
Nietzsche Contra Homer, Socrates, and Paul

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Near the conclusion of “Homer’s Contest,” Nietzsche exclaims, “What a problem opens up before us [. . .] when we ask about the relation of the contest to the conception of the world of art!”¹ He writes this following a discussion of the way in which works of art are not only indebted to but perhaps also intrinsically linked with what their creators were striving to oppose. Problem-posing, as shaping and presenting new sets of challenges by rendering unfamiliar what we take to be nearest to us (GS 345), emerges in Nietzsche’s early writings as his *modus operandi*, and he continues to refine that strategy throughout his works. Nietzsche creates problems and wrestles with new questions that take on labors intended to have effects similar to those of tragedy: “Concerned but not disconsolate, we stand aside a little while, contemplative men to whom it has been granted to be witnesses of these tremendous struggles [*Kämpfe*] and transitions [*Übergänge*]. Alas, it is the magic of these struggles that those who behold them must also take part and fight!” (BT 15)² Problems are intended as provocations in response to which Nietzsche hopes his readers will leap into the fray.

Contestants are engaged in different ways throughout Nietzsche’s career. Nietzsche’s account of the development of Greek culture, art, and science—broadly conceived—figures Homer as offering not only the first monumental revaluation but also as providing a medium through which other revaluations might be forged. In other words, contest as it is conceived by Homer not only provides the conditions for esteeming human life in light of exemplary and exceptional struggles but it also provides the fuel for revisioning that very ideal as it draws others to contest the aims and ends of struggles that characterize human life. Nietzsche reads the production of Platonic philosophy as emerging out of a contest with Homer and philosophy thereafter as a struggle against and with Platonic ideals. Thus, although Nietzsche takes on numerous other contestants worthy of consideration—Luther, Wagner, Darwin, to name a few—the selection of Homer, Socrates, and Paul is not accidental. In Nietzsche’s eyes these particular contests are intrinsically linked: they develop out of each other and together form a kind of unity. Throughout his career, Nietzsche sees it as his task to take on each of these quintessen-

tial agonists. Below I trace the forms of these contests and how they reveal different contestatory aims. I conclude by evaluating Nietzsche as a contestant, drawing upon criteria that emerge out of the discussion of Nietzsche's agonists.

I. HOMER'S CONTEST AS EXEMPLARY REVALUATION

Nietzsche's contestatory gesture toward Homer is that of emulation that aims to exceed. He contends with Homer in order to create new values, ones that might empower (at least some) others to do the same. In this context Nietzsche envisions a new nobility whose contests will not be organized around the pursuit of glory but rather will be focused on the refinement of *poiesis*—that is, of practicing what Nietzsche calls in *The Gay Science* the “art of transfiguration” [*Kunst der Transfiguration*].³ Nietzsche's contest with Homer aims to restore an axiology Nietzsche imagines to be constituted in Homeric literature. His goal is to resituate the fulcrum on which moral valuation rests—no longer to be centered by a supernatural arbiter of good and evil but rather finding a pivot point in the naturalistic, homo-centric realm of the good and base.

Nietzsche's Homer struggles to forge a conception of human existence that aims to completely recast its possibilities for meaning. He is credited with consciously reversing the wisdom of Silenus in *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁴ Nietzsche seeks to emulate that feat in transforming the reigning valuations of good and evil. But Nietzsche does not seek to simply reinstate Homeric, heroic ideals. He aspires to effect a Homeric victory with specifically Nietzschean artistic and scientific insights. Those worthy of this victory would be the newborn free spirits capable of practicing gay science in the place of Homer's funeral game victors who exercise their thrill-seeking in blood-sports. In pursuit of such a transformation in values, Nietzsche must contest not only those values that subsequently emerged as successful in struggle with the Homeric (first the Socratic/Platonic and later the Judeo-Christian) but also the Homeric values themselves. Struggle, striving, and contest—*agon*—are reinstated by Nietzsche as the *means* by which new values are established, but the *end* to which he aspires shifts. Put another way, Nietzsche's contest with Homer aims to resurrect the structure of the contest he attributes to Homer—he will respect what he recognizes as the general organizing principles of agonistic contests and how one might compete within them—but Nietzsche's own conception of contest, his own aspiration for the end of participation, shifts from Homer's glory-gaining to his own value-creation. What it means for Nietzsche to contest Homer is shaped by these general interests and aims.

Being victorious over Homer requires exceeding him—engaging the activity of rising above in the competition, what Nietzsche designates as *erheben* in the second volume of *Human, All-Too-Human*, “The Wanderer and His Shadow” § 29.⁵ Alternatively, Nietzsche might have sought victory over Homer by disgracing him, beating him by revealing him to be a fraud and not truly worthy of reverence. To do thus would be to resort to the kind of activity described in the same passage from “Wanderer” as forcing back [*herabdrücken*], diminishing, but given his commitments to the form of the contest and to its prospects for summoning explicitly creative activity, Nietzsche must strive to excel Homer. How does he attempt to do this? Excelling Homer first requires Nietzsche to articulate precisely what it is with which he is contending; he must name his Homer. He must specify Homer’s distinction and support it as something worthy of esteem. Only then may he turn his attention to surpassing Homer’s accomplishment. Why? Because the value of what emerges as victorious in a contest marked by excellence is bound to that which it surmounts: it has its victory in relation to that which it exceeds. The greater the competition, the more significant its overcoming. Nietzsche’s victory over Homer would be even more meaningful if Homer’s accomplishments were enhanced, and so one finds in this particular kind of *agon* an interest in raising up not only oneself but one’s opponent as well.⁶

The Homer who emerges in the course of Nietzsche’s contest is one who is capable of remarkable cultural alchemy: his magic is worked through poetry, transfiguring what is lowly and base—human existence conceived as a cruel and irredeemable punishment by the gods—into something quite precious—the possibility for a life so glorious that it propels its victor to the precarious position of inviting the envy of the gods. One could cite numerous passages illustrating these ideas in Nietzsche’s writings. Consider just two aphorisms from the first book of *Human All Too Human*. Nietzsche claims the creation of the vision of the Olympian gods simultaneously shifts axiological bases and metaphysical relations. The Olympians are considered to have the same nature as human beings; they are idealized, no doubt, but in this case the gods do not differ in *kind* from their human fellows. Nietzsche claims this results in a feeling of being “inter-related,” that a natural “mutual interest” or “symmetry” follows from this worldview. He continues, “Man thinks of himself as noble when he bestows upon himself such gods, and places himself in a relationship to them such as exists between the lower aristocracy and the higher . . .” (HH I:114).⁷ This fundamental *relationship* provides the grounds for the measure of their worth and the relative values of all things human, as Nietzsche sees it. It also conditions the sense of freedom they experience (HH I:262): although they could not be Olympians and this limitation shaped their estimation of themselves, Homer’s audience could nevertheless utilize the restriction that they could not be gods as a springboard for greater possibility—they *could become* heroes because unlike the gods they could risk

their lives. Nietzsche writes, proto-Foucault, “All great spiritual forces exercise beside their liberating effect also a repressive one; but it makes a difference, to be sure, whether it is Homer or the Bible or science that tyrannizes over mankind” (HH I:262).⁸

Homer’s accomplishment is cast as twofold: he provides both the form (*agon*, contest) and the content (the good life as glorious) for an entire cultural transfiguration the likes of which, according to Nietzsche, Western peoples have not witnessed since (with a possible exception or two).⁹ In the “The Wanderer and His Shadow,” Nietzsche writes, “This was the school in which the Greek poets were raised: firstly to allow a multiplicity of constraints to be imposed upon one; then to devise an additional new constraint, impose it upon oneself and conquer it with charm and grace: so that both the constraint and its conquest are noticed and admired” (WS 140).¹⁰ This is how Nietzsche approaches Homer—he takes on the imposition of the constraint of “Homer” (as one who wields the most potent poetic force), and then he strives to conquer that ideal by producing something still more beautiful and more powerful. Nietzsche’s contest with Homer aims to open a contestatory space in which those accomplishments can be appreciated and wrestled for the purposes of surpassing them.

The confines of this paper do not permit a comprehensive account of how these aims unfold in Nietzsche’s writings, but the example of Nietzsche’s own most-cherished work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and the conception of will that is articulated there serve well to illustrate Nietzsche’s general strategy and direction. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra indicates that he conceives of esteeming, exercising one’s will for the purpose of giving value to something, as a kind of love. The urgency for recognition of the significance of will stems from Zarathustra’s conception of love. Such loving is directed by a cultivated taste (a capacity for judgment), which manifests itself in an exercise of will. The goods of loving/willing are its creative prospects: “To esteem is to create” (Z I: “On the Thousand and One Goals”), to value that which one loves. Esteeming alone gives value. Such loving is what draws and moves us to action organized around that which is esteemed. Throughout the text Nietzsche crafts a sense of the self-legislation of human existence as consisting in an on-going activity that amounts to an exercise of taste—pursuing what is esteemed and valued in the activity of willing. Zarathustra claims: “all of life is a dispute over taste and tasting. Taste—that is at the same time weight and scales and weigher; and woe unto all the living that would live without disputes over weight and scales and weighers!” (Z 2 “On Those Who Are Sublime”).¹²

The poetry of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* lies in Nietzsche’s attempt at offering a new hero, who not only succeeds Odysseus but also rivals Jesus, Plato’s Socrates, and those figures associated with the *Bildungsroman* tradition.¹³

The (meta-)value of loving/willing (often at work in Nietzsche's discussion of taste) is established through the advocacy of redemptive practices. In such a case contests for glory replace trials that draw one into a praxis of redemption in the sense of creating new values. The figure of Homer that Nietzsche creates serves him as an agonist whose distinctions take on a defining character for who and what Nietzsche himself aspires to become. Nietzsche *strives together with*¹⁴ Homer, relocating their ends along the way.

II. *PHILOSOPHOS AGONISTES*: SOCRATES AS SUBLIMATOR

The struggle with Socrates is somewhat different, and our pursuit of Nietzsche's agonist here is complicated by the fact that Nietzsche himself does not always seem sure about whom he is fighting. Is it Socrates the historical figure and teacher of Plato? Is it Plato's Socrates? Is it Plato himself? Nietzsche's personification of his target in this contest certainly seems to shift somewhat throughout his career,¹⁵ but the general objects of his contentions remain fairly constant. Nietzsche's rendition of "Socratism" from *The Birth of Tragedy* on depicts Socrates as the model scientist out to correct existence. He is read as reducing the meaning of human existence to a formula, a product of mere calculation. The enemy of ambiguity *par excellence*, the Socrates incapable of music, and the advocate of tyrannical reason—these are Nietzsche's persistent enemies, radiating from the *type* that the name "Socrates" is meant to signify, and whether they are designated as "Socrates," "Plato," or "Plato's Socrates" is inconsequential for my particular purposes here.

