

Nietzscherforschung

Jahrbuch
der Nietzsche-Gesellschaft

Band 5/6

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Akademie Verlag

Nietzsche's Problem of Homer¹

„There is no greater glory for a man so long as he lives than that which he achieves by his own hands and feet.“

(Homer, *Odyssey* 8.147-148)²

„be bravest and pre-eminent above all“

(Homer, *Iliad* 6.208 and 11.784)³

„With a god's favoring hand, one man
may whet another's ambition, inspire him
to prodigious feats,

if glory's in his birthright.“

(Pindar, *Olympian X*)⁴

„Greek prudence. – Since the desire for victory and eminence is an inextinguishable trait of nature, older and more primitive than any respect for and joy in equality, the Greek state sanctioned gymnastic and artistic contests between equals, that is to say marked off an arena where that drive could be discharged without imperiling the political order. With the eventual decline of the gymnastic and artistic contests the Greek state disintegrated into inner turmoil.“

(Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*)⁵

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- 1 Portions of this paper were presented at professional conferences. I am grateful to the respondents and audience members at the meetings of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas (Haifa), the Friedrich Nietzsche Society (St. Andrews), the American Philosophical Association (Pittsburgh), and The Nietzsche Society (Georgetown University, USA) for their questions and suggestions. I am also grateful to Ralph Acampora, Daniel W. Conway, Alexander Nehamas, Uschi Nussbaumer-Benz, Nickolas Pappas, Donald Rutherford, and Steven Strange for assistance and helpful comments on earlier drafts of this work.
 - 2 Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by Arthur T. Murray, New York 1919 (Loeb Classical Library), Vol. 1, 269.
 - 3 This passage is cited by Zarathustra in *Also sprach Zarathustra* (part 1, section 15), as the Greeks' „law of their overcoming“, which inspired them to greatness. The citation is from Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by A. T. Murray, New York 1924 (Loeb Classical Library), Vol. 1, 277, 539.
 - 4 *Pindar's Victory Songs*, translated by Frank J. Nisetich, Baltimore 1980, lines 19-21, 131.
 - 5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*, translated by Reginald John Hollingdale, Cambridge 1986, section 226. The work is hereafter cited HH. Citations of Nietzsche's texts include part and section numbers of the relevant translations. Substantial citations are accompanied by the original German text in the footnotes. For the latter, I cite *Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Werke*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and New York 1967 ff.). This edition of Nietzsche's works is hereafter cited KGW. The passage cited above reads, „Klugheit der Griechen. – Da das Siegen- und Hervorragewollen ein unüberwindlicher Zug der Natur ist, älter und ursprünglicher, als alle Achtung und Freude der Gleichstellung, so hatte der griechische Staat den gymnastischen und musischen Wettkampf innerhalb der Gleichen sanctionirt, also einen Tummelplatz abgegränzt, wo jener Trieb sich entladen konnte, ohne die politische Ordnung in Gefahr zu bringen. Mit dem endlichen Verfall des gymnastischen und musischen Wettkampfes gerieth der griechische Staat in innere Unruhe und Auflösung“ (KGW 4/3, 294).

„Human nature finds it harder to endure a victory than a defeat.“
 (Nietzsche, „David Strauss: der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller“)⁶

In the course of his career Nietzsche examines several monumental instances of shifts in value that significantly altered Western consciousness. The first he locates in Homeric literature. Rather than viewing Homer as marking the beginning of Greek culture, Nietzsche claims that Homer stood at the end of a long history of anxiety and despair: the great personality that the name „Homer“ represents signals a triumph over a sense of exhaustion with life. Homer, Nietzsche claims, gave human existence a powerful new meaning. In his early work Nietzsche approaches Homer's significance from several perspectives: 1) as cultivating a moral and political ideal that launched unparalleled cultural achievements in the classical age, 2) as a great personality that can serve to be instructive today, and 3) as providing one of the conditions that generated the art form of tragedy. Nietzsche employs the first two perspectives in „Homer's Wettkampf“, and *Die Geburt der Tragödie* springs from his investigation of the third. Nietzsche's exploration of Homer's new values grounds much of his later work and serves as a model for the studies of valuation that mark his career. I argue here that Nietzsche strives to make Homer problematic, highlighting his significance as a creative reevaluator, in order to make the Homeric valuation of life a challenging *problem for us*.

In the first section I demonstrate the importance of Nietzsche's philological interests for his philosophical pursuits, focusing on Nietzsche's interpretation of Homer. In the history of human beings as revaluators, which one might argue is the theme that consumes the bulk of Nietzsche's writings, Homer stands at the beginning. In his reexamination of a quintessential philological problem, the „Homeric question“, Nietzsche shifts the object of concern from locating the identity of Homer to determining his significance. Nietzsche argues that we would do better to abandon the question „Who was Homer?“ in order to focus our attention on the question „What was the meaning of Homer?“ In so doing, Nietzsche makes problematic the appearance and effects of Homeric literature and thereby prepares the ground for asking the question „What does Homer (and, by extension, the Greeks) mean for us?“ This sort of problem-posing is characteristic of many of Nietzsche's philosophical investigations, which aim to make problematic values and concepts that have become hackneyed and commonplace.

In the following three sections, I develop an analysis of *agon* as it is discussed in „Homer's Wettkampf“ and other writings from the early 1870s. I identify the specific reevaluation with which Nietzsche credits Homer, and describe how this is linked in Nietzsche's work with the cultural accomplishments of ancient Greece. Nietzsche cites certain social practices that indicate the degree to which *agon* was valued in Greek culture, and I describe how these values are related to others Nietzsche identifies with the Greeks and to those he held himself. Nietzsche distinguishes creative forms of agonistic behavior from those that are destructive, and I show how agonistic play (a form of *agon*) differs from other modes of playful activity. Additionally, Nietzsche draws together several examples of what happens in the absence of *agon* – when it atrophies from neglect or becomes exhausted through excess. Finally, in the last section, I describe how these examples serve to further our understanding of the

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, „David Strauss: der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller“, translated by Reginald John Hollingdale, Cambridge 1989, section I. Subsequent references to this essay are abbreviated DS followed by section number. KGW 3/1, 155: „Die menschliche Natur erträgt ihn schwerer als eine Niederlage“.

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possibilities and the potential problems associated with developing and embracing agonistic models of interaction and development.

Nietzsche's transformation of the ancient Greek idea of contest (*agon*) can be charted from his early appeals for cultural rejuvenation through his later polemics on self-overcoming. Until recently, much of the secondary literature on Nietzsche ignored the prominence of agonistic imagery in his writing and, consequently, neglected to articulate its philosophical significance.⁷ This article strives to articulate the concept as Nietzsche initially develops it, thereby preparing the ground for further work that could be done to illustrate how Nietzsche applies and strives to enact agonistic ideas and practices in his later writings. Persistent problems for those espousing and defending agonistic theories include: 1) defining agonistic actions and practices in such a way so as to distinguish them from other manifestations of power and resistance (a problem not adequately addressed either by Foucault or the editors of *Agonistics: Arenas of Creative Contest*⁸); 2) specifying mechanisms for negotiating regulation the contest in such a way that it both protects against exploitation and oppressive domination and preserves the radical openness that facilitates the on-going circulation of provocation and empowerment (a challenge unmet by both Lyotard, Bonnie Honig, and Lawrence Hatab);⁹ and 3) discussing ways in which a propitious disposition regarding agonistic engagement might be cultivated and enhanced in prospective participants (a need recognized by William Connolly,¹⁰ which would benefit from further analysis). This article takes some initial steps to specify these problems and explores several ways in which Nietzsche offers conceptual resources to address them.

I.

Nietzsche fashions his own Homeric problem by weaving together and transforming a variety of concerns and approaches that stem from Neohellenist scholarship. Winkelmann's effort to elucidate the harmonic coordination of individual artistic achievements with cultural and social advancement and his literary approach to the study of art provided a fruitful framework for the study of literature, history, and philosophy. Traces of these ideas can be found in the works of Lessing, Herder, Goethe, von Humboldt, and Friedrich August Wolf. Wolf's well-known *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) advanced the argument that the Homeric epics were not the products of a single individual but of a group of rhapsodes. Drawing on recently discovered manuscripts, Wolf's arguments served as models for the emerging formal methods

7 Noteworthy exceptions include: H. Siemens, „Nietzsche's Hammer: Philosophy, Destruction, or the Art of Limited Warfare“, in: *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 2 (Juni) 1998, 321-347; and Benjamin C. Sax, „Cultural Agonistics: Nietzsche, the Greeks, Eternal Recurrence“, in: *Agonistics: Arenas of Creative Contest*, edited by Janet Lungstrum and Elizabeth Sauer, New York 1997, 46-69; and Cynthia Haynes-Burton, „The Ethico-Political Agon of *Other* Criticisms: Toward a Nietzschean Counter-Ethic“, in: *Pre/Text* 11 (1990).

8 Janet Lungstrum and Elizabeth Sauer (Eds.), *Agonistics: Arenas of Creative Contest*, 1997.

9 See Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, Ithaca/ New York 1993; and Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, La Salle/Illinois 1995.

10 See his *The Ethos of Pluralization*, Minneapolis 1995, and *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, New York 1991.

of a systematic approach to classical study later named „*Altertumswissenschaft*.“¹¹ Although many of his specific arguments were subsequently refuted or undermined,¹² Wolf's work was and remains extremely influential, and it initiated a long-standing debate concerning the authorship, authenticity, and dating of the so-called Homeric corpus. The debate became known as the „Homeric question“, and it dominated classical philology for more than a hundred years after it was ignited.

