Nietzsche's Early Political Thinking II: "The Greek State"

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Abstract

This paper uses an extended discussion of Nietzsche's essay "The Greek State" to uncover the political aspects of his early thinking. The paper builds on a similar discussion of another essay from the same period, "Homer on Competition," in arguing that Nietzsche's thinking is based on a confrontation with the work of Plato. It is argued that the key to understanding "The Greek State" is seeing it, in its entirety, as an enigmatic interpretation and re-writing of Plato's Republic. Nietzsche interprets the Republic as Plato's accomplishment of the task of the genuine philosopher: the legislation of values and the moulding of human character.

As a birthday gift to Cosima Wagner in December 1872, Nietzsche sent a carefully crafted, leather-bound manuscript in his best handwriting; the manuscript was entitled *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books*. Although this work has not received wide attention within Nietzsche scholarship, two of the essays in that volume, "Homer on Competition" and "The Greek State," give us an insightful summary of Nietzsche's early political thinking. "Homer on Competition" presents Nietzsche's understanding of the nature of existence as strife, while "The Greek State" presents Nietzsche's understanding of how this natural strife unfolds itself in human institutions and regimes. The essays, then, provide the early Nietzsche's most thoughtful articulation of the relation between nature and culture or convention − *phusis* and *nomos* − the distinction which lies at the very roots of Western political philosophy.

For Nietzsche, state institutions and regimes (the domain of *nomos*) are essentially tied to a purposive nature (*phusis*) in its unfolding. The goal of this purposive unfolding is the creative individual (the genius). In this way, we can understand Nietzsche's early political thinking by means of two sets of fundamental relations:

1. NATURE and the STATE

2. The STATE and the INDIVIDUAL

In another essay, I have undertaken the first part of an interpretation of the early Nietzsche in terms of these two sets of relations. That essay, by means of a close reading of "Homer on Competition," explores Nietzsche's understanding of nature as strife, and how it channels itself into cultural or state forms. The present essay contains part two of this analysis. By means of a close reading of "The Greek State," it explores how the state, rooted in nature, leads to the production of the genius or individual.[1]

I) On Nietzsche's Early Political Thinking

i) The State or the Individual

The present inquiry builds on its predecessor in a few respects. First of all, it takes as its point of departure the assumption that Nietzsche, indeed, had a political teaching. This assumption would seem to be contradicted, in the first instance, by Nietzsche's own insistence that he was, in fact, the "last anti-political German."[2] Rather than a political teaching, Nietzsche seems to offer us a vision of the unfettered creativity of the individual – a creativity that any communal effort can only mask or hinder. If we can say anything, at best we can say that his political thinking is in the negative mode; that is, Nietzsche's political teachings seem to consist of attacks against certain enemies. Indeed, he characterized himself as "warlike by nature." This self-characterization repeats a dominant theme within his writings: the equation of identity and opposition. A thing becomes what it is through the enemy, through the limitation, or through the dialogic conflict with that which differs (EH 1.7). Yet, Nietzsche's negative or warlike stance does not preclude the production of a "positive" political teaching: "I contradict as has never been contradicted before and am nevertheless the opposite of a No-saying spirit. I am a bringer of glad tidings like no one before me" (EH 4.1).

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The modern "State" is one of the enemies that the warlike Nietzsche attacks most vehemently. For him, it is the "coldest of all cold monsters" (TZ 1.11); it is the false idol that prevents the growth of the creative individual. According to Nietzsche's logic of affirmation by means of opposition, however, this warlike attack on the modern State should yield fruit in the form of a positive political teaching. By turning to Nietzsche's early thinking, I will attempt to harvest this positive political fruit. In "The Greek State," the early Nietzsche describes the form of political community that presents a positive possibility for political action.

The present inquiry, like that of "Homer on Competition," reveals that Nietzsche's teaching does not fit within either of the polar categories usually carved out for it by Nietzsche scholars. The early twentieth-century reception of Nietzsche saw in his writings a prophecy of the race-based and nation-based politics of that era (see Golomb and Wistrich). Nietzsche was seen as the consummate philosopher of the "State" or the political community, as rooted in a national or racial identity. In response to this tendency, the pendulum of Nietzsche scholarship has swung in the other direction. Beginning with Walter Kaufmann's landmark study, scholars have emphasized the individualism and apolitical nature of Nietzsche's thinking. Rather than a philosopher prophesying the rule of any group, Nietzsche is celebrated as a prophet of individual self-realization and rebellion against any existing social norms or standards.[3] In "The Greek State" Nietzsche elucidates his understanding of the relations between the state and the individual. This set of relations charts a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of these two poles of Nietzsche interpretation. As was discovered through the analysis of "Homer on Competition", two dimensions of Nietzsche's thinking are discernible: (1) a political dimension wherein the sources and benefits of contest and cohesion within a group are identified, and (2) a transpolitical dimension wherein the sources and benefits of contest and cohesion within a "republic of geniuses" who call to one another across the ages are identified. The two dimensions are co-defining in that the political dimension, as embodied in the State, has as its goal the production of the individual genius, while the transpolitical

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dimension, as embodied in the individual genius, acts in such a way as to give an end or meaning to the State.

ii) The Art of Lento

The present inquiry also builds on its predecessor in terms of its method. The analysis of "Homer on Competition" revealed that the art of slow reading was required in order to cull the essay's deepest secrets. Nietzsche, as well as his works, "are friends of *lento*." It is for this reason that Nietzsche as a philosopher is inseparable from Nietzsche as a philologist, "that is to say, a teacher of slow reading." This art of slow reading is difficult to teach, says Nietzsche, "in the midst of an age of 'work', … of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste" (D, "Preface" 5). According to Cosima Wagner, Nietzsche's manuscript showed "signs of clumsy abruptness" (163). Cosima received the *Five Prefaces* during what she refers to as a "gloomy phase" in the life of the Wagners. Perhaps this gloomy disposition did not allow her to practice the type of slow reading that the essays require. Despite appearing to be clumsy and abrupt, the *Five Prefaces* are, in fact, carefully crafted. Through the analysis of "Homer on Competition", we discovered that the structure of Nietzsche's work, as well as his carefully chosen selection of examples and citations, reveal deeper meanings beneath the manifest shell of the text. We will need to be mindful of similar clues and underlying structures as we survey the terrain of "The Greek State." By closely analyzing the works in this way, we can see that Nietzsche's early thinking contains many of the essential insights of the supposedly "mature" works. Despite the changes in style and intellectual position with respect to certain questions, there is a fundamental continuity throughout Nietzsche's intellectual career when it comes to many of his core concepts. This also means that study of his "early" thinking can provide essential insights into certain dimensions of Nietzsche's later works.[4]

iii) Nietzsche's Contest with Plato

Finally, the present inquiry, like its predecessor, sees Nietzsche's engagement with the thought of Plato as central to understanding his political teaching.[5] We saw that in

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"Homer on Competition" the ultimate competition was not Homer's own contest with Hesiod, but that of Plato against Homer. *"Homer's Wettkampf"* is really about *"Plato's Wettkampf"*. So too, "The Greek State" could more aptly be named "The Platonic State." In "The Greek State," modern political institutions and principles of equality are opposed to "Plato's perfect state." Nietzsche reaches this affirmation of Plato's state in the last paragraph of the essay, where he indicates that he finds "in the total concept of the Platonic state, the wonderfully grand hieroglyph of a profound esoteric doctrine of the connection between state and genius, eternally needing to be interpreted."[6] He also indicates that the entire essay has been his attempt to express what he has "fathomed of this secret script."

Nietzsche's entire essay, then, is an extended reading of Plato's *Republic*, an interpretation which attempts to reveal its secrets and uncover its mysteries. This is a baffling claim. The essay, at first sight at least, bears no signs of being an extended discussion of Plato's book. It discusses, instead, various manifestations of Greek political experience, without explicitly referring to Plato, and contrasts them with the faults of the political opinions of Nietzsche's day. Nietzsche's essay seems, on the surface at least, concerned only with the need for a new, pyramidal, caste-like society – with a broad base of slaves to support a few cultural creators. In this way, Nietzsche's early essay is consistent with his discussion of the law of Manu in *The Antichrist*, a work composed in his last productive year (1888): "A high culture is a pyramid: it can stand only on a broad base; its first presupposition is a strong and soundly consolidated mediocrity" (A 57). In order to provide for this sound consolidation of mediocrity, "The Greek State" asserts the need to unleash the warrior instincts of society. Such instincts forge a hierarchical society, wherein a military caste, headed by the "military genius", sits atop the pyramid ruling a broad base of slave-labourers. At best we could say that this discussion of a caste-like society bears superficial resemblance to Plato's *Republic* inasmuch as the "city in speech" described in Books 2 - 4 contains a similar ordering of rulers, warriors and labourers. Nowhere do we see, however, any overt reference to the dialogue's central discussion

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of the philosopher and his fitness for ruling in the highest sense, expressed ultimately in those most powerful of poetic images that form the centre of Plato's work: the images of the Sun, the Divided Line and the Cave. Nietzsche's essay does not even mention the title of Plato's dialogue. On the face of it, the *Republic* is virtually absent from the discussion until the end of the essay; yet Nietzsche claims that the whole essay is an extended unlocking of its innermost secrets. Let us take him at his word on this and see if we can hunt down any traces of its presence. Let us begin by exploring that against which he defined the ideal of the Platonic state: the modern state.

