WHAT IS TRAGIC ABOUT THE PRE-PLATONIC PHILOSOPHERS? ON NIETZSCHE'S *PHILOSOPHY IN THE TRAGIC AGE OF THE GREEKS*

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ABSTRACT. This essay aims to understand the tragic character of the first philosophers in Nietzsche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. It claims that their tragicity should be understood based on the categories of personality and grandiosity in so far as they are related to these philosophers' experience of the monstrous and their heroic response to this experience through the artistic production of concepts. The first philosophers carry out a symbolic mediation of the presence of the monstrous in culture, which is so important to preserve the connection between culture and life, in such a way that they make it possible for their culture to live a life in abundance. Nietzsche is aware that the categories used by human beings in general have a fictional and intrinsically artistic nature. When considering the first philosophers, he consciously makes use of fictional and artistic categories (where the monstrous is included too). Like these philosophers, he asserts himself as a tragic hero who artistically produces this kind of categories in response to his own experience of the monstrous in modern culture. The tragicity of the first philosophers is, therefore, fundamentally related to them being an inspiring ideal created by Nietzsche the tragic philosopher.

KEYWORDS: The tragic, the monstrous, the birth of philosophy, philosophical concepts.

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1. Introduction

In her "Introduction" to the translation of Nietzsche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Marianne Cowan refers to the problematic character of the title of the Nietzschean text in the following terms:

> The greatest trouble was presented by the title, *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen.* That ought of course to be translatable by any first semester German student as "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks." But what can "The Tragic Age of the Greeks" mean in English? The "Greek Age of Tragedy?" Or an age which for some reason was an especially tragic one for the Greeks? Or both? We have two plans for prefaces by Nietzsche. Neither touches directly upon the point in question, but both emphasize that the book is to be an account of certain personalities, rather than a handbook of philosophic doctrines or the history of a certain period in philosophy. This suggests, not too remotely, that the philosophers are dealt with as though they were tragic heroes, or at least heroic figures in a time that was presented upon the world stage as a tragic drama.[1]

In the same way, the term *tragisches Zeitalter der Griechen* presents no difficulty when translating into other modern languages like Portuguese, Spanish, Italian or French. Nevertheless in the modern languages mentioned too *tragisches Zeitalter der Griechen* is, from the historiographical periodisation category point of view, a rather enigmatic expression. The relative familiarity that this expression may have for philosophers and classicists is to be attributed to the use Nietzsche makes of it in his text.[2] However, this familiarity can conceal a vague and unquestioned understanding of the phrase, so that we need to investigate its meaning more precisely.

The terms of the problem are defined by Cowan as follows. One needs to ask whether "Tragic Age of the Greeks" indicates a historical period in which the tragedy genre plays a central role in the ancient Greeks' culture and art or a particularly tragic historical moment in their community life. But the question needs to be put in a rather different way. Given that Nietzsche's text consists in an interpretation of the history of Greek philosophy from its beginnings, what is necessary to under-

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[1] Cowan (1962) 19.

[2] According to Cancik (2000) 48, the idea of a "Tragic Age of the Greeks" is a Nietzschean invention. Chronologically speaking, Nietzsche means the period of Greek history extending from the sixth to the fifth century BC: cf. Nachlass 1870/71, 7[191], KSA 7.212; VP, KGW II 4.215. When citing Nietzsche's texts, I use the abbreviations in Nietzsche (1988) vol. 14, 21-35.

stand is, on the one hand, the role played by the earliest philosophers in the formation itself of the "Tragic Age of the Greeks" and, on the other, the way these philosophers reflect the tragic nature of the historical period in which they lived. In a word, it is a matter of comprehending what is tragic about the philosophers in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* in these two senses.

Although she does not expressly put the question in these terms and, consequently, does not directly establish a link between the title of Nietzsche's text and the tragic nature of the philosophers themselves considered in it, Cowan mentions that these philosophers are presented by Nietzsche in his text as tragic heroes or heroic figures in a tragic historical period. Apart from this, she indicates that this interpretation of the status of the first philosophers in Nietzsche's text is suggested by the fact that they are discussed in it on the basis of the idea of personality and not of the content of their teachings. In establishing a link between the first philosophers' tragic or heroic nature and the idea of personality, she seems to go in the right direction as regards the clarification of the fundamental problem that the present essay intends to consider and which corresponds to one of the questions whose solving will make it possible to understand Nietzsche's text more correctly.

Nevertheless, there are certain aspects in Cowan's approach that are imprecise and even incorrect. The working out and correcting of these aspects, seemingly involving mere details, lead to an interpretation of the Nietzschean text that is significantly different from hers. In the first place, the personalities of the earliest philosophers get revealed not only in their attitude vis-à-vis the world but also in the content of their teachings, so that a correct understanding of what is tragic about these philosophers will need to also include a consideration of those teachings. In the second place, the idea that the earliest philosophers are presented by Nietzsche as tragic heroes or heroic figures is not only suggested. On the one hand, if one observes the close relationship *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* has with *The Birth of Tragedy*, it becomes clear that Nietzsche's text on the beginnings of Greek philosophy intends precisely to stress that the status of the earliest philosophers is that of tragic heroes or heroic figures. On the other hand, it is not on the basis of the concept of personality that one can perceive with clarity that it is this that Nietzsche's text is trying to emphasise, but instead on the basis of the experience of the "monstrous" (*ungeheuer*), which underlies the tragicity or heroicity involved in the concept of personality.

Ungeheuer is not an easy category to define, if it is definable at all. In the context of his analysis of the first philosophers – and generally in his writings dating from 1869-76 – Nietzsche uses it frequently, but without ever defining or systematizing it. The way he uses it reflects, therefore, the content of this category and is not a peculiarity of his. The difficulty (or, perhaps, impossibility) of defining it, which

arises from the multiplicity of its possible meanings, does not indicate that there is an incompatibility between some of them. *Ungeheuer* may refer to something enormous, strong, powerful, excessive, extraordinary, frightening and even repugnant. As we shall see, Nietzsche makes use of several (if not all) of these meanings. It is, however, a use in which this multiplicity of meanings serves to account, in the way possible for a human being, for the complex and multifaceted unity of one same experience, which is at the origin of philosophical activity such as, according to the young Nietzsche, it takes shape in the doctrines of Greek philosophers before Plato. Hence Nietzsche uses *ungeheuer* to talk about each of the various elements that are involved in the original philosophical experience of the monstrous: the monstrous itself (the pre-linguistic ground and kernel of nature), the character of the philosophers who face it and the concepts they create in order to respond to it without succumbing to its overwhelming raw (that is, non-symbolic) manifestation. In my view, the fact that Nietzsche frequently uses *ungeheuer*, with all its range of meanings, to refer to the experience of the first philosophers indicates precisely that he intends to draw attention to one same experience in its intrinsic complexity and at the limit of its congruence and representability. In order to reflect this unity, and despite the variety of meanings of *ungeheuer*, I always translate the German term as "monstrous," even though sometimes, due to the more common meaning of the English term ("having the appearance of a monster," "ugly," "revolting," "outrageous" etc.), this can be misleading, as, nevertheless, the latter has the capacity to express the richness of *ungeheuer* and seems the best single term to refer to such a richness.

The monstrous in the aforementioned sense will be called here "the monstrous in nature." But, most intriguingly, Nietzsche also uses *ungeheuer* to characterise the dangers that threatened the survival of the tragic culture in which those philosophers lived. The monstrous understood in this way will be called, in what follows, "the monstrous in history." As shall become clear below, the monstrous in nature, in so far as it is symbolically mediated by the concepts created by the first philosophers, thus contributing to preserving archaic tragic culture, is diametrically opposed to the monstrous in history. This highlights a fundamental equivocality in the Nietzschean understanding of the monstrous. For space reasons, this equivocality cannot be addressed at length in this essay, in spite of its problematicity and importance for understanding the young Nietzsche's thinking (cf. n47 for just some very brief remarks on the topic).

