of moments."[23]

That is, of course, not to say that Nietzsche's style is derived solely from the Greeks. As Nietzsche himself admits:

> "My sense of style, of the epigram as style, was awoken almost instantaneously on coming into contact with Sallust... Compact, severe, with as much substance as possible, a cold malice towards 'fine words', also towards 'fine feelings' – in that I knew myself. One will recognize in my writings, even in my *Zarathustra,* a very serious ambition for *Roman* style, for the '*aera perennius'* [more enduring than brass] in style." (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.105)

Indeed, Nietzsche is exceptionally critical of the Greeks, claiming that he "received absolutely no such strong impressions from the Greeks... One does not *learn* from the Greeks... Who would ever have learned to write from a Greek!" (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.106)

Nietzsche's stylistic impulses are, as such, derived from that which he most admired in Antiquity, both in the poetry of Greece and in the prose of the Romans. Arguably, that which Nietzsche most admired in Antiquity was the creative figure of the hero. It was upon this figure of the hero that Nietzsche was to model the keystones of both his philosophy and his philosophical works - the Übermensch and the character of Zarathustra.

> "The Poet is a heroic figure belonging to all ages... Let Nature send a Hero-soul; in no age is it other than possible that he may be shaped into a Poet... Hero, Prophet, Poet, - many different names, in different times and places, do we give to Great Men; according to varieties we note in them, according to the sphere in which they have displayed themselves!"[24]

Historically, Nietzsche stands out as both philosopher and poetic artist. His concern is with life, exhibited throughout both by the content of his philosophy as well as its poetic style more generally. It is conceivable that Nietzsche is bearing the mantle of the ideal poet as outlined by Plato's Socrates at the conclusion of the *Republic.* Strongly akin to Nietzsche's call for a revaluation of all values is Plato's admission that:

> "The first thing our artists must do... and it's not easy - is to wipe the slate of human society and human habits clean. For our philosophic artists differ at once from all others in being unwilling to start work... until they are given, or have made themselves, a clean canvas." (Plato, *Republic*, p.223-224)

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[23] Abercrombie, Lascelles, *The Idea of Great Poetry,* (London: Martin Secker Ltd., 1926) pp.39-40

[24] Carlyle in *English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century),* Edmund D. Jones (ed.), (London: Oxford University Press, 1924) p.254

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RETURN OF THE HERO

Yes, I know from where I came!
Ever hungry like a flame,
I consume myself and glow.
Light grows all that I conceive,
Ashes everything I leave:
Flame I am assuredly.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

> "But whereas the chief single influence upon Nietzsche was that of the pre-Socratics, there are a number of points in which, as we have seen, he is nearly related to Socrates and Plato: although he is a fervent and almost unremitting critic of their work and its effects, yet his beliefs concerning the rôle of the philosopher in civilization, and his ambitions to fill that rôle, are such as one would only expect to find in their pupil."[25]

As already discussed, Nietzsche greatly admired the "will to power" and the "*explosive material"* of the Greek "human condition" at the time of Socrates and Plato. As Cooksey highlights:

> "Friedrich Nietzsche presents a more complex response to Socrates'; he is drawn to the irony, but also rejects Socrates' rationalism as a symptom of a cultural decadence that covers up the tragic." (Cooksey, p.24)

Nietzsche himself admits that he "recognized Socrates and Plato as symptoms of decay, as agents of the dissolution of Greek, as pseudo-Greek, as anti-Greek[.]" (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.29) He is severely critical of Plato and the Platonic attempt to educate the Greece of his day. In *Twilight Of The Idols* Nietzsche writes that "Plato is boring... I find him deviated so far from all the fundamental instincts of the Hellenes[.]" (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.106) Nietzsche also says of Socrates that he "was the buffoon who *got himself taken seriously[.]"* (Nietzsche, *Twilight,* p.31) However, Nietzsche greatly admired the pre-Socratic, or, more appropriately, the pre-Platonic spirit of the Greeks. He claimed in a notebook later published

[25]Knight, A. H. J., *Some Aspects Of The Life And Work Of Nietzsche, And Particularly Of His Connection With Greek Literature And Thought,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933) p.183

as part of *The Will To Power* that "The real philosophers of Greece are those before Socrates (- with Socrates something changes)."[26]

Nietzsche thought Plato's *decadence* to be an attempt to counteract a Greek "human condition" which was essentially creative and heroic. The great suffering of man that Plato sought to alleviate, Nietzsche regards as also indicative of a capacity for exuberant joy.

