

## CHAPTER 1

### NIETZSCHE'S PLATONISM

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TWO PROPER NAMES. Even if modified in form and thus conjoined.

As such they broach an interval. The various senses of this legacy, of Nietzsche's Platonism, are figured on this interval.

The interval is gigantic, this interval between Plato and Nietzsche, this course running from Plato to Nietzsche and back again. It spans an era in which a battle of giants is waged, ever again repeating along the historical axis the scene already staged in Plato's *Sophist* (246a–c). It is a battle in which being is at stake, in which all are exposed to not being, as to death: it is a *γγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας*. As the Eleatic Stranger stages it, the battle is between those who drag everything uranic and invisible down to earth, who thus define being as body, and those others who defend themselves from an invisible position way up high, who declare that being consists of some kind of intelligibles (*νοητά*) and who smash up the bodies of the others into little bits in their *λόγοι*, philosophizing, as it were, with the hammer of *λόγος*.

Along the historical axis, in the gigantic interval from Plato to Nietzsche, the contenders are similarly positioned for the ever renewed battle. They, too, take their stance on one side or the other of the interval—again, a gigantic interval—separating the intelligible from the visible or sensible, *τὸ νοητόν* from *τὸ αἰσθητόν*. Those who station themselves way up high are hardly visible from below as they wield their *λόγοι* and shield themselves by translating their very position into words: *μετὰ τὰ φυσικά*. And yet, the history of metaphysics is not just their history: partly of course because their history

is one of contention with the others, with those who continue to drag the invisible, intelligible kinds of things down to earth; but also because the nonmetaphysics of these others remains always a temptation to those above, just as those down below are bound sometimes to experience—even as they are captivated by such a word as *empiricism*—the attraction of the heights. For these reasons the battle has continued, has continually been renewed, its outcome remaining undecided.

And yet, finally, with Nietzsche it seems that the battle has come to an end. From the Platonic beginning, from that inaugural staging, the history of metaphysics would have run its course, coming to its end at the moment when Nietzsche, the last metaphysician, confounds beyond hope the very interval at stake throughout that history. What was way up high is cut loose and drifts out of sight. There is no longer anything to drag down to earth, and in a sense nothing is required in order to remain true to the earth—nothing except the utmost insistence on the surface that remains once the gigantic interval is no more and the sensible has been twisted free of the intelligible.

Retrospecting, one will see that Platonism casts its shadow across the entire interval running from Plato to Nietzsche. And even should one seek, beginning with Nietzsche, to step out finally into the light, one would perhaps only discover how persistently one is drawn back into the shadow; or rather, one would perhaps discover that Platonism, even as it seems to come to its end, is like a question mark so black, so monstrous, that it casts shadows on anyone who ventures to inscribe it.<sup>1</sup> Even at the limit, even beyond the limit, Platonism would perhaps prove not to have been left behind. Least of all by Nietzsche.

It is a question, then, not just of the interval as such but rather of various figures of movement across the interval. One figure concerns the reach of Platonism; it is the figure of Platonism as it reaches across the entire interval, decisively determining Nietzsche's thought, indeed to such an extent that, as Nietzsche himself recognizes, his thought remains a kind of Platonism. A second figure is that of the extension of Platonism

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1. The passage being adapted here comes from *Die Götzen-Dämmerung*: "A revaluation of all values, this question mark so black, so monstrous, that it casts shadows on anyone who sets it down" (*Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969], VI 3: 51). All further references to Nietzsche's texts are given according to the volume and page number of the Colli-Montinari edition.

within the interval, short of the decisive break that Nietzsche ventures; this is Platonism as Nietzsche takes it to have persisted after Plato, or rather, as it was repeatedly reconstituted and passed along, the Platonism that came to inform and deform Christianity. A third figure is that of Nietzsche's interpretive move back across the interval, his turn to the Platonic texts themselves, or rather to these texts as mediated by the doxographical and philological traditions. Beyond these interpretations, found in Nietzsche's early Basel lectures, there is still another turn to Plato, one that grows out of Nietzsche's thinking, an opening to a Platonic thinking anterior to virtually all Platonism. This fourth figure thus traces an encounter beyond doxography, a turn—in Nietzsche's phrase—to "the *concealed* history of the philosophers" (VI 3: 257).

Figured thus on the interval broached by the two proper names, these four figures determine the senses of Nietzsche's Platonism.