In this essay, it will be shown that it is the phenomenon of the monstrous that allows us to adequately understand the tragic and heroic character of the first philosophers according to the Nietzschean text. The first step in this direction is to

explain the connection, from a genetic and thematic point of view, between *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and *The Birth of Tragedy*, a work in which the monstrous plays a prominent role and Nietzsche presents a key definition of the tragic (cf. sections 2-3). The symbolic mediation of the monstrous by tragic art, as it appears in *The Birth of Tragedy*, will constitute the starting point from which one can begin to understand that, by resorting to the category of personality to characterise the first philosophers, Nietzsche is pointing to the grandiosity, tragicity and heroicity of the way they try to fight against the monstrous in history: the secularisation that is threatening their culture (cf. section 4). As we shall see, according to *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, this grandiosity, tragicity and heroicity reside, moreover, in the way in which they respond to the monstrous in nature via the artistic creation of philosophical concepts so as not to succumb to the direct and potentially disintegrating experience of this phenomenon. Such an experience is described by Nietzsche as a complex and internally divided one, which coincides with the process of creating concepts based on what is an original and pre-linguistic experience of the monstrous conceived as the ground and kernel of nature. It is the complex unity of this experience – which involves the object (the monstrous itself), the subject (each one of the first philosophers) and the mediating instruments (their philosophical concepts) of the relation between the former two elements of the experience – that will allow us to understand why Nietzsche refers to all these elements as being monstrous. As shall become clear, the symbolic mediation of the monstrous in nature through philosophical concepts keeps the presence of this phenomenon within community life bearable for human beings and thus makes it possible for them to fight against the harmful effects of the monstrous in history: the spread and consolidation of the secularisation of culture (cf. section 5). One of the main focuses of this essay is merely to show that Nietzsche considers the experience of the monstrous in nature to be common to all philosophers before Plato. In this respect, the essay will mainly analyse the parts of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* in which Nietzsche refers precisely to what is common to all these philosophers. But, just for the sake of exemplification, I will seek to indicate, very briefly, how the experience of the monstrous in nature and the artistic, conceptual response to this experience are manifested in the description of the particular doctrines of the first philosophers that are considered in Nietzsche's text (cf. section 6).

However, the tragic character of the first philosophers does not just have to do with the fact that they respond to the monstrous in nature through the artistic creation of concepts. An additional aspect, equally central in the definition of their tragic character, relates to the fictionality of the concepts they create to carry out

such a response. This aspect of their tragic, artistic character is not explored in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, although it is implicit there and key to understanding the Nietzschean text. For this reason, we will have to make some incursions into two other writings by Nietzsche that deal with the same issue in a way closely related to the text on the origins of philosophy. First of all, his inaugural lecture *Homer and Classical Philology*, where the fictionality of the category of personality is shown in the context of the Nietzschean account of the history of Homeric scholarship (cf. section 7). Secondly, the opusculum *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, a text that was initially conceived by Nietzsche as an introduction to a study on the origins of philosophy in Greece, and where Nietzsche focuses not only on the intrinsic fictionality of all human concepts, but also on the salvific dimension of this fictionality in its capacity to transform life and make life abundant (cf. section 8). But, as we shall see, the tragic character of the first philosophers also concerns the fact that it is the projection of Nietzsche as a philosopher who defines himself as tragic and artistic, as someone who creates fictional interpretative categories through which he produces ideal models that inspire him in his confrontation with the monstrous character of his culture. It shall become clear that the monstrous (and all categories pivoting around it) is one of such categories – a most central one for that matter – through which he builds the inspiring model of the Pre-Platonic philosophers (cf. section 9).

Let us begin, then, by considering in what sense does *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* have a genetic and thematic connection with *The Birth of Tragedy*, as well as in what way the definition of the tragic presented by Nietzsche in the latter work can help us understand that the category of personality, which plays a central role in the former one, essentially involves a response both to the monstrous in history and the monstrous in nature.

2. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and *The Birth of Tragedy*

As is known, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is an unfinished and fragmentary text.[3] This does not, however, make it less important from the point of view of the understanding of Nietzsche's interpretation of the history of Greek philosophy, the place that this interpretation has in the framework of his thinking regarding ancient Greek culture and the role that the latter plays in his critique of modern culture.

[3] Cf. Nietzsche's letter to Carl von Gersdorff, April 5, 1873, no. 301, KGB II 3.139; also Cowan (1962) 4-5; Colli (1988) 916.

Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks is an indispensable document for defining Nietzsche's view of the start of philosophy in Greece in some detail, given that it represents the text in which, without abandoning the originality and experimental character of his approach, he addresses the earliest Greek thinkers in a most evolved and systematic way.[4] Nietzsche asks himself about the function of philosophy in the midst of a community, and also about the distinctive characteristics of philosophers when confronting their historical reality.[5] His aim is to find where there is a divergence from what occurs in the modern world from the point of view of the relationship between philosophy and the world of culture. In this sense, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* aims at identifying what could function as a source of inspiration for the establishing of a renewed link between philosophy and culture in modernity.[6] As Nietzsche says, in an extract dating from

[4] Regarding the more conventional character of Nietzsche's lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, cf. Heit (2014) 221. When comparing *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* with the lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, Thomson (2003) 196 claims that the latter are "a bit short on style." However, Nietzsche's lectures contain decisive aspects for understanding his interpretation of the beginning and historical development of Greek philosophy, many of them complementary to the view that can be found in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. They were written shortly before it (no earlier than 1872: cf. Parkhurst [2019] 312-13) and can be considered a source for its writing (cf. D'Iorio [1994] 387; Cancik [2000] 69). For the divergences between *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and the lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, cf. D'Iorio (1994) 385-6, 402-4, 405-6. Nietzsche's project for a book on the early Greek philosophers goes back to a period when he was especially interested in Democritus (cf. Nachlass 1869/70, 2[2], KSA 7.45) and is part of a wider project to publish a major book on ancient Greek culture (cf. Nachlass 1869/70, 3[22], KSA 7.66; 1873, 27[64], KSA 7.606; 29[171], KSA 7.702). Although Nietzsche never published the book on the first philosophers, he only abandoned this project after leaving Basel. The project went through various phases, as can be testified by the different plans for the book (cf. D'Iorio [1994] 75-6; Riedel [1995] 49-50). The two introductions to *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* were written after the rest of the text (there is some disagreement as to the precise dates when they were written: Oehler [1904] 50 indicates that the first introduction was written in 1874 and the second one in 1879; Landfester [1994b] 655 proposes 1875/76 as being the date of the second introduction). The later date of their writing is evidence of Nietzsche's long reflection on the meaning of the first philosophers' activity.

[5] Cf. Cowan (1962) 11.

[6] Cf. Nietzsche's letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, towards the end of February, 1873, no. 297, KGB II 3.127; also BA II, KSA 1.687; BA III, KSA 1.694. For the connection between his project of a study of Pre-Platonic philosophy and his attempt to assert himself as the philosophical mentor of the Wagnerian cultural reform based in Bayreuth, cf. Nachlass

1875 from a set of notes serving the composing of his never written *We Philologists*, "If one tries to live as in ancient times – one immediately comes a hundred miles closer to the ancients than through any erudition" (Nachlass 1875, 5[167], KSA 8.89).[7] In the same set of notes, he makes it clear that this aim to live in the style of antiquity is intended to be set up as a counter-movement vis-à-vis the culture of his time: "My goal is: to create complete enmity between our current 'culture' and antiquity. Whoever wants to serve the former must *hate* the latter" (Nachlass 1875, 3[68], KSA 8.33).

In line with what we have just seen, Nietzsche's text on the origins of Greek philosophy is part of a more general project involving a critique of the modern world based on the contrast between this and ancient culture. But if, on the one hand, the *We Philologists* notes emphasise the criticism of the way philology looks at antiquity as a subject for research, on the other, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* tries to carry out this project on the basis of a critique of the then dominant portrayal of the history of philosophy as progress.[8] In a similar way, the more

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1872/73, 19[316], KSA 7.516; D'Iorio (1994) 383-7. The bulk of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* was written for the occasion of Wagner's birthday: cf. Nietzsche's letter to Carl von Gersdorff, March 2, 1873, no. 298, KGB II 3.132. Contrary to Nietzsche's intentions and expectations, Wagner understood the Nietzschean conception of early Greek philosophy as working against his ideas and attacking the cohesive force of myth (cf. Riedel [1995] 45-61; Otto [1998] 122-3). The disappointment with Wagner's reaction led Nietzsche to abandon his book project in its present form (cf. D'Iorio [1994] 411).