> "One cannot insist too strongly upon the fact that the great Greek philosophers represent the decadence of every kind of Greek excellence and make it contagious[.]" (Nietzsche, *Will,* p.233)

This bipolarity of the Greek spirit was regarded as something profoundly beautiful and artistic. According to Nietzsche, this spirit was lost through the incorporation of Platonic influence into the Greek attitude to life. Through Platonic philosophy, Nietzsche argues, mankind lost something creative, artistic and poetic from the "vital relation" to life itself – the instincts. "In summa: the mischief has already reached its climax in Plato - ... Socrates represents a moment of the profoundest perversity in the history of values." (Nietzsche, *Will,* p.235)

Nietzsche had a sincere reverence for the role of the poet. He writes in *The Gay Science*:

> "The higher human being always becomes at the same time happier and unhappier... he calls his own nature *contemplative* and overlooks that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating this life. Of course, he is different from the *actor* of this drama, the so-called active type... As a poet, he certainly has... above all *vis creative* [contemplative power; creative power], which the active human being *lacks*... We who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually *fashion* something that had not been there before... This poem that we have invented is continually studied by the so-called practical human beings (our actors) who learn their roles and translate everything into flesh and actuality, into the everyday... Only we have created the world *that concerns man!...* we fail to recognize our best power and underestimate ourselves, the contemplatives, just a little. We are *neither as proud nor as happy* as we might be" (Nietzsche, *GS*, pp.241-242)

This aphorism immediately precedes the aphorism concerned with what Nietzsche calls the *"happiness of Homer!* The state of him that gave the Greeks their gods - no, who invented his own gods for himself!" (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.242) However, Nietzsche's philosophical intentions extend well beyond a simple admiration for Homeric Greece. What Nietzsche advances throughout his philosophy is, in fact, an *actual* return to the pre-Platonic spirit of "that world into which I have sought to find a way... the ancient world." (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.105) This

[26] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will To Power,* Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) p.240

spiritual return to pre-Platonic Greece is catalysed by Nietzsche through a continual contradiction and inversion of the principles of the Platonic philosophy which sought to "cut loose... all the dead weights natural to this world of change and fastened on them by sensual indulgences." Plato's intentions thus run exactly contrary to Nietzsche's own philosophical world view.

> Underlying [Nietzsche's philosophy] is a vision of a world conceived in terms of continual change, a world that denies the reality of the individual as something fixed and autonomous." (Cooksey, p.161)

Nietzschean philosophy seeks to instigate a return to the creative and heroic principles of Homeric Greece. Plato wielded rationality as the device for counteracting the instincts and "sensual indulgences" of the Greece of his day. In contrast, Nietzsche wields his irrational philosophy as a weapon against Platonic *decadence* in order to return humanity to the heroic influence of the instincts which Platonic philosophy sought to suppress.

> "To *have* to combat one's instincts – that is the formula for *décadence:* as long as life is *ascending,* happiness and instinct are one." (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.34)

This theme is abundant throughout the majority of Nietzsche's writing. However, it is most remarkably prevalent and, perhaps, most clearly articulated in *Twilight of the Idols.* Nietzsche describes "Greek philosophy as the *décadence* of the Greek instinct... Plato is a coward in face of reality – consequently he flees into the ideal[.]" (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.107)

It is exactly Plato's negation, "in face of reality," of the instincts, a central aspect of the Nietzschean conception of *life itself,* that Nietzsche seeks to challenge. If this is true, then it goes some way towards explaining Nietzsche's stance as the self-proclaimed 'Anti-Christ'. After all, as Nietzsche continually points out, the ideals of Platonic philosophy are strongly linked historically with the spread of Christianity throughout Europe.

