EURIPIDARISTOPHANIZEIN AND NIETZSCHESOKRATIZEIN

Aristophanes, Nietzsche, and the Death of Tragedy

Rainer Friedrich

For Hermann Wein

The impact Nietzsche had, for better or for worse, on the intellectual and literary life during the first half of this century can hardly be overrated; yet — contrary to common belief — it was only sporadic on classical studies. One classicist to whom Nietzsche meant much but whose scholarly work is surprisingly free from Nietzschean elements was Karl Reinhardt, and it was he who stated that the history of classical philology has no place for Nietzsche.[1] Even 'the Dionysian', often thought — and most so by himself — to be Nietzsche's great contribution to the understanding of Greek culture, did not have to wait for him to be discovered: it had been commonplace among men of letters and classicists since the eighteenth century.[2] It is true, there was E. Rohde, the devout friend; and W. F. Otto who was converted to paganism by Nietzsche's work[3]; moreover, the scholars of the Cambridge School of Classical Anthropology — Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray and others — founded their ritual theory of myth and drama on Nietzsche and Frazer: they endeavoured to render Nietzsche's vision of Dionysian ritual and Greek tragedy scientific (whatever that means) by fusing it with Sir James' anthropology. But just like Nietzsche's work, the ritual theory of myth and drama exerted,

1. K. Reinhardt, "Die klassische Philologie und das Klassische", in: *Wege und Formen* (Godesberg 1948), p.435.
2. See on this M. L. Baeumer, "Nietzsche and the Tradition of the Dionysian", in: James C. O'Flaherty *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition* (Chapel Hill 1976), pp.165-189.
3. W. F. Otto, *Dionysos* (Frankfurt/M.1933). Cp. W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (London 1950), p.145n. on Otto's book: 'Is it too harsh to agree with one of his compatriots that, from the scholar's point of view, "wo in der Literatur diese zwei Begriffe (i.e. das Dionysische und das Apollonische) überhaupt eine Rolle spielen, hat man es fast immer mit Dilettantismus zu tun" (K.Pfister, *Bursians Jahresbericht*, suppl.229(1930) p. 136).' This reflects a general attitude among classicists.

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and still does, a strong influence on literary and dramatic criticism and theory, but was received by classical scholars, if it was received at all, mostly with sharp critique. In short, ever since Wilamowitz had thundered his verdict on Nietzsche's early work *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872), its author has been ostracized from the republic of classical scholars; and he accepted the lot of the exile by giving up his chair at the university of Basle. But he seems destined for a future role in classical studies. During the past decade there has been a most vigorous resurgence of interest in Nietzsche's philosophy almost everywhere. Small wonder that classical scholarship is calling back its once ostracized citizen from exile, as the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford does in a programmatic essay entitled 'Nietzsche and the Study of the Ancient World.'[4]

In the last issue of this journal Professor George Grant reacted to Professor Lloyd-Jones' article,[5] and he did so with a mixture of approval and hesitation, expressing at once satisfaction and concern. One can easily sympathize with Professor Grant's ambivalent reaction. On the one hand, it is certainly a good thing that justice be done at last to a thinker who has been excessively maligned in the English speaking world on the basis of ignorance and prejudice. On the other hand, the motives which have caused the current interest in Nietzsche are not quite clear and may raise some doubts. Among other things, Nietzsche is credited by Lloyd-Jones with having set in motion the movement in classical studies which concerns itself with the irrational in Greek culture, and which has culminated in E. R. Dodds' book *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) (incidentally a book, quite unnietzschean in its sober and historical treatment of the phenomenon, which mentions Nietzsche only in passing and in a polemical context at that). If this is any indication, then the renewed interest in Nietzsche is to a large extent an interest in 'the irrational' which time and again becomes the opiate of intellectuals inside and outside Academia. Current intellectual (rather anti-intellectual) fashions known as New Sensibility, Post-Modernism, Post-structuralist Freudianism, *Uebermensch*-Socialism etc., and labelled as the New Irrationalism, certainly account partly for *Nietzsche Redivivus*. Professor Grant wants to know how far Lloyd-Jones wants to go with Nietzsche when he brings him onto the stage of

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4. H.Lloyd-Jones, "Nietzsche and the Study of the Ancient World", in: J.C. O'Flaherty, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-15.
5. G. Grant, "Nietzsche and the Ancients. Philosophy and Scholarship", *Dionysius* III (1979) pp. 5-16.

classical scholarship — will it be inevitable that Nietzsche enter centre stage? Legitimate and most timely questions. Nietzsche's view, or rather his vision, of ancient culture is being suggested as a guide for classical studies, and this requires of us to ascertain what this view is and whether it is valid. But in doing so one might meet with Professor Grant's scorn. As many a Christian thinker, he feels a certain fascination for the author of the *Antichrist* and seems to be overly awed by his savage and often crude critique of Christianity; he is therefore inclined to ridicule any attempt to raise questions about Nietzsche's account of antiquity as pedantic and pedestrian: a philosopher must not be measured by the yardstick of the respectable scholar. But the question to be raised is not one of sound philological method and historical facts; the question is whether his understanding of classical culture is such that it can provide direction to classical studies.

Such an examination has to focus necessarily, yet not exclusively, on *Birth of Tragedy*. It is, first of all, this book which is credited by Lloyd-Jones with unprecedented insights into the nature of divinity as the Greeks conceived it, and of the greatest achievement of Greek culture, tragedy. Not that Lloyd-Jones ignores the failings of this work, once so mercilessly exposed by Wilamowitz: but it is his view that 'the faults of Nietzsche's book, glaring as they are, sink into insignificance' in comparison with the insights it offers. Most illuminating in this work, as to Nietzsche's understanding of antiquity, is his account of the death of tragedy at the hands of Euripides and Socrates. This account immediately calls to mind, and invites comparison with, that of Aristophanes of the demise of Old Tragedy. Both accounts are very similar in many respects;[6] but for our question it will ultimately be the difference between them which will be most important. At the same time this comparison touches a larger theme. Both Aristophanes and Nietzsche show a rather ambivalent attitude towards their *bêtes noires*, Euripides and Socrates. What they attack in them is the principle of critical reflexion. It forces those who criticize it to adopt it, and this will account for the contradictory relation Aristophanes and Nietzsche exhibit towards their critical objects. The contradiction will be shown as a necessary one, which suggests that the short-comings of critical reflexion, or of enlightenment, cannot be countered by opposing to them a blind tradition or an even blinder naturalism.

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6. Cp.B.Snell, "Aristophanes and Aesthetic Criticism", in: *The Discovery of the Mind — The Greek Origins of European Thought*, trans.T.G. Rosenmeyer (Harper Torchbooks: New York 1960), pp.119f. This essay touches many

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Even nowadays *Birth of Tragedy* makes stimulating reading. One can easily imagine the stir it created among the representatives of classical philology which at that time was already completely imbued with the spirit of historicism. Its language is exalted, at times turgid, and occasionally obscure — a mixture that rarely fails to give the impression of profundity. On the whole, this early work shows its author as a master of the German language. It would not be difficult to make an esthetic case for *Birth of Tragedy;* it is persuasive not so much by virtue of the stringency of its argument as by virtue of its rhetorical power. In fact, it is no easy matter to summarize its argument: one is always in danger of presenting it in a form more coherent than it actually is or its author would have wished. So one has to strike a balance. I shall largely ignore the last ten sections dealing with Wagnerian opera (Nietzsche later regretted that he ever wrote them), and shall concentrate on the first fifteen sections dealing with the drama of Tragedy's turbulent birth, its brief but vigorous flowering, and its shocking death ingeniously plotted by way of induced suicide — a drama of Aeschylean dimensions with divine and human agents: Dionysos, Apollo, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and, in the role of the villain, Socrates the Athenian.

Aristotle, Nietzsche holds, has thoroughly misunderstood Greek tragedy. Ever since he gave his misunderstanding a theoretical form in his *Poetics,* esthetic theory has been out of joint, and Nietzsche was born to set it right. He did this by introducing the concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac. At first view, they denote art drives underlying artistic modes of creation and preceding any individual artistic activity. But they soon reveal themselves as elemental life-forces arising directly from nature. In human existence they are operative as fundamental drives, as *instincts* from which all other instincts derive. In its most immediate form, the Apollonian manifests itself in dreams in which men order their experiences according to their individual liking. It is through the Apollonian drive or instinct that Nature brought about individuation; the Apollonian, thus, stands for the *principium individuationis.* Individuation is delimitation, and delimitation requires order. In short, the Apollonian crystallizes in individuality, order, measure, culture, language, consciousness. By contrast, the Dionysiac life-force, most immediate in intoxica-

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of the themes of my article, but concentrates on Schlegel. It is a splendid defence of Euripides.

tion and the ecstacy of orgiastic rites, makes man give up his individuality and re-unite with Nature from which individuation has severed him. Individuality and the corresponding Apollonian order fade away in Dionysian excess. In all manifestations of the Dionysiac — ecstacy, intoxication, natural communion, music — the primordial unity of Nature re-asserts itself and dissolves all phenomena of the Apollonian. The Apollonian must be understood as Nature's self-inflicted wound: through the Apollonian, Nature brought about individuation, but individuation is the rupture of Nature's primordial unity. Individuation is therefore the root of all evil and a never-ending source of suffering (10)[7]. Now, the Apollonian is as much a *force naturelle,* an instinct, as the Dionysiac is; and it is Nature herself who creates the antagonism of these her own forces — an antagonism so painful to her and so destructive of her unity. Why Nature would do this — this is one of the questions one must not ask, and Nietzsche's philosophy is partly designed to silence such questions once and for all: Nature is enigmatic and works in mysterious ways, and must not be defiled by rationalistic questioning. Somehow, individuation is preserving and, in artistic form, enhancing Life, and this is sufficient for Nature to bring it about, painful or not.