[7] All translations in this essay are mine. On Nietzsche's *We Philologists*, the never published fifth *Untimely Meditation*, cf. Cancik (1994) 81-96; Cancik (2000) 94-106; Cancik and Cancik-Lindemeier (2014) 263-79; Billings (2020) 549-65.

[8] According to Cancik (2000) 38, 40, 64, Nietzsche's idea of a tragic age involves a reaction against the conception of the history of philosophy as a progression. As regards the influence that Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy had in suggesting this conception during the nineteenth century, cf. Heit (2014) 219-21 (but cf. Riedel [1990] 3-8 for similarities between Nietzsche and Hegel in terms of their periodisation of early Greek philosophy). Borsche (1985) 62-3 maintains that the progressive model of the historiography of Greek philosophy begins with Kant's critical philosophy and finds in Schleiermacher a defender of the idea that the history of Greek philosophy constitutes an organic whole analogous to organic nature. However, Zeller is the main target of Nietzsche's revolutionary proposal for the historiography of early Greek philosophy (cf. his letter to Erwin Rohde, June 11, 1872, no. 229, KGB II 3.10; SE 8, KSA 1.417; Oehler [1904] 8). Although Zeller's presentation in his monumental *The Philosophy of the Greeks in Its Historical Development* is intended to be non-idealist, it is Hegelian in nature (cf. Müller [2005] 111-13), but the conception of the history of philosophy as progress dates back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (cf. Landfester [1994d] 659; Müller [2005] 108-10).

directly philosophical context of the latter text is to be distinguished from the more strictly philological and artistic scope of *The Birth of Tragedy*. As Giorgio Colli says, referring to the text on Greek philosophy, "Thus another writing is born, in which the ideal of philosophy takes the place of the ideal of art that predominated in *The Birth of Tragedy*."[9] Matthew Meyer, in turn, upholds that the difference between the book on tragedy and *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is that the first text presents a conception of the Greek poetical world as not philosophical, whereas the second proposes that the earliest philosophers expressed a tragic view of the world that promoted the emergence of the tragic genre.[10] In a word, the transition from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is the transition from the thematisation of art and poetry to that of philosophy in the general context of a tragic culture.

In a letter dated March 2nd 1873, addressed to von Gersdorff, Nietzsche refers to the text on Greek philosophy as complementary to the book on tragedy:

> My writing grows and develops into a side piece to the "Birth." The title will perhaps be "the philosopher as a physician of culture." I actually want to surprise W<agner> with this on his next birthday. (No. 298, KGB II 3.132)[11]

It is possible to interpret the complementariness of which Nietzsche speaks in the terms used by Colli and Meyer. Nevertheless, if, on the one hand, the distinction between the purpose of one text and the other makes it possible to have a clear idea of the role of each one of them in the framework of the young Nietzsche's thinking, and also to better pinpoint the complementarities between the various stages in and dimensions of his critical project, it can, on the other hand, make us lose sight of the constants of this project, the overlapping in topics among the various analyses that materialise it and the very multidimensionality of each of its stages. Nuancing his position, Meyer upholds that the connecting element between *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is Heraclitus, whose thinking gets reflected in the two texts: in the first, as regards the thesis that only aesthetically is life justifiable; in the second, as the most important

[9] Colli (1988) 916.

[10] Meyer (2014b) 197-8, 208. Cf. also Riedel (1990) 2-3.

[11] Cf. also Nachlass 1872/73, 23[24], KSA 7.548. On the different titles for the piece, cf. Landfester (1994c) 656; Kirkland (2011) 421n11. The title *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* occurs for the first time in Nachlass 1872/73, 19[214], KSA 7.485.

representation of a philosophical and anti-metaphysical worldview.[12] The link between the two texts made by Meyer based on Heraclitus is, to a great extent, merely nominal, given that he does not expound the meaning of the Nietzschean thesis of the aesthetic justification of life and, as a result, does not demonstrate what relation there is between this thesis and Heraclitus' philosophical and anti-metaphysical worldview in the writing on early Greek philosophy. Although Heraclitus constitutes the starting point for a possible relation between the two texts by the young Nietzsche, given that this Greek philosopher has a residual explicit presence in *The Birth of Tragedy* and is just one of several philosophers broached in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, he does not seem to represent the most solid connecting link between the texts in question; nor, for all the more reason, does he correspond to the element in the book on tragedy that allows most light to be shed on the meaning and structure of the writing on Greek philosophy. Thanks to its omnipresence in *The Birth of Tragedy* and its importance in key passages of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, the phenomenon of the "monstrous" (*ungeheuer*) seems to be able to connect the two texts more consistently, in such a way that the meaning of this phenomenon in the first text makes it possible to more clearly comprehend what is at stake in the second. In what follows, this essay will seek to show that the monstrous is an experience that allows us to connect the two Nietzschean texts, an important step towards the realisation of the essay's fundamental task of presenting the monstrous as the core of the tragic and heroic nature of the philosophers portrayed in Nietzsche's writing on the origins of philosophy.

3. The tragic and the monstrous in *The Birth of Tragedy*

The phenomenon of the monstrous plays a structural role in the composition of *The Birth of Tragedy* which, due to space restrictions, it is not possible to present here in all its aspects.[13] For present purposes, it is only of interest to highlight the way in which, in Nietzsche's first book, the monstrous is at the centre of his understanding of the tragic and represents the fundamental experience defining the

[12] Meyer (2014b) 208-9. Cf. also Meyer (2014a) 36, where he maintains that *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* smooths the transition between two different Nietzschean versions of tragic philosophy, one metaphysical (*The Birth of Tragedy*), the other non-metaphysical (*Human, All Too Human*).

[13] For a more complete analysis of this question, cf. Lima (2023) 112-36. Other accounts of the meaning of the monstrous in Nietzsche can be found in Lacoue-Labarthe (1979) 61-9; Lacoue-Labarthe (1986a) 108-11; Lacoue-Labarthe (1986b) 126-31; Salaquarda (1989) 317-37; Luyster (2001) 1-26; Schmidt (2001) 191-224; Leiter (2018) 151-73; Loeb (2018) 428-47.

tragic hero. This will allow us to establish a relation between this book and *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,* in such a way that it becomes clear that the definition of the tragic based on the heroic experience of the monstrous, just as this definition is presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is that to be found underlying the concept of personality in the text about the earliest philosophers and, consequently, that on which both the attitude of these philosophers towards the world and the content of their doctrines rest.

Given that the kernel of *The Birth of Tragedy* is tragedy and the tragic, what could be closest to a Nietzschean definition of the monstrous emerges in the context of the analysis of the tragic hero's fundamental experience. This experience is that of the monstrous or of the monstrous character of life.[14] Oedipus' experience, as the exemplary tragic hero, is one of "monstrous suffering" (*ungeheures Leiden*; GT 9, KSA 1.65) resulting from a "look into the inner and terrifying element of nature" (*Blick in's Innere und Schreckliche der Natur*; GT 9, KSA 1.65), from a "look troubled by a frightening darkness" (*das von grausiger Nacht versehrte Blick*; GT 9, KSA 1.65).[15] As Nietzsche says, using Schopenhauerian terminology, "the monstrous fright" (*das ungeheure Grausen*; GT 1, KSA 1.28) due to the "breakdown of the principle of individuation" (*Zerbrechen des principii individuationis*; GT 1, KSA 1.28) derives from a "look into the essence of the Dionysian" (*Blick in das Wesen des Dionysischen*; GT 1, KSA 1.28), which is associated with the "heroic urge towards the monstrous" (*heroischer Zug ins Ungeheure*; GT 18, KSA 1.119).

The monstrous is presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* in the symbolic context of art and religion. It is his understanding and explanation of the birth of art and the symbolic that lead Nietzsche to postulate a non-symbolic relation with the monstrous and its manifestation. Starting from a symbolic representation of the monstrous, originating from art and religious ceremonies, Nietzsche emphasises an implicit original experience of this phenomenon. Such an experience is one in which one gets seized by the vision of the "horror and absurdity of being" (*Entsetzliches oder Absurdes des Seins*; GT 7, KSA 1.57), by the "thought of repugnance over the horror and absurdity of existence" (*Ekelgedanken über das Entsetzliche oder Absurde des Daseins*; GT 7, KSA 1.57). The feeling of the absurdity of being, and also the repugnance towards the existence thus revealed, bring the original experience of the monstrous closer to a non-symbolic pessimism. This experience is the non-

[14] On Nietzsche's conception of the tragic in *The Birth of Tragedy* and elsewhere, as well as on the background of this conception in German philosophy, cf. Silk and Stern (1981) 1-3, 265-80, 297-331; Hühn and Schwab (2011); Billings (2014).

