Philosophy as an Erotic Contest: Nietzsche Contra Plato

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Nietzsche contra Plato

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Epigraphs

“Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits!”
-Jonathan Swift, The Lady’s Dressing Room

“I have found God, but he is insufficient.”
-Henry Miller, Tropic of Cancer

Contents

References and Translations

Plato

References to Plato are given with the usual Stephanus numbers and the translations used are the following: *Gorgias.* Translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; *Republic*. Translated by Desmond Lee. London: Penguin Classics, 2007; *Symposium.* Translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; *Theaetetus*. Translated by Robin Waterfield. London: Penguin Classics, 2004.

Nietzsche

In the text, Nietzsche's works are referred to by their standard English abbreviation and followed by, if applicable, a shortened section title and the number of the aphorism. In the case of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the number of the book is followed by the shortened name of the aphorism. After that, all reference includes the book and page number of the *Kritische Studienausgabe (*KSA*)*:

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1980. *Samtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 banden,* edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Munich/Berlin/New York: DTV/ De Gruyter.

The following abbreviations and translations are used:

A *Der Antichrist: Fluch auf das Christenthum.*
The Antichrist. Translated by Judith Norman. In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* 1-67. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

BGE *Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft.*
Beyond Good and Evil. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

BT *Die Geburt der Tragödie.*
The Birth of Tragedy. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

CW *Der Fall Wagner*: *Ein Musikanten-Problem.*
The Case of Wagner. Translated by Judith Norman. In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings, 231-262.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

D *Morgenröte: Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurtheile.*
Daybreak. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

EH *Ecce Homo*: *Wie man wird, was man ist.*
Ecce Homo. Translated by Judith Norman. In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* 69-151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

GM *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift.*
On the Genealogy of Morality. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

GS *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft: "la gaya scienza."*
The Gay Science. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

HC *Homer's Wettkampf*.
Homer's Contest. In *On the Genealogy of Morality,* 174-181. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

HH *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister.*

Human, All Too Human. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

SE *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, Drittes Stück: Schopenhauer als Erzieher.* Schopenhauer as Educator. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale, in *Untimely Meditations,* 125-194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

TI *Götzen-Dämmerung*: Oder wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt. Twilight of the Idols. Translated by Judith Norman. In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings:* 153-229. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Z *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen.* *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Translated by Graham Parkes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Nietzsche's posthumous notes, the *Nachlass* (NL), are referred to by "NL number of the notebook [number of the note]". After that, the reference includes the book and page number of the KSA or, if not found in there, of the *Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe (*KGW):

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1967-present. *Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe,* established by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, continued by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter and Karl Pestalozzi (editors), Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.

Nietzsche's letters are referred to by their number in the KGB (*Nietzsche Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*) and followed by book and page number in the KGB:

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1975-present. *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe,* established by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, continued by Norbert Miller and Annemarie Piepe (editors), Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.

The translations from the KSA, KGW and KGB are my own.

Nietzsche's own frequent quotation marks have been rendered as single to separate them from the double quotation marks I have used for quotes from Nietzsche and other authors.

Introduction

What if we would find, under the pillow of Nietzsche's deathbed, not his own *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but a copy of Plato's *Symposium*? We would consider that there might be a hidden depth, and perhaps also a debt, in Nietzsche's relationship to Plato, which on the surface is characterised by attacks such as calling Plato's philosophical concepts the worst error in history (BGE Preface, KSA 5.13). Nietzsche himself toyed with the idea that under the pillow of Plato's deathbed, instead of a metaphysical work, they found a comedy of Aristophanes (BGE 28, KSA 5.46): the anti-sensualist Plato needed the carnal and burlesque comedy of Aristophanes, who famously ridiculed Socrates, to endure life. In this study, I will consider the idea that Nietzsche, often considered the quintessential anti-Platonist, might have needed Plato in order to endure philosophy. Nietzsche, perhaps the most immoderate of the philosophers, needed the cool rationality of Plato to contend with, to reform and, perhaps, to keep his own philosophy in check. In Nietzsche's own words: "Perhaps this old Plato is my true great *opponent*? But how proud I am to have such an opponent!" (954, KGB III/5.200).

I take my clue and starting point for this investigation into this philosophical relationship from Nietzsche's surprising but fascinating definition of Plato's philosophy as an erotic contest. In *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche writes:

> "Nothing is less Greek than the hermit's conceptual cobweb-weaving [*Begriffs-Spinneweberei*], the *amor intellectualis dei à la* Spinoza. Philosophy *à la* Plato is more accurately defined as an erotic contest [*Wettbewerb*], as the further development and internalization of the ancient agonal gymnastics and its *presuppositions* . . . What ultimately grew out of Plato's philosophical erotics? A new, artistic form of the Greek agon, dialectics. –" (TI Skirmishes 23, KSA 6.216, Translation modified).

To my mind, Nietzsche offers his readers a challenge to think through this experimental definition: How can a form of philosophy, Plato's dialectics, be erotic and competitive instead of lonesome and dispassionate? In what way can his philosophy, a practice explicitly opposed to the quarrelsome sophists, be a form of competition and even a new form of Greek agon? How can the agon of dialectics grow out of philosophical erotics, since eros and competition are seemingly opposed to each other? While the attempt to answer these questions with regard to Plato's philosophy will form the starting point of this study, I will continue Nietzsche's experiment and apply this daring definition of philosophy to Nietzsche himself. Earlier in the *Twilight*, Nietzsche writes that the spiritualization [*Vergeistigung*] of sensuality [*Sinnlichkeit*], as love, and the spiritualization of enmity are the great triumphs of immoralists, such as himself, over Christianity, another principal object of his hostility (TI Morality 3, KSA 6.84). Nietzsche thus suggests that his philosophy includes important competitive and erotic elements as well. Considering this and Nietzsche's opposition to philosophy as cobweb-weaving, an image he sometimes uses to designate thinking in universal rational terms[1]: Could it be that the great enemy of Plato practises philosophy *à la* Plato, as an erotic contest as well? In this study, I will attempt to show how Nietzsche reconceptualized and redirected Platonic eros and reconsidered and repurposed the competitive elements of Plato's philosophy. I will consider how he built his own philosophical project on the critical transvaluation of the agonal and erotic elements of Platonism.[2] Specifically, I will examine: In

[1] E.g. "the eternal spider and cobweb of reason" (Z III Sunrise, KSA 4.209) and metaphysical concepts as "the brain diseases of sick cobweb-weavers" (TI Reason 4, KSA 6.76).

[2] Transvaluation, the re-examination of phenomena on the basis of a changed standard, is a translation of a key concept in Nietzsche's later philosophy, *Umwertung* (e.g. BGE 203, KSA 5.126 TI Preface, KSA 6.57-8; EH Destiny 1, KSA 6.365). Nietzsche uses the term to designate his project to create life-affirming values in opposition to what he sees as previous life-denying values (GM Preface 3, 6 KSA 5.249-50, 5.252-3) In 3.1, I will consider the project of critical transvaluation more elaborately.

what sense can Nietzsche's philosophy be fruitfully understood as a transvaluation of the erotic and agonal aspects in Plato's philosophy, along with the philosophical practice they inform?

Before delving into the question, there are a few preliminary considerations that need to be discussed: How can any philosophical similarities between these antipodes, Nietzsche's philosophy and Platonism, be possible? Is Nietzsche's "philosophising with the hammer" not rather a form of destruction than a form of competition? Is there a place for love in Nietzsche's philosophy? To start with the first: it is due to his own frequent charges against Plato that Nietzsche is often considered his greatest enemy. He designated his own philosophical project as overturned Platonism (*umgedrehter Platonismus*), called Plato a symptom of decay and considered his invention of the pure spirit and the good in itself the gravest error in the history of humanity (NL 7[156], KSA 11.612; TI Socrates 2, KSA 6.67-8; BGE preface, KSA 5.12). Nevertheless, Nietzsche's lifelong engagement with Plato's philosophy is undeniable. It is well known that Nietzsche started his career as a philologist, where one of the lectures he gave was a thorough introduction to the Platonic dialogues (KGW II/4.5-188); it is less well known that the young Nietzsche called the *Symposium* his *Lieblingsdichtung* (favourite work) and wrote a short essay on it when he was nineteen (Kaufman 1974a, 23, 393n3; KGW I/3.384-387). The later Nietzsche continues to wrestle with Plato and Platonism: Plato is one of the most frequently invoked figures in Nietzsche's writings. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is filled with allusions to images from Plato's dialogues, and criticism of Platonic concepts permeates his works.[3] However, next to the frequent attacks, there are statements of praise: Plato is also "the most beautiful outgrowth of antiquity", his disastrous idealism was "the caution of an overabundant and dangerous health" and his style is magnificent (BGE Preface, KSA 5.12; GS 372 3.624; BGE 7, KSA 5.21). Thus, there is a deep ambivalence in Nietzsche's continuous engagement with Plato and his philosophy; it was not simply a matter of outright rejection. Most studies concerning Nietzsche's relationship to Plato have acknowledged this fact, but have also sought to solve this ambivalence and to find Nietzsche's "final" position on Plato.[4] In contrast to those other studies, I will argue that viewing Nietzsche's relationship to Plato through the lense of the agonal nature of critical transvaluation makes this continued ambivalence intelligible as a rejection of a final position in favour of a plurality of competing perspectives.

Secondly, it is difficult to find many ideas on love or eros in Nietzsche's writings, and therefore I would say this is a relatively understudied subject.[5] Nevertheless, I will argue in this study, on the basis of his metaphors and language games, that eros plays a key role in Nietzsche's philosophy. However, I also think Nietzsche invites us to search for these allusions to the role of eros based on explicit statements. The first of those is the importance that Nietzsche, similarly to Plato, gives to eros in the development of philosophy and even culture in general. In the previously discussed TI Skirmishes 22 (KSA 6.215-6), Nietzsche is critical of Schopenhauer's idea that beauty leads to a temporary rest from the ever-present will and, therefore, negates the desire to procreate. Luckily, Nietzsche states, Plato contradicts him and states that it is exactly beauty's function to stimulate us to procreation, both in the bodily sense and the spiritual sense; often in history, sexual interest formed the first impetus for higher culture (TI 22-23, KSA 6.215-6). So Nietzsche sides with Plato here against Schopenhauer on the fundamental importance of eros for cultural phenomena such as philosophy. He already acknowledged the supreme importance of love for the development of culture in

[3] Graham Parkes in his translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* traces many of these allusions to Plato's dialogues in the *Explanatory Notes* (2005, 288-321).

[4] E.g. Kaufman (1974b, 333n133), Lampert (2004, 217), Brobjer (2004, 245), Zuckert (1996,10).

[5] I will later discuss the few authors that are sensitive to the theme of eros in Nietzsche. At the moment, I also want to emphasise that it is not uncommon for scholars to be critical of the idea that there is any place for love in Nietzsche, e.g. Hatab (2019, 108).

Schopenhauer as an Educator (SE 6, KSA 1.385). Moreover, in other works by Nietzsche, the importance of the erotic element in philosophy is often suggested by the relation of the philosopher to the figure of woman.[6] Perhaps the best-known examples of this are the Preface of *Beyond Good and Evil,* where truth is imagined as a woman and the dogmatic philosophers as her clumsy suitors, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* where wisdom and life are both imagined as women whom Zarathustra attempts to court. In this metaphorical manner, Nietzsche calls attention to the importance of eros in philosophy and suggests the form their relation can take, something which I will discuss elaborately in 2.1.

Thirdly, Nietzsche's praise of antagonism and his aggressive style are perhaps less in need of demonstration than his appreciation of eros. In *Zarathustra,* the seeker of wisdom is compared to a warrior, clearly suggesting the spiritual dimension of Nietzsche's antagonism (Z I Reading, KSA 4.49). In *The Twilight of Idols*, war is praised as a cure for the overserious in the *Preface*, the first chapter constitutes an attack on Socrates and the subtitle of the book is "How to Philosophise with a Hammer". The bellicose nature of his writings has famously made his philosophy an object of approbation by fascism, helped by the effort of his sister, and has given rise to the image of his philosophy as a purely destructive enterprise; his name still carries a faint hint of infamy, also in the academic world. What, however, is important to realise is that Nietzsche speaks of war as a spiritual practice, not a material one, and has clear ideas on the bounds of enmity. Due to the imposition of certain limits, destructive war can become a form of competition, an agon. In one of his early works, *Homer's Contest,* Nietzsche explains the agon as a Greek cultural phenomenon that allowed the expression of aggressive, otherwise destructive, affects within a circumscribed arena (HC KSA 1.786). Through this ongoing competition, where any overpowerful force had to be contained for the agon to continue, the Greeks were motivated to greatness. Affects such as hatred, envy and anger were turned into a productive cultural force for the development of things such as athletic games and performing poetry, tragedy and philosophy. The later Nietzsche explains in *Ecce Homo* that, what he calls his (spiritual) war praxis, is contained by similar limitations (EH Wise 7, KSA 6.274-5). Recently, both Christa Davis Acampora (2013) and Herman Siemens (2021) have used these ideas on controlled warfare and the agon as an interpretive key to understand Nietzsche, sometimes puzzling, philosophical practices. Inspired by these works, I will seek to apply the agon to Nietzsche's philosophical method as well and, in this manner, set up a fruitful comparison between Plato's philosophical method of dialectics and his own way of philosophising.