> "I should prefer to describe the entire phenomenon 'Plato' by the harsh term 'higher swindle' or, if you prefer, 'idealism', than by any other... And how much there is still of Plato in the concept 'Church', in the structure, system, practice of the Church!" (Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p.106)

Or, as Nietzsche's notes of the same period explain:

> "the good, as Plato (and after him Christianity) understood it, it seems to me to be actually a life-endangering, life-calumniating, life-denying principle." (Nietzsche, *Will,* p.342)

Nietzsche is making *the same* philosophical stand against *both* Platonic idealism, which he sees as *decadent* "symptoms of decay,... agents of the dissolution of Greek, as pseudo-Greek, as anti-Greek," *and* its monastic brother - Christianity. He highlights this connection further in *The Gay Science,* describing "that Christian faith which is also the faith

of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine." (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.283) Seeking to thwart the influence of both, Nietzsche is striving to catalyse a retrograde step *back* to the Homeric spirit of pre-Platonic Greece.

> "*What we lack.* – We love what is *great* in nature, and we have discovered this – because in our heads great human beings are lacking. It was the other way around with the Greeks: their feeling for nature was different from ours." (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.198)

This lack of "great human beings" was the *need* that Nietzsche perceived in the "human condition" of his time. Mankind *lacked* and, therefore, *needed* a return to "the most profound enjoyment of the moment... and the whole crimson melancholy of the happy... [where] one is also more capable of suffering than any other creature under the sun." (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.242)

Although it was originally intended to alleviate the "human condition," Nietzsche saw that the influence of Platonic philosophy, especially incorporated under the banner of Christianity, was now a major contributing factor *to* the problems concerning the "human condition" of his time. Nietzsche, therefore, is also *decadent.* As Nietzsche's notes explain, he believed there to be *two decadence* movements at work in Greece. After all, the heroic, Homeric spirit was responsible for the decline of Greece to the extent that it *needed* Platonic intervention.

> "Gradually everything genuinely Hellenic is made responsible for the state of decay... The decline of Greece is understood as an objection to the foundations of Hellenic culture: basic error of philosophers - . Conclusion: the Greek world perishes. Cause: Homer, myth, the ancient morality, etc...Two decadence movements and extremes run side by side: (a) sensual, charmingly wicked decadence, loving art and show, and (b) gloomy religio-moral pathos, Stoic self-hardening, Platonic slander of the senses, preparation of the soil for Christianity." (Nietzsche, *Will,* pp.231-232)

It is the Homeric "sensual, charming, wicked decadence" with which Nietzsche aligns his own philosophy. This Platonic and Christian antithesis is explained further in *The Gay Science:*

> "I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said – and did not say. This mocking and enamoured monster and pied piper of Athens." (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.272)

However, Nietzsche, the philosopher-poet who sings of the "profound enjoyment" of life, cannot agree with the "pied piper of Athens" in one very definite regard. "Socrates, Socrates *suffered life!*" (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.272) He concluded, "Alas, my friends, we must overcome even the Greeks!"(Nietzsche, *GS*, p.272).

It is *immediately after* the aphorism in *The Gay Science* from which the quotations above are taken that Nietzsche introduces his doctrine of the 'Eternal Recurrence'. Considering the latter part of the aphorism concerned with the 'Eternal Recurrence', entitled *The greatest weight,* in the light of Nietzsche's intentions to catalyse a return to Homeric Greece as outlined above, it is little wonder that "If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you." (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.274) Nietzsche is astutely conscious of the fact that, if the world did return to Homeric life so as to alleviate the "human condition" of *his* time, then, this would, in turn, establish the conditions which created the *need* for the philosophy of Plato in the first place. If he is successful in *his* "turning around of the mind itself" contrary to Plato; if he manages to reverse history's Platonic education by inverting Platonic and Christian motifs, then the relevant "human conditions" which created the *need* for *both* his philosophy and Plato's would oscillate backwards and forwards throughout time. Effectively, the course of human history would recur eternally in a cycle which vacillates between the "human condition" of Homeric Greece, as directly catalysed by Nietzsche, and the 'Modern' "human condition" felt by Nietzsche to be the stunted end result of Platonic philosophy. If this hypothesis is accurate, it is possible to read the following sentences in a literal sense:

> "The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and in innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?" (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.274)