[15] As regards the importance of the figure of Oedipus for the composition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, cf. von Reibnitz (1989) 28-35, 366-7, 374-5; Halliwell (2003) 109-11; Ugolini (2007) 4-5, 10-11, 93-5.

symbolic pessimistic experience of being, and leads to the non-symbolic pessimistic conception of existence in which it would have been best to not have existed and the second best thing would be to stop existing – in sum, a conception in which existing in general is absurd and causes repugnance (GT 3, KSA 1.35).

Nevertheless, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the experience of the monstrous is directly connected to the pessimism of strength or symbolic pessimism.[16] This form of pessimism is found in the tragic, the Dionysian and tragedy; it is related to the monstrous in the experience of the Dionysian from which tragedy is born (VS 1, KSA 1.12). It gets constituted as a symbolic relation with the Dionysian and the monstrous. In the case of *Oedipus at Colonus*, the symbolic transformation of the relation with the Dionysian and the monstrous materialises in two ways: on the one hand, in the content of the myth which the play represents; on the other, in the dramatic art involved in the theatrical representation of the myth. In both cases, there is a magical, salvific and medicinal transformation (GT 7, KSA 1.57; GT 9, KSA 1.65) of the relation with the Dionysian and the monstrous via the tragic art. This kind of art modifies the non-symbolic relation with the Dionysian and the monstrous that gets expressed in the so-called wisdom of Silenus, in the feeling of repugnance in the face of the horror and absurdity of existence – in a word, in non-symbolic pessimism. Tragic art makes it possible to continue to live (GT 7, KSA 1.57), build a new world from the ruins of an ancient one (GT 9, KSA 1.65).[17] In other terms, the world of the pessimism of strength and of the symbolic relation with the monstrous gets built from the ruins of the non-symbolic pessimism deriving from the exposure to the immediate experience of the monstrous.

Let us now see how the development of this symbolic relation with the monstrous through tragic art is what is at the basis, first of all, of Nietzsche's conception of personality as it can be found in the text on the origins of philosophy and, as a result, of the tragic and heroic character of the Pre-Platonic philosophers.

[16] For the historical background of Nietzsche's discussion of pessimism, the different forms pessimism takes in his work and their role particularly in *The Birth of Tragedy*, cf. Silk and Stern (1981) 118-19, 123-5, 160-1, 222, 252, 326; von Reibnitz (1989) 127-31, 169-72, 197-8; Landfester (1994a) 514-16; Pauen (1997) 30-161; Wilkerson (2006) 51-88; Schmidt (2012) 11-12, 17; Beiser (2016); Gardner (2020) 454-78; Hassan (2023).

[17] With respect to the role of tragic art in overcoming the pessimistic revelation of the absurdity of life, cf. Silk and Stern (1981) 280-96; Nussbaum (1991) 75-111; Halliwell (2003) 113-14; Ugolini (2007) 93-5; Halliwell (2018) 91-112; Leiter (2018) 151-73.

4. The monstrous and the meaning of personality in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*

In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche looks to consider the emergence of philosophy and the earliest philosophers based on the concept of personality. According to him, it is this concept that determines which philosophical contents produced by these philosophers should be highlighted. It is the intrinsic link between their personality and some of their doctrines that ensures the up-to-datedness of their philosophical production: "I tell the story of those philosophers in a simplified way: I only want to highlight the point in every system that is a piece of *personality* and belongs to that irrefutable, undisputable thing that history has to preserve" (PHG Einleitung, KSA 1.801). The personality of the earliest philosophers, in their ability to produce philosophical doctrines, is what should constantly be an inspiration to each present time. For Nietzsche, this concept of personality involves the idea of grandiosity or a grandiose human being: "The task is to bring to light what we must always *love* and *revere* and what no later knowledge can rob us of: the great human being" (PHG Einleitung, KSA 1.802).[18]

In his approach, Nietzsche attempts to diverge from the manuals of Greek philosophy.[19] Instead of setting out to present all the teachings transmitted by the earliest philosophers, as is usually done in the framework of the said manuals, he proposes to select the teachings coined by the personal element of each one of these philosophers:

[18] Kirkland (2011) 426 presents an overly broad conception of personality, according to which it concerns the always already established relationship between every human being and their world. But as we shall see better, in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, through the concept of personality Nietzsche refers to a special type of human being, the great human being, and to an extraordinary experience of history and nature, that of the monstrous. For the Nietzschean use of the category of personality in other contexts, cf. below, n71. As Oehler (1904) 52 points out, Nietzsche will throughout his life perceive the first philosophers as monstrous personalities: cf. VM 221, KSA 2.474; Nachlass 1880, 7[189], KSA 9.356.

[19] Regarding the most influential Greek philosophy manuals at the time when Nietzsche was putting together his text, cf. Heit (2014) 218-23. As Heit shows, by resorting to the concept of personality, Nietzsche argued against, on the one hand, the predominant understanding of the history of Greek philosophy based on an arrangement into philosophy schools (223) and, on the other, Hegel's conception that character and the personal element are not important from the point of view of a philosophical historiography (225).

> [...] the teachings have been selected in which the personal nature of a philosopher resonates most strongly, while a complete list of all possible transmitted teachings, as is the custom in the handbooks, brings about one thing at least, the complete silencing of the personal. (PHG Einleitung 2, KSA 1.803)

Nietzsche says he will refer to some anecdotes about each one of the Pre-Platonic philosophers, so as to succeed in painting a picture of each one of them as a human being: "It is possible to give a picture of a human being from three anecdotes; I will try to highlight three anecdotes from each system and leave the rest behind" (PHG Einleitung 2, KSA 1.803). Jonathan Barnes and Helmut Heit point to Nietzsche being inspired by Diogenes Laertius' doxographical method, but maintain that his text on the beginnings of Greek philosophy does not apply the method of expounding the teachings of the earliest philosophers based on anecdotes about their lives.[20] If one tries to understand the word anecdote in the sense used by Diogenes, it seems evident that Nietzsche does not achieve the purpose announced by himself and it can even be speculated to what extent this cannot be ascribed to the unfinished character of his text. However, it is possible to understand the term anecdote as another way for him to refer to personality, so that a rigorous comparison with Diogenes' method turns out perhaps to be not relevant, which is not to say that the ancient doxographer was not at all a source of inspiration for the Nietzschean approach to early Greek philosophy.[21] In addition, he talks of three anecdotes, but this could mean that he is going to base himself on various personal aspects – and not necessarily three – of the philosophical doctrines he intends to depict.[22]

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[20] Barnes (1986) 21; Heit (2014) 225; cf. also Landfester (1994d) 660. On the relationship between Nietzsche and Diogenes, cf. in addition Gigante (1994) 3-16; Müller (2005) 103-17.

[21] Cf. Nietzsche's letter to Erwin Rohde, August 26, 1872, no. 252, KGB II 3.48, which he signs as "Diogenes Laertius." As indicated by Oehler (1904) 36, Nietzsche's interest in the Pre-Platonics can be traced back to his work on Diogenes. Cancik (2000) 68 considers that the Nietzschean access to early Greek philosophy is essentially determined by Diogenes' book and that Nietzsche is a modernised Diogenes. Contrary to the common opinion of his time, Nietzsche developed a positive view of Diogenes as a doxographer: cf. Müller (2005) 107-17.

[22] For a different view, cf. Heit (2014) 225, who considers it important that Nietzsche indicates a precise number of three anecdotes. On the significance of the anecdotical method for Nietzsche, cf. Bertram (1918) 227-37; Niehues-Pröbsting (1983) 255-86; Müller (2005) 113-17. Concerning the importance of Aristotle, Theophrastus and Plutarch for Nietzsche's anecdotical approach to the Pre-Platonics, cf. Landfester (1994e) 665; Müller (2005) 114; Kirkland (2011) 424.