I start my investigation of Nietzsche's transvaluation of eros and the agon in Plato by considering in what manner Plato's philosophy is an erotic contest. What is the role of eros in Plato's philosophy, and why is dialectics "the further development and internalization of the ancient agonal gymnastics and its presuppositions"? How can the seemingly opposed concepts of love and strife come together, and what does Plato attempt to accomplish by putting the agon and eros in the service of philosophy? As we have seen, the agon and eros also form important elements in Nietzsche's philosophy, therefore I will ask in the second chapter: In what manner can we access Nietzsche's (metaphorical) thought on eros and what does it mean for his philosophy? What are Nietzsche's thoughts on the agon and how do they reflect in his manner of philosophising? How is Nietzsche's philosophy an erotic contest and what is the purpose of this contest? In the third chapter, I will consider how Nietzsche's erotic

[6] The significance of Nietzsche's remarks on women and his (metaphorical) usage of the figure of woman is a heavily debated topic. Some view his writings on women as a simple expression of misogynism (e.g. Kaufman 1974, 84), while others accord Nietzsche's writing on women philosophical significance (e.g. Derrida 1979). This study will not engage with the debate: I will only consider that by identifying abstract concepts (truth, wisdom, life) with the figure of woman, Nietzsche attaches erotic significance to them. See Burgard 1994 for a careful consideration for Nietzsch's use of the figure of woman.

contest is a transvaluation of Plato. But first, we have to ask: what is *Umwertung* and what problem does it respond to? Considering Nietzsche's *Umwertung* as a project to transvaluate values that say no to life, how do Plato's conceptions of eros and the agon deny life? And how do Nietzsche's ideas on the agon and eros respond to that? Secondly, I will consider some of the problems with this "first transvaluation" and ask if considering Nietzsche's relationship with Plato as a form of contest as well could circumvent some of these issues. After that, I will consider the consequences of this philosophical agon and some of its problems as well. Finally, it is important to state that I have had to limit myself in a few important ways in this investigation. For my consideration of Plato's philosophy, I have taken my guidance from the *Symposium* and the *Republic* and have left out the *Phaedrus,* with its consequential chariot metaphor, with one horse motivated by eros and another horse driven by what we could call agonal affects. As for Nietzsche, I have left his early theories on Plato, Socrates and the dialectic, as presented in the *Birth of Tragedy,* out of consideration. I have placed emphasis on his mature writing, *Zarathustra* and beyond, with the occasional reference to his earlier work or his philological works notwithstanding.

Chapter 1
Plato's Erotic Contest

1.1 Transcendental Eros

In the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche designates eros as the origin of Platonic philosophy:

> He [Plato] says with an innocence that only a Greek could have (and not a 'Christian'), that there could never have been a Platonic philosophy without such beautiful young men in Athens: the sight of them is what first puts the philosopher's soul in an erotic rapture [*Taumel*] and won't let it rest until it has sunk the seed of all high things into such beautiful soil [*Erdreich*]" (TI Skirmishes 23, KSA 6.126).

Contra Schopenhauer and with Plato, Nietzsche views erotic desire as the origin of the higher activities of the soul: beauty motivates procreation, not only physically but also mentally. In the above passage, Nietzsche clearly refers to Plato's *Symposium,* where Socrates designates erotic desire as the driving force behind philosophy. In Socrates' speech, erotic desire is identified as the quest for procreation amid beauty in both the physical and the mental realm (206b). Beauty not only arouses sexual desire and stimulates physical procreation, but might also stimulate the mind and lead to mental procreation through activities such as poetry, craftsmanship or philosophy (209a). The prospective philosopher needs to be guided to cultivate his erotic desire towards higher, non-physical, forms of beauty, a process commonly known as the ladder of love. According to Plato, the philosopher has to start with loving the physical beauty of "a beautiful young man", and ends with loving the Form of beauty itself (211b-c). The first step the philosopher should take on this ladder of love accords with Nietzsche's description: "The proper way to go about this business […] is for someone to start as a young man by focussing on physical beauty [τὰ καλὰ σώματα]) and […] to beget [γεννᾶν] there beautiful reasoning [λόγους καλούς]" (210a, translation modified).

However, in the *Symposium* the cultivation of eros is described as having a higher purpose than just generating beautiful words around beautiful young men. By ascending the ladder of love and loving the non-physical manifestations of beauty, the philosopher is eventually able to procreate true excellence (ἀρετὴ ἀληθής) instead of illusions (εἴδωλα), "because it is truth [ἀληθῆ) rather than illusion [εἰδώλου] whose company he is in" (212a, translation modified).[7] The endpoint of the ladder of love is the Form of beauty (αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν). Cultivating eros to love the perfect and permanent Form of beauty itself instead of "beauty tainted by human flesh and colouring and all that mortal rubbish" is presented as the prime task for the philosopher (211e-212a). When coming into touch with the Form of beauty, the philosopher can become truly excellent and procreate speeches, deeds or works that express this true excellence. The more elaborate presentation of the purpose of philosophical eros in the *Symposium* is aptly summarised by Socrates in the *Republic* as follows:

> [I]f someone really and truly loved learning [φιλομαθής], he'd have been born, as we said to struggle towards what really is [τὸ ὄν], and wouldn't spend time dallying over the many things people believe in; on he'd go, losing none of his sharpness, none of his passion [τοῦ ἔρωτος], until he'd grasped the nature of each thing as it really is [ὃ ἔστιν ἑκάστου τῆς φύσεως], in itself [αὐτοῦ], with the part of the soul that is peculiarly suited for grasping such a thing; using that to come near to and genuinely couple with [μιγεὶς] what is, begetting [γεννήσας] intelligence [νοῦν]

[7] The Greek term "ἀρετή" can both be translated as "virtue" and "excellence" in English. For the Greeks, the meanings were inseparable: something had ἀρετή when it performed its function well and for human beings, this meant being virtuous. However, the word virtue suggests a stronger moral association than ἀρετή had for the Greeks and, therefore, I have opted to translate the word as "excellence".

> and truth [ἀλήθειαν], he'd live a true [ἀληθῶς] life, truly nourished, only then ceasing from his birth-pangs, and not before? (490a-b, translation modified)[8]

Thus, erotic desire not only instigates Plato's philosophy but is also, as Nietzsche fails to mention, the key to accessing the truth: only through learning to love the world of Forms, "the nature of each thing as it really is", instead of the world of appearances, of "mortal rubbish", can the philosopher produce true excellence and intelligence.

What led Plato to posit a higher world of truth (ἀληθής) as opposed to a world of appearances (εἴδωλον)? Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics,* explains Plato's philosophy as a reaction against the problem of acquiring knowledge in a world where everything perceived is in constant flux (987a-b, 1078b). Some modern commentators disagree with Aristotle that this was Plato's intention[9]; Nietzsche, however, subscribes to this idea in his early lecture series on Plato's philosophy (PD 2-4, KGW II/4.148-52). Aristotle, thus, tells us that Plato's idealism is a reaction against the uncertainty of a sensible world in constant flux. As Plato writes in the *Theaetetus*, it is impossible to correctly name a property of a sensual object, as it is subject to constant change (182d). To allow for the possibility of knowledge, an unchanging world needs to be posited, the world of Forms, from which we can take our definitions. When considering the changing nature of abstract qualities, the impossibility of finding them permanently and purely in the sensual world is especially clear: what was once beautiful wastes away, youth fades and a flower wilts. Moreover, nothing in the sensual world seems to perfectly embody a quality: for example, no state or individual is completely just. Thus, perfection, permanence and certainty cannot be found in the world of appearances.

Eros can be the philosopher's greatest ally to redirect one's focus from the everchanging sensual world towards the constant ideal world. Two different reasons can be discerned in the *Symposium* for why love for the eternal Form would be a better satisfaction of eros than anything mortal. First, Plato makes clear that the Form of beauty has a "perfect, immaculate purity*",* while the other kinds of beauty are "tainted by human flesh and colouring and all that mortal rubbish"; "gold and clothing and good-looking boys and youth will pale into insignificance besides it [true beauty; αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν]" (211d-e). Erotic desire as an attempt to remedy our imperfection in contrast with the divine, would surely be better satisfied with the perfect Forms instead of the fluctuating glimpses of beauty in mortal life. Secondly, cultivating eros towards the Forms offers humans their best chance at immortality. In order to hold on to the possession of the good and the beautiful, eros strives towards procreation, since procreation is the only approximation to permanence in the sensual world of flux (207c-208c). In this manner, procreation, be it through children, deeds or works, is a coveted desire for immortality: the beautiful stories of Achilles in the Iliad or laws of Solon in Athens have immortalised their creators. However, as seen above, one who perceives the Form of beauty

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[8] Although the term φιλομαθής*,* a friend of learning, is derived from φιλία, which refers to the love one feels for friends or family, and not from the term eros, the subject of the philosopher is introduced a few lines earlier with terms that are derived from ἔρως: the philosopher passionately desires (ἐρῶσιν) learning (μαθήματός) and is similar to a lover (ἐρωτικῶν) (485b). There is disagreement in the literature as to whether Plato uses φιλία and derivative words when his meaning is closer to eros or if he actually has two different things in mind when describing the love for wisdom and learning with ἔρως or φιλία (see Cooper 2008, 27n21 for a short overview of this discussion).

[9] The veracity of Aristotle's account is often questioned: he seems to be more interested in fitting previous philosophers in his own theories than accurately representing them (Kahn 1985 242-243). However, most commentators agree that Plato considered the sensual world in flux in some manner and that his Form theory consitutes an opposition to this. The largest point of contention concerns the manner in which Plato understood flux, and whether this accords with the theories of Heraclitus at all. Nietzsche himself in his early lectures on Plato argues that Plato understood Heraclitus wrongly (PD PD 2-4, KGW II/4.148-52): Plato read a stronger theory of flux, that everything is in constant change in Heraclitus than he intended, that nothing remains the same.

has the greatest potential for immortality through his ability to procreate true excellence instead of phantom excellence (212a).[10] The suggestion is that true excellence must be better remembered than phantom excellence and will lead to immortal renown for the philosopher.

Plato's views on eros could be understood as a transvaluation of eros.[11] Plato takes on one of the strongest desires known to humans, erotic love and the desire for procreation, and suggests that its true fulfilment is to be found in the world of Forms. The usual expressions of this erotic love, propagating children or, especially significant in the Greek context, educating a younger man in a homosexual relationship, are seen as less fulfilling or only as steps towards the love of the Forms. Also, the desire for immortal renown, a significant aspect of ancient Greek culture, is understood as a form of eros. The philosopher will be remembered better than an athletic hero or popular orator, since he or she might come into contact with the Forms and procreate true excellence. By contrasting phantom excellence with the true excellence of the philosopher (212a), Plato suggests that the excellence procreated by poets, such as Homer or Hesiod, or lawgivers, such as Solon (209c-e), might have only been "phantom excellence". Nevertheless, Plato appears to be aware of the difficulty of living according to this transvaluation. The speech of Alcibiades shows the madness of eros (214e-22b), which comes to full force when we consider his tragic fate in history, of dying a traitor and failure. Perhaps, Plato explains Alcibiades' fate with his designation of eros as a tyrant that leads the soul to madness in the *Republic* (573a-b). Hence, Plato suggests that only eros transvaluated according to the standards of philosophy is worthwhile and that the more human forms of eros carry grave risks.

1.2 Agonal Dialectics

In *The Twilight of Idols,* it becomes clear that Nietzsche saw Plato's philosophical method of dialectics as a form of the agon, but does not explain this classification. He calls Plato's manner of philosophising a "further development and internalization of agonal gymnastics and its presuppositions", and dialectics a "new, artistic form of the Greek agon" (TI Skirmishes 23, KSA 6.126). However, after these statements, the topic changes back to the connection between eros, procreation and culture. Earlier in *The Twilight of Idols*, Nietzsche already calls Socrates the discoverer of a new kind of agon, but does not elaborate on the exact nature of this designation (TI Socrates 8, KSA 6.71). Nietzsche's other writings also fail to offer an elaboration of dialectics as an agon. In *Homer's Contest* Nietzsche notices the agonal spirit that informs Plato's dialogues, but does not call his manner of philosophising agonal (HC, KSA 1.790). In Nietzsche's works in between *Homer's Contest* and *The Twilight of the Idols*, there are no considerations of the agonism of the Greeks except for a few aphorisms in *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak*.[12] Only one of those aphorism, *Daybreak* 195, links the agon to dialectics: dialectics is called "the fencing-art [Fechtkunst] of conversation" without any further elaboration (KSA 3.169). Nietzsche's unpublished notes likewise lack an explanation of the agonal nature of dialectics. So, before we consider how dialectics is a type of agon and why it is a "further development and internalization" of this practice, it would be prudent to shortly consider what "agonal gymnastics and its presuppositions" are.

The agonal nature of the ancient Greeks was considered by the young Nietzsche *Homer's Contest* (KSA 1.783-92), but was developed in tandem with the historian, and

[10] Plato also often suggests that the soul itself is immortal and can be reincarnated in higher froms of life through reaching knowledge of the Forms (see for example the myth of Er in the *Republic* 608b-621d). However, this suggestion is not made explicit in the *Symposium* where immortality is defined as procreation.

[11] Note that transvaluation does not necessarily have to proceed with life as its highest value. Nietzsche also refers to the transvaluation of previous values into ones hostile towards life (EH Destiny 7, KSA 6.373).

[12] HH 170, KSA 2.158; D 29, KSA 3.39; D 38, KSA 3.45-6; D 175, KSA 3.156-7.

Nietzsche's colleague at Basel, Jacob Burckhardt. In his *Cultural History of Greece,* Burckhardt developed an influential theory that competition, the agon, was one of the most pervasive elements in ancient Greek culture (1999). This agonal spirit is taken to be the cause of the high vitality of ancient Greek culture and its tremendous cultural achievements. While the root meaning of the Greek word ἀγών is "gathering", it eventually also came to mean a contest, something for which people came together, and also a struggle or trial in general, such as the tasks of Herakles. The most well-known example of the agon in the life of the Greeks are all sorts of athletic contests of which the Olympic games are but one. Next to sports, the agonal spirit was expressed in cultural phenomena such as tragedy and poetry competitions or in politics through competitions of speeches. Gymnasia were frequented to train for the athletic competitions and wandering teachers such as the sophists taught the skills necessary to succeed in rhetorical agones. However, the term *agon* must be contrasted with the term ἀθλῖος, which means specifically competing for a prize: the emphasis in the agon lies not so much on winning a prize as on showcasing one's excellence (ἀρετή) before a public of spectators (Hawhee 2002, 185-186, 193).[13] Therefore, practising the agon served an educational function as well. The excellence of others inspired one, or motivated one with jealousy, to develop one's own excellence and outperform others (HC, KSA 1.790). Talent was developed through agonal training: the gymnasium offered an opportunity for the young to develop their excellence. Perhaps the best image of the agonal pedagogy of the ancient Greeks is the older men wrestling the younger ones in the gymnasia.