With individuation, man becomes the battleground of both forces: their antagonism determines the *conditio humana.* Individuation is man's curse, but also his inescapable fate, and he has thus to come to terms with the conflict of the Dionysiac and the Apollonian which was caused by it. He must not give himself entirely over to the Apollonian principle which urges him on to ever higher forms of individuation and thus to further separation from his natural substance. Nor must he let himself sink altogether into the Dionysiac ground of his existence, thereby annihilating his individuality. This almost impossible mediation was achieved in archaic Greek culture; and its highest form, Greek tragedy, attests to it. It is the 'child of the mysterious marriage' of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac(4).

In force and simplicity, Nietzsche's vision of these two *forces naturelles* pervading in eternal conflict universe, culture, and man, is reminiscent of Presocratic natural speculation. But where a Greek would find order, Nietzsche finds, as the ultimate reality, an

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7. Nietzsche's works are quoted in the following way: *Birth of Tragedy* by section, other works by volume and page from K. Schlechta's edition: F. Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden* (Munich 1956). Reference will also be made to W. Kaufmann's translation of *The Will to Power* (London 1968) by *WP* and number of paragraph.

eternal flux of creation and destruction. The Heraclitean flux is one ordered by *logos* and therefore a *kosmos;* in pointed contrast to this, Nietzsche describes his Dionsysiac flux as a creative-destructive *chaos*. It is the Titanic-barbarous essence of Life and in all its manifestations expresses the 'truth of Nature' before which anything cultural, that is Apollonian, dwindles to a mere appearance. In the Dionysiac ecstacy man experiences his individuality as an alienation from nature and Apollonian order as a beautiful illusion. Behind it there emerges, as the ultimate reality, the Dionysian substance, Nature's primordial unity, the ground in which human individuality dissolves and man is restored to his true state as *homo naturalis*. Nietzsche's philosophy, the first modern full-fledged *lebensphilosophie,* is at once a radical estheticism — 'only as esthetic phenomena are existence and world for ever justified' (5 & 24) — and a thorough-going naturalism: *true/false* and *good/evil* are replaced as criteria of judgement by *beautiful/ugly;* und from there it is only one step to the naturalistic conceptual pairs of *healthy/sick* and *strong/weak*. To determine the relation of art to nature, Nietzsche uses a term which later became central to Freud's cultural theory: art is *sublimated* instinct (III,867); as the sublimation of nature art remains substantially nature and never transcends it:

> 'Art reminds us of states of animal vigour; it is on the one hand an excess and overflow of blooming physicality into the world of images and desires; on the other, an excitation of the animal functions through the images and desires of intensified life; — an enhancement of the feeling of life, a stimulant to it.' (*WP* 802)

The Apollonian, likewise, sublimates the Dionysiac, and in this way tragedy originates. But this implies a principally Dionysiac understanding of tragedy, and renders the Apollonian second in every respect.

Nietzsche makes no secret of it. Thus, to say, as most interpreters do, that in Nietzsche's theory of tragedy there is a true mediation of the two forces, is to neglect the supremacy of the Dionysiac in his philosophy; as a kind of *natura naturans,* it has in *Birth of Tragedy,* and elsewhere in Nietzsche, the status of an *ens realissimum* before which the Apollonian pales to a mere epiphenomenon. A mediation is intended, that much is true, but it presupposes that both forces are on an equal footing which they are not. The supremacy of the Dionysian in Nietzsche's theory of Greek tragedy can be seen by a brief glance at his account of *prototragodia* and his views on the tragic protagonist and the tragic vision.

Prototragodia. Tragedy's antecedent, *prototragodia,* is the crude and barbarian Dionysian ritual. It consists of the chorus alone; the principal chorist is the satyr. He is pure nature; but not a mere ape, rather 'the archetype *(Urbild)* of man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense aspirations.' 'Here archetypal man was purged of the illusion of culture, here authentic man revealed himself as the bearded satyr, jubilantly greeting his god. Before him cultural man shrank to a mendacious caricature.' However, it is through the Apollonian that the primitive Dionysian rite is sublimated and elevated to the art-form of tragedy. The Apollonian elements of tragedy — dialogue, individual characters, the formal architecture — seem to become predominant over the Dionysiac substance. Apollonian form seems to bend the quintessence of Dionysiac music to its own purposes — dramatic illusion. But in the final effect the Dionysiac element triumphs once again. Dionysus, as Nietzsche elegantly put it, first 'speaks the language of Apollo, but Apollo, in the end, the language of Dionysus; thereby the highest goal of tragedy and of art in general is reached.' (8 and 21).

The tragic protagonist. Nietzsche's view of the great figures of Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy shows that he thinks of tragedy in terms of the Dionysian ritual. 'Up to Euripides, Dionysus remained the dramatic protagonist; all the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus etc. are but masks of that original hero Dionysus . . . . . The one and truly real Dionysus appears in a multiplicity of forms, in the mask of the struggling hero, and enmeshed, as it were, in the web of individual will. The god enters the stage, resembling in what he says and does an erring, striving, and suffering individual; that he can appear at all with such epic precision and clarity is due to the dream-interpreter Apollo who, through that symbolic figure, interprets to the chorus its Dionysiac condition. Yet in truth, that hero is the suffering Dionysus of the mysteries; the god who in himself experiences the pains of individuation; the god of whom the wonderful myths relate that, as a child, he was dismembered by the Titans . . . . we have an indication that dismemberment — *the* Dionysiac suffering — was like a separation into air, water, earth, and fire, and that individuation should be regarded as the *fons et origo* of all suffering and as something to be rejected.' (10).

The tragic vision. In tragedy, the protagonist, and through him the spectator, faces heroically the terrible truth about the *condition humaine:* man lives in an indifferent universe which emerges as an everflowing chaos of creation and destruction; its order is but a beautiful Apollonian illusion, and so is man's individuality and its identity. In short, in tragedy man comes face to face with the abyss and its finality. The individuality of Apollonian man, embodying as it does Nature's inner dissonance, is experienced as the root of all evil and the source of all suffering. Tragic Man's striving for universality can only mean 'de-individuation'(9). Knowing his annihilation as an individual to be his fate, the tragic protagonist affirms and embraces it: in this his *amor fati* consists his heroism. Tragedy is profoundly pessimistic, yet it is not a pessimism of despair, but of strength. From the spectacle of the tragic hero suffering annihilation of self as his accepted fate, the spectator is sent away with the great 'metaphysical solace that life is at bottom,

> despite all changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and joyful'(7). And elsewhere Nietzsche characterizes the Dionysiac thus: 'The saying of yes to life, and even to its most bizarre and most difficult problems; the will to life rejoicing at its own infinite exhaustiveness in the sacrifice of its highest types — that is what I called Dionysiac, that is what I meant as the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not to cast out terror and pity, or to purge oneself of dangerous passion by discharging it with vehemence, — this was Aristotle's misunderstanding — but to be far beyond terror and pity, to be the eternal lust of Becoming itself — that lust which also includes the lust of destruction' (II,1032 and 1110).

In short, 'tragedy is the Apollonian embodiment of Dionysiac insights and effects'(8). The Apollonian provides the artistic form allowing the spectator to experience the 'Dionysiac condition' ('the shattering of the individual and his *unio mystica* with primal being') symbolically only, through the vicarious suffering of the tragic protagonist.