Nietzsche's quarrel with Socratism largely focuses on the Socratic contest of dialectic. Dialectic appears to be a form of *agon*, and this Nietzsche suggests, lent it an immediate attraction.¹⁶ But, ultimately, Nietzsche thinks dialectic is not a real contest at all. Rather, it is a perversion of the model that he attributes to the mechanism for producing excellence. Much more can and should be said about why the Socratic contest is so objectionable to Nietzsche.¹⁷ I shall focus on just three main features, which clearly do not exhaust the matter. The means, the end, and the consequences of the Socratic *agon* are each features of the problem *with* Socrates from Nietzsche's standpoint, and they shed light on the problem *of* Socrates discussed at length in *Twilight of the Idols*. Nietzsche objects to the means of dialectic because it is fundamentally nihilistic and springs from a decadent desire to destroy. The end it seeks is a cessation of suffering, which Nietzsche views as a necessary condition of life. And the consequence of the Socratic contest is the displacement of the agonistic sphere from the realm of the cultural to the individual.

The latter is especially dangerous because it produces the need to take on an internal enemy, oneself. Given its means and end, Nietzsche thinks such a contest becomes a violent war that leads to self-destruction.

The problem of Socrates read in light of Nietzsche's views of the *agon* helps us to better appreciate Nietzsche's conception of philosophy and affords insight into how Nietzsche distinguishes different kinds of force. His opposition to dialectic is grounded, in part, in his view that dialectic engages force destructively and differs in kind from other sources of power that he seeks to cultivate. Socrates' dialectic is problematic not only because it brutally exercises force but also because its proliferation—the cultivation of a widespread *taste* for dialectic—presents a grave danger.¹⁸

Why is it a problem that “with Socrates, Greek taste changes in favor of dialectics” (TI, “Socrates” 5)?¹⁹ With this question we return to the ideas discussed above from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Taste, as Nietzsche considers it, is not simply a matter of preferences; it is an exercise of judgment. Matters of taste resist argument but not merely because they are subjective impulses or dispositions. As a standard of judgment itself, taste must be grounded on more than the rearticulation of a single particular standard of judgment.²⁰ Nietzsche does not seek to simply replace reason and morality with aesthetics. He does not oppose the use of reason *as such*, but he does challenge the idea of what it means to *have* a reason for believing something and how those beliefs are related to considerations of value broadly conceived. As the products and projects of one's will, one's own judgments and values must issue from participation in the struggle for their creation. It is not merely ignoble to adopt the values of others *carte blanche*, it is an offense to taste itself, to the possibility of judgment itself—it compromises the very activity of esteeming or of holding any values at all. The universal standardization of taste risks nihilism. That is what Nietzsche strives to resist, and dialectic is dangerous and objectionable on those grounds.²¹

Dialectic is also repugnant to Nietzsche for the modes of action it encourages in the course of participating in the philosophical contest: dialectic appears to be a refinement of what Nietzsche designates as *Vernichtungslust* in “Homer's Contest”—the desire to destroy or annihilate the opponent. Socrates' dialectic, in Nietzsche's view, is a destructive form of contest, the kind that strives to “force back” by dissecting and annihilating the presumed knowledge of its interlocutors. Success in the Socratic *agon* is found not by offering a superlative performance—*e.g.*, to be most excellent in speaking simply shows one to be a sophist. And one does not “win” in a Socratic dialectical contest by providing the most excellent vision of the object of the game—*e.g.*, Socrates often emerges as the philosophical hero in Plato's dialogues not by offering the best positive conception of what is being investigated, rather, the Socratic position *wins* by rendering “furious and helpless at the same time” those who choose, or are compelled by fascination to participate

(TI, "Socrates" 7).²² Nietzsche sees dialectic as "a merciless tool [. . .] one can become a tyrant by means of it; one compromises those one conquers" (TI, "Socrates," 7).²³ Nietzsche claims that in Plato's dialectical works he finds an incredible lust for power that masks itself as a love of truth and reason: "The whole of history teaches that every oligarchy conceals the lust for tyranny; every oligarchy constantly trembles with the tension each member feels in maintaining control over this lust. (So it was in Greece, for instance: Plato bears witness to it in a hundred passages—and he knew his own kind—and himself)."²⁴

Plato vivifies a Socrates whose engagement with his interlocutors appears to resemble the contests that the Greeks admired and encouraged. In this way, he finds his place in the pre-existing economy of competition and striving. But measured against the standards of what Nietzsche identifies as the best possibilities for agonistic institutions and participants, Socrates is a false opponent. The Socratic contest sketched above does not permit opponents full participation. The rules of Nietzsche's Socratic *agon* are so prescribed that only those willing to abide by the rigid guidelines are even considered contestants, and those rules ensure the same position will always win. Socrates is *unbeatable* on his own turf, and no one who spars with him can survive untouched—he merits ostracism,²⁵ for he effectively closes off the *agon* from serving its function of providing genuine outlets for creative expression and opportunities for the communal justification of judgment, which are, for Nietzsche, the stuff of culture building. Because dialectic is a kind of going under that does not indicate a way of overcoming, it strips away old values and old judgments regarding what is estimable without also cultivating the activity of affirmative willing: in short—again—it leads to nihilism.²⁶

Finally, dialectic is also suspect on the ground that it springs from a fundamentally pessimistic worldview. Ironically, although Nietzsche himself appears to don the mantle of pessimism in his conviction that suffering is a fundamental condition of life, he faults Socrates for being a decadent pessimist. The end of the Socratic contest is objectionable because it ultimately seeks to bring about the cessation of suffering whereby the highest form of suffering is identified as being in utter ignorance (*e.g.*, to be unwittingly ignorant). If the rational is the good (and also the virtuous), to be irrational is base (later, in Christian terms, foolish, *i.e.*, being separated from God, *evil*). Nietzsche's Socrates seeks to bring forth the rational, or at least to purge the irrational, at every possible turn. Since life itself is characterized by suffering and (at least partially) what is irrational, as Nietzsche sees it, to seek the obliteration of suffering and irrationality is at the same time to seek the destruction of life. But if Nietzsche is also a pessimist, what distinguishes, at least in his eyes, his own view from that of Socrates?

Recall Nietzsche's admiration of Homer on the grounds that he thoroughly inverts the view of life expressed in the so-called wisdom of Silenus. Homer's

contest is the potent formula for the alchemy that Homer effects in changing the conception of life as base into one that regards it as gilded with glory. In “Homer’s Contest,” it is the Homeric response to the question, “What does a life of fighting and victory want?” that is so remarkable. The Homeric answer is not relief from pain or atonement for sin, or even the honor of some god; its answer is to make life beautiful, to deify it with glory. It effects the transformation of the meaning of suffering, bringing forth its value by associating it with a form of life that can be esteemed.

Ultimately Nietzsche, in spite of his claims to have shed his Schopenhauerian skin, remains a pessimist—he believes that suffering is essentially the human lot—but he thinks we need not suffer from our suffering. It is not suffering itself that is unbearable, Nietzsche claims in the *Genealogy*, but rather meaningless suffering. Human existence itself is tolerable, perhaps even possibly enviable, so long as it is possible to provide it with meaning. There are numerous ways in which such meaning can be produced—Nietzsche’s agonists bear witness to that—and some ways are better than others in terms of their sustainability and what other values they bring in their wake. Nietzsche examines the Socratic solution all the way to its root. Ultimately, he asks, do we find in the Socratic outlook an estimation of life as something *worth* living; is human suffering esteemed or redeemed? Contrary to those who insist on reading Nietzsche as a sadist, his interest is not the celebration of cruelty but rather possible transformations of suffering and the elusion of nihilism. If the Socratic contest could provide these measures, Nietzsche might be able to embrace it. But what he finds instead is a tremendous perversion of values (from the Homeric) to ones that, at their core, devalue human existence and strip the capacity for further revaluation.

The ideal of the dying Socrates (BT 13)—escaping suffering through death—as the new end for the *agon*, this striving for a route out of life, follows the form designated in the *Genealogy* as “life against life.” The contest is no longer organized between competitors seeking to outdo each other but rather finds its expression in a moralized rational contest in which one aims to undercut the internal enemies that make life so torturous in the first place. Hence, contests in the public sphere pale in comparison as their significance is bound only to the realm of existence that is considered deficient and worthy of flight. Through this process the *agon* is effectively displaced from the cultural realm to the individual.²⁷ Although Nietzsche is concerned about the detrimental effects of the disappearance of the *agon* from social life, he regards the displacement in the case of Socrates as especially hazardous in light of the fact that the contest itself becomes structured around the activity of *forcing back* and aims at annihilation. Since an internal contest produces the need to find an enemy within, one’s own self is at stake in the fight. How one regards the enemy that is oneself in an internalized contest is of the foremost

significance, and in Nietzsche's Socratic contest the human is locked in mortal combat with an agonist who has a taste for blood.

Nietzsche regards Socrates as a competitor who exhibits a tremendous power for changing the rules of the game and for reconfiguring the aims of the contest. Just as his readers are not ever certain which Socrates (or which Plato, Socratic, or Platonist) Nietzsche is fighting, so Nietzsche at times does not appear certain where he stands in relation to his agonist. One thing is certain for Nietzsche: the stakes of this particular contest are the highest a human being can seek. The Socratic type becomes for Nietzsche the most seductive and forceful exponent of nihilism. Nietzsche's fight with him focuses his energies and enables him to appreciate the risks involved in playing that "dangerous game" in which the meaning of one's life (rooted in what one conceives as the value and significance of human existence as such) hangs in the balance.

