

NIETZSCHE'S ADMIRATION FOR SOCRATES*

BY WALTER A. KAUFMANN

It may seem to be a rather trivial problem whether Nietzsche happened to admire Socrates; and even the fact that almost all his interpreters and critics have harped on his alleged repudiation of Socrates could hardly give the present thesis much importance. Yet this is not a footnote on a footnote but part of a reevaluation of Nietzsche's philosophy, and the present study reflects the overall revision. The "immoralist" who has been so often pictured as the heir of Callicles and Thrasymachus, the sophists whom Socrates sought to refute—the Nietzsche for whom Socrates was allegedly "a villain"¹ appears to have modelled his entire philosophic enterprise in the image of Socrates. Important passages in the *Zarathustra* and at least one grotesque episode in Nietzsche's biography suddenly acquire a new meaning, and the *Ecce Homo* emerges as a mad attempt to overtrump the matchless irony of Socrates' *Apology*.

A. THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY

The prevalent conception of Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates depends partly on a misconstruction of his first book which was written, for the most part, during the Franco-Prussian War and published in 1872. Its origin is thus reminiscent of that of Hegel's first book, the *Phenomenology*, which was completed in Jena in 1806 while the French took the city. *The Birth of Tragedy* also resembles Hegel's work in its fundamentally dialectical conception. Though Nietzsche's uneven style brings out the negative and critical note most strongly, he was not primarily "for" or "against": he *tried* to comprehend. In a general way, his dialectic appears in his attitude toward his heroes. Like Oscar Wilde, he thought that "all men kill the thing they love"—even that they should kill it; and for that reason he always admired Shakespeare's portrait of Brutus.

* The significance of Nietzsche's "revaluation of values" and his reputedly anti-Socratic ethics do not fall within the scope of the present article; but they are to be discussed in detail in a forthcoming book on Nietzsche of which the present essay will form a part.

¹ Brinton, *Nietzsche* (Harvard University Press, 1941), 83.

Independence of the soul—that is at stake here! No sacrifice can then be too great: one's dearest friend himself one must be willing to sacrifice for it, and be he yet the most glorious human being, embellishment of the world, genius without peer. . . . (FW 98)²

Friedrich Gundolf has pointed out, in his two books on Caesar and on Shakespeare, that Nietzsche read his own "sacrifice" of Wagner into this drama. Nietzsche's relationship to Wagner, however, is merely the most striking instance of his dialectic. He pictured the second, negative, stage of his own development—and of any quest for independence and freedom—as a deliberate renunciation of all that one has previously worshipped: old friends and values are given up in a "twilight of the idols." (XVI, 37) If one considers Nietzsche's attitude toward Schopenhauer, one finds the same break: the Brutus crisis. The category "What Nietzsche Hated"³ is thus inadequate; and we shall now see how the inclusion of Socrates in it is quite untenable.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Socrates is introduced as a demigod, the equal of Dionysus and Apollo, man and myth at once. Nietzsche has propounded his thesis of the origin of Greek tragedy out of the "Dionysian" and the "Apollinian"; he has described the great dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and finally the Euripidean attack on these giants.

Euripides, too, was . . . a mask only: the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysus, nor Apollo, but . . . Socrates. (GT 12)

While Socrates is pictured, in the following pages, as the embodiment of that rationalism which superseded tragedy, his superhuman dignity is emphasized throughout. Reverently almost, Nietzsche speaks of the "logical impulse" of Socrates:

. . . in its boundless flood it manifests an elemental force of nature, as we find it only in the very greatest instinctive powers to our awed amazement. (GT 13)

He speaks of sensing "even a breath of that divine naiveté and assurance of the Socratic direction of life" and of the "dignified seriousness with which he emphasized his divine calling everywhere, even before his judges." GT 13 Nor have there been

² All volume and page references are to the *Musarion* edition (23 vols., München 1920-29); but, wherever possible, work and § (the same in all editions) are cited instead. "GT" means *Geburt der Tragödie*; "FW," *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*; "G," *Götzendämmerung*; and "WM," *Der Wille zur Macht*. All translations are my own.

³ Brinton, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV.

many since Plato who have described Socrates' death with more loving poetry:

That death, and not only exile, was pronounced on him, therein Socrates, with full clearness and without the natural shuddering from death, seems to have had his own way: he went to his death with that calmness with which, according to Plato's description, he leaves the symposium in the first grey light of day, as the last of the drinkers, to begin a new day; while behind him, on the benches and on the earth, the sleepy table companions remain to dream of Socrates, the true erotic. (GT 13)

Nietzsche's conception of Socrates was shaped decisively by Plato's *Symposium*⁴ and *Apology*, and Socrates became little less than an idol for him. To reconcile this patent fact with the established notion that Nietzsche's attitude was somehow hateful, some of the more careful students of Nietzsche's work have postulated a distinction between "Socratism," which he is then said to have detested, and the personality of Socrates himself.⁵ Some such distinction is indeed required—but its validity depends perforce on the definition of Socratism; and the view that Nietzsche merely admired the man Socrates while hating the very outlook which Socrates embodied is quite untenable. Even a cursory inspection of § 15 of *The Birth of Tragedy* would seem to show this quite conclusively—and this section is unquestionably the very climax and conclusion of Nietzsche's long analysis of the problem of Socrates. The original manuscript ended with § 15; the remainder of the work, which consists of the "timely" application of the previous analysis to Wagner's work, was—as Nietzsche later regretted—added as an afterthought.⁶ Nevertheless, interpreters have almost invariably ignored § 15—and on this depends not only Brinton's construction but also Morgan's:

⁴ When Nietzsche graduated from school, he designated the *Symposium* his "*Lieblingsdichtung*." (Cf. his *curriculum vitae* in E. Förster-Nietzsche, *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches*, I, 109.)