The first figure is that of Platonism as it decisively determines Nietzsche's thought, making that thought a kind of Platonism. This connection with Platonism is by no means something that went unremarked by Nietzsche. On the contrary, it is a bond that Nietzsche recognized, affirmed, and expressed from the earliest phase of his thinking up through his final creative year. Thus in one of the early sketches for *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes: "My philosophy an *inverted Platonism*: the further removed from true being, the purer, the more beautiful, the better it is. Living in *Schein* as goal" (III 3: 207). Here the word *Schein* is used to name that semblance or appearance that Platonism distinguishes from "true being." From the time of this early sketch (1870–1871), Nietzsche's strategy is to mix up what is way up high and what is down below, to invert the opposition, the interval, that Platonism would enforce, thus to regard *Schein* as the purer, the more beautiful, the better and to demote what Platonism calls "true being" to the inferior position. Even in this earliest phase Nietzsche's philosophy would arise as an inversion that comes to celebrate *Schein*.

This celebration of *Schein* is a decisive moment in *The Birth of Tragedy*. It is in reference to "the beautiful shining of the dream-worlds [*der schöne Schein der Traumwelten*]" (III 1: 22) that Nietzsche thematizes the Apollinian considered as a natural artistic energy anterior to the advent of the human artist. In the Apollinian state

images shine; as in dreams, they shine forth as figures or shapes in which one takes immediate delight. When Apollinian art arrives on the scene, it comes in imitation of the protoartistic natural state; in Apollinian art, as in dreams, everything is gathered around the beautiful shining of images. Even when the Apollinian is yoked together with Dionysian ecstasy in Greek tragedy, it is the shining image that Nietzsche continues to celebrate. Tragic art is, in turn, set over against the Socratic demand for unlimited uncovering; and, as thus opposed to the force released through Socrates, it cannot but have succumbed to the Socratism that Nietzsche takes to have determined the further course of Western thought and art. As long as Socratism remains in force, the Apollinian can at best—as in Euripides—only be reconstituted as “the cool, paradoxical *thoughts*” accompanying the “fiery *affects*” that replace Dionysian ecstasies (III 1: 80). Only when Socratism comes to its self-recoiling end is the space again freed for the advent of Apollinian *Schein* and for the celebration that would invert Socratism (rethought as Platonism) and raise *Schein* above “true being” itself.<sup>2</sup>

This inversion and the radical dislocation that issues from it are at the core of Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*, written in his last creative year, its Preface dated 30 September 1888, barely over three months before Nietzsche’s final breakdown in Turin. Subtitled “How One Philosophizes with a Hammer,” this text sounds out “eternal idols”—that is, everything linked to Platonism—by touching them with a hammer as with a tuning fork. Here, too, it is the hammer of λόγος that is at work (the final section is entitled “The Hammer Speaks”); what it tells primarily is the history of an error, that is, of Platonism, yet it tells this history as one by which the error came to be exposed, tells it as the story of “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” (VI 3:74–75). This history Nietzsche reduces to a series of stages, precisely the stages by which Platonism came finally to be inverted and dislocated.

It was Heidegger who first recognized the decisiveness of the passage in which Nietzsche relates this curious history of Platonism as error. Indeed Heidegger marked it as the passage where, if ever, Nietzsche exceeds the Platonism that otherwise, as he merely inverts

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2. This interpretation of *The Birth of Tragedy* is developed in *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

it, continues to control his thought. Since Heidegger focused attention on the passage, interpretation after interpretation has been layered on it.<sup>3</sup>

The passage and the history it relates begin with the true world; not yet set in the quotation marks that enclose it in the title of the passage and in the fifth, penultimate stage of the history, it is accorded at least the status of a signified, even in a curious sense that of something actual. Nietzsche says that in the beginning the true world is “relatively sound, simple, convincing”; for it was “attainable for the wise, the pious, the virtuous man,—he lives in it, *he is it.*” His very elevation, his assumption of this superior position, defines the true world, brings it about. This is why Nietzsche says that the true world is—at the beginning—a rewriting, a transcripton (*Umschreibung*), of the sentence “I, Plato, *am* the truth.”

Beginning with the second stage, deferral comes into play. After Plato the true world—its name still significant, still free of qualifying punctuation—becomes such that it is unattainable for now, though promised to those wise, pious, virtuous men who formerly lived in it and were it. This stage is marked, then, by separation, by the promise of presence that is also the denial of presence. There is no longer just the wise, pious, virtuous man but also another, one that is absent but promised. Of this other that the true world has become, Nietzsche says also that it becomes finer (as if covered by a fine veil, for instance), that it becomes more compromising or trickier (*verfänglicher*), and that it becomes impossible to grasp. One could say perhaps that the true world becomes elusive and seductive. Writing in italics, Nietzsche says—as if to say all this in a single word—“*it becomes woman [sie wird Weib].*” Dropping the italics, he adds: “it becomes Christian.” Here—at this stage but also, even more, in what Nietzsche says of it—so many things are juxtaposed, not to say mixed up: deferral (with its structure of promise and denial), seductive elusiveness, woman, Christianity, even sin (Nietzsche quotes: the true world is for “the sinner who repents’”). Within the story this witches’ brew is

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3. See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1961), 1:231–242; also Jacques Derrida, *Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 59ff.; and my *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 160–62.

not to be analyzed but stirred and allowed to brew. But lest it be thought that here Nietzsche lays a trap by setting out an idea or essence (or whatever it will later be called) of woman, one should note that it is precisely the opposite that is under way here: it is with the appearance of the woman that the idea as such begins the recession that will culminate in its disappearance and abolition.