II) The Crisis of Modernity

Nietzsche reaches this affirmation of the Platonic state as an ideal only at the end of the essay. The body of the essay proper consists of a prolonged critique of certain aspects of modern politics, and this critique of modern politics is tied to a more fundamental critique of modernity itself. For Nietzsche, modernity presents itself as a crisis: the highest values that have guided the actions of Western humanity for the last two millennia have devalued themselves. Unable to posit new ends or values, modern humanity exists in the desert of nihilism. "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devaluate themselves*. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (WTP 2; cf. also WTP 12, 18). Without new ends or values, humanity clings to modern state forms and mere existence itself as a way to find meaning (see EH 3 "The Case of Wagner" 2).

This is the significance of Nietzsche's opening remarks in the essay. Nietzsche begins by ironically confronting the "advantage" of us moderns in relation to the Greeks: "We moderns have the advantage over the Greeks with two concepts given as consolation, as it were, to a world which behaves in a thoroughly slave-like manner whilst anxiously avoiding the word 'slave': we speak of the 'dignity of man' [*Würde des Menschen*] and of the 'dignity of work' [*Würde der Arbeit*] (Paragraph 1). "*Würde*" signifies dignity, that which is worthy of respect. It also signifies honour, in the sense that what is dignified possesses an honour and order of rank higher than

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what is ordinary. According to modern thinking, all humanity and all labouring activity, no matter how aimless, shares the same dignity and honour.

i) The Ends of Man

This state of affairs contrasts sharply with that of ancient Greece. For the Greeks, dignity was accorded to those rare men and those rare actions that embodied and enacted the virtues of the city to the highest degree. More generally, the dignity of any thing as such can be seen only in the fulfillment of its excellence or virtue (*arête*). The eye, for instance, deserves the dignity of that name only inasmuch as it can see. Sight is the excellence, virtue or proper functioning of the eye (cf. Xenophon, *Symposium* 5.2-5; *Memoirs* III.8). In other words, sight is the "end" or "final cause" for which the activities of the eye take place. For this reason, classical philosophy concerned itself with attaining wisdom with respect to the end or "good" of each thing. Aristotle makes this clear in his definition of philosophy as the quest for wisdom, wherein "'wisdom' is concerned with the first causes and principles" (*Metaphysics* 981b). There are four types of cause or principle to be examined by the philosopher: material, formal, efficient and final. In its highest sense, however, philosophy is a way of thinking which attempts to articulate the final cause: the "why" of each thing, the "good" of each thing. The supreme way of knowing, the highest philosophy, "is the one which knows that for the sake of which each thing must be done, and this is the good in each case, and, in general, the highest good in the whole of nature" (*Metaphysics* 982b). Classical political philosophy, as a branch of philosophy, seeks wisdom concerning political things and it defines this wisdom as an articulation of the "ends" of the political things or their "ought to be." Classical political philosophy, then, took as its point of departure considerations of the best political order and considerations of the best way to live.

The crisis of modernity begins with the modern philosophical revolution – whose point of departure was a certain narrowing of the classical philosophical horizon described above. Modern thought has its foundation in three breaks from the classical

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definition of philosophy: the refusal to account for the goal of society, or how things "ought" to be, as first articulated in the political philosophy of Machiavelli; the refusal to account for the "final cause" of beings, as first asserted in the natural philosophy of Bacon; and the positioning of the human subject as the pivotal locus of truth, as first developed in the metaphysics of Descartes.

ii) Machiavelli

For Machiavelli, the attempt to account for and secure the final ends of humanity within the political community had been misguided and unrealistic. The notion that man has an excellence or virtue (*arête*) that is proper to him must be abandoned in order to accommodate the accomplishment of more modest goals (*The Prince*, chapter 15). In this way, Machiavelli consciously lowers the standards of social action. He lowers the standards such that the actualization of those standards is more possible, more in accordance with that aspect of fortune that can be shaped by human willing (cf. Strauss 1983, 213).

> I compare fortune to one of those dangerous rivers that, when they become enraged, flood the plains, destroy trees and buildings, move earth from one place and deposit it in another. … But this does not mean that, when the river is not in flood, men are unable to take precautions, by means of dykes and dams, so that when it rises next time, it will either not overflow its banks or, if it does, its force will not be so uncontrolled or damaging (chapter 25).

Fortuna can be shaped, within limits, by a certain *virtú*. Of course, this is a different sense of virtue than that described by the classical political philosophers. Virtue is no longer considered one's proper end (*telos*) that has been allotted by fate or that is fixed in accordance with one's nature. Rather, virtue is now considered the active power of self-determination. For this re-thinking of virtue to become possible, and through it the Machiavellian lowering of the horizon for social action, man in his essence had to be seen as Protean. This decisive modern insight was, of course,

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articulated by Pico della Mirandola. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, he has God say the following words to Adam: "We have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, more freely and more honourably the moulder and maker of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever form you shall prefer" (478).[7] For Machiavelli, too, man's ends, or the virtue and dignity proper to man, were malleable; they can be moulded by the proper institutions – as long as we do not set our sights too high.

iii) Bacon

This occurrence in the realm of political thinking found its corollary in natural philosophy. There, too, beginning with the thought of Bacon, the search for the ends or final causes of things had to be discarded in order to achieve a foundational knowledge that would benefit man here and now (*New Organon* 1.65). It is for this reason that Bacon sees Machiavelli as a father of the inductive method in the realm of civil philosophy. That is, Machiavelli uses histories and examples, not general unfounded axioms. "We are much beholden to Machiavel and others that write what men do, and not what they ought to do" (III.430).

The classical attempt to understand the "why" or the ultimate purpose behind the phenomena was an abstraction from nature as it is in itself. Bacon claims that his method of eliminative induction is a way of encountering nature as it shows itself; it is a true "interpretation" of nature, unclouded by prior theoretical prejudices, as opposed to what he calls "Anticipations of Nature" (*New Organon* 1.25). In order to interpret nature as it shows itself, we must "be content to wait upon nature instead of vainly affecting to overrule her" (*Great Instauration* 298-99). Although the ostensible modality of this interpretation is one of servitude to nature, the ultimate goal of this scientific interpretation of nature is a certain, secured power over and commanding of nature: "For the end which this science of mine proposes is the invention not of arguments but of arts, not of things in accordance with principles but of principles themselves, not of probable reasons but of designations and directions for works. And

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as the intention is different, so accordingly is the effect, the effect of the one being to overcome an opponent in argument, of the other to command nature in action" (*Great Instauration* 314). Bacon sums up this paradoxical relation between his method and the purposes of human mastery to which it is directed: "Nature to be commanded must be obeyed" (*New Organon* 1.3). One cannot simply observe nature empirically, however, in order to know and control her. Nature is much too self-concealing and subtle (*New Organon* 1.10). The ability to command nature will only arise through the methodological approach to studying nature: "Our steps must be guided by a clue, and the whole way from the very first perception of the senses must be laid out upon a sure plan" (*Great Instauration* 307). Gradually, through the rigour of research, we will build our knowledge from the particular to the more general and all-embracing truth; eventually we will be able to know the forms or necessary conditions of all things (*New Organon* 2.4-5). By means of a rigorous research plan that follows a careful framework, Bacon proposes "to establish progressive stages of certainty" (*New Organon*, "Preface" 327).

Thus, in Bacon's natural philosophy, as in Machiavelli's political philosophy, the source of the order or virtue of the things themselves was seen to be replaced by the operation of a certain human action. Things do not have a proper nature within themselves; rather, their identity and meaning arise only within the realm of knowledge as moulded by a human, experimental ground plan. The projected "third part" of Bacon's *Great Instauration* was to embrace "the Phenomena of the Universe; that is to say, experience of every kind, and such a natural history as may serve for a foundation to build philosophy upon" (318). This embracing of phenomena, this natural history as the foundation of a new philosophy, was "to be a history not only of nature free and at large (when she is left to her own course and does her work her own way) ... but much more of nature under constraint and vexed; that is to say, when by art and the hand of man she is forced out of her natural state, and squeezed and moulded. ... Nay (to say the plain truth) I do in fact (low and vulgar as men may think it) count more upon this part both for helps and safeguards than upon the other, seeing

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that the nature of things betrays itself more readily under the vexations of art than in its natural freedom" (320). Nature is experienced here as that which can be forced, through a certain human moulding and measuring, to betray itself, or show itself in a way that is not "natural," that is outside of its own limit and measure. Within Baconian science, beings are "drag[ged] into light" (320) and are not granted the withdrawal and limits which make them what they are.[8]

iv) Descartes

The modern revolution in philosophy, then, is marked by the refusal to consider the final cause of things; rather than having ends within themselves, things arise only as moulded by a certain human activity or ground plan. It was Machiavelli who first took this approach with respect to the political things and it was Bacon who first took this approach with respect to the things of nature. With the thinking of Descartes we see the first articulation of the broader metaphyscial point of departure that this modern revolution in thinking assumes. For Descartes, it is not a particular realm of things that arises as defined by its relation to a human moulding; rather, existence itself, truth itself, is defined by means of a determinative relation to the human subject.