The subaltern status of the Apollonian and what it stands for — civilized and cultural existence — is reflected in its ultimate fate: in Nietzsche's later writings it is hardly mentioned. In the two self-critical retrospects to *Birth of Tragedy* — in *Attempt at a Self-Criticism* (1886) and in *Ecce Homo,* his last work — the Apollonian has been tacitly phased out as a concept of Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche finds much in his youthful work that embarasses him; but there is much *coquetterie* in his self-criticism, and on the whole he is still rather proud of this book. Of the two 'decisive innovations' of *Birth of Tragedy* he notes in *Ecce Homo* 'first, the understanding of the Dionysiac phenomenon with respect to the Greeks — it gives the first psychological interpretation of it, and sees it as the root of the whole of Greek art.' (II,1109). The Apollonian is conspicuously absent. All the same, its use as a philosophical category is a quaint one and calls for some comment. It stands for order, culture, language, conscious individuality — in short, for everything which is traditionally assumed to raise man and human society above the natural, above instinctual life; and yet, Nietzsche conceives of it as a natural force, an instinctual drive. It resembles the Socratic which was to take its place as the counterforce to the Dionysiac; but the Socratic is denounced by Nietzsche as instinct-corroding and hostile to life. Apart from this difficulty, there arises the question what Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* may contribute to an understanding of Greek tragedy. Its two categories, the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, are nowadays hopelessly hackneyed. But this cannot be held against Nietzsche, for in his book they are still fresh. However, when one tries to apply them to the exegesis of

individual Greek plays, one will soon find out what they really are: abstractions, too narrow to grasp the esthetic richness and ethical substance of Greek tragedy. They do no harm, but they are not of much use either. To apply the Dionysiac and the Apollonian, and their antagonistic interplay, as a *passe-partout* to Greek tragedy and Greek archaic culture as a whole, is a typical case of reducing the complex and differentiated to the simple and elemental. Besides, where is in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* the Dionysiac, where is the profound pessimism? In a book which purports to reveal the nature of Greek tragedy there is extended comment on only one play, the Aeschylean *Prometheus;* and while most of what Nietzsche has to say on this play and its central figure is stimulating and intriguing, his conclusions as to the Dionysiac essence of this play must remain dubious as long as it is not taken into account that this play is only part of a larger artistic whole, the *Prometheus* trilogy, and thus not the last word on this theme and figure by the author. (There is also some comment on *Oedipus Tyrannus* and some passing mention of Euripides' *Bacchae). Cum grano salis* it could be claimed that Nietzsche's theory of the tragic would be far more appropriate for the naturalistic tragedies of Ibsen and Strindberg, incidentally two playwrights who were directly influenced by Nietzsche. This is only another way of saying that *Birth of Tragedy* is rather the birth of Nietzsche's philosophy — its first exposition, using Greek culture as its medium.

There remains the last act: the Death of Tragedy. It died by suicide, at the hands of one of its own poets, Euripides, who drank a potion of Dionysus' wine mixed with a medicine which turned out to be a fatal poison. It was prepared and administered by Socrates. If it was a suicide, it was an induced one, and thus a veiled murder. The poison was 'esthetic Socratism'(12); its ingredients morality and rationality.

A pensive man, this Euripides: it made him a troubled spectator of the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Behind their Apollonian splendor, he sensed the Dionysiac darkness; but, critical thinker that he was, he was unable to accept it and come to terms with it. Being under the spell of Socrates, reason had become for him the fountainhead of all doing and enjoyment. Its ingrained optimism ('the hidden essence of the universe has no strength to resist the courage of knowledge') had made his mind impervious to the tragic vision and the Dionysiac pessimism. Its mystery, its incommensurability offended him, and thus he could perceive in the tragedies of his great predecessors only elusive structures and faulty resolutions of conflicts, intellectually deficient and morally

doubtful. Being a gifted dramatist himself, he decided to combat these faults *in praxi:* what had troubled Euripides, the critical spectator, Euripides, the dramatist set out to correct. He did so by eliminating the primitive and pervasive Dionysiac element. But this did not result in a purely Apollonian drama: drive out Dionysus, and Apollo will follow him. Euripides brought the spectator on stage by portraying him in his dramatic figures: as a consequence, the characters of the tragic myths ceased to be larger than life and sank to the level of everyday reality. The debasement of myth became complete through the moralism and rationalism which penetrated it in Euripidean drama: yet 'without myth all art loses its organic vigour and its creative strength.' Laying out his dramatic plan as Socratic thinker and carrying it out as passionate actor, Euripides created a new type of drama; it was at the same time cool and fiery, capable alike of freezing and consuming its spectators: cold paradoxical thoughts have taken the place of Apollonian contemplation and fiery emotions the place of Dionysiac ecstacies. The realist, ultimately inartistic, drama which, through the agency of the emotions, appeals to reason, was the result of Euripides becoming the poet of esthetic Socratism and its principle: 'whatever is to be beautiful, must be reasonable and conscious' (12).

Euripides was but a mask; the divinity which spoke through this *persona* was a wholly new demon named Socrates who drove off the Attic stage its former deities. This, then, was the new opposition: the Dionysiac and the Socratic, 'and the art-work of tragedy perished by it' (12). But what perished, was not only authentic tragedy; the whole of Greek culture, authentic Greek culture, that is, perished, too. The second innovation of *Birth of Tragedy* on which Nietzsche, in the ch. "Why I Write Such Excellent Books" in *Ecce Homo,* congratulates himself, is 'the comprehension of Socratism — Socrates being presented for the first time as the instrument of Greek dissolution' (II,1109). However, this innovation was not as novel as Nietzsche makes it out to be. He does make mention of Aristophanes when he points out the connection between the death of tragedy and Socrates' teaching. But he fails to give him full credit as a perceptive critic of the crisis of the *polis* and its highest art-form.

II

The configuration of *Birth of Tragedy:*

the suicide of tragedy/through the art of Euripides/plotted and induced by Socrates

is already there in Aristophanes' *Frogs;* and Socrates looms large as the subverter of the *polis* culture in *Clouds.* In *Frogs,* produced at the *Lenaea* of 405, shortly after Sophocles and Euripides had died, Dionysus the theatre god sets out on a journey to Hades: the Attic stage is in a wretched state now that the great tragic triad is gone; he therefore plans to fetch back Euripides in order to revive the tragic art. As the theatre god, Dionysus is also the *genius* of the communal life of the *polis:* it manifests itself as much in the citizens' participation in the theatrical festivals as in their activities in ἐκκλησία, ἡλιαία, and στρατία. His predilection for Euripides is thus an indication of the slightly corrupt state of the δῆμος. After an eventful journey, Dionysus arrives just in time at Pluto's palace to preside as judge over a contest *(agon)* between Aeschylus and Euripides for the Hades chair of poetry. In the course of the *agon,* Dionysus is cleansed of his enthusiasm for the art of Euripides; in the end he declares Aeschylus the winner and takes him back to the upper world for the revival of Old Tragedy and the salvation of the *polis* (ἄγε δὴ χαίρων Αἰσχύλε χώρει / καὶ σῶζε πόλιν τὴν ἡμετέραν *Frogs* 1500f). But this hope is expressed against the poet's melancholy awareness that tragedy had indeed died. Aristophanes must therefore be credited with having first formed the now fashionable thesis of the Death of Tragedy which, in *Frogs,* he translated into dramatic situation: the *agon* between the two tragedians takes place in the realm of death. The critical substance of this comedy is the demonstration that the highest art-form of the *polis* has been utterly ruined by Euripides' art and its destructive innovations. The ruin came from within, from one of its own practioners; it was suicide. In the exodus of the play the chorus leave no doubt as to who induced this suicide:

> χαρίεν οὖν μὴ Σωκράτει
> παρακαθήμενον λαλεῖν,
> ἀποβαλόντα μουσικὴν
> τά τε μέγιστα παραλιπόντα
> τῆς τραγῳδικῆς τέχνης. . .
>
> Thus it is best not to sit
> beside Sokrates and engage
> in futile dialogues, betray-
> ing the Muses and abandoning
> all that is best and noble
> in tragic art . . . (*Frogs* 1491ff)

Although Euripides to whom these lines refer is the primary target, the ultimate *causa corruptionis* of the dramatist is identified as the philosopher Socrates.

The evils Euripides, and indirectly Socrates, are accused of are legion and could easily fill Pandora's box. The presentation of the gods of traditional religion amounts to impiety. His realistic treatment of legend and saga debunks the great heroic figures of the past: the national myths are profaned. Probing critically into the customary notions of right and wrong, and questioning the moral solutions as they are presented in those myths he shatters the belief in the accepted ethics. His plays exhibit his general scepticism about the rationality and validity of all traditional views, convictions, customs, and this undermines the *patrios nomos* — the totality of all traditions and customs on whose observance the ethical life of the *polis* depends. In short, Euripides is accused of almost any ugly -ism a conservative may imagine: atheism, rationalism, scepticism, realism, and immoralism. All that is fatal to tragedy and defeats its purpose which is, as Aeschylus makes Euripides state (*Frogs* 1009f), to make good citizens out of its spectators. And what is a good citizen? A man whose words and deeds are determined by the four cardinal virtues (ἀρεταί) of the *polis:* moderation, justice, piety, and courage; whose relation to the state is defined not so much by claimed rights as by owed duties; and who sees his freedom actualized in his *praxis* as a *polites* in its three basic forms as warrior, judge, and statesman. This is the kind of citizen Aeschylean tragedy produced; but that of Euripides is found utterly wanting in this. Not only does it bereave the citizens of their great models through the realism of its dramatic style — it also turns them into hypercritical sceptics like the poet himself; moreover, it turns them into selfish individuals, *idiōtai,* who, clamouring for rights instead of fulfilling duties, wish to live *off* rather than *for* the *polis.* Instead of strengthening the ethical life of the *polis* and anchoring more firmly the *patrios nomos* in the hearts and minds of the spectators, Euripides' art undermines both.