Nietzsche clearly illustrates his very literal retrograde intentions later in *The Gay Science* in a significantly open-ended aphorism:

> "In sum: All philosophical idealism to date was something like a disease, unless it was, as it was in Plato's case, the caution of an over-rich and dangerous health, the fear of *over-powerful* senses, the prudence of a prudent Socratic. – Perhaps we moderns are merely not healthy enough *to be in need of* Plato's idealism? And we are not afraid of the senses because -" (Nietzsche, *GS*, p.333)

He also outlines this position in the 'Prologue' of the same work:

> "Not only laughter and gay wisdom but tragic, too, with all its sublime unreason, belongs among the means and necessities of the preservation of the species... Consequently - . Consequently. Consequently. O, do you understand me, my brothers? Do you understand this new law of ebb and flood?" (Nietzsche, *GS*, pp.75-76)

This doctrine of the 'Eternal Recurrence' in *The Gay Science*, however, is premeditated by Nietzsche's early work *The Birth of Tragedy,* published in 1872, in which he outlines his views of, what he calls, Dionysiac art.

> Tragedy calls out: 'We believe in eternal life'... In Dionysiac art and its tragic symbolism this self-same nature speaks to us in its true, undisguised voice: 'Be as I am! - the primal mother, eternally creative beneath the surface of incessantly changing appearances, eternally forcing life into existence, forever satisfying myself with these changing appearances!' "[27]

In the 'Preface' to *The Birth of Tragedy* written in 1886, four years after publication of *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche explains his reasoning as follows:

> "Thus my instinct turned against morality at the time I wrote this questionable book; as an advocate of life my instinct invented for itself a fundamentally opposed doctrine and counter-evaluation of life, a purely artistic one, an anti-Christian one. What was it to be called? As a philologist and a man of words I baptized it, not without a certain liberty - for who can know the true name of the Antichrist? - by the name of a Greek god: I called it Dionysiac." (Nietzsche, *Birth,* p.9)

This 'Preface' concludes with a quotation from Nietzsche's work dealing with *his* ideal philosopher. The character Nietzsche describes as "that Dionysiac monster who bears the name of Zarathustra[.]" (Nietzsche, *Birth,* p.12)

Thus, in *The Gay Science,* it is extremely significant that Nietzsche introduces the character of Zarathustra *immediately* subsequent to this aphorism of the Eternal Recurrence. As Nietzsche is inverting Platonic and Christian motifs in order to retard the effects of Platonic philosophy on the "human condition," it stands to reason that he does so in an inversely Platonic and Christian *style*. He writes in his notes that in "Dionysus versus the "Crucified": there you have the antithesis." (Nietzsche, *Will,* pp.542-543) Plato's instrument of change was the image of what he thought to be the ideal philosopher - the character of Socrates. Nietzsche's is also the image of his ideal philosopher. This character, who is introduced in an aphorism entitled *Incipit tragoedia*, 'the tragedy begins', is named Zarathustra.

> "When Zarathustra was again on firm land he did not go off straightaway to his mountain and his cave, but made many journeys and asked many questions and inquired of this and that, so he said jokingly of himself: 'Behold a river that flows back to its source through many meanderings!'" (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.187)

[27] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* Ronald Speirs (trans.), (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.80

CHAPTER EIGHT

THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA: THE POETIC ANTI-PLATONIC PARABLE

He clasps the crag with crookèd hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like the thunderbolt he falls.

Lord Tennyson, *The Eagle*

> "When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains. Here he had the enjoyment of his spirit and his solitude and he did not weary of it for ten years. But at last his heart turned – and one morning he rose with the dawn, stepped before the sun, and spoke thus:
> Great star! What would your happiness be, if you had not those for whom you shine!
> (...) Behold! I am weary of my wisdom, (...) I should like to give it away and distribute it, until the wise among men have again become happy in their folly and the poor happy in their wealth.
> To that end I must descend into the depths: as you do at evening, when you go behind the sea and bring light to the underworld too, superabundant star!
> Like you, I must *go down* – as men, to whom I want to descend, call it.
> (...) Bless the cup that wants to overflow, that the waters may flow golden from him and bear the reflection of your joy over all the world!
> Behold! This cup wants to be empty again, and Zarathustra wants to be man again.
> Thus began Zarathustra's down-going." (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.39)