⁵ Intimations of this view are to be found in Bertram's *Nietzsche* (Berlin 1918); but this Stefan-George-trained gourmet, who sampled the apices of Nietzsche's thought as if they were so many bottles of champagne, was quite content to avoid any final clarity. His account, which revels in deliberate ambiguity, was strengthened by Hildebrandt's monograph on *Nietzsches Wettkampf mit Sokrates und Plato* (Dresden 1922). Hildebrandt supplied a chronological analysis of Nietzsche's writings but ignored GT 15 and concluded that Nietzsche was for Socrates, but against Socratism.

⁶ The original manuscript, entitled *Socrates und die Griechische Tragödie*, has since been published: ed. Mette (München, Beck, 1933).

The Birth of Tragedy not only formulates the antinomy between knowledge and life: it presages Nietzsche's solution . . . suggesting that the antagonism between Socratism and art may not be necessary.⁷

Actually, Nietzsche starts out with the antinomy, with the dialectical relationship, of the Dionysian and the Apollinian. In Hegel's terms, they are his thesis and antithesis; and their synthesis is found in tragic art. Then Socrates is introduced, a third deity, as it were, and the antithesis of tragic art. The antagonism is not one which "may not be necessary." Rather Nietzsche concerned himself persistently with what he accepted as necessary; and because Socratism seemed necessary to him, he affirmed it. Like Hegel, Nietzsche sought to comprehend phenomena in their necessary sequence; that is part of the significance of his *amor fati*.

In fact, Nietzsche asks quite explicitly: "Perhaps art is even a necessary corollary and supplement of science?" (GT 14) In the very next sentence, he replies: ". . . it must now be said how the influence of Socrates necessitates ever again the regeneration of art." (GT 15) Far from merely presaging a solution, Nietzsche then tries systematically to show how the "sublime metaphysical delusion" of Socrates is that instinct which leads science ever and ever to its own limits—at which it must necessarily give way to art. Socratism, i.e., the rationalistic tendency, was not arbitrarily and viciously injected into the Greek mind by Socrates; it was "already effective before Socrates" and "only gained in him an unspeakably magnificent expression." (GT 14) What—Nietzsche asks in the end—would have happened to mankind *without* Socratism? He finds

in Socrates the one turning point . . . of world history. For if one were to think of this whole incalculable sum of energy . . . as *not* employed in the service of knowledge, . . . then the instinctive lust for life would probably have been so weakened in general wars of annihilation . . . that, in view of the custom of suicide, the individual might feel a final remnant of a sense of doing his duty, when he . . . would strangle, as a son, his parents, as a friend, his friend: a practical pessimism. . . . (GT 15)

This is the final vision of *The Birth of Tragedy*—except for the appended application to Wagnerian opera. Unrestrained pessimism would not only fail to continue to produce great art, but it would lead to race suicide. The Socratic heritage, the elemental

⁷ What *Nietzsche Means* (Harvard University Press, 1941), 264.

passion for knowledge, must "by virtue of its own infinity guarantee the infinity" and continuation of art. (GT 15)

In the picture of the "theoretical man" who dedicates his life to the pursuit of truth, Nietzsche does not only pay homage to the "dignity" of Socrates, but his own features seem to mingle with those of his ideal. (GT 15) Socratism is still envisaged as the necessary antithesis of tragedy; but by ensuring the continued development of culture, it makes possible an eventual synthesis of art and philosophy, even as tragedy itself was a synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus. The new synthesis, of course, cannot be anti-Socratic; and one may note that Nietzsche pictures it—another attempt at a self-portrait—as "an 'artistic Socrates.'" (GT 14)⁸

B. THE FRAGMENTS AND LECTURES ON CLASSICAL PHILOLOGY

In the summer of 1872, in 1873, and 1876, Nietzsche, who was then a professor at the University of Basle, lectured on "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers." His lectures (IV, 245-364) substantiate what has been said about his attitude toward Socrates. First of all, the significant conception of the "pre-Platonic" philosophers (which so pointedly includes Socrates) has been unjustifiably ignored in Oehler's book on "Nietzsche and the Pre-Socratics"; and practically all later interpreters have relied on Oehler's account of Nietzsche's relation to the ancient Greeks. The only English book which gives a detailed account of Nietzsche's "connection with Greek literature and thought" goes to the extent of re-christening the lectures altogether, referring to them as "The pre-Socratics."⁹

⁸ Oehler, in his very influential book on *Friedrich Nietzsche und die Vorsokratiker* (Leipzig, 1904), substitutes an *a priori* construction of *The Birth of Tragedy* for a careful reading. The early Nietzsche, we are told, "was completely under the influence of Schopenhauer" and hence a pessimist and, therefore, had to repudiate optimistic Socratism (p. 28). Outside of the Nietzsche literature, however, I have found, since first writing this essay, one author who has recognized the elaborate dialectic of *The Birth of Tragedy*: Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (Tübingen, 1922), I, 499ff. Troeltsch does not consider Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates, and his view of Nietzsche is, in other respects, different from the one here developed. His clear recognition of Nietzsche's dialectic, however, leads him, too, to find here "more Hegel than Schopenhauer."