It is this question that Nietzsche approaches in his Basel *Antrittsrede* (May 28, 1869), „Homer und die klassische Philologie.“ In that lecture, Nietzsche describes a split in contemporary philology between realists, whose primary interest is in applying a strictly scientific approach to the study of antiquity, and artists, whose aim is to capture the „wonderful creative force; the real fragrance, of the atmosphere of antiquity.“¹³ No question divided this group more than the concern about the authorial unity of the Homeric epics. Nietzsche claims those eager to laud the artistic greatness of the Homeric works have an interest in identifying stylistic similarities and the aesthetic harmony of the poems because they best support the single author thesis. Those who scientifically scrutinize the linguistic and structural elements conclude, in part on the basis of incongruities, that it is nearly impossible that a single author could have composed the entire corpus. Nietzsche redefines the „Homeric question“ when he claims that the most important concern is not whether there were one or several authors but what kind of personality the epics suggest, what judgment the appearance of Homeric literature reflects.

For Nietzsche, Homer represents „a productive point of view“: „the wonderful capacity of the soul of a people to represent the conditions of its moral beliefs in the form of a personality.“¹⁴ The study of works attributed to Homer, he claims, should focus on identifying the beliefs and perspective the poems represent. What kind of cultural, social, and material conditions could produce such works? What was the relationship between those works and the lives of those who heard them? What role did the genius we call „Homer“ play in the cultural lives of the Greeks? What was the *value* of Homer for Greek culture, and what values can we credit the Homeric literature with creating and perpetuating?

Nietzsche's answers to these questions are not fully articulated in the lecture, but he does make the following assertion: „Homer as the composer of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is not a

11 Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300–1850*, Oxford 1976, 175.

12 Ebd. Wolf's line of argument was, however, supported and expanded in the twentieth-century by Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, edited by A. Parry, Oxford 1987. Additional studies of this controversy can be found in J. Russo, „Homer Against His Tradition“, in: *Arion* (Summer, 1968), 275-295; Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer's Odyssey*, Berkeley 1975; Piero Pucci, *Odysseus Polytropos. Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and the Iliad*, Ithaca 1987; David Shive, *Naming Achilles*, Oxford 1987; and Richard P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad*, Ithaca 1989. Also see David R. Lachterman, „Die ewige Wiederkehr der Griechen: Nietzsche and the Homeric Question“, in: *International Studies in Philosophy* XXIII: 2 (1991), 90-91.

13 KGW 2/1, 252: „das wunderbar Bildende, ja den eigentlichen Duft der antiken Athmosphäre [...]“. Translated by J. M. Kennedy in Friedrich Nietzsche, „*On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*“ and „*Homer and Classical Philology*“, New York 1964, 148. Subsequent references to „Homer and Classical Philology“ are cited as HCP.

14 KGW 2/1, 254 f.: „fruchtbaren Gesichtspunktes [...] die wunderbare Fähigkeit der Volksseele anerkannt, Zustände der Sitte und des Glaubens in die Form der Persönlichkeit einzugiessen.“ HCP, 152.

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historical tradition, but an *aesthetic judgment*.¹⁵ Nietzsche cites the legendary story of the contest between Homer and Hesiod as evidence of a conscious, ancient distinction between two poetic tendencies: the heroic and the didactic. It was not until the Homeric works were collected and formally organized that the aesthetic differences became clear. Then „the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* arose from the depths of the flood and have remained on the surface ever since.“¹⁶ That process, Nietzsche claims, shifted the identification of Homer from the creator of heroic poetry to the forefather of poetry in general and obscured Homer's accomplishment. A pressing philological and philosophical question, for Nietzsche, is determining the significance of Homer for the subsequent Greeks. „We believe in a great poet as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – but not that Homer was this poet.“¹⁷ Nietzsche is careful to resist the interpretation that Homer, in this sense, represented the unconscious poetizing soul of the people, a mere product of the times. The poetic expressions called „Homeric“ represent, according to Nietzsche, a unique and significant shift in the history of Greek judgment and are not simply a natural evolution of human consciousness. „Homer's Wettkampf“ and *Die Geburt der Tragödie* serve to articulate the significance of this change.

It is necessary to consider briefly the portrait of Homer that *Die Geburt der Tragödie* provides, because „Homer's Wettkampf“, for reasons I describe below, makes few references to the poet. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche contends that Homer brought about a reversal of the wisdom of Silenus. Sophocles draws attention to an ancient mythical view of life. In „Oedipus at Colonus“, the story of Midas' search for wisdom is recounted. Dionysus' companion Silenus tells Midas that what is best for humankind is not to be born and second-best is to die soon.¹⁸ Homer, Nietzsche claims, reversed that perspective, creating a new view of what is best for humankind: „to die soon is worst of all for them, the next worst – to die at all.“¹⁹ In Homeric literature, Olympian gods and the heroes who emulated and challenged them sounded „nothing but the accents of an exuberant, triumphant life in which all things, whether good or evil, are deified“ (BT 3).²⁰ They exhibited an excess of life that included finding life enjoyable. They were self-absorbed and proud. Everywhere they saw „the ideal picture of their own existence“ (BT 3). Homer exhibited a supreme celebration and glorification of life, but, Nietzsche insists, Homer must be read as a reevaluator, as a conqueror over the prior folk-wisdom. For Nietzsche that means that although it is appropriate to interpret the world that Homer portrayed as one infused with supreme optimism, we must not forget the

15 KGW 2/1, 263: „Homer als der Dichter der Ilias und Odyssee ist nicht eine historische Ueberlieferung, sondern ein *aesthetisches Urtheil*.“ HCP, 163.

16 KGW 2/1, 264: „Ilias und Odyssee tauchten aus der Fluth empor und blieben seitdem immer auf der Oberfläche.“ HCP, 163.

17 KGW 2/1, 266: „Wir glauben an den einen grossen Dichter von Ilias und Odyssee – doch nicht an Homer als diesen Dichter.“ HCP, 167.

18 *Oedipus at Colonus*, lines 1224 ff. Theognis expresses a similar view in his *Elegies*: „For man the best thing is never to be born, / Never to look upon the hot sun's rays, / Next best, to speed at once through Hades' gates / And lie beneath a piled-up heap of earth“ (lines 425-428), translated by Dorothea Wender in: *Hesiod and Theognis*, New York 1973, 111.

19 KGW 3/1, 31: „Das Allerbeste ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zu sein, nichts zu sein. Das Zweitbeste aber ist für dich – bald zu sterben.“ Translated by Walter Kaufmann in: *Nietzsche, „The Birth of Tragedy“ and „The Case of Wagner“*, New York 1967, section 3. Subsequent citations of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* are from the same translation and are cited in the text as BT, followed by the section number.

20 KGW 3/1, 31: „nichts an Askese, Geistigkeit und Pflicht: hier redet nur ein uppiges, ja triumphirendes Dasein zu uns, in dem alles Vorhandene vergöttlicht ist, gleichviel ob es gut oder böse ist.“

terror that preceded it: the unforgettable knowledge and experience of the horrific aspects of human existence.²¹ Homeric optimism was not a naturally occurring state. Homer's naiveté was a triumphant achievement, and it is precisely the nature of this victory and the needs that generated the struggle for its accomplishment that Nietzsche hopes to understand.

The world that Homer made possible is described in „Homer's Wettkampf.“ Homer, who turned the trials of life into a series of competitions, revalued struggle as an opportunity to win honor and distinguish oneself. Once this possibility was extended, once there was an alternative to nihilistic resignation, Greek culture began to flourish. Homer's competition held out the promise of fame and honor, an opportunity to make one's life meaningful. „Homer's Wettkampf“ explores the significant consequences of this judgment.

II.

Throughout his career as a philologist, Nietzsche resisted romantic tendencies to portray the Greeks as idealized genteel noblemen, possessed of all the bourgeois values of the day. That is to say, Nietzsche consciously strove to avoid reading his contemporaries' concerns and values into those of the Greeks. In a notebook from the 1870's,²² Nietzsche wrote: „The *human element* that the classics show us is not to be confused with the *humane*. The antithesis to be strongly emphasized; what ails philology is its effort to smuggle in the humane.“²³ Nietzsche took interest in what he called the „animal instincts“ of the Greeks, in their struggles and political turmoil, in their sensuality, and in their decadence as well as their excellence. He wanted to explain the „miracle“ of the development of classical Greek culture by examining what preceded it, and he preferred an explanation for which his colleague Jacob Burckhardt is better known. In lectures that formed the basis of his *Griechische*

21 „In the Greeks the ‚will‘ wished to contemplate itself in the transfiguration of genius and the world of art; in order to glorify themselves, its creatures had to feel themselves worthy of glory they had to behold themselves again in a higher sphere, without this perfect world of contemplation acting as a command or a reproach. This is the sphere of beauty, in which they saw their mirror images, the Olympians. With this mirroring of beauty the Hellenic will combated its artistically correlative talent for suffering and for the wisdom of suffering – and, as a monument of its victory, we have Homer, the naive artist“ (BT 3). KGW 3/1, 34 f.: „In den Griechen wollte der ‚Wille‘ sich selbst, in der Verklärung des Genius und der Kunstwelt, anschauen; um sich zu verherrlichen, mussten seine Geschöpfe sich selbst als verherrlichenswerth empfinden, sie mussten sich in einer höheren Sphäre wiedersehen, ohne dass diese vollendete Welt der Anschauung als Imperativ oder als Vorwurf wirkte. Dies ist die Sphäre der Schönheit, in der sie ihre Spiegelbilder, die Olympischen, sahen. Mit dieser Schönheitsspiegelung kämpfte der hellenische ‚Wille‘ gegen das dem künstlerischen correlative Talent zum Leiden und zur Weisheit des Leidens: und als Denkmal seines Sieges steht Homer vor uns, der naive Künstler.“