The drift continues. The true world, assuming next its Kantian guise, proves not just unattainable but unpromisable; there remains only the indemonstrable thought of it, effective only as an imperative. Still further: it is unknown and as such cannot even obligate, ceases entirely to be effective. Nietzsche describes this fourth stage: "Gray morning. First yawn of reason. Cockcrow of positivism"—leaving it as though it were unproblematic *only* (one would presume) because reason (*Vernunft*) has been so thoroughly problematized in the immediately preceding section of the text. In this section, entitled "'Reason' in Philosophy," Nietzsche charges reason with everything from dehistoricizing and mummifying life and becoming to falsifying the testimony of the senses and being utterly duped by language. He concludes that reason "has constructed the 'true world' out of contradiction to the actual world"; now Nietzsche encloses the true world in quotation marks, reduces it to a mere signifier. And finally, the very distinction "between a 'true' and an 'apparent' world is declared merely a symptom of "d cadence," of "declining life."

The awakening of reason can be, then, only a stage on the way to its abolition. The next, penultimate stage marks such a point: the true world has become a useless and superfluous idea, hardly even an idea but only words returning to themselves, only the "true world." Whatever it may be or not be, Nietzsche declares: "let us abolish it!" The brightness of day lets one see "Plato's embarrassed blush."

So, finally, at noon, at the "moment of the shortest shadow," at the moment when even the shadow of Platonism would finally recede, one would step out into the light. With the true world abolished, reduced to the "true world"—to something merely said, merely told, a fable—it is only a question of what world remains. Nietzsche's answer: none—for "with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one [die scheinbare]." No longer determinable by opposition to the true world, turned, as it were, out of this opposition, twisted free of it, *die scheinbare Welt* is now to be interpreted, not as the inferior

*Erscheinung* of a deferred and deferring world beyond, but in its very shining forth to sense. In this sense of sense linked to sense, it is to be celebrated as *Schein*.



The second figure is that of Platonism short of the Nietzschean inversion, Platonism as it persisted despite being progressively exposed and compromised in that history that Nietzsche tells as the history of an error. It is the figure of Platonism as it consolidated itself outside of and over against that history, persisting at the stage that, in that history, is only one stage removed from the Platonism of Plato. Initially and for some time this figure is identical with Christianity, “Platonism for ‘the people’” Nietzsche calls it (VI 2: 4). It is the advocate of declining life, of all that is weak and base—in the words of *The Antichrist*: “Christianity has sided with all that is weak and base, with all failures; it has made an ideal of whatever *contradicts* the instinct of the strong life to preserve itself” (VI 3: 169). Born out of hatred of life, Christianity invents a god who enforces this resentment, who exemplifies this contradiction of life: “God degenerated [*abgeartet*] into the *contradiction* of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yes!” (VI 3: 183).

In Nietzsche’s final texts the polemics become ever more strident, the hammer of λόγος ever harder. And it becomes then ever more imperative to hear also the words in which Nietzsche celebrates life, to counter the negativity with his jubilant yes-saying.

In the second figuration, Platonism proved hardly insular. It was only a matter of time before this Platonism, reconfigured as Christianity, seeped back into philosophy as it had, at least for a while, run its course somewhat apart (with the Preplatonian philosophers, especially Heraclitus, and with “a few skeptics” [VI 3: 176]). For Nietzsche the title of that seepage is theology, and it has long since spoiled everything. Again the words of *The Antichrist*: “It is necessary to say whom we consider our antithesis [*als unsern Gegensatz*]*—the theologians and whatever has theologians’ blood in its veins—our whole philosophy*” (VI 3: 172).

But there is also another kind of transfer from this figure of Platonism, a monstrous translation that in a certain sense enables philosophy rather than spoiling it. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche

broaches this translation: “It seems that all great things first have to bestride the earth in monstrous and frightening masks in order to inscribe themselves in the hearts of humanity with eternal demands” (VI 2: 4). It is the struggle against this Platonism in its monstrous guise—what Nietzsche calls simply “the fight against Plato”—that, as he declares, “has created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which had never yet existed on earth.” It is this tension that energizes even the Nietzschean inversion, so that, as he says, “with so tense a bow one can now shoot for the most distant goals” (VI 2: 4f.).