Plato frequently compares the philosophical conversation between Socrates and his (younger) interlocutors to wrestling or invokes other agonal elements in his dialogues. Wrestling is presented as a metaphor for philosophical conversation in the *Theaetetus* (144c, 169b), the *Republic* (544b) and the *Protagoras (343c).* In the *Euthydemus,* the give and take of arguments is compared to the catching and passing on of a ball (277b).[14] Moreover, as Robert Metcalf points out, Socrates' interlocutors often express emotions associated with agonal defeat, such as anger or shame, in for example the *Meno* (94e*), Gorgias* (461b, 482c-483a, 494d-e) and in the *Republic* (350d) (2018,3). Even more detailed is Richard Patterson's survey on agonal imagery in the *Republic* (1997, 330-343). Firstly, he points out how some allusions in the *Republic* compare Socrates to heroes in mythological agones; an allusion that is even more explicit in other works such as the *Cratylus* (411a), where Socrates speaks of having put on the lion skin, similar to Heracles. Secondly, he traces the frequent allusions in the *Republic* to ἀνδρεία, *"*manly" qualities such as courage, which according to Plato are necessary to discover the nature of good. One instance of agonal imagery that Patterson does not dwell on is Plato's agonal description of reaching a dialectical account of the good when he discusses the nature of this philosophical method in Book VII:

> If someone isn't capable of giving an account of the Form of the good [τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν], one that sets it apart from everything else, and of *surviving all challenges*, as it were in *battle* [ὥσπερ ἐν μάχῃ], *eager to test* [πάντων ἐλέγχων διεξιών] what he's saying not by reference to belief [δόξαν] but to how things truly are [οὐσίαν], and *coming through* [διαπορεύηται] all of this with his account *still standing* [ἀπτῶτι] – if he can't do all of this, your claim will be, won't it, that he has no knowledge either about the good itself [αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸν] or about any other good, and that if he is managing to get a hold on some kind of shadowy image [εἰδώλου] of it, it's through belief not through knowledge (534b-c, translation modified, emphases mine).

Considering all these examples, it becomes clear Plato's dialogues show an agon in which the philosopher is a kind of fighter who needs courage to succeed and might feel shame when his account is refuted. Nietzsche seems to draw his assessment of Plato's dialectics as a form

[13] Cf. D 29 (KSA 3.29).
[14] See Reid (2020, 8) or Metcalf (2018, 3-5) for more examples.

of the agon from Plato's own frequent allusions to the agonal nature of his philosophical practice.

It is not difficult to see that the dialogical nature of Plato's writing is particularly suited to exhibit philosophy as a contest, as wrestling with words.[15] Although Plato seems to use the term dialectics with differing meanings (Baltzly 2023, 221-222), in its basic sense and etymology, the word dialectics originates from the adjective διαλεκτικός, which means "conversational". Dialectics is, then, philosophy as a conversation or as Plato states in the *Republic* "the give and take of an argument [δοῦναί τε καὶ ἀποδέξασθαι λόγον]" (531e). There seems an obvious comparison between the giving and taking of arguments during a philosophical dialogue and agonal practices such as boxing where punches are given and received. One either defends against an argument or is taken by it, just as one either deflects a punch or is hit by it. In the end, the line of argument of one person emerges victorious as having convinced the opponent, and the other line of argument is refuted and, thus, defeated. The dialectical wrestling with words is, then, the "further development and internalization" of the Greek agonal practices: the physical boxing punches and wrestling holds become verbal questions, arguments and refutations. However, Plato's dialectics does not only transpose the agon into philosophy, but also takes along its presuppositions. As we have seen, the primary presupposition of the agonal mentality is that excellence is the highest good together with the display of it through competing with and defeating others. Heather Reid argues in that vein that Plato's dialogues can be seen as virtual gymnasia wherein the readers are guided towards excellence by "coach" Socrates (2020). Moreover, Plato's dialogical format, either recounted or enacted with different speakers, emphasises the public nature of this dialectical training for excellence. Plato thus takes on and transvaluates the Greek agon and its presuppositions: the agonal spirit and the striving for excellence remain but the agon is transposed from the physical to the mental realm.

On the other hand, however, Plato is extremely critical of the love of victory that motivates many contests and attempts to exclude it from his agonal dialectics. In the *Republic,* he warns that teenagers who get their first taste of the dialectics might treat it as a form of play and verbally shred everybody that comes near them like "little puppies" (539b): dialectics becomes eristics, characterised by disputation and polemics. Dialectics should be reserved for a few specific persons above thirty who realise that dialectics is not a sport but a search for the truth (539c). In Patterson's terms: the philosopher is not engaged in a zero-sum game with winners and losers but attempts to realise goodness in both oneself and others (1997, 353). For Reid, this means that Plato endeavours to turn *philonikia*, the love of victory, into *philosophia,* the love of wisdom (2008). Perhaps for that reason, Socrates asks his interlocutors to do him the favour of refuting him (*Gorgias* 470c): finding the truth is more important than being right and Plato's dialogues, therefore, often end in aporia instead of someone's victory.[16]

1.3 The Dialectical Journey

How can we bring together Plato's view on eros and agonal dialectics; or in Nietzsche's language: how did dialectics grow from Plato's philosophical erotics? Eros might be the key to preventing Plato's dialectics from turning into eristics by ascending from the love of particular instances in the world of flux towards the world of Forms. While the competitive spirit might turn someone towards dialectics (Reid 2008, 181) – just as beautiful bodies form the starting

[15] To my knowledge, there are only a few contemporary scholars that discuss the presence of the agon in Plato's dialogues (Patterson 1997; Metcalf 2018; Reid 2008, 2020), and one that argues against it (Wilkinson 2013).

[16] Note, however, that not all interlocutors agree and some think that Socrates is still motivated by winning the argument (*Gorgias* 515b).

point for the development of philosophical eros – the prospective philosopher has to come to the realisation that wisdom is a higher good than victory. The philosophical lover of the truth would realise that coming into touch with the truth serves a higher purpose than any victory in the deceptive world of the senses. However, Plato's agonal dialectics share a deeper affinity with the erotic part of his philosophy: dialectical philosophy is the path towards the beloved true world of Forms.

On the face of it, erotic desire seems to be opposed to the affects, such as the feeling of honour, shame and the love of victory, that motivate the agon. In Plato's famous tripartition of the soul, eros is part of the appetitive, part, while the agonal affects belong to the spirited part of the soul, *thymos* (437b-441c). Eros is a desire towards union and, in Plato's view, physical and spiritual procreation, while t*hymos* is directed towards conflict. However, eros and the agonal affects, *thymos*, have the same origin when we consider *thymos* as arising from frustrated desire. Laurence Cooper, in his study of eros in Plato, Rousseau and Nietzsche, suggests this interpretation of *thymos* based on a remark of Glaucon, Socrates' interlocutor, at the beginning of the *Republic* (2008, 36-42). Cooper points out, firstly, that Socrates never refutes Glaucon's initial suggestion that the spirited part belongs to the appetitive part of the soul (439e) and, secondly, without much argument, that it was a common idea in ancient Greece that spiritedness was aroused by frustrated desire, as can be seen in the Homeric abductions of women and their consequences. While Cooper's suggestion is not supported by the strongest arguments, I think his idea is the right one. Nevertheless, we should not forget that, although *thymos* might originate from eros, its nature is different and it can even turn against eros (e.g. Republic 439e-440e). As Cooper states: "Spiritedness not only breaks free of the desire or eros on whose behalf it has been aroused, but also defines itself precisely by its opposition—if not to desire as such, then to unchecked desire and to the weakness and insufficiency that desire reveals*"* (2008, 41).

More significantly, and as the previous discussion has suggested, eros and the agon of dialectics both strive towards the truth in Plato's philosophy. To elucidate this, we first need to consider the dialectics slightly more in-depth. Although there is disagreement on what exactly constitutes dialectics, scholars normally take Plato's description in the *Republic* 531d-539d as the starting point (Baltzly 2023, 222).[17] In Socrates' description of the "dialectical journey [διαλεκτικὴ πορεία]", dialectics is shown to lead to the world of Forms:

> [W]hen someone tries to make his way by the means of dialectic, setting out after each thing as it really is [αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν], in itself, through argument and without any of the senses, and not giving up until he grasps the nature of the good in itself [αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἀγαθὸν], through the use of intellect by itself [αὐτῇ νοήσει], then it is that he finds himself a the furthest limit of the intelligible […] (532a-b).

In this passage, it becomes clear that dialectics is a method that attempts to arrive at the truth through the use of rational argumentation only, without any involvement of the sensual world. The usage of the phrase "the nature of the good in itself [αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἀγαθὸν]" indicates that the way of dialectics leads to the world of Forms. Plato thus suggests that a true understanding is only possible through purely rational dialectics: the dialectical journey is – similarly to Plato's famous metaphor of the prisoner who leaves the cave of shadows towards the sun – an escape from the world of appearances to the truth (532b-d).

[17] Baltzly also indicates that in the past the term dialectics was used for Plato's method across all dialogues. Nowadays, scholars normally call Socrates's cross-questioning in the early dialogues "elenchus" and separate the "method of hypothesis" as presented in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* from dialectics proper. For the present study, this means that Nietzsche's definition is broader than the one used in present-day scholarship.

The dialectical journey can be seen as the contest in Plato for which the cultivation and transvaluation of eros have set the objective. With his conception of eros, Plato seems to set the aim for philosophy by awakening love for the true world of Forms away from the love of the physical and particular. The dialectical journey is the path towards this aim through reason and argumentation. Its bellicose aspect is well expressed by the early Nietzsche: "Only a completely and precisely described concept, a from all sides recognised concept without gaps, can provide access to what is. One must also make an effort with dialectics *to hunt down* the concept, to *overcome* all unclear thinking and to *eliminate* all that is misleading or ambiguous" (KGW II/4.154, emphases mine).[18] Ultimately, these agonal dialectics lead to the Form of the good (αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸν). At the end of both the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*, this struggle to be good is called the most important agon. In the Republic, Socrates states. "[T]he contest [ἀγών] matters […], this contest of ours to become good or bad – too much for it to be worth our being lured by honour, or money, or any sort of power, or indeed poetry, into a neglect of justice and the other parts of excellence [ἀρετῆς]" (608b). In the *Gorgias,* Socrates calls "following path of truth" (τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀσκῶν) and trying "to be as moral a person as I can" the most important ἀγών (526d-e). For Plato, as we have seen, truth, real excellence and the knowledge of the good are only to be found in the world of Forms and not in the world of appearances. Thus, the dialectical journey, since it leads to knowlegde of the Forms, is for Plato the most worthwhile agon of them all. Out of the eros for the true world of Forms, grows the agonal practice of dialectics as the path towards it. In this sense, Plato's philosophy is fundamentally an erotic contest.

Plato's great contribution to philosophy is not positing a rational world of eternal truth in contrast to the flux of the sensual world, but putting the agon and eros in service of reaching this true world. Catherine Zuckert in her *Postmodern Platos* points out that the pre-Socratic philosophers first came up with the idea of a world of pure intelligibility, but, quoting Nietzsche on the pre-Platonic philosophers in the *Gay Science* (GS 110 KSA 3.469-71), that they had to deceive themselves that reason is free and self-originating activity (1996, 19-21). Plato, however, understood that reason is not a disinterested activity, but needs to be motivated by a conception of the good and by directing emotive forces in the soul. Plato's teaching maintains philosophy as a way of life and recognizes eros and the agon as necessary sources of motivational energy. The above discussion has grounded this assessment of Zuckert by describing how Plato transvaluated erotic desire and the practice of the agon. Plato attempts to direct eros away from the physical world and creates the spiritual agon of dialectics as an alternative to the athletic and cultural agones of the Greeks. The agon of Heracles to complete his twelve tasks or of Odysseus to arrive home are of lesser relevance compared to the dialectician's journey to arrive at the truth. And, instead of training for such an agon through wrestling or gymnastics, the philosopher will have to practise dialectics – for which Plato's dialogues could be the virtual gymnasia.

However, Plato is aware of the problematic nature of this undertaking: the erotic and agonal affects are so powerful that they might easily run wild. In the *Republic,* Socrates states explicitly: "What will sound the most surprising of all is the way each of the very features of a philosophical nature we were picking out for praise – courage, moderation and all the rest – actually works to corrupt its owner's soul, pulling it away from philosophy " (491b). To prevent this from happening, Plato writes, as we have seen, critically of an excessive love of victory

[18] The immediate question this description of dialectics leads to if it is not rather a destructive war against everything non-rational than an agon. We will see in chapter 3 that this is an important part of Nietzsche's criticism of Plato. However, the argument has been made that the Platonic philosopher constantly needs to re-ascend towards the Form of the good (Lowenstam 1985) and, thus, that the non-rational will constantly reassert itself. In this manner, dialectics might be more agonal than it seems since the union with the Forms is never permanent, and so the the dialectical contest is constantly renewed.

and warns of the dangers of eros. In order for dialectics to act as the path to the true excellence of the Forms, one has to fight the instincts that would lead one astray.