The relation between personality and the monstrous thus begins to become clear: personality has to do with the grandiosity of a human being, with their stature. But the link between the two things is not limited to the use of the phrase "the great human being" (*der große Mensch*) when Nietzsche attempts to explain what the concept of personality corresponds to. He sets out to explain in what the idea of a grandiose human being consists and, with this, other facets of the monstrous in its link to the question of personality become clearer.

According to Nietzsche, what distinguishes the earliest philosophers is the fact that they knew when to start to philosophise: "in abundance" (*im Glück*) and not in sadness or out of boredom (PHG 1, KSA 1.805).[23] In this sense, they justified philosophy and its emergence, given that they did not attempt to present reasons to substantiate the relevance of its appearing and limited themselves to philosophising: "The Greeks, as the truly healthy ones, once and for all *justified* philosophy itself by the fact that they philosophised" (PHG 1, KSA 1.805; cf. PHG 1, KSA 1.809). In other words, philosophy was put into practice by the Greeks as an activity that was an expression or affirmation of the situation of prosperity in which they found themselves. This prosperity is, in turn, understood by Nietzsche as an expression of life, in such a way that the fact that they philosophised in such a situation shows their "respect for life" (*Rücksicht auf das Leben*; PHG 1, KSA 1.807). As he says, "they wanted to immediately experience what they learnt" (PHG 1, KSA 1.807). Rather than a rapid practical application of what they learnt or discovered from a philosophical point of view, this signifies that the earliest philosophers produced their doctrines as a manifestation of their own lives and of the need that the latter has in expressing itself when it is in a situation of abundance (PHG 1, KSA 1.807). The moment of the Greeks' philosophical discoveries coincides with their being applied to life, since they are always rooted in the latter's realm.[24]

It should, however, be considered that, for Nietzsche, this is not an isolated realm, but rather one that gets manifested in a community context: life is life in a community, based on a community and in relation to a community. He maintains that the first philosophers carried out philosophy "as human beings of culture and with the aims of culture" (PHG 1, KSA 1.807) or, as he relates further on, "a philosopher protects and defends their homeland" (PHG 2, KSA 1.810). They belonged intrinsically to the historical and cultural period in which they lived, given that they originated from it and its prosperity, and also tried to preserve its course and clear its path by removing the frightening dangers that threaten to stop this (PHG 2, KSA

[23] Cf. SE 3, KSA 1.361; VP, KGW II 4.215; Nachlass 1872/73, 19[5], KSA 7.418; 23[35], KSA 7.555.

[24] Cf. VP, KGW II 4.212-13.

1.810).[25] The link between them, on the one hand, and their time and culture, on the other, is defined by Nietzsche on the basis of the idea of life, of the vital core on which both rest. The prosperity or vitality expressed in their philosophical activity is the same as that of the historical moment in which they are situated and it is such a historical prosperity or vitality that, through their activity, they aim to defend. The threats, identified by Nietzsche, to the prosperity of ancient Greece are "the monstrous dangers and temptations of secularisation" (*ungeheure Gefahren und Verführungen der Verweltlichung*; PHG 1, KSA 1.808).[26] These frightening and monstrous dangers, which Nietzsche identifies with secularisation, are associated with the progressive reduction in the religious dimension, in the Greek and pagan sense of the term, of the grandiosity characterising the sixth and fifth centuries BC in Greece.[27] It would not be risky to say that the secularisation that Nietzsche diagnoses here is related to the growing historical influence of Socratic rationalism and optimism as identified in *The Birth of Tragedy*.[28] The closeness of the diagnosis in

[25] Cf. VP, KGW II 4.212n1.

[26] Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[29], KSA 7.425. Nietzsche also speaks of the monstrous character of the dangers threatening modern culture and of the need to conduct a monstrous battle against these dangers: cf. SE 3, KSA 1.351; WB 6, KSA 1.464; BA I, KSA 1.668; BA IV, KSA 1.714. He conceives of the Pre-Platonics as reformers (Nachlass 1875, 6[18], KSA 8.105), as thinkers who manifest the strength of a culture with the capacity to correct itself (Nachlass 1875, 6[13], KSA 8.102). On the importance of the Greeks' victory over the Persians and of the resulting Athenian domination over the remaining Greek cities for what Nietzsche refers to as the decline of ancient Greek culture, cf. Nachlass 1875, 6[27], KSA 8.108-9; 6[30], KSA 8.110; 6[45], KSA 8.114; 6[49], KSA 8.118. He uses the image of the Persian wars to characterise his own historical times: cf. Nachlass 1870/71, 5[23], KSA 7.97; 1870/72, 8[23], KSA 7.230; 1871, 13[2], KSA 7.372. According to Cancik (2000) 39, Nietzsche's construction of a tragic age in ancient Greek history is anti-classical and anti-Attic. In much the same spirit, Oehler (1904) 50 highlights that the Nietzschean early Greek thinkers are cultural reformers with a panhellenic ethos.

[27] For an account of the birth of philosophy as a response to a social crisis resulting from the dissolution of the aggregating force of myth, cf. Müller (2005) 117-35.

[28] For Nietzsche, Socratism is older than Socrates himself: cf. ST, KSA 1.545. On the connection between secularisation and what Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, calls "the Socratism of science," cf. GT 23, KSA 1.148. Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 23[35], KSA 7.554-5, where Nietzsche contrasts the pessimism (or the artistic optimism) of the early Greek thinkers with Socrates' "no longer artistic [optimism]." Meyer (2014b) 208-9 maintains that *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* rests, just like *The Birth of Tragedy*, on the opposition between pessimism and optimism. Concerning the pessimism of the first philosophers, cf. also VP, KGW II 4.321, 327, 328; Nachlass 1869/70, 3[84], KSA 7.82; 1872/73, 23[35], 555; Lesser (1987) 30.

the text regarding the beginnings of philosophy in Greece to what is found in the book on tragedy is strongly suggested when Nietzsche recounts that a philosopher "arrives like a noble warner for the same purpose for which, in those centuries, tragedy was born" (PHG 1, KSA 1.808-9; cf. PHG 2, KSA 1.812).

The similarities between what I have just described and *The Birth of Tragedy* are evident. They go further than the referring, in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, to the purpose for which tragedy was born. In fact, they have also to do with fundamental questions like prosperity, the justification of existence and the primacy of life. Nevertheless, the similarity that most needs to be highlighted here is that which Nietzsche says exists between the purpose of philosophy in ancient Greece and the purpose of Attic tragedy, since it is here that the image of the earliest philosophers as grandiose figures tackling monstrous phenomena to save the prosperity of Greek community life from the destructive powers threatening to destroy it begins to be clearly depicted. As indicated above, tragedy, as an artistic genre, was created to confront, via its symbolic representation of the experience of a hero, the non-symbolic monstrous and non-symbolic pessimism and, thus, make it possible for human beings to continue to live. Through this converging between the text on the origins of philosophy and the book on tragedy, Nietzsche already begins to point to the heroic and tragic character of the Pre-Platonic philosophers in their clash with the terrible and monstrous dangers that could deflect the course of Greek history from the path that was dominant in it until then. In other words, the personality of the Pre-Platonics, which he proposes to consider, has to do, first of all, with their attitude towards the monstrous in Greek culture and history – an attitude distinctly characterised, through the parallel with *The Birth of Tragedy*, by its heroic and tragic nature.[29] But, in addition, their personality is also related to their attitude towards the monstrous in nature. Next, we will therefore consider this second dimension of their personality, more precisely, Nietzsche's thesis that their philosophical doctrines arise as a conceptual response to the monstrous in nature.

[29] In this respect, the parallel between, on the one hand, the first philosophers and, on the other, Schopenhauer and Wagner is also clear: cf. SE 3, KSA 1.362; SE 4, KSA 1.373; WB 2, KSA 1.435-9; WB 3, KSA 1.439, 441, 442, 443, 445. But Nietzsche refers to the figure of the philosopher as such in tragic and heroic terms as well: cf. BA IV, KSA 1.713, where he claims that the philosopher's intention is to bring "not merely amazement but terror;" also BA II, KSA 1.673-4.