In his seminal work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Nietzsche presents the character of Zarathustra, the prophet and philosopher-poet who represents Nietzsche's ideal philosopher. In a letter to Franz Overbeck in 1883, Nietzsche admits of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra:*

> This book... the work of ten days, now seems to me like my last will and testament. It contains an image of myself in the sharpest focus... It is poetry, and not a collection of aphorisms."[28]

Nietzsche also wrote to Carl von Gersdorff in 1883, warning:

> "Do not be deceived by this little book's having a legendary air: behind all the plain and strange words stands my *deepest seriousness* and my *whole philosophy.* (Nietzsche, *Letters,* p.213)

As discussed in the previous section, the character of Zarathustra is effectively Nietzsche's antithetical mirror-image of Plato's ideal philosopher - Socrates. Nietzsche also inverted Platonic motifs and themes in an attempt to catalyse a retrogradation of the influence

[28] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Selected Letters Of Friedrich Nietzsche,* Christopher Middleton (ed.), (Indiana, U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing, 1996) p.207

of Plato's philosophy. By doing so, he incorporated into his own philosophy several of Plato's predominant images, for example, the sun as a major focal point. The importance of this image is *inverted* by Nietzsche in order to highlight the essentially subjective aspect of life and all human experience. In the first aphorism of the work Zarathustra proclaims to the sun, "Great star! What would your happiness be, if you had not those for whom you shine!" (Nietzsche, *Zara.*, p.39)

As in the *Republic*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* also begins with its protagonist's "down-going."

> "Echoing the opening of Plato's *Republic* as well as the Parable of the Cave, he decides to "go down" and "go under" in order to share the gift of his wisdom." (Cooksey, p.172)

Zarathustra descends from his mountain with a message for the people and subsequently re-ascends, having realized that "they do not understand (...) I am not the mouth for these ears." (Nietzsche, *Zara.*, p.45) The style of *Zarathustra* is, therefore, also parabolic. However, although Zarathustra's movements are essentially similar to those of Socrates in Plato's macrocosmic parable the *Republic*, it is not man the macrocosm, i.e., the state or ideal society, with which Nietzsche is concerned. Zarathustra claims that "The state is the coldest of all cold monster's... the state where universal slow suicide is called - life." (Nietzsche, *Zara.*, pp.75-77) Rather, Nietzsche is concerned with man the microcosm, man the individual, and thus *inverts* the microcosmic Platonic parable which is concerned with the ideal individual - the 'Parable of the Cave'. "Zarathustra's down-going" and subsequent "going up" is a deliberate inversion responding to the movements of Plato's prisoner out of and back into the cave. As already mentioned, Nietzsche's purpose in doing so is to catalyse a reversion to the heroic, pre-Platonic spirit of the Homeric Greeks. As R. J. Hollingdale points out, the German phrase which Nietzsche employs in order to describe Zarathustra's "down-going" possesses highly significant connotations related to both Nietzsche's anti-Platonic intentions and his deliberate inversion of Platonic imagery:

> "*Untergehen* has three meanings: to descend or go down; to set (as of the sun); and to be destroyed or to go under. There is much play upon this triple meaning throughout the book." (Nietzsche, *Zara.*, p.339)

Zaratuhstra's wisdom is intent on teaching "the wise among men" to be "happy in their folly." This is antithetical to Plato's emphasis upon "understanding" exhibited by the

following statement from the *Timaeus* concerning the cyclical metamorphosis of all living things:

> "These are the principles on which living creatures change and have always changed into each other, the transformation depending on the loss or gain of understanding or folly." (Plato, *Timaeus*, p.121)

It is not the intention of this essay to provide an exhaustive analysis of the conceptual images and themes recurrent within *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* The purpose is simply to underline Nietzsche's intention in this work to completely undo the influence of Plato and catalyse a return to the exuberant spirit of pre-Platonic Greece. He does this by inverting major Platonic concepts and motifs, including the relation of philosophy to poetry, and by presenting his philosophy in the style of an *inverted* Platonic parable. As with the analysis of poetry, however, it is perhaps prudent to extract one or two holistic events within *Zarathustra* which clearly illustrate this interconnection between the various aspects of Nietzsche's very *practical* anti-Platonic intentions. After all, *Zarathustra* is "a poem."