The tension that has been generated lies in the very relation to truth as such—that is, in the unconditional belief in the value of truth, in the unlimited will to truth. It is precisely the tension that reaches its extreme at the moment when the belief in the value of truth impels the believer finally to put this very value in question. This is the moment in which one can no longer forgo asking whether in the perspective of life itself a higher value might not belong rather to deception and lies, whether truth itself—what one would take to be truth *itself*, secured in its alleged distinctness from its opposite—might not turn out to be only a certain kind of lie required by a certain kind of living being. This is the moment in which the unlimited will to truth—this “eternal” demand inscribed in the hearts of humanity—comes finally to demand the truth about truth itself. It is the moment in which Platonism, as advocate of truth itself, coils up at the limit and recoils upon itself. Yet, at this limit where one might expect the monstrous and frightening masks to fall away revealing truth itself, there occurs instead a releasing of the monstrosity of truth, a releasing of truth into its monstrosity.

In his skirmishes with this Platonism, Nietzsche frequently conflates it with Plato, with what the proper name would signify. As when, in the *Twilight of the Idols*, he charges Plato with being “preexistently Christian” (VI 3: 149). Or, again, in *The Gay Science*: “even we knowers of today, we godless antimetaphysicians still take *our* fire, too, from the flame that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith, which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.” He continues, pressing toward the limit: “But what if this should become more and more unbelievable, if nothing should prove to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, lies—if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie?—”(V 2: 259).



There can be little doubt but that such conflation of Plato with Platonism in this figuration is largely strategic. For Nietzsche was keenly aware of a range of differentiations that set the author of the dialogues quite apart from this Platonism. This awareness is most directly and extensively attested in Nietzsche's early Basel lectures on this other Platonism, the Platonism of the dialogues.



In 1995 the full text of Nietzsche's lectures on Plato was published in the Colli-Montinari edition (II 4: 1–188).<sup>4</sup> These lectures were first presented in the Winter Semester 1871–1872, a little more than two years after Nietzsche, still in his mid-twenties, had been appointed to a professorship in classical philology at the University of Basel. Initially entitled “Introduction to the Study of the Platonic Dialogues,” the lectures were repeated under various titles in the Winter Semester 1873–1874, in the Summer Semester 1876, and in the Winter Semester 1878–1879, Nietzsche's last before resigning from his position at the University of Basel. The lectures thus span almost the entire Basel period and, in terms of Nietzsche's published works, extend from the period in which he prepared and published *The Birth of Tragedy* up through the year in which the first volume of *Human, All-Too-Human* appeared.

The lecture course falls into two main parts. In the first Nietzsche deals with recent Plato literature and with Plato's life and then goes on to give a summary account of each of the individual dialogues. The second main part offers a thematic presentation of Plato's thought.

In the introductory paragraphs preceding the first part Nietzsche provides some general remarks that serve to orient the entire lecture text. First of all, he declares that Plato has always—and rightly—been considered the genuine philosophical leader or guide for the youth. This vocation is linked to the paradoxical image presented by Plato. Nietzsche describes it as “the image of an overabundant philosophical nature that is just as capable of a grand intuitive vision of the whole

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4. An abridged text of these lectures was published in vol. 19 of *Werke* (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1913), 235–304.

as of the dialectical labor of the concept.” Nietzsche says: “The image of this overabundant nature kindles the drive to philosophy; it arouses θαυμάζειν [wonder], which is the philosophical πᾶθος” (II 4: 7).

From this opening it is already evident, then, that what Nietzsche designates here by the name Plato is quite remote from the Platonism with which, as noted, he will later often conflate it. As an overabundant philosophical nature who arouses wonder in the youth, Plato is anything but the avatar of Platonism for the people, of Platonism configured as Christianity. On the other hand, Nietzsche does mark, at the very outset of his lectures, a connection between Platonic thought and Kantian idealism. Plato’s theory of ideas—his *Ideenlehre*, as Nietzsche calls it—is said to have been invaluable preparation for Kantian idealism, since it presents already the properly conceived opposition between the thing-in-itself and appearance. On the one hand, then, Nietzsche binds Platonic thought to the later history of metaphysics; and yet, if one observes that, within the context of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Kant and Schopenhauer are precisely the thinkers who force to its limit the drive to truth and prepare thereby a rebirth of art, then the bond of Platonic thought to Kantian idealism can equally well be regarded as setting Plato at the limit of metaphysics, as bringing his thought into proximity with the Nietzschean inversion.

Nietzsche stresses Plato’s talent as a prose writer. He grants, too, that Plato displays great dramatic talent. Yet he insists that it is not Plato the writer that is primary but rather Plato the teacher. The writer is only a specter (εἶδωλον) of the teacher, and his compositions only a remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) of the speeches held in the Academy. As—one might venture to say—Nietzsche the teacher of classical philology is only a specter of Nietzsche the thinker, and his lectures on Plato only an anticipation of his later encounter with Plato’s thought as such.