Chapter 2
Nietzsche's Erotic Contest

2.1 For the Love of Life

Contrary to Plato, Nietzsche does not present us with an explicit theory on the nature of eros and its relation to philosophy. Perhaps Nietzsche's most famous concept of love is his idea of *amor fati,* love of fate (e.g. GS 276, KSA 3.521; EC Clever 10, KSA 6.297), but, on the face of it, it is unclear how the idea relates to the practice of philosophy or if this type of love would be erotic.[19] Therefore, I will leave the concept of *amor fati* aside for now and first examine eros in Nietzsche. The term eros or erotic is not often used by Nietzsche and, except for the previously discussed passages on Plato and Socrates in *Twilight of Idols* (Socrates 8, KSA 6.71; Skirmishes 23, KSA 6.126)*,* not directly linked to the practice of philosophy. However, as we saw in the introduction, Nietzsche agrees with Plato that erotic desire forms the basis of cultural practices: "[A]ll beauty stimulates to procreation, - that this is precisely the *proprium* of its effect, from the most sensual all the way up to the most spiritual" (TI Skirmishes 22, KSA 6.126, translation modified). The idea that higher culture, and we could assume that this includes philosophy, develops from eros is an idea that returns in different places throughout Nietzsche's works. In TI Skirmishes 23, Nietzsche remembers against Schopenhauer, who saw beauty as disinterested, and to the honour of Plato that the higher culture of classical France grew on the ground of sexual interest. In *Schopenhauer as an Educator,* Nietzsche alludes to the importance of eros for culture in a different manner: he describes love for a great individual as the stimulus for self-elevation and, thus, as the consecration into culture (SE 6, KSA 1.385). Another passage in Nietzsche's oeuvre where he explicitly reflects on the role of eros and beauty, Aphrodite, in culture occurs in *Daybreak* 76*.* His reflections in this aphorism end on the following note: "All our thinking and poetising, from the highest to the lowest, is characterised, and more than characterised, by the excessive importance to the love story…" (D 76, KSA 3.74). This idea prompts us to ask what the love story characterising Nietzsche's thinking could be.

One of the most famous love stories in Nietzsche's thinking is his comparison of truth to a woman, who has been clumsily suited by dogmatic philosophers. The opening sentences of the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* read:

> Suppose that truth is a woman [*Weib*] – and why not? Aren't there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women? That the grotesque seriousness [*schauerliche Ernst*] and the clumsy obtrusiveness [*linkische Zudringlichkeit*] , with which they have approached the truth so far, are unsuitable ways of pressing their suit [*für sich einzunehmen*] with a woman [*Frauenzimmer*]? What is certain is that she has spurned them – leaving dogmatism of all types standing sad and discouraged (BGE Preface, KSA 5.11, translation modified).

By imagining truth as a woman, Nietzsche connects himself to the Platonic tradition that views philosophy as an erotic activity (cf. Lampert 2001, 9, 96; Pippin 2010, 15-19). Further in the Preface, it becomes clear that Nietzsche views Platonism as one of the prime examples of these dogmatic philosophies. Nietzsche, as a philologist with a thorough knowledge of Plato,

[19] Beatrice Han-Pile argues that amor fati is a form of agape rather than eros, since *amor fati* involves passive surrender, instead of the active pursual associated with eros (2011, 230-2). For as far as we can equate *amor fati* with the love of life, Han-Pile's argument is not completely valid since, as we will see later in this section, Zarathustra actively pursues the woman Life out of his love for her (Z, III Dance-song, KSA 4.282-5. Further research could determine the exact place of *amor fati,* and of agape and eros, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and in Zarathustra's romantic pursuit of the woman Life.

must be seen as responding to Plato's image of the philosophers as a kind of lover. It seems that Nietzsche is ridiculing the lofty story Plato presents us with in *Symposium,* about the philosopher successfully coming into touch with the higher truth, by calling these philosophical lovers clumsy, obtrusive and unsuccessful. By providing such a critique in the opening stages of the book, Nietzsche sets the stage to suggest a more successful alternative.

What form this alternative seduction of the truth might take is best illustrated by Nietzsche's speculations about "the philosophers of the future" in *Beyond Good and Evil.* Here, he announces a new type of philosopher, who, instead of being a dogmatist, is a *Versucher (*BGE 42, KSA 5.42). While the primary meaning of *Versucher* should be read as "experimenter", the word is also a biblical term for "tempter". Nietzsche makes it clear in this aphorism that he is playing with the double meaning of the word: he calls his new name for the philosophers also a *Versuchung,* which can only means a "temptation".[20] When we read Nietzsche's suggestion to view the philosopher of the future as a *Versucher* together with the Preface of *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche's conceptualisation of the philosophers as *Versucher* suggests a novel erotic relation to the woman truth.[21] I think Nietzsche himself encourages us to read BGE 42, in which he introduces the philosopher as *Versucher*, together with the Preface of BGE by immediately asking the question of how these new philosophers relate to truth in the next aphorism (BGE 43, KSA 5.60): the philosophers of the future will still love their truths but not as the dogmatists did. Note that the dogmatists, who attempted to win over the truth through obtrusiveness (*Zudringlichkeit)* in the Preface, make their first reappearance in BGE 43. By baptising the philosopher of the future as *Versuchers,* Nietzsche seems to suggest that these philosophers try to win over the truth by tempting her instead of forcing her. The biblical evocations of the term *Versucher* remind one of the snake who tempted Eve to eat the apple from the tree of knowledge. By giving in to temptation, the woman Eve gained knowledge of good and evil. Will the philosopher tempt the woman truth to give up knowledge *beyond* good and evil?

As most commentators on the *Versuch* motif agree, Nietzsche himself must be seen as employing the method of the *Versucher* described in BGE 42 as the way of the philosopher of the future (Kaufman 1974a, 85; Picht 1988, 62-63; Blondel 1991, 81; Conway 1997a, 75-78; Lampert 1993, 337; Ottman 1999 436-352). Writing about himself in an aphorism in *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche states the "great liberator" that overcame him was "the thought that life could be an experiment [*Experiment]* for the knowledge-seeker [*Erkennenden*] – not a duty, not a disaster [*Verhängnis*], not deception!" (GS 324, KSA 3.552). Although Nietzsche does not use the term *Versuch* here – he uses *Experiment* instead – this presentation in *The Gay Science* seems to prefigure the more elaborate presentation in *Beyond Good and Evil.*[22] In both cases, knowledge now revolves around the notion of the experiments, as shown in BGE 210 (KSA 5.142), where he calls the philosophers of the future *Menschen der Experimente* (people of experiments). Thus, considering Nietzsche's philosophy as *Versuch* suggests that Nietzsche himself philosophises with a new erotic relation to truth. As I will show below,

[20] While Nietzsche's discussion of the philosopher as *Versucher* is limited to *Beyond Good and Evil,* the term resurfaces in other important places in Nietzsche later works (e.g. BT Preface, KSA 1.11; NL 18[17], KSA 13.537; EH Books 3, KSA 6.302-3). Through his use of the term *Versuch* Nietzsche seems to emphasise both the experimental and the seductive nature his writings.

[21] In his *Nietzsche and the Political*, Daniel Conway offers an alternative reading of the erotic nature of the *Versuch* (1997, 75-95). For Conway, the philosopher shapes himself through self-experimentation into an exemplary human being who has an erotic effect on others. I wish to advance a different reading that accords with the idea of philosophy as a contest motivated by eros.

[22] Both Blondel and Kaufman (1991, 81; 1974a, 85) also equate Nietzsche's ideas on philosophy as *Versuch* and *Experiment*. Moreover, they both provide an overview of the occurrence of these terms in Nietzsche's corpus (Blondel 1991, 289n17, Kaufman 1974a, 85n4).

Nietzsche's idea of the philosopher as *Versucher* also draws out the agonal element of his thinking, but first, we should consider how the *Versucher*-philosopher relates to truth.

Nietzsche's conception of truth develops in opposition to the prejudices that the dogmatic philosophers have of truth. These philosophers believe that things of value cannot be derived from "this ephemeral [*vergänglichen*], seductive [*verführerischen*], deceptive, lowly [*geringen*] world, from this mad chaos of confusion and desire", but must have an origin (*Grund*) in something such as "the lap of being, the everlasting [*Unvergänglichen*], the hidden God, the 'thing-in-itself'. "From these 'beliefs [*Glauben*]' ", Nietzsche states, "they try to acquire their 'knowledge [*Wissen*],' to acquire something that will end up being solemnly christened [*getauft*] as 'the truth' " (BGE 2, KSA 5.16). Dogmatic philosophers have been looking for "the truth" solely based on their belief that there must be a higher world without constant change. But it is solely through our use of reason in language that we deploy unified concepts that make it seem as if there is more than becoming: "Being is imagined into everything as cause [*als Ursache hineingedacht] – pushed under* [*untergeschoben*] everything " (TI Reason 5, KSA 6.77). Conceptual language involves an imaginary fixation of becoming, freezing it into being. Of course, this is exactly what Plato has been doing by positing a higher world of Forms. For Plato, as we have seen, knowledge was impossible in a world of flux. For Nietzsche, however, "[B]eing is an empty fiction", since "[t]he 'apparent [*Scheinbare*]' world is the only world: the 'true world' is just *a lie added on to it* [*hinzugelogen]*. . ."(TI Reason 2, KSA 6.75). Nietzsche, thus attempts to philosophise in a world seen as only becoming, something that Plato considered impossible. What does that mean for Nietzsche's conception of knowledge?

While the dogmatic philosophers desire their truth to be universal, "everybody's truth", the *Versucher* philosophers are perspectivists who realise that the truth is determined by the perspective it is pronounced from. Recall from the Preface that the dogmatic philosophers approach the truth with seriousness (*Ernst)* and clumsy obtrusiveness (*linkische Zudringlichkeit*) (BGE Preface, KSA 5.11). The *Versucher* philosopher, by contrast, remembers that his advances at truth are "only attempts" (*nur ein Versuch*), as Nietzsche also calls his introduction of the term *Versucher* (BGE 42, KSA 5.42). The philosopher of the future rejects the fiction of being and the metaphysical opposition of values; he wonders if "[i]t could even be possible that *whatever* gives value to those good and honourable [*verehrten*] things has an incriminating [*verfängliche*] link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like [*scheinbar entgegengesetzten*] their evil [*schlimmen*] opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same [*wesensgleich*]" (BGE 2, KSA 5.17). So what does this all mean for the erotic nature of Nietzsche's thought? Nietzsche's philosopher is still a lover of truth, but the nature of this truth is radically different. Truth is no longer metaphysical knowledge beyond the world as it appears, but truth becomes the very effort to represent this world as it appears to us in all its "mad chaos of confusion and desire". Nietzsche, therefore, considers Heraclitus' philosophy of becoming the most akin to his own (EH BT 3, KSA 6.312-3; TI Reason 2, KSA 6.75). Instead of Plato's imperative to develop a love of the permanent unchanging Forms, a Nietzschean philosopher is asked to love impermanence.

The most extensive reading of *Versuch* as a philosophical method that stays true to the becoming of life is offered by Eric Blondel in his *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture.* He suggests that Nietzsche, by practising philosophy as *Versuch*, is able to avoid the discursive closure that would deny the becoming of life (Blondel 1991, 75-87). Philosophy as *Versuch* is an attempt to avoid the metaphysical fixations of the dogmatist and to express the play of perspectives that life consists of. The way to express this play of perspectives for Nietzsche is to show thought in aphorisms that present a fragmentary interpretation of life. The next aphorism is another attempt or *Versuch* to capture an interpretation of life again, and it might confront the previous aphorism. In his text, Nietzsche thus attempts to capture life as a dynamic interplay of perspectives. The *Versucher*-philosopher always has to realise that these perspectives are incomplete, might need to be revised or might be a failed attempt. Therefore

Blondel states: “[t]he truth about life is only true provided there is an ‘or else’ followed by a row of dots (*Gedankstrich*) preceded by innumerable ‘or else’ that mark the infinite plurality of living (genealogical) perspectives*”* (Blondel 1991, 86). Nietzsche describes this as the perspectivist conception of truth: “the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept [*Begriff*]’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity’ “ (GM III 12, KSA 5.365). Nietzsche’s stylistic choices, his preference for aphorisms, his frequent use of ellipses and question marks and his invocation of metaphors, are attempts to open up his discourse to the plurality of life. There is a conscious desire in Nietzsche to keep his thoughts experimental and avoid metaphysical closure. He describes it best in the closing aphorism of *Beyond Good and Evil* (cf. GS 298, KSA 3.538)*:*

> Oh, what are you anyway, my written and painted thoughts! It was not long ago that you were still so colorful, young and malicious [*boshaft*], so full of thorns and secret spices that you made me sneeze and laugh – and now? You have already lost your novelty, and I am afraid that some of you are ready to turn into truths: they already look so immortal, so pathetically decent and upright [*herzbrechend rechtschaffen*], so boring! (BGE 296, KSA 5.239).

The philosopher of the future desires to acquire those new truths, but also realise that perspectival truth dies when it is captured in discourse and becomes metaphysical truth instead.

Loving the impermanent perspectivist truth equals loving life, Nietzsche suggests in *Beyond Good and Evil* and metaphorically recounts in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Lampert expresses this idea by stating that love of truth is transfigured into love of the true, which equals love of life (Lampert 2001, 119-120, 293). Even though Lampert’s use of the term “the true” suggests a metaphysical reading of Nietzsche, he is right in his observation that Nietzsche equates his insights into the conditions for truth, “the true,” with life. In *Beyond Good and Evil*¸ Nietzsche states that perspectivism is the fundamental condition of all life (BGE Preface, KSA 5.12). Being alive, creatures are determined by their needs, desires and capabilities: their truth is necessarily perspectivist. One’s truth is determined by life and, when loving truth, one also has to love the perspective it is seen from and the form of life that creates the possibility for that perspective. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Nietzsche takes the argument further. Wisdom teaches Zarathustra:“ ‘You will, you desire [*begehrst*], you love, for that reason alone you *laud* life’ “ (Z II Dance-song, KSA 4.140). Loving and desiring, also for truth, are a form of praising life. The insight that truth and the desire for truth are immanent, what Lampert calls “the true” transfigures love of wisdom into love of life. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, this transfiguration is shown in Zarathustra’s two dances with the woman Life. The woman Life and Wisdom seem almost identical, Zarathustra’s wisdom accords with life, but Zarathustra also realises that “[f]rom the ground up [he loves] only life …” ((Z II Dance-song, KSA 4.140-1). Nietzsche’s new philosopher is ultimately a lover of life and his love of truth stands in the service of life. For this reason, one of the main questions in Nietzsche’s philosophy becomes how one can affirm the becoming of life fully, something which has been rejected so thoroughly by philosophers in the past. Zarathustra’s quest for complete affirmation and the ideas on *amor fati* in other works could perhaps be seen as Nietzsche’s alternative ladder of love, one towards life instead of transcendence.

