

Discussion

Interpretation as Self-Creation: Nietzsche on the Pre-Platonics

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There has never been more interest in Nietzsche's thought among philosophers than there is today. Books on Nietzsche continue to appear regularly in English, yet it has become a special occasion when the English speaking audience is treated to a previously untranslated text by Nietzsche himself. This dearth of new Nietzsche translations is surprising, since a great deal of important, untranslated material has already been published. Fortunately, Greg Whitlock's translation of Nietzsche's *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* gives us reason to hope that this dam may soon burst.¹ *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*—composed of Nietzsche's somewhat unevenly polished notes from a lecture course he first gave in 1869 (then repeated three more times between 1872 and 1876, revising and elaborating the text)—appeared in complete form in German only in 1995, in the justly celebrated critical edition of his complete works begun by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari.² Previous editors of Nietzsche's works omitted crucial parts of *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* as redundant or superceded materials, mistakenly thinking them merely the left-over notes from which Nietzsche culled his great early text, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873).³ Although Nietzsche did rework some of his earliest notes from *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* and incorporate these into *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, reading the two texts side-by-side shows that *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* represents merely the tip of the iceberg in Nietzsche's reading of the Pre-Platonic philosophers. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* rescues much more of this work from the icy waters of Nietzsche's *Nachlaß*.

In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche adopts the Hölderlinian dictum that we understand an age when we understand its greatest *personalities* (the individuals who most fully embody the spirit of their times), and so he sets himself the task of presenting these 'personalities' through no more than three well-chosen philosophical 'anecdotes' from their lives. The result is a brilliant whirlwind tour through the pre-Platonic thinkers, long on style but (scholars

¹ *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. By Friedrich Nietzsche. Edited and Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by Greg Whitlock. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. Pp. xlvii + 287.

² See *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, part two, volume four, Fritz Bornmann and Mario Carpitella edd. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995) pp. 207-362.

³ This is a potentially telling mistake, since Nietzsche's *Nachlaß* has fallen from favor among many leading Nietzsche scholars today for some similar (and, in at least some cases, similarly erroneous) reasons.

have complained) a bit short on argument. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, conversely, is long on argument but a bit short on style. Indeed, one of its great strengths is that it offers scholarly evidence and philosophical arguments in support of provocative claims merely asserted in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. As Whitlock documents, the young Nietzsche's scholarly evidence is not always good, nor, I would add, are his arguments always consistent, but *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* more than makes up for such shortcomings with revealing insights and elaborate arguments entirely absent from his more famous text.

Nietzsche begins *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* by declaring his hermeneutic approach: 'We desire to ask: What do we learn from the history of their philosophy *on behalf of the Greeks*? Not, What do we learn on behalf of philosophy?' (3) That is, ask not what the Greeks can do for you, but rather what you can do for the Greeks. Nietzsche (like Heidegger, whose views he influenced here) thinks it a mistake simply to focus on the advances made by the Greeks toward contemporary philosophical views, since such an approach arrogantly assumes that the Greeks were stumbling toward truths we have subsequently established, and so tends to produce anachronistic misreadings of their actual views and motivations. Nor should our study of the pre-Platonic philosophers be guided by the question of how they might contribute to solving our own contemporary philosophical problems, since this approach, while humbler, also seeks merely to *make use of* the ancient Greeks. Instead, Nietzsche says, our guiding question should be: What use can *we* be to the ancient Greek philosophers? What can we, today, contribute to understanding these pre-Platonics? The young philologist-cum-philosopher's view is that we should use whatever advances in knowledge we have attained in order better to illuminate the philosophical views and motives of the Greeks 'from within'. By grasping their inner motivations, we will come to appreciate the pre-Platonic philosophers' great '*originality*' (4). 'We desire to establish *first of all* that the Greeks were driven from within themselves toward philosophy' (3). This means that 'we should emphasize the *originality* of their *conceptions*, from which subsequent philosophy has taken its fill', for 'almost always the ancient Greek form of such conceptions is the most majestic and purest'. As Nietzsche succinctly puts it, the pre-Platonic philosophers 'are the genuine "discoverers"... They had to find the path from myth to laws of nature, from image to concept, from religion to science' (5). He even goes so far as to suggest that the Greeks 'have really created every type' of philosopher (4n2), bequeathing to posterity a full set of possible *archetypes* of 'the philosopher'.⁴

⁴ Nietzsche thus contradicts his claim in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* that the genius of the Greeks is to be found not in their originality, but rather in their prodigious (the second *Untimely Meditation* will say 'superhuman') capacity to digest, assimilate, and develop ideas originating elsewhere: 'Nothing would be sillier than to claim an autochthonous development for the Greeks. On the contrary, they invariably absorbed other living cultures. The reason they got so far is that they knew how to pick up the spear and throw it onward from the point where others had left it' (See Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. M. Cowan [Washington, Regnery

This concept of philosophical ‘archetypes’ (*Rubriken*, which Whitlock usually translates as ‘paradigms’) explains why Nietzsche speaks of *pre-Platonic* rather than *pre-Socratic* philosophers. Put simply, Plato is the first ‘mixed type’ of philosopher, because he combines several pre-existing philosophical archetypes: ‘Socratic, Pythagorean, and Heraclitean elements unite in his theory of the Ideas... Also, as a human being, [Plato] possesses the traits of a regally proud Heraclitus; of the melancholy, secretive, and legislative Pythagoras; and of the reflective dialectician Socrates. All subsequent philosophers are of this sort of mixed philosophical type. In contrast, the series of pre-Platonics presents the pure and unmixed types, in terms of [their guiding] philosopheme as well as [their] character’ (5). Nietzsche thus advances the rather Occidentric view that the pre-Platonics represent an originality entirely without precedent; collectively, they inaugurate the very origin of philosophy: ‘Each one of those men is hewn entirely from one block of stone... Each is the first-born son of philosophy’ (4). Since the actual ‘Socrates is the last in this series’ of ‘pure’ or ‘unmixed’ philosophical archetypes, Nietzsche refers to them all as *pre-Platonic* philosophers. Here Nietzsche refuses to separate the lives of the pre-Platonics from their philosophies, first, because when attempting to ‘reconstruct and illuminate these philosophers and their teachings’ (and we should remember that Nietzsche’s lectures antedate Diels’ seminal compilation), ‘their lives are just as important to us as the ruins of their systems’ (5), and second, because the pre-Platonic philosophers themselves make no distinction between life and philosophy; for them ‘the philosopher’ is ‘one who lives *only* for knowledge’ (4).