⁹ A. H. J. Knight, *Some Aspects of the Life and Work of Nietzsche, and particularly of his Connection with Greek Literature and Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1933), 18. This book is thoroughly vitiated by its admitted and uncritical acceptance of Oehler's, Bertram's, and Frau Förster-Nietzsche's writings as authori-

Actually, Nietzsche quite specifically includes Socrates: "Socrates is the last one in this line." (§ 1) In his lecture on Heraclitus, Nietzsche says further that three of the pre-Platonics embody the

purest types: Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates—the sage as religious reformer, the sage as proud and lonely truth finder, and the sage as the eternally and everywhere seeking one. (§ 10)

One may suspect that Nietzsche must have felt a special kinship to the ever seeking Socrates. In any case, the lecture on Socrates leaves little doubt about this self-identification. Socrates is celebrated as "the first philosopher of life (*Lebensphilosoph*)": "Thought serves life, while in all previous philosophers life served thought and knowledge." (§ 17) Even then, Nietzsche was writing his "untimely" essay on the "Use and Disadvantage of History for Life." Written in 1873, it appeared in 1874.

His admiration for Socrates, however, prevented him no more than the Platonic Alcibiades from stressing the physical ugliness of Socrates no less than his plebeian descent. His flat nose and thick lips, and his alleged admission that nature had endowed him with the fiercest passions, are all emphasized on the page just preceding the praise of the *Lebensphilosoph*.¹⁰

On the whole, the lecture draws heavily on the *Apology*: wisdom consists in seeing the limitations of one's own knowledge; Socrates, living in poverty, considered it his mission to be a gadfly on the neck of man; "life without such inquiries is no life." The irony of Socrates receives special emphasis. We may quote parts of the final tribute:

Thus one must consider his magnificent apology: he speaks before posterity . . . he wanted death. He had the most splendid opportunity to show his triumph over human fear and weakness and also the dignity of his

tative. To their notorious inaccuracies, the author adds many errors of his own; e.g., we are told that "only once does Nietzsche praise" Plato (p. 57) and that "Nietzsche was undoubtedly influenced, in his Superman theories, by . . . Kierkegaard." (138f. and 58) Yet Nietzsche's writings abound in tributes to Plato (who exerted a decisive influence on Nietzsche's thought); while the "Superman theories" were developed long before 1888, when Brandes first called his attention to Kierkegaard, too late for Nietzsche to become acquainted with the ideas of the Dane. In any case, Knight follows Bertram in admitting—amid many inconsistencies—that Socrates influenced Nietzsche's conception of the ideal philosopher.

¹⁰ Ignoring this, Oehler (*op. cit.*, 28 ff., 31 f.) assumes that Nietzsche's later insistence on Socrates' features and descent is proof of his hatred. As usual, the literature has generally followed Oehler.

divine mission. Grote says: death took him hence in full magnificence and glory, as the sun of the tropics sets . . . with him the line of original and typical "sophoi" is exhausted: one may think of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Democritus, Socrates. Now comes a new era. . . . (§ 10)

The prevalent view of Nietzsche's repudiation of Socrates ignores these lectures completely; yet the fragments of that period reiterate the same profound admiration. Beyond question the most important of these is "Philosophy in the Tragic Era of the Greeks" which Knight perversely identifies with "pre-Socratic philosophy," concluding hence that Socrates must here have been conceived as the great villain.¹¹ Yet the essay, like the lectures, is based on the conception of "the pre-Platonic philosophers as a group which belongs together and to which alone I intend to devote this study" (§ 2); and Nietzsche speaks of "the republic of geniuses from Thales to Socrates." (§ 2)

Of the many quotations which might be added, we shall adduce only two which are to be found in the lectures on "The Study of the Platonic Dialogues." (IV, 365-443) Here the *Apology* is celebrated as "a masterpiece of the highest rank" (I. § 2), and later Nietzsche adds:

Plato seems to have received the decisive thought as to how a philosopher ought to behave toward men from the apology of Socrates: as their physician, as gadfly on the neck of man. (II. § 11)

Even then, in the spring of 1873, Nietzsche began, but did not complete, an "untimely" essay on "The Philosopher as the Physician of Culture" (*Der Philosoph als Arzt der Kultur*, VI, 65-74). Apparently, Nietzsche himself derived his picture of the ideal philosopher from the *Apology*, and Socrates became his model.

C. FROM THE "UNTIMELY MEDIATIONS"¹² TO THE "GENEALOGY"

After what has been said so far, one may suspect that the point

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, 23, 58. Knight depends on Oehler who, while granting that Nietzsche himself attached supreme importance to this fragment, assumed that Nietzsche was concerned with the pre-Socratics only (*op cit.*, 123). The same assumption is at least implicit in Löwith, *Nietzsches Philosophie der Ewigen Wiederkunft des Gleichen* (Berlin, 1935) 110.