22 March 1875, MpXIII 6b, in KGW 3/4, 90-114.

23 KGW 4/1, 93: „Das Menschliche, das uns das Alterthum zeigt, ist nicht zu verwechseln mit dem Humanen. Dieser Gegensatz ist sehr stark hervorzuheben, die Philologie krankt daran, dass sie das Humane unterschieben möchte [...]“ Translated by William Arrowsmith in *Unmodern Observations*, edited by William Arrowsmith, New Haven 1990, „We Classicists“, 3:12. The text is hereafter cited WPh, followed by the part and fragment numbers. Compare WPh 3:16: „Escape from reality to the classics: hasn't the understanding of antiquity already been falsified in this manner?“ (KGW 4/1, 95: „Flucht aus der Wirklichkeit zu den Alten: ob dadurch nicht die Auffassung des Alterthums gefälscht ist?“)

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*Kulturgeschichte*²⁴ Burckhardt claims that the principle around which the entire new culture revolved was a competitive drive to excel. The *agon*, or contest, was the source of strength in ancient Greece, the wellspring of its enormous success, and, for Nietzsche, at the root of its ultimate decline.

It is well known that Nietzsche and Burckhardt were colleagues at Basel. Lesser known are the details of their interaction. Burckhardt's lectures on Greek culture were published posthumously, but Nietzsche was at Basel during the first few years they were given. Nietzsche attended a lecture on at least one occasion, and he had two students prepare transcripts, which he studied and compared. Notes taken from the transcripts appear in Nietzsche's *Nachlaß*. However, I do not suggest that Nietzsche simply inherited the idea from Burckhardt. Notes and plans for Nietzsche's most extended work on the significance of *agon*, „Homer's Wettkampf“, date back at least as far as two years prior to his Basel appointment. Nietzsche also had occasion to think about the role of *agon* in Greek culture as he edited the ancient text *The Contest Between Homer and Hesiod* (anonymous author) and as he prepared his commentary on the same while a student in Leipzig.²⁵ Burckhardt's lectures did not begin until 1870 (although he had been working on them since the early 1860s) and there is no evidence that Nietzsche had any knowledge of Burckhardt's thesis before he came to Basel.²⁶ Although it is Burckhardt who is credited among classicists for having „discovered“ the agonistic element of the so-called „Greek spirit“,²⁷ it is Nietzsche who recognized and explored its serious dangers. Nietzsche developed and extended this idea throughout his philosophical writings.

„Homer's Wettkampf“, finished by Nietzsche in 1872, is a preface to an unwritten book. Its status in the Nietzsche corpus is still not fully appreciated. It does not number among his published works, yet its use in constructing interpretations of Nietzsche's work is not subject to the same criticisms as the so-called *Wille zur Macht*.²⁸ Unlike many of the sketches and plans for projects that appear in Nietzsche's notebooks, „Homer's Wettkampf“ is a work that

24 See Jacob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, translated by Sheila Stern and edited, with an introduction by Oswyn Murray, New York 1998, *passim*, especially „The Agonal Age“.

25 Later published as „Der Florentinische Tractat über Homer und Hesiod, ihr Geschlecht und ihren Wettkampf“ in III: *Rheinisches Museum* NF XXV (1870), 528-40, and III/IV *Rheinisches Museum* NF XXVIII (1873), 211-249; also see Nietzsche's „Certamen quod dicitur Homeri et Hesiodi“. The texts appear in KGW 2/1.

26 There is some disagreement regarding the degree to which Nietzsche influenced and was influenced by Burckhardt. For the view that contact between the two was significant and mutually influential see Edgar Salin, *Jacob Burckhardt und Nietzsche*, 2. Aufl., Heidelberg 1948, and James Hastings' introduction to Burckhardt's *Force and Freedom: Reflections On History*, New York 1943, 21-29. A different view is offered in Alfred von Martin, *Nietzsche und Burckhardt: Zwei Geistige Welten im Dialog*, Basel 1945. Walter Kaufmann in his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4. Aufl., Princeton 1974, argues that the influence was one-sided (that Burckhardt influenced Nietzsche) and superficial. Also see Felix Stähelin's introduction to Burckhardt, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 8: *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Stuttgart 1930, xxiii-xxix.

27 For a critical review of Burckhardt's thesis in light of current classical scholarship see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*, Middletown 1977, 295-305. Oswyn Murray also discusses the reception and evaluation of Burckhardt's thesis in his introduction to Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*. Murray writes, „Nietzsche seems to have realized the importance of the agon or contest, even before he arrived in Basle“ (xxxii), although Murray does not provide any support for that claim. In a footnote, he writes, „The exact relation between the views of Burckhardt and Nietzsche on the agon is obscure, and would repay further investigation“ (note 55, 369).

28 See Bernd Magnus, „The Use and Abuse of *The Will to Power*“, in: *Reading Nietzsche*, edited by Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen Marie Higgins, New York 1988, 218-236; and Wayne Klein, „Nietzsche's Apocrypha: *The Will to Power* and Contemporary Scholarship“, in: *New Nietzsche Studies*. 1:1/2 (Fall/Winter 1996), 102-125.

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Nietzsche considered finished. It is one of five prefaces „to books unwritten that never will be written.“²⁹ Nietzsche polished and considerably reworked the material before presenting it to Cosima Wagner as a Christmas gift in 1872. He knew well that his gift, like others the Wagners received, would be displayed and read for the enjoyment of other guests at the Wagners' Bayreuth home. For this reason, „Homer's Wettkampf“ must be viewed as a publicly shared writing, not on par with his published books and yet neither an excerpt from his notebooks nor a finished work he decided to keep only for himself. After 1872, Nietzsche continued to work on the ideas explored in „Homer's Wettkampf.“ Drafts and plans for *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* include one to be titled „Der Wettkampf“, and Nietzsche planned to include some of the work in his book on the pre-Platonic philosophers. Later, portions of the text were incorporated into other works in each of Nietzsche's periods.³⁰

In „Homer's Wettkampf“, Nietzsche describes an ethical transformation, a revaluation of values that he claims provided the conditions for the flourishing of Greek culture. He accounts for cultural institutions that made possible monumental accomplishments in art and literature. He describes the nature of education in early Greek society and how this practice yielded exemplary human beings. Finally, Nietzsche suggests that one reason why a similar cultural prosperity has not been achieved in modern society is that it has devalued the agonistic ideal and the expression of drives such as envy that support it. Although Nietzsche does not think that we should simply strive to recreate Greek culture – partly because he does not think that is possible and partly because he does not believe the Greeks to be without serious faults³¹ – he does investigate the conditions that made Greek accomplishments possible. The agonistic spirit is one condition Nietzsche sought to revive.

In contrast to most nineteenth-century philological scholarship, Nietzsche highlights the brutality and harshness of life exhibited in the works of Homer and Hesiod. Hesiod's portrayal of life as a punishment that all humans must bear provides evidence for Nietzsche that early Greeks spent much of their energy on sheer survival, leaving little time for developing a life that we, or the later Greek philosophers, might call a *flourishing* life. Nietzsche argues that the ancient Greeks became distinctive when, „protected by the hand of Homer“,³² they reinterpreted their bellicose instincts, their need to strive, as a source of strength rather than

29 Nietzsche gave them the collective title, „Fünf Vorreden zu fünf ungeschriebenen Büchern.“ The dedication reads: „Für Frau Cosima Wagner in herzlichster Verehrung und als Antwort auf mündliche und briefliche Fragen, vergnügten Sinnes niedergeschrieben in den Weihnachtstagen 1872.“ See KGW 3/2, 245-246.

30 For a few examples, see KGW 3/4, 16, 122, 134-5, 143, 187, 309, 312. Revised portions appeared later in published writings: *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* I (158, 159, 477, 503); *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* II (2, 29-31, 33, 99, 170, 226). Also see *Morgenröthe*, 38, 69; *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, III, 168; *Also sprach Zarathustra*, I (5, 10, 14); *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 23; *Der Antichrist*, 16.

31 Nietzsche writes: „At present, all [cultural] bases, the mythical and sociopolitical, have changed; our pretended culture has no stability because it's been built on shaky, indeed already crumbling, conditions and beliefs. – So, if we fully understand Greek culture, we see that it's gone for good“ (WPh 3, 76). (KGW 4/4, 114: „In Betreff der Cultur heisst dies: wir kannten bisher nur eine vollkommene Form, das ist die Stadtkultur der Griechen, auf ihren mythischen und socialen Fundamenten ruhend, und eine unvollkommene, die römische, als Dekoration des Lebens, entlehrend von der griechischen. Jetzt haben sich nun alle Fundamente, die mythischen und die politisch-socialen verändert; unsere angebliche Cultur hat keinen Bestand, weil sie sich auf unhaltbare, fast schon verschwundene Zustände und Meinungen aufbaut. – Die griechische Cultur vollständig begreifend sehen wir also ein, dass es vorbei ist.“)

32 Friedrich Nietzsche, „Homer's Wettkampf“, KGW 3/2, 278. All translations of „Homer's Wettkampf“ (hereafter cited HC) are my own.