Expanding this latter theme elegantly, Nietzsche proclaims that the pre-Platonic philosopher is one who ‘has such an excess of intellect that he no longer directs it only for personal, individual purposes but rather arrives at a pure intuition with it...for the first time, *mundane existence* [or ‘*the everyday*’, *das Alltägliche*] appears to [the intellect] *worthy of contemplation as a problem*. That is the true characteristic of the philosophical drive: wonderment at that which lies before everyone’ (6). Philosophy, born of this wonder before *all that is*, ‘seeks the whole’. Philosophy ‘searches out the tones of the world to test their resonances and to represent their collective sounds in concepts’ (9n6), thereby becoming ‘the art that presents an image of the universal existence in concepts’ (8). To come up with a concept capable of expressing that which all entities share in common, the philosopher must examine a great variety of entities, distinguishing the characteristics which ultimately unite them from those that distinguish them. Thus the seeker of the whole must also be one who *distinguishes* (Nietzsche points out that etymologically, *sophos* is related to *sapiens*, ‘one who tastes’, one who is capable of making fine discriminations). Moreover, simply by living for knowledge—living, that is, solely to discover and communicate the

Gateway, 1962] p. 30). *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* begins by bemoaning the ruinous influence of such ‘imported’ plants, ‘indigenous to Asia and Egypt’ (3). As this shows, although *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* often complements *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, there are also some interesting tensions between the two texts.

underlying unity of all things—the pre-Platonic philosopher confers distinctions in a more exalted sense: establishing what is most worthy of being known. For this reason philosophy ‘is a legislating of greatness’, an ‘elevation’ of ‘culture’, and one which (some Nietzscheans may be surprised to hear) ‘begins with legislating morality’.

Despite Nietzsche’s overemphasis on the ‘*originality*’ of the pre-Platonic philosophers, his ‘internal’ (he would later say *genealogical*) approach allows him to show that philosophers were not the first to elevate culture by legislating morality. Rather, philosophy itself emerges from the mytho-poetic legislation of morality prefigured in Greek religion. In their religion the Greeks implicitly ordered ‘the rights and ranks’ of a ‘colorful divine realm’ they had mostly ‘borrowed’ from other sources (10). By ordering these divine forces the Greeks were implicitly ordering their world, seeking to find an overarching unity capable of making sense of the competing motivations at work in their lives.⁵ Nietzsche traces this proto-philosophical act of moral legislation—whereby a culture establishes its sense of what really matters—from mythology through the ‘sporadic-proverbial preliminary stage of philosophy’ in Hesiod, Homer, and others (14–16). Here it becomes clear that the young Nietzsche is drawn to the tragic view of existence inherent in ‘the aristocratic, heroic world of Homer’, that great ancient authority whose work yielded proverbs like: ‘Of all the creatures that breathe and walk on the earth there is nothing more helpless than a man’, and: ‘As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity’ (14). For Nietzsche, these famous proverbs record the Greeks’ noble confrontation with the fact of human mortality, a struggle to accept the tragic truth of death ‘heroically’. Indeed, he believes that this struggle with mortality forms the inner core of the tragic worldview of the Greeks, so this existential struggle will also emerge as one of the most powerful themes underlying his reading of the pre-Platonic philosophers—beginning with Anaximander. First, however, Nietzsche pauses at the gates of Delphi long enough to note the emergence of ‘an appeal to human conscience’ justified neither by ‘by prophecy nor by ethical teachings’ but simply legislated, performatively, by words of wisdom. He then follows this proto-philosophical legislation of morality through the legendary teachings of the ‘seven sages’, examining some of the twenty-two ancient candidates for this exalted title and so restaging something of their ‘great contest of wisdom’ (18–22).⁶

Not surprisingly, Nietzsche begins his systematic treatment of pre-Platonic ‘philosophy’ proper with Thales, and the account nicely supplements his famous portrait in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* of Thales and the seem-

⁵ For Nietzsche, the greatest challenge the Greeks faced here was to find a way to unify ‘the most difficult juxtaposition’ between ‘the Olympians’ and ‘the mystery gods’, uniting the gods who ‘clarify everything at hand, as continual guardians and observers of all Greek existence’ with the gods who inspire ‘earnest religious elevation’ and ‘the hope of immortality’ (interestingly, as he explicates four Orphic theogonies, Nietzsche stresses the importance of the two different Dionysoses; see 12).

⁶ The future aphorist displays his already complex wit—saying, pithily, that ‘anyone at all with a pithy saying places himself in relation to [the seven sages] forever’.

ingly double 'absurdity' with which philosophy begins by *stumbling into the well*, figuratively as well as literally. Here too one begins to appreciate how sympathetically Nietzsche views the proto-naturalism of the pre-Platonics; he goes so far as to compare Thales' understanding of water as the *archê* of all things with 'the Kant-Laplace hypothesis' — Kant's famous (because later confirmed) 'nebular hypothesis' that the universe was formed out of rotating gas clouds. Nietzsche discerns in Thales the very model of 'philosophical imagination', that 'philosophical thought...detectable at the center of all scientific thought' (26). To illustrate the contrast between the philosophical and scientific approaches, Nietzsche presents a first version of that famous and beautiful description of the two 'wanderers' trying to cross a raging river: philosophical intuition boldly leaps from one precarious rock to another, footholds tumbling away behind, while scientific thought struggles desperately to follow, trying to secure footholds others subsequently will be able to use. And if Nietzsche rather ungenerously remarks at one point that Thales shows how '[h]umanity very slowly discovers how complicated the world is: at first he thinks it very simple, as superficial as himself', in general it would be difficult to find a more generous reading of Thales.⁷

Nevertheless, with Anaximander, 'Thales was infinitely outdone' (34). Like Thales, Anaximander addresses the 'question of becoming', that is, the question of how to account for both *becoming* and (the obverse of the same phenomenon) *passing-away*. Anaximander's idiosyncratic way of addressing this latter aspect of the question of becoming raises 'the most profound [of] ethical problems': 'How can something that deserves to live pass away?' Anaximander is the first philosopher (Nietzsche does not add the qualifier *Western*) to grapple with what we would now recognize as an *existential* question: Why must things pass away? More to the point: Why must *we* pass away — that is, *die*? On Nietzsche's reading, the question of becoming is rooted psychologically in this basic existential question. Anaximander wants to know why we have to pass away, but as a philosopher (one who seeks to grasp the whole), he generalizes the question from human beings to *all* beings, thereby generating the question of becoming. Nietzsche thus begins to advance one of the most intriguing lines of interpretation which runs through *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. By tracing the question of becoming back to the 'tragedy' of human mortality, he is able to show that this existential questioning pervades the thought of many of the subsequent pre-Platonics, whose various answers to the question of becoming are also confrontations with Anaximander's existential problem: *Why does that which deserves to exist have to pass away?* Even the style of Anaximander's response is influential. Anaximander 'answers' the question only by undermining it, denying the first premise (that anything deserves to exist). Following suit, Parmenides will deny the second premise (that anything passes away, the same premise undermined by

⁷ Indeed, we would probably have to look to Heidegger's understanding of ontotheology in order to find a more generous reading of Thales. See my 'Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's *Destruction of Metaphysics*' *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* (2000) 8: 297-327, esp. 311-312.