III. FIGHTING TO DEATH: THE AGONIES OF PAULINE CHRISTIANITY

Nietzsche famously describes Christianity as "Platonism for 'the people'" (BGE P), and we can see Nietzsche's attack on Pauline Christianity as an immediate outgrowth of the struggles with Socrates elaborated above. The case of Paul is like the case of Socrates in many respects except that Paul lacks some of the redeeming qualities possessed by Socrates.²⁸ Nietzsche does not seem to admire Paul in any way, although he is fascinated by him. We could hardly imagine Nietzsche saying of Paul, as he does in reference to Socrates that he is "so close to me I am almost always fighting him."²⁹ In Paul's hands, as Nietzsche sketches it, the perversion of the ends of the *agon* results in atrophy even more freakish than that produced by the Socratic turn inward.

As modes of development, both Christianity and the model Nietzsche anticipates have their roots in the *agon*. Both derive value from trials of serious and painful struggle—agonies. Both spring from the internalized contest that is the legacy of the Socratic displacement; both engage a dynamic in which the object of one's resistance is oneself. Still, Nietzsche thinks Christianity differs significantly from the agony of self-overcoming that he describes. With Christianity, he claims, the spiritualized contest becomes a means of *self*-destructing those over whom the power of faith is exercised, and it employs the same weapon against its enemies. In short, Nietzsche thinks the model of Christian agony encourages a form of struggle that debilitates those who emulate it, and it is hostile to the contest itself. I take it that this is one of the ways in which Christianity is complicit in bringing about its own

destruction according to Nietzsche: it sets up a contest as central to the meaning of what it is to be a “good” Christian, but the end (eradicating what makes one a human being) undermines the very possibility of being a player. Not only is the contest not good in itself but the modes of action that would otherwise be considered virtuous in an agonistic situation (e.g., self-interest, competitiveness, desire for victory) are hostile to the virtues allegedly sought through Christian agonies.

Self-overcoming, by contrast, is supposed to enhance one’s strength by encouraging a dynamic in which parts of one’s self are exhausted in pursuit of surpassing them, and it cultivates relations with others and products of competition that are (at least potentially) renewable. The confines of this paper do not allow a more extensive account of these distinctions, which is certainly necessary. Briefly put, consider the distinction Nietzsche draws between the model of self-resistance or self-opposition that operates out of *Vernichtungslust*, or a desire for destruction and a model that regards the internalized opponent as something that must be overcome and *in the process* meets its destruction. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche often deploys organic metaphors in his account of self-overcoming. The self or part of the self that one overcomes is described as *going to ruin* (*zu Grunde gehen*), suggesting that it meets a natural or fitting end, and connoting a kind of passing on that is appropriate in a process of becoming. The model of self-overcoming that emerges out of Nietzsche’s middle and later writings utilizes the language of biology to describe the dynamic. In the process of self-overcoming, what one has been is incorporated and appropriated in the course of the *Kampf* that one is: “Thus the body goes through history, a becoming [*ein Werdender*] and a fighting [*ein Kämpfender*]. And the spirit—what is that to the body? The herald of its fights and victories, companion and echo.” (Z 1: “Gift-Giving”; Kaufmann’s translation emended.)

The problem of Paul is more complex than one might initially think. It is tempting to see the case against Paul as synonymous with the case against Christianity or to see Paul as the prototypical ascetic priest so reviled in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*. Although these aspects are certainly important considerations, Nietzsche’s interest in the type that Paul signifies exceeds his concerns about Christianity. I wish to consider here just two facets of the problem of Paul as Nietzsche sketches it: *Saul’s* conversion and *Paul’s* exegesis. Saul/Paul as the inventor of Christianity—as the revaluator of the symbol of Jesus—is interesting because his feat is considered as resulting from a specific personal struggle. Hence Nietzsche considers Saul metamorphosing to Paul as indicating a psychological type whose struggles are instructive, particularly when measured against the agonistic models Nietzsche advances. “Saint Paul” is also emblematic of a perverting tendency manifest in Christianity, with whose legacy Nietzsche wrestles. Paul symbolizes for Nietzsche the consequences of the Christian valuation scheme that reverses

the alchemy of Homer and inhibits the production of alternative values (those that might contest the Christian/ascetic ideal).

Saul's *Kampf* is elaborated in *Daybreak* § 68. His problem hinges upon his concern with Jewish law and his prospects for fulfilling it. Saul seeks the highest distinction the law affords insofar as one incorporates it into one's life. Nietzsche writes that Saul "was constantly combating and on the watch for transgressors and doubters, harsh and malicious towards them and with the extremest inclination for punishment."³⁰ But Paul discovers that even he is incapable of living up to the law. What impedes him is "his wild thirst for power" [*ausschweifende Herrschsucht*], and that thirst was only intensified by his efforts to struggle against others in the name of the law. (Nietzsche casts Luther in similar light.) Eventually he comes to despise the very institution that he previously looked to for the means for securing his distinction as the bearer of supreme piety and obedience to God: "The law was the cross to which he felt himself nailed: how he hated it! How he had to drag it along! How he sought about for a means of *destroying* it [*es zu vernichten*]."³¹ And once he finds his means—the figure of Christ—*Saul becomes Paul* as he conspires to secure his freedom from the law. He pursues his liberation through the revenge of overturning the law.

We should consider more closely why Nietzsche binds together these two ideas: freedom and revenge. From what, in the example as Nietzsche depicts it, does Paul seek to be free? Why does he come to despise it so, and why does destruction seem to him his only alternative? Paul seeks freedom from the obligations of the law not because he is essentially a rebel who is too much of a "free spirit" to obey any law (and Nietzsche's own free spirits should not be characterized thus either); rather he seeks to be free of the tyranny of the law and the institutions that enforce it. Unlike the enabling limitation created by Homer's vision of the Olympian world, the limitation that Saul experiences in the form of the Jewish law is thoroughly *disabling*, as Nietzsche recounts it. It is the impossibility of achieving the distinction that the law allegedly extends that causes Paul to resent it so. The values the law inscribes—the goals it establishes for what constitutes the greatest of all possible meanings for a human life—are deemed impossible. Measured against them Saul's life is worthless, and *that* is unbearable—it crushes him, and he is provoked into a death-struggle with the law. He revolts against the purpose of the law: "the law existed so that sins might be committed, it continually brought sin forth as a sharp juice brings forth a disease."³² Redemption, in the form of revaluation, was hitherto possible only within the dictates of the law. Unless it was obliterated, Saul was lost.

Nietzsche articulates the logic of Saul's revenge thus: with the death of Christ to evil, the law that arbitrates sin dies—"Even if it is still possible to sin, it is no longer possible to sin against the law [. . .] God could never have resolved on the death of Christ if a fulfillment of the law had been in any

way possible without this death; now not only has all guilt been taken away, guilt as such has been destroyed [*vernichtet*]; now the law is dead, now the carnality in which it dwelt is dead."³³ The abolition of the law frees Saul to seek distinction through another means, and he does so through the erection of another ideal, one that remains faithful to the destructive roots that made his creation possible.

We should now consider precisely what is performed in the transformation of Saul to Paul, that is, further explore the form Paul's revenge takes and its legacy as Nietzsche sees it. If we look at the text of Luther's Bible, which we can imagine Nietzsche knew well, we find that the German words "Wettkampf" and "Kampf" appear nearly exclusively in the writings of Paul. It is notable that Paul does not write a gospel. Unlike the other Apostles, he does not write a biography that offers an account of an exemplary life. Instead, much of what Paul produces is an account of the injustice of the *end* of Jesus' life and what it means to struggle and fight in the wake of that event. He heralds Christ's *agonies*—which Nietzsche denies are inherent in the original symbol of the figure of Jesus—and invests them with a particularly potent significance that serves to elevate Paul's own status. In an account Nietzsche calls "the *genuine* history of Christianity," he distinguishes Christian doctrine and dogma from the life of Christ: "in truth, there was only *one* Christian, and he died on the cross. The 'evangel' *died* on the cross. What has been called 'evangel' from that moment was actually the opposite of that which *he* had lived: 'ill tidings,' a *dysangel*."³⁴ Of all the 'first Christians' Nietzsche most blames Paul for an account of the significance of Jesus that Nietzsche finds so destructive. In his creation of the Christ ideal, Paul transforms the meaning of what it is to be a good (Christian) human being, and all other meanings and values are similarly unhinged. Paul's "exegesis"³⁵ is elaborated in the context of Nietzsche's investigation of the genealogy of the accretions of the meanings of the "Redeemer" at the heart of Christianity.

Paul's Christ is a transmogrification of Nietzsche's Jesus. Nietzsche's Jesus is (loosely) conceived as a free spirit (A 32) because he is free of *ressentiment*. This is supposedly exemplified in the way he lived his life and in his free/easy death (A 40). He is free in the sense of being free from the limitations of "any kind of word, formula, law, faith, dogma": "the whole of reality, the whole of nature, language itself, has for him only the value of a sign, a simile" (A 32).³⁶ In that light, Nietzsche figures Jesus as a symbolist *par excellence* (A 34). He is credited with effecting a transfiguration of all things as modeling blessedness and perfection (A 34), an original symbolism [*ursprünglichen Symbolismus*] (A 37) in which the concept of guilt is abolished and the "cleavage between God and man" is obliterated (A 41). Jesus is thought to *live out* this unity as an affirmation much like the Israelites Nietzsche admires in his account of the early history of Judaism (A 25).

It is quite remarkable, given his admiration, that Jesus is conceived as what seems to be the *opposite* of Nietzsche's new agonist. (And Paul is described as the opposite of Jesus [A 30].) Nietzsche characterizes Jesus' life as exhibiting a thoroughly *anagonistic* practice: "He does not resist, he does not defend his right, he takes no step which might ward off the worst; on the contrary, he *provokes* it. And he begs, he suffers, he loves *with* those, *in* those, who do him evil. *Not* to resist, *not* to be angry, *not* to hold responsible—but to resist not even the evil one—to *love* him" (A 35).³⁷ In contrast, the warlike, no-saying, no-doing spirit of Christianity, it is claimed, is a by-product of the "rebellion against the existing order" [*Aufruhr gegen die Ordnung*] that seeks to lay blame for Jesus' death (A 40); it stems from *ressentiment*. And with *ressentiment* comes a desire for revenge, and thus the symbol of the Redeemer begins to take on the characteristics of struggle. The revenge is effected through the elevation and distancing of Jesus—a separation of his life from the practice of living Nietzsche thinks it exemplifies. In so doing, Paul crafts a new sense of redemption. Salvation lies in the faith, absolute belief, in the doctrine that brings about this separation: the resurrection.