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as a curse. Moderns, on the other hand, Nietzsche claims, see the whole world with an ethical „coloring“ different from that of the ancients.

The Greeks were distinctive, in Nietzsche's view, because of their reinterpretation of jealousy [*eris*] and envy [*Neid*]. While moderns view these human tendencies as decadent and evil, the Greeks understood them quite differently, and that is reflected in their mythology. Eris, sister of the war god Ares, was associated in antiquity with discord and strife. She figured prominently in the story of the judgment of Paris and was generally considered an evil goddess by the Greeks. In *Works and Days*, however, Hesiod describes two Eris-goddesses: one is responsible for the drive to wage wars of annihilation and destruction, the other Eris-goddess provides gifts whose works are good. The second goddess inspires the kinds of envy and jealousy that drive individuals to better one another. According to the myth in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Zeus put the good Eris on the earth to encourage labor among men. She is praised by Hesiod because she encourages activities that aid humankind.³³ To be spurred on by envy is not a punishment in the sense of painful yearning for what one lacks; rather, it is a god-given gift that leads to greater human accomplishment.³⁴

It is the good form of *eris* that Nietzsche claims modern interpreters of Hesiod have ignored and are unable to understand. Like Burckhardt, Nietzsche claims the introduction of artistic and athletic contests, the Greek *agon*, harnessed a natural drive to rule in ways that led to unprecedented cultural achievement. It is undeniable that the Greeks celebrated and cultivated their contesting spirit. Homeric literature chronicles great struggles of men and gods. Persons from all parts of the Greek world gathered to witness and participate in the Olympic and other sacred athletic competitions. Art and sculpture exalted heroic victors. Youths in Greece were educated for participation in a culture that required them to strive for greatness in artistic ability, physical prowess, or political success. In ancient Greece, Nietzsche claims, physical, intellectual, and artistic achievement developed in unison.

No figures in antiquity knew more about the agonistic way of life than Homer's struggling heroes. It was thanks to Homer that the Greeks thought they knew so much about the mythical age of the great heroes, the race of people who allegedly lived in the age before his own. For the heroes „everything pivoted on a single element of honour and virtue: strength, bravery, physical courage, prowess. Conversely, there was no weakness, no unheroic trait, but one, and that was cowardice and the consequent failure to pursue heroic goals.“³⁵ One's reputation was of paramount concern. Achieving that kind of recognition was a public affair. James Redfield goes so far as to claim that we can see Homeric literature as reflecting the view that it was only through public competition that individuals could fully realize the height of human existence.³⁶ In this sense, the *agon* serves as a site where human being gathers its meaning, its value as worthwhile, respectable, desirable. To be a hero one had to be willing to stake

33 Hesiod, *Works and Days*, in *Hesiod and Theognis*, translated by Dorothea Wender, 1973, 59, lines 1-26.

34 Although there is no evidence that the second Eris-goddess played a significant role in Greek mythology, two recent studies have explored distinctions between the words „*zelos*“, commonly translated „jealousy“, and „*phthonos*“, commonly translated „envy.“ „*Zelos*“ was generally a positive word, indicating a desire to imitate or emulate. „*Phthonos*“ was used to indicate an unwarranted, hostile antagonism of the sort that might arise in sibling rivalry or sexual jealousy. See Peter Walcot, *Envy and the Greeks* (Warminster, England 1978), and Patricia Bulman, „*Phthonos*“ in *Pindar*, *Classical Studies*, vol. 35, Berkeley 1995.

35 M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, New York 1991 [reprint of the second revised edition (1978)], 28.

36 James Redfield, „Homo Domesticus“, in: *The Greeks*, edited by Jean-Pierre Vernant, translated by Charles Lambert and Teresa Lavender Fagan, Chicago 1995, 164-165.

everything – including one's life – in a struggle to acquire greater prestige. Consequently the immortal gods could not be heroes. The hero's life was exclusively the domain of human beings, more precisely, of human men.

The life of the hero as portrayed in Greek literature resembles the life Nietzsche describes in *On The Genealogy of Morals* as the aristocratic or noble. Nietzsche is often read as praising that form of life, and he is frequently accused of advocating a return to heroic morality, of praising the institution of slavery, and of being a champion of cruelty and sadism.³⁷ Although these claims are not wholly unfounded, a careful reading of Nietzsche can place them in a broader context. The second part of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, especially sections 6 and 7, is often cited as evidence that Nietzsche advocates cruelty. The most famous section of those passages is the following: „To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle to which even the apes might subscribe; for it has been said that in devising bizarre cruelties they anticipate man and are, as it were, his ‚prelude‘. Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches — and in punishment there is so much that is festive! —“³⁸ The passage should be compared with *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 229, where Nietzsche writes: „We should reconsider cruelty and open our eyes. [...] Almost everything we call ‚higher culture‘ is based on the spiritualization of *cruelty*, on its becoming more profound: this is my proposition. That ‚savage animal‘ has not really been ‚mortified‘; it lives and flourishes, it has merely become — divine.“³⁹ Zarathustra's and Nietzsche's own declarations of war are also cited as evidence of his admiration for unbridled expressions of brute force and strength. It is clear, however, from what follows the cited passage from the *Genealogie* that Nietzsche believes cruelty is an inescapable part of human life — an element that can be channeled, redirected, and refined but one that is inevitable. Nietzsche attributes the cultural successes of the *agon* to a particular mode of productive action. In „Homer's Wettkampf“ he writes that in the *agon* the good Eris „as jealousy, resentment, and envy, provokes human beings to action — not to the action of fights of annihilation, but rather to the

37 On cruelty and slavery see Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, Cambridge 1995, especially 164 and 166; and Philippa Foot, „Nietzsche's Immoralism“, in: *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's „Genealogy of Morals“*, edited by Richard Schacht, Berkeley 1994, 3-14. On Nietzsche and sadism, see notes in Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, translated from the Italian by Angus Davidson, 2. Aufl., New York 1970. Nicholas Martin, in his *Nietzsche and Schiller: Untimely Aesthetics*, accuses Nietzsche of „yearning for barbaric simplicity and raw power“, and exhibiting a „strong masochistic streak in his character“ (Oxford 1996, 199 and 200).

38 KGW 6/2, 318: „Leiden-sehn thut wohl, Leiden-machen noch wohler — das ist ein harter Satz, aber ein alter mächtiger menschlich-allzumenschlicher Hauptsatz, den übrigens vielleicht auch schon die Affen unterschreiben würden: denn man erzählt, dass sie im Ausdenken von bizarren Grausamkeiten den Menschen bereits reichlich ankündigen und gleichsam ‚vorspielen‘. Ohne Grausamkeit kein Fest: so lehrt es die älteste, längste Geschichte des Menschen — und auch an der Strafe ist so viel Festliches! —“. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale Nietzsche in: *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (hereafter cited GM and EH respectively), New York 1968, II, 6. An otherwise careful reader of Nietzsche, Robert Solomon, calls attention to these passages but does not put them in context in his recent essay „Nietzsche *ad hominem*: Perspectivism, personality, and resentment revisited“, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, edited by Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, Cambridge 1996, 180-222.

39 KGW 6/2, 172: „Fast Alles, was wir ‚höhere Cultur‘ nennen, beruht auf der Vergeistigung und Vertiefung der Grausamkeit — dies ist mein Satz; jenes ‚wilde Thier‘ ist gar nicht abgetödtet worden, es lebt, es blüht, es hat sich nur — vergöttlicht.“ Translated by Walter Kaufmann in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, New York 1966, 158.

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action of contests.⁴⁰ *Eris*, in the form of envy, employed what Nietzsche believed to be unavoidable urges in a struggle for preeminence; those urges to strive found their expression in perpetual competition. Striving then came to be understood as a way of living the best possible life.

In his discussion of the two *Eris*-goddesses in „Homer's *Wettkampf*“, Nietzsche distinguishes two types of activities they incite. One goddess drives human beings to *Vernichtungslust*, a desire to bring about the complete destruction of what opposes. The other *Eris* incites people to better their opposition in fights of contest, *Wettkämpfe*. Nietzsche characterizes the latter as an activity among similarly skilled opponents, e. g., a struggle between rivals worthy of each other. In *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, Nietzsche further distinguishes those two actions when he writes, „The envious man is conscious of every respect in which the man he envies exceeds the common measure and desires to push him down to it – or to raise himself up to the height of the other: out of which there arise two different modes of action, which Hesiod designated as the evil and the good *Eris*.“⁴¹ These modes of action – pushing down and rising above – distinguish not only individuals, but also varieties of culture. Nietzsche argues that the achievements of Greek culture were made possible by the proliferation of outlets organized on the *agonistic* model. Contests, through which the striving impulse could express itself, allowed and encouraged competitors to rise above one another. Creative action, Nietzsche claims, thrived in competitive institutions.

Of course, every reader of Homer knows that competition in Homeric writings is not always a gentleman's duel. The battles are fierce, and the stakes are high. Loss of honor might also bring with it loss of life, yet competitors willingly take those risks. The spirited athletic contests held in the courts of kings and in honor of the dead are no more frequent than the bloody scenes of war and personal fights to the death. Competition in Homeric literature is supreme, and it is not always what the modern age has deemed „civil“. Inseparable from the image of the victorious hero in the foot-race is the hero in the grips of deadly struggle on the battlefield. Nietzsche is not unaware of the destructive possibilities competition can generate.