Another one of Nietzsche’s major reconsiderations is that the erotic desire for truth and life is not a lack but a form of overabundance.[23] Plato considered eros to be based on lack:

[23] Pippin states that Nietzsche aligns himself with Plato view that the desire to know is not just driven negatively, by practicality or insecurity, but by a positive and original erotic desire (2010, 16). However, the consideration that Plato equated erotic desire with lack partially invalidates his idea. For Plato eros is born from both lack (Πενία) and resourcefulness (Πόρος) (203b-e). In the Waterfield translation, also

we desire what we do not have, stop desiring something we already have or keep desiring it to guarantee our continued possession of it in the future (200a-e). Consequently, Diotima states: “No god philosophises [φιλοσοφεῖ] or desires wisdom [σοφὸς], because gods are already wise; by the same token no else who is wise philosophises” (204a, translation modified). In the penultimate aphorism of *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche introduces the exact opposite idea: the gods philosophise and the god Dionysos is a philosopher (BGE 295, KSA 5.238). Both philosophising under the sign of Dionysos and the suggestion that the gods philosophise, introduce the love for wisdom as a form of excess. For Plato, the gods did not philosophise since they are perfect beings that are not in need of anything; for Nietzsche, the idea that the gods philosophise does not change the definition of gods as perfect beings but rather suggests that philosophy becomes the expression of an excess of force. Philosophising under the sign of Dionysos, the god of intoxication and ecstasy (both *Raush* in German), expresses this idea in strong terms (cf. Rethy 25-30). In posthumous notes, Nietzsche writes it down less metaphorically: “The lover becomes a squanderer [*Verschwender*]: he is rich enough for that” (14[120], KSA 13.300). These different conceptualisations of eros in Plato and Nietzsche seem tightly interwoven with their respective philosophies: considered from the perspective of being, eros appears as a desire striving for permanence born from incompleteness, while considered from the perspective of becoming eros is energetic movement.

2.2 Agonal Experimentation

In considering the agonal aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy I begin with Nietzsche’s own thoughts on the ancient Greek agon in the short early essay called *Homer’s Contest*, given to Cosima Wagner for Christmas in 1872 (KSA 1.754). The last thirty years have seen a surge of interest in Nietzsche’s ideas on the agon expressed in the essay: political philosophers have used it to develop a more vital conception of democracy,[24] and, more recently, studies have appeared that apply the agon to Nietzsche’s philosophical practices, most notably by Christa Davis Acampora (2013) and Herman Siemens (2021). After reviewing the features of the agon Nietzsche described in *Homer’s Contest*, I will apply those features, inspired by some of the aforementioned studies, to the method of *Versuch.*

We have already seen that in the agon, as opposed to the focus on a prize in an ἀθλῖος, participants were mostly concerned with showcasing their excellence before the public. In *Homer’s Contest,* Nietzsche suggests a few more elements that were important for the practice of the ancient Greek agon. First, the agon was a redirection of free-roaming destructive affects (the evil Eris), such as anger, jealousy and grudges, into an agonal arena where these expressions would turn productive (the good Eris) towards the development of excellence (HC KSA 1.785-786). These dangerous affects served as the motor behind agonal competitions; the good Eris “goads man to action” (HC 1.787). Secondly, the agon needed a rough equality between contestants to function. The practice of ostracism was essential for the continuation of the agon: in case any contestant proved to be undefeatable, he or she should be banned (HC KSA 1.788-9). Several contestants of approximately equal strength both incite each other to action, to become the best, and keep each other within limits, to prevent someone from dominating all others. Thirdly, the potential destructiveness of agonal instincts was bound by external factors as well: for example, the Greeks’ love for their native

used in this present study, “Πόρος” is confusingly translated as “plenty”, leading to the suspicion that his conception in this sense might come close to Nietzsche’s ideas on love as excess. Nevertheless, the positive nature of philosophy remains in Plato’s considering it a form of desire. as opposed to treating the will to knowledge as born from the fear of uncertainty.

[24] See e.g. Connolly (1991), Honing (1993) and Hatab (1995) for theories on agonistic democracy.

city-state curbed their selfishness (HC KSA 1.789-90).[25] Fourthly, the agon involves both an affirmation and negation of one's opponents, either living or dead: worthy adversaries are seen as great masters but also as rivals to be surpassed (HC KSA 1.790-1). Lastly, the agon is not only a contest as to who is the most excellent, but also involves a contestation of the very terms or standard of excellence and convincing the public and/or adversaries of one's own definitions of superiority (HH 170, KSA 2.158).

Some of the features of the ancient Greek agon are visible in Nietzsche's method of *Versuch* and some of them in his relationship to Plato, something which I will consider in the next chapter. As Siemens (2021, 104) noticed, philosophy as *Versuch* involves the agonal elements of empowerment and limitation and of affirmation and negation. On one hand, it affirms philosophical discourse by participating in it, on the other hand, it negates philosophical discourse by shattering it in aphorisms and opening it up with rows of dots and question marks. Blondel (1991, 30-31) describes this self-opposition in Nietzsche's texts as saying (*le dire*) and unsaying (*le dédire*). The saying of Nietzsche's text is the rational philosophical discourse that his text expresses, necessarily reflecting the truth as metaphysical because it has been captured in concepts. The unsaying of Nietzsche's text is everything in it that remains outside of this discourse such as incoherences but also all rhetorical and artistic elements (Blondel 1991, 7). Maintaining the tension between saying and unsaying allows Nietzsche to practise a philosophy that reflects the becoming of life: only saying would replicate metaphysical discourse, and only unsaying would have nothing to add philosophically. In Nietzsche's words: "a seeker after knowledge [*Erkennenden*] must have the willingness [*gute Wille*] to declare himself *against* his previous opinion and to mistrust anything that wishes to become *firm* [*Fest*] in us"(GS 296, KSA 3.537). In this manner, the *Versucher*-philosopher has to engage in self-limitation: any strong opinion must be battled with distrust, just as participants in the Greek agon attempted to limit any overpowerful participant. A consequence of this self-limitation is also the empowerment of other thoughts: space is created in the agonal arena or mind for multiple participants or ideas to assert themselves. A philosopher who is able to consider various ideas, without any favouritism, might engage them in an honest battle and in the process strengthen all of them.

However, these battles of ideas need a public to provide them with meaning in the absence of any metaphysical significance; a public is essential in order to authorise a non-metaphysical discourse. Whereas in metaphysical discourse, meaning depends upon abstract principles, e.g. the world of forms, the philosopher who rejects any sort of higher world has no such recourse. A non-metaphysical philosophy can only derive meaning from interpretation, performed from a certain perspective. For this reason, the *Versucher*-philosopher is dependent upon listeners and readers to interpret their words and so provide meaning to them. Nietzsche's texts and concepts, from the *Übermensch* to Dionysos, remain enigmatic to a certain degree, because there is no fixed signification. The text has to be interpreted, and contested by the agonal public of readers to have any meaning at all. Also, in this manner, Nietzsche's philosophy avoids the closure inherent in metaphysics: the lack of a stable, metaphysical meaning opens up the text to numerous perspectives and interpretations. Thus,

[25] In an unpublished note (NL 16[16], KSA 7.398), Nietzsche describes three more factors that keep the individual and their possible excessive selfishness within bounds: the agon itself (presumably other roughly equal contenders), the public and love, φιλία. One could speculate on the importance of the last factor in Plato's erotic philosophical agon: Could φιλία for wisdom, following the name of the practice as φιλοσοφία, bind the potentially destructive effects of eros and prevent dialectics from becoming eristics?

Nietzsche, in his later writings, strives to create a public by frequently refering to "we" and "our".[26]

The last important question, when considering Nietzsche's text as an agon, is what it attempts to show to the public of readers. As I have shown above, the agon of the ancient Greeks was primarily about showcasing one's excellence, and Plato adopted this principle when he made the dialectical agon about showcasing philosophical excellence or ἀρετὴ ἀληθής. However, how could Nietzsche's philosophy, which recognises evaluations such as excellence as being only perspectivally valid, be striving for a determinate form of excellence? I would argue that Nietzsche's texts, so as to avoid any sort of closed meaning of excellence, show excess vitality as excellence instead.[27] Excess vitality forms a pivotal element in the *Versuch,* since it drives the attempt to exceed discourse and break it open to different perspectives constitutive of life. Both Nietzsche's earlier works and his latest are filled with these excessive claims. For this reason, Alexander Nehamas, in his famous study *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, calls hyperbole the single most pervasive feature of his writing (1985, 22-24). To name a few examples that Nehamas offers: Greek tragedy died by suicide (BT 11, KSA 1.75), cruelty is behind all festivals (GM II 6, KSA 5.302) and Christianity is the greatest curse on humankind (AC 62, KSA 6.253). The objective of these hyperboles, this textual excessiveness, is, according to Nehemas, to attract the reader's attention and draw them into the argument (1985, 27). Based on the previous discussion, we could extend Nehemas' claim towards the idea that excessiveness encourages agonal participation. Excessive claims not only attract readers, but also motivate them to contest the claim, to become participants in the agon, and provoke them to critique, due to the suspicion that the matter must be more nuanced. As Nietzsche states: "One needs thunder and heavenly fireworks to address slack and sleepy senses" (Z II Virtous, KSA 4.120).[28]

2.3 Self-overcoming

One of the most famous pronouncements from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* emphasises both the erotic and the warlike nature of philosophy: "Courageous, untroubled [*unbekümmert*], mocking, violent—thus does Wisdom want us: she is a woman [*Weib*] and always loves only a warrior" *(*Z I Reading, KSA 4.49). Nietzsche introduces the philosopher as a sort of warrior and suggests that only by having the qualities of one will he be able to win over the woman Wisdom. Similarly to Plato, Nietzsche could be seen as encouraging the philosopher to have ἀνδρεία, courage and other "manly" qualities. Thus, when writing about philosophy as *Experiment* and *Versuch,* Nietzsche often calls attention to the danger involved in these experiments and invokes war as a metaphor for this type of philosophising. For the knowledge-seeker who sees life as an experiment, knowledge "is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings also have their dance- and playgrounds" (GS 324, KSA 3.553). In *Beyond Good and Evil,* the real philosopher is said to "[feel] the weight and duty of a hundred experiments and temptations [*Versuchen und Versuchungen*] of life", to "constantly [put] *himself* at risk" and to "[play] the rough game" (BGE 205, KSA 5.133). What is the danger in Nietzsche's philosophy of *Versuch* or experiment, and what does the Nietzschean philosopher need to overcome with his "manly" qualities? Whereas for Plato erotic desire needed to be directed towards the world of Forms and the agon of dialectics was the road towards it, for Nietzsche, erotic desire is for immanent life and the agon of *Versuch* is an attempt to stay true to the dynamism of life. Plato's erotic contest for the world of Forms leads to the production of true

[26] E.g. some of the chapter titles of BGE or aphorism titles of book V of GS or his invocation of "we immoralists [*wir Immoralisten*]" in e.g. D Preface 4 (KSA 3.16) BGE 226 (KSA 5.162), TI Morality 6 (KSA 6.87). See also Siemens 2021, 69-73.
[27] Conway makes same observation (1997a, 67).
[28] Cf. "the magic of extremes" in 10[94] (KSA 12.510).

excellence, ἀρετὴ ἀληθής. However, what is the result of Nietzsche's attempt to stay true to life and to showcase excess vitality in his agonal *Versuchen?*

The best way into these questions might be a more detailed account of Nietzsche's conception of life. In *On the Genealogy of Morality,* the law of life (*das Gesetz des Lebens*) is designated as self-overcoming (*Selbstüberwindung*) (GM III 27, KSA 5.410).[29] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* presents the secret of life as being "*that which must always overcome [überwinden] itself*" (Z II Self-overcoming, KSA 4.148).[30] Self-overcoming is explained as a phenomenon or creature submitting to a law it itself has created and which brings about its own demise and transition into something new (Z II Self-overcoming, KSA 4.148; GM III 2, KSA 5.410). Nietzsche's example in the *Genealogy,* which is also one of the main themes in *Beyond Good and Evil* and in Nietzsche's oeuvre in general, is the self-overcoming of truthfulness (GM III 27, KSA 5.410). Concisely put, the process starts with Christian morality placing a high value on truth, one could think of confessions and the watchful eye of God. Slowly, this will to truth leads to the questioning of everything and, consequently, to the destruction of the Christian dogma. Ultimately, and this is Nietzsche's step, the will to truth starts to question itself as a moral imperative and one has to conclude, for example, that deception is also necessary for life (e.g. BGE 4, KSA 5.18; HH Preface 1, KSA 2.14). The result is a new conception of truth that incorporates its conditions, such as the necessity of perspectivism and deception, and not simply the rejection of the idea of truth. This process of self-overcoming is not limited to concepts such as truth, but could be ascribed as well to institutions, a powerful juridical system ends up with lighter or no punishments (GM II 10, KSA 5.309), and living beings, the transformation from species (*Art)* to "overspecies (Über-Art)" and from man (*Mensch)* to overman (*Übermensch*) (Z Preface 3, KSA 4.14; Z I Bestowing, KSA 4.98).

Self-overcoming is powered by the excess, inherent in Nietzsche's conception of eros and showcased by his textual agon. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche contrasts the role of love in his philosophy with the role it plays for the idealists: their love is scornfully called "immaculate perception (*unbefleckte Erkenntnis*)" and moonlike, since the moon is unable to heat and nurture, to create, as the sun does (Z II Perception, KSA 4.156-159).[31] The other conception of love, solar-like, is the will to procreate and the will to create beyond oneself (*über sich hinaus schaffen*). It is excessive, the sun desires to drink up the sea, and transformative, the sea becomes air. However, the transformative aspect of Nietzsche's conception means that love rhymes with going-under (*Untergehen)*: "Will to love […] means being willing to die too" (Z II Perception, KSA 4.157). For this reason, the philosopher is both a lover and a warrior: he or she needs to have the courage to go under for his or her love. Nietzsche calls idealists cowards (*Feiglingen*) for not willing to accept this consequence of love and "fleeing into the ideal" (TI Ancients 2, KSA 6.156). Earlier in the book, Zarathustra lists the kind of people he loves and are capable of self-overcoming, of going-over (*Übergehen*) and going-under (*Untergehen*), and many of them are driven by excess: such as, living in order to understand, an addiction to virtue, a squandering soul and an overfull

[29] We should be sensitive to the fact that Nietzsche places self-overcoming in between quotation marks in the *Genealogy* and designates it as a moral term in BGE 257(KSA 5.205) and CW Preface (KSA 6.11). What this means for Nietzsche's conception of self-overcoming is a worthwhile question for further research.