Nietzsche's evidence for the fundamental significance of the resurrection to Paul's conception of Christianity is offered in a loose paraphrase of I Corinthians 15:14 and 17. In *Antichrist* 41, he attributes to Paul the following claim: "If Christ was not resurrected [*nicht auferstanden ist*] from the dead, then our faith [*Glaube*] is vain [*eitel*]."³⁸ Luther's translation of I Corinthians 15:14 and 17 reads: "Ist aber Christus nicht auferstanden, so ist unsre Predigt vergeblich, so ist auch euer Glaube vergeblich" [14]; "Ist Christus aber nicht auferstanden, so ist euer Glaube nichtig, so seid ihr noch in euren Sünden" [17]. The meaning of Jesus' life, its true significance, is fully invested in the resurrection as Paul frames it. Why doesn't Paul write a gospel? Because the *human* life of Jesus is nearly irrelevant. The foundation of the community Paul sought to establish is an absolute faith in something that denies what human experience teaches: a metaphysical miracle—the resurrection of the body of Christ. If the latter did not happen, "our belief"—the specific set of beliefs and values Paul sought to erect—is vain, empty, void.

Immortality through personal salvation *overdetermines* the significance of individual human lives. Once in possession of eternal life, one trumps any and all claims to distinction some other might make. Thus, Nietzsche can claim, the noble virtues are perpetually eclipsed to the point of vanishing behind this new ideal: "'Immortality' conceded to every Peter and Paul has so far been the greatest, the most malignant, attempt to assassinate *noble* humanity" (A 43).³⁹ And although Nietzsche might be referring to a specific form of noble humanity in that passage—perhaps one modeled on the portrait he creates of the ancient Greeks—it would still be consistent with his line of argument to further strengthen his claim by inserting the word "any"

before the word “noble.” Under this sign of redemption we are stripped not only of our significance but also of the potency to be makers of meaning. Nietzsche claims this ultimately leads to the demise of the institutions organized to cultivate our sense of community: “gratitude for descent and ancestors,” and the spirit of cooperation, trust, and promotion of the “common welfare” (A 43).⁴⁰ He describes Paul’s revaluation as bringing about a kind of axiological vertigo—“When one places life’s center of gravity not in life but in the ‘beyond’—*in nothingness*—one deprives life of its center of gravity altogether” (A 43).⁴¹

Motivated by *ressentiment*, Nietzsche claims, the disseminators of Paul’s interpretation deify Jesus so that they can use him as a weapon of revenge—and this is the model for the Christian *agon* as Nietzsche sees it. By elevating Jesus to a supernatural status, they strip him of the ability to serve as a model for human emulation—no human is capable of that sort of redemption. Instead, Jesus as the almighty son of God, as the crucified-but-resurrected Christ, becomes the lightning rod for retribution for injustice: “Precisely the most unevangelical feeling, *revenge*, came to the fore again. The matter could not possibly be finished with this death: ‘retribution’ was needed, ‘judgment’ (and yet, what could possibly be more unevangelical than ‘retribution,’ ‘punishment,’ ‘sitting in judgment’!)” (A 40).⁴² Considered thus, the good fight, the only one worth pursuing, is the one that seeks revenge for the injustice of the crucifixion; this pseudo-*agon* is not one *for* distinction but rather *against* evil. It is allegedly staged and engaged not by the community and individual contestants for personal distinction (as it was for Homer), or by the individual on his own behalf to better himself (as it was for Socrates), but rather by humanity as such against an omnipresent yet intangible nemesis (evil in itself) in accordance with a divine script. Moreover, to add insult to injury, the Christian labors are, in the end, for naught since the true redemption was already accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ. With this, the destruction of the ancient *agon* is complete: the form of the contest, the modes of competing within it, and its ultimate aims and cultural functions are utterly deformed.

In “Homer’s Contest,” Nietzsche begins his discussion of the significance of Homer’s accomplishment by situating it as a response to a perennial problem—namely, what is the meaning of human trials and tribulations; for what do we suffer? Nietzsche writes, “The Hellenic genius had yet another answer ready to the question: ‘What does a life of fighting and victory want?’ and gives this answer through the entire breadth of Greek history” (KSA 1, p. 785).⁴³ Homer is not the first to ask the question, and there are older traditions from other cultures that employ the military metaphors in their accounts of the character of human existence, such as in the cults of Isis and Mithras (cf. A 58). Homer does not *invent* the contest that characterizes human life; he *revalues* it, he transfigures it, he gives it a different interpretation. As indi-

cated above, his answer to the question, “What does a life of fighting and victory want?” is “*More life*”—rather than the end of life itself or the good of some suprahuman being. Paul’s response to the same question is, “*Everything*,” but his path to pursuing his end puts human beings in the position of being able to earn *nothing*, and *everything is worthless* unless miracles (e.g., the resurrection) are possible.

It is precisely this thought that Nietzsche links to Paul’s corruption of the *agon*.⁴⁴ His new concept of redemption strips the possibility for the production of any values at all. His mechanism for revaluation/redemption—a further adaptation of the contest that Socrates appropriates—operates such that everything is (and nothing can be further) redeemed in this most extraordinary act. And the act itself is precisely the complete accomplishment of what the Homeric heroes struggling for the highest glory, and any other human being seeking whatever aim of distinction, could never achieve—immortality. The death of the *agon*, for Nietzsche, is the assassination of *any* form of nobility: it effects the obliteration of distinction, difference, and the basis of genuine respect.

IV. NIETZSCHE *AGONISTES*

The foregoing discussions of Nietzsche’s contestants serve to ground an ethos of contest that allows for evaluating Nietzsche’s own “*Kriegspraxis*.”⁴⁵ How does Nietzsche measure up to his standards of what constitutes an admirable agonist, particularly in light of the tools of measure he employs in his own evaluations of the adversaries considered above? Because I think the case of Socrates is somewhat exceptional, I shall alter the order in which I consider Nietzsche’s agonists above as I briefly evaluate Nietzsche’s own activities in the course of the contests he creates. The cases of Homer and Paul fit fairly neatly into a schema and provide interesting contrasts, while the case of Socrates is persistently enigmatic.

In the course of elaborating the organization and motivation for Nietzsche’s contest with Homer, it was necessary to treat in that section the matter of Nietzsche’s mode of competing as it was crucial to the organization of the contest. I now wish to focus not on Nietzsche’s direct engagement with Homer but rather upon his work that grows out of that contest. Adapting and redirecting the formal model Nietzsche credits Homer with creating—the contest—Nietzsche seeks to re-stamp it with his own significance and to redefine its future potentialities. He utilizes it in effecting his own work, establishing his own set of labors, and thereby transforming himself into a sort of heroic figure. Nietzsche’s contest with Homer enables him to engage a philosophical-poetic practice that conjures a new type of hero shaped through such a

process—Zarathustra—as one who might eclipse Homer’s most celebrated agonist, Odysseus.⁴⁶

Although Zarathustra becomes the Nietzschean replacement for the Homeric heroes, we should be careful not to see him simply as aspiring to be *more heroic* than Odysseus, or as being more entitled to the same honor reserved for Odysseus. Zarathustra obviously wrestles challenges that are quite different from those of Odysseus, and he pursues them to achieve different aims. Over what does he have his victories? While Homer’s heroes strive for fame, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra aspires to overcome his vanity, his self-ignorance, his shame, and his fear. Zarathustra’s demons are chiefly internal ones, although those same aspects of his self appear to be formed by external forces to some extent. Is he, then, a model fighter, a supreme agonist? Apparently not. In Zarathustra, one finds some of the same traits of Nietzsche’s Jesus who does not fight (cf. A 35). Zarathustra poses as a (Nietzschean kind of) lover rather than a fighter—he is an advocate (at least) of loving in the form of willing something precious, rare, and exceptionally valuable into existence. To be entitled to that, to become the authority and exemplar of that practice, Zarathustra is drawn into the dynamic of undergoing and overcoming that serves as the model for Nietzsche’s new labors. That the Nietzschean agonist is not envisioned as a (Homeric) warrior is further supported by a notebook passage from the late 1880s. There Nietzsche considers what it means to create and *have* ideals. He writes: “Whatever kind of bizarre ideal one may follow (e.g., as ‘Christian’ or as ‘free spirit’ or as ‘immoralist’ or as *Reichsdeutscher*—), one should not demand that it be *the* ideal: for one therewith takes from it its privileged character. One should have it in order to distinguish oneself, not in order to level oneself” (WP 349).⁴⁷ In what ways do pursuing ideals have a leveling effect? When the ideal is taken as the uniform and single standard for all, or when its value for the one who pursues it is contingent upon the recognition of others as the single most worthwhile goal, then the point of having an ideal at all is misunderstood. Ideals are what orient and shape lives—they sketch out the horizons in which possible meanings can emerge and be forged. Having ideals and pursuing them is how one participates in what Nietzsche describes as “Kunst der Transfiguration” (GS P 2:3).⁴⁸ One pursues them for one’s own sake or for the sake of the meaning of human being as such, transforming life into a living poetic practice.⁴⁹ A conception of the heroic that considers fighting with “sacrifice, devotion, disinterestedness” [“Aufopferung, Hingebung, Uneigennützigkeit”] “for others” in pursuit of the ideal is misguided. Rather, Nietzsche writes, “true heroism” consists “in *not fighting at all*” (WP 349).⁵⁰ The hero does not gather his strength in pursuit of his ideal via recognition from others. In his pursuit of the ideal the hero commands, legislates in the manner described above: “‘This is what *I* am; this is what *I* want’:— *you* can go to hell!”⁵¹

Nietzsche's *Kriegs-Praxis* involves fighting at the right time and in the right way. It demands agonal wisdom—knowing when *not* to fight and what to refuse to fight, what relations to refuse to be drawn into, and what would be fruitfully pursued. This seems to be what Nietzsche admires about Jesus and helps us understand why Nietzsche might appreciate his *anagonistic* practice. Nietzsche's admiration of Socrates' silence (*GS* 340) is also clarified in this light. This does not mean that one *never* fights, but rather that one does not fight simply in order to gain confirmation through the recognition of others (such is not effective legislation or commanding), and one ought not fight in the name of pursuing the goal of forcing all others to also strive for and reach the distinction that one achieves through "true heroic" fighting, through the exercise of the *Kriegs-Praxis*. The contest with Homer enables Nietzsche to appreciate these characteristics.