In *Clouds,* Socrates is attacked as the representative of the New Learning advocated by the sophists which has corrupted Euripides. The comic hero, Strepsiades, a once moderately wealthy peasant, has married — against custom — above his station; through the aristocratic life-style of his son he has run hopelessly into debt and faces bankruptcy. He has heard of the *phrontistērion,* the thinking-shop of the sophists, headed by a certain Socrates; it is said to teach a dialectical skill which can turn wrong into right. This might be the solution for Strepsiades' financial problems. Having first miserably failed as a student, Strepsiades brings his parental authority to bear upon his son (860f:τῷ πατρὶ/πιθόμενος ἐξάμαρτε) and escorts him to the *phrontistērion.* There, two allegorical figures, *Right* and *Wrong,*

engage in an *agon* in which they fight for the tutorship of the young man. *Right,* champion of the Old Education which had produced the Marathon-fighters, advocates adherence to tradition and custom and service to the *polis; Wrong,* propagating the New Learning of the sophists, refutes the validity of everything customary and traditional, and advocates the natural right of the individual to engage in the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest and the gratification of desires. *Wrong* wins and becomes the young man's instructor. He learns fast, and there is every hope that the family will be saved from bankruptcy. But in a dispute over his son's infatuation with Euripides and his contempt for Aeschylus, Strepsiades is beaten by his son who has learned in Socrates' school how to give a theoretical justification to an act like that. This amounts to a negation of the most sacred relationship, the basic element of all order. At this point, Strepsiades has his *anagnorisis:* he recognizes the utterly corrupting effect of the New Learning upon family and state. In this he is helped by the chorus of Cloud goddesses who first appeared in the guise of tutelary deities of the sophists: they now reveal themselves as agents of the Olympian gods urging on, in truly Aeschylean fashion, a man bent on evil so that he may, by falling, learn: πάθει μάθος. The play ends with the burning of the *phrontistērion* by Strepsiades and the expulsion of Socrates and his fellow-sophists.

The attack on Socrates is all the more violent as Aristophanes deals here with the fountainhead of all evils that beset the *polis.* Socrates, the arch-sophist — are we to take Aristophanes seriously in this? He certainly wished to be taken seriously. A year after the *Clouds* had made a poor third at the Dionysia of 423, Aristophanes berated the audience in the *parabasis* of *Wasps* for having allowed his best play to become a flop. And with reference to *Clouds* he describes himself as 'evil-averting purifier of the country' (1043:ἀλεξίκακος τῆς χώρας καθαρτής). Classicists are still wringing their hands in despair: how could Aristophanes who certainly knew better lump together phenomena so vastly different as Socratic philosophy, Sophistic teaching and *ideologiekritik,* natural speculation, Euripidean tragedy, the New Dithyramb and the New Music to become the poet's composite *bête noire* called the New Spirit? Perhaps a closer look at Old Comedy's self-understanding might reveal the much-laboured problem of 'Socrates in the *Clouds*' as a pseudo-problem.

The poet of Old Comedy regarded himself as the guardian of the ethical life of the *polis ('polissittlichkeit')* and understood the purpose of his art to be the catharsis of the polis from any evil through satire, as Aristophanes says in *Wasps.* Satire reveals evil as

ridiculous, and thus as infinitely void and lacking substance. Evil is anything that deviates from, or goes against, the *patrios nomos* and the ethical order of the *polis* which rests on the unconditional and unquestioning acceptance of the former. Such evil poisons the body-politic. Comic catharsis is the laughter that purges away the evil, exposed to ridicule, and restores the body-politic to the state of moral health. *Sōtēria poleōs* — the salvation of the city (*Frogs* 1501: σώζειν πόλιν τὴν ἡμετέραν) — is the *telos* of Old Comedy, to be accomplished by combining censure, advice, and satire.

The New Spirit was the result of the rise of a newly awakened individuality, the great discovery of the 5th century. It posited an individual capable of a free moral decision, independent of the laws, the customs, and the institutions of the *polis*. This individuality claiming independence would no longer accept decisions on what was right or wrong simply on the basis that they were in accordance with the *patrios nomos:* now every moral act had to be a conscious one in order to be truly moral. The old customary morality — based as it was on habit and the unreflective compliance with the traditional code — gave way to a new morality which, born from the New Spirit, was based on critical reflexion: everything claiming validity and authority — and this affected all spheres of the life of the *polis:* state, family, religion — had to justify its claim by giving a rational account of itself (λόγον διδόναι). Yet the ethical order of the *polis* largely depended on the principle of customary morality, i.e. the individual's unquestioning and obedient acceptance of its laws, customs, institutions, and religion; an acceptance that could remain unreflective, since their rationality and validity could be taken for granted. The principle of critical reflexion meant the end of this innocence. It was this principle which Aristophanes saw at the centre of Socratic philosophizing, Sophistic teaching, and the probing in Euripidean tragedy. In view of this common denominator, the differences, vast as they were, sank into insignificance for the comic poet. No need for subtle differentiations; what mattered to the guardian of the ethical order was the fatal danger critical reflexion posed to the innermost substance of the *polis,* whether it took a Socratic, a Sophistic, or a Euripidean shape. Therefore the purifier of the city unhesitatingly lumped them together in his plays in order to expose them to comic catharsis. To complete the *sōtēria poleōs,* the Old Polis of the Marathon-fighters, and their educational institution, Aeschylean tragedy, were invoked and held up as a model to be followed on the path to salvation.

However, matters were more complicated. Aristophanes tried hard to make himself appear as the unreflective advocate of a

return to the simplicity and the intact virtues of the early *polis*. But in this he was bound to fail. Once the principle of critical reflexion has entered the world, a return to the pristine innocence of prereflective times is impossible, in particular to so critical a mind as that of Aristophanes. Witness his ambivalent attitude towards Euripides. Towards the end of the *agon* in *Frogs*, Pluto urges Dionysus to declare a winner. But Dionysus cannot make up his mind. It is easy to see why. Throughout the *agon*, Aristophanes permits Euripides to be rather successful in scoring points against his adversary, and in the process Aeschylean tragedy is critically assessed, more critically than is good for a model to be followed. The real weaknesses of Aeschylean tragedy are mercilessly and gleefully exposed by Aristophanes through the mouth of Euripides: its faulty structure; its stationary plot lacking in dramatic development; the frequent pomposity and turgity of its style, at times bordering on the absurd with its grotesque compounds; and the obscurity of its language, all too often full of sound and fury signifying little. By implication, many of Euripides' innovations are justified as being introduced to rid the tragic form of its Aeschylean faults. And what about the solid citizens Aeschylean tragedy makes out of its spectators — the element said to be its *forte*? Aristophanes has Aeschylus describe them: those six foot tall hoplites so devoted to their civic duties that they are unable to think beyond their armour and the next battle. And the brave sailors manning Athens' proud triremes: anything beyond gulping down their invigorating broth and bending on their oars seems to be beyond their ken. One wonders what kind of audience they would make for Aristophanes' comedies. He had his share of trouble with audiences not quite up to the finesse of his wit and thought: he must still have had in mind the audience of 423 which sent his best play, *Clouds*, down to a humiliating defeat, when he commends in this play (*Frogs* 1109ff) his audience for its intellectual advance. Aristophanes must have wondered to what extent he owed such an audience — sophisticated enough to give his comedy of literary criticism a stunning victory — to the New Learning otherwise known as the evil of evils. At any rate, he is quick to have his Dionysus poke fun at Aeschylus' hoplites and sailors (*Frogs* 1018 and 1074f).

And what are we to make of the portrait of Aeschylus himself? In *Frogs* he is a crude bard, so conservative that it borders on the reactionary; a haughty aristocrat, martial to the point of being mindlessly militaristic; and to the degree he is given to Ares, he is hostile to Aphrodite. The only concern of his poetry seems to be the glorification of prowess and exhortation to patriotism.

Compared to the real Aeschylus, the author of the *Oresteia,* this portrait could be mistaken for a caricature. But it seems to be the stylization of the old poet by an intellectual who glorifies an ideal of the past to which he can have only a romantic relation. (It is almost like Evelyn Waugh's stylized image of the British insular Tory with ear-trumpet, antisemitism, and all that; yet, unlike Waugh, Aristophanes had the good sense not to affect his type).

Indeed, the decision at the end of the *agon* is difficult; and when it is made in favour of Aeschylus, it does not come unexpected, for the literary genre prescribed it; but it strikes us as arbitrary nonetheless. Almost every round results in a tie; only the round with the weighing of lines goes clearly to Aeschylus, but the price for the greater 'weight' of his verse is obscurity. Dionysus' difficulty to decide seems to be the author's own. Dutifully, he gives Aeschylus the palm; dutifully, he would sit through the performance of an Aeschylean trilogy; but we feel he would find the performance of a play by Euripides more stimulating. Stimulating in more than one sense, to be sure; for it would stimulate him, at the very least, to a parody. There is hardly any play among the extant comedies of Aristophanes in which Euripides is not quoted, alluded to or parodied. Aristophanes' life-long fascination for Euripides is best documented in the *Women Celebrating The Thesmophoria.* In this play Euripides is shown trying to free a relative being held a prisoner by the women celebrating this all-female festival. He devises intrigues and escapes drawing on his own plays. It is not only one of Aristophanes' best-plotted plays, but also splendid *paratragodein,* parody of tragedy; and it owes much of its brilliance to Euripidean drama which it parodies. There is a hitch in the business of parody. Only what is worth so extensive and consistent attention can be so extensively and consistently parodied as Euripidean tragedy is in Aristophanic comedy. It is largely the quality of the parodied on which the success of the parody depends. Parody, therefore, often attests to the grandeur of the parodied as much as it mocks it. Thus the frequent parody of Euripidean comedy in Aristophanes' plays may be taken as a sign for the great respect and admiration the author felt — perhaps grudgingly — for Euripides. This can be further corroborated by the different treatment Aristophanes gives Euripides and the younger tragedian Agathon in the same play. Agathon is subjected to a personal invective (ψόγον δραματοποιεῖν, as Aristotle terms it *Poet.* 4.1448 b37): he is ridiculed as a pompous and effeminate fop of an esthete; while Euripides' integrity for all the wit Aristophanes expends on parodying his drama, is left intact.