As already mentioned, Nietzsche refers to Socrates as the "pied piper of Athens" in *The Gay Science.* In the three *subsequent* aphorisms which conclude 'Book Four' of this work, Nietzsche claims, "Alas, my friends, we must overcome even the Greeks"; outlines his doctrine of Eternal Recurrence; and introduces the character of Zarathustra.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which was published one year after the publication of *The Gay Science*, the *second* short essay of 'Zarathustra's Discourses' in 'Part One' is entitled *Of The Chairs of Virtue.* In this essay, Zarathustra hears the teaching of "a wise man... who was said to discourse well on sleep and virtue[.]" (Nietzsche, *Zara.*, p.56) In the final line of the preceding essay, Nietzsche writes of Zarathustra that "at that time he was living in the town called The Pied Cow." (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.56) There is a clear recurrence of the word "pied" connecting Nietzsche's conception of Socrates in *The Gay Science* and Zarathustra's location in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* This word is extremely appropriate. It possesses strong connections with the poem by Robert Browning, *The Pied Piper of Hamlin* (1842). Notably metaphorical of the intentions of *both* Plato *and* Nietzsche, Browning's Pied Piper sought to alleviate the suffering of the town of Hamlin by musically enticing away the rats. When the corrupt society refused to pay the Piper his due, he enticed their children away as well. The poetic analogy describing Socrates as the "pied piper of Athens" is clear. On the other hand, Zarathustra's location in "the town called The Pied Cow" is far less explicit. After all, the word "pied" means "having two or more different colours... (originally in the sense 'black

and white like a magpie)." (*OED*, p.1081) Cows are very often 'black and white'. Is it possible that Nietzsche could merely have constructed a very simple visual image? It is definitely a possibility. However, Nietzsche gives his audience one very definite piece of advice to bear in mind when encountering his philosophy:

> "Certainly one *quality* which nowadays has best been forgotten - and that is why it will take some time yet for my writings to become readable - is essential in order to practice reading as an art - a quality for the exercise of which it is necessary to be a cow, and under *no circumstances* a modern man! – *rumination."*[29]

"Rumination" means to "think deeply about something" or "(of a ruminant) chew the cud." (OED, p.1252) A cow is a ruminant. Nietzsche's *double entendre* is deliberate. He is employing this metaphorical image in conjunction with the earlier metaphorical analogy of Socrates as the 'pied piper" in order to compel his reader to "think deeply" about this connection. Although they are not directly Zarathustra's words, Nietzsche makes this connection of "cow" to "rumination" in the sense of "think deeply" *unequivocal* in his reader's mind a little further on in *Of the Chairs of Virtue* by writing, "Ruminating I ask myself, patient as a cow[.]" (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.57)

Nietzsche is metaphorically alluding to Plato's Socrates as the "wise man" in *Of the Chairs of Virtue.* This "wise man" teaches of "sleep and virtue." Plato's Socrates is definitely concerned with "virtue" in the *Republic.* The entire discourse is concerned with "*justice (or right conduct or morality)"* in both the ideal individual and the ideal society. Has Socrates' then any connection with "sleep" in the *Republic*?

> "Any shadowy notion such a man gets hold of is the product of opinion rather than knowledge, and he's living in a dream from which he will not awake on this side of the other world, where he will finally sleep forever." (Plato, *Republic*, p.266)

The philosophy of the "wise man," who is a metaphor for Socrates, does not seem initially dissimilar to the philosophy of Zarathustra, who is a metaphor for Nietzsche. Zarathustra teaches that "Man is something that should be overcome." (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.41) The "wise man" teaches that "You must overcome yourself ten times a day: that causes a fine weariness and is opium to the soul." (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.56) *Both* Plato and Nietzsche are striving to *overcome* the "human condition" of their time. Their method for achieving this is essentially similar, though inversely proportional. Nietzsche's efforts, however, are not to