Homer educes the "Kunst der Auslegung" (*GM* P: 8),⁵² the "Kunst der Transfiguration," out of Nietzsche. The goal of Nietzsche's contest with him is to redefine what is excellent—to craft a new nobility, to bring forth an advance in the meaning of human existence. It has creative aims and facilitates the creative activity of rising above (*erheben*), as Nietzsche describes it in *WS*. It also gives shape to Nietzsche's overall project, and hence appears to have been productive in terms of its specific effects on Nietzsche for having engaged it.

The case of Paul stands in sharp contrast with Nietzsche's treatment of Homer. Nietzsche suffers no lost love for Paul: he is depicted as the patron of cruelty, self-hatred, and shame. He doesn't even garner the respect Nietzsche extends to slavish morality generally, which is characterized in *On the Genealogy of Morals* as having the redeeming features of bringing about a reevaluation of values that, although it is a celebration of overcoming what is superior to itself, at least makes human beings interesting animals (*GM* I:6). The Christian worldview Paul is alleged to have crafted is clearly one that has been successful and expansive. Nietzsche's treatment of Paul and Christianity's most cherished values invites accusations of *Vernichtungslust*. Still, Nietzsche does not appear to aim at destroying Paul, or at diminishing his transformation as trivial; if anything Nietzsche's work reveals the tremendous power of this particular rival and the seeming insuperability of its accomplishment. How could one fight such an incredible force? Nietzsche himself appears uncertain as he wonders in the third essay of the *Genealogy* what might possibly oppose the ascetic ideal. He can look to his counter-creation, his counter-ideal as his best effort of resistance, but even he realizes the Dionysian Zarathustra is no match for "The Crucified," at least not yet.

Paul is a significant figure in Nietzsche's taxonomy of revaluations. The advent of slavish morality, which reverses values and transforms its poles,

is read by Nietzsche as an essentially creative act even if it had destructive aims and consequences. And it provided spiritual depth—the invention of conscience—that Nietzsche admires. But Paul himself gets no such credit: his invention of the “dysangel” appears to have no productive or creative value for Nietzsche. Paul’s revaluation appears to be nothing more than a disaster, the intensification of a disease that rendered humankind thoroughly decadent. If we read Nietzsche’s contest with Paul as transpiring in the arena of morality generally, and if we allow him to have offered his counter-ideal in Zarathustra and models of self-overcoming that are sketched in *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, then the structure of the contest appears to share significant characteristics with the contest with Homer, but Nietzsche’s mode of competing within that space is quite different. Nowhere do we get the sense that Nietzsche treats Paul with “agonistic respect.”⁵³ Paul appears as a worthy opponent only in light of the venom hurled upon him. He doesn’t even earn the same kind of respect bestowed by Nietzsche upon Luther, who Nietzsche also thought as engaged in an ill-fated revaluation (of Christianity). Luther at least gets admired *qua* revaluator, even if Nietzsche endeavors later to go on to show that Luther’s own mode of contesting Rome was fatally infected with a desire to destroy without necessarily creating in the wake of that destruction. In other words, Nietzsche sees Luther as motivated by a will to destroy while “reformation” was merely an afterthought. Paul, by contrast, is cast as the engineer of a refined and nearly complete sort of cruelty.

The case of Paul fits a model Nietzsche sketches in his notes in the late 1880s. There, he describes a means of generating development through opposition by converting the opponent to the agonist’s antithesis. Nietzsche writes:

Consequence of struggle: the fighter tries to transform his opponent into his [own] *antithesis*—in imagination naturally. He tries to have faith in himself to such a degree that he may have courage for the “good cause” (as if he were the good cause); as if his opponent were attacking reason, taste, virtue—The belief he needs as the strongest means of defense and attack is a belief in himself, which, however, knows how to misunderstand itself as belief in God:—never to imagine the advantages and utility of victory, but always victory for the sake of victory, as “the victory of god”—Every little community (even an individual) that finds itself involved in struggle tries to convince itself: “We have good taste, good judgment, and virtue on our side.”—The struggle compels to such an exaggeration of self-esteem—(WP 348)⁵⁴

But even in the case of Paul, Nietzsche acknowledges that the calamity that he initiates does not really begin with him. Just as Socrates is relieved of the responsibility for the death of tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy* when Nietzsche claims that Socrates effectively saved the Greeks from a kind of savage barbarity toward which they were headed lest that energy be directed in more benign outlets, Nietzsche claims in *The Antichrist* that the culture that Paul

overcame or exploited was already decadent. Paul, like Socrates, is considered as capitalizing on that decadence and transforming it. But in the case of Paul, it would seem, the deformity he effected was perhaps even more grotesque than that of his predecessor.

The structure of Nietzsche's contest with Paul—the ultimate aims it seeks—appears to be creative insofar as what Nietzsche aims to establish is what he conceives as a healthier, more creative valuation practice, something he thinks enhances human life as such. Hence, Nietzsche takes arms against Paul not in order to earn fame (or even to become *infamous*), and not merely to perfect himself (as might be said of his engagement with Homer), but rather to open the possibility of advancing human existence altogether. The name “Paul,” when penned by Nietzsche, gathers together a process of symbolic mortification that Nietzsche aims to resist. In other words, this, too, is a contest the stakes of which are the entitlements and possibilities of the *Kunst der Auslegung*—the hermeneutics of human being.

As for his mode of action within the contest, Nietzsche certainly tests the boundaries of the very ethos he advocates through the *agon*-model and that he describes as characteristic of his *Kriegs-Praxis* in *Ecce Homo*. One might claim that the conversion of the opponent to an antithesis in which the aim is a transformation oriented toward a higher goal is creative, but if that is allowed it would seem that many of the cases in which one aims to win by belittling one's opponent could be framed in this way. How does such a practice *really* differ from the mode of action of forcing back (*herabdrücken*), disparaged by Nietzsche early in his career as unworthy of the genuine *agon* and later in his career as analogous to slavish morality and *ressentiment*? In Nietzsche's own mind, at least, there appears to be a way of distinguishing these two. In a note that dates from the period Fall 1887–March 1888, Nietzsche writes, “Every ideal presupposes love and hate, reverence and contempt. Either the positive feeling is the *primum mobile* or the negative feeling is. Hate and contempt are, *e.g.*, the *primum mobile* in all *ressentiment* ideals” (*WP* 350).⁵⁵ The key is to identify whether a positive feeling, a kind of love, initiates the action or whether a form of contempt is operative. In the case of Paul, Nietzsche clearly seems to have contempt for his opponent, although he remains insistent that it springs from a genuine concern for enabling a productive will—in Nietzsche's terms, as discussed in the preceding section on Homer, a higher kind of love.

I indicate above some of the difficulties of investigating Nietzsche's contest with Socrates—*e.g.*, the ambiguity of Nietzsche's uses of the names “Socrates” and “Plato.” In my own discussion, I treat the problem of Socrates as stemming from Nietzsche's consideration of a *Socratic type* that he sought to resist. Nietzsche's contest with Socrates recalls other *agones*: the struggle between *dike* and *nike*, the contest of *Weisheit* and *Wissenschaft*, the quarrel

between poetry and philosophy. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes, “Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism” (GM III:25).⁵⁶ What is at stake in that antagonism is the character of the power of interpretation—the power of art to shape and give meaning to lives.

Contrary to the view that Nietzsche sees human beings as either successful or impotent-but-aspiring beasts of prey, I read Nietzsche’s philosophical anthropology as advocating a conception of human beings as essentially meaning makers: they mete out measure. In Nietzsche’s eyes, human beings cling to their capacity to produce values as their most distinctive characteristic. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes: “Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging—these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent that in a certain sense they constitute thinking as such: here . . . we may suppose, did human pride, the feeling of superiority in relation to other animals, have its first beginnings. Perhaps our word ‘man’ (*manas*) still expresses something of precisely this feeling of self-satisfaction: man designated himself as the creature that measures values, evaluates and measures, as the ‘valuing animal as such’” (GM II:8).⁵⁷ When we engage in this activity, however, we are not reading the order off the world itself. In our measuring of values, our evaluations, our measures, we are “setting,” “determining,” and “contriving.” In short, we are inventing, and thereby issuing the values we advance. Nietzsche provocatively calls this a kind of lying, famously, “in a non-moral sense.” It is a sort of fabrication that often masquerades as revelation. To perfect lying in the sense of creating the meaning of things and honoring that capability is to enhance the value of human existence. Nietzsche describes this as having a “good conscience” about the “will to deception,” and he sees this as the most promising kind of opposition to the ascetic ideal, a more worthy opponent of Christianity than science. The contest of Plato and Homer, cited above, is situated in the following context:

art, in which precisely the lie is sanctified and the will to deception has a good conscience, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than is science: this was instinctively sensed by Plato, the greatest enemy of art Europe has yet produced. Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism—there the sincerest advocate of the ‘beyond,’ the great slanderer of life; here the instinctive deifier, the golden nature (GM III:25).⁵⁸

Having surpassed Homer, Nietzsche inserts himself in the *agon* of Plato and Homer and seeks to reinvigorate it. Nietzsche’s *agon* with Socrates is constituted by this struggle.

So what are we to make of Nietzsche’s portrayal? Nietzsche’s treatment of Socrates (and Plato), especially in *Twilight of the Idols*, also invites the accusation of *Vernichtungslust*. Are we to reject Nietzsche’s portrayals because

they are unfair, incomplete, or worse, exaggeration to the point of sheer ridicule? Should such maneuvers be recognized as admirable modes of agonistic engagement? Does Nietzsche's *Kriegs-Praxis* against Socrates abide by the four principles he indicates in *Ecce Homo* ("Wise" 7)?⁵⁹

Nietzsche himself recognized the scholarly inadequacies of his writing and the degree to which his criticisms fail to capture the richness of Socrates' "personality" and Plato's work. Among his notes one finds the following: "Every society has the tendency to reduce its opponents to caricatures—at least in imagination—and, as it were, to starve them. Such a caricature is, e.g., our 'criminal'. [. . .] Among the immoralists it is the moralist: Plato, for example, becomes a caricature in my hands" (*WP* 374).⁶⁰ Nietzsche's practice of caricature draws on the means of exaggeration of several aspects of Plato's work and Socrates' personality in order to be able to call attention to certain tendencies in his contemporaries' philosophy, which he traces to these quasi-fictional roots.⁶¹ Furthermore, Nietzsche is able to use the tactic as a means of calling into question what one might argue is the genuine interpretation of those ideas, thereby enabling his readers to challenge them for themselves. Is this a legitimate contest according to Nietzsche's own criteria? Nietzsche would like to fight Socrates, but I fail to see precisely how he does so. He resists Socratism, no doubt, but does that resistance constitute an *agon*? I do not think so. Instead, Nietzsche at times appears to envision his role as bringing about the possibility for a future contest that will require an agonist better prepared than he.