[30] In the passage from *Zarathustra*, self-overcoming is presented as closely connected with the will to power. To keep this study clear and focussed, I have left out the complicated discussion of the will to power. However, note that the will to power seems to share some important similarities with (Platonic) eros: the will power is procreative (*der unerschöpfte zeugende Lebens-Wille)* (Z II Self-Overcoming, KSA 4.147) and aroused by beauty (TI Skirmishes 20, KSA 6.124).

[31] Considering the discussed TI 23, Plato seems to fall in between both conceptions of love. In contrast to Schopenhauer and the idealists, he views love as procreative. On the other hand, Plato's rejection of sensuality and the excess of eros, place his views on love squarely on the idealist side.

(*übervoll)* soul (Z Preface 4, KSA 4.16-8). Also, Zarathustra himself is motivated by excess to start his speeches (his *Untergang*): he is weary (*überdrussig*) of his wisdom and wants to overflow (*überfliessen*) like a cup filled to the brim (Z Preface 1, KSA 4.12).

The close relation between self-overcoming and going-under explains the danger Nietzsche often refers to when describing the philosophers of the future, who must constantly put themselves at risk, since the result of self-overcoming involves the sacrifice of the present self and the outcome of the transformation is uncertain. However, there is a second, philosophical, danger for Nietzsche concerning his project of stimulating the self-overcoming of truth. Interestingly, he speaks in similar agonal language about the self-overcoming of truth, as Plato spoke about the great agon to be as moral as possible (526d-e, 608b):

> The thinker - that is now the being in whom the drive to truth and those life-preserving errors are fighting their first battle [*Kampf*], after the drive to truth has *proven* itself to be a life preserving power, too. In relation to the significance of this battle, everything else is a matter of indifference: the ultimate question about the condition of life is posed here, and the first attempt [*Versuch*] is made here to answer the question through experiment. To what extent can truth stand to be incorporated [*Einverleibung*]? - that is the question; that is the experiment (GS 110, KSA 3.471).

Nietzsche's “great agon” comes down to the question of whether the will to truth, which has always been transcendent in orientation, can be made part of, incorporated, into a philosophy that attempts to affirm immanent life. As we have seen, Nietzsche’s attempt at the incorporation of truth, with philosophy as *Versuch,* is also a staging of the battle (*Kampf)*, or perhaps better agon, between truth (saying) and life (unsaying). His discursive statements do not escape metaphysics but they are challenged by stylistic openness and self-opposition. All these extra-discursive elements also create an excessiveness in Nietzsche’s text and in that manner, as Blondel (1991, 31) noticed, his text follows the structure of self-overcoming. Questioning the will to truth discursively, and challenging it extra-discursively, are what Nietzsche calls a *Wagnis* (a daring, risky undertaking) “of which there is perhaps no greater” (BGE 1, KSA 5.14). In his notes concerning Zarathustra, he states: “*We are attempting an experiment* [*Versuch*] *with the truth!* Possibly, humanity will perish from it. Now then!” (NL 25[305] KSA 11.88). Life, as becoming and multiplicity, stands in contrast with thinking, as conditional upon the principles of non-contradiction and identity. The dare to incorporate thinking into life gives rise to Nietzsche's method of *Versuch* as an effort to philosophise differently, in accord with life.

Nietzsche’s embrace of dangerous experiments, excess and daring undertakings contrasts strongly with Plato’s attempt to prevent anything from happening that could turn the soul away from philosophy. He condemned excessive agonal affects and warned of the dangers of eros, while Nietzsche is more interested in strengthening these instincts to provide the energy for self-overcoming. He reminds us that any weakening of agonal affects diminishes cultural production: the good and the bad Eris depend on the same affects, as argued in *Homer’s Contest*, and the strengthening of life might necessarily involve the strengthening of these affects (BGE 23, KSA 5.38). On the other hand, in both passages, Nietzsche is keenly aware of the danger of the agonal affects. Partly, he considers this danger necessary, “going over” involves “going under” as we have seen. Partly, he might put his trust in formal functions of the agon, such as approximate equal strength and external bounds, as described in *Homer’s Contest* and later in his War-Praxis (EH Wise 7, KSA 6.274-5), so as to avoid the potentially destructive consequences of agonal affects. As for eros, although Nietzsche admits that philosophy requires a certain repression of common forms of eros – a great philosopher cannot be married, he claims (GM III 7, KSA 5.350-1) – he is less concerned about the potential “madness of eros”, the risk Plato saw exemplified in Alcibiades. In Zarathustra’s words: “One must still have chaos within, in order to give birth to

a dancing star" (Z Preface 5, KSA 4.19). Nietzsche praises "tropical men" such as Cesare Borgia and condemns the moderation that the moralists, we can think of Plato, commend (BGE 197, KSA 5.117). Their moderation stands in direct opposition to the danger and risky experiments that are necessary for self-overcoming.

Chapter 3
Nietzsche's Transvaluation of Platonism

3.1 The Project of Critical Transvaluation

As argued in the previous chapter, life becomes the central erotic object in Nietzsche's philosophy. However, according to Nietzsche's diagnosis in *Twilight of Idols*, all the wise men of all ages have judged life negatively (TI Socrates 1, KSA 6.67). He calls previous philosophers "mummies" who "have been using only conceptual mummifies [*Begriffs-Mumien*]; nothing real makes it through their hands alive" (TI Reason 1, KSA 6.74). Alternatively, he calls his philosophical predecessors heartless and compares them to vampires: "some long-concealed blood-sucker who starts with the senses and finally leaves behind and spares only bones and rattling" (GS 372, KSA 3.624). What all these rather strong metaphors serve to make clear is that philosophy so far has always led to an impoverishment of life. Why? Nietzsche argues that the idea of metaphysical truth, idealism, leads to the degeneration of life: it alienates humans from the natural process of self-overcoming, the law of life, prevents them from the affirmation of the world as it appears to us and makes us mistrust the body and instincts (see e.g. Z I Despisers, KSA 4.39-41; Z I Bestowing, KSA 4.98; TI Reason 1-6, KSA 6.74-9). In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche describes the problem more straightforwardly although in no less strong terms: "When the emphasis of life is put on the 'beyond [*Jenseits*]' rather than on life itself when it is put *on nothingness* [*Nichts*] -, then the emphasis [*Schwergewicht*] has been completely removed from life" (AC 43, KSA 6.217). How can Nietzsche work in a tradition, philosophy, that until now has been hostile to life, while he attempts to promote life? I have argued above that his agonal method of *Versuch* avoids metaphysical closure, the beyond that is so hostile to life, but the question remains how Nietzsche relates himself to his predecessors. Why does he still call himself a philosopher and hope to encourage a new type of philosopher when the philosophical project has been so problematic?

The relation Nietzsche attempts, and encourages the philosophers of the future to have, with metaphysics, and the Platonic-Christian values that are based on it, is one of transvaluation (*Umwertung*).[32] Transvaluation is a key term in Nietzsche's later philosophy and perhaps best described in the *Preface* to *On the Genealogy of Morality*:

> Have they [the value judgements of good and evil] up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing [*Gedeihen*]? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration [*Entartung*] of life? Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness [*Fülle*], strength and will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?" (GM Preface 3, KSA 5.250).

Transvaluation questions the value of values for life. Or as Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "The question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves, and perhaps even cultivates [*Art-züchtend]*, the type" (BGE 4, KSA 5.18). The goal of Nietzschean transvaluation is, thus, the creation of values that promote human flourishing, a fullness of life that could lead to self-overcoming. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 203 (KSA 5.126), Nietzsche explicitly identifies *Umwertung* as the central task of the new philosophers, the philosophers of the future. In a later aphorism (BGE 211, KSA 5.145), we learn that the real philosopher is a legislator (*Gesetzgeber*), a creator of values, so the task of philosophical transvaluation is the creation of life-affirming and life-promoting values. However, as the term *Umwertung* implies, the project consists not of an outright denial of all previous values but of a re-evaluation of them. I think it is important to consider that transvaluation involves three

[32] See Siemens (2021, 7n9) for an overview of all instances where Nietzsche uses the term *Umwertung* as a designation for his philosophical task.

moments: appropriation, critical evaluation and replacement. The Nietzschean transvaluator appropriates a certain phenomenon or value, perhaps for its strong influence, perhaps for its potential; then, he critiques it according to the standard of life, or through the "prism of life" (BT Preface 4, KSA 1.17); and lastly, he attempts to replace or reconceptualise the value or phenomenon in the service of life. In the next section, I will trace these three moments in Nietzsche's transvaluation of the erotic and agonal elements in Plato's philosophy.

3.2 The First Transvaluation

What seems to make Platonism such an important target of appropriation for Nietzsche's transvaluation is the fact that he recognizes Plato as his last predecessor; that is, a true philosopher who created values. In the late preface to *Daybreak,* Plato is called the last successful "philosophical architect" in Europe (D Preface 3, KSA 3.13). In earlier versions of BGE 211 (KSA 5.145), the aphorism in which Nietzsche described the real philosopher as legislating new values, Plato is named as an example (NL 26[407], KSA 11.259; NL 38[13], KSA 11.612).[33] Kant and Hegel, the great German philosophers in Nietzsche's and our time, are called mere 'philosophical labourers' whose task is to press established values into formulas (BGE 211, KSA 5.144). Even though Plato might have been a "true philosopher", he does not escape Nietzsche's charge against the life-denying nature of previous philosophers. In *Ecce Homo*, he calls Plato's philosophy "in a certain sense" an example of "the *degenerate* [*entartenden]* instinct that turns against life with subterranean vindictiveness [*Rachsucht*]" (EC BT 2, KSA 6.311). Plato's idealist philosophy is a form of life-negation: his emphasis on the philosophical truth in the realm of ideas has shifted the focus away from life and denied perspectivism as the basic condition of life. Nevertheless, Plato's philosophy is only "in a certain sense" a denial of life, a caveat that will be explored further below. First, however, we should consider in what way exactly Plato's philosophy constitutes a turning against life.

The section of the *Twilight of the Idols* on *The Problem of Socrates* offers the most comprehensive account of the later Nietzsche's critique of Plato. Although the section is on Socrates, Nietzsche discusses philosophical tendencies common to both Plato and Socrates, and he often states that he identifies Socrates partly as a proxy for Plato (e.g. BGE 190, KSA 5.111, EH UM 3, 6.320). Both Socrates and Plato employ the philosophical method of dialectics, which Nietzsche identifies with the tyranny of reason. Dialectics employs reason as a tyrant that denies other parts of the soul their power: "[O]ne has to imitate Socrates and establish a permanent state of *daylight* against all dark desires [*Begehrungen*] – the daylight of reason [*Vernuft*]. One has to be clever, clear, and bright at any cost: any concession to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads *downwards* . . ." (TI Socrates 10, KSA 6.72). The need for the tyranny of reason is born from the problem of the anarchy of the instincts: Plato and Socrates lived in a time where the instincts were no longer in natural harmony, as they supposedly were in previous, perhaps Homeric, times, and every soul was in danger of being tyrannised by its drives (TI Socrates 9, KSA 6.71). In Plato's *Symposium,* the problem is exemplified by introducing the figure of Alcibiades who turned from a promising, excellent young man into a self-indulgent and depraved traitor. Plato, as seen in the first chapter, was very concerned about the risks of the drives, the erotic and agonal affects, and attempted to pacify them through his warnings and their sublimation into philosophical desires. As we have seen in chapter one, the result of this sublimation, dialectics, is denying all claims that cannot be rationally articulated or defended – and, in this manner, the method of *Versuch* is diametrically opposed to dialectics – its power and validity. While the rational tyranny of dialectics is meant to be a cure for the anarchy of the instincts (TI Socrates 11, KSA 6.72-3), it has led to "self-vampirism" and the "mummification" of the world.

[33] I owe the observation that in NL 38[13] Nietzsche uses Plato as an example of a real philosopher to Lampert (2001, 197n17).

The Greeks' agonal practices are damaged by this tyranny of reason. Although Nietzsche, as I have explored, designates dialectics as "a further development and internalisation of the agon", he also considers the Greek philosophers the counter-movement to the ancient world's agonal instinct (TI Ancients 3, KSA 6.157). Plato attempted, as described in chapter one, to turn *philonikia* into *philosophia* and his condemnation of eristics counters the core motivations of the agon. In *Homer's Contest*, Nietzsche described how the agon is powered by the "negative" affects, such as love of victory, envy, jealousy, ambition and grudges (HC KSA 1.786). A condemnation and suppression of these affects ultimately removes the motivation behind engaging in the agon and thereby destroys its stimulating and binding effect. The agon was a cultural institution that enabled the ancient Greeks to channel their destructive affects into productive and non-destructive agonal engagements, transforming the bad Eris into the good Eris. Rejecting Eris completely, as Plato did, is a way of denying one the necessary energies of life that have to increase with the enhancement of life, regardless of its dangerous potential (BGE 23, KSA 5.38). Moreover, rejecting the agonal instinct removes its productive potential: Nietzsche, just like his colleague Burckhardt, considered the channelling of Eris into the agon the reason behind the Greeks' cultural achievements (HC KSA 1.789). Hence, Plato's condemnation of the agonal affects makes him an "anti-Greek" and "a symptom of decay" (TI Socrates 2, KSA 6.67-8). Additionally, Acampora points to the fact that Socrates' role in the agon as a superior contestant, one that nobody can beat, destroys it (2022, 83). As we have seen, Nietzsche explained that the agon needs a rough equality of power between participants, to keep functioning as an open arena in which everybody could attempt to better an opponent while discharging their agonal affects (HC KSA 1.788-9). Thus, in his dialogues, Plato encourages his contemporaries to join Socrates in his non-eristic quest for wisdom and, in case they still want to attempt eristics, as is for example Thrasymachus in the *Republic* the superior Socrates will surely beat them (350d).