Nietzsche views the *agon* as a tactic for moderating, without eliminating, a natural and undeniable human desire to strive against others. Regarding the Greeks, he writes: „The wisdom of their institutions lies in there being no gulf between good and evil, black and white. Nature, as she appears, isn't denied but merely *ordered*, restricted to specific days and religious cults. This is the root of all spiritual freedom in the ancient world; they sought to release natural forces moderately, not to destroy or suppress them“ (WPh 4, 146).⁴² When envy and resentment were given outlets in competition, they could be used for creative ends. Positive valuation of envy, Nietzsche claims, led to a significant shift in the ethic of the Greeks: contest became valued as a means to life and health, as a means of affirming the value

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40 Friedrich Nietzsche, „Homer's *Wettkampf*“, in: KGW 3/2, 281: „und dann wieder eine andre *Eris* als gute preist, die als Eifersucht Groll Neid die Menschen zur That reizt, aber nicht zur That des Vernichtungskampfes, sondern zur That des *Wettkampfes*.“

41 KGW 4/3, 200: „Der Neidische fühlt jedes Hervorragende des Anderen über das gemeinsame Maass und will ihn bis dahin herabdrücken – oder sich bis dorthin erheben: woraus sich zwei verschiedene Handlungsweisen ergeben, welche Hesiod als die böse und die gute *Eris* bezeichnet hat.“ HH, II/2, 29.

42 KGW 4/1, 155: „Die Weisheit ihrer Institutionen liegt in dem Mangel einer Scheidung zwischen gut und böse, schwarz und weiss. Die Natur, wie sie sich zeigt, wird nicht weggeleugnet, sondern nur eingeordnet, auf bestimmte Culte und Tage beschränkt. Dies ist die Wurzel aller Freisinnigkeit des Alterthums; man suchte für die Naturkräfte eine mässige Entladung, nicht eine Vernichtung und Verneinung.“

of human existence, and it supported the judgment that life – in spite of its hardships – was worth living.⁴³

Nietzsche believes his contemporaries have failed to recognize the good form of *eris* and, as a consequence, they do not understand the need for its expression. The degree to which productive *eris* was valued in Greek culture was so great that, „Every great Hellene passes on the torch of the contest; every great virtue sets afire new greatness [among them].“⁴⁴ Festivals, physical contests, art forms, even the means of determining what was just, were all fueled by this ambitious drive. Nietzsche’s view provides a wholly different framework for understanding the accomplishments of the ancient Greeks. By highlighting the degree to which struggle was valued in Greek life, Nietzsche is able to provide a new explanation for the Greeks’ uncanny propensity for competition. Because *eris* was a value tied to the meaning of human life, Nietzsche argues, the Greeks developed innumerable means of generating competitive environments. In this way the Greeks not only overcame their own despair; they were exemplary shapers of values that reflect a celebration of human existence, for the revaluation of *eris* spurred individuals to strive for ever greater accomplishments in every facet of life.

III.

What is particularly interesting in Nietzsche’s account of the utility of *eris* in the *agon* is the way in which the Greeks moderated their contests. No single force was permitted total domination. Nietzsche cites the original practice of ostracism as an example. The Greek *agon* could not withstand, and consequently would not tolerate, a lone „genius“ (KGW 3/2, 283).⁴⁵ Were someone to be the unbeatable best the contest would end. A victory was temporary because a challenge to the victor’s title was always anticipated.

In his account of the evolution of the practice of ostracism, which he attributes to Heraclitus,⁴⁶ Nietzsche explains why it is that a „best“ man could not be tolerated in ancient Greek society. Were someone to win, to establish himself as an ultimate victor, Nietzsche claims, the action of the contest would cease and with that „the perpetual source of life of the Hellenic state would be endangered“ (KGW 3/2, 282). The greatness of the Greeks was not accidental; the „miracle“ of Greek culture that yielded unsurpassed achievements in art, archi-

43 Nietzsche recalls that interpretation in his genealogy of the word „good“ when he links the Latin word *bonus* (good) with „the warrior“ via its connection with the word *duellum*. He writes, „Therefore bonus as the man of strife, of dissention (*duo*), as the man of war: one sees what constituted the ‚goodness‘ of a man in ancient Rome“ (GM I, 5). KGW 4/2, 278: „Bonus somit als Mann des Zwistes, der Entzweiung (*duo*), als Kriegsmann: man sieht, was im alten Rom an einem Manne seine ‚Güte‘ ausmachte.“

44 KGW 3/2, 282: „Jeder große Hellene giebt die Fackel des Wettkampfes weiter; an jeder großen Tugend entzündet sich eine neue Größe.“

45 Nietzsche often refers to geniuses as great men who are catalysts for higher culture. Near the end of his career Nietzsche describes that type in greater detail in his *Götzen-Dämmerung*, translated by Walter Kaufmann in: *The Portable Nietzsche*, reprint, New York 1982, „Skirmishes of an Untimely Man“, 44. The text is hereafter cited TI. Carl Pletsche usefully discusses the development of Nietzsche’s ideal of genius in his *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius*, New York 1991). Pletsche provides helpful background details of the use of the term ‚genius‘ in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy and educational theory. In „Homer’s Wettkampf“, Nietzsche is critical of the nineteenth-century concept of genius, although Pletsche does not make use of that text.

46 Nietzsche’s source is likely Diogenes Laertius IX.2.

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ecture, and drama required *stimulation*, which could be realized only in contest. Nietzsche claims *agon* kept alive the spirit of cheerfulness,⁴⁷ the belief that life was worth living, that the ancients displayed.

In „Homer's *Wettkampf*“ Nietzsche claims the agonistic contest demands that „in a natural order of things, there are always *several* geniuses, who incite each other to reciprocal action as they keep each other within the limits of measure.“⁴⁸ The model of competition that Nietzsche has in mind is a genuine contest in which the opposition is fierce and the necessary resistance is considerable. Agonistic combatants, if they are truly engaged in the contest, hold each other to the limits of the contest: in their struggle they strive to maintain the integrity of the battle and avoid excess. The contest creates a battleground for the development of talents and unleashes the ambition that enables competitors to fully realize their capacities.

When competitions between great individuals are arranged such that each demands to be surpassed before relinquishing his place of honor, the *agon* cultivates a dynamic in which multiple persons incite and inspire others to action. The relationship between contestants in this model is critical: with them the spirit of competition burns so strongly that they desire to hold each other within the boundaries of contest so that the competition remains alive. The community enforces the preservation of the contest, of the productive outlet for the ambitious drive, and declares that its perpetuation supersedes any individual's desire to be the definitive best: „the crux of the Hellenic idea of contest [is that] it detests autocracy and fears its dangers, it craves as *protection* against the genius – a second genius.“⁴⁹

We might build upon Nietzsche's interpretation to hypothesize that perpetual striving of the sort cultivated in agonistic activities keeps the political, civic, and intellectual arenas always open to new and previously thwarted contestants; it extends the promise of engaged participation, at least ideally, in the creation of new political arrangements, new forms of artistic expression, and new visions of social order.⁵⁰ Although, in ancient Greece, specific victories would be memorialized in poetry or in the statuary that marked an individual victor's achievement, victory itself was temporary and a challenge to a victor's title was always anticipated. Victors achieved success against specific opponents at specific times and places.⁵¹

Nietzsche cautions his readers against interpreting banishment of the „best“ as a „safety valve“ that served to protect the status quo. Originally, Nietzsche claims, ostracism served as a stimulus, not as a prophylactic. Ostracism was meant to *preserve the contest*, not to insure the pride of the mediocre. Nietzsche writes: „one removes individuals who tower over the others only to reawaken the play of powers – a thought that is hostile to the 'exclusivity' of genius in the modern sense.“⁵² Modern genius, Nietzsche claims, is immeasurable. The very

47 Nietzsche discusses different kinds of cheerfulness throughout his writings. See *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, passim; *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, section II; and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, sections 4 and 343 for some examples.

48 KGW 3/2, 283: „in einer natürlichen Ordnung der Dinge, es immer *mehrere* Genies giebt, die sich gegenseitig zur That reizen, wie sie sich auch gegenseitig in der Grenze des Maaßes halten.“

49 KGW 3/2, 283: „Das ist der Kern der hellenischen *Wettkampf*-Vorstellung: sie verabscheut die Alleinherrschaft und fürchtet ihre Gefahren, sie begehrt, als *Schutzmittel* gegen das Genie – ein zweites Genie.“

50 It is that consequence that seems to follow from Nietzsche's praise of the Greek *agon* that serves as a starting point for Lawrence Hatab's *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*.

51 Accordingly, the Greeks did not maintain the practice, common in modern sport, of racing against the clock or establishing records against which future competitors might strive. Competition was limited to the very tangible challenges of those met in specific contests.

52 KGW 3/2, 283: „man beseitigt den überragenden Einzelnen, damit nun wieder das Wettspiel der Kräfte erwache: ein Gedanke, der der ‚Exklusivität‘ des Genies im modernen Sinne feindlich ist ...“.

fact that one cannot be measured is a mark of his exceptional talent, and as such, he is unable to be challenged. Achievements of that kind of genius, of what is presumably most valuable, are not made through competitive striving and success. Because they cannot be measured, modern geniuses are poor models of greatness against which others can test and appraise themselves. The consequence, according to Nietzsche, is that the modern genius is incomprehensible and his achievements are meaningless. That kind of individual cannot serve the same cultural function as Nietzsche claims the Greek heroes performed: the modern genius lacks the definition required to spark the eristic flames of envy and spite that can provoke further creative accomplishment.