And was Aristophanes' comedy altogether impervious to the New Spirit for which he persecuted Euripides so harshly? The sympathetic view on the wretched lot of women in antiquity expressed in *Lysistrata* bears close resemblance to that expressed in Euripides' *Medea* — a view that originated clearly in the doctrines of the sophists. The same comedy is advocating Panhellenism, another newly-fangled notion born from the New Spirit which questioned the notion of the self-contained *polis*. And, of course, all that talk about women's equality is a lot of non-sense, but the very same play demonstrates that the intervention of women may bring back common sense to the politics of the *poleis*.

Such *euripidizein* did not escape the ancients. As a scholiast points out:

> Ἀριστοφάνης. . .ἐκωμῳδεῖ τὸ ἐπὶ τῷ σκώπτειν μὲν μιμεῖσθαι δ'αὐτόν.[8]

And to exemplify it he quotes from Aristophanes' older rival, the comic poet Cratinus, who coined the neologism εὐριπιδαριστοφανί ζειν, 'to compose in the manner of Euripides and Aristophanes, in order to bring out the affinity between both:

> 'Τίς δὲ σύ;' κομψός τις ἔροιτο θεατής/'ὑπολεπτολόγος, γνωμοδιώκτης, εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζων.'[9]

The great tragic triad: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, had its parallel in Old Comedy: Cratinus, Eupolis, and Aristophanes. What Cratinus is saying with his neologism, is that Aristophanes is the Euripides among the poets of Old Comedy. *Malgré lui,* of course. Aristophanes is in the delicate situation of the conservative guardian of custom and tradition who criticizes the intellectualism of the enlightenment by means of the very intellectualism he castigates in his opponents as destructive of the *patrios nomos*. The conservatism inherent in his literary genre makes him a *laudator temporis acti* by profession; but this often conflicts with the critical spirit of the author whose wit differs from the vigorous boisterous humour of a Cratinus in its intellectuality. (Needless to say, that his attitude to the glorious past he wishes to restore becomes necessarily a mediated, that is romantic, one). This makes Aristophanes so often engage in *euripidizein*. Cratinus' coinage *euripidaristophanizein* is so felicitous since Euripides, too, — quite in

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8. Schol.Plat.*Ap.*19c: 'Aristophanes was satirized for deriding Euripides yet imitating him'.
9. Frg. 308(Edmonds): 'Should a clever spectator ask, "who are you?" (he would answer:) "a subtle speaker, a hunter for the clever phrase, an Euripidaristophanizer am I".'

contrast to the necessarily one-sided stylization in *Frogs* — was a rather complex figure and not without contradictions. In short, Aristophanes was imbued with the very spirit of critical reflexion he so vehemently combats as the fountainhead of all evils that were besetting the *polis*.

From this arises that contradictory attitude to which the scholion points. In *Frogs*, the pattern of Old Comedy prescribes that Aeschylus win. But in the rough and tumble of the Aristophanic *agon*, this venerable model of Old Tragedy loses quite a few feathers; this lends, by implication, a good measure of justification to the innovations for which his adversary is censured. But in this play Aristophanes conformed with the tradition of the comic *agon:* the forces of evil are defeated. In the *agon* of *Clouds*, they are allowed to triumph.

Wrong is the vivid portrait of the typical sophist of the younger generation: the strident, arrogant, and aggressive type of the *physis* sophist. With this generation of sophists, critical reflexion has been perverted to a crude reductionism, playing off *physis* against the *nomos* of the *polis*, which is reduced to a mere arbitrary convention. In this form, critical reflexion is used as a weapon against everything standing in the way of the individual's natural right to the ruthless pursuit of self-interest and the unlimited gratification of desires. Yet even in this reduced and perverted form, critical reflexion is shown as being capable of utterly shattering the foundations of the Old Order as represented by *Right*. Being based on the unreflective acceptance of the *patrios nomos*, the Old Order is defended accordingly: the most conceptual form *Rights'* defence can take is the sonorous and solemn proclamation of edifying maxims. Certainly, this is the adequate form in which the wisdom of a customary morality expresses itself; but not sufficient for holding out against *Wrong's* incessant aggressive demands to give a rational account of itself (λόγον διδόναι). Reacting first with helpless indignation, *Right* progressively disintegrates, until he finally collapses, and *Wrong* wins the day. *Wrong's* victory is not due to his own strength, but to the weakness of what *Right* stands for. Once touched by critical reflexion, the ethical foundation of the Old *Polis* is bound to crumble because of its incapability of *didonai logon* — this is what Aristophanes is willy-nilly demonstrating by *Wrong's* victory over *Right* — a fine illustration of ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν. The victory of evil in the *agon* is a deviation from the traditional pattern which necessitates another deviation: it makes impossible the traditional comic catharsis which discharges itself in the festive atmosphere of the *kōmos* concluding all other extant comedies. After the defeat of *Right*, the only path open to

the *soteria poleos* is the violent catharsis of the city: it consists in the physical destruction of the *phrontisterion* and the expulsion of Socrates and his school. *Clouds* is the only known play of Old Comedy ending in dissonance.

Aristophanes' dramatic work is a constant fight against the decay of the *polis;* the remedy he proposes is a return to the *polis* of the Marathon-fighters and Aeschylean tragedy that had shaped their virtues; but for all that, he does not exempt them from his critical wit and exhibits mercilessly the weaknesses of the forces he champions. We tried to explain this by pointing out that Aristophanes, being the younger contemporary of Euripides and Socrates, could not help being profoundly imbued with the spirit of critical reflexion he so vehemently combatted. It adds to the complexity of his work and personality. And it does not discredit him nor throw any doubt on his concern for the *polis*. The New Spirit, after all, gave freedom, realized in its objective form in the *polis* order, its subjective dimension; and in postulating the independence of thought and positing an independent thinking subject, it was certainly a principle of the future. But it had, of necessity, a destructive effect on the very *polis* culture which provided the conditions for its rise; and, furthermore, it exhibited the greatest weakness and the limitation of the *polis:* its incapability of accommodating an independent subjectivity. Thus the violent clash was inevitable. *Clouds* did not cause, as is often unreasonably claimed, Socrates' condemnation, but its violent final scene certainly prefigured it. What has been said of the Athenians — that the sentence on Socrates bears on the one hand the aspect of unimpeachable rectitude inasmuch as the Old Polis condemns its deadliest foe; but on the other hand that of a profoundly tragic character, inasmuch as the Athenians had to make the discovery that what they reprobated in Socrates had already struck firm root among themselves, and that they must be pronounced guilty and innocent with him[10] — most certainly applies to Aristophanes and his relation to Socrates and Euripides.

III

Nietzsche's attitude to Socrates is as ambivalent as that of Aristophanes to Euripides. What he says about it in 1875, applies to all his writings from *Birth of Tragedy* down to *Ecce Homo:* 'Socrates, to be quite frank, is so close to me that I am almost

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10. Cp.G.W.F.Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans.J.Sibree (New York 1899), p.270.

always fighting with him' (III,333). 'Nietzschesokratizein', *sit venia verbo,* is then the philosophical counterpart to literary *euripidaristophanizein.*

'Esthetic Socratism', which destroyed Greek tragedy, is but one facet of a larger phenomenon. Socratism — as logical and ethical Socratism — destroyed the whole of the archaic Hellenic culture. It was, Nietzsche says, a Dionysiac culture; its art, ethics, and wisdom were based on instincts and their purpose was the enhancement of life. Socrates ruined it by putting reason and consciousness in place of instinct. The second innovation of *Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche comments in *Ecce Homo* — and here is the complete citation — was 'the comprehension of Socratism — Socrates being understood and shown for the first time as the instrument of Greek dissolution, as a typical *decadent.* "Reason" versus instinct. "Reason" at any cost, as a dangerous, life-undermining force' (II,1109). The significance of this can hardly be overrated: Socrates ushered in European decadence, characterized by the hypertrophy of the intellect and the atrophy of the instincts. Moreover, Socrates set its pattern of evolution by establishing that 'most bizarre equation ever seen', the equation of logical and ethical Socratism: Reason=Virtue=Happiness. It was 'an equation which was essentially opposed to all the instincts of the older Hellenes' (II,953). With Socrates began the 'devitalization of life' and the 'denaturalization of moral values'. 'In short,' he sums up in *Will to Power,* 'the denaturalization of moral values resulted in the creation of the degenerating *type of man* — "*the* good man", "*the* happy man", "*the* wise man". — Socrates represents a moment of the lowest perversity in the history of values' (III,759).