To resist Plato, to *refuse to play* the Socratic game strictly on its own terms, appears to be precisely where Nietzsche thinks his own engagement of that philosophy has its value. Nietzsche writes, "the fight against Plato or, to speak more clearly and for 'the people,' the fight against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia—for Christianity is Platonism for 'the people'—has created in Europe a magnificent tension in the spirit the likes of which had never yet existed on earth: with so tense a bow we can now shoot for the most distant goals" (*BGE P*).⁶² Nietzsche caricatures the Socratic in order to incite that kind of resistance and to open the possibilities of harnessing what he views as significant potential for productive striving. Nietzsche's struggle with Socrates strives to problematize and reinvigorate encounters with that "buffoon" who bears so many similarities to himself,⁶³ but even at the end of Nietzsche's career the *agon* with Socratic-Platonic philosophy had not yet commenced, and the distant goal or possible future it might open remained to be claimed.

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1. Friedrich Nietzsche, “Homer’s Wettkampf” (hereafter HC) in *Kritische-Studien Ausgabe*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1967–1977, volume 1, p. 791: “Welches Problem erschließt sich uns da, wenn wir nach dem Verhältniß des Wettkampfes zur Conception des Kunstwerkes fragen!—.” The translation is my own. Subsequent references to Nietzsche’s works in German are drawn from this edition.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* in *The Birth of Tragedy* (hereafter BT) and *The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1967) § 15=KSA 1, p. 102. Walter Kaufmann’s translation slightly emended to include the exclamation point that appears in the original.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (hereafter GS), translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), preface for the second edition, § 3=KSA 3, p. 349.

4. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, much of which was written after Nietzsche’s plans for “Homer’s Contest” had already been shaped, Homer is credited with overcoming the earliest expression of a modified version of the Hobbesian state of nature, namely that for humans, life is nasty, brutish, and [not] short [enough]. Nietzsche finds this view crystallized in the so-called wisdom of Silenus, who tells Midas that what is best for humans is to never have been born and that second best is to die soon. (See Sophocles, “Oedipus at Colonus,” lines 1224f, cited and discussed in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 3.) Silenus and Hesiod testify that human life is marked by endless toil and struggle, meaningless labor and strife, and the best we can hope for is to get out of it as quickly as possible. But guided by Homer, Nietzsche claims, one finds the significance of the labors of human existence deliberately transformed and placed into the hands of humans themselves.

5. There Nietzsche writes of “Envy and his nobler brother”: “One who is envious senses every way in which another juts beyond the common measure and wants to force him back [*herabdrücken*] to it—or raise [*erheben*] himself up to that height: out of which there arise two different modes of action, which Hesiod designated as the evil and the good Eris” (KSA 2, p. 562: “Der Neidische fühlt jedes Hervorragendes 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.”) The translation is my own. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references to *Human All Too Human* (hereafter HH) [“The Wanderer and his Shadow,” hereafter WS] are drawn from the translation by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge, 1986). I discuss this passage in greater detail in my “Of Dangerous Games and Dastardly Deeds: A Typology of Nietzsche’s Contests” forthcoming in *International Studies in Philosophy*. In that article I refer to the mode of action of “herabdrücken” as “pushing down” because I rely on Hollingdale’s translation. I think my own translation here better captures the sense of the passage. Having chosen “every way in which another juts beyond” for “jedes Hervorragendes des Anderen über,” I think the translation of “herabdrücken” as “forcing back” makes more sense.

6. I elaborate Nietzsche’s contest with Homer in my “Nietzsche’s Problem of Homer” in *Nietzscheforschung V/VI* (2000): 553–574.

7. =KSA 2, p. 117: “Man fühlt sich mit einander verwandt, es besteht ein gegenseitiges Interesse, eine Art Symmachie. Der Mensch denkt vornehm von sich, wenn er sich solche Götter giebt, und stellt sich in ein Verhältniss, wie das des niedrigeren Adels zum höheren ist; während die italischen Völker eine rechte Bauern-Religion haben, mit fortwährender Aengstlichkeit gegen böse und launische Machtinhaber und Quälgeister.”

8. =KSA 2, pp. 218–219: “Alle grossen geistigen Mächte üben neben ihrer befreienden Wirkung auch eine unterdrückende aus; aber freilich ist es ein Unterschied, ob Homer oder die Bibel oder die Wissenschaft die Menschen tyrannisiren.”

9. The Renaissance qualifies for Nietzsche as a culture that might rival that of Greek antiquity. But Nietzsche is persistently fascinated with the idea that monumental value shifts, which he locates as embodied in prototypical *personalities*, can shape cultures, and he also deploys

the notion as a diagnostic tool. Of course, value creators do so not always with what he might regard as good effects. Luther sometimes qualifies as such a creator, and he is at times credited with (maligned for) having brought about the ruin of Renaissance culture. Socrates and Plato are evaluated in these terms as are the figures of Jesus and Paul, among others.

10. =KSA 2, p. 612: “Diess war die Erziehungs-Schule der griechischen Dichter: zuerst also einen vielfältigen Zwang sich auferlegen lassen, durch die früheren Dichter; sodann einen neuen Zwang hinzuerfinden, ihn sich auferlegen und ihn anmuthig besiegen: sodass Zwang und Sieg bemerkt und bewundert werden.”

11. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (hereafter Z), translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), Book II, “On Redemption” =KSA 4, p. 181: “Alle ‘Es war’ ist ein Bruchstück, ein Räthsel, ein grauser Zufall—bis der schaffende Wille dazu sagt ‘aber so wollte ich es!’—Bis der schaffende Wille dazu sagt ‘Aber so will ich es! So werde ich’s wollen!’”

12. =KSA 4, pp. 150–151: “Aber alles Leben ist Streit um Geschmack und Schmecken! Geschmack: das ist Gewicht zugleich und Wagschale und Wägender; und wehe allem Lebendigen, das ohne Streit um Gewicht und Wagschale und Wägende leben wollte!”

13. I discuss Nietzsche’s Zarathustra as an alternative to the *Bildungsroman* heroes in my “Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as Postmodern *Bildungsroman*,” *Nietzsche, Postmodernismus und was nach ihnen kommt*, edited by Endre Kiss and Uschi Nussbaumer-Benz (Cuxhaven and Dartford: Junghans, 2000), pp. 33–41

14. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that the English word “compete” is drawn from the Latin connoting the sense of *striving together with*.

15. Nietzsche’s notoriously ambivalent attitude toward Socrates is well illustrated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Socrates is both blamed for driving tragedy past the brink of suicide and praised for saving Greek culture and perhaps all of Western civilization by directing what Nietzsche perceives as brutal instincts for domination into what were superficially more peaceful outlets.

16. See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols (TI)*, translated by Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954) “The Problem of Socrates,” section 7.

17. And many others have spilled much ink on the issue. Remarkably, none have approached the problem in quite this way: to consider Nietzsche’s relation to Socrates in the context of his conception of *agon* and how Socratic philosophy is in tension with those ideas. For other treatments of Nietzsche’s views on Socrates and Plato, see: Richard Oehler, *Friedrich Nietzsche und die Vorsokratiker* (Leipzig: Dürr, 1904); Kurt Hildebrandt, *Nietzsches Wettkampf mit Sokrates und Plato* (Dresden: Sybillen, 1922); Walter Kaufmann *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974 [fourth edition]); Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche’s View of Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) and Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

18. In TI Nietzsche writes, Socrates, “fascinated by appealing to the agonistic impulse of the Greeks—he introduced a variation into the wrestling match between young men and youths” (TI, “Socrates” 8) = KSA 6, p. 71: “Er fascinierte, indem er an den agonalen Trieb der Hellenen rührte,—er brachte eine Variante in den Ringkampf zwischen jungen Männern und Jünglingen.”

19. =KSA 6, p. 69: “Mit Sokrates schlägt der griechische Geschmack zu Gunsten der Dialektik um.”

20. One does not come to love, in the way that Zarathustra describes the creative activity of willing (of esteeming something), by means of being told that such is the case or by means of being forced into that conclusion. Zarathustra struggles with that very lesson in the course of *Zarathustra*. Nietzsche faults Socrates with putting his interlocutors in a position that compromises their capacities for value creation by his insistence upon a uniform standard of taste cloaked in the rational.

21. See *Beyond Good and Evil* (hereafter BGE) 43 and Alexander Nehamas' discussion of the "future philosophers" in his "Who are 'The Future Philosophers': A Reading of *Beyond Good and Evil*" in *Reading Nietzsche*, edited by Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

22. =KSA 6, p. 70: "er macht wüthend, er macht zugleich hüfllos". Recall that in Plato's *Meno*, Socrates' questioning leaves his interlocutor dizzy, "brimful of perplexity" (80a), "truly torpid in both mind and mouth" (80b), see Jane M. Day, editor, *Plato's Meno in Focus* (New York: Routledge, 1994). In the *Theatetus*, Theodorus compares Socrates to a wrestler who will not be satisfied until he has stripped by force all who come near him so he may test his strength (*Theaetetus* 169a–b).

23. =KSA 6, p. 70: "Man hat, als Dialektiker, ein schonungsloses Werkzeug in der Hand; man kann mit ihm den Tyrannen machen; man stellt bloss, indem man siegt." A more literal translation of the German text here would recall the passage from *Theatetus* cited above. As it is translated by Hollingdale, it recalls Nietzsche's "second principle" of his *Kriegspraxis* elaborated in *Ecce Homo*: he attacks things such that he compromises only himself (*Ecce Homo*, "Why I am So Wise").

24. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (hereafter GM) and *Ecce Homo* (hereafter EH), translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1969) GM III:18=KSA 5, p. 384: "Unter jeder Oligarchie liegt—die ganze Geschichte lehrt es—immer das tyrannische Gelüst versteckt; jede Oligarchie zittert beständig von der Spannung her, welche jeder Einzelne in ihr nöthig hat, Herr über dies Gelüst zu bleiben. (So war es zum Beispiel griechisch: Plato bezeugt es an hundert Stellen, Plato, der seines Gleichen kannte—und sich selbst . . .)." Once channeled into the powerful outlet of dialectic, Nietzsche claims, Plato's desire for power becomes perverted and self-destructive. When he gives up his cultural values in favor of the Socratic, Plato becomes a decadent. Nietzsche speculates in a notebook from 1888: "[He] severed the instincts from the polis, from contest, from military efficiency, from art and beauty, from the mysteries, from belief in tradition and ancestors—He was the seducer of the nobility: he was himself seduced by the roturier Socrates—He negated all the presuppositions of the 'noble Greek' of the old stamp, made dialectic an everyday practice, conspired with tyrants, pursued politics of the future and provided the example of the most complete severance of the instincts from the past. He is profound, passionate in everything anti-Hellenic—" (in *The Will to Power* [WP], translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Vintage Books, 1967], 435). (=KSA 13, p. 272: "aber er löste die Instinkte ab von der Polis, vom Wettkampfe, von der militärischen Tüchtigkeit, von der Kunst und Schönheit, von den Mysterien, von dem Glauben an Tradition und Großväter . . .

—er war der Verführer der nobles: er selbst verführt durch den Roturier Sokrates . . .

—er negierte alle Voraussetzungen des 'vornehmen Griechen' von Schrot und Korn, nahm Dialektik in die Alltags-Praxis auf, conspirierte mit den Tyrannen, trieb Zukunfts-Politik und gab das Beispiel der vollkommensten *Instinkt-Ablösung vom Alten*. Er ist tief, leidenschaftlich in allem Antihellenischen. . . .")

25. In "Homer's Contest" Nietzsche imagines the contest as so crucial to the productive development of Greek culture that he accounts for the original practice of ostracism as a mechanism for ensuring a radical openness for agonistic engagement. A thoroughly dominant victor would lock the culture in stasis and hence was ostracized not because competition was feared, but rather because it was so highly valued.

26. Compare Nietzsche's charges with Socrates' claim in the *Apology*: "I am called wise because my listeners always imagine I possess the wisdom which I do not find in others. The truth is, O men of Athens, the gods only are wise and in this oracle they mean to say wisdom of men is little or nothing" (Plato, *Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Symposium, Republic*, translated by B. Jowett [New York: W. J. Black, 1942] 23a).

27. In brief, Nietzsche thinks the *agon* is transplanted from the social sphere to the human

psyche. The *agon*-space, in other words, shifts from public and shared cultural institutions to private and remote regions of the soul. The roles of athletic trainers, sophists, judges, and artisans in public contests are replaced by those of priests and philosophers, who regulate developmental and moral labors of the individual. These new engineers of contest do not directly provide agonistic engagement themselves but rather specialize in training the individual to become his own best enemy. The *agon* is thus no longer a structure mediating relations among other human beings: contest now becomes chiefly a part of how one relates to oneself. As to precisely how this shift occurred, Nietzsche experiments with several different hypotheses.

28. This seems to include the fact that nothing beneficial follows from Paul's reevaluation. As noted above, Socrates' reevaluation of the contest is interpreted in both *BT* and *TI* as at least saving the Greeks in some respects, although its usefulness expired and thence its consequences became a detriment that Nietzsche sees it as his task to fight. The same cannot be said of Paul. He is a fascinating type for Nietzsche, in part because of his tremendous reevaluation, but he is ultimately an intellectual and creative inferior to Socrates. For a more explicit elaboration of this idea, see HH II [2]: 85 and 86. In § 85 Nietzsche claims that Paul *remains* Saul as a persecutor of God. By this I take it he means that the root of the reevaluation that *Saint Paul* effects in the invention of Christianity is ultimately the destructive aim of the rebellion that *Saul* aimed to lead.

29. In his notes, Nietzsche famously writes about Socrates that he is "so close to me that I am almost constantly fighting with him" ("*Socrates*, um es nur zu bekennen, steht mir so nahe, dass ich fast immer einen Kampf mit ihm kämpfe" [KSA 8, p. 97].) The translation is drawn from "The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom," translated by Daniel Breazeale in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1979), p. 127.

30. Nietzsche, *Daybreak* (D) 68. In general, I rely on R.J. Hollingdale's translation (New York: Cambridge, 1982), however, I have emended the translation in some places =KSA 3, p. 65: "fortwährend im Kampfe und auf der Lauer gegen die Übertreter und Anzweifler desselben, hart und böse gegen sie und zum Äussersten der Strafen geneigt."

31. =KSA 3, p. 66: "Das Gesetz war das Kreuz, an welches er sich geschlagen fühlte: wie hasste er es! wie trug er es ihm nach! wie suchte er herum, um ein Mittel zu finden, es zu vernichten—."

32. =KSA 3, p. 67: "denn das Gesetz war dazu da, dass gesündigt werde, es trieb die Sünde immer hervor, wie ein scharfer Saft die Krankheit."

33. =KSA 3, p. 67: "Selbst wenn es noch möglich wäre, zu sündigen, so doch nicht mehr gegen das Gesetz [. . .] Gott hätte den Tod Christi nie beschliessen können, wenn überhaupt ohne diesen Tod eine Erfüllung des Gesetzes möglich gewesen wäre; jetzt ist nicht nur alle Schuld abgetragen, sondern die Schuld an sich vernichtet; jetzt ist das Gesetz todt, jetzt ist die Fleischlichkeit, in der es wohnt, todt."

34. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* (hereafter A), translated by Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche*, section 39 =KSA 6, p. 211: "im Grunde gab es nur Einen Christen, und der starb am Kreuz. Das 'Evangelium' starb am Kreuz. Was von diesem Augenblick an "Evangelium" heisst, war bereits der Gegensatz dessen, was er gelebt: eine "schlimme Botschaft", ein *Dysangelium*." In general, I rely on Kaufmann's translation, but I emend the text in several places and include phrases from the original that were omitted in Kaufmann's translation as noted below.

35. In the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, in a section titled "On the origin of religions" (GS 353), Nietzsche describes how founders of religions posit a way of life and then offer it "an interpretation that makes it appear to be illuminated by the highest value so that this life style becomes something for which one fights and under certain circumstances sacrifices one's life." [=KSA 3, p. 589: "gerade diesem Leben eine *Interpretation* zu geben, vermöge deren es vom höchsten Werthe umleuchtet scheint, so dass es nunmehr zu einem Gute wird, für das man kämpft und, unter Umständen, sein Leben lässt."] Paul is described as offering "an exegesis, he read

the highest meaning and value into” the little lives of those in the Roman province. As I shall only briefly mention below, one could make a fruitful comparison between the *Auslegung* of Paul and the practice of *auslegen* advocated by Nietzsche in the preface to the *Genealogy*, in which Nietzsche is seeking to reveal the joints of the interpretation crafted by Paul and anticipate ways of countering it.

36. =KSA 6, p. 204: “widerstrebt bei ihm jeder Art Wort, Formel, Gesetz, Glaube, Dogma”; “alles Übrige, die ganze Realität, die ganze Natur, die Sprache selbst, hat für ihn bloss den Werth eines Zeichens, eines Gleichnisses.”

37. =KSA 6, pp. 207–8: “Er widersteht nicht, er vertheidigt nicht sein Recht, er thut keinen Schritt, der das Äusserste von ihm abwehrt, mehr noch, *er fordert es heraus* . . . Und er bittet, er leidet, er liebt *mit* denen, *in* denen, die ihm Böses thun [. . .] *Nicht* sich wehren, *nicht* zürnen, *nicht* verantwortlich-machen . . . Sondern auch nicht dem Bösen widerstehen,—ihn *lieben* . . .” Curiously, Kaufmann’s translation omits a brief passage: “Die Worte zum *Schächer* am Kreuz enthalten das ganze Evangelium. Das ist wahrlich ein *göttlicher* Mensch gewesen, ein ‘Kind Gottes’ sagt der Schächer. ‘Wenn du dies fühlst—antwortet der Erlöser—*so bist du im Paradiese*, so bist auch du ein Kind Gottes . . .’”. The passage is included in Hollingdale’s translation. I designate Nietzsche’s characterization of Jesus as *agonistic* in contrast with the more common term *antagonistic* and a term I use elsewhere to describe someone who is aggressively hostile to the agonistic model—ant(i)agonistic.

38. =KSA 6, p. 215: “‘*Wenn* Christus nicht auferstanden ist von den Todten, so ist unser Glaube eitel.’”

39. =KSA 6, p. 218: “Die ‘Unsterblichkeit’ jedem Petrus und Paulus zugestanden war bisher das grösste, das böartigste Attentat auf die *vornehme* Menschlichkeit.”

40. =KSA 6, p. 217: “Wozu Gemeinsinn, wozu Dankbarkeit noch für Herkunft und Vorfahren, wozu mitarbeiten, zutrauen, irgend ein Gesamt-Wohl fördern und im Auge haben?” I think this demonstrates that Nietzsche is concerned for the social and political good, not just for personal or individual success or glory as the heroic morality is often described. In these passages one recognizes that it is precisely because it is so selfish that Nietzsche despises Christianity: “The ‘salvation of the soul’—in plain language: ‘the world revolves around *me*.’” (A 43). [“Das ‘Heil der Seele’—auf deutsch: ‘die Welt dreht sich um *mich*.’”]

41. =KSA 6, p. 217: “Wenn man das Schwergewicht des Lebens *nicht* in’s Leben, sondern in’s ‘Jenseits’ verlegt—in’s *Nichts*, so hat man dem Leben überhaupt das Schwergewicht genommen.”

42. =KSA 6, p. 214: “Gerade das am meisten unevangelische Gefühl, die *Rache*, kam wieder obenauf. Unmöglich konnte die Sache mit diesem Tode zu Ende sein: man brauchte ‘Vergeltung’, ‘Gericht’ (—und doch was kann noch unevangelischer sein als ‘Vergeltung’, ‘Strafe’, ‘Gericht-halten’!)”

43. =“Der hellenische Genius hatte noch eine andere Antwort auf die Frage bereit ‘was will ein Leben des Kampfes und des Sieges?’ und giebt diese Antwort in der ganzen Breite der griechischen Geschichte.”