Nietzsche believes the fear of ambition is most crippling (and most evident) in the educational system. Moderns, he claims, denounce the unleashing of ambition as „evil in itself“ [*das Böse an sich*], whereas to the ancients „the goal of agonistic education was the welfare of the whole, of civic society. Every Athenian, for example, was supposed to develop himself in contests in order to be of the highest service to Athens and to bring it the least harm.“⁵³ Consequently, Nietzsche thinks, modern educators fail to test their students, to stimulate and heighten their powers of resistance. The view that envy is destructive has led modern educators to eliminate the situations in which ambitious striving might actually serve to enhance education. The Greek model of education fostered the development of productive *eris* and endowed the younger generation with a sense of its value. An agonistic education, Nietzsche argues, equipped Athenian youths to be good citizens, soldiers, and educators, and it prevented the direction of their energies toward destructive projects of violence and murder.

How is an agonistic education accomplished? By example. Nietzsche claims the agonistic ordering of education reveals the predominant belief that „Every talent must express itself in fighting.“⁵⁴ Constant challenge encouraged youths to overcome the provocations of teachers and other students alike. The greatest musicians, orators, sophists, and poets all engaged in constant struggle against those who would challenge their superiority. Nietzsche claims that virtually every kind of education was achieved in this manner: „even the most general art of instruction, through drama, was given to the people only in the form of a marvelous wrestling of great musical and dramatic artists.“⁵⁵

Musician against musician, poet against poet, artist against artist – the Greeks desired to witness struggle throughout the arts. Every great work of their art, Nietzsche claims, reflected a personal struggle, one that modern tastes disdain. The good of Greek society depended upon the emergence and development of great contestants. The Greeks had what Nietzsche calls a *Kampfregung* – an agonistic impulse.⁵⁶ That is precisely what moderns lack; they are and will remain degenerate until they are fit enough for that impulse to manifest itself.

Our understanding of *agon* will be enhanced if we distinguish it from other forms of struggle and play. I have argued above for a distinction between creative and destructive modes of contest, emphasizing the distinction Nietzsche draws between rising above and

53 KGW 3/2, 283: „Für die Alten aber war das Ziel der agonalen Erziehung die Wohlfahrt des Ganzen, der staatlichen Gesellschaft. Jeder Athener z. B. sollte sein Selbst im Wettkampfe soweit entwickeln, als es Athen vom höchsten Nutzen sei und am wenigsten Schaden bringe.“

54 KGW 3/2, 283: „Jede Begabung muß sich kämpfend entfalten [...]“.

55 KGW 3/2, 284: „selbst die allgemeinste Art der Belehrung, durch das Drama, wurde dem Volke nur erteilt unter der Form eines ungeheuren Ringens der großen musikalischen und dramatischen Künstler.“

56 Note, too, that „Regung“ can also be translated as „stirring“ or „movement“, which is congruent with the notion that the function of the contest is to preserve and ensure the continued activity of humanity.

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pushing down one's competitors. However, in order to link *agon* with superior accomplishment, and to recognize institutionalized *agon* as culturally productive, we need to recognize agonistic play as different from other potentially non-destructive contests.

Contests of chance, games of mimicry, and self-induced vertigo are modes of playful activity that do not typically involve competition in which opponents face-off and try to beat each other.⁵⁷ Consider the kind of play associated with the lottery. Although lotteries have enormous appeal and the rewards are great, success in the lottery indicates little about the character or value of the person who, by chance, happens to win. A lottery winner may be wealthier, but there is little reason to believe that kind of success will make the person better; at least there would not seem to be any intrinsic connection between winning the lottery and being a productive contributor to the cultural development of a society.⁵⁸ Furthermore, it is not clear that there is any way in which *playing* the lottery makes one a better person or contributes to the development of productive skills. While the winner of a lottery might think that her new wealth makes life worth living, that disposition would seem to be significantly different from the positive valuation of life that Nietzsche identifies with the Greeks.

The agonistic game is organized around the test of a specific quality the persons involved possess. When two runners compete, the quality tested is typically speed or endurance; when artists compete, it is creativity; craftsmen test their skills, etc. The contest has a specific set of rules and criteria for determining (i. e., measuring) which person has excelled above the others in the relevant way. What is tested is a quality the individual competitors themselves possess; and external assistance is not permitted. (This is not to say that agonistic games occur only between individuals and that there can be no cooperative aspects of agonistic engagement. Clearly individuals can assert themselves and strive against other individuals within the context of a team competition, but groups can also work collectively to engage other groups agonistically. In those cases what is tested is the collective might, creativity, or organizational ability of the participating groups.)

As I mentioned above, it is crucial to agonistic competition that opponents are similarly skilled so that the distinction of the victor is adequately manifest. The agonistic player asserts his „will against external obstacles“, which requires a creative and active „development of superiority.“⁵⁹ Ideally, agonistic endeavors draw out of the competitors the best performance of which they are capable. Although agonistic competition is sometimes viewed as a „zero-sum game“, in which the winner takes all, in the cases that Nietzsche highlights as productive agonistic institutions, all who participate are enhanced by their competition. Winning must be a significant goal of participation in agonistic contests, but it would seem that winning might be only one, and not necessarily the most important one, among many reasons to participate in such a competition.

Suppose two runners, who are similarly skilled, choose to engage in a running contest. The two are friends and they have been running together for many years. However, the two runners have reached a plateau, and they decide they want to increase the level of their training and test the limits of their abilities. To do so, they devise a series of running contests to measure and improve their physical strength and endurance as well as their mental stamina. Each

57 A French sociologist, Roger Caillois, provides an analysis of these games in *Man, Play, and Games*, translated from the French by Meyer Barash, New York 1961.

58 The fact that *some* lottery winners later engage in philanthropic activities does not undermine my claim.

59 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 77.

wishes the other well. In fact, it is because they share the corporate goal of developing themselves in this way that they engage in the contest in the first place. The contests take place over a period of several months. Sometimes one wins; other times the other runner takes the race. At the end of the period, one runner emerges as the clear winner – within the specified number of races, she won more times than did her friend. Both developed stronger muscles, the ability to run greater distances, and confidence in their ability to improve their skills. Neither need leave the competition feeling a loser. Yet the desire to win is what distinguishes those activities from mere exercise. The runners chose to harness a desire to emerge as the best in order to test and improve themselves.

The runner example draws out some consequences that Nietzsche does not explicitly state in „Homer's Wettkampf“. Nietzsche has in mind a very similar idea when he describes agonistic modes of interaction in education, in which the goal of pitting students against each other or challenging them from the position of a teacher is not to humiliate the losers but to enhance the development of all who are participants in the class. The role of *agon* in Greek culture, as Nietzsche portrays it, has a similar effect: the phenomenon of individual victories simultaneously elevates the entire group of people dedicated to supporting the institutions that make those victories possible.

Agon can be a difficult condition to create and a fragile one to maintain. It requires the availability and willingness of similarly skilled opponents. It needs a clearly defined goal that is appropriately demanding of the competitors. It requires that the goal and the acceptable means of achieving it are clearly articulated, and yet it must allow for creativity within those rules. It demands systematic support to cultivate future participants. And it must have some kind of mechanism for keeping the competition open so that future play can be anticipated. When any one of the required elements is disrupted, the competition can deteriorate into alternative and non-productive modes of competition, or as described below, into destructive forms of striving. But when *agon* is realized, it creates enormous opportunities for creative self-expression, for the assertion of what distinguishes oneself from others, for developing one's own character, and for achieving individual as well as corporate goals.

IV.

Competition, Nietzsche claims, must be moderated to protect against an invincible victor, which is what ostracism is meant to do, not only so that others might have the opportunity to compete but also so that victors are not driven to *hybris*, a dangerous form of excessive pride that manifests itself in assaults on the carefully guarded pride of others and often arouses great anger and leads to acts of revenge.⁶⁰ Too much or too little competition leads to destruction. In his notes Nietzsche writes, „the agonistic element is also the danger in every development; it overstimulates the creative drive. – The luckiest thing in development; when several men

60 N. R. E. Fisher has recently identified a central meaning for the word *hybris* and traces the similarities of its use from Homer to New Comedy in *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*, Warminster 1992.

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of genius mutually impose limits on each other“ (WPh 4, 146).⁶¹ Excessive striving, then, according to Nietzsche's interpretation, is the source of destruction – passivity and destruction lie at opposite ends of the same spectrum. One way we can better understand *agon*, and thereby be in a better position to maintain or generate it, is by examining the institutions and historical periods in which the mechanisms for moderating, channeling, and checking that drive are absent or work to annihilate active striving. That is precisely what Nietzsche does. His early reflections on Greek and German culture, his thoughts on morality (and later on Christianity), and his continued reflections on the philosophy of Socrates bear witness to those instances of *agon* gone awry. I focus on the first of those instances in this section, the remaining cases must be left for a subsequent treatment.