Pythagoras' belief in reincarnation); Heraclitus will deny one of the question's presuppositions (that any *thing* exists); and so on. Thus, ironically, the pre-Platonics repeatedly raise the existential question only to dodge it—and in this sense they represent a regression from the tragic heroism of Homer.⁸

The fact that Anaximander projects the *prima facie* injustice of human mortality onto beings as a whole helps explain his 'tragic' view of existence. It must be that nothing deserves to exist, Anaximander concludes, because to exist is to take on a definite form and, in so doing, unjustly to distinguish oneself from *apeiron*, 'the Unlimited, the final unity, the matrix of continuous arising'. *Apeiron* 'has not been understood previously', Nietzsche boldly proclaims; 'it is not "the Infinite" [*das Unendliche*] but instead "the Indefinite" [*das Unbestimmte*]' (36). The Indefinite, unlike the entities which distinguish themselves from it when they take on a determinate form, is 'eternal, ungenerated, incorruptible' (33), qualities entities must forfeit in order to exist as discrete, delimitable, determinate entities—entities which *become*, and thereby become mortal, generated, and corruptible. 'The immortality of the primal Being lies not in its infinitude but rather herein, that it is bare of definite qualities leading to destruction' (36). By thus reading the 'eternity' of Anaximander's 'Indefinite' in terms borrowed from his understanding of Kant's 'thing-in-itself', Nietzsche violates his own hermeneutic stricture against anachronistic interpretation, but the effect is quite engaging nonetheless. Logically, the existence of individual entities is an implicit violation of the 'Indefinite' eternal being from which they come and to which they return when they pass away, so passing-away itself justly expiates the primal violation of entering into existence as an individual. 'All of becoming is an emancipation from eternal Being; for this reason [it is] an injustice consequently imposed with the penalty of perishing' (33). Re-submergence into the Indefinite repays the loan incurred by becoming an individual; passing-away justly expiates the crime of individual existence. This morbid proto-existentialism makes Anaximander 'the first pessimist philosopher', a forerunner of Schopenhauer, so, not surprisingly, Nietzsche feels quite an affinity for Anaximander—an admiration rivaled only by his great love for Democritus and Socrates, and exceeded only by his unbridled enthusiasm for Heraclitus and Empedocles. Nietzsche even discerns in Anaximander a doctrine of eternal return, although it is an eternal recurrence of the *different* rather than the same (37).

As Nietzsche turns to Anaximander's 'successor', Anaximenes, he grows increasingly 'suspicious' of the notion of 'teacher-student succession (*diadochê*)' (39). In fact, this hermeneutic suspicion develops into a major refrain of *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. The young philologist's audience is regularly treated (or, depending on their taste for philology, *subjected*) to lengthy disputations concerning exactly when each pre-Platonic philosopher lived and who was a student

⁸ Of Parmenides' response to 'the problem of becoming'—viz., his 'denial' of becoming—Nietzsche will say that 'this is the shortest way out, yet the least illuminating', and that the 'fundamental failure remains' (88).

of whom. In this dialogue with a mainstay of the philological tradition, Nietzsche debunks one hagiographic succession myth after another, nicely showcasing his own irreverent style of critical philology in the process. Still, Nietzsche's obsession with succession is extreme and persistent enough that one begins to suspect him of working through other issues beneath the surface.⁹ Besides his 'critical' ethos, Nietzsche's exaggerated emphasis on pre-Platonic originality (which also deserves psychological scrutiny) helps explain his tendency to reject traditional accounts of succession. The pre-Platonics embody the archetypes of 'independent original philosophers', so '[t]he coupling of these [archetypes] by means of succession is arbitrary and entirely incorrect. These are...totally different ways of considering the world, where they coincide, where they learn from one another, usually lies the *weaknesses* in the nature of each' (42-43).¹⁰ Despite such dubious romantic claims, Nietzsche's philosophical genealogies frequently reveal complex, multi-generational, and even cross-cultural philosophical influences, such as Anaximander's influence on Pythagoras (who also viewed 'earthly existence as punishment for a prior transgression') and Pythagoras' influence on Parmenides and Empedocles (who shared versions of Pythagoras' teaching that 'complete liberation is the perfect fruit of philosophy' [47]). Nietzsche even traces this latter influence back beyond Pythagoras to the Occident, *via* 'the so-called Orphics and Bacchics—who are in truth, however, Egyptians' (48).¹¹ Of course, by revealing such influences and interconnections, Nietzsche's genealogies undermine his exaggerated claims for pre-Platonic originality. He occasionally attempts to avoid this tension by distinguishing between the philosophies of the pre-Platonics (which influence one another) and their lives (which could still be completely original), but this only generates further contradictions (with his aforementioned view that one cannot separate life from philosophy among the pre-Platonics). Here we should recall, however, that we are reading Nietzsche's lecture notes, which show him working through his views in front of his students. Still, one wonders if Nietzsche's recognition that his lectures contained such obvious tensions helped attract him to Heraclitus, that unabashed philosopher of contradiction?

It is, at any rate, with Heraclitus that Nietzsche feels most at home. In Heraclitus Nietzsche felt he encountered a kindred soul, for he sensed the tearing 'loneliness' of a genius isolated by the very height from which his views had allowed him to see. Heraclitus embodied 'the highest form of pride', a 'superhuman'

⁹ Is the young Schopenhauerian (who did not actually study with Schopenhauer) seeking to legitimate philosophical succession from outside a line of direct pedagogical descent? The psychological acuity with which Nietzsche exposes Plato's partially successful interception of the Parmenidean legacy (which was rightfully Zeno's) shows that such issues and motives were at least in Nietzsche's mind.

¹⁰ Here Nietzsche lists 'seven' archetypes: Anaximander, Heraclitus, the Eleatics, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and the Atomists, but he is not consistent about this (cf. 4, 58, 151).

¹¹ Nietzsche even seems to side with Heraclitus against Dionysus, in whom Heraclitus 'saw only an invitation to ill-bred drives by way of hot-blooded festivals of desire' (56).