¹² *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* has been translated as *Thoughts out of Season*. Even more literal translations of the title have missed the meaning of "*Betrachtungen*" which distinguishes these "Contemplations" from Nietzsche's other, generally unreflective, works. The fact that his next book, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, had, in its first edition, a long motto from Descartes' *Meditationes* on the page following the title page suggests that Nietzsche's *Betrachtungen* were probably named after Descartes' work.

must be at hand where Nietzsche's passionate admiration should have been shaken by a "Brutus crisis"—a deliberate attempt to maintain "independence of the soul" by turning against the idolized Socrates. In a fragment, sketched late in 1875, we actually find an enumeration of three brief points regarding "Socratism" which is abruptly terminated by this sentence :

Socrates, to confess it frankly, is so close to me that almost always I fight against him. (VI, 101)

Now we have previously admitted that some distinction must indeed be made between Nietzsche's attitudes toward Socrates and Socratism, although it is false to say that Nietzsche abominated Socratism, if the latter is taken to mean the outlook which Socrates embodied.

Quite generally, Nietzsche distinguishes between (1) men whom he admires, (2) the ideas for which they stand, and (3) their followers. Only in terms of some such categories can one understand Nietzsche's complex attitude toward Christ, Christianity, and Christendom. Similarly, Nietzsche admired Schopenhauer; respected but criticized Schopenhauer's philosophy; and despised the followers who made his "debauches and vices . . . a matter of faith." (FW 99) Nietzsche admired Wagner and felt drawn to much of his music; but he abominated the ostentatiously Christian nationalists and anti-Semites who congregated in Bayreuth—Wagner's son-in-law (H. S. Chamberlain) and Nietzsche's sister are characteristic representatives—and Nietzsche's critique of Wagner himself might be epitomized by saying that he accused Wagner of having become a Wagnerian.

Nietzsche's fight against Socrates thus takes two forms: denunciations of his epigoni and respectful criticisms of his doctrines. The critical period begins, characteristically, with a brief note in which "the pre-Socratic and the post-Socratics (*Nachsokratiker*)" are contrasted and the increasing concern with happiness after Socrates is deplored. (VI, 104) The attack on the epigoni is also foreshadowed by the conception of Alexandrian culture which we find in the closing pages of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but Nietzsche certainly distinguished between the *Lebensphilosoph* Socrates and the mediocrity who knows only the palest pleasures and lacks any conception of life or passion.

Socrates, while definitely a decisive "turning point" in history,

is the very embodiment of Nietzsche's highest ideal: the passionate man who can control his passions. Here, as in Goethe, he found one who had "given style to his character" (FW 290) and "disciplined himself into wholeness." (G IX 49) Such men, however, live, more often than not, on the threshold of what Nietzsche called decadence; and they perform their great deed of self-creation and integration on the verge of destruction and disintegration. Besides Socrates and Goethe, one may think of Caesar—whom Nietzsche admired for this reason and not for his military feats—of Michaelangelo, and perhaps also of Beethoven.

Even Schopenhauer does not come up to this ultimate standard. Against both him and Kant, Nietzsche levels the charge that they failed to achieve any true integration of life and learning:

Is that the life of sages? It remains science. . . Socrates would demand that one should bring philosophy down to man again. (VII, 21)

The notion that Nietzsche repudiated his earlier view of Socrates as the "theoretical man," when he now described his philosophy as "practical," rests on a basic misunderstanding. There is no new positivistic and pro-Socratic period in which Nietzsche gives up his previous conceptions. Throughout, Socrates is admired for his integration of the theoretical and practical: in the earliest writings he is both the "theoretical man" and the *Lebensphilosoph*; now he is "the theoretical man" who "would rather die than become old and feeble in spirit." (VII, 198)¹³

Socrates is thus the very incarnation of the ideal which Nietzsche opposes to his contemporary "Alexandrianism"; and in the essay on Schopenhauer, in the *Untimely Meditations*, Socrates appears, as it were, on Nietzsche's side:

. . . the conditions for the origin of genius have *not improved* in modern times, and the aversion to original men has increased to such a degree that Socrates could not have lived among us and would not, in any case, have reached the age of seventy. (VII, 107)

From Nietzsche's next work, *Human, All-too-Human*, where Socrates is often referred to with unqualified approval and the notion of the gadfly and the divine calling are still prominent, we shall cite only a single passage:

¹³ Hildebrandt (*op. cit.*), who would distinguish the anti-Socratic "theoretical" construction and the pro-Socratic "practical" interpretation, simply overlooks these and many similar passages.

Socrates: If all goes well, the time will come when, to develop oneself morally-rationally, one would rather take into one's hand the *memorabilia* of Socrates than the Bible, and when Montaigne and Horace will be used as precursors and sign-posts to the understanding of the most simple and imperishable mediator-sage, of Socrates. . . . Above the founder of Christianity, Socrates has the gay kind of seriousness and that *wisdom full of pranks* which constitutes the best state of the soul of man. Moreover, he had the greater mind. (II, II § 85)

Such passages would seem to render absurd any claim that Nietzsche hated Socrates. Oehler, however, has suggested—and most of the literature has followed him—that Nietzsche's writings are to be divided into three stages of which the second, with its enlightened views, represents a temporary (and unfortunate) departure from true Nietzscheanism. This untenable dogma was surely inspired by Oehler's aunt—Nietzsche's sister—who wished to explain away her brother's break with Wagner, his repudiation of nationalism and racism, and his vision of the "Good European."