Descartes begins his *Meditations* by applying himself "to the general destruction of all [his] former opinions" (95). The "First Meditation," then, concerns itself with the destruction of the foundation of all knowledge. Because he is destroying the foundation of knowledge, truth, and Being, he does not have to concern himself with individual propositions that would be derived from that foundation: "the destruction of the foundation necessarily brings down with it the rest of the edifice" (Descartes 95). This foundation will have to, in turn, be reconstructed on a new ground. Descartes finds a new Archimedean point for the truth of beings in the "Second Meditation": "Archimedes, in order to take the terrestrial globe from its place and move it to another, asked only for a point which was fixed and assured. So also, I shall have the right to entertain high hopes, if I am fortunate enough to find only one thing which is certain and indubitable" (102). This Archimedean point of security and

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certainty, and with it the founding of modern metaphysics, stands in Descartes' statement: *Ego cogito, ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." Here, the locus of truth is shifted to the subject in its certain representing. "All consciousness of things and of beings as a whole is referred back to the self-consciousness of the human subject as the unshakable ground of all certainty" (Heidegger 1982, 86; cf. also 1977a, 127-28). The essence of truth becomes this self-asserted certainty. For the Greeks, human existence consists of a certain receptivity to that which presences in unconcealment (*alētheia*). The medieval metaphysics founded by the Latin translation of *alētheia* into *verum-falsum*, and prepared for by the Platonic-Aristotelian assertion of truth as *homoiosis*, still echoes this receptivity inasmuch as the true and the fallen are taken to be that which are given by God; they are not products of human representing. The salvation to be secured in medieval metaphysics, for instance, is grounded in revelation as interpreted and consolidated in Christian doctrine.[9] In modern metaphysics, however, the modern subject becomes the self-secured locus of certainty as well as the measure and setting of beings (Heidegger 1977a, 131-32).[10]

v) The Value of Existence: Hobbes, Locke, Hegel

Given that, within this modern revolution of thinking, the thing itself in its nature can no longer be defined in terms of its own end or virtue, it comes to be defined as the means to any end that may be posited by the human subject – modern rationalism replaces classical rationalism by being "instrumental". The state does not exist, for instance, to foster one's virtue; it exists to provide the means to the individual pursuit of one's own ends. Since various, individually chosen, ends cannot be unqualifiedly affirmed by the community, the means (wealth, fame etc.) become the virtues of the modern community. These were the ultimate conclusions, building on the insights of Machiavelli, Bacon, and Descartes, reached by Hobbes and Locke, and which form the basic principles of modern liberalism. This is why Nietzsche refers to the modern concept of the "dignity of work" with such disdain. Greek crafts or skilled labour (*technē*) are justified in their ends, or their products. In the modern experience, in the absence of an agreed upon purpose to all of our mindless activity and busy-work, the

activity itself comes to be celebrated. With his discovery of the value of work itself, outside of a purpose, modern man lies to himself and says that he has invented happiness; however, this fiction is too transparent to nourish his self-overcoming.

The problems identified here with the "dignity of work" also point to the reasons for Nietzsche's questioning of the "dignity of man," or of the value of his existence. The modern age "is infected with the biographical plague," which forces it to "quite different and statelier thoughts as to the dignity of man" than would otherwise be warranted (PTG 4). In the context of this faith in the value of human existence and the dignity of man, the plague of modernity reaches its fevered pitch in the absolute denial of the possibility of transcending our individual passions – including the base desire for mere existence, rather than self-transcendence. The point of departure of Hobbes, for instance, can be contrasted with that of the classical political philosophers. While the latter had based their normative judgements on reflections on the "ends" of man, Hobbes makes man's beginnings his basis (Strauss 1953, 180). Hobbes' point of departure is that the political community arises out of a primordial state of nature ruled by a *bellum omnium contra omnes.* The state arises by means of a social contract designed as a way of ensuring that all of the combatants in this struggle have their most basic desire fulfilled: the desire to exist; or, more pointedly, the state has its origin in the basest of passions: the fear of violent death (*Leviathan* chap. 13, 14, 27).

Locke agrees with Hobbes in every fundamental respect, but takes his conclusions further. For Locke, as for Hobbes, one gives up the theoretical freedoms enjoyed in the state of nature in order to make his self preservation more secure (*Second Treatise*, sect. 123). However, Locke extends the pre-requisites of self-preservation: not just security against external, physical threats is needed, one also needs nourishment, or more generally, property. Locke introduces the value of acquisitiveness to the basic desire for self-preservation. Acquisitiveness does not lead to happiness, however. The painful labour to acquire possessions is a manifestation of man's negative freedom,

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man's reaction to his basic and unending misery. Self-preservation as acquisitiveness marks modern man's existence as a "joyless quest for joy" (Strauss 1953, 251).

The logic of modernity, and with it the apotheosis of the value of self-preservation, is extended in Hegel's dialectic of master and slave, where the slave becomes a slave as such by ending the battle to the death for recognition and submitting to the eventual master – that is, by valuing mere existence over mastery and other forms of honour (cf. *Phenomenology*, Sect. 178-96; Kojève 3-30). It is for this reason that Nietzsche refers to modernity as a "slave-like" culture or morality: a culture based on the "the drive to exist at any price, the same all-powerful drive which makes stunted plants push their roots into arid rocks" ("GSt", Paragraph 1). Within the aristocratic culture or master morality of the Greeks, on the contrary, "[w]ork is a disgrace because existence has no inherent value" (Paragraph 3).

In "The Greek State," Nietzsche attempts to uncover the illusions of the modern thinkers mentioned above concerning the "origin and meaning of the state" (Paragraph 7). Rather than existing to preserve the individual's mere existence, the state has as its goal the production of genius. Nietzsche seems to agree with the Hobbesian characterization of the state of nature as a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, which he quotes twice (Paragraph 11; see also WTP 99-100). He agrees with the premise that existence at its core is strife. The highest goddess, although one with a Janus-face, is Eris ("HC", Paragraphs 5, 6). However, he disagrees with the theory that states are formed by means of a contract to preserve existence *per se*. Rather, nature's purpose in first crafting "the cruel tool of the state" is to provide "the point where the individual completely transcends himself and no longer has to procreate and work in the service of the continuation of his individual life ("GSt", Paragraph 8, 3).

It is within the context of the modern replacement of ends with means as the ultimately defining character of one's life, as well as modernity's slave-like valuing of

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mere existence, that Nietzsche opens his preface. Within the horizon of modernity, men and their actions can no longer arise within their proper dignity in the sense of ends; rather, men and their actions arise as interchangeably equal – as equally valuable and, thus, equally valueless. Nietzsche would later characterize the product of this enlightened, liberal rationality as the "last man". The last man is the culmination of the logic of modernity described here, seeking a peaceful, conflict-free existence of simple pleasures and convenience: "One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled – else it might spoil the digestion" (TZ 1 "Prologue" 5). In order to be able to live in the face of the meaninglessness of his existence, modern man, as the "last man", must create fictions for himself, fictions that can be seen in such modern notions as "the alleged 'equal rights for all' or the 'fundamental rights of man', of man as such, or in the dignity of work." We should note that Nietzsche does not oppose these fictions because they are fictions; rather, he opposes them because they are "transparent lies" ("GSt", Paragraph 3).

vi) Modernity's Transparent Lies

The lies spun out of the depths of the crisis of modernity are "transparent," according to Nietzsche. Of course, Plato's "perfect state" would rely on the use of a "noble" (*gennaion*) lie. "Could we," Socrates asks Glaucon, "somehow contrive one of those lies that come into being in case of need, of which we were just speaking, some one noble lie to persuade, in the best case, even the rulers, but if not them, the rest of the city?" (*Republic* 414b). The difference between Plato's noble lie and the slave-like lies of modernity seems to rest, for Nietzsche, on their respective powers to persuade. On the one hand, Plato's lie will persuade the entire community, perhaps even the rulers. On the other hand, the lies by which the modern slave lives are "transparent". The power to persuade is a function of the poetic and rhetorical arts. Socrates does not possess these arts. After the description of the noble lie that the citizens would be called upon to believe in order to ensure the unity of the "city in speech", Glaucon asks Socrates if he has "some device for persuading them of this tale?" "None at all," Socrates responds, "for these men themselves; however for their sons and their

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successors and the rest of the human beings who come afterwards" (415c-d). Socrates lacks the poetic and rhetorical arts; thus, he will rely on the authority of tradition to inculcate this new code. Let us leave aside for now the question of whether or not, lacking the ability to persuade the present generation, Socrates by himself would be any more successful at persuading future generations. Rather, let us take note of where, within the parameters of the *Republic*, the power to persuade does reside. In the *Republic*, the poetic and rhetorical arts are embodied in the figure of Thrasymachus. He is the only participant in the dialogue who professes to possess an art or skill. In order for the Socratic revolution in thinking to gain sway, it would need to be married with Thrasymachus' rhetorical skill. This is the significance of the fact that Socrates and Thrasymachus are shown to be ultimately friends – despite their ostensible opposition in Book 1 (498c-d). Perhaps this is because Thrasymachus now believes that Socrates is no longer a threat to the city; perhaps it is because he now sees that his rhetoric has a place in Socrates' enterprise for which philosophy alone does not suffice (Bloom 400; see also Palmer 14; and Strauss 1964, 123-4).