[*übermenschlich*] pride ‘not in logical knowledge but in the intuitive grasping of the truth’. This superhuman pride led to Heraclitus’ ‘involuntary identification of himself with his truth’ and to his ‘certainty of belief in the truth as grasped by himself alone’ (55). In such views Nietzsche recognizes, simultaneously, the excesses of an ‘enthusiastic’ mystic and the insights of an ‘inspired’ proto-naturalist. Appropriately, the opposites of science and mysticism unite in Heraclitus’ guiding idea; for the truth he intuitively recognized and identified with was the *logos*, ‘the unified lawfulness of the world’ (58). Heraclitus is a kind of mystical naturalist, for he believes that the universe is ordered by an ‘intelligence’ (*gnômê*) ‘connecting all things to one another’ (70), and that ‘[t]o become one with this intuitive intelligence...is wisdom’ (71). In terms of Nietzsche’s ‘philosophical archetypes’, Heraclitus thus plays the surprising role of proto-naturalist:

We must designate these three as the purest paradigms: Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Socrates—the wise man as religious reformer; the wise man as proud, solitary searcher after the truth; and the wise man as the eternal investigator of all things... These three types discovered three incredible unified ideas by which they developed away from the norm: Pythagoras by the belief in the identity of the countless races of humanity, indeed more so by the identification of all souls with all time; Socrates by his belief in the unity and binding power of thought, eternally the same for all times and in all places; and Heraclitus [by his belief in] the oneness and eternal lawfulness of nature’s processes. (58)

Nietzsche even appeals to his own ‘natural sciences’ in order to motivate Heraclitus’ famous insistence that in truth there is only becoming. His contemporary natural sciences show that ‘whenever a human being thinks he recognizes any sort of persistence in living nature, it is due to our small standards’, in other words, to our having observed the alleged ‘being’ across too brief a temporal span. To argue that not only our limited duration but also *the speed at which we process time distorts our perceptions of reality*, Nietzsche leads his students through an ingenious and captivating ‘thought-experiment’ (60–62). If the duration of a human life were shrunk—and the speed of our perceptions proportionally accelerated—‘a thousand times’, so that our whole life took place in ‘one month’, then ‘we would be able to follow a flying bullet very easily with our vision’. If we could continue the experiment further, proportionally speeding-up human life another thousand-fold so as to take place in a mere ‘forty minutes, then we would consider the grass and flowers to be something just as absolute and persistent as we now consider the mountains’ (61). At the limit of such acceleration, our perception of ‘all motion would cease’ (62).¹² Conversely, if we could expand the duration of our lives (while proportionally slowing down the

¹² Nietzsche’s reasoning would also suggest that Parmenides truly lived in the moment, viewing reality from the perspective of the instant.

speed at which we process our perceptions) by a factor of one million, we would recognize that everything is caught up in a process of emergence and dissolution, that is, of continual becoming: 'Every shape appearing to us [now] as persistent would vanish in the superhaste of events and would be devoured in the wild storm of Becoming'. Heraclitus recognized that reality is ultimately composed of oppositional forces coming together and breaking apart, millennia before the natural sciences articulated a similar worldview, because his intuitive intelligence enabled him to approach the temporal frame of the universe itself, and so to intuit an experience of reality viewed *sub speciae eternitatis*, a perspective the *hoi polloi* could not even imagine.

Moreover, because Heraclitus identifies with the universe rather than 'the many' individual mortals, he is able to counter Anaximander's tragic vision of the inherent injustice of existence with his own '*cosmodicy*', a justification of the existence of the cosmos (63). Heraclitus' cosmology—in which the 'craving' of the many for 'the unity of the primal fire' fuels an *eternally recurring* cycle of universal 'conflagration' and rebirth—does not merely present the cosmic cycle as a 'just injustice', as did Anaximander (despite the striking similarities between their views). Rather, Heraclitus' *cosmodicy* vindicates this cosmic cycle by recognizing the fundamental *innocence* of the creative and destructive forces behind it. Heraclitus grasps the cosmic cycle in terms of 'the sublime metaphor' of 'the play of the child (or that of the artist)'. As a result, the perspectival range of Heraclitus' cosmogony is limited; the cosmos is justified 'only as an aesthetic phenomenon' (68–70). The aesthetic justification of existence Nietzsche famously elaborates in *The Birth of Tragedy* can thus be traced back to his reading of Heraclitus.

Nietzsche's tendency to identify closely with Heraclitus also generates some less than edifying results for his contemporary, liberal-democratic readers.¹³ Without a trace of irony, Nietzsche lauds Heraclitus' belonging to 'the most noble of all races' and his 'merciless' opposition to the 'herd' and their 'democratic parties' (53). German philology would later become notorious for having nourished an odious strain of nationalism which attempted to define the identity of 'Germany' by establishing *racial* connections between the German and Greek peoples. If the young Nietzsche was clearly infected with such ideals of racial 'nobility', it is also true that he later produced powerful philosophical antibodies to such racist and nationalistic views. Here, however, the young Nietzsche celebrates 'the idea of war-justice' (*polemos-dikê*) as 'the first specifically Hellenic idea in philosophy—which is to say that it qualifies not as universal but rather as national' (64). The Greek's 'national' idea of war-justice emerges 'from the deepest fundament of the Greek being': 'From the gymnasium, musical competitions, and political life Heraclitus became familiar with the paradigm of such strife', the *polemos* which—like the tension of opposites which tautened the strings

¹³ Such readers will find the early Nietzsche in general even more resistant than the later Nietzsche to this kind of (hermeneutically dubious) political domestication and assimilation.

of the lyre, allowing its notes to sing forth—gives rise to the perfectly just harmony that orders the cosmos. As Nietzsche explains the idea of war-justice: ‘Every individual competes as if it alone is justified, yet an infinitely definite standard of just judgment decides who is linked to victory’. On Nietzsche’s reconstruction, Heraclitus’ understanding of *polemos* does not glorify war, it *spiritualizes* it, universalizing the tenet (which Nietzsche undoubtedly appropriates from Darwinism) that *competition is good*. Thus Nietzsche says that the idea of war-justice is ‘Hesiod’s notion of good Eris turned into a universal principle’ (‘Good Eris’ is that form of envy we display when we compete with our perceived betters; such envy is ‘good’, Nietzsche argues, because this competition leads us to better ourselves. He opposes this to the ‘bad envy’ displayed by those who, like crabs trapping themselves in a shallow bucket, constantly pull those above them down to their own level).¹⁴ Yet the idea of war-justice is also *nationalistic* in another, more troubling sense. It proclaims not only that conflicts naturally promote justice, but, further, that *victory is inherently just*, since ‘an immanent lawfulness’—‘an infinitely definite standard of just judgment’—decides every competition, whether it is a contest between Olympians, orators, dramatists, or armies. This *agonistic* idea fascinates the young Nietzsche (who liked to pose for photographs with a sword at his side); he is as yet completely untroubled by the fact that put into practice it tends to justify imperialism, revisionism (since history is *justly* written by the winners), and social Darwinism.