5. The birth of philosophy and the monstrous in nature

One of Nietzsche's objectives, in making his analysis relate to the personality of each one of the earliest philosophers, is to demonstrate what he calls "the polyphony of Greek nature" (*die Polyphonie der griechischen Natur*; PHG Einleitung, KSA 1.802) as manifested in the history of philosophy from Thales to Socrates.[30] In this sense, he understands the personality of each one of these philosophers to also be the singularity or incomparability of their attitude towards the monstrous and of the philosophical doctrines deriving from this attitude. According to him, the Greeks invented "the typical representatives of philosophers" (*die typischen Philosophenköpfe*; PHG 1, KSA 1.807). That is, it was in ancient Greece that there was the emergence of those philosophers who, not comparable with each other in their individual attitudes towards the monstrous, gave expression to the character traits from whose mixing all the following philosophers took shape, with the spotlight on the first of those who were to come: Plato (PHG 2, KSA 1.809-10).[31] As Nietzsche expressly mentions, the earliest philosophers, from Thales to Socrates, form "the pure types" (*die reinen Typen*; PHG 2, KSA 1.810)[32], in comparison with whom the eccentricity of later philosophers like the Cynics is no more than a "caricature" (*Caricatur*; PHG 2, KSA 1.810).

However, if the first philosophers are characterised by their singularity as regards their specific attitude towards the monstrous dangers threatening the historical period in which they live, it is possible to define them en bloc based on the fundamental core of meaning of their attitude. Nietzsche explicitly indicates that he is talking "of the Pre-Platonic philosophers as a homogeneous community" (PHG 2, KSA 1.809).[33] One of the characteristics distinguishing them from later philosophers is, precisely, the fact that their attitude reveals a belonging to or immanence in the historical period and culture in which they lived. In Nietzschean terms, their philosophical activity goes in the direction of "a healing and cleansing"

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[30] Müller (2005) 117-22 explains Nietzsche's concept of polyphony in this passage based on the diversity of the Greek colonial experience.

[31] As Nietzsche maintains, each one of these philosophers lives in their own solar system: cf. CV 1, KSA 1.758; PHG 8, KSA 1.834. For the importance in this regard of Nietzsche's *The Successions of the Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, cf. Laks (2010) 252-3.

[32] Cf. VP, KGW II 4.212, 214; also VP, KGW II 4.265, where Nietzsche restricts "the purest types" (*die reinsten Typen*) to just three philosophers: Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Socrates.

[33] One of the main objectives of the Nietzschean approach to early Greek philosophy is to grasp the very essence of the philosopher as such: cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[89], KSA 7.448; 1873, 26[9], KSA 7.573-4. Concerning the designation "the Pre-Platonic philosophers," in addition to the passages considered in the main text of this essay, cf. VP, KGW II 4.214, 360-1.

(*eine Heilung und Reinigung*; PHG 2, KSA 1.810) of Hellenic culture. The Greek philosophers after Plato are like founders of sects, which are no more than institutions opposing Hellenic culture and the unity of its style. Their aim is the salvation of individuals or groups of friends and young people who are close to them (PHG 2, KSA 1.810). As Nietzsche maintains, the philosopher, from Plato onwards, "is in exile and conspires against their homeland" (PHG 2, KSA 1.810).[34]

Given that the Pre-Platonic philosophers, taken together, express the prosperity of the historical moment in which they lived and uphold the continuation of this, their belonging to Hellenic culture is shown in two ways: on the one hand, they are a reflection of this culture and, on the other, they promote it through their philosophical activity. Based on what I have been indicating, it appears clear that the double face of these philosophers' immanence in Greek culture rests on the idea of tragicity understood as a heroic struggle against the monstrous: on the one hand, their personality reflects the tragic character of the historical period in which they lived, which is that of the emergence of the tragic genre; on the other, their attitude promotes the survival of this historical era by way of a heroic confrontation with the monstrous dangers that could destroy it.

Nevertheless, the way they reflect and, at the same time, consolidate the tragic character of Hellenic culture between the sixth and fifth centuries BC is not limited to their heroic confrontation with the monstrous in history. Their tragic character, which is that of their culture and historical period, is also that of their attitude towards the natural world.[35] In the framework of the presentation of Thales of Miletus' teachings, according to which water is the origin of everything, Nietzsche indicates that this philosopher's fundamental operation is that of a "monstrous

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[34] Cf. *Einführung in das Studium der platonischen Dialogen*, KGW II 4.9, 155; Nachlass 1872/73, 23[16], KSA 7.545.

[35] Just as for Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 986b14, 990a3; *On the Soul* 426a20), for Nietzsche the first Greek thinkers were "natural philosophers" (φυσιολόγοι) – cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.816: "[…] Thales is a creative master who began to see into nature's depths without any fantastic fables." Kirkland (2011) 430 gives a very interesting account of Nietzsche's conception of "nature" (φύσις) in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*: "[…] terror is itself the immediate and undeniable *pathos* of *phusis*;" "[…] this direct confrontation with the abyssal ground of their world […] qualifies the age of pre-Platonic philosophical thought as 'tragic' for Nietzsche." However, he does not relate this terrifying experience of nature and the resulting tragic character of the age of Pre-Platonic thinking to the phenomenon of the monstrous, its internal complexity and pervasiveness in the Nietzschean text. Although Müller (2005) 101 recognizes that Nietzsche's concept of nature in early Greek philosophy includes both cosmology on the one hand and a complex of personal and life conditions on the other, he explores mainly the latter.

generalisation" (*ungeheure Verallgemeinerung*; PHG 3, KSA 1.813). Although this is mentioned in the context of the description of Thales' principal thesis, it characterises something found at the centre of the attitude of each one of the Pre-Platonic philosophers (PHG 3, KSA 1.813).[36] The generalisation carried out by Thales is monstrous, first of all, because it violates experience, the sphere of what is verifiable by the senses: "it is peculiar how violently such a belief deals with the whole plane of experience" (PHG 3, KSA 1.813).[37] Nietzsche refers to this generalisation as something produced by a "proposition of metaphysical belief" (*metaphysischer Glaubenssatz*) arising from a "mystical intuition" (*mystische Intuition*; PHG 3, KSA 1.813).[38] In other terms, Thales' central thesis is a concrete manifestation of something more general and fundamental, underlying all Pre-Platonic philosophy: "All is One" (*Alles ist Eins*; PHG 3, KSA 1.813).

When Nietzsche says that the monstrous generalisation involved in the reduction of All to One violates experience, he does not do it in a condemning way, but rather in order to indicate that the generalisation surpasses what can be observed by the senses. For this reason he maintains that it originates from a metaphysical belief that, in turn, derives from a mystical intuition. If the metaphysical belief points to the fact that the generalisation transcends experience by assembling it from a higher level that is not verifiable by any of the senses, the mystical intuition indicates that the generalisation process results from a form of access carried out by a non-sensorial faculty.[39] Nietzsche's formula calls attention to the complex relationship among three elements, which act on separate levels. What one has access to through mystical intuition, which appears to not have the possibility of a

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[36] Cf. VP, KGW II 4.241, where Nietzsche calls Anaximander's hypothesis of the ἄπειρον, rendered as *das Unbestimmte* ("the indeterminate;" VP, KGW II 4.245), "a monstrous leap" (*ein ungeheurer Sprung*).

[37] Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[62], KSA 7.439, where Nietzsche speaks of the philosopher's description of nature as "poetry beyond the limits of experience, continuation of the mythical impulse." On the poetic character of concepts, cf. Nachlass 1869/70, 3[94], KSA 7.85; also Porter (2024) 7-11, especially 9, where he points out a parallel between the poetry of concepts in Nietzsche and Kant's theory of schematism.

[38] Cf. PHG 9, KSA 1.839; PHG 10, KSA 1.840-1. In GT 16, KSA 1.103, Nietzsche associates the mystical with the Dionysian experience of "the innermost kernel of things."