For Nietzsche, a healthy society is founded on its artistic vision. "Plato's perfect state," through the poetics of its noble lie, would be an example of this type of artistically founded community. Nietzsche saw in the Greeks of the tragic age the highest example of such an artistically founded community. As Nietzsche asserts in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Greeks of the tragic age enjoyed such cultural health because they were able to balance their two fundamental artistic impulses (the Apollonian and the Dionysian). The Apollonian fiction is necessary, says Nietzsche, in order to veil the Dionysian horror of becoming. Nietzsche describes that Dionysian becoming as a contradictory melange of all things, as an absence of distinctions, orders of rank or meaning:

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> Whatever wants to live, or rather must live, in this horrifying constellation of things is quintessentially a reflection of the primeval pain and contradiction and must seem … an insatiable craving for existence and eternal self-contradiction in terms of time, therefore as *becoming*. Every moment devours the preceding one, every birth is the death of countless beings, procreating, living and murdering are all one ("GSt", Paragraph 6).

The role of the artistic fiction is to draw distinctions, and posit orders of rank and value on this otherwise contradictory maelstrom of becoming: "To impose upon becoming the character of being – that is the supreme will to power" (WTP 617). The myths conveyed by the earliest poets performed such a function. The first Greek philosophers, however, turned from these myths and poetic fictions to see if they could discern the meaning of nature herself (*Metaphysics* 983b). Nietzsche observes that, over two millennia later, this inquiry into nature has yielded no fundamental insights into the meaning of its becoming. This holds true today despite the advancements in theoretical physics achieved after Nietzsche's death. According to Richard Feynman, for instance, quantum mechanics "describes nature as absurd from the point of view of common sense. And it fully agrees with experiment. So I hope you can accept nature as She is – absurd" (129). In our age of the absurd, we moderns, indeed, accept that nature is meaningless – we stare into the void without the comfort of a sheltering lie or fiction.

In contrast, the genius of the Greeks manifested itself in their Janus nature. The Greeks of the tragic age possessed a Dionysian element in their culture that allowed them to stare into the abyss and experience the absurdity of nature. The Greeks also possessed, however, an Apollonian element in their culture that allowed them to add a veil of appearance to this maelstrom of becoming. The first, pre-Socratic philosophers, although turning to nature in its becoming, shared this tragic vision inasmuch as they were still able to poetically gather the multiplicity of nature into a certain whole and to "legislate" for humanity by drawing the lines of distinction that would otherwise be lacking: "Now the concept of greatness is changeable. … And so

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philosophy starts by legislating greatness. Part of this is a sort of name-giving. 'This is a great thing,' says philosophy, thereby elevating man over the blind unrestrained greed of his drive for knowledge" (PTG 3). The death of Greece's tragic culture, for Nietzsche, arises out of Socratism – the optimism that sees in nature, including human nature, a rational order without need of poetic veil, an optimism that was to lead to the modern "delusion of limitless power" over nature by means of a certain knowledge of nature (BT 18).[11] Socratism ultimately led to the crisis of modernity we have been discussing; the optimistic inquiry into the nature of all things is consummated in the experience of existence as meaningless, as without an end or purpose, other than where an end has been posited by human frameworks. For Nietzsche, modernity is within the grips of an enduring Socratism and, like Socrates himself, lacks the artistic ability to posit a new fiction or "noble lie".

It is for this reason that Nietzsche felt the issues of modern politics were tied to issues of modern art and culture. "The Greek State" originally constituted a section of an early draft of *The Birth of Tragedy* – entitled "The Origin and Aim of Tragedy" (KGW 3.5, 142-55). It was removed from the final version of Nietzsche's book, perhaps at the request of Richard Wagner, but remnants of its arguments, concerning the need for a slave class, for instance, remain (BT 18; Ruehl 83). The crisis of modernity, as outlined in the first few paragraphs of "The Greek State," is tied to a crisis of art; it is tied to the fact that the fictions by which we moderns live are "transparent". Fictions such as the "dignity of man" and the "dignity of work" are self-contradictions and cannot create the sheltering horizon needed for human culture to flourish.

III) Art and the *Polis*

Nietzsche makes this point concerning the connections between politics and art explicit later in the essay: "It is through this mysterious [*geheimnissvollen*] connection which we sense here between the state and art, political greed and artistic creations, battlefield and work of art, that, as I said, we understand the state only as the iron

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clamp producing society by force" (Paragraph 11). We have seen briefly how this connection is delineated through the opposition of Apollo and Dionysus according to the argument of *The Birth of Tragedy*; however, in what ways, exactly, within the rubric of "The Greek State" itself, is art tied to the "iron clamp" of the state?

The answer to that question takes us to the heart of the essay and its central concerns. As Nietzsche makes clear in "The Greek State," the realm of nature and its meaningless necessities is transcended by means of the state. The state forces the majority to slavishly satisfy the natural necessities of existence "*beyond* the measure that is necessary for the individual." Through this toil and misery, a "small number of Olympian men" can be "removed from the struggle for existence, in order to produce and satisfy a new world of necessities." This new world of necessities is a world of cultural or artistic necessities: "Culture … is first and foremost a real hunger for art" (Paragraphs 5 and 6). In this way, we can think of nature in its relation to art and culture as having "an uncanny dual character" ("HC", Paragraph 1), with the state as the hinge linking the two extremes. On the one hand there is "the horrifying, predatory aspect of the Sphinx of nature"; on the other hand, through "the glorification of the artistically free life of culture," the same Sphinx "so beautifully presents the torso of a young woman" ("GSt", Paragraph 5). For this reason, Nietzsche asserts that the birth of culture and its creation of art and the world of appearance, by means of the genius, is the salvation and ultimate goal of nature: "then all this indicates how enormously necessary the state is, without which nature might not succeed in achieving, through society, her salvation in appearance, in the mirror of genius" (Paragraph 9). For Nietzsche, this "is the fundamental idea of *culture … to prepare the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within us and without us and thereby work at the perfecting of nature*" (emphasis in original) (UMc 5, cf. 6).

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i) The Question of the Value of Art

So, when Nietzsche thinks about the connections between the state and art, he seems to be praising art in the highest terms; that is, art is tied to the state inasmuch as art is the goal or end of all political activity. Art is nature's goal, for which she "forge[s] for herself the cruel tool of the state" (Paragraph 8). Nietzsche's essay is not unreservedly praising of the artistic genius and his activity, however. Earlier in the essay, while critiquing the notion of the dignity of work, he refers to Plutarch in order to make the point that no noble Greek would ever wish to be an artist, despite enjoying the products of artistic labour: "Plutarch says somewhere, with ancient Greek instinct, that no youth of noble birth would want to be a Phidias himself when he saw the Zeus in Pisa or a Polyklet when he saw the Hera in Argos: and would have just as little desire to be Anacreaon, Philetas or Archilochus, however much he delighted in their poetry" (Paragraph 4). Nietzsche is pointing to a difference between artistic activity as such, which, for the Greeks, "falls into the same category of undignified work as any philistine craft," and the work of art as final product. Artistic creation is a craft (*technē*) like all other crafts and finds its meaning in its *telos* only, not in its activity.