[29] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Genealogy of Morals,* Horace B. Samuel (trans.), (New York: Dover Publications, Ltd., 2003) p.7

cause “a fine weariness and... opium to the soul.” Rather, Nietzsche intends to catalyse a return to the exuberant Homeric spirit. Zarathustra, having heard the “wise man,” concludes at the end of this essay:

> “Now it is clear to me what people were once seeking above all when they sought the teachers of virtue. They sought good sleep and opium virtues to bring it about!” (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.58)

Confident in the retrograde effect of his own philosophy, Zarathustra generously concedes in the mischievously metaphorical, penultimate line of this essay, “Blessed are these drowsy men: for they shall soon drop off.” (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.58)

In the *first* essay in ‘Zarathustra’s Discourses’, Nietzsche again makes a clear metaphorical reference to his intentions to transmogrify the human spirit:

> “I name you three metamorphoses of the spirit: how the spirit shall become a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child.” (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.54)

The essay concludes with the same statement but employs the past tense, followed by the metaphorical statement that Zarathustra is located in “the town called The Pied Cow.” This *immediately precedes* the essay *Of the Chairs of Virtue* in which Zarathustra rejects the doctrine of “sleep and virtue” as taught by a metaphorical Socrates. It is not necessary here to discuss the symbolism connected to each stage of Nietzsche’s intended “metamorphoses of the spirit.” The final stage, however, when the spirit becomes “at last a child,” further elucidates Nietzsche’s intentions.

It has been argued that Nietzsche is striving to catalyse a return to the heroic spirit of pre-Platonic Greece, represented by the figure of Homer, who “invented his own gods for himself .” If Zarathustra’s “three metamorphosis of the spirit” *are* metaphorical symbols of the three stages of this return, then Nietzsche’s objective, the Homeric spirit, is represented symbolically by the “child.” This “child” is “innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes.” (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.55) This image of the “child” must *also* be a metaphor for Nietzsche’s conception of the ‘Superman’, as Zarathustra explicitly states:

> “Behold, I teach you the Superman.
> The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth.” (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.42)

The language used by Nietzsche to describe the image of the child is repeated again in ‘Part One’ of *Zarathustra*, in an essay entitled *Of the Way of the Creator:*

> "Are you a new strength and a new right? A first motion? A self-propelling wheel? Can you also compel stars to revolve about you?" (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.88)

Further, the first occurrence of the phrase *Übermensch* ('Overman' or 'Superman') in Nietzsche's writings occurs in an aphorism in *The Gay Science* concerned with the invention of gods in relation to man in which it is claimed that "The invention of gods, heroes, and overmen of all kinds... was the inestimable preliminary exercise for the justification of the egoism and sovereignty of the individual." (Nietzsche, *GS*., pp. 191-192) Thus, following the thread of Nietzsche's thought, the symbol of the spirit having become a "child" is intrinsically representative of both the creative, heroic spirit of pre-Platonic Greece *and* the Superman which is the meaning of Zarathustra's teaching. The question, "Can you also compel stars to revolve around you?" is referential to Zarathustra's own inversion of the metaphorical Platonic relationship between man and the sun at the very beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Zarathustra's opening statement to the sun is itself a justification of the "sovereignty of the individual."

Considering the *first* essay of 'Part Two' of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, entitled *The Child with the Mirror,* Nietzsche makes a clear reference to his adoption of the mantle of Anti-Christ as an intrinsic part of his anti-Platonic stance. When a child carrying a mirror appears to Zarathustra in a dream, the child encourages Zarathustra to look at his own reflection in the mirror.

> "But when I looked into the mirror I cried out and my heart was shaken: for I did not see myself, I saw the sneer and grimace of a devil." (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.107)

Zarathustra interprets this dream and concludes that "my *doctrine* is in danger... Truly, my happiness and my freedom come like a storm! But my enemies shall think the *Evil One* is raging over their heads." (Nietzsche, *Zara*., pp.107-109)

The connection of Nietzsche's anti-Platonic intentions with its anti-Christian overtones is prevalent throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* As discussed above, the first essay of 'Zarathustra's Discourses' is arguably analogous to Nietzsche's intended spiritual return to Homeric Greece. The second is arguably analogous to Nietzsche's combined anti-Platonic and anti-Socratic position. The third essay, however, is *definitely* concerned with Nietzsche's anti-religious, particularly anti-Christian, philosophy. The essay is entitled *Of the Afterworldsmen.* As with the first reference to the *Übermensch* in *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche

is once again concerned with the “justification of the egoism and sovereignty of the individual” in relation to the creation of gods.