Nietzsche’s great affinity for Heraclitus generates an hermeneutic prejudice as well. He celebrates ‘Parmenides’ forerunner’, Xenophanes—for his ‘extraordinary freedom of individuality’, his keen eye for scientific anomalies, his struggles against mythology and anthropomorphism, and for being the first highbrow critic of popular culture (the public obsession with sports) and the first epistemologist (76–80)—yet his reading of Parmenides himself smacks of hermeneutic frugality. This seems strange, given the exemplary generosity usually displayed by Nietzsche’s readings of the pre-Platonics, until one realizes that, in effect, the young, hyper-Heraclitean Nietzsche has *taken sides* in this *gigantomachia*. While Nietzsche acknowledges Parmenides’ ‘great influence’ and ‘personal prestige’ (80–81), he seems resolved to strike back at Parmenides for his insulting references to Heraclitus as ‘two-headed’, ‘helpless’, and ‘knowing nothing’ (84–85), insults which Heraclitus—who Nietzsche argues was a ‘contemporary’ of Parmenides (75–77)—was apparently too proud to dignify with a personal response (Scholars now agree, however, that the target of these Parmenidean insults is humanity in general rather than Heraclitus). Tellingly, Nietzsche’s critique begins by undermining Parmenides’ *originality*; his ‘Eleatic’ views show a ‘threefold influence’ from Anaximander, Xenophanes, and Pythagoras (via Ameinias) (80–81). It was through Anaximander, not ‘the Eleatics’, that ‘the problem of Becoming came into philosophy’ (88), and the Pythagoreans were

¹⁴ See Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest’, excerpted in Walter Kaufmann ed. and trans., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954) pp. 32–39.

responsible for presenting philosophy as the vehicle of a healing reunion with the underlying unity of all things. Nietzsche revealingly explicates the role of Aphrodite in the cosmology implicit in Parmenides' 'way of belief' (82-83), then concludes that this cosmology reduces 'Becoming and passing away to a love struggle between Being and not-Being. What a colossal abstraction!' (83). Nietzsche takes Parmenides to have originally believed in this cosmology himself until tensions in the way of belief finally led him—in a moment of 'absolutely bloodless abstraction' (as he puts it in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*)—to the doctrines expressed by his 'way of truth'.¹⁵ Parmenides' philosophical development is seen by Nietzsche as a *regression*; the 'later standpoint... is the most void of content, the least fruitful, because it clarifies nothing at all: Aristotle rightly calls him no natural philosopher (*aphusikos*)' (87). With his famous equation of thinking and Being, Parmenides is guilty of 'assuming that our intellect is the measure of all things', and thanks to this (pre-Protagorean) assumption, '[p]ossessing ideas and believing in Being merge together' into a kind of 'idealism' which is neither Buddhist nor Kantian (85-87). Parmenides' distinction between of the true world of Being and the false world of becoming effects 'an unnatural tearing apart of the intellect', a schism between 'spirit (the faculty of abstraction) and bodies (lower sensory apparatus), and we recognize the ethical consequences already in Plato: the philosopher's task to liberate himself as much as possible from the bodily, meaning from the senses. [This is] the most dangerous of false paths, for no true philosophy can construct itself from this empty hull' (86). Nietzsche's critique of this dualism inverts the ordinary metaphor; it is the mind without the body that is the 'empty hull'. Parmenides' distinction is disastrous historically; nevertheless, 'this raw distinction' between mind and body 'is of the greatest worth; it is the original source first of dialectic... and later of logic' (86).¹⁶ Zeno, Parmenides' philosophically 'adopted son', helps these valuable developments along, for he 'is the first to introduce the art of discussion in reasons and counterreasons into philosophy. A completely new talent!' (90). Such ambivalence aside, Nietzsche ungenerously concludes (violating his hermeneutic injunction against anachronistic reading once again) that Parmenides and Zeno show that 'all sorts of reflection on our notions as eternal truths (*aeternae veritates*) lead to contradictions... And if there had been a seed of profundity in Eleatism, it would have been to foresee the Kantian problematic' (93).

Hermeneutically, Nietzsche's reading of Parmenides is the exception, and his interpretive empathy soon returns. In Anaxagoras Nietzsche recognizes 'a precocious genius (*ingenium praecox*)' who matures into a philosopher of the greatest nobility and seriousness, becoming 'the genuine, premier philosopher of Athens'.¹⁷ 'Pericles is said to derive his seriousness from his contacts with'

¹⁵ See Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, p. 69.

¹⁶ Earlier Nietzsche blames Anaxagoras for inaugurating 'the crude opposition between soul and matter' (72).

¹⁷ This is, of course, a shot at Socrates, as it is when Nietzsche leaves Socrates off his list of

Anaxagoras, who ‘never laughs’ (95-96). Despite his friendship with Pericles — and the fact that in general ‘he enjoys the most noble and highest society’ — Anaxagoras’ philosophy escapes the confines of nationalism. In answer to Nietzsche’s ultimate philosophical question — ‘What gives life value?’ — Anaxagoras’ answer is: a life lived “‘for the sake of contemplating the heavens and the whole order of the universe”. When someone chastised him, “Have you no concern for your homeland?” “Gently”, he says, “I am greatly concerned with my fatherland”, and pointed to the sky’ (95). Reconstructing Anaxagoras’ cosmology, Nietzsche illuminates his answer to Anaximander’s question of Becoming. Properly speaking, there is no ‘becoming’, rather, ‘countless beings exist (unalterable, rigid, and eternal)... [I]ntellect itself... moves the rigid plurality and calls forth life’ through the ‘mixture and separation’ of these ‘different qualities’ which ‘eternally exist’, albeit initially as scattered like seeds throughout the universe (101, 96). As Nietzsche puts it, Anaxagoras accepts the Eleatic principle that ‘that which truly *is* must be eternal’, but maintains that instead of a monolithic eternal Being, ‘countless beings’ exist — and that every being contains the seeds of every other being within it; an idea made thinkable by the concepts of infinite divisibility and number Anaxagoras adopts from Zeno (101). Once ‘intellect has given impetus to motion — it produces a circular motion (or vortical movement, *hê perichôrêsis*) on one point of mass, which immediately expands outward and pulls ever larger parts into its range’ (98), eventually forming the known universe through a process of ‘combination (*summisgesthai*) and dissolution (*diakrimesthai*)’ of the eternally existing qualities. Nietzsche’s meticulous reconstruction implies (much more convincingly than in the case of Thales) that Anaxagoras too anticipated Kant’s nebular hypothesis: ‘This is the important idea of Anaxagoras, that rotation suffices to explain all order and regularity in the universe’ (98). Hence the young Schopenhauerian and would-be naturalist complains that *nous* is misunderstood when interpreted as if it were a divine mind: ‘Every commentator explains intellect incorrectly: it is life, not conscious knowing... Anaxagoras means “acts of will” as the primary expression of intellect’ (99).¹⁸ ‘It is foolishness for us to speak of a personality of the spirit’ with regard to *nous*; it is instead a catalyzing volition — a ‘*life force*’ — compatible with naturalism (In fact, it is Anaxagoras who ‘discovers the law of conservation of force and that of the indestructibility of matter’). Nietzsche cannot give a naturalistic explanation, however, for why, given the infinity of time, *nous* began motion just when it did (and not earlier). This first and ‘uniquely *voluntary* act’ remains the one arbitrary moment in an otherwise coherent naturalistic system (100). ‘Yet in any case’, Nietzsche concludes, Anaxagoras gives us ‘the most inspired comprehension of natural phenomena... really, he vented his religious feelings in this manner’ (105).