This leads to certain questions regarding the notions of art and craft (*technē*) raised in Plato's *Republic*. The "city in speech" discussed in Books 2 to 4 of the dialogue is based on the principle that each individual should practice one craft. The shoemaker should practice the art of making shoes, and no other; the warriors should practice the art of war and no other. Justice itself is defined in Book 4 in accordance with this overriding principle (432d-33a). This principle does not preclude a hierarchy of arts, however. The rulers are the ones with political wisdom; their art of ruling is higher than the others. The warriors' art takes the second place in terms of importance. Finally, all other types of ordinary labourers or money-makers practice a third order of craft. Of course, the one form of *technē* that Plato seems to prohibit in this "city in speech" is the poetic or artistic *technē*. In the first instance, in the discussion of poetry in Books 2 and 3, Plato has Socrates say that poetry must be banished because the poet attempts to play different roles and practice different arts (397d-e). How, the

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reader must ask himself at this point, did Nietzsche interpret this controversial element of Plato's dialogue, and in what way can Plato's critique of art shed light on the relations between art and the political realm?

ii) Plutarch and the "Divine Plato"

In order to address these questions, let us look more closely at the reference to Plutarch that first brings up the notion that artistic creation is as "undignified work as any philistine craft." As indicated above, Nietzsche's references and citations are carefully chosen and often reveal deeper meanings to those who practice the art of "slow reading". Nietzsche introduces this particular reference with the words "Plutarch says *somewhere,*" indicating that he does not have the text at hand and does not even remember the context within which the point was made. Nietzsche then goes on, however, to recite Plutarch's text practically verbatim – most tellingly, the list of five artists and their respective works of art are enumerated in the exact order of Plutarch's text. Perhaps Nietzsche, indeed, did not have the text in front of him as he wrote this passage and was relying on his prodigious memory. What is more likely, however, is that he did have the text in front of him and was very conscious of the context of the quote. At this point, early in the essay, Nietzsche is testing the reader to see if he has the patience to read slowly.

"Plutarch says *somewhere*", we are told, but if we are to search within the hidden machinery of Nietzsche's thinking and follow these casual references to their source, how are we to know exactly where Plutarch makes this point – aside from reading everything Plutarch ever wrote? Nietzsche gives us a clue earlier in the essay. The previous citation in the essay was to Pindar's Pythian Ode VIII, where Pindar refers to the human being as a "pathetic non-entity and 'shady dream'" (Paragraph 3). Pindar's Pythian Ode VIII concerns Aegina, an island close to the Piraeus, and its case for freeing itself from Athenian domination. This account in terms of the perspective of the Aeginetans has as its counter-point the perspective of the Athenians, who saw the island's proximity to both their port and the Peloponnesus as a threat to their security

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(Thucydides 2.27). That perspective is summed up in Pericles' urging of the Athenians to remove "that eyesore of the Piraeus" (Plutarch, "Life of Pericles", Chapter 8). Pericles was "extremely cautious in his use of words," according to Plutarch, and left nothing behind in writing, except in the form of decrees he proposed. Only a few of these sayings, says Plutarch, have been handed down. Pericles' saying with respect to Aegina is one of only two sayings quoted by Plutarch. Nietzsche's reference to Pindar, then, leads the reader, in a circuitous manner to be sure, to Plutarch's "Life of Pericles" – doing so, in the first instance, within the context of cautious communication. Not surprisingly, Plutarch's reference to the undignified nature of artistic labour that we were searching occurs in his "Life of Pericles."

The reference occurs in Chapter 2, part of his two-chapter introduction to the second series of *Lives*. In that introduction, Plutarch asserts that this series of lives concerns models of virtue in action (*praxesin*). The implied distinction is to a virtue that is embodied in speech (*logos*) only. Pericles is to be the first example of someone who embodies virtue in action. Two issues with respect to Plutarch's argument, however, strike the reader as contradicting that statement. First of all, early in his "Life of Pericles" Plutarch describes his background and influences. Three teachers are listed as having the most influence upon Pericles: Damon the musician, Zeno the Eleatic philosopher, and Anaxagoras of Clazomenae. It is the latter who is described as the "one man more closely associated with Pericles than any other, who did most to clothe him with a majestic bearing that was more potent than any demagogue's appeal, and who helped to develop the natural dignity of his character to the highest degree" (Chapter 4). For Nietzsche, when Pericles "stood before his people as public orator, in the beautiful rigidity and motionlessness of a marble Olympian and began to speak, calmly, wrapped in his mantle, its draperies unmoved, his countenance without change of expression, without smile, his strong voice powerfully even … then he represented the very image of the Anaxagorian cosmos, the image of *nous* itself that has built for itself a most beautiful and worthy mansion" (PTG 19; see also *Phaedrus*

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269d-70b). Pericles' three teachers, then, were a musician and two philosophers –
teachers of virtue in speech, perhaps, but not of virtue in action. Secondly, the
defining feature of Pericles' "action" is that it consists of highly arranged and
rhetorical speech. As noted above, our entry to the "Life of Pericles" was within the
context of cautious communication – ensuring that the words are suited to the matter
and audience at hand: "In this way he proved that rhetoric, in Plato's phrase, is the art
of working upon the souls of men by means of words, and that its chief business is the
knowledge of men's characters and passions which are, so to speak, the strings and
stops of the soul and require a most skilful and delicate touch" (Chapter 15). If
Pericles is Plutarch's example of virtue in action, then this active virtue is certainly
not that of an Achilles, for instance. It is a new virtue that consists of ruling through
carefully constructed speech.

This rhetorical power of speech to charm the many is associated, in Plato's *Republic*,
with the power of poetry to mould the characters and virtues of the members of the
city. In the same way that poetry must stand before the philosopher's scrutiny, so too
must the art of the rhetorician. Both are criticized as dangerous unless put in the
service of the wisest of men. Plato's *Republic* does not ultimately banish poetry and
rhetoric; rather, it institutes a new philosophically directed poetry and rhetoric (498c-
d; 595a-608b). Plutarch's "Life of Pericles" concerns the Periclean art of philosophic
rhetoric. Interestingly, in this context, it is the work that refers to Plato the most of all
of Plutarch's *Lives*.[12] It is also the only one of the *Lives* wherein Plato is referred to as
the divine (*theios*). The questions of Plato's doctrine concerning art and of the relation
of art to the state have led to Plutarch's "Life of Pericles", which concerns an example
of a new type of "virtue in action" and wherein the "divine Plato" figures
prominently. What can this strange coincidence tell us? We must return to Plutarch's
discussion of Pericles' dominant mentor, Anaxagoras, for some preliminary answers
to this question.

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iii) Anaxagoras and the Good

Anaxagoras brought philosophic inquiry from the Ionian colonies to Athens. According to Anaxagoras, all material elements of the cosmos have existed for all time – although in a chaotic mixture. It is pure Mind (*Nous*) that composed definite arrangements of like particles with like, such that things could have a definite shape and could be given a name (see *Metaphysics* 984b 15-18). Plutarch's description of Anaxagoras emphasizes this as a turn in the history of philosophical inquiry: "he was the first to dethrone Chance and Necessity and set up pure Intelligence in their place as the principle of law and order which informs the universe, and which distinguishes from an otherwise chaotic mass those substances which possess elements in common" (Chapter 4).

Plato's Socrates was to take this one step further. In the *Phaedo* we are presented with Socrates' philosophical autobiography – one presented in a more private setting, on his deathbed and among his closest friends, than his more famous accounting for his way of life in the *Apology*. In the latter dialogue, Socrates asserts that he takes no interest in the study of nature, or of the "things below the earth and in the sky" (19b-c). This assertion seems to be contrasted by his private account of his inquiries, where Socrates intimates that earlier in his career he had undertaken inquiries into nature. These inquiries, he claims, led to a confrontation with the absurdity of its chaos. Even basic distinctions that he had taken for granted, such as that between a tall man and a short man, could be called into question and reversed if nature in its becoming is examined closely (*Phaedo* 96e – 97b). This examination of the things of nature in their pure becoming leads to a sort of blindness, Socrates claims, as when one tries to "watch and study an eclipse of the sun" (99d). This is the chaos of becoming that Nietzsche describes, where every "moment devours the preceding one, every birth is the death of countless beings, procreating, living and murdering are all one" ("GSt", Paragraph 6).

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Rather than resign himself, however, to accepting nature as absurd, as the modern physicist would have us do, Socrates found a way out of the this confusion by means of the thought of Anaxagoras. Upon first hearing Anaxagoras' cosmological theories, Socrates was very pleased: "Somehow it seemed right that mind should be the cause of everything, and I reflected that if this is so, mind in producing order sets everything in order and arranges each individual thing in the way that is best for it" (97c). At first blush, Anaxagoras' theories seemed to lead the way from the chaos of physical causes to a knowledge of the "final causes" of things. So, Socrates "lost no time in procuring the books, and began to read them as quickly as [he] possibly could, so that [he] might know as soon as possible about the best and the less good" (98b). To his surprise, however, Anaxagoras "made no use of mind and assigned to it no causality for the order of the world, but adduced causes like air and aether and water and many other absurdities" (98b-c). For this reason, Socrates took it upon himself to undertake a second voyage (*deuteros ploūs*) in search of causes (99c). Socrates' second voyage constituted a turning from the study of things themselves in their becoming to a study of speeches (*logoi*). Socrates would use speeches as a way of "trying to discover the truth about things" (99d-e) – and the "truth about things" was now to be understood in the light of what is Good as such. As mentioned above, this search for wisdom concerning final causes was to become the defining feature of classical philosophy.