Nietzsche turns to the recent Plato literature. Among the various scholars he discusses, two bear significantly on Nietzsche’s reading of Plato. One is Tennemann, a Kantian whose works on Greek philosophy, including a four-volume presentation of Plato’s philosophy, were well-known to the German Idealists.<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche mentions, in

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5. See, for example, F. W. J. Schelling, “*Timaeus*” (1794), ed. Hartmut Buchner (Stuttgart-Bad Constatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994), 28, 74; also Hegel’s critical remark in his Berlin lectures on the history of philosophy: “The great Tennemann is gifted with too little philosophical sense to be able to grasp the Aristotelian philosophy” (*Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Teil 3, ed. P. Garniron and W. Jaeschke [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996], 64f.).

particular, Tennemann's view that Plato has a "double philosophy," that is, an overt and a covert philosophy; Tennemann thus gives renewed prominence to the ancient distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric Plato, between the philosophy found in the dialogical writings and that of the unwritten teachings.

A very different emphasis was brought by the other scholar, the philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. What Schleiermacher stresses in his well-known Introduction to his translations of the dialogues is that in Plato's work form and content are inseparable, that alongside Plato the philosopher there is also Plato the artist. While Nietzsche acknowledges Plato's artistic talent, he nonetheless takes issue with Schleiermacher as regards the significance of the artistic element in the dialogues: Nietzsche insists on ascribing only secondary significance to Plato the artist and to the dialogues as artworks. Nietzsche declares that the intent of the dialogues is to capture actual, remembered conversations; yet rather than just realistically reproducing a conversation, Plato proceeds in a manner analogous to that of a Greek sculptor, who idealizes the figure in reproducing it. Still, it is not the idealizing, not the artistic reshaping, that is primary. Nietzsche says, without qualification: "A dialogue is not intended to be regarded as something dramatic but, in the form of remembrance, as a dialectical course" (II 4: 14). Much later in his lectures Nietzsche will insist even more strongly on limiting the import of the dramatic element in Plato's work, declaring, for instance, that "Plato's dramatic power has been astonishingly overrated" (II 4: 161).

Nietzsche turns to an extended discussion of Plato's life, drawing on a wide range of sources including, as most important, the *Platonic Letters*. Two points especially deserve to be mentioned. The first arises in Nietzsche's discussion of the course of Plato's education: Nietzsche stresses the importance of Plato's poetic tendencies, noting that Plato is said to have composed dithyrambic poems in his youth but later to have burned his poems. Secondly, Nietzsche takes care to set Plato somewhat apart from the other Socratic philosophers who persisted in the Socratic way after the master's death. On the one hand, Plato idealized the image of Socrates, while, on the other hand, his Socratic tendency was limited by his earlier Heracliteanism. Nietzsche says of Plato: "He was initially a Heraclitean and was never purely Socratic" (II 4: 45).

Nietzsche's accounts of the individual Platonic dialogues are largely summary in character. Yet even as such some of the accounts

are remarkably astute, even by the standards of the best recent scholarship. For example, in his account of the *Timaeus*, Nietzsche's interpretation of the long-disputed passage on the blending of the world-soul corresponds closely to that of such more recent and very differently oriented interpreters as A. E. Taylor and Serge Margel:<sup>6</sup> like these interpreters, Nietzsche distinguishes between the two stages of the blending and recognizes that what results from the two elements mixed at the first stage then becomes a third component to be mixed with these same two elements at the second stage of the blending. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that Nietzsche's accounts sometimes stray from the language of Plato's texts, replacing what the texts say with traditional formulations that cannot but cover up much of what is at issue, formulations that in effect project back upon the Platonic texts a language and a conceptuality that became possible only as a result—only in the aftermath—of what was achieved in those texts. For example, in his account of the *Timaeus*, there is a passage that refers unmistakably to what in the dialogue itself is called (among its many names) the *receptacle* (ὑποδοχή) and, untranslatably, the *χώρα*. But when Nietzsche draws the distinction between the receptacle and intelligible being, he does so by characterizing the former as a primitive matter (*primitive Materie*) alongside the ideas, as a *μη ὄν* (nonbeing) that would have no part in the eternity of the ideas. And yet, in the *Timaeus* itself the receptacle is never designated by the word ὕλη (matter), a word that indeed plays almost no role at all in Plato's thought.<sup>7</sup> In the *Timaeus*, too—quite contrary to Nietzsche's account—the receptacle is said to partake of the intelligible even if in a most perplexing way; and it is explicitly said to be everlasting (ἄεί) (see *Tim.* 51a–b, 52a–b). It is perhaps, then, no accident that Nietzsche feels compelled to return to this issue at the very end of his lectures, to return in a reading more attentive to the Platonic text.