All the ideals of Nietzsche's so-called "middle period," however, can also be found in his later writings and receive their most extreme formulation in the final works of 1888. State worship, for example, is denounced in the essay on Schopenhauer in the "early" period; in the aphorisms of the "middle" period; then, even more vehemently, in the chapter "Of the New Idol" in the *Zarathustra*; and finally in the *Götzendämmerung* and *Ecce Homo*.¹⁴

¹⁴ Those who would consider Nietzsche's condemnation of the State as somehow anti-Socratic may well be reminded of Socrates' dictum in the *Apology*: "if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good to either you or to myself. . . . no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; he who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one" (31 f., Jowett). Even in the *Republic*, where the Platonic Socrates describes the ideal City, he concludes: "perhaps there is a pattern set up in the heavens for one who desires to see it and, seeing it, to found one in himself. But whether it exists anywhere or ever will exist is no matter; for this is the only commonwealth in whose politics he can ever take part" (592, Cornford). Nietzsche, to be sure, did not believe in Plato's heaven or his Theory of Forms—but he assumed that Socrates had not believed in them either; and in their virulent opposition to any existing form of government, and perhaps also in their deprecation of business and democracy, both Plato and Nietzsche seem to have considered themselves heirs of Socrates. The scattered notes of Nietzsche's last years in which he toys with notions of breeding philosophers and with a caste system in which nature herself distinguishes between the predominantly spiritual ones (*Geistige*), the warriors, and the mediocre mass,

Just as persistent are his anti-racism, his appreciation of the Enlightenment—and his admiration for Socrates.

The *Morgenröte* (Dawn) is the first of Nietzsche's books in which a respectful critique of Socratic doctrines can be found. Socrates and Plato, though they were "great doubters and admirable innovators," shared that "deepest error that 'right knowledge must be followed by right action'" (M 116; cf. M 22).

In the *Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (Gay Science—"Joyful Wisdom" is surely a mistranslation) Nietzsche's admiration for Socrates reaches its apotheosis. The genuine simplicity of the dying Socrates is celebrated once more (FW 36), his war on ignorance and unthinking acceptance of the opinions of others is lauded (FW 328), and Nietzsche declares:

I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in all he did, said—and did not say (FW 340).

This affirmation, though unqualified, is not blind—and the very same aphorism ends with the words: "we must overcome (*überwinden*) even the Greeks." As a dialectical thinker, Nietzsche affirms as necessary and admires even what must be overcome. His admiration does not arrest his thinking, and his critique does not detract from his admiration. In his own historical situation, Socrates acted as wisely and courageously as was then possible; but in the same passage Nietzsche claims that Socrates was a pessimist who "suffered life" as a disease. This is what must be overcome—and the following aphorism contains one of the first statements of the conception of eternal recurrence. With this ultimate affirmation of life, Nietzsche would overcome pessimism; but this doctrine obviously bars any idiosyncratic repudiation.

The *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's next work, contains no explicit mention of Socrates; yet two of its chapters cannot be understood properly, except in terms of Nietzsche's admiration for Socrates: "Of the Friend" and "Of Free Death." Nietzsche's scornful words about love of one's neighbor are known well enough, but the key sentence of the chapter "Of Neighbor-Love" has been ignored: "Not the neighbor do I teach you but the friend."¹⁵ Nietzsche's

are obviously inspired by the *Republic*, no less than the notes in which Nietzsche suggests that military discipline must be part of the philosopher's education. Yet who among all the great philosophers was a soldier's soldier—except Socrates?

¹⁵ In this respect, Jodl's *Geschichte der Ethik* is at one with Morgan (*op. cit.*); while Santayana, in his *Egotism in German Philosophy*, actually writes: "it is re-

high esteem for the Greeks is a commonplace; but it has been assumed that he wanted to return to the pre-Socratics, while his far greater debt to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics has been overlooked.¹⁶ In his attempt to overtrump the Sermon on the Mount, Nietzsche goes back to the Socratics. Thus we find an epigram at the end of the first part of the *Zarathustra* (quoted again in the preface to the *Ecce Homo*): "The man who seeks knowledge must not only be able to love his enemies but also to hate his friends." One is immediately reminded of Aristotle's excuse for his disagreement with Plato (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a): it is a "duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth, even to destroy what touches us closely" since "piety requires us to honor truth above our friends." Nietzsche goes beyond Aristotle by urging his own readers: "One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a pupil only." Like Socrates, Nietzsche would rather arouse a zest for knowledge than commit anyone to his own views. And when he writes, in the chapter "Of the Friend," "one who is unable to loosen his own chains may yet be a redeemer for his friend," he seems to recall Socrates' claim that he was but a barren midwife.

Nietzsche's emphatic scorn for those who would abandon their own path to follow another master, and his vision of a disciple who might follow his master's conceptions beyond the master's boldest dreams are thus no longer enigmatic. We can also understand the grotesque episode in Nietzsche's biography in which he was looking for such a disciple—just one, not twelve. The young people whose potentialities he appraised from this point of view seem rather

markable how little he learned from the Greeks . . . no sense for friendship. . ." (121 f.).

¹⁶ Thus Oehler ignores Nietzsche's dialectic, his ceaseless questioning, his irony, his discourse on love of one's educator, his conception of sublimation with its incessant allusions to the *Symposion*, his development of Plato's notion of *Sophrosyne*, his eulogy of friendship and free death, his *amor fati*, etc., etc. A just recognition of Nietzsche's debt to the pre-Socratics need not entail the claim that Nietzsche despised the later Greeks. Like Oehler's later book on *Friedrich Nietzsche und die Deutsche Zukunft* (Leipzig, 1935), his *Friedrich Nietzsche und die Vorsokratiker* depends on a tendentious selection of fragmentary quotations, torn from their context. Oehler's earlier book, however, ends with a quotation which, while supposed to justify the attempt to trace Nietzsche's spiritual ancestry, is actually amusingly at odds not only with Oehler's *furor teutonicus* but also with his central thesis that Nietzsche's preference for the pre-Socratics entailed a repudiation of Socrates and Plato: ". . . In that which moved Zarathustra, Moses, Muhammed, Jesus, Plato, Brutus, Spinoza, Mirabeau—I live, too. . ."

ridiculous: there was no Plato among them. In any case, a "Nietzschean," whether "gentle" or "tough," is in a sense a contradiction in terms: to be a Nietzschean, one must not be a Nietzschean.