For Nietzsche, this transformation of a purposeless *Nous* to one that arranges things in the best possible way represented a fateful turn in the history of philosophy – a turn from an aesthetic justification of the meaninglessness of existence to a moral one; also a turn that marked the end of the tragic age of the Greeks (PTG 19). Although the *Phaedo* presents Socrates as the one who effects that turn, for Nietzsche, it was Plato who was ultimately the author of this transformation, and Socrates merely as one of his characters: "*Plato* objects that [Anaxagoras] should have shown, but did not so, that each thing in its own fashion and its own place is most beautifully, best, and usefully situated" (emphasis added) (PTG 19). As we shall see, Nietzsche understands Plato's motivations for undertaking this transformation in philosophical focus: Plato

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needed to secure the fate of philosophy in the face of the city's suspicions of its dangers. Philosophy had to make use of poetic fictions – of the Good as such or of the moral order of the cosmos – in order to provide for itself a home in the city.

iv) Philosophy and the Polis

Let us return to Plutarch's "Life of Pericles" to understand Plato's motivations more fully. In that work, Plutarch describes the confrontation of natural philosophy and ancestral myths and superstitions:

> In my opinion, however, there was nothing to prevent both the scientist and the prophet from being right, since the one correctly diagnosed the cause and the other the meaning of the prodigy. It was the business of the first to observe why something happens and how it becomes what it is, and of the second to foretell the purpose of an event and its significance. Those who say that to discover the cause of a phenomenon disposes of its meaning fail to notice that the same reasoning which explains away divine portents would also dispense with the artificial symbols created by mankind. The beating of gongs, the blaze of beacons, and the shadows on sundials all have their particular causes, but have also been contrived to signify something else (Chapter 6).

Plutarch is pointing to the difference between the philosophical concern with beings in their becoming – their "coming to be" and their "origins" – and the mythical or poetic concern with the meaning of things beyond this becoming – as they are in the "end". Interestingly, after the passage quoted above, Plutarch says: "However, this is perhaps a subject for a separate essay." On the contrary, the passage is an elucidation of one of the central concerns of the "Life of Pericles"; it is also an indication of why Plato figures so prominently in that work, and is referred to as "divine".

The philosophical approach is dangerous, and treated suspiciously (PTG 1). Plutarch makes this explicit while discussing Nicias' reaction to the eclipse of the moon, which ultimately led to the disastrous delay in the departure of the Athenian fleet from Sicily. Nicias' superstitious response to this phenomenon provides an occasion for

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Plutarch to discuss the reasons for the distrust of the philosophical account of the same phenomenon. "The first man to attempt to explain in writing the illumination and eclipse of the moon was Anaxagoras, and his account was the boldest and the most lucid of all. But this was a recent theory, nor did it enjoy much repute: in fact, it was still treated as a secret, confined to a small circle and only communicated with great caution rather than with confidence." Philosophical discoveries need to be communicated cautiously to the many. The reason for this cautious communication is that these discoveries call into question the religious fictions that give meaning to the lives of the average citizen: "Public opinion was instinctively hostile towards natural philosophers and visionaries, as they were called, since it was generally believed that they belittled the power of the gods by explaining it away as nothing more that the operation of irrational causes and blind forces acting by necessity" ("Life of Nicias", Chapter 23). Plutarch refers to the fact that many philosophers, as a result of this instinctive hostility on the part of the public, were persecuted: including Protagoras, Anaxagoras himself and ultimately Socrates. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates asserts that the charges brought against him at the trial were based on older, more dangerous charges, charges articulated by the poet Aristophanes (18a-19c). In his *Clouds*, Socrates is portrayed as one who "inquires into things below the earth and in the sky, and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and teaches others to follow his example." Of course, in the process, Socrates is portrayed as a ridiculously comic figure, one who "goes whirling round, proclaiming that he is walking on air" (*Apology* 19b-c). Beneath this comic presentation, the poet's ultimate critique of the Socratic philosopher is that he is unable to persuade the many; he is not able to assuage the instinctive hostility of the many, as represented by Strepsiades (*Clouds* 1490-1510). The poet, on the other hand, understands the passions of the many and can direct them accordingly (*Republic* 459e-60a; *Laws* 719b; Strauss 1989b, 179-83).

Plato's genius was to join philosophic inquiry with myth-giving poetry and the persuasive power of rhetoric. Through his invention of the "Good" as such, Plato ensured that his philosophy would be a discussion of the ends or meanings of things.

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By making his inquiry into causes one and the same as the explication of ends, Plato was able to make philosophy appear less dangerous. Plato preserves philosophical inquiry by giving it a poetic and moral exterior. His *Republic*, in this sense, is the highest apology for philosophy that one could imagine – in response to the poetic accusations against philosophy presented by Aristophanes, Plato presents the finest poetic eulogy of philosophy. For Plutarch, this is the importance of Plato, and what made him "divine". After referring to the atmosphere of persecution in which the earlier philosophers lived, Plutarch points out that it "was not until later that the glorious fame of Plato shone forth, and served, not only through the example of his life, but also through his teaching that the forces of nature are subject to a higher principle, to dispel the odium which had attached itself to such theories, thereby enabling them to circulate freely" ("Life of Nicias", Chapter 23).

v) Horace: On Philosophic Poetry

The first reference in Nietzsche's "The Greek State" is to Horace's *Ars Poetica*. His first reference is not to a work dealing with political matters, but to one dealing with the craft or art of poetry. He points out that the modern "individual is flamboyantly pieced together like the fantastic creature at the beginning of Horace's *Ars Poetica*" (Paragraph 2). In the text to which Nietzsche refers the reader, Horace compares a literary work lacking unity and consistency to the work of "a painter who wanted to combine a horse's neck with a human head, and then clothe a miscellaneous collection of limbs with various kinds of feathers, so that what started out at the top as a beautiful woman ended in a hideously ugly fish" (124). Horace is building on a similar discussion of the need for speeches to have their own organic unity in Plato's *Phaedrus*: "there is one point at least which I think you will admit, namely that any discourse ought to be constructed like a living creature, with its own body, as it were; it must not lack either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to suit each other and the whole work" (264c). Interestingly, the "city in speech" in the *Republic* is described in similar artistic terms (see 361d, 420c-d, 472d, 488a). Ultimately, justice itself is defined along these broader lines of the unity and

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consistency of all things, that is, as each element of the city performing its proper function within the context of the organic whole (433a).[13]

The things themselves in their becoming can lack this unity or justice; they show themselves as the contradictory mixture of elements described by Socrates in the *Phaedo*. Turning to speeches (*logoi*), or accounts of things, allows things in their oneness to shine forth.[14] This is why Socrates has his interlocutors help him to construct a "city in speech" in order to determine the essential limits of the political realm (369c). The artistically constructed speech or poetic fiction arranges the matter at hand into an appropriate, organic unity. Nietzsche's refers to Horace in order to describe how modern individuals lack this type of artistically forged unity; they lack the type of fiction, or poetic word (*logos*), that would give their chaotic lives meaning.

Horace's work, to which we have been pointed by Nietzsche's first reference, also refers to poetry, in its highest form, as being guided by "Socratic books":

> Wisdom is the starting-point and source of correct writing. Socratic books will be able to point out to you your material, and once the material is provided the words will follow willingly enough. If a man has learned his duty to his country and his friends, the proper kind of love with which parent, brother, and guest should be cherished, the functions of a senator and a judge, the task of a general sent to the front – then he automatically understands how to give each character its proper attributes. (131)

Horace calls for a type of poetry directed by the philosopher's wisdom. This notion of a philosophic poetry is a product of the reversal effected by Plato in his contest with the poets. That is, prior to Plato's contest with the poets, philosophy had been judged by the poet's standards – which were essentially the standards of the city. Poets have always been the valets of a morality (GS 1) – enforcing the prejudices of a particular cave. In the *Republic*, Plato calls for a new, philosophic poetry. Such a poetry would provide the necessary lie – i.e., it would provide the fiction of an end or of a "Good"

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as such – but would also spur the attentive reader to question these pre-given values. Such a poetry would spur the few who are able to free themselves and leave the cave.

vi) Plato's Contest with Homer

We can see Plato's editing and re-writing of Homer in the *Republic* in this light, that is, as the institution of a new, philosophic poetry. Socrates begins his criticism of the poets in Book 2 by saying that they do not tell the proper lies (377d). In particular, the lies that they tell about the gods need to be altered. For the poets, the gods are changeable, sometimes bringing good, sometimes bad. Plato's Socrates presents a new order of gods, ones more amenable to human endeavour. This new order of philosophically-inspired gods are constant, truthful and good (377e-383c). At the centre of the dialogue we are confronted with the significance of this new order of gods. The old gods have been replaced by the philosophers' ideas, and ultimately the idea of the Good as such.