Near the end of „Homer's Wettkampf“, Nietzsche claims that the failure of institutions to offer viable outlets for the desire to struggle results in destructive expressions of the same, what he calls *Vernichtungshust*. Nietzsche provides two examples of this phenomenon: the *hybris* and lust for victory of the Persian War hero Miltiades and the decline of Greek culture following the Persian War. The victory of Greece over the Persians was largely attributed to Miltiades' accomplishments during the decisive battle at Marathon. He earned the favor of persons throughout the Greek world for his exceptional military skills. But his honor was short-lived. He formed a clandestine relationship with the priestess of Demeter, Timo. One night as he brazenly attempted to enter the sacred temple, which was strictly forbidden to all men, Miltiades was suddenly struck by terror and was mortally wounded as he tried to leap back over the temple wall. In „Homer's Wettkampf“ Nietzsche recalls the story of Miltiades as evidence that the Greek spirit of competition was in a state of decline following the war. By achieving such an enormous success, Miltiades effectively propelled himself to an insurmountable status – no one could challenge him. Finding no other outlet for his aggression, Miltiades challenged the gods, a competition about which Greeks were warned against in countless myths. Through his audacious actions, Miltiades aroused the dreaded envy against in countless myths. Through his audacious actions, Miltiades aroused the dreaded envy against the gods, a kind of envy believed to crush humankind. Nietzsche describes it thus: „godly envy is inflamed when it spots a human being without a rival, unopposed, on a solitary peak of fame.“⁶² Miltiades succumbed to *hybris*, and he was crushed by its weight. That the Greeks failed, in the sense that they lacked the cultural resources to support the agonistic needs of a person such as Miltiades, is symptomatic, according to Nietzsche, of the weakening of the agonistic element in Greek culture.

Elsewhere in his writings, Nietzsche characterizes the decline of Greek culture in terms similar to his diagnosis of the condition of Miltiades. Greece's victory over the Persians left the Greek city-states as a whole in a precarious position of superiority that Nietzsche links to their downfall. Reflecting on the golden age of Greece, Nietzsche writes, „How did this age perish? Unnaturally. Where then are the seeds of corruption? [...] In the case of Athens [...] they were destroyed by the Persian wars. The danger was too great, and the victory was too

61 KGW 4/1, 154: „Das Agonale ist auch die Gefahr bei aller Entwicklung; es überreizt den Trieb zum Schaffen. – Der glücklichste Fall in der Entwicklung, wenn sich mehrere Genie's gegenseitig in Schranken halten.“

62 KGW 3/2, 286: „göttliche Neid entzündet sich, wenn er den Menschen ohne jeden Wettkämpfer gegnerlos auf einsamer Ruhmeschöhe erblickt.“

extraordinary.⁶³ That extraordinary victory, according to Nietzsche, led Athens and other Greek states to commit acts of *hybris* similar to those of Miltiades.

At the end of „Homer's Wettkampf“ in a densely-packed paragraph beginning with the claim, „just as Miltiades perishes, so the noblest city-states perish, when, through merit and fortune, they arrive at the temple of Nike from the race track.“⁶⁴ Nietzsche alludes to several specific examples of what we might call the „Miltiades complex“: Athens' actions at the end of the war, the subjugation of the Greek city-states by Athens in the Delian League, and Sparta's actions against Athens in a subsequent battle. Near the Persian War's end, once victory was assured, the Athenians and Spartans went to take the victory prize: the bridge at the Hellespont. When they arrived, they found the bridge already destroyed. The Spartans left for home, but Xanthippos, the Athenian leader insisted on staying to annihilate the Persians still occupying the Thracian Chersonese. According to Herodotus, Xanthippos's soldiers brutally killed the regional governor, Artauktes, after forcing him to watch as they stoned his son to death. Following the Persian War the Greeks formed an alliance known as the Delian League. The league shared a treasury and council, both of which were controlled by the Athenians. States that attempted to withdraw from the league were punished and subdued by Athens, and the treasury was used to tax other states for the benefit of rebuilding Athens. Finally, Sparta proved itself ruthless when the commander Lysander slaughtered the Athenian fleet in the battle of Aegospotamoi near the end of the Peloponnesian war.

Nietzsche recalls these stories from ancient Greece to highlight the destructive craving we risk when the contesting spirit slips into excess. Sheer exploitation, brutal violence, and murder are not examples of the agonistic spirit Hesiod and Nietzsche praised. The cruelty Athens displayed in its conduct during the war was a crucial indicator to Nietzsche that the fruitful, healthy, and non-destructive agonistic spirit was fading amongst the Hellenes. Athens and the other Greek city-states became so powerful that they were unable to find worthy opponents and were overcome by their lust for victory. As a result, the Greeks were weakened by internal struggles in the Peloponnesian wars, and the Delian League was ultimately unable to resist the Macedonian conquest and, eventually, Roman rule; the greatness that was ancient Greece was lost. While the Greek states were able to compete with each other they experienced comparable peace and unsurpassed cultural achievement. When one of those states seized an abundance of power, it effectively brought that competition to a close. The result was an overall decline in political power even though they continued to achieve cultural successes in the years following. Nietzsche interprets those events as examples of Athens' resignation of a genuine contesting spirit and found in them an explanation of Athens' ultimate cultural decline.

Nietzsche recognizes a different but related example of cultural decline in nineteenth-century Germany. In the first of his *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, Nietzsche offers a diagnosis of contemporary German culture: German victory in the Franco-Prussian War has led to complacency, self-satisfaction and destructive self-deception. For Nietzsche, the German has become a cultural philistine, who „perceives around him nothing but needs identical with

63 KGW 4/1, 178: „Wie stirbt diese Zeit ab? Unnatürlich. Wo stecken denn nur die Keime des Verderbens? [...] Die Pest kam hinzu, für Athen. Dann ging man an den Perserkriegen zu Grunde. Die Gefahr war zu groß und der Sieg zu außerordentlich.“ Translated by Daniel Breazeale in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, Atlantic Highlands 1991 (reprint), 132, section 192; also see page 140, section 199.

64 KGW 3/2, 286: „so wie Miltiades untergeht, auch die edelsten griechischen Staaten untergehen, als sie, durch Verdienst und Glück, aus der Rennbahn zum Tempel der Nike gelangt waren.“

and views similar to his own; wherever he goes he is at once embraced by a bond of tacit conventions in regard to many things especially in the realms of religion and art [...]“ (DS II).⁶⁵ The philistine not only lacks creative energy, he acts as a cultural impediment: „a swamp to the feet of the weary, a fetter to all who would pursue lofty goals“ (DS II).⁶⁶ The philistine celebrates the common as the height of accomplishment.

Whence this self-satisfaction, this narrow-minded self-contentment? How was it that „happiness“ and „coziness“ replaced more ambitious goals? Nietzsche's answer is that Germany was unable to endure its victory. „Human nature“, he claims, „finds it harder to endure a victory than a defeat“ (DS I).⁶⁷ The Germans erroneously convinced themselves that the victory over France was not simply a military success, but was also proof of cultural superiority. This deception was harmful not simply because it was deceptive, but because this particular deception was also *destructive*. German success led to stupefaction and stagnation: „everyone is convinced that struggle and bravery are no longer required, but that, on the contrary, most things are regulated in the finest possible way and that in any case everything that needed doing has long since been done —“⁶⁸ (DS I). With victory, German culture „feels itself not merely confirmed and sanctioned, but almost sacrosanct“⁶⁹ (DS I). The Germans were no longer able to question and challenge themselves, Nietzsche argues, and the courage required to overcome any opposing threat was deemed unnecessary.⁷⁰ Germany suffers, according to Nietzsche, because it fails to recognize the value of struggle in cultural life, and, moreover, it believes that all forms of struggle are needless.

Struggle and striving, Nietzsche claims, are inevitable constituents of human life. He begins „Homer's Wettkampf“ with the claim, „When one speaks of *humanity*, underlying this idea is the belief that it is humanity that *separates* and distinguishes human beings from nature. But, there is, in reality, no such distinction: the ‚natural‘ qualities and those properly called ‚human‘ grow inseparably.“⁷¹ Nietzsche's approach to the Greeks is aimed at showing how they, considered by many to be exemplars of the humane, possessed and displayed characteristics that, for a variety of reasons he explores elsewhere, modern culture despises as crude, inhumane, and uncivilized. Nietzsche makes what many would consider to be an outrageous claim: *Eris*, envy, and lust were not only operative in Greek culture, those passions were what made them „Greeks“ and made possible their unsurpassed accomplishments. There

65 KGW 3/1, 162: „Er nimmt um sich herum lauter gleiche Bedürfnisse und ähnliche Ansichten wahr; wohin er tritt, umfängt ihn auch sofort das Band einer stillschweigenden Convention über viele Dinge, besonders in Betreff der Religions- und der Kunstangelegenheiten.“

66 KGW 3/1, 163: „der Morast aller Ermatteten, die Fussfessel aller nach hohen Zielen Laufenden.“

67 KGW 3/1, 155: „Die menschliche Natur erträgt ihn schwerer als eine Niederlage.“

68 KGW 3/1, 157: „denn ich sehe, wie jedermann überzeugt ist, dass es eines Kampfes und einer solchen Tapferkeit gar nicht mehr bedürfe, dass vielmehr das Meiste so schön wie möglich geordnet und jedenfalls alles, was Noth thut, längst gefunden und gethan sei, kurz dass die beste Saat der Kultur überall theils ausgesät sei, theils in frischem Grüne und hier und da sogar in üppiger Blüthe stehe.“

69 KGW 3/1, 157: „sie fühlt sich, nach solchen ‚Erfolgen der deutschen Kultur‘, nicht nur bestätigt und sanctionirt, sondern beinahe sakrosankt.“

70 Nietzsche offers a similar analysis in TI in the sections entitled, „What the Germans Lack“, and in EH in „The Untimely Ones.“

71 KGW 3/2, 277: „Wenn man von *Humanität* redet, so liegt die Vorstellung zu Grunde, es möge das sein, was den Menschen von der Natur *abscheidet* und auszeichnet. Aber eine solche Abscheidung giebt es in Wirklichkeit nicht: die ‚natürlichen‘ Eigenschaften und die eigentlich ‚menschlich‘ genannten sind untrennbar verwachsen.“

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can be little doubt why the community of classical scholars did not embrace Nietzsche's work or encourage its development.