Nietzsche's hymn on "dying at the right time," in the chapter "Of Free Death," has stumped his interpreters; for he obviously does not have in mind suicide. Jesus, moreover, is named explicitly as one who died a "free death," but "too early" and "too young," and not "at the right time." A close reading of the chapter, however, and a comparison with the many passages in which Nietzsche speaks of Socrates' death leave no doubt that we are confronted with another juxtaposition of Socrates and Christ. Nietzsche's quite general failure to equal his hero could hardly be illustrated more frightfully than by his own creeping death.

In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche's next work, we are told that the influence of Socrates, though it may well have been a corruption, was a *necessary* and fruitful ingredient in the development of Western man: "let us not be ungrateful. . . ." We must keep this programmatic preface in mind when we read Nietzsche's violent objection to the Socratic identification of the good with the useful and agreeable "which smells of the plebs." (§ 190) Although Socrates, "that great ironic, so rich in secrets," recognized the irrational component of moral judgments, his influence led to the misconception that reason and instinct aim naturally for the good (§ 191).

A later passage confirms that Nietzsche has not really changed his mind about Socrates: he is still the ideal philosopher. Short of the value-creating philosopher of the future who has never yet existed—and does not live today (§ 211)¹⁷—there is none greater than Socrates.

. . . the philosopher, as a *necessary* man of the tomorrow . . . always *had to* find himself opposed to his today. Until now, all these extraordinary promoters of man, whom one calls philosophers and who rarely felt like friends of wisdom but rather like disagreeable fools and dangerous question marks found their . . . hard, unwanted, inescapable task, but finally also the greatness of their task, in being the bad conscience of their time. By applying the knife vivisectionally just to the . . . *virtues of the time* they betrayed what was their own secret: to know of a *new* greatness of

¹⁷ In § 44, Nietzsche expressly calls himself a mere "herald and precursor" of this "philosopher of the future."

man. . . . Every time they uncovered how much hypocrisy, comfortable-ness, letting oneself go and letting oneself drop . . . was concealed under the best honored type of their contemporary morality. . . . At the time of Socrates, among men of fatigued instincts, among conservative old-Athenians who let themselves go . . . irony was perhaps necessary for greatness of soul—that Socratic spiteful assurance of the old physician and plebeian who cut ruthlessly into his own flesh as well as into flesh and heart of the “nobility”. . . . Today, however, when the herd animal alone is honored in Europe . . . standing alone . . . belongs to the concept of “greatness” . . . today—is greatness even *possible*? (§ 212)

Nietzsche realizes that the greatness of Socrates is indubitable, while his own greatness is problematic. The model philosopher is still a physician, but the gadfly has turned into a vivisectionist.

In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Socrates is mentioned only once:

What great philosopher has, to date, been married? Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer—these were not. . . . A married philosopher belongs *in comedy* . . . and that exception . . . the spiteful Socrates was, it seems, married ironically, just to demonstrate *this* sentence (III 7).

Eight *great* philosophers are named; only one is a pre-Socratic, though others could have been added easily—and Socrates and Plato are both included.

D. NIETZSCHE IN 1888

The posthumously published notes of Nietzsche's last years have been invoked to prove many assertions about Nietzsche which are at odds with the published works. As a matter of principle, it should not be forgotten that the notes—including those which the editors chose to publish as *The Will to Power*—are mostly the scribbles which Nietzsche jotted into his notebooks during his long walks in the Alps. They cannot balance the lectures and the books; and most of them, including again the material published in *The Will to Power*, appear in Nietzsche's later books—often in a form and in a context which yields an unexpected meaning.

In any case, the notes contain no departure from Nietzsche's previous position. Side by side with occasional tributes to the philosophers “before Socrates” (WM 437; XVI, 3, 4), we find, for example, these sentences:

Some ancient writings one reads to understand antiquity: others, however, are such that one studies antiquity *in order* to be able to read *them*. To these belongs the *Apology*; its theme is supra-Greek . . . (XVI, 6).

Nietzsche's references to the ugliness and plebeian descent of Socrates are as continuous with the earlier works as the tributes to his irony and integrity.

The passages about Socrates in *The Will to Power* deal primarily with his alleged decadence (§§ 429–32, 437, 441–43, 578). Nietzsche, however, explains in the preface of *The Case Wagner*, his first great polemic of 1888.

I am no less than Wagner the child of this time, and that means a decadent: only I comprehended this, only I struggled against this. The philosopher in me struggled against this.

Wagner, it seems, resembled the Athenians who let themselves go, while Nietzsche emulates Socrates, the model philosopher:

What does a philosopher demand of himself, first and last? To overcome his time in himself, to become "timeless."