[39] In PHG 3, KSA 1.814, Nietzsche speaks of one of the philosopher's faculties, "phantasy" (*Phantasie*), as "a foreign power" (*eine fremde Macht*). Cf. the concept of "the suprapersonal" (*das Ueberpersönliche*) in WB 4, KSA 1.453. Here Nietzsche links the suprapersonal in Wagner to the experience of "something sacred" (*etwas Heiliges*) and to a "tragic disposition" (*tragische Gesinnung*). For this concept, cf. also WB 4, KSA 1.451; WB 5, KSA 1.457.

direct and faithful linguistic expression, generates a proposition of metaphysical belief equivalent to a formal schema with some degree of possibility of being expressed by language: "All is One." But this fundamental schema, which is already found on the monstrous generalisation level, is what produces the mediation between the mystical intuition and its declared, even if indirect and unfaithful, linguistic expression in Thales' thesis and those of the other Pre-Platonic philosophers. There is, however, a decisive aspect that needs to be stressed: in spite of the discontinuity between the mystical intuition and the linguistic level in both the proposition of metaphysical belief and the Pre-Platonic philosophers' theses, the monstrous generalisation does not represent a subjective action imposed on the natural world. The very expression "mystical intuition" points clearly to the grasp of an objective content, in such a way that the monstrousness of the generalisation aims to refer, albeit with an imperfection inherent to linguistic expressiveness, to an objective plane: that of nature. Therefore, the monstrous character of the generalisation does not only correspond to a violating of experience, but also and in particular to how the early Greek philosophers, through the same action that produces this violation, try via human language to address what is grasped by the mystical intuition, thus revealing its monstrous status and creating something monstrous: the generalisation itself.

The objective character of the monstrous transpires again when Nietzsche, basing himself on *Nicomachean Ethics* 1141b3-8, relates that philosophy is distinct from science because of the "selection and discrimination of the strange, amazing, difficult, divine" (*Auswählen und Ausscheiden des Ungewöhnlichen Erstaunlichen Schwierigen Göttlichen*; PHG 3, KSA 1.816).[40] He is, once again, talking about the monstrous generalisation and the objective phenomenon of the monstrous which the former tries to address. He describes the objective side of the generalisation using terms expressing its objectivity and monstrousness: the strange, amazing, difficult and divine. What the generalisation attempts to respond to, through an abstraction, selection, highlighting and refinement process, is something that exceeds, surpasses or transcends common experience, thanks to its singularity, rapture, exigency and inhumanity. In as much as the Pre-Platonic philosophers tackle the phenomenon of the monstrous in nature through a power to select and discriminate its exceptionality and grandiosity, the figures of monstrousness characterising this phenomenon also serve to characterising that power: the characterisation of both is reciprocal. Such a reciprocity is clearly described by Nietzsche in the context of the opposition between philosophy and science. According to him, science is defined by a blind and unrestrained impulse towards everything that is

[40] Cf. VP, KGW II 4.218.

understandable, towards knowing everything at whatever price, whereas philosophy addresses itself to "things most deserving of being known" (*wissenswürdigste Dinge*), to "great and important knowledge" (*große und wichtige Erkenntnisse*; PHG 3, KSA 1.816), to the "essence and kernel of things" (*Wesen und Kern der Dinge*; PHG 3, KSA 1.817). It is philosophy's concentration on and restriction to grandiose knowledge, involving the restraint of an untamed desire for knowledge, that grant it grandiosity: "'This is great,' says [philosophy], and in doing so [philosophy] raises the human being above the blind, untamed desire of their impulse for knowledge" (PHG 3, KSA 1.816). Through fundamental knowledge like that obtained by Thales, human beings "sense the ultimate solution of things and overcome, through this sensing, the imprisonment common to the lower levels of knowledge" (PHG 3, KSA 1.817) of science when compared to philosophy.[41]

In this way, it is possible to verify, with evidence, the link that Nietzsche establishes between the idea of personality, implicit in the reference to grandiosity, and the monstrous as a global phenomenon involving an inner split between the objective side of its manifestation in nature and the subjective one corresponding to

[41] Nietzsche claims that a reference to the selecting power of the philosopher is implicit in the etymology of the word σοφός: cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.816; VP, KGW II 4.217-18. In many passages, he maintains that philosophy tames science's excessive drive for knowledge (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[41], KSA 7.432; 19[45], KSA 7.434; 19[321], KSA 7.517; 23[14], KSA 7.544), which gives philosophy an artistic (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[36], KSA 7.428; 19[38], KSA 7.430; 19[51], KSA 7.436), grandiose (VP, KGW II 4.218; Nachlass 1872/73, 19[83], KSA 7.447) and tragic dimension (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[35], KSA 7.427-8). This does not mean that science does not play an important role in the definition of philosophy (cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[72], KSA 7.443). But, regardless of such an importance, the artistic impulse prevails over the scientific one in philosophy's constitution (CV 1, KSA 1.760; VP, KGW II 4.235; Nachlass 1872/73, 19[105], KSA 7.454; 1875, 6[15], KSA 8.103). In Nietzsche's view, they are both decisive in this respect (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[72], KSA 7.443; 23[8], KSA 7.540). But, although philosophy is scientific in so far as it works through concepts, it is artistic in terms of purpose (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[62], KSA 7.439). Like the "monstrous task of art" (*Ungeheure Aufgabe der Kunst*; Nachlass 1872/73, 19[36], KSA 7.428), its objective is to present a solution to the enigma of the world (Nachlass 1875, 6[15], KSA 8.103; cf. MA I 261, KSA 2.215). For a problematisation of the Nietzschean definition of early Greek philosophy in its relation to art, science and religion, cf. Otto (1998) 133-40. D'Iorio (1994) 402, 405 indicates that the artistic bias of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, when compared to other, more scientifically biased versions of the book project on the Pre-Platonic philosophers, was probably assumed by Nietzsche because of its addressee Wagner and provided a better conciliation with the book on Greek tragedy. According to the same scholar (408-9), the topic of the relationship between philosophy, art and science continuously nurtured Nietzsche's reflections for the book on the Pre-Platonics.

the fundamental schema of the Pre-Platonic philosophers: "All is One." As we were already beginning to glimpse above, this unity of the monstrous is complex and Nietzsche's analysis of its inner composition unveils important discontinuities, relating to the passing from a non-linguistic level to that of language.

In one of the richest and most fascinating passages of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, he examines the linguistic question just hinted at, at the same time as he lays the groundwork for being able to establish a relation between, on the one hand, personality and the monstrous and, on the other, tragedy and the way in which the first philosophers, like the tragic poets, simultaneously mirror and produce the world to which they belong. Just like the tragedians, the Pre-Platonic philosophers are the mediators between the natural world and that of culture. In a musical language immediately recalling *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche upholds that "The philosopher tries to make the global tone of the world resound within themselves and to place it outside of themselves in the form of concepts" (PHG 3, KSA 1.817).[42] As he also says, a philosopher considers themselves the "reflection of the world" (*Wiederschein der Welt*; PHG 3, KSA 1.817). A philosopher's mediation function is, fundamentally, similar to a tragedian's. Nietzsche depicts the mediation process based on an analysis of what happens in the tragedian's case, to then apply the results to that of the philosopher. The latter is, thus, understood on the basis of an artistic model, more precisely, as an artist, someone whose activity is endowed with artistic inventiveness. "[T]he dramatic artist," says Nietzsche, "transmutes themselves into other bodies, speaks from them and, indeed, knows how to project this transmutation towards the outside, in written verses" (PHG 3, KSA 1.817). In a similar way, but with distinct resources, a philosopher transmutes themselves into other bodies than their own, speaks from them and projects their transmutation outwards, but the bodies that materialise it, instead of dramatic characters or written verses, correspond to the concepts resulting from "dialectic thought" (*dialektisches Denken*), from "dialectics and scientific reflection" (*Dialektik und wissenschaftliches Reflektiren*; PHG 3, KSA 1.817).[43] Just as a dramatist mediates the relation between the natural world and that of culture by

[42] For this same idea, cf. VP, KGW II 4.218n8. For a similar one, cf. SE 7, KSA 1.410: "[…] [the philosopher] themselves uses themselves as an image and abbreviation of the whole of the world." In VP, KGW II 4.217, Nietzsche claims that "Philosophy is […] the art of presenting an image of the whole of existence in concepts." According to him, Schopenhauer had very early on a "monstrous vision" (*ungeheure Vision*) which determined his fundamental image of life, and everything he later learned, including Kant's philosophy, served him only as a means to express this vision (cf. SE 7, KSA 1.410-11).