Regarding eros, Plato made two fundamental mistakes according to Nietzsche: he conceived of eros as a lack and thought it could transcend the body. To start with the latter: both Plato and Nietzsche think that the sublimation of eros needs to start with cultivating bodily eros. Plato describes this process with the ladder of love in the *Symposium,* and Nietzsche expressed his agreement with Plato, contra Schopenhauer, that sexual interest often forms the basis of higher culture (TI Skirmishes 23, KSA 6.126). However, Plato argues that ultimately eros can transcend bodily dimension and that the philosopher can come to love the abstract Forms. Nietzsche disagrees**:** the body and its health should always be a central concern and any focus on the beyond counteracts that (Z I Behind KSA 4.35-38; EH Destiny 8, KSA 6.374).

Secondly, as seen in chapter two, Nietzsche conceptualised eros as excess in contrast to Plato's conception of it as a lack. I will consider the consequences of this on the basis of Nietzsche's ideas. According to him, a negative judgement of life has a physiological origin in a descending form of life (TI Socrates 2, KSA 6.68). Perhaps considering eros as a lack is another sign of a descending form of life, since its incapacity and inability to fulfil desires comes to the foreground. From the idea of eros as a lack, it is a small step to idealism, since as Nietzsche states, we humans need to will something rather than nothing (GM III 1, KSA 5.339). If satisfaction in the sensual world is presented as imperfect and inferior, a perfect world of ideas might become the object of eros. However, the desire for this ideal world represses life and the body. As Nietzsche explains in the following passage from *The Antichrist:*

> The enormous lie of personal immortality destroys all reason [*Vernuft*], everything natural in the instincts, - everything beneficial [*wohlthätig*] and life-enhancing in the instincts, everything that guarantees the future, now arouses mistrust. To live *in this way*, so that there is no *point* [*Sinn*] to life any more, *this* now becomes the 'meaning [*Sinn*]' of life . . . What is the point of public spirit, of being grateful for your lineage or for your ancestors, what is the point of working

> together, of confidence, of working towards any sort of common goal [*Gesammt-Wohl*] or even keeping one in mind? . . . (AC 43, KSA 6.217).

The passage about Christianity seems applicable to Platonism too, considering Nietzsche's frequent identification of the two and Plato's view that immortality was the outcome of the successful ascension of the ladder of love (212a). Idealism removes the focus from the world around us and, as such, weakens life. In this manner, Socrates' statement in the *Phaedo* that philosophy is the practice of dying (67e), makes perfect sense.

Before I turn to Nietzsche's transvaluation, I want to point out that it can be concluded, on the basis of Plato's own ideas and Nietzsche's criticism, that Platonism is self-defeating. As shown in chapter one, Plato's philosophy needs strong erotic and agonal affects that can be transvaluated towards philosophy; or, as Plato himself states, the qualities that make the philosopher risk corrupting him as well (491b). Plato's caution about sensuality might have been an appropriate consideration in his time – Nietzsche suggests that Plato's contemporaries had stronger senses than us (BGE 14, KSA 5.14) and thinks that an age can benefit from ideals opposed to its tendencies (BGE 212, KSA 5.146) – but, considering that we modern people lack these strong senses, Plato's caution would constitute a further unproductive weakening of the senses. Plato's anti-sensuality, perhaps fitting for his age, has set the stage for the complete Christian denial of the body and weakening of life (e.g. TI Ancients 2, KSA 6.156). In this way, the end-point of Plato's philosophy is Nietzsche's famous last man who has given up on all striving, does not differentiate himself and just wants a bit of happiness (Z Preface 5, KSA 4.19-20). The lack of a longing to move beyond the self, either as self-transcendence or self-overcoming, is despicable for both Plato and Nietzsche. In a certain sense, then, we could read Nietzsche's attempt at transvaluating Plato as an attempt to save the philosophical project.

Thus, to conclude this section, the result of Nietzsche's transvaluation of Plato's philosophy as an erotic contest is its replacement by a different philosophy as an erotic contest. While Plato's philosophy encourages engagement in the purely rational agon of dialectics motivated by an erotic desire for the transcendent world of Forms, Nietzsche's philosophy is a collection of agonal *Versuchen* that are motivated by the erotic desire for immanent life. As I have shown, eros is of a different nature in Nietzsche, a form of excess and always bodily, than in Plato, for whom it is a lack and ultimately a motivation for bodily transcendence. Nietzsche's method of *Versuch* is thoroughly agonal and is also an attempt to continue the contest, while Plato's dialectics, although based on a transvaluation of the physical agon, condemns the agonal instincts in favour of a collaborative quest for wisdom. Most importantly, dialectics, by only valuing the rational articulable, intends a closure against life, denies the movement of life in favour of transcendent rational truths, while the *Versuch* attempts to open itself towards life by integrating the extra-discursive and avoiding any conclusive statements. Nevertheless, as I hope I have sufficiently shown, in both Plato's and Nietzsche's thinking the agonal and erotic are essential for the project of philosophy. Both philosophers view eros as an essential motivating force, promote the virtues of the warrior in the spiritual realm and create an agonal public in their texts, either through the dialogical format or by invoking communities of readers. Moreover, both philosophies are attempts to go beyond the ordinary limits of the everyday. Plato's dialectical journey promises immortality, a superior satisfaction in the world of the Forms and a virtuous life. Nietzsche's idea of self-overcoming, on the contrary, is thoroughly immanent and sounds, therefore, perhaps less rosy: a dangerous excess motivates the creation of something new. In Zarathustra's words: "I love those who do not know how to live except by going under [*Untergehende*], for they are those who go over and across [*Hinübergehenden*]" (Z Preface 4, KSA 4.17).

3.3 The Second Transvaluation

However, Nietzsche's first transvaluation runs into a number of problems with regard to its goal to stay true to life. The first, and perhaps most famous, of these objections is raised by Heidegger in his assertion that Nietzsche's philosophy is still metaphysical and merely turns traditional, Platonic, metaphysical concepts on their head (1991, 25-33, 230-232). Nietzsche's thought completes metaphysics by inverting the hierarchy of the transcendent and the sensual, but in this reversal still holds onto the distinction that one of these worlds constitutes the true is and the other is not truly being. Nietzsche's ideas on the eternal recurrence of the same and the will to power are for Heidegger the prime metaphysical doctrines that locate true being in the sensual world.[34] However, in chapter two, we have seen that the methodology of *Versuch* avoids metaphysical closure. When we read these "metaphysical doctrines" as *Versuchen* instead, Nietzsche's philosophy, in this sense at least, avoids Heidegger's critique: the will to power or eternal recurrence do not constitute a new metaphysical doctrine, but are experiments to think beyond the confines of traditional metaphysics. However, Nietzsche's insistence on immanence and his erotic focus on life, do risk becoming metaphysically charged. The problem is that life set as an object for eros constantly risks becoming a metaphysical concept. As soon as the object of philosophy is called life, it has been reduced to a concept and included in metaphysical discourse. In this manner, the concept of life is part of the discursive closure against life and becoming. As Blondel showed, in order to stay true to life, to move beyond the metaphysical concept, the idea of life as an erotic goal has to be broken up and contested by extra-discursive elements. Another problem, raised by Siemens (2023, 237), is that Nietzsche cannot just negate Platonism and metaphysical discourse without betraying his own goal of the total affirmation of life. In a philosophy of radical immanence, Platonism also stems from life and is a form of life. Were Nietzsche simply to transvaluate and then reject Platonism, he would deny an aspect of life, counteracting his goal to love the whole of life. These problems point to the fact that if Nietzsche kept to the first transvaluation of Plato's erotic contest, he would betray his own philosophy.

However, when we consider Nietzsche as opposing Platonism in an agonal manner, we can start formulating solutions to the above problems. Nietzsche's transvaluation must not only be seen as "reversing", Plato's erotic contest, but also as creating a contest between his philosophy and Plato's, in order to complete his transvaluation. Siemens argues that Nietzsche engages in an agon with metaphysical thinking and Platonism, which performatively enacts life and for that reason avoids the metaphysical trap of just describing life (2021, 67). In this reading, Nietzsche's discourse might reduce life to just another metaphysical concept, but his style, and all the other elements that constitute the *Versuch,* display life and do not reduce it to metaphysics. Moreover, as we have seen in chapter two, agonal contestation never includes an outright denial of the opponent, but hovers in between limited affirmation and negation of the opponent. Referring to "the Platonism for the people", Nietzsche states: "The church has always wanted to destroy its enemies: but we, on the other hand, we immoralists and anti-Christians, think that we benefit from the existence of the church" (TI Morality 3, KSA 6.84). Consequently, Nietzsche's philosophy might benefit from the existence of Platonism and does not aim to destroy it. In this section, I will show that he maintains an agonal tension in his own texts between Plato's idealism and his own life-affirming philosophy, while in the next section, I will consider whether this agon between the two philosophies might be the most fruitful way to continue the philosophical project.

There are many implicit and explicit forms of agonal tension with Platonism or elements thereof in Nietzsche's texts. I will consider two of the more obvious examples that clearly show the formal functions of the agon, as seen in chapter two, and, in that manner, support the claim

[34] I have summarised Heidegger's elaborate critique in this short statement. Further research could benefit from a deeper engagement with Heidegger ideas on Nietzsche's relation with Platonism.

that Nietzsche strives to maintain an agonal tension with Platonism. The first of these examples is the *Preface* of *Beyond Good and Evil* (KSA 5.11-3), which both condemns and honours Platonism. On the one hand, dogmatism, of which Nietzsche mentions Platonism as a prime example, is a supreme failure. He states: *"*[T]he worst, most prolonged, and most dangerous of all errors to this day was a dogmatist's error, namely Plato's invention of pure spirit [*Geist*] and the Good in itself". On the other hand, Nietzsche asks us to be grateful towards dogmatism, since "the struggle against Plato […] has created a magnificent tension of spirit [*Geist*] in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known: with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals". Platonism is both the worst and the best thing that has happened to us: it is for the agonal public, the readers, to decide if the ideas can be synthesized and whether the fight against Platonism is empowering or if Plato's ideas are dangerous errors best avoided. Next, in one set of questions, Nietzsche manages to both negate and affirm the figure of Plato, when he asks: "'How could such a disease [*Krankheit*] [of dogmatism] infect Plato, the most beautiful outgrowth of antiquity? Did the evil Socrates corrupt him after all?' ". Plato is negated as a sick individual whose philosophical ideas are shaped by that sickness. However, Plato is also affirmed as "the most beautiful outgrowth of antiquity" and the blame for his sickness is shifted onto Socrates. Again, it is for the public to decide for themselves what could have happened here. Is it really Socrates who corrupted Plato or is it perhaps the anarchy of the instincts as Nietzsche later argued in *Twilight of the Idols*? If Plato's idealism is the sickness, is it then the artistry of the dialogues that makes Plato beautiful?[35] Or should we heed Nietzsche's posthumous note that Plato is worth more than his philosophy and could even form the best refutation for Christianity?[36] But what would Plato be without his philosophy?

The second example in which Nietzsche clearly engages in an agonal manner with Plato and his philosophy is in *Gay Science* 372 (KSA 3.623-4). As mentioned earlier, GS 372 contains similar considerations as BGE 14 (KSA 5.28-9), but is more interesting for our purpose than the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil,* because it also offers a clear example of Nietzsche's critique recoiling upon himself. GS 372 offers a heavy critique of philosophical idealism, where idealism is compared to vampirism and ideas are said to have *"*always lived off the 'blood' of the philosopher; they always drained his senses and even, if you believe it, his 'heart' ". Platonism is implied at the beginning of the aphorism by referring to the "kingdom of ideas" and by referring to the philosopher's superstition that all music is distracting, siren-music, recalling Plato's critique of poetry. However, when Nietzsche explicitly mentions Plato at the end of the aphorism, it is surprisingly positive: "[A]ll philosophical idealism until now was something like an illness [*Krankheit*], except where, as in Plato's case, it was the caution of an overabundant [*überreichen*] and dangerous health; the fear of *overpowerful* [*übermächtigen*] senses; the shrewdness [*Klugheit*] of a shrewd Socratic".This statement forms a surprising turn on the former critique of idealism that seemed to implicate Plato and contrasts greatly with the above-discussed *Preface* of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Plato is suggested to have been infected with the illness of dogmatism. Moreover, the aphorism also questions Nietzsche's extremely strong, opposition to idealism by considering Plato's idealism as a clever reaction to an overabundant health. We, the agonal public, are asked to consider that idealist philosophy might have its place in certain times and with certain people and could come to new and different conclusions about its usefulness. In the penultimate sentence of GS 372, we witness Nietzsche's critique recoiling upon himself. He asks: "Maybe we moderns

[35] Other statements could be used to confirm or deny this idea. For example, in BGE 7, Plato's style is called magnificent (KSA 5.21). However, in TI Ancients 2, Nietzsche says he does not admire Plato's artistry and call his style decadent (KSA 6.155).

[36] "Nicht das Gute, sondern der Höhere! Plato ist mehr werth als seine Philosophie! Unsere Instinkte sind besser als ihr Ausdruck in Begriffen. Unser Leib ist weiser als unser Geist! *Wenn* Plato jener Büste in Neapel glich, so haben wir da die beste Widerlegung *alles* Christenthums!" (NL 26[355], KSA 11.244)

are not healthy enough *to need* Plato's idealism?" Thus, he implies that his own critique of idealism might have been performed from a position of sickness, while at the same time implying that Plato was healthier than himself. The consideration that Nietzsche's critique was enacted from a position of sickness, while Plato's idealism came from a position of health, completely breaks up the aphorism and even allows us to place questions marks to Nietzsche's transvaluation of Platonism. The thoughts do not necessarily invalidate the problems Nietzsche raises, but open his critique up to the critique of the public and invite them to continue his thinking, perhaps from a position of health.