philosophical archetypes (see n9 above). His ambivalent reading of Socrates is examined below.

¹⁸ ‘*Nous* is neither intellect, understanding, nor reason — authentically Greek — the power of language!’ (97).

Nietzsche's fascinating treatment of Empedocles supports the idea that Empedocles was one of the great inspirations for Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (in part *via* Hölderlin's great unfinished play, 'The Death of Empedocles').¹⁹ On Nietzsche's reading, Empedocles attempted 'to bring the collective Hellenes to the new Pythagorean way of life' (108). He 'sought to impress the *oneness of all life* most urgently... [W]e find here the most internalized empathy, and overwhelming sympathy, with all of nature' (109). Nietzsche highlights the Schopenhauerian connection: 'Empedocles is the *tragic* philosopher, the contemporary of Aeschylus. The most unique thing about him is his extraordinary pessimism, *which works on him actively, however, not quietistically*' (113, my emphasis)—in this sense Empedocles *exceeds* Schopenhauer, and precisely in the direction Nietzsche himself hoped to follow. Indeed, Nietzsche's Empedocles looks like a proto-Zarathustra, for his 'real fundamental idea is...to lead humanity across [the bridge] to the universal friendship (*koina tôn philôn*) of the Pythagoreans and thus to social reform... [H]e moves about as a wandering prophet after he fails to found the rule by all from love' (113).²⁰ Like Zarathustra, Nietzsche's Empedocles 'is a seer, poet, doctor, and prince...now, since his wandering, he is also "god, no mere mortal"'. Empedocles 'plunges into [Mt.] Aetna because he wants to confirm himself as a god'; Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* begins with Zarathustra carrying his own ashes up the mountain, and culminates with Zarathustra speaking his deepest secret into the ear of life. Intriguingly, Empedocles 'later confesses to have spoken the true secret', a secret related to 'Pythagorean-Orphic mysticism' (113). Nietzsche even hints that the 'secret' Empedocles betrayed may have been his understanding of 'Aphrodite...as a cosmic principle. The life of sexuality is the best, the noblest, the greatest opposition against the drive toward divisions' (114)—a secret which gave Empedocles hope, for it promised the cosmic recurrence of a better world. Like Heraclitus before him, Empedocles 'joins the religious instinct to scientific explanation and broadens it in this scientific form. He is the one who enlightens and consequently remains unloved among the faithful' who cling to older, destructive systems of value. On Nietzsche's reconstruction, Empedocles' cosmology shows an impressive psychological acuity; the universe eternally recurs, pendulum-like, in a great cosmic oscillation. First it develops in the direction of ever greater unity—as the force of love works tirelessly to reunite all of the divided elements in a chaotic universe. Then, once this equality is finally achieved, 'Aversion arises' as a rejection of equality without differentiation, and the forces of strife reverse the cosmic cycle, generating ever greater division until maximal differentiation is reached—at which point the force of love again takes hold and reverses the swing of the cosmic pendulum once again (and so on, *ad infinitum*). Empedocles' view is tragic

¹⁹ Thanks to Ananda Turner for bringing this intriguing interpretation to my attention.

²⁰ Nietzsche alleges that Aristotle's 'overriding resentment of Empedocles' stems from his 'jealousy' for 'all philosophical fame before himself' (108), but he accepts Aristotle's reading of Empedocles as 'the inventor of rhetoric' (111). Not coincidentally, one finds an in-depth study of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* alongside *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* in his collected works (see n26 below).

in part because he believes we are currently caught in the backward cycle of ever growing strife, and so are proceeding from more to less perfect forms. 'Mortals appear to him, accordingly, to be fallen and punished gods!' (114). Like Anaximander and Heraclitus, Empedocles holds the tragic view that existence 'punishes a guilt' (110). We are caught in the retrograde cosmic cycle, in which we have fallen away from a much more perfect divine state, because we are being punished for the crime of 'carnivorism'. Eating animals, 'our nearest relatives', is a kind of 'self-cannibalism' given 'the genuine Empedoclean idea' of the fundamental '*oneness of all living things*' (115).

Such tragic overtones aside, Empedocles' cosmology does well to reject Anaxagoras' *nous* in favor of 'the ultimate phenomena of life', the 'forces of attraction and repulsion' (116). For the result is a 'particularly brilliant...theory concerning the origins of purposiveness' (118), a naturalistic theory of drives which is able to account for the purposiveness of the universe without recourse to teleology or divine agency. 'We have here a special connection to Darwinian theory' (116), Nietzsche explains; for 'in Empedocles we find kernels of a purely atomistic-materialistic viewpoint: the theory of *chance* forms—that is, all possible combinations of random elements, of which some are purposive and capable of life' (118). In the end, Empedocles remains a 'boundary-line figure. He hovers between poet and rhetorician, between god and man, between scientific man and artist, between statesman and priest, and between Pythagoras and Democritus'. Nietzsche's Empedocles seems, like Zarathustra, caught half-way across the bridge of historical self-overcoming, for 'he demarcates the age of myth, tragedy, and orgiastics, yet at the same time there appears in him the new Greek, as democratic statesman, orator, enlightenment figure, allegorist, and scientific human being. In him the two time periods wrestle with each other; he is a man of *competition* [*agonaler*] through and through' (119). Indeed, where Empedocles ends, *Zarathustra* begins.