There are incisive remarks about other dialogues too. Noting that the theme of the *Phaedo* is “the philosopher and death” or “the charming away of the fear of death,” Nietzsche remarks that “death is

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6. See A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 109ff.; and Serge Margel, *Le Tombeau du Dieu Artisan* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1995), 82.

7. The conflation of *χώρα* and ὕλη is found already in Aristotle (*Physics* 209b) and is frequently repeated by later interpreters. See my discussion in *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's "Timaeus"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 151ff.

the authentic inspiring genius of philosophy." Without death there would hardly be any philosophizing. Humans alone are certain of death; but there is a remedy, a medicine, that works against the effects of this certainty. Nietzsche uses here the word *Heilmittel*, presumably translating φάρμακον, which means also poison and is the word used in the *Phaedo* to designate the potion given to Socrates. The pharmacological remedy consists, says Nietzsche, of "metaphysical insights, the core of all religions and philosophies." He suggests that this connection between death and philosophy is genuinely Platonic, not Socratic. He mentions, too, that Plato's theory of immortality caused a great stir, and he notes that it was ridiculed by comedy (II 4: 85–87).

The *Symposium* Nietzsche links, predictably, to the *Phaedrus*, not only, however, as regards the common theme but also as regards the question of rhetoric. In the *Symposium* a rhetorical superiority is demonstrated by the presentation of seven speeches on the same theme as those in the *Phaedrus*, of which there are three, only one of which however went uncensored. Nietzsche concludes: "It is completely false to believe that thereby Plato wanted to present various wrong tendencies: they are all philosophical λόγοι and all true, with ever new sides of the one truth" (II 4: 104–106).

Nietzsche's brief remarks on the *Sophist* are much less venturesome than one would have hoped in view of the pertinence of several of the themes of this dialogue to subsequent developments in Nietzsche's thought. Perhaps the most notable of these themes are the determination of being as δύναμις and the enacting of the γιγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας. In fact Nietzsche does refer to the latter, though not by this name, when he remarks: "The passage is famous in which the εἰδῶν φίλοι and the materialists are discussed." Nietzsche insists that the former are not to be identified with the Megarians; he suggests that probably Plato had in mind "the supporters of his older view," which set the immovable ideas over against "that which they animate." Nietzsche marks the contrast: in the *Sophist* the ideas are apprehended, not as immovable, but as moving and moved (*als bewegender u. bewegter*) (II 4: 134–36).

The thematic presentation of Plato's thought that Nietzsche offers in the second main part of his lecture course proceeds with only minimal reference to the Platonic texts. Many of the interpretations border on the conventional, and one cannot but suspect that they are controlled as much by the doxographical and philological traditions

as by Plato's texts themselves. It is most remarkable that Nietzsche's interpretation of Plato could have remained within such narrow bounds during the very time when, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was breaking in the most radical manner with the view of Greek culture handed down by Winckelmann, Goethe, and the entire tradition of German Hellenism. Over against the narrow limits within which Nietzsche's interpretation of Plato is bound, one recalls the image of Prometheus unbound that appeared on the original title page of *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Nietzsche's thematic presentation begins with an account of the Platonic ideas, an account presented with a straightforwardness that precludes letting what is at issue in this regard reflect back upon the very nature and possibility of giving an account. Nietzsche begins with the concept, with conceptual determination (*Begriffsbestimmung*), and, first of all, identifies the ideas as the objects of such conceptual determinations. He continues with a second, enumerated point: "Objects of general conceptual determinations are not sensible things but rather another kind of beings [*eine andere Gattung des Seienden*]." He concludes with a third point intended to explain the second: "The reason for separating the ideas from the sensible is that he saw the sensible in perpetual flux and change and therefore did not regard it as an object of knowledge; but, with Socrates, he held that the ethical was conceptually knowable" (II 4: 149). Here the interpretive schema merely extends that of the previous account: it is a matter of an initial Heracliteanism that declares everything sensible to be in flux but that is then tempered by the Socratic insistence on the ethical as knowable, hence as escaping the perpetual flux of the sensible, hence as, in Nietzsche's words, another kind of beings. Nietzsche adds that just as our particular sense-perceptions correspond to particular objects so likewise must our general concepts correspond to objects that are just as unchangeable as the concepts themselves. Little wonder that Nietzsche observed, at the very beginning of his lectures, that "the theory of ideas is something very astonishing" (II 4: 7)! But what is perhaps most astonishing is that such an account could have been given, with scarcely a hint of a question, by one who during this very same period could write in the text "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense" that "truths are illusions that one has forgotten are such, metaphors that have been used up and that have lost their sensible force, coins that have lost their image and now come to be considered no longer as coins but as metal" (III 2: 374f.).