> “Yes, this Ego, with its contradiction and confusion, speaks most honestly of its being - this creating, willing, evaluating Ego, which is the measure and value of all things... My Ego taught me a new pride, I teach it to men: No longer to bury the head in the sand of heavenly things, but to carry it freely, an earthly head which creates meaning for the earth! (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.60)

As Zarathustra proclaims, the “Superman is the meaning of the earth.”

To sum up, Nietzsche’s philosophical style is unique and his intentions are anti-Platonic and in possession of a Homeric and Dionysiac *decadence.* As he explains in a letter to Erwin Rohde in 1884:

> “My style is a dance - a play of symmetries of every kind, and an overleaping and mockery of these symmetries... I have remained a poet... although I have tyrannized myself a great deal with the antithesis of poetry. (Nietzsche, *Letters,* p.221)

Incipit Zarathustra: “I know how to speak the parable of the highest things only in the dance.” (Nietzsche, *Zara*., p.135)

CONCLUSION

POETRY, PHILOSOPHY & LIFE: THE EQUILATERAL GOOD

For Knowledge must make shift by narrow ways
To enter, here or there; and pains abound
Whose sudden visitation blunts our thought.
Each man, with eye particular beholding
Some moment of his momentary world,
Soon, like a wisp of smoke, flits up and away.
His chance experience fashions all his faith;
And, driven upon that random round, each boasts
The Universe laid bare! How hardly, then,
Shall eye or ear perceive or the grasp of mind
Reach out to wisdom! Therefore, here secluded,
You'll learn what springs from mortal wits, - not more.

Empédoclês, *The Limitations of Knowledge*

To conclude, we have traced the educational origins of poetry and philosophy and have seen that they exist in a critical relation concerned with the practice of life and the advancement of knowledge. Having analysed the style of their major works, it has been shown that both Plato in the *Republic,* and Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* posit a poetically orientated, philosophical parable. The fundamental style of each parable consists of the parabolic motion of the character personifying either Plato or Nietzsche's ideal philosopher. Each respective parabola is indicative of the spiritual and intellectual motion which both philosophers postulate as a poetic solution to the "human condition" of their time. Both the Platonic parabola and the Nietschean parabola are congruent in conflict. The movement and motifs of the one are inverted by the course of the other. In both instances philosophy possess an essential link to the educational spirit of the poetry of Antiquity - a "vital relation" to life itself.

As is the case with the analysis of poetry, however, it has not been the intention of this essay to attempt any definitive interpretation of the philosophies of either Plato or Nietzsche. There is much of value in the works of both philosophers aside from their poetic

antithesis. If this essay has simply served to enrich the appreciation of these great thinkers and, perhaps, elucidate a few of their more elusive ideas, then this is more than sufficient.

Having established the concentric, parabolic pattern in the philosophies of both Plato and Nietzsche, it is the fond hope of the author of this essay that:

> "Now, man's increased aesthetic feeling will decide definitively from among the many forms which offer themselves for comparison." (Nietzsche, *Human*, p.29)

And that, reconciled with philosophy, "poetry should return, if she can make her defence... proving that she doesn't only give pleasure but brings lasting benefit to human life and human society." (Plato, *Republic*, p.351) As Shelly explained in his *Defence of Poetry:*

> "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life – [.]" (Shelly, pp.1194-5)

For the *need* for philosophy and poetry is the same. It is *life* that needs them both.

Their several ends pursuing, one will roam
The teeming sea, hard-driven by obstinate gales;
And hoping still to ship some profit home
The prodigal son of his own life he sails...
Another man the Olympian Muses teach
By whose dear cunning measured numbers flow;
And lord Apollo, archer of long reach,
Makes prophets, who forsee the impending blow...
Now agony from a trifling hurt may spring,
Nor any salve untie the knot of pain,
Now men distraught by desperate suffering
At a mere touch are won to health again.

Solon, from *Diversity of Gifts*

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