This conception of the decadent philosopher who cannot cure his own decadence but yet struggles against it is developed in the last work which Nietzsche himself sent to press, the *Götzendämmerung*. Like his first book, it contains an extended treatment of what Nietzsche now calls "The Problem of Socrates";¹⁸ and one may generalize that the works of 1888, for all their sardonic hyperboles and for all their glaring faults, represent more sustained analyses than any of Nietzsche's works since *The Birth of Tragedy*. However strained and unrestrained they are, they contain some of Nietzsche's most fruitful and ingenious conceptions.

In his chapter on "The problem of Socrates," Nietzsche recalls the ugliness, plebeian descent, and decadence of Socrates and adds—in a sentence which we shall have to recall later: "Socrates was the buffoon (*Hanswurst*) who *made others take him seriously*" (§ 5). He is also said to have "fascinated" the contest-craving Greeks by offering them a new kind of spiritualized dialectical contest, and—as in *The Birth of Tragedy*—he is considered a great "erotic" (§ 8). Far more significant is the fact that, just as in Nietzsche's first book, Socratism is considered dialectically as something necessary—in fact, as the very force which saved Western civilization from an otherwise inescapable destruction. Socrates "understood that all the world *needed* him—his means, his cure, his personal artifice of self-preservation" (§ 9): "one had

¹⁸ Knight (*op. cit.*, 128) erroneously declares this chapter to be part of the *Genealogy*.

only *one* choice: either to perish or—to be *absurdly rational*" (§ 10). In this way alone could the excesses of the instincts be curbed in an age of disintegration and degeneration; Socratism alone could prevent the premature end of Western man. Yet "to *have to* fight the instincts—that is the formula for decadence" (§ 11). Socratism itself is decadent and cannot produce a real cure; by thwarting death it can only make possible an eventual regeneration which may not come about for centuries. Socrates himself realized this: "In the *wisdom* of his courage to die," he recognized that for himself no ultimate cure was possible—except death (§ 12).¹⁹

E. THE ECCE HOMO

The *Ecce Homo* was Nietzsche's last work²⁰ and in many ways the apotheosis of his philosophy. Much of it can be understood only in terms of juxtaposition which we have previously encountered: Christ versus Socrates. As Nietzsche assures us in the *Antichrist*,²¹ he reveres the life and death of Jesus—but instead of interpreting it as a promise of another world and another life, and instead of conceding the divinity of Jesus, Nietzsche insists: *Ecce Homo!* Man can live and die in a grand style, working out his own salvation instead of relying on the sacrifice of another. Where Kierkegaard, at the outset of his *Fragments*, poses an alternative of Christ, the Savior, and Socrates, the Teacher, and then chooses Christ and His revelation, Nietzsche, as ever, prefers Socrates: man's salvation is in himself, if anywhere, and requires no transcendent interference. Like Kierkegaard—and unlike contemporary "humanists"—Nietzsche felt that this position involved a decisive break with Christianity. In any case, it does not involve

¹⁹ Not only Hildebrandt (*op. cit.*, 57–59) assumes that this chapter contains another "hateful" repudiation of Socratism, but even Klages [*Die Psychologischen Errungenschaften Nietzsches* (Leipzig, 1926), 181,] takes for granted Nietzsche's "passionate repudiation of Socrates . . . in GT and G"—and that in a chapter in which Klages accuses (!) Nietzsche of "Socratism," i.e. of not having been as irrational as Klages. Neither author offers any analysis of the text of G.

²⁰ Not, as Knight (*op. cit.*, 44) and many others have claimed, *The Will to Power*. The notes published under that title were accumulated from 1884 till the fall of 1888, at which time Nietzsche abandoned this project and embarked on the *Revaluation of All Values*, (a modification of the subtitle of the earlier project); of this he completed Book I: *The Antichrist*.

²¹ Morgan (*op. cit.*) translates this title "The Antichristian" which seems to me to soft-pedal Nietzsche's very deliberate attempt to be provocative.

any departure from Nietzsche's "middle" period. He still considers himself the heir of the Enlightenment: at the end of the *Ecce Homo* he cites Voltaire's "*Écrasez l'infâme!*"

This virulent polemic is not incompatible with the *amor fati* which Nietzsche stresses just in the *Ecce Homo*. Thus we are told in the first part: "Nothing that is may be subtracted, nothing is dispensable" (§ 2); and in the second part Nietzsche elaborates:

My formula for the greatness of a man is *amor fati*: that one would not have anything different—not forward, not backward, not in all eternity (§ 10).

If this attitude is not markedly different from Hegel's, Nietzsche's attitude toward Christianity certainly is. Yet both men find their own historical significance to be due to their relation to Christianity. Owing to this, each considers himself, in Nietzsche's words, a destiny. Hegel thought of himself as the last great world-historical philosopher who evolved a specifically Christian system, reconciling in an essentially secular philosophy the dogmata of Christianity and the heritage of ancient and modern philosophy. He saw himself standing at the end of an era as a fulfillment and *non plus ultra*. Nietzsche answered his own question, "why I am a destiny," by claiming that he was the first to have "uncovered" Christian morality. He believed that after him no secular Christian system would be possible any more; and he considered himself the first philosopher of an irrevocably anti-Christian era. "To be the first one here may be a curse; in any case, it is a destiny" (§ 6). His anti-Christianity, therefore, does not seem to him essentially negative. He is no critic who would have things different: he lives at the beginning of a new era, and things *will* be different. "I contradict as has never been contradicted before and am yet the opposite of a no-saying spirit" (§ 1).