Before I continue to consider what could be fruitful about an erotic contest between Nietzsche and Plato, I wish to treat a common objection to the two examples above: Nietzsche just changed his mind about Plato a lot. I attempted to show that, although Nietzsche could be seen as contradicting himself, the purpose of those conflicting statements is to fire up the agon between himself and Plato: sometimes it takes the forms of negation, opposition and critique and other times it involves affirmation, empowering and self-critique. The opposite idea, that Nietzsche changed his mind about Plato a lot in his last few productive years, is raised by both Lampert and Kaufman. Kaufman in a note to GS 372 in his translation of the books, states that it is "clear" that Nietzsche changed his mind about Plato in *Twilight of Idols* with regard to GS 372 (1974b, 333n133). In that work Plato is called a "type of decline" (*Niedergangs-Type)* and said to be "at odds with the basic Hellenic instincts, so moralistic, so proleptically Christian" (TI Socrates 2, KSA 6.67-8; TI Ancients 2, KSA 6.155). Both statements seem opposed to the idea that Plato still possessed the overabundant health of the Greeks. However, what Kaufman does not take into account is that Plato was also already called sick in the *Preface* of *Beyond Good and Evil,* and Lampert, who advances a different final judgement by Nietzsche on Plato, considers that GS 372 on Plato's heath constitutes Nietzsche's final judgement, as reconsidered from the idea of Plato's sickness in the *Preface* to *Beyond Good and Evil* (2004, 217). As I have shown, Nietzsche's opposition to and affirmation of Plato and Platonism can be found in the same aphorisms. His desire to contextually empower or disempower Plato's philosophy for agonal purposes seems a more likely reason for these contradictory statements than a fickle opinion on Plato after a lifelong engagement with him. Both considering Plato, or Nietzsche, as sick and as abundantly healthy are fruitful ways of thinking about idealist philosophy, and we readers could continue one of these tracks and reject the other, or we can attempt to synthesise them.

Normally a philosophy that attempts to hold onto two conflicting positions would be rejected as bad or incoherent, but, with Nietzsche's philosophical method in mind, the practice becomes sensible. The philosophy of *Versuch* is based upon an openness to the multiple perspectives in the movement of life: from one perspective Platonism is a disaster and Plato a decadent, from the other Platonism is an opportunity and Plato the epitome of health. As Richard Bett states in his article on the relationship between Nietzsche and Plato: "Nietzsche brought multiple 'affects' and 'eyes' to bear on Plato" (2019, 268). In this notable exception to the common attempt to find Nietzsche's final position of Nietzsche on Plato, he applies Nietzsche's, previously discussed, new definition of objectivity (GM III 12, KSA 5.365) to his evaluation of Plato. As already discussed, these many "eyes" and "affects" allow the agon between Nietzsche and Plato to continue, which leads to the fruitfulness of agonal confrontation, a possibility to both negate and affirm Plato's philosophy and a prevention of metaphysical closure. These advantages notwithstanding, one could, of course, still object that Nietzsche's position is incoherent. However, even if that may be the case, it agrees with his rejection of the metaphysical opposition of values (BGE 2, KSA 5.17): sickness and health or the danger of corruption and a beneficial influence are not metaphysically opposed for Nietzsche. These judgements are heavily dependent on the perspective they are pronounced from, might change over time and can be closely interlinked. In conclusion, Nietzsche completes the transvaluation of Plato's philosophy not by replacing Platonism, but by

maintaining an agonal tension with it that avoids dogmatic opposition and the metaphysical closure against life.

3.4 Philosophy as Erotic Contest

In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche suggests philosophers need to be the bad conscience of their time (BGE 212, KSA 5.212). Socrates' irony was suited for an age where people still acted as if they were virtuous but no longer were, and "the ideal of a stupid, self-abnegating, humble, selfless humanity" was fitting for the Renaissance where people had an abundance of will and egoism. Our time, Nietzsche suggests, suffers from a weakness of will and, therefore, needs the ideal of hardness and abundance of will. Considering that the weakness of will is ultimately caused by the denial of the senses of idealism, could Nietzsche's philosophy be read as the bad conscience of Platonism? This would mean that Nietzsche's emphasis on excess, the Dionysian and life is part of a performative, agonal challenge to Platonism, which does not necessarily constitute the most suited philosophy for all peoples and ages. Moreover, Nietzsche's philosophy might benefit from, or is perhaps even incomplete or unsuccessful, without an agonal tension with Platonism.

The problem with Nietzsche's philosophy is that the focus on excess vitality, under the sign of Dionysos might be just as destructive as the life-denying effect of Platonism. As Lawrence Hatab states: "Yet we should remember that the Dionysian by itself also represented the danger of nihilism, of abandonment to self-denying ecstasy. In other words, alienation from life can stem from either a static refuge in pure form (Socrates and Plato) or a dynamic refuge in a disintegrating formlessness" (2008, 179). If Nietzsche indeed wants to create a philosophy under the sign of Dionysus (BGE 295, KSA 5.238; TI Ancients 5, KSA 6.160; EC BT 3, KSA 6.311), we should consider the constant risk of destructive excess: Plato's philosophy might burn itself out, but Nietzsche's philosophy risks blowing itself up. A complete affirmation of life and excess seems to lead to the life of a Homeric hero or "blond beast", not that of a philosopher. Moreover, Nietzsche philosophical excess is prone to misunderstanding and misuse, as Nietzsche himself feared (e.g. GS 381 3.633-5; EC Destiny 1, KSA 6.365), and as history has proven. Conway asserts that Nietzsche is "the quintessential loose cannon" who "[i]n the eyes of many readers […] is the consummate anti-priest, a powerful ally in virtually any skirmish with established authority (1997b, 168). Nietzsche calls himself "dynamite" (EC Destiny 1) and, as everybody knows, explosives can be used for all sorts of purposes, beneficial and harmful ones. As Nietzsche himself states, at the relaxation of a great historical tension (we could think of Platonism) "there will appear next to each other, and often mixed up and tangled together, a magnificent, diverse, jungle-like growth [*Heraufwachsen*] and upward striving [*Emporstreben*], a kind of *tropical* tempo in the competition [*Wetteifer*] to grow and an immense [*ungeheures*] destruction [*Zugrundegehen*] and self-destruction [*Sich-zu-Grunde-Richten*]" (BGE 262, KSA 5.216). Does this mean that Nietzsche's philosophy is an experimental move that could lead to both growth and devastation? Could an agonal tension with Platonism prevent some of the dangers and destructions of Nietzscheanism?

In Nietzsche's texts, there are a few different hints that his philosophy of excess benefits from Platonism. First and foremost, Nietzsche aspires to use the tension created by the long fight against Platonism(BGE Preface, KSA 5.12-3). As he explains later in *Beyond Good and Evil:* "The continuous struggle [*Kampf*] with constant unfavourable conditions is […] what causes a type [*Typus*] to become sturdy and hard" (BGE 262, KSA 5.214). When the struggle relaxes, as might happen with the struggle against Platonism, the strength that was used in the struggle is still present to be used for all sorts of different purposes. Nietzsche offers an example in *On the Genealogy of Morality*: the reversal of perspective that idealism created, from life to the ideal world, has trained us in the ability to take up different perspectives and judge their pros and cons (GM III 12, KSA 5.363-5). This latter ability seems essential for

the project of *Umwertung.* Moreover, there is also an advantage to be drawn from Platonism in the present. In *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche explains that we moderns are still motivated by the urge towards certainty in knowledge, but that we have learned to control ourselves and "not easily let go of the questionable character of things" (GS 375, KSA 3.627-8). In this manner, it seems that the new philosopher is both erotically drawn to idealist certainty, which can never be found in the world of becoming, and the "questionable character" of immanent life. The tension between these two erotic desires shapes the new philosopher and might prevent both a life-negating focus on idealism and an unphilosophical focus on life. Next to that, the philosopher has always been, and will always be, shaped by the ascetic ideal. The philosopher needs:

> freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, business, duties, worries; the dance, bounce and flight of ideas; good, thin, clear, free, dry air, like the air in the mountains, in which all animal existence becomes more spiritual and takes wings; peace in every basement; every dog nicely on the lead; no hostile barking and shaggy rancune; no gnawing worms of wounded ambition; bowels regular and under control, busy as a milling mechanism but remote; the heart alien, transcendent [*Jenseits*], expectant [*zukünftig*], posthumous … (GM III 8, KSA 5.352).

A description that sounds more similar to Platonic anti-sensualism than Nietzschean excess. Furthermore, Nietzsche states that poverty, humility and chastity can be found in the life of every philosopher (GM III 8). I leave it to the reader to trace these marks of asceticism in Nietzsche's own life, but note that Nietzsche also refers to his desert, his ascetic environment, in GM III 8 (KSA 5.353).[37] What this passage shows is that for all his appreciation for the excess of the Dionysian, Nietzsche and the Nietzschean philosopher also need the ascetic ideal; they might need some sort of rejection of the senses and of life to practice philosophy effectively.

An erotic contest with Platonism might curb the dangerous excesses of Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy and provide the missing ingredients in Nietzsche's thinking. The reader would be both erotically attracted to Plato's certainty and Nietzsche's wisdom of life. The binding effect of the agon could prevent the risk of Platonism cancelling itself out through its denial of sensuality and the risk of Nietzscheanism blowing itself up in excess. Those attracted to the erotic quest for wisdom, could both be energised by the agon between the two – the *stimulating* function of the agon – and be prevented from dangers of both philosophies – the bounding function of the agon. However, a Dionysian philosophy is in constant danger of breaking the agonal elements of the *Versuch* and the agonal tension that it keeps with idealist philosophy. And Nietzsche himself sometimes seems to prefer destruction, antagonism over agonism: "If a shrine [*Heiligthum*] is to be set up*, a shrine has to be destroyed*: that is the law [*Gesetz*] – show me an example where this does not apply! . . ." (GM II 24, KSA 335). So, Nietzsche also thinks that values need to be destroyed for other values to take their place; the destructive function of the Dionysian is also an important part of Nietzsche's philosophy, something that is lost in the above-discussed theory of agonal tension with Platonism.[38] Is, then an agonal tension with Plato's philosophy enough to complete Nietzsche's *Umwertung* or does Platonism need to be, partially, destroyed?[39] If so, eradicating Platonism would, as

[37] Nietzsche compares his study Piazza di San Marco in Venice to a desert and, then, sensually describes when this location is at its most beautiful. Does the sensual description of this study suggest that he is no life-denying ascetic and that one can merely use the power of the ascetic ideal to improve one's spirituality?

[38] For more examples see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* e.g. Z II Self-overcoming, Z III Tablets 29 (also quoted at the end of TI), and Nietzsche's descriptions of his Dionysian philosophy, e.g. EC BT 3, EC Destiny 2.

[39] See Siemens 2021, 276-279, for a careful consideration of a few of the problems with the agonal model of *Umwertung.*

shown, invalidate important goals of Nietzsche's philosophical project and, moreover, it would endanger the philosophical project itself with the dynamite of Dionysian excess.

Perhaps necessarily, there is no answer to these questions to be found in Nietzsche: his transvaluation is an attempt to break open philosophy to the movement of life, self-overcoming, and find ways to keep it open. A prescribed agonal tension between his philosophy and Platonism would invalidate this openness, just as a prescribed destruction of Platonism would. Keeping in mind that to Nietzsche, the agon also includes a contestation of its terms (HH 170, KSA 2.158): prescribing an agonal tension with Platonism would close off this aspect of the agon and lead to metaphysical closure on a methodological level. Nietzsche would betray his own perspectivism if he prescribed the one and the only way to transvalue Platonism. In Zarathustra's words: "*The* way after all – it does not exist" (Z III Gravity, KSA 4.245). Nietzsche's mastery is opening up paths of thinking for his readers that were not visible before; and he has done so richly for Plato. He has shown us a destructive critique of Plato and a life-enabling alternative, the possibility of continuous agonal tension and an admiration for Europe's greatest philosophical architect. None of these alternatives is superior, there is only the experiment as to which relationship with Platonism is most fruitful for each philosopher.

Conclusion

In one of his late unpublished notes, Nietzsche writes: “Plato, for example, becomes a caricature with me” (NL 10[112], KSA 12.521). In this study, I have shown that this statement might have been an exaggeration. I started by applying Nietzsche’s rich but undefined definition of Plato’s philosophy as an erotic contest to Plato’s own writings. What appeared is that Plato grounded philosophy in the economy of the psyche by tying it to eros and the agonal drive. Although these drives are necessary, they should be firmly under the control of reason, and any excess is highly dangerous. Nietzsche re-evaluated both the direction and the danger of these drives. The object shifted from transcendence through rationality to thinking in accord with the movement of life; completely rational dialectics was replaced by experiments incorperating extra-rational elements, the *Versuch.* However, simply replacing Plato’s focus on the beyond with Nietzsche’s focus on life would be a mere inverted Platonism that repeats the metaphysical closure that Nietzsche tried to avoid. An agonal tension between the philosophies of Nietzsche and Plato would prevent this closure and could be the best form for Nietzsche's project of transvaluating philosophy through “the prism of life”. Still, claiming this as the only or the “right” way to transvaluate Platonism would invalidate Nietzsche’s philosophical project as well.

Nevertheless, in another sense Nietzsche and I have made a caricature of Plato: we have equated Plato’s philosophy with the metaphysical theories presented (mostly) by Socrates in the dialogues. Plato’s writings, however, are rich in counter-positions, voiced by interlocutors, and extra-discursive elements, the dialogue’s scene, setting and characters. I have been highly sensitive to these extra-discursive elements in Nietzsche and argued with the help of Blondel that they form an indispensable part of his philosophy’s attempt to go beyond metaphysics, but I have shown none of that consideration for Plato. Ultimately, I have theorised on Nietzsche's attempt to tame the already magnificent beast of Platonism, that is the metaphysical doctrines in his dialogues that have shaped Western philosophy. However, tackling the beast of Plato, that is his dialogues in all their richness, is a task we have not even begun.

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