44. For the sake of brevity I have focused on the single most influential feature of the problem of Paul as it relates to his alteration of the *agon*, but Nietzsche’s accounts of Christianity identify a variety of other contests that stem from the Christian worldview. A fascinating review of several of the pseudo-contests engineered by Christianity can be found in GM III: 17–21.

45. Nietzsche specifically discusses what he calls his *Kriegspraxis* in *Ecce Homo* in the section titled “Why I Am So Wise.” I discuss the passage at length in my forthcoming “Nietzsche’s Agonal Wisdom,” *International Studies in Philosophy*.

46. There are clear allusions to and reversals of Homer in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra cites as the Greek “law of overcoming” in part 1, “On the Thousand and One Goals” a line from Homer’s *Iliad*: “be bravest and pre-eminent above all” (*Iliad* 6.208 and 11.784). He offers his estimation of life and the importance of death at the right time (see Z 3: “On the Three Evils”;

Z 3: “On Old and New Tablets”; Z 1: “On Free Death”; Z 3: “The Convalescent”; and *BT* 3). He suggests his allegiance with Achilles when he claims that he would “rather be a day laborer in Hades” than join the chairs of higher education (compare with *BT* 3); yet in “The Tomb Song” (Part 2), Zarathustra claims that, unlike the hero Achilles, he is invulnerable “only in the heel.” For a fuller discussion of these resonances, see Laurence Lampert’s *Nietzsche’s Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

47. =KSA 12, p. 521: “Welcher Art von bizarrem Ideal man auch folgt (z.B. als ‘Christ’ oder als ‘freier Geist’ oder als ‘Immoralist’ oder als Reichsdeutscher—), man soll nicht fordern, daß es *das Ideal* sei: denn damit nähme man ihm den Charakter des Privilegiums, des Vorrechts. Man soll es haben, um sich auszuzeichnen, nicht um sich gleichzusetzen.”

48. =KSA 3, p. 349.

49. In the context of illustrating how Nietzsche’s (nihilistic) project of self-overcoming represents his pursuit of a transfiguring “limit experience” that would transform the meaning of his life into a sign, Daniel Conway draws fascinating parallels between Nietzsche and Odysseus. Both strive to effect a community that makes the transfiguration possible while not being in control of the precise meaning produced in the course of meeting the limit experience. In Odysseus’s case, the limit experience of withstanding the siren song is pursued by clever advance planning to protect himself from himself by having his crew bind him to the mast of his ship. He insulates his crew from his own anticipated protests to be unbound by stuffing their ears. In Nietzsche’s case his pursuit of self-overcoming and the destruction of Christianity unwittingly produces a community of readers fit to recognize Nietzsche as the symbol of decadence that he claims characterizes his age. But Conway sees that Nietzsche’s “wax”—the stopgap for his anticipated decadence—is not as effective as Odysseus’, and Nietzsche ultimately fails in his pursuit of the dangerous game: “He envisioned a vanguard of warrior-genealogists whom he would personally train in the arts of manly contest, but his actual readers are nook-dwelling creatures of *ressentiment*, versed in the ‘effeminate’ arts of subterfuge, duplicity, and deception. [. . .] Like their reluctant father, these readers are agents of decadence who anachronistically expend their residual vitality in the service of heroic ideals” (Conway, *Nietzsche’s Dangerous Game*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 254–255). Conway thinks this is not such a terrible fate for Nietzsche, since late modern culture is, itself, too decadent to sustain the heroic *agon* to which Nietzsche aspires; what it really needs are the shady characters Nietzsche produced, who “can be counted upon to consume themselves in the priestly Armageddon that will (supposedly) bring modernity to a close” (p. 255). As I have tried to argue, I am not convinced that Nietzsche’s *agon* is figured within a heroic context, although I certainly recognize that it bears traces of such ideals. Moreover, I am unconvinced that any and all agonistic models are essentially emblematic of the heroic such that it is not possible to advance an agonistic perspective without at the same time (anachronistically) reinstating the heroic.

50. =KSA 12, p. 522: “der wirkliche Heroism besteht darin, daß man *nicht* unter der Fahne der Aufopferung, Hingebung, Uneigennützigkeit kämpft, sondern *gar nicht kämpft*.”

51. =KSA 12, p. 522: “. . . ‘So bin *ich*; so will *ich*’s:—hol’ *euch* der Teufel!’”

52. =KSA 5, p. 255.

53. The phrase is William Connolly’s. See his *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991) and *The Ethos of Pluralism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

54. =KSA 12, p. 573: “(289) **Consequenz des Kampfes:** der Kämpfende sucht seinen Gegner zu seinem *Gegensatz* umzubilden,—in der Vorstellung natürlich

—er sucht an sich bis zu dem Grade zu glauben, daß er den Muth der „guten Sache“ haben kann (als ob er die *gute Sache* sei): wie als ob die Vernunft, der Geschmack, die Tugend von seinem Gegner bekämpft werde. . .

—der Glaube, den er nöthig hat, als stärkstes Defensiv- und Aggressiv-Mittel ist ein *Glaube an sich*, der sich aber als Glaube an Gott zu mißverstehen weiß

—sich nie die Vortheile und Nützlichkeiten des Siegs vorstellen, sondern immer nur den Sieg um des Siegs willen, als ‘Sieg Gottes’—

—Jede kleine im Kampf befindliche Gemeinschaft (selbst Einzelne) sucht sich zu überreden: ‘*wir haben den guten Geschmack, das gute Urtheil und die Tugend für uns . . . Der Kampf zwingt zu einer solchen Übertreibung der Selbstschätzung. . .*’

55. =KSA 12, pp. 458–459: “(144) Jedes Ideal setzt **Liebe und Haß, Verehrung und Verachtung** voraus. Entweder ist das positive Gefühl das primum mobile oder das negative Gefühl. *Haß und Verachtung* sind z.B. bei allen Ressentiments-Idealen das primum mobile.”

56. =KSA 5, p. 402–3: “Plato *gegen* Homer: das ist der ganze, der ächte Antagonismus.”

57. =KSA 5, p. 306: “Preise machen, Werthe abmessen, Äquivalente ausdenken, tauschen—das hat in einem solchen Maasse das allereste Denken des Menschen präoccupirt, dass es in einem gewissen Sinne *das* Denken ist: hier ist die älteste Art Scharfsinn herangezüchtet worden, hier möchte ebenfalls der erste Ansatz des menschlichen Stolzes, seines Vorrangs-Gefühls in Hinsicht auf anderes Gethier zu vermuthen sein. Vielleicht drückt noch unser Wort ‘Mensch’ (manas) gerade etwas von *diesem* Selbstgefühl aus: der Mensch bezeichnete sich als das Wesen, welches Werthe misst, werthet und misst, als das ‘abschätzende Thier an sich’.”

58. =KSA 5, pp. 402–3: “die Kunst, in der gerade die *Lüge* sich heiligt, der *Wille zur Täuschung* das gute Gewissen zur Seite hat, ist dem asketischen Ideale viel grundsätzlicher entgegengestellt als die Wissenschaft: so empfand es der Instinkt Plato’s, dieses grössten Kunstfeindes, den Europa bisher hervorgebracht hat. Plato *gegen* Homer: das ist der ganze, der ächte Antagonismus—dort der ‘Jenseitige’ besten Willens, der grosse Verleumder des Lebens, hier dessen unfreiwilliger Vergöttlicher, die *goldene* Natur.”

59. Generally speaking, it would seem that it does: 1) Nietzsche’s target—Socratic philosophy—defines philosophy as such and hence can be seen as the reigning victor; 2) Nietzsche does not appear to compromise others in his struggle, unless one argues that Nietzsche’s insistence upon the complicity of Christianity as he characterizes it violates the second principle; 3) with some work one can see that it is “Socratism” (fairly narrowly defined and exaggerated) that Nietzsche attacks rather than the persons of Socrates and Plato, although passages from *Twilight of the Idols* certainly support the contrary view (e.g., about Socrates’ ancestry and his physical appearance); and 4) whether there is a personal grudge that Nietzsche is avenging is difficult to judge; no rancor other than jealousy of Socrates’ powerful and lasting influence seems immediately obvious. Giving Nietzsche the benefit of the doubt, a case could be made that he abides by his *Kriegs-Praxis* principles in the case of Socrates. Still, the assessment of Nietzsche’s engagement should be measured against what he writes about forms of contests and modes of competing within them, for the *Kriegs-Praxis* principles alone seem insufficient for evaluation here.

60. =KSA 12, p. 521: “(229) Jede Gesellschaft hat die Tendenz, ihre Gegner bis zur *Carikatur* herunterzubringen und gleichsam auszuhungern,—zum Mindesten in ihrer *Vorstellung*. Eine solche Carikatur ist z.B. unser ‘*Verbrecher*’. [. . .] Unter Immoralisten wird es der Moralist: Plato zum Beispiel wird bei mir zur Carikatur.”

61. Compare an earlier note: “Platon’s Sokrates ist im eigentlichen Sinne eine Carricatura, eine Überladung” (KSA 8, p. 95).

62. BGE, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1966) Preface =KSA 5, pp. 12–13: “Aber der Kampf gegen Plato, oder, um es verständlicher und für’s ‘Volk’ zu sagen, der Kampf gegen den christlich-kirchlichen Druck von Jahrtausenden—denn Christenthum ist Platonismus für’s ‘Volk’—hat in Europa eine prachtvolle Spannung des Geistes geschaffen, wie sie auf Erden noch nicht da war: mit einem so gespannten Bogen kann man nunmehr nach den fernsten Zielen schiessen.”

63. See *EH*, “Why I am a Destiny,” 1: “I do not want to be a holy man; sooner even a buffoon.—Perhaps I am a buffoon.—Yet in spite of that—or rather *not* in spite of it, because so far nobody has been more mendacious than holy men—the truth speaks out of me.—But my truth

is *terrible*; for so far one has called *lies* truth” =KSA 6, p. 365: “Ich will kein Heiliger sein, lieber noch ein Hanswurst . . . Vielleicht bin ich ein Hanswurst . . . Und trotzdem oder vielmehr *nicht* trotzdem—denn es gab nichts Verlogneres bisher als Heilige—redet aus mir die Wahrheit.—Aber meine Wahrheit ist *furchtbar*: denn man hiess bisher die *Lüge* Wahrheit.”