Nowhere is the young Nietzsche's deep sympathy for naturalism more obvious than in his treatment of the atomists. Democritus' cosmology exceeds Anaxagoras' by avoiding an arbitrary beginning, Nietzsche wants to claim. 'Of all the more ancient systems, the Democritean is of the greatest consequence. The most rigid necessity is presupposed in all things: there are no sudden or strange violations of nature's course' (125). Nietzsche's reconstruction of Democritus' cosmology stresses its fundamental 'materialism', which Nietzsche, following Aristotle, takes to be 'the most down-to-earth view' (126). Even as Nietzsche appreciates Democritus' rigorous materialism, he brings out the poetic beauty inherent in Democritus' picture of atoms originally falling at a uniform rate through the void: 'a steady eternal fall into the infinity of space' (127). Just as Nietzsche refused to oppose mysticism to naturalism when dealing with Heraclitus and Empedocles, so his exegesis of Democritus seeks to render his poetic picture of atoms falling through the void maximally compatible with materialism. Nietzsche thus rejects the idea of a random 'swerve' which arbitrarily begins the chain reaction of collisions between atoms, for that interpretation leaves the

unfolding of the universe entirely to “chance”, accidental colliding (*concurso quodam fortuito*) — which, Nietzsche says, is ‘an entirely unphilosophical manner of speaking’ (126).²¹ Instead, the universe begins with every atom descending at a uniform rate; it thus starts out in a state of ‘apparent repose’, an appearance of rest stemming from ‘the commonality of movement’, the idea that this uniform descent lacks any contrast class (127). The first (relative) motion is not the arbitrary result of chance, but rather a product of unequal acceleration between different kinds of atoms. ‘Democritus derives all motion from empty space and weight [or “mass”, *Schwere*]. Heavy atoms sink faster and drive the smaller ones upward by pressure... Given unequal acceleration, they collide with each other, and several ricochet; thus is a circular motion produced’ (126–127). A footnote titled ‘Critique’ shows Nietzsche to be well aware that weight or mass would be irrelevant to acceleration ‘in an empty infinite space’, and thus that, ‘given infinite time, motion would never begin’ (126n29), but he does not press this devastating critique.²² Ignoring this problem (which in fact shows that Democritus’ cosmology is no more able to account for its own starting point than Anaxagoras’), Nietzsche celebrates the atomists’ reduction of ‘all qualities’ to ‘quantitative differentials’, to the ‘shape (*rhysmós*, *schéma*), arrangement (*diathigê*, *taxis*), and position (*tropê*, *thesis*)’ of the ‘atoms’, each an ‘indivisible oneness’ (124). Unpacking the implications of Democritus’ atomic materialism, Nietzsche argues that it already reveals ‘the genuine embarrassment of [all] materialism’. This ‘most down-to-earth’ perspective ‘always’ culminates in relativism, because the materialist takes reality to be ‘only an extremely mediated given, an extremely relative existence that has passed through the machinery of the brain and has entered into the forms of time, space, and causality’ (129–130). Nietzsche stands ready to accept such relativism, however, as the epistemological price we must pay for naturalism. As he puts it, ‘materialism is a worthwhile hypothesis of relativity in truth... [The idea that] “all is false” has been discovered to be an illuminating notion for natural science. We still consider, then, all its results to be truth *for us*, albeit not absolute. It is precisely *our* world, in whose production we are constantly engaged’ (130). Those seeking the philosophical roots of Nietzsche’s later epistemological perspectivism and his conception of truth as a collective performance would thus do well to examine his treatment of Democritus.

In his penultimate subject, Pythagoreanism, Nietzsche again seeks to unify the mystical with the naturalistic. His detailed treatment of Philolaus and the ‘philosophy of number’ reflects his early interests in mathematics, music, and science. Revealingly explicating the numerological mysticism of the Pythagoreans, Nietzsche relies on his knowledge of geometry and musical ‘acoustics’ in order to render the view that ‘number is the genuine essence of things’ (132) maximally

²¹ Here Nietzsche is criticizing Kant’s interpretation of Democritus in his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, a book which exercised a great influence on the young Nietzsche.

²² Nietzsche’s exegeses of Empedocles and Democritus show, moreover, that he assumes naturalism is compatible with vitalism (see, e.g., 116, 128).

compatible with naturalism—which he does by reducing Pythagoreanism to ‘the claim that everything qualitative is only quantitative’ (133). ‘The Pythagoreans have thus discovered something extremely important: the significance of number and hence the possibility of a completely exact investigation into physical things’ (133-134). Indeed, by laying the groundwork for the exact natural sciences, the Pythagoreans represent one peak of pre-Platonic naturalism. ‘In other physical systems...[t]he various qualities were said to originate by means of association or dissociation. Now, finally, the message will be delivered that qualitative differentiation resides solely in differences of proportion’. ‘With this’, however, the Pythagoreans ‘burn a bridge to Anaximander’; for the scientific ‘task is to now resolve the Indefinite into nothing but definite numerical relations’ (140). Despite his unstinting praise for the systematic precision of naturalism, Nietzsche is not blind to the shortcomings of its reductive forms, which cannot account for the perspective from which naturalism itself emerges, namely, the first-person *intentionality* of the naturalist. The Pythagoreans reduce the world to ‘*numerical relations alone*’, but they ‘could not, of course, also have said of the world *what* actually calculates’ (141). We have seen Nietzsche highlight various doctrines of eternal recurrence in Anaximander, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Xenophanes, but the version he discovers in the Pythagoreans is closest to his later view, for both hold that: ‘Whenever the stars once more attain the same position, not only the same people but also the same behavior will again recur’ (139).

Nietzsche’s final chapter paints a revealingly ambivalent picture of Socrates. Nietzsche admires the nobility of the previous pre-Platonic philosophers as well as their developments of naturalism, but Socrates ‘distinguishes himself from all previous philosophers by his plebian origins and by an altogether meager education. He was always hostile to the entire culture and arts, along with the natural sciences’ (143). Here, I submit, we find the roots of Nietzsche’s later views on ‘The Ugliest Man’ (in *Zarathustra*) and on ‘The Problem of Socrates’ (in *The Twilight of the Idols*): Socrates ‘is, to be precise, ugly, and as he himself says [in response to the famous physiognomist], he suffers the greatest from natural passions’ and was even ‘prone to violent outbursts’ (144). Through ‘an incredible force of will [*Willenskraft*]’, however, Socrates masters his passions and becomes ‘a self-taught ethicist’. A ‘purely human ethic resting on principles of knowledge...is *sought*... A moral flood therefore flows forth from Socrates; in this way he is prophetic and priestlike. He feels a sense of mission’ (146). Like the Pythagoreans, Socrates strives philosophically for a ‘moral reform’ of his culture, however, the *means* he chooses distinguishes him: ‘*Knowledge* as the path to virtue differentiates his philosophical character’ (144-145). Indeed, ‘this is the essentially Socratic belief, that knowledge and morality conjoin. Now, the reversal of this proposition is revolutionary in the highest degree: everywhere luminous knowledge does not exist is the bad (also evil or the ill, *tò kakón*). Here Socrates becomes the critic of his times’ (145). Nietzsche clearly admires this Socrates, a revolutionary who legislates values by revealing, through relentless criticism, the ignorance of his age. Socrates ‘uses his own ignorance [*amathia*] to

convict his epoch. He directs the entire flood of knowledge on this course; the chasm he opens engulfs all the floods issuing forth from the more ancient philosophers... He hates all *previous closings of this chasm*' (148). Socrates' quest for 'proper knowledge' reveals that none of the philosophical systems which preceded him were 'closed', for none could account for its own presuppositions, as Nietzsche's own lectures have by now shown.