'Thenceforward,' he says in *Birth of Tragedy,* 'the real antagonism was to be between the Dionysiac and the Socratic'; and Socrates figures as 'the vortex and turning point of Western civilization' (15). Now, such a figure of world-historical stature demands admiration. Indeed, Nietzsche shows the respect due to the new antagonist of Dionysus and his own historical counterpart (Socrates the first philosopher of European decadence and Nietzsche its last thinker who will transcend it); and he does so in his own truly Nietzschean way, suspecting an instinctual force behind Socrates: the 'logical drive' manifest in Socrates exhibits 'a natural power such as we observe, with awe and surprise, only in the greatest instinctual forces' (13). On the other hand, the excessive predominance of the logical and the rational in Socrates can only be the result of a 'superfetation' (ibid., and III, 772); everything points to a physio-psychological defect. Nietzsche tries to identify it by pointing to the negative function of the Socratic

daimonion, which in *Birth of Tragedy* he describes as an instinct (but dismisses later as an 'aural hallucination; a morbid element' (III,772 and II,952)): 'whereas in all productive men it is instinct which is the creative-affirmative force, and consciousness which acts critically as a dissuading force, in Socrates instinct becomes the critic and consciousness the creator — truly a monstrosity *per defectum*' (13). And yet, after denouncing Socrates as a monster of decadence, Nietzsche tries to give a historical justification for this monstrosity. He sees anti-Dionysiac tendencies in Greek culture antedating Socrates; in other words, decadence set in before Socrates. There was the danger that the energies of the Greeks, no longer bound to life-enhancing instincts, might go astray and weaken man's zest for life; and the Socratic enterprise then channelled these energies into the pursuit of knowledge and moral goodness, thereby neutralizing their destructive potential(15).

Nietzsche's reflexions on Socrates often move along this argumentative figure combining repudiation and justification, always accompanied by a fascination for his *bête noire* which he himself might have termed morbid. Most comprehensively, and at the same time most succinctly, does he present his ambivalent attitude towards Socrates in that part of *Twilight of the Idols* which is entitled "The Problem of Socrates" (II,951-956, quoted in the following by sections). It is worthwhile letting Nietzsche speak himself by quoting somewhat extensively. In this late piece his naturalism is not guarded by his estheticism; its language is plainly biologistic matching the crude naturalism of the thought.

Again, Nietzsche congratulates himself on achievements of *Birth of Tragedy;* this time it is his courageous irreverence which destroyed the learned and vulgar prejudice concerning Socrates and Plato: he had recognized them as symptoms of decadence, of Greek decay, and as not only pseudo-Greek but anti-Greek(2). He then concentrates on Socrates, harping on the latter's physical ugliness:

> 'Socrates was mob. One knows, one can still see it, how ugly he was. But ugliness, itself an objection, amounted almost to a refutation among the Greeks. Was Socrates really a Greek? Ugliness is very frequently an expression of a development thwarted by crossing. In other cases, it appears as a decadent development. The anthropologists among the criminologists declare the typical criminal[11] is ugly: *monstrum in fronte,*

11. This is a delicate point: in II,1020ff the criminal is defended and glorified (he is the instinctually strong man made sick by a society and culture that suppress the instincts); and in II,631 (aphorisms 109 and 110) crime is estheticised.

> *monstrum in animo*. But the criminal is a decadent. Was Socrates a typical criminal?'(3)

Nietzsche makes much of an anecdote told in several ancient authors (e.g. Ciciero, *Tusc.*4.47.80): A physiognomer judging from Socrates' facial features told him that he was harbouring the worst vices and wildest passions, and Socrates admitted to that. Nietzsche infers from this a disorder of the instincts in Socrates:

> 'The acknowledged wildness and anarchy of Socrates' instincts point to decadence; but also that superfetation of the logical faculty and his special characteristic: his malice born from his rickety ('Rhachitiker-Bosheit') . . . . Everything in him is excessive, *buffo*, caricature, everything in him is also concealed, of ulterior motives, subterraneous'.(4)

This is an example of the famous psychological method on which Nietzsche prided himself, reducing Socratic rationalism to symptoms of physiological causes: 'I try', he adds, 'to understand the idiosyncracy from which the Socratic equation has arisen: Reason=Virtue=Happiness, that most bizarre equation which has all the instincts of the older Hellenes against itself' (ibid.).

Now the justification of the *monstrum Socraticum*. The point of the anecdote referred to above was that Socrates when he admitted that he was a crater full of evil desires could claim he had mastered them all. Because of this he could offer himself as a solution, or so it seems, to a problematical situation; for

> 'the same kind of degeneracy was silently becoming rampant everywhere: archaic Athens was coming to an end. . . . Everywhere the instincts were in a state of anarchy; everywhere men were close to excess: the *monstrum in animo* was the universal danger. "The instincts would play the tyrant; a counter-tyrant must be found who is stronger than they." '(9)

Socrates had found that counter-tyrant:

> 'Reason was then discovered as the saviour; however, neither Socrates nor his 'patients' had a free choice in this — to be rational was *de rigueur*, the last resort. The fanaticism with which the whole of Greek thought jumped onto rationality, reveals an emergency: men were in danger and had only one choice: perish — or else be absurdly rational ('absurd-vernünftig'). The whole moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato on is the result of a pathological condition, and so is its appreciation of dialectics.'(10)

But one must not deceive oneself: the tyranny of reason over

instinct, the victory of Theoretical Man over Dionysian Man, arise from an instinctual disorder, i.e. decadence, and remain part of it: the cure is not a real one, it is only a palliative:

> 'It is self-deceit on the part of philosophers and moralists to think that they can escape decadence by merely waging war on it. Such escape is beyond their power: that which they choose as a means, as a path to salvation, is itself but an expression of decadence — they only modify its expression, but do not abolish it. Socrates was a misunderstanding. The whole of amelioration morality — the Christian morality included — was a misunderstanding . . . To be forced to fight the instincts — this is the formula of decadence'(11).

Is Socrates the cause or the symptom of Greek degeneration? Nietzsche is not quite consistent here and means presumably both. But what is consistent, is the monism in Nietzsche's genealogy of European decadence. While *Birth of Tragedy* and its account of European decadence might at times suggest a dualism — seemingly, that is — in *The Problem of Socrates* Nietzsche manages to explain everything, even the counterforce, in terms of instincts: reason is born from a 'logical drive'; rationality such as that of Socrates is the result of 'superfetation'; and the predominance of reason is nothing but the symptom of a disorder of instincts. Nietzsche may not have a system — he was an avowed antisystematizer and thought the will to a system a lack of intellectual honesty — but there is certainly a sustained main tenor of his thought, and in *The Problem of Socrates* the tenor becomes shrill. Fortunately, Nietzsche had no system; thus his thought was allowed to range widely enough to let him deviate from the main course of his thinking. Therefore numerous utterances can be found in the writings of all three periods which are in blatant contrast to the notion of Socrates as the decadent destroyer of a healthy Dionysiac culture.

There is talk of the 'profundity of the Socratic experience' (14); admiring remarks about the proud and free attitude Socrates showed towards his god Apollo — even he is being examined and tested by the philosopher — an attitude which Socrates could reconcile with a profound *eusebeia;* elsewhere Socrates is favourably compared to Christ for his 'joyous kind of seriousness which constitutes the best condition in man's soul', for his prankish wisdom, and above all, for his greater understanding (I, 915). By virtue of his rationality Socrates appears even as the liberator of man from life-denying chains *(ibid.)*. More of this may be found in the chapter "Nietzsche's admiration of Socrates' in W. Kaufmann's

Nietzsche book, a curious piece of Nietzsche-apologetics: whenever it comes to discussing the more questionable aspects of his doctrines, Nietzsche is always made to speak metaphorically or ironically. In his attempts to neutralize extreme statements, among those statements on Socrates, Kaufmann has to overwork the term 'dialectical'. Kaufmann promises to show the complexity in Nietzsche's attitude towards Socrates. But in the end, as the chapter title suggests, he presents only the plainly positive attitude of admiration; and Socrates becomes in the process something of an idol for Nietzsche.[12]

There remains the enigmatic image of the *music-practising Socrates,* appropriately placed in *Birth of Tragedy* at the transition from the account of tragedy's death to that of its rebirth. It is enigmatic because Nietzsche has not elaborated it. Is it a dialectical image in which theoretical Socratic Man and musical Dionysian Man are reconciled, marking the end of European decadence?[13] Dialectical in the sense that the Socratic would not be plainly negated but taken up into the new Dionysiac world Nietzsche envisaged as the overcoming of decadence; that is, taken up and preserved as a moment of equal weight? This is doubtful. Although Nietzsche uses here(15) the term *umschlagen,* he had no taste for dialectics which he spurns; but he did have a great taste for the paradoxical. I offer this exegesis: Modern science, the contemporary form of Socratism, will, as Nietzsche points out in this section of *Birth of Tragedy*(15), be driven, by its insatiable zest for knowledge, to its limits where it will be confronted with what defies scientific illumination: the abyss — the recognition that the universe is a chaos, not a *kosmos.* Then only art — Dionysiac 'music' — will provide recourse. Science will be forced — by its own principle — to recognize, in a last great act of reflexion, its own impossibility, and thereby pass into art. Out of this self-negation of the Socratic there will arise, like a phoenix, a reborn Dionysus. Tragedy once died through the Socratic: through the self-negation of the Socratic, it will be reborn. The grandeur of this image cannot be denied; but is it a dialectical one? Instinctual rejuvenation and the restitution of a Dionysiac nature leaves no room for a dialectically superseded Socratic. A 'Back to, or Forward to, Nature' is hardly dialectical.