Nietzsche claims that modern culture has lost sight of the value of competition and has sought to eliminate it from most forms of human interaction. The Christian ethic of faith, hope, and charity, he claims, encourages the elimination of all forms of envy and jealousy; envy, after all, is a sin. Nietzsche views the competitive drive as one that has become tamed, whipped into submission by the desire to be „good“ according to a new ethic.

What he portrays as the new ethic stands in stark contrast to the heroic conception of virtue. Even after the time of Socrates, competition and struggle played a significant role in the way many Greeks thought of themselves and their world, but we can notice a shift that immediately follows the time of Socrates: a spiritualization of competition, an emphasis on surmounting spiritual rather than physical struggles becomes foremost. *Agon* in the Cynic and Stoic diatribes characterizes the heart of the ethical projects of Hellenistic philosophy, and Hellenistic philosophers claim for themselves the distinction of being the „true athletes in their struggle for virtue.“⁷² For both the Cynics and the Stoics, the philosopher himself is a battleground for struggles of passions and desires. They take Herakles as their patron,⁷³ claiming that he wrestled not with flesh and blood beasts but with the beasts of pleasures and pains. Herakles is portrayed as a *moral* athlete who won the prize of virtue. He serves as the ethical model for the „contest into which man enters, if he wishes to follow the Stoic way of life“ in the struggle against all that threatens his peace of mind. That was the essence of the activity of living – „the Olympic contest of life itself.“⁷⁴

Hellenistic philosophers often drew analogies to boxers, wrestlers, and pancratiasts as they described the „persistent and unflinching struggle in the face of opposition. The business of life is like wrestling for it requires of man to stand ready and unshakable against every assault however unforeseen.“⁷⁵ Furthermore, the true sage was to embrace the challenges of struggle as a boxer eagerly engages his sparring partners, in order to build his strength so that he will be able to withstand even greater challenge.⁷⁶ *Agon* imagery is also found in Hellenistic Judaic writings, including Philo and IV Maccabees.

Early Christian writers use athletic images in their descriptions of the ethical ideal. Paul describes the task of the Christian thus:

„Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.“ (I Corinthians 10: 24-27)

72 Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature*, Leiden 1967, 28.

73 Dio. Chrys. VIII 27 and 30.

74 Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 29. See Epictetus III 22, 51; III 25, and *Encheiridion* 51; Pfitzner provides many more examples of this imagery in Hellenistic philosophy.

75 Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 31, citing Marcus Aurelius 7, 61.

76 Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 31. See Epictetus I 24 1 f.; IV 9, 15 f.; *Encheiridion* 29; Seneca *De Provid.* 2, 2 ff.

By the time we reach the age of Christianity, the *agon* motif is incompatible with the traditional Greek ideal, as Victor Pfitzner recognizes, since the *agon* „typifies the Greek spirit of self-assertion, of human achievement“ whereas Christian doctrine places „emphasis on human impotence and divine grace.“⁷⁷ In the course of his study, Pfitzner describes how Paul's use of agonistic imagery differs from that in the Cynic and Stoic diatribes and earlier uses. He describes a redefinition of *agon* in the ideology of Paul that sheds an interesting light on Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, and the ethical shift that Paul's redefinition of struggle represents in *Der Antichrist*.

„Homer's Wettkampf“ is an important example of Nietzsche's effort to characterize the human drives and cultural institutions that contribute to and support vigorous value creation. There he concludes, „without envy, jealousy, and contesting ambition, the Hellenic state, like the Hellenic human being, degenerates. It becomes evil and cruel; it becomes revengeful and godless; in short, it becomes ‚pre-Homeric‘ –.“⁷⁸ Nietzsche refers to *Neid* (and words derived from it) more than 170 times in his published works and notebooks, but nowhere does he focus his attention on the topic more explicitly than in this early preface. It is one thing to claim that cruelty is an acceptable or desirable mode of action and quite another to claim that it is an inescapable condition of life. We fail to understand Nietzsche when we do not recognize the distinctions he draws between actions motivated by envy, jealousy, and contesting ambition and those that are evil, cruel, and motivated by revenge.⁷⁹

Even if we are careful to note these distinctions in Nietzsche's work, we are still left with determining the consequences of this view of human life for social and political arrangements, determining what we may learn and apply from Nietzsche's analyses and what we must reject. The distinctions Nietzsche makes between creative and destructive expressions of power do not themselves constitute a moral theory, and I do not mean to suggest that my elaboration of the role of strife in Nietzsche's works permits us to construct such a theory from the rest of the work. I do not, however, think that Nietzsche aims at such a construction. His self-proclaimed effort is to revalue values, to provide an account of values that helps those who read him to recognize the motivations that precede our valuations and to promote the claim that human beings can actively participate in the creation of values that are expressions of a positive interpretation of human life.

Nietzsche claims agonistic institutions contribute to the health of individuals and the culture in which these institutions are organized because *agon* provides the means for attaining personal distinction, for defining oneself creatively through resistance to what one is not. That activity, Nietzsche claims, is meaningful freedom. Late in his career, Nietzsche writes, „How is freedom measured in individuals and peoples? According to the resistance which must be overcome, according to the exertion required, to remain to top. The highest type of free men should be sought where the highest resistance is constantly overcome: five steps from tyranny,

77 Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 7.

78 KGW 3/2, 286: „ohne Neid Eifersucht und wettkämpfenden Ehrgeiz der hellenische Staat wie der hellenische Mensch entartet. Er wird böse und grausam, er wird rachsüchtig und gottlos, kurz, er wird ‚vorhomerisch‘ –“.

79 Noteworthy recent discussions of Nietzsche and cruelty are: Ivan Soll's „Nietzsche on Cruelty, Asceticism, and the Failure of Hedonism“ and Martha Nussbaum's „Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism“, both in: *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's „Genealogy of Morals“*, edited by Richard Schacht, Berkeley 1994. Neither seeks to excuse Nietzsche's remarks on war and cruelty as unfortunate slips of Nietzsche's pen, rather both strive to reconcile these passages with Nietzsche's other interests and ideas.

close to the threshold of the danger of servitude" (TI, „Skirmishes“, 38).⁸⁰ Nietzsche believes that it is only when our strength is tested that it will develop. Later in the passage just cited, Nietzsche continues, „Danger alone acquaints us with our own resources, our virtues, our armour and weapons, our *spirit*, and *forces* us to be strong. *First* principle: one needs to be strong – otherwise one will never become strong“ (TI „Skirmishes“ 38).⁸¹ Nietzsche takes upon himself, in his own writing, the task of making these kinds of challenges for his readers: „To make the individual *uncomfortable*: my mission! Appeal of liberating the individual by struggling!“ (WPh 5, 178)⁸² Nietzsche's critiques of Christian morality, liberal institutions, democracy, and Platonism should be read in the context of this conception of human freedom and the goal Nietzsche takes for himself as a kind of educator who is also a liberator.

The Nietzsche literature has identified many ‚Nietzsches‘, but two types emerge as prominent: Nietzsche the philosopher, whose work is systematic and organized around one or several general principles, and „the new Nietzsche“, whose writings are primarily deconstructive, asystematic, ambiguous, and playful. Further exploration of Nietzsche's agonism will reveal that his notion of the *agon* is central to his thought and unifies the variety of themes explored in his works. Moreover reflection on the agonistic form of Nietzsche's thought demonstrates that his writing is *essentially* playful, *necessarily* ambiguous, ironic, and poetic. Nietzsche's „Problem of Homer“, which I suggest elsewhere is similar to his „Problem of Socrates“,⁸³ indicates that Nietzsche's conception of power includes criteria for distinguishing between creative and destructive forms of struggle, conflict, and contest. Like many of his other efforts scrutinize past and prevailing values (social, artistic, scientific, moral, and religious), the „Problem of Homer“ enables a comparison and contrast of exemplary forms of valuation that arise from agonistic (as opposed to *antagonistic*) interactions. Finally, investigation of Nietzsche's „Problem of Homer“ reveals an important aspect of Nietzsche's philosophical practice, illustrating how Nietzsche himself strove, sometimes unsuccessfully, to enact agonistic intellectual practices in his writings. Nietzsche vacillates between goading his readers and illustrating his own contests in which the reader is invited to join. Reading him in this way illuminates the legacy of Nietzsche's philosophical practice by encouraging us to contest him by building upon and using his own critical tools against him and providing useful conceptual resources for amplifying and clarifying agonistic theories that are pervasive in numerous other fields, including political science, moral psychology, and literary criticism.

80 KGW 6/3, 134: „Wonach misst sich die Freiheit, bei Einzelnen, wie bei Völkern? Nach dem Widerstand, der überwunden werden muss, nach der Mühe, die es kostet, oben zu bleiben. Den höchsten Typus freier Menschen hätte man dort zu suchen, wo beständig der höchste Widerstand überwunden wird: fünf Schritt weit von der Tyrannei, dicht an der Schwelle der Gefahr der Knechtschaft.“

81 KGW 6/3, 134: „Erster Grundsatz: man muss es nöthig haben, stark zu sein: sonst wird man's nie. —“

82 KGW 4/1, 167: „Das Individuum unbehaglich zu machen: meine Aufgabe! Reiz der Befreiung des Einzelnen im Kampfe!“

83 Christa Davis Acampora, „Re/Introducing ‚Homer's Contest‘: A new translation with notes and commentary“, in: *Nietzscheana*, Fall 1996.

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