All this shows the essential continuity of Nietzsche's thought, no less than does his reiteration, in the first chapter, that both Socrates and Nietzsche are decadent. In the discussion of the *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche even ascribes to the superman that "omnipresence of spitefulness and frolics" which he evidently associated with Socrates,²² and in speaking of *The Case Wagner* Nietzsche

²² In the chapter, "Why I write such good books" (§ 1), Nietzsche insists that only oxen could construe the superman as a Darwinistic conception—a point which most interpreters have overlooked, though his writings from the second and third "Meditation" (§ 6) on are quite emphatic regarding it.

emphasizes his own love of irony. Yet not one of these points is half as important as the fact that the *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche's *Apology*.

Brinton remarks incidentally—though, in conformity with almost the entire literature, he fails to discuss the *Ecce Homo*—that it “is not apologetic.”²³ This, of course, is the basis of our comparison with the *Apology*—that masterpiece for whose sake one studies antiquity. The heading of the first chapter, “why I am so wise,” recalls the leitmotif of the *Apology*. Socrates, after claiming that he was the wisest of men, had interpreted his wisdom in terms of the foolishness of his contemporaries, who thought they knew what they really did not know, and in terms of his own calling. Nietzsche answers his own provocative question in terms of “the disparity between my task and the smallness of my contemporaries” (Preface § 1). His wisdom, he claims, consists in his opposition to his time—and we have seen that he felt close to Socrates in this respect.

The second question, “why I am so clever,” is similarly answered: “I have never pondered questions which are none” (§ 1). Again one recalls the *Apology* where Socrates scorns far-flung speculations; he confined his inquiries to a few basic questions of morality.

The third question, “why I write such good books,” receives a more startling reply:

There is altogether no prouder nor, at the same time, more subtle kind of book: here and there they attain the ultimate which can be attained on earth: cynicism (§ 3).

We are reminded of that Socratic “wisdom full of pranks which constitutes the best state of the soul of man”—and the *Ecce Homo* goes farther than any previous book of Nietzsche's in seeking to translate the cynicism of the “great ironic” into prose.²⁴

In the *Götzendämmerung*, Socrates had been called a buffoon: now “buffoon” and “satyr” (the term which the Platonic Alci-

²³ *Op. cit.*, 65. Hildebrandt, in his discussion of Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates, does not even mention the *Ecce Homo*.

²⁴ Morgan (*op. cit.*, 133 f.) writes: “I am unable to account for Nietzsche's extraordinary valuation of *cynicism*.” We have tried to show how Nietzsche “received the decisive thought as to how a philosopher ought to behave toward men from the apology of Socrates.” In the *Ecce Homo* he would outdo Socrates' request for maintenance in the Prytaneum (*Apology* 36).

biades had used to picture Socrates) become idealized conceptions. In the preface to the *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche would be a satyr. In the chapter "why I am so clever," he praises Heine's "divine spitefulness without which I cannot imagine perfection" and calls him a satyr (§ 4).²⁵ On the same page, Nietzsche says of Shakespeare: "what must a man have suffered to find it that necessary to be a buffoon"; and in the last chapter, Nietzsche says of himself: "I do not want to be a saint, rather a buffoon. Perhaps I am a buffoon" (§ 1).

We may conclude by considering a passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* (§ 295) which is quoted at the end of "Why I write such good books." Nietzsche introduces this quotation: "I forbid, by the way, any conjecture as to whom I am describing in this passage" (§ 6). We need not "conjecture," however, if we know that Nietzsche called Socrates the "Pied Piper of Athens"—in *The Gay Science*, right after saying: "I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in all he did, said—and did not say" (§ 340).

The genius of the heart, as that great hidden one has it . . . the Pied Piper . . . whose voice knows how to descend into the depths of every soul. . . . The genius of the heart . . . which teaches to listen, which smooths rough souls and lets them taste a new yearning. . . . The genius of the heart . . . which divines the hidden and forgotten treasure, the drop of goodness . . . under the . . . thick ice. . . . The genius of the heart from whose touch everyone goes away richer, not having found grace nor surprised, not as blessed and oppressed by the goods of another, but richer in himself . . . opened up . . . less sure perhaps . . . but full of hopes which have yet no name. . . .

In many particulars, Nietzsche's picture of Socrates may have been untenable; but that question is hardly relevant to the present study which aims solely to show the importance of Nietzsche's admiration for Socrates for Nietzsche's entire philosophic effort. In the end, one may wonder if Nietzsche, for all his love of Socrates—and just in his love of Socrates—was not really much more akin to Alcibiades, the mad, drunken Alcibiades of the *Symposium*: whether Nietzsche did not fall as short of the peerless mature humanity of Socrates, without ever being able to overcome the fascination, the charm, and the genius of his heart. Reading the words of Alcibiades, we may understand Nietzsche better, too:

²⁵ Nietzsche was seriously influenced by Heine's prose style, his polemics, and his division of mankind into *Hellenen* and *Nazarener*.

I have been bitten by a more than viper's tooth; I have known in my soul . . . that worst of pangs . . . the pang of philosophy which will make a man say or do anything. And you . . . all of you, and I need not say Socrates himself, have had experience of the same madness and passion in your longing after wisdom. Therefore, listen and excuse my doings . . . and my sayings. . . . But let profane and unmannered persons close up the doors of their ears (*Symposion*, 218, Jowett).

Princeton University.