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12. W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche — Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (3rd ed. Princeton 1968), pp. 391-411. — For a more balanced treatment see W. J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* (Ithaca and London 1974).
13. This is R.Grimm's view, see his *"Dionysos und Sokrates"*, in R. Grimm & J.Hermand (eds), *Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche* (Königstein 1978), p.165.

How could the contradictory picture of Nietzsche's relation to Socrates, as it emerges from his writings, be explained? It is a necessary contradiction, reflecting as it does the basic contradiction which runs through the whole of Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche was the father of modern *lebensphilosophie*. This 'philosophy of life' extols the irrational soul, instinctual life, and *natura naturans*, and denigrates reason and all the forms in which it manifests itself. Its philosophers present the disturbing, and in this century all too frequent, picture of the thinker who performs the *sacrificium intellectus* on the altar of a hysterical cult of instinctual life. Luckily, the *lebensphilosoph* with his vitalistic posturing is not the whole Nietzsche, and the at times shrill naturalism is only one aspect, although a most important one, of his philosophizing. The other Nietzsche shows his colours when he describes the philosopher's role — *his* role — in the Socratic image of the gadfly on the neck of modern man. Perhaps Nietzsche is the most perceptive and penetrating critic of modern culture; his uncanny keen-sightedness made him predict most of the barbarity of the twentieth century (some of which he welcomed). 'Separating true knowledge from illusion and error' and never flagging in this task is 'the one and truly human occupation of Socratic Man', Nietzsche writes in *Birth of Tragedy* (15): what else is he pursuing when he cuts through the illusions of his age subjecting modernity, its science and positivism to his merciless and uncompromising critique? Like Aristophanes, he is imbued with the very spirit of critical reflexion which he so vehemently prosecutes as instinct-corroding and life-destroying in his denunciations of Socrates and Western philosophy. 'His critique of Western philosophy', writes J. Habermas, 'his critique of science and his critique of prevailing morality constitute a single testimonial to knowledge striven after on the path of self-reflexion, and only on this path.' When Nietzsche 'denies the critical power of reflexion', Habermas continues, he does so — and how could it be otherwise? — 'with, and solely with, the means of reflexion.' In Habermas' apt expression, Nietzsche becomes thus the *'Virtuose einer sich selbst verleugnenden Reflexion'*, a virtuoso of a reflexion that denies itself.[14]

At his best, Nietzsche makes critical reflexion, the principle of all enlightenment, reflect critically upon itself, and is then the *'Aufklärer, der über die Aufklärung selbst aufgeklärt ist'* (H.Wein).[15]

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14. J.Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, trans. J.J. Shapiro (Boston 1971), pp.299f.
15. H.Wein, "Nietzsche ohne Zarathustra. Die Entkitschung Nietzsches: Der kritische Aufklärer", *Nietzschestudien* I (1972) pp. 359-379.

But, alas, all too often he arrests the critical process taking recourse to the natural, and falls thereby prey to the naturalistic fallacy. In his capacity as the critical diagnostician of modernity, Nietzsche is nowadays most important to us. Unfortunately, through most of the therapies he proposed in many of his doctrines, he became very much part of the European malaise he so keen-sightedly had diagnosed. It is from this Nietzsche that the totalitarians of the 20th century borrowed — and that not always illegitimately. In his critical Foreword to *Birth of Tragedy* of 1886, Nietzsche calls his youthful work, not without *coquetterie,* an impossible book (I,11) for various reasons. One of them touches the dilemma of the *lebensphilosoph:* in this book he was arguing *theoretically against theory,* and was thereby confirming what he negated by the way in which he negated it. The disciple of Dionysus should have *sung,* not *argued* (II,12). This, again, is neatly argued, but is no solution to his problem. Had he sung instead of argued, it would not have helped him to drag himself out of the quagmire of his contradictions. Singing, too, involves the use of language, and language is, as Nietzsche knew only all too well, essentially rational ('"Reason" in language! — oh, what a deceptive old hag! I am afraid we shall not get rid of God because we still believe in grammar':II,960). The philosophers of life cannot reduce themselves to creatures living, in the fashion of large beautiful animals, only for the invigoration and gratification of their instincts and confining all utterances to vitalistic emotional noises. Instead, they have to write books — their books happen to be the most voluminous ones — ; and as long as they use language, even if they sing, they are bound to loathesome reason. They are like Midas: whatever they touch, turns into something intellectual; not, however, necessarily intellectual gold.

IV

Referring to the same phenomena — the decline of the *polis* and the ruin of its art-form — Aristophanes and Nietzsche give opposing names to the *causa corruptionis:* for the first it is immorality, for the other morality. As the portrait of the New Spirit in the dramatic figure of *Wrong* in *Clouds* suggests, Aristophanes was thinking primarily of the younger sophists, while Nietzsche was fixated on Socrates. But we may safely take this as a clue for a more basic difference: their standpoints differ radically, and so does their understanding of the *polis.*

Let us again determine Aristophanes' standpoint, this time in terms emphasizing the difference between his and Nietzsche's. His

standpoint is based on the understanding of the *polis* as the ethical universe conceived of as the sole framework of human existence. Only by being a member of a *polis* does man rise above the natural state in which human life is notoriously 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. This is the point of the definition of man as a *zoon politikon,* usually obscured by the translation 'political animal'; for as a *zoon politikon* man is placed between *animalitas* and *divinitas* (cp. Aristotle, *Pol.* I,2,1253 a29).

With great alarm Aristophanes noted how all this was radically inverted by the sophists wielding their destructive weapon of the *physis/nomos* antithesis: *physis* became the measure of all things ethical, and the ethical sphere of *nomos* paled to a *corpus* of mere arbitrary conventions, to be disposed of if they came in conflict with nature. Against the *polis* and its ethical order, the *physis* sophists played off the natural state; standards of conduct were to be derived from the animal world. Aristophanes has splendidly satirized this in the scene of *Clouds* in which Pheidippides justifies father-beating by demonstrating that respect for parents is one of those unnatural arbitrary conventions parading as divinely ordained laws:

Str.: ἀλλ' οὐδαμοῦ νομίζεται τὸν πατέρα τοῦτο πάσχειν.

Phe.: οὔκουν ἀνὴρ ὁ τὸν νόμον θεὶς τοὐτον ἦν τὸ πρῶτον
ὥσπερ σὺ κἀγὼ, καὶ λέγων ἔπειθε τοὺς παλαιούς;
ἧττόν τι δῆτ ἔξεστι κἀμοὶ καινὸν αὖ τὸ λοιπὸν
θεῖναι νόμον τοῖς υἱέσιν, τοὺς πατέρας ἀντιτύπτειν;
. . . . . .
σκέψαι δὲ τοὺς ἀλεκτρυόνας καὶ τἄλλα τὰ βοτὰ ταυτί,
ὡς τοὺς πατέρας ἀμύνεται. καίτοι τί διαφέρουσιν
ἡμῶν ἐκεῖνοι, πλήν γ' ὅτι ψηφίσματ' οὐ γράφουσιν;

At this point Strepsiades shows the first sign of a beginning understanding; he drives the argument of the *physis* sophists to its ultimate conclusion:

τί δῆτ ' , ἐπειδὴ τοὺς ἀλεκτρυόνας ἅπαντα μιμεῖ,
οὐκ ἐσθίεις καὶ τὴν κόπρον κἀπὶ ξύλου καθεύδεις;[16]

16. *Clouds* 1420ff (M.Hadas' translation):
Streps.: But nowhere is it *lawful custom* that fathers should be so treated.
Pheid.: Was he more than mortal, of different clay, who that law legislated?/Have we not the same good right by *persuasion* to innovate,/To allow sons who have been beaten on their sires to retaliate?/ . . . . Consider roosters and other beasts — do they their fathers spare?/ How do such creatures differ from us except that they write no decrees?
Streps.: If the cock your model you make, be consistent, please:/off the dunghill take your meals, roost upon a bush.