[43] Cf. Nachlass 1871/72, 16[13], KSA 7.397: "The intellect shows itself as a *consequence* of a primarily artistic apparatus."

writing their verses, so does a philosopher also carry out the mediation between the two worlds through the production of concepts. If, with this, it becomes evident that the mediation culminates in the contribution of both protagonists to the formation of Hellenic culture through the creation of tragedies or philosophical doctrines, it is not yet clear what the starting point of the mediation is – in other terms, what in the natural world is being mediated. Once the artistic model to be applied to the philosopher has been established, Nietzsche describes in greater detail the specificities of the mediation process in the philosopher's case. In doing it, he points out something that works like the very vehicle for mediation by transmutation: "enchantment" (*Verzauberung*; PHG 3, KSA 1.817).[44] This concept is equivocal, in the sense that it points in multiple directions: first, the direction of that which enchants; second, that of the enchantment itself; third, that of the result of the enchantment. The intrinsic meaning of the term, that of a bewitching or amazement, is immediately linked to the images of monstrousness that Nietzsche, inspired by Aristotle, used to describe the grandiose knowledge obtained by the earliest philosophers. Accordingly, what enchants, the enchantment and its products receive their power and appearance from the strange, amazing, difficult and divine character they possess, that is, from their monstrousness and grandiosity. In a word, the monstrous and the grandiose are present in all the three stages of the mediation, which philosophy shares with tragedy and by whose way both contribute to preserving tragic culture.

In line with this, the monstrous, as a whole, involves mediation and, therefore, discontinuity, in which the arising of language plays a decisive role. Language constitutes one of the moments of the said mediation and corresponds to the main responsible for the latter's inner discontinuity. In philosophy, the moment of language amounts to that of the concept. Concepts are the linguistic tools of philosophy; they derive from dialectic thinking and give it expression. According to Nietzsche, the enchantment exposes a philosopher to the ecstasy triggered by the experience of the monstrous in nature.[45] This ecstasy or transport, which, ulti-

[44] According to VP, KGW II 4.215-16, "astonishment" (*Verwunderung*) is the experience from which the three main Pre-Platonic problems arise: becoming, finality and knowledge. In SE 4, KSA 1.375, Nietzsche associates this experience to that of "something ineffable" (*etwas Unaussprechbares*); cf. below, section 8 (with n85). For the connection between "the primordial unity" (*das Ur-Eine*), music, tragic drama and verse, cf. GT 5, KSA 1.43-4; GT 8, KSA 1.62; GT 14, KSA 1.95.

[45] The idea of the mystical, which Nietzsche frequently applies in his characterisation of early Greek philosophy (cf. n38 above), involves going beyond the individual self. This

mately, possesses the power to disintegrate a philosopher's individuality, is, in Nietzschean terms, petrified by dialectic thought and assumes the form of a conceptual presentation of the monstrous (PHG 3, KSA 1.817). Philosophical language, the concept deriving from dialectics and reflection, is the symbolic and artistic resource permitting a philosopher to not succumb to the disintegration triggered by the direct contact with the monstrous in nature.[46] Just as the tragic genre is an artistic or symbolic medium making it possible for a human being to continue to live, so too is the philosophical genre, in such a way that both are part of one same culture and one same movement to preserve it, which Nietzsche conceives as a tragic culture. In both cases, what is at stake is an artistic or symbolic effort to, on the one hand, prevent the direct and, in this sense, destructive entry of the monstrous in nature into culture and, on the other, avoid that the secularisation of culture leads to the forgetting and abandoning of all and any relation with the monstrous, so essential for maintaining the link between culture and life.[47]

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is clear from the connection, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, between the mystical and "self-alienation" (*Selbstentäusserung*): cf. GT 2, KSA 1.31; GT 5, KSA 1.44; also GT 16, KSA 1.103, where the mystical is associated with the Dionysian breaking of the principle of individuation; and Nachlass 1874, 32[36], KSA 7.765 concerning the monstrous character of self-alienation. But such a connection is present in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, when Nietzsche resorts to the image of the philosopher as someone coming out of the Cave of Trophonius (cf. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.39.9). For an illuminating analysis of the significance of this Nietzschean image, cf. Kirkland (2011) 427-34, who points out that people who consulted the oracle "communed with divinity directly," which left them "unconscious both of [themselves] and [their] surroundings" (429).

[46] Nietzsche points to this function of the concept in VP, KGW II 4.267, when lecturing on Heraclitus' cosmology: "Two monstrous ways of consideration [*Zwei ungeheure Betrachtungsarten*] captivated his gaze: the eternal movement, the negation of all permanence and persistence in the world, and the inner, uniform lawfulness of that movement. These are two monstrous intuitions [*zwei ungeheure Intuitionen*]: the path of natural science was, at the time, indeed very limited and uncertain; they are truths to which nevertheless the νοῦς feels compelled, one being as terrifying [*schrecklich*] as the other is uplifting [*erhebend*]." It seems clear that the concept has an Apollonian function: after the Dionysian experience of the monstrous in nature, it allows the philosopher to continue living – cf. GT 3, KSA 1.35-6; GT 25, KSA 1.155. Even if implicitly, the opposition and conciliation between the Dionysian and the Apollonian also play a decisive role in the text on the early Greek philosophers.

[47] For Nietzsche, Sophocles and even Aeschylus already showed signs of the decadence of tragic culture: cf. GMD, KSA 1.525; ST, KSA 1.549; Nachlass 1875, 6[42], KSA 8.113. Although I cannot elaborate on this here, it is at least important to note that the fight against the monstrous in history through the symbolic and artistic mediation of the experience of

It is the link between culture and life that philosophical language, the concept, proposes to establish, in the same way as the language of tragedy, the versified word, did it:

> And just as for the playwright word and verse are only stammering in a foreign language in order to say in it what they lived and saw, so the expression of every deep philosophical intuition through dialectics and scientific reflection is, on the one hand, the only means of communicating what is seen, but it is an impoverished means, indeed basically a metaphorical, completely unfaithful transposition into a different sphere and language. (PHG 3, KSA 1.817)

The symbolic and artistic character of philosophical language derives from the very transmutation, mediation and discontinuity that the concept carries out in the phenomenon of the monstrous as a whole. The monstrousness of nature, the essence and core of things, is seen and experienced by the philosopher, who expresses their profound intuition through reflection and dialectics, that is, concepts. But, as the passage quoted indicates, the concept, like a dramatist's verse, is no more than a "stammering in a foreign language" (*Stammeln in einer fremden Sprache*) to that which it expresses, which signals the discontinuity introduced by it.[48] The concept, like the verse, passes from the private or individual level of experience and intuition to the collective level of communicability, that is, it introduces

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the monstrous in nature manifests the presence of two antagonistic conceptions of the monstrous, which point to a fundamental equivocality in Nietzsche's understanding of this phenomenon, one that is already apparent in *The Birth of Tragedy* (cf. Lima [2023] 112-36). In the book on tragedy, the monstrous also takes on the negative or defective meaning of absence, on a cultural level, of any relation to the monstrous understood as the ground and kernel of things (cf. GT 13, KSA 1.90, where Nietzsche speaks of the advent of Socratism as "a true monstrosity by defect" [*eine wahre Monstrosität per defectum*] or "a monstrous defect" [*ein monstroser defectus*]; for the connection between Socratism in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the monstrous dangers of secularisation in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, cf. section 4 above). The same fundamental equivocality of the concept of the monstrous is present in the parallel, pointed out above (cf. n29), between the first philosophers and the Nietzschean father figures, Schopenhauer and Wagner (cf. also n89). Furthermore, it also occurs in Nietzsche's characterisation of the task of the philosopher (cf. n86) and the historian (cf. n88), as well as in his description of his own task as a historian of Greek culture and a tragic philosopher (cf. section 9). In all these places in Nietzsche's work, the monstrous in a defective sense, as the absence on the historical plane of a relation to the monstrous in nature, is fought against by an endeavour to make a symbolic, artistic relation to the monstrous present and effective in human culture (ancient or modern).

[48] Cf. ST, KSA 1.539; Nachlass 1869, 1[106], KSA 7.41; 1871, 9[28], KSA 7.281.

language as a possibility and means of communication among human beings within the sphere of culture. It is, according