Nietzsche insists repeatedly on the priority that the ethical had for Plato. Thus in positing the ideas Plato's point of departure was the good, the beautiful, the just, and his aim was to shelter these ethical abstractions from the thoroughgoing flux of the sensible. Nietzsche grants that it would be possible for one to posit the ideas on the basis of a consideration of the visible world, but he insists that Plato did not proceed in this way, that the genesis of the theory of ideas did not lie in a consideration of the visible world. The origin of the theory is not aesthetic; the ideas are not posited on the basis of aesthetic contemplation or intuition. Thus Nietzsche returns to a point on which he insisted earlier: that Plato's artistic drive is secondary and is thoroughly governed by another drive, the moral. As Nietzsche says of Plato: "He is an ethicist through and through" (II 4: 161). From this point Nietzsche moves rapidly to a string of conclusions—that the body is the prison of the soul, that the task of philosophy is to seek release from the sensible—that point unmistakably to the metamorphosis of Plato's thought into the Platonism for the people that will become the principal target of Nietzsche's genealogical critique. As to Plato himself, the author of the dialogues, one would do well at this point to heed what Nietzsche confesses in a note penned in 1887: "Plato, for example, becomes in my hands a caricature" (VIII 2: 187).

Yet, as noted already, Nietzsche returns at the end of his lectures to a discussion of what the *Timaeus* calls the receptacle, the  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ . As before, the word *matter* (*Materie*) is brought into play, along with *foundation* (*Grundlage*) and *raw material* (*Rohstoff*). But now, noting that it was Aristotle who called it  $\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\eta$ , Nietzsche puts in play—as almost nowhere else in the lectures—the precise, if paradoxical, language of Plato's text. He mentions that its apprehension is of such a character as to be hardly trustworthy ( $\mu\acute{o}\gamma\iota\varsigma \pi\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\nu$ ). And he notes, remarkably, that "because it is always the same as itself and unchangeable, it insinuates itself in an illegitimate way . . . into the realm of the νοητά [the intelligibles]." Then, finally, most remarkably, Nietzsche calls it by the names that it is given at the heart of the Platonic discourse, and accordingly he indicates one of the most decisive and controversial issues at the center of the *Timaeus*: "Difficulties arise from the fact that Plato also calls it  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  and  $\acute{\epsilon}\delta\rho\alpha$  and calls the becoming in it a becoming  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu \tau\iota\upsilon \tau\acute{o}\pi\omega$  [in some region or place]. Greatly contested question whether the so-called matter is perhaps nothing other than space" (II 4: 185f.). Nietzsche is at the threshold of some of the most decisive demands imposed by Plato's discourse on

the  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ , perhaps most notably that of thinking together, as one and the same, the enclosedness of a receptacle and the free openness of what will come to be called space.



There is still a fourth figure of Nietzsche's Platonism. It is the figure of a turn to Plato in a dimension quite different from that governing Nietzsche's Basel lectures, a turn determined less by bonds to the doxographical and philological traditions than by Nietzsche's rare capacity to discern the most decisive ambiguities and the incessant circulation of thought within these ambiguities. It is through this turn, above all, that Nietzsche encounters Plato's thought in a way that opens toward its singularity rather than dissipating its force in the transition to Platonism. Precisely in this turn the caricature of Plato would be undone for the sake of what one would call Plato himself, were not the image that emerges so driven by ambiguity as to threaten the very propriety of the proper name.

Indeed there are moments even in the Basel lectures when Nietzsche takes care to complicate what would otherwise come down to a caricature. Thus Plato the Heraclitean is not said simply to become Socratic instead; nor is Plato the artist consistently presented as having been transformed without remainder into the Socratic moralist. To be sure, Nietzsche stresses in the lectures that Plato's artistic drive came to be limited by the moral impetus received from Socrates. To be sure, as Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Plato "burned his poems that he might become a student of Socrates." And yet, Nietzsche continues, "where unconquerable propensities struggled against the Socratic maxims, their power, together with the impact of his monstrous character, was still great enough to force poetry itself into new and hitherto unknown channels. An example of this is," says Nietzsche, "Plato" (III 1: 80f.). Even if he destroyed his poems, he did not cease to write, did not become one who, like Socrates, does not write. No doubt, had he not come under the spell of Socrates, he would have written entirely otherwise; in *Human, All-Too-Human* Nietzsche even ventures that "It is no idle question whether, if he had not come under the spell of Socrates, Plato might not have discovered an even higher type of philosophical man who is now lost to us forever" (IV 2: 220). Yet,



even under the spell of Socrates, Plato persisted in writing; he remained an artist.