Aristophanes' satire does not apply to the older sophists. With them the *physis/nomos* distinction had a purely cognitive purpose; and in the case of a conflict, they would side with *nomos* and the *polis* order against *physis* and the natural state. The savage was anything but noble: Plato has Protagoras express the common Greek view that the worst citizen of a *polis* is still far better than any savage (*agrios*, cf *Prot.*327c4ff). The *physis* sophists were, as was already noted, the sophists of the next generation, most vividly portrayed by Plato in the *personae* of Thrasymachus in *Republic* and Callicles in *Gorgias*. The latter was certainly the most formidable and most radical of all the sophists, although he claimed not to be one in that he was contemptuous of the pursuit of theoretical knowledge if it did not serve the will to power. By means of the *physis/nomos* antithesis he had arrived at a Genealogy of Morals and a Transvaluation of Values, demonstrating that virtues such as *dikaiosyne* and *sōphrosyne* are nothing but the resentment of the weak translated into the language of an ethical code; this was designed to prevent the strong from pursuing their Will to Power: for lack of claws they needed laws (cp.*Gorg.*492a/b). It is surprising to what degree all this anticipates Nietzschean doctrines[17]; Callicles is almost a superman *avant la lettre.* No doubt Nietzsche took his cue for *Genealogy of Morals* from this Platonic *persona.* Small wonder, then, that Nietzsche revised the traditional view on the causes of the decline of classical Greece in favour of the sophists; not, however, in the fashion of Grote whom he chides for trying to make them respectable by raising them to emblems of morality. On the contrary: 'they possess the courage of all strong spirits to *know* their immorality. . .' (III,730). To Nietzsche, the sophists were the last witnesses of the old healthy *polis* culture. Against the tribe of the philosophers — i.e. 'the decadents of Greece, the counter-movement directed against the old and noble taste: against the agonal (*sic!*) instinct, against the *polis*, against the value of race, against the authority of tradition' (II,1030), Nietzsche invokes the 'culture of the sophists', this 'invaluable movement amidst the moral and idealist swindle of the Socratic schools which was then breaking out in all directions'(II,1029):

> 'The Greek culture of the sophists has grown from all the Greek instincts; it belongs to the culture of the Periclean age as necessarily as Plato does not: it has its predecessors in Heraclitus, in Democritus, in the scientific types of the old

17. For more details on this, cp. E.R. Dodds' edition of the *Gorgias: Plato: Gorgias. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford 1959), pp.387-391.

> philosophy; it finds its expression in the high culture of Thucydides' (III,757). 'Greek philosophy (i.e. Socrates and thereafter) (was) the decadence of the Greek instinct; Thucydides (whom Nietzsche sees as a sophistic Macchiavelli) (was) the great *summa,* the last revelation of that strong, severe, and adamant positivism which was inherent in the instincts of the ancient Greeks' (II,1029). 'The sophists were Greeks: when Socrates and Plato took the side of virtue, they were Jews or I do not know what'(III,730).

This may suffice. What emerges clearly from all this is that Nietzsche understood the essence of the old *polis* culture in terms of instincts — it is, as we noticed time and again, almost a compulsion with him to see instinct at the bottom of everything he thinks admirable.

It is true that in *polissittlichkeit* there is a lack of reflexion: what is good and reasonable is self-evident and can be taken for granted by the citizens so that it needs no reflexion and consciousness on their part. Based on wont and obedience to established custom and tradition, *sittlichkeit* is to a large degree spontaneous. But this is only the exterior; Nietzsche obviously took it for the substance and felt entitled to conclude from the apparent absence of self-reflexion on the part of the acting subjects that the ethical order of the Greek *polis* was an example of *Instinkt-Moral,* 'the instinctive morality of strong races and times' (III, 735); and that its centre, *arete,* virtue, was the 'result of an immorality, of a will to power in the service of the species, or of the race or of the *polis*'(III,756). To assume nature where the moment of consciousness is not explicitly present, and to deny, as Nietzsche does, the rationality of such a morality, is the typical naturalist fallacy. Against this must be held that *polissittlichkeit* is at bottom rational; it is rational in substance, only not yet conceptually cleared into its rational principles. As Hegel put it: 'The Athenians before Socrates were objectively, and not subjectively, moral, for they acted rationally in their relations without knowing that they were particularly excellent.[18]

Nietzsche who saw 'no cardinal difference between man and animal' (I,272 *et passim)* — or, as Professor Grant put it: 'it was not Freud but Nietzsche who first and most consistently expounded the doctrine that human beings are *ids*'[19] — was bound to interpret the *polis* culture and its vigorous beauty in terms of instincts. But this flies into the face of the Greeks' self-understanding who saw

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18. G.W.F.Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* trans.E.S.Haldane (New York 1955) vol. I, p.388
19. G.Grant, "Nietzsche and the Ancients", p.9.

in their *polis* exactly that order which raises men above the level of instinctual existence. — For the old *polissittlichkeit,* the opposition of *nomos* and *physis* had not yet arisen; but Aristophanes' comic art was already dragged into it. His standpoint is *nomos;* Nietzsche's, like that of his idol Callicles, is the sophistically conceived *physis.* Hence their opposing names for the evil that caused the decay of the *polis* and its art-form. It shows that a gulf separates them — the similarities of their accounts of the Death of Tragedy notwithstanding. Nietzsche projected modern naturalism into classical culture, and that vitiated his understanding of it. If there is a true symptom of Greek dissolution or *decadence* — to borrow for a moment Nietzsche's favourite terms — it can be found in the immoralism of the younger sophists. But viewed with the eyes of modern naturalism it is bound to become a sign of pristine health.

This brings us back to the initial question: can Nietzsche's vision of Greek culture be a guide for classical studies? He has been credited — not only by his admirers — with having provided a wider as well as a more profound concept of classical culture. This is hard to see. He reduced the whole of Greek culture — or what remains of it after Nietzsche's revaluation — to the antagonistic interplay of the two abstractions called the Dionysiac and the Apollonian. Its periodization is determined by the constellations in which these two forces stand. According to this, Homer is purely Apollonian. In view of the frequent statements that the Dionysiac is the substance of Greek culture, one begins to wonder about Homer's status. Greek tragedy, as we have seen, is understood in terms of the Dionysiac ritual; its great dramatic characters viewed as masks of Dionysus. The ritual interpretation has been applied to Greek tragedy — with rather dismal results.[20] If it were successful, one would come up in each individual play with the monotonous recurrence of an identical pattern. More importantly, Greek tragedy became the great art-form it is by transcending the primitive Dionysiac ritual; what made it transcend was the element of consciousness, of — *horribile dictu* — reflexion.[21] On the whole, Nietzsche's concept of authentic Greek culture is rather exclusive. Of Greek tragedy, it is, strictly speaking, only Aeschylus who is

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20. See A.W.Pickard-Cambridge's critique of the Cambridge ritualists in his *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (Oxford 1927), pp.185-207 and 329-352.
21. Most pointedly put, against Nietzsche, by B.Snell ("Aristophanes and Aesthetic Criticism", p.122): The 'indispensable element which explains why we continue to occupy ourselves with tragedy is none other than . . . . the Socratic "knowledge", the element of reflexion. It attended at the birth of tragedy, and if we encounter it also at its demise, we should in all fairness refrain from crying "murderer".'

fully recognized for the Dionysiac substance of his tragedies. But since Nietzsche never demonstrated its presence in Aeschylean tragedy, it has been eluding us; and it has been eluding us for so long that we might give a serious thought to the suspicion that it is not there in the first place. Sophocles' status is not clear; as in *Frogs,* he plays the part of a second-rate Aeschylus. He is at times even suspect: after all, did he not lay hands on the Dionysiac substance of tragedy by reducing the chorus? Nietzsche takes this as the first sign of the anti-Dionysiac tendencies that antedated Socratic corruption(14). He even influenced Aeschylus in this. Moreover, was his tragic art not already slightly sicklied o'er with the pale cast of self-consciousness? In the famous oracle listing the three wisest men of his time, he is in the dubious company of Socrates and Euripides. His art was a conscious art, while, as he told Aeschylus, the latter did always the right thing but without knowing it.[22] Greek philosophy from Socrates on, as we saw, is excluded from authentic Greek culture except for the sophists, Thucydides included. Thus, what is left? Mainly the seventh and sixth centuries, and part of the fifth. Theognis, a second-rate poet, is highly praised and put on a par with Pindar. It is the time when classical Greece seems to be most oriental with its despotic *übermenschen,* the tyrants, and the waves of ecstatic Dionysianism. To classify this as authentic Greek culture is not in strict accord with Hellenic self-understanding.

And the profundity of Nietzsche's vision of classical antiquity? Ah, yes, the abyss! Nietzsche leads us to it by first removing the shallow optimism with which classical rationalism and moralism had covered it. In place of this shallow optimism, Nietzsche puts his Dionysian pessimism, always thought to be profound in itself. But what is shallow, is the banality of the opposition optimism/pessimism, and Greek tragedy was certainly beyond it. Then the abyss itself — when Nietzsche describes it with the sweeping and at times splendid rhetoric of *Birth of Tragedy,* it attains a certain mythic-poetic quality. Elsewhere, it sounds quite prosaic: time and again the Dionysiac message is driven home that the world is a chaos without order and meaning (II,115;I,750; I,1022;II,994 etc). But where does one find this in Aeschylus? As exegetical tools, the abyss and Dionysiac pessimism are hardly more helpful than the antagonistic interplay of the Dionysiac and the Apollonian.

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22. Sophocles to Aeschylus (in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai* 428f: εἰ καὶ τὰ δέοντα ποιεῖς, ἀλλ'οὖν οὐκ εἰδώς γε ποιεῖς — 'although you do the right things, you nevertheless do them without knowing it.'

Birth of Tragedy and his other writings dealing with classical antiquity should, first of all, be taken for what they are: part of the exposition of Nietzsche's philosophy; classical antiquity is in this context only the medium. His startling revaluation of the forces that shaped classical Greece cannot be isolated from his programmatic Transvaluation of Values. Here his naturalism, in particular his obsession with the instincts, plays an important part, rendering his views on classical antiquity eccentric and often bizarre. For that reason they may be, as many hold, most stimulating and interesting. But they are hardly — *pace* Lloyd-Jones — a reliable guide for classical studies.*

Dalhousie University
Halifax, N.S.

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