Next, in Book 3, Socrates addresses those poetic fictions that provide us with models of heroic virtues, most notably, the image of courage as presented in the figure of Achilles. Achilles' brand of courage is presented as a specifically "political courage", that is, the courage demanded of one who fights the enemy on the basis of a thumotic impulse, not on a rational basis (see 430c). The Homeric virtue of courage as presented in the figure of Achilles has limitations, which Socrates exposes. Plato presents the Socratic life as a new and higher example of the virtue of courage (*Apology*; Rabieh; Strauss 1983, 44). In order to re-write this conception of courage, Plato must edit and re-write the Homeric tradition of stories that support that conception (386b-393c). To take just one example, Plato has Socrates cite the following passage from Homer's *Odyssey* as an example of a description of Hades that is inappropriate:

> I would rather be on the soil, a serf to another
> To a man without lot whose means of life are not great,
> Than rule over all the dead who have perished (XI.489-91).

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At the beginning of Book 3, Socrates cites this passage as an example of the type of poetry that must be censured within the "city in speech" since it would provoke a fear of death as opposed to a willingness to battle fearlessly for the community (386c). Socrates opposes this passage because it does not teach the proper "political" virtues. However, later in the dialogue, the same passage reappears in a positive light. During his description of the image of the cave, Socrates describes the perspective of the freed prisoner upon recalling his previous life within the cave: "would he be affected as Homer says and want very much 'to be on the soil, a serf to another man, to a portionless man,' and to undergo anything whatsoever rather than to opine those things and live that way" (516d). Now Hades represents the cave of the political community and the speaker is saying that he would rather be the lowest thinker in the realm of truth than be the highest of rulers within that cave-like community. When discussing the philosophical nature and his virtues, the Homeric quote has been brought back in a new sense. Now, rather than as a spur to political, military action, the passage is used as a spur to philosophic reflection; it is an enticement to leave the cave of political opinion.

Plato rewrites the tradition of Greek poetry and provides, in this way, a new philosophic poetry. Whereas the older poetry merely reflected the values of particular communities, Platonic poetry has the power to provoke the reader to question those values – this path of questioning is one reserved for the very few, however. It is reserved for those with the philosophic virtues, including philosophic courage, described in Books 6 and 7 of the *Republic*.

vii) Plato's Fiction of the Good

Plato marries the philosophic inquiry into causes with the poetico-mythical concern with the why. He accomplishes this by means of the fiction of the "Good" in itself. In the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates contrasts the many in their becoming to that which is one and is enduring. Each thing, says Socrates, has its Form or Idea. There are many glasses, for instance, but the Idea of glass allows one to see that which is enduring and

constant within the multiplicity of glasses that exist. Beyond the Ideas, there is the "Good", which can be understood as the oneness and unity of the Ideas themselves. It is the Idea of the Ideas. As such, it is the ultimate object of knowledge for the philosopher.

The Good can only be seen through its products or poetic images. Rather than the Good itself, Socrates is only able to present "what looks like a child of the good" (506e). The Good is the father of poetic offspring. This is a curious image and one has reason to suspect that the father in question is either absent or otherwise indeterminable. The reader approaches Socrates' description of the Good only after encountering Socrates' discussion of the family arrangements of his city in speech, wherein children would never know their fathers (457c-66d; Derrida 1981). The actual act of procreation undertaken by the Good, in this case the poetic creation of images, is also hidden; we only see the image in its final shining character. In reference to the shame of productive activity, upon observing the artistic product, upon hearing Socrates' descriptions of the images of the sun, line and cave, we would not wish to be its maker; we would not wish to be Good as such. The Good withdraws and it is the images of the Good that spurs one to reflection on the nature of the Good. Plato's Socrates says that it is in the light of the Good that things, out of the maelstrom of their becoming, can be discerned as this or that. Within the context of Nietzsche's essay, we should more properly think of the Good as an artistic fiction or veil that gives shape to that which would otherwise be invisible. It gives form and distinction to otherwise chaotic phenomena.

With this in mind, we could say that the *Republic* itself is an artistic veil that gives shape to political experience that would otherwise be shapeless, and thereby spurs one to reflection on political phenomena. This also means that the *Republic* is not to be viewed as a program for political action; that is, it is not a practical guide for the public administrator. Rather, it is a spur to individual questioning. Another way of considering this point is to highlight the fact that Plato's Socrates, in describing the

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philosophic journey by means of the image of the cave, does not describe a "mass enlightenment" or a bringing of knowledge and wisdom back to the cave; rather, he describes a mysterious selection and freeing of the few, or of the one, who are able to leave the realm of the political and its fictions (Bloom).

Conclusion

The crisis of modernity is an artistic crisis: it resides in the inability of modern culture to found itself aesthetically and to posit a meaning within the meaningless maelstrom of becoming. The tragic culture of the Greeks, on the other hand, was able to achieve this type of aesthetically grounded culture by means of a careful balancing of the Apollonian and Dionysian art impulses. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche asserts that Socratic optimism, with its limitless examination of the nature of things, led to the death of that tragic culture. This Socratic inquiry into things was optimistic in its assumption that the nature of things would reveal itself as in conformity with reason and moral order. Upon observing nature in its becoming, Socrates was not artistic enough to give existence a meaning.

In "The Greek State," Nietzsche turns to Plato as the one who was able to give such a meaning, as the original "artistic Socrates". Nietzsche turns to the *Republic* and its treatment of the relation between art and the state in order to uncover Plato's secret teaching – the teaching that has been occulted throughout the Western tradition of Socratism or Platonism. Plato's secret teaching also offers Nietzsche insights into the path we must take in order to free ourselves from the crisis of modernity; that is, we must free philosophy and poetry from the tyranny of utilitarian science and allow a truly philosophic poetry to once again legislate values for humanity, that is, create a new fiction for humanity.

Although "The Greek State" is, according to Nietzsche's own declaration, an explication of the deepest secrets of Plato's *Republic*, it does not seem, at first glance, to refer to that dialogue's central concerns: the ultimate justification for the rule of the

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philosopher, as discussed via the images of the sun, line and cave. As we have seen, however, upon closer inspection Nietzsche's essay does reveal the essential connection between the philosopher's legislation of values and the artist's providing of meaningful fictions for the community. Plato's new philosophic poetry combines these tasks.

Whereas Plato had found a way to preserve the essential conditions of philosophic inquiry, in the modern age philosophy finds itself in a crisis condition; it is subservient to the scientific pursuit of the technologically useful (PTG 3). Seeing that the Pre-Socratic scientific enlightenment had dangerously asserted that existence is a chaotic play of forces, Plato provided the fiction of the Good as a way to shelter the many in the face of the meaninglessness of this existence. He provided the end or sheltering horizon that allowed the West to flourish for millennia, while still allowing for philosophic inquiry. The modern scientific enlightenment, and the mass education of its discoveries, has resulted in the calling into question of this Platonic fiction; it has found nature to be absurd, offering no standard for human endeavour or any framework for discerning what might be considered the "Good" as such. This attack on Plato's fiction has resulted in the rule of the new religion of science over philosophy. The scientific attack against Platonism, however, has also created the tension of the bow that will allow humanity to shoot its arrow toward a new goal (BGE, "Preface"; Lampert 2001). In this context of the crisis conditions of philosophy, and the possibility that the tension of this bow may be dissipated, Nietzsche must be exoteric about philosophy's esoteric nature. In order to prepare for the new creation of goals, Nietzsche must uncover the secret ways of Plato, as well as all other philosophers ("GSt" Paragraph 14; see also BGE 30). Nietzsche points out that Plato's noble lie concerned making philosophy appear conventional. Plato's invention of the fiction of the Good made philosophical inquiry appear beneficial and in accordance with the standards of the community: "philosophers too, as soon as, with priestly ulterior motives, they form the intention of taking in hand the direction of mankind, at once also arrogate to themselves the right to tell lies: Plato before all"

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(WTP 141; see also, 140-43, 427-47; BGE 7, 40; and TI "The 'Improvers' of Mankind"). In other words, Plato put the philosopher in the mask of the priest (GM 3.10). Or, to borrow the word of Plutarch, Plato made the philosopher "divine".