In an early text entitled "The Greek State," one of his *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books*, Nietzsche underlines the struggle, the ambiguity, that remained: "That he excluded the genial artist from his state was a rigid consequence of the Socratic verdict on art, which Plato had made his own in a battle against himself" (III 2: 270f.). Yet this battle against himself did not cease when Plato made the Socratic verdict on art his own; rather it was precisely then that it reached its highest pitch, that it became most intense. With this image of Plato battling against himself, with this image of dynamic but also energetic ambiguity, Nietzsche touches on the singularity of Plato's thought.

There are other passages, superb ones, that open toward this singularity, passages in which Nietzsche draws the image of one who, with enormous artistic endowments, encounters the force of the Socratic verdict and injunction and is set in perpetual battle against himself, divided from himself and yet set turning, circulating, within the ambiguity.

As when, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, which declares Plato's to be "the greatest force any philosopher so far has had at his disposal" (VI 2: 114), Nietzsche poses as a physician in order to ask: "How could the most beautiful growth of antiquity, Plato, catch such an illness? Did the wicked Socrates corrupt him after all? Could Socrates have been the corruptor of youth after all? And did he deserve his hemlock?" (VI 2: 4).

Or as when, again in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes of Plato's secrecy, of the concealment in which he holds back, hiding himself; and of his sphinx nature, as if he were destined to present the riddle to tragic man; and of what, above all, had led him, Nietzsche, to dream about Plato's secrecy and sphinx nature. Here is what Nietzsche writes, celebrating the comic poet: "I know of nothing that has caused me to dream more on Plato's secrecy and his sphinx nature than the happily preserved *petit fait* that under the pillow of his death-bed there was found no 'Bible,' nothing Egyptian, Pythagorean, or Platonic—but a volume of Aristophanes. How could even a Plato have endured life—a Greek life to which he said No—without an Aristophanes?" (VI 2: 43).

As when, once more in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes of Plato's nobility: "There is something in the morality of Plato that

does not really belong to Plato but is merely encountered in his philosophy, one might say, in spite of Plato: namely, the Socratism for which he was really too noble" (VI 2: 113).

As when, alongside the stern condemnation pronounced against Plato in *The Twilight of the Idols* ("Plato is boring . . . , is so moralistic, so preexistently Christian" [VI 3: 149]), Nietzsche also writes of Plato: "He says with an innocence for which one must be a Greek, not a 'Christian,' that there would be no Platonic philosophy at all if there were not such beautiful youths in Athens." Nietzsche continues: "Philosophy after the fashion of Plato might rather be defined as an erotic contest, as a further development and an inwardizing of the ancient agonistic gymnastics and of its *presuppositions*. What finally grew out of this philosophic eroticism of Plato? A new art form of the Greek agon, dialectic" (VI 3: 120).

As when, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes of Plato's healthiness and of his overpowerful senses: "All philosophical idealism hitherto was something like an illness, unless it was, as in the case of Plato, the caution of an over-rich and dangerous healthiness, the fear of *overpowerful* sense, the prudence of a prudent Socrates.—Perhaps we moderns are merely not healthy enough *to be in need of* Plato's idealism?" (V 2: 306).

As when, finally, in a notebook entry from the mid-1880s, Nietzsche writes of the inversion once effected by Plato, by Plato *the artist*, Plato *still* the artist: "Basically, Plato, as the artist he was, preferred appearance [*Schein*] to being: thus lie and invention to truth, the unreal to the actual. But he was so convinced of the value of appearance that he gave it the attributes 'being,' 'causality,' and 'goodness,' and 'truth,' in short everything men value" (VIII 1: 261).

It is remarkable how this image of Platonic inversion places even the origination of metaphysics more in the hands of Plato the artist than of Plato the Socratic moralist. It is the artist who set up that "true world" that was finally to become a fable, who set it up, however, precisely as appearance, as a fable, which it no doubt would have remained, had not the Socratic moralist inverted—or confused—the names *appearance* and *being*.

At the limit this figure of Nietzsche's Platonism begins, then, to communicate with, in a sense even to merge with, the first figure, the inverted Platonism of Nietzsche's own thought, which—like Plato the artist—would give preference to appearance over being, or at

least to what, determined in opposition to being, had always been called appearance.

This is why to the very end Nietzsche remained a Greek, or rather sought, as from the beginning, to come back to the Greeks, as he declares with incomparable brilliance in the final paragraph of the last work he completed in his final creative year. Beyond these words written for the 1886 Preface to *The Gay Science* and then, finally, repeated at the end of *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*—beyond these words there is little more than silence: “Oh, those Greeks! They understood how to live. What is required for that is to remain courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance [*Schein*], to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole *Olympus of appearance*. Those Greeks were superficial—*out of profundity*. And is not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there—we who have *looked down* from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—artists?” (V 2: 20, repeated in VI 3: 437).