By explicitly making the quest for knowledge 'the purpose' of life, Socrates helps maintain the essential openness of philosophical thought, so Nietzsche praises him as 'the first philosopher of life [*Lebensphilosoph*]... A life ruled by thought! Thinking serves life, while among all previous philosophers life had served thought and knowledge' (145). Yet, since 'everywhere he went he produced the feeling of ignorance' (148), '[a]gainst him an incredible animosity had gradually accumulated—countless personal foes, fathers whose sons left against their wishes, and many slanderers, such that Socrates says in the *Apology*: "And this it is which will cause my condemnation"' (149). With the subject of Socrates' death sentence, Nietzsche's ambivalence returns. He rejects Plato's view that Athens sentences Socrates to death to its everlasting infamy. Instead he proclaims: 'The astonishing liberality of Athens and its democracy to tolerate such a mission for so long! Freedom of speech was considered sacred there. The trial and death of Socrates prove little against this general proposition'. Indeed, Nietzsche presents Socrates' death as a self-determined philosophical martyrdom. 'Socrates knew what he had done; he wanted death' (150). Socrates orchestrated his death sentence in order to bear witness to the ideal examined life he had lived. In so doing, Socrates practiced what *Zarathustra* will call 'the good death', for he knew *how to die at the right time*: 'He believed specifically that it was the right time for him to die; were he to live longer, his [old] age would render his normal lifestyle impossible for him, hence the conviction to give an impressive doctrine by way of such a death. We must consider his grand death speech in this way; he is speaking before *posterity*', a martyr bearing posthumous witness, with his life, to his life. Socrates' death is perfectly consistent philosophically, moreover, for when he enacts his martyrdom, his last 'instincts are overcome; intellectual clarity rules life and chooses death' (150). After this stirring reading, Nietzsche brings *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* to its end with these words:

The last exemplar of the sage that we know is Socrates...the wise man as the conqueror of the instincts by means of wisdom. Thereby the series of original and exemplary sages is completed; we recall Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Democritus, Socrates. Now comes a new age of the sages, commencing with Plato, the more complicated characters, from the convergence of the currents formed from the flowing about of the original and single-minded sages (151).²³

²³ The final sentence reads: 'For the moment, then, my task has been achieved; later I will discuss the Socratic schools in their significance to Hellenic life'.

We have touched upon only a few of the fascinating topics and questions that Nietzsche's long forgotten text brings to our attention. Still, even if *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* fails to revolutionize the study of ancient philosophy at this late date, it will greatly interest philosophers for several reasons. Not only does it provide arguments conspicuously absent from *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, it goes beyond the interpretations advanced there in a number of significant ways, as we have seen. The work also provides us with a valuable glimpse of the style and substance of the early lectures given by this brash but brilliant young professor of classical philology. The text's primary significance, however, will likely come from the contributions it will encourage to the burgeoning scholarship on 'the early Nietzsche'. Nietzsche scholars now typically divide his philosophical career into three periods: early (1872-77), middle (1878-83), and late (1883-88). The latter two periods have received the lion's share of philosophical attention thus far; increasingly, however, scholars trained in the Nietzschean art of genealogy have begun turning to his earliest works in order better to understand the development of his thought, and this text will aid that endeavor—in the ways I have shown and more. For *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* (1869-76) grants us access to the scholarly workshop where the young Nietzsche (a self-described 'nursling of ancient times') struggled to find—or better, *create*—himself philosophically. Here, as he grapples with the very beginnings of Western thought, he begins to develop some of the central philosophical concerns which would occupy him throughout his life, issues such as the role of the philosopher as a legislator of meaning and values; the possibility and limits of systems of metaphysical knowledge; the roots and implications of modern science; the different cosmological doctrines of eternal recurrence; the ideal relationships between philosophy, science, culture, life, and art; and the method and significance of the history of philosophy. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* thus helps us understand how Nietzsche began to form the ambitious philosophical agenda which would shape his more famous, later work.

Whitlock's editorial apparatuses are overflowing with detailed scholarly analyses and information; indeed, they nearly double the length of the text. Some may find such supplemental materials a bit unwieldy, but patient readers will discover much that is valuable here.²⁴ One minor annoyance in the translation itself is that Whitlock occasionally supplies standard English translations of the Greek rather than directly translating Nietzsche's German, thereby obscuring the subtle interpretations Nietzsche worked into his own translations.²⁵ An index and running page references to the original German would also have been useful. Such nit-picking aside, however, it is obvious that Whitlock has done an immense amount of research editing and translating this text (tirelessly tracking down Nietzsche's many uncited Greek and Latin references, for example), for which he deserves

²⁴ The lengthy counter-polemic Whitlock directs against Heidegger, for example, is well off-topic and should have been omitted.

²⁵ See, e.g., 66nn54-55, 100n30, 102n32, 103n42; and cf. 71n74.

our unstinting gratitude. Indeed, instead of endlessly retranslating Kaufmann's artful renditions of Nietzsche's major works, those of us who fancy ourselves Nietzsche scholars would do better to follow Whitlock's lead, rolling up our sleeves and getting to work on the treasury of untranslated materials already published in the *Complete Critical Edition* of Nietzsche's works.²⁶ Some may protest that scholars do not need translations, but even if this were true (which I do not believe), Nietzsche's work has never been the exclusive domain of scholars (nor did he want it to be), and when philosophers stop translating, something is surely lost—from their work as well as from the translations.

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²⁵ The volume of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* containing *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* also includes Nietzsche's often brilliant interpretations of the Platonic dialogues, an in-depth study of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and these are but a few of the important works now awaiting translation. Unfortunately, the current Stanford series of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* is translating only the abridged 'Critical Student Edition' (*Kritische Studienausgabe*) of Nietzsche's work, an edition which, however valuable, does not contain this work on the Pre-Platonics, Plato, and Aristotle.