Nietzsche points to Plato's esoteric nature in a brilliant fashion at the end of "The Greek State". He points out how "Plato saw beyond the terribly mutilated Herm of contemporary state life, and still saw something divine inside it" (Paragraph 14). Nietzsche is referring to the speech by Alcibiades praising Socrates at the end of Plato's *Symposium*. In that speech, Alcibiades asserts that Socrates' speeches are like "sileni that open down the middle. Anyone listening to Socrates for the first time would find his arguments simply laughable … But if you open up his argument, and really get into the skin of them, you'll find that they're the only arguments in the world that have any sense at all, and that nobody else's are so godlike" (221d-222a). A couple of points should be noted here. First of all, "The Greek State" is an explication of the essence of the political and of the Platonic dialogue that treats of that essence, the *Republic*. At the limits of the political there are the passions of the human soul, the passions (*eros*) which had to be directed and marginalized within the discussion of the city in speech in the *Republic*. The *Symposium*, on the other hand, is specifically directed toward this theme of *eros* that provides the essential limits of the political (Rosen 1968; Strauss 2001). The end of Nietzsche's essay fittingly points us to that dialogue. Secondly, Nietzsche exposes the esoteric nature of the philosopher in his own name; he points to himself, "Mr. Nietzsche" (Strauss 1983, 174). It is only in the mouth of the drunken Alcibiades, on the other hand, that Plato allows this to be expressed (Rosen 1989, 163).

We should not, however, allow this latter point to make us underestimate Nietzsche's own rhetorical nature; Nietzsche is not entirely frank and forthcoming with respect to his insights. Although he exposes Plato's fictions, Nietzsche must ultimately hide his own deepest teachings; he still needs to be esoteric in his own way. Nietzsche knows what lies behind any project of philosophic legislation: the groundlessness of all

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goals, that even the newest creations will be no different than the "transparent lies" by which we currently live, other than being, hopefully, less transparent and more artistic (Rosen 1989, 161-2). However, Nietzsche only indicates this to the reader obliquely, by means of references to Plutarch and to Anaxagoras' and Socrates' confrontations with the indefinable becoming that is existence. This truth, the groundlessness of all projects, including Nietzsche's own, is what Nietzsche had to express cautiously, through a "grand hieroglyph" of references and allusions. In this essay, "we have said what we believe we have fathomed of this secret script."

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Textual Note and Abbreviations

Textual note:

For "The Greek State" and "Homer on Competition," I have used the translation by Carol Diethe (in Nietzsche 1994, pages 176-86 and 187-94 respectively). The German text of the two essays can be found in volume I of *Nietzsche. Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1988), p 764-78 and 783-93. Because of the short length of the essays, and to facilitate cross-reference with the original and with other translations, I have referred to these essays by paragraph number. For Nietzsche's other works, I have used the appropriate section numbering as a reference − except in the case of Nietzsche's early unpublished notes (Nb), which I have referred to by notebook and page number.

Abbreviations:

Dates in parentheses refer to year of publication or composition.

A = *The Antichrist* (1888), in Nietzsche 1954, 568-656

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), in Nietzsche 1966, 179-435

BT = *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), in Nietzsche 1966, 3-144

CW = *The Case of Wagner* (1888), in Nietzsche 1966, 609-48

D = *Daybreak* (1881), Nietzsche 1982

EH = *Ecce Homo* (1888), in Nietzsche 1966, 671-791

GM = *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche 1994

GS = *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche (1974)

"GSt" = "The Greek State" (1871)

"GW" = "The Greek Woman" (1871), in Nietzsche 1964, 21-6

"HC" = "Homer on Competition" (1872)

HH = *Human, All too Human* (1878), Nietzsche 1986

Nb = *Unpublished Writings* (1872-74), Nietzsche 1995

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PP = *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* (Course given 1872, 1873 and 1876), Nietzsche 2001

PTG = *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873), Nietzsche 1962

TI = *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), in Nietzsche 1954, 463-563

TZ = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5), in Nietzsche 1954, 103-439

UMa = *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer* (1873), in Nietzsche 1983, 3-55

UMb = *Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874), in Nietzsche 1983, 59-123

UMc = *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), in Nietzsche 1983, 127-94

WTP = *The Will to Power* (1883-88), Nietzsche 1967

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NOTES

[1] Interpretations of Nietzsche's political thinking abound; see Hunt, Ansell-Pearson 1991 and 1994a, Strong, and Warren. These interpretations are commendable in many respects. One aspect that is commendable in these works is that they call for a more nuanced interpretation of Nietzsche's political thought than has traditionally been offered. That is, they call for an interpretation that does not label his thinking with the names of any of the modern political ideologies that dominate contemporary political thinking. For instance, Hunt makes the case that Nietzsche cannot rightly be called, on the one hand, a totalitarian or an authoritarian, or an anarchist on the other (25-6). Similarly, Ansell-Pearson calls into question Nietzsche's link to modern liberalism (1994a). Despite the existence of these fine studies, there is still room for more scholarly exploration of Nietzsche's political philosophy. There has been, for example, no systematic interpretation of Nietzsche's early works with the goal of discerning his early political thinking. In that respect, this essay, along with its predecessor, are offered as a small contribution to such a systematic interpretation.

[2] As Keith Ansell-Pearson points out, this quote is often "taken at face value rather than understood in its specific context where Nietzsche expresses his opposition to German nationalism and statism under the rule of Bismarck" (1994b, ix).

[3] In the French tradition, this anti-political dimension of Nietzsche's thinking has been approached in a different way. Rather than a philosophy promoting the self-realization of a particular individual or subject-identity, for poststructuralists, following Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche's thinking is seen as a revolution against even the "micropolitical" fascism of fixed, subject identities. See Deleuze 1977, 1983, 1990; Deleuze and Guattari 1983; Derrida 1979 and "Différance" in 1982, 1-27; Klossowski; and Lyotard. Of course, it is Foucault who, perhaps, sums up this poststructural view most succinctly: "Rather than the death of God – or, rather, in the wake of that death and in a profound

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correlation with it – what Nietzsche's thought heralds is the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man's face in laughter and the return of masks" (1973, 385); see also Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in 1977, 139-64.

4   According to the standard approach, Nietzsche's works have been divided into early, middle and late periods. These divisions are marked by literary, intellectual as well as personal developments and find support in Nietzsche's own account of his literary career in *Ecce Homo*. The early period (1870-76) corresponds to Nietzsche's years as a professor of classics at Basel University and is marked by his close association with Richard Wagner. In this period, Nietzsche turns to the Greeks for clues as to how modern German culture can be revived on aesthetic grounds.
The middle period (1876-82) corresponds to his break with Wagner and his abandonment of his vision of a classically inspired, aesthetic renewal of German culture. Rather than a specifically German culture, Nietzsche adopts the cosmopolitan perspective of the "good European", and rather than seeking redemption through the fictions of art, Nietzsche seeks it through knowledge. That is, while in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) art is necessary to protect us from the horrors of reality, in *Human, All too Human* (1878) Nietzsche asserts that this sort of artistic deception is life denying rather than enhancing.
Finally, the late period (1883-88) begins with the publication of the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is often referred to as Nietzsche's "mature" phase – the phase in which he outlines his "final position" and develops the doctrines that are associated with his name: the overman, will to power, and eternal return. For a discussion of how Nietzsche's early period has often been overlooked in favour of this "mature" period, see Quentin P. Young 1-3.

5   Laurence Lampert has done an expert job of uncovering the complex relations with the thought of Plato that are on display in Nietzsche's two major works: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*; see 1986, 2001 and 2004. For a counter-argument to this emphasis on the role of Plato in Nietzsche's thought, see Brobjer.

6   I have slightly altered the Diethe translation here: substituting "esoteric doctrine" (Mügge's translation [Nietzsche 1964]) for "secret study" (Diethe's translation).

7   For a good discussion of "renaissance self-fashioning", see Greenblatt.

8   For other articulations of the position that the goal of Baconian science is a total mastery or power over nature, see Paterson; Hulse 318, 322; Faulkner 4, 7; Whitney 1; Weinberger 9; and Van Leeuwen 2.

9   On this point, the Christian experience of truth as related to the securing of salvation, see Heidegger 1973, 19-26; 1982, 87-89; 1977a, 89-90, 122; and 1992, 51.

10   On this self-grounding of knowledge and truth, see, also, Heidegger 1977b, 272.

11   Nietzsche's relations to the "problem of Socrates" are complex. For an overview of the issues at stake, see Blondel, Dannhauser, Kofman, and Tejera.

12   Plato is referred to or quoted 5 times in Plutarch's "Life of Pericles" – including a quotation that Plutarch mistakenly attributes to Aristotle. This ties the "Life of Pericles" with the "Life of Solon" for the largest number of references to Plato.

13   On this point, Heidegger is instructive: "*Dikē* is translated as "justice," but that misses the proper sense, inasmuch as justice is transposed straightaway into the moral or even the merely "legal" realm. But *dikē* is a metaphysical concept, not originally one of morality. It names Being with reference to the essentially appropriate articulation of all beings" (1979, 165-66).

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[14] *Logos* originally comes from *legein*, which means "to speak", but also "to gather" such that what is gathered is brought together into an articulated unity (Heidegger 1959, 127-8; 1976, 252; Sallis 7). In this sense we could say that the Greek definition, rather than pointing to the human as the rational or logical animal, defines the human as the animal able to gather the disparate phenomena of existence into a meaningful unity or whole and to articulate the meaning of that unity – in short, the animal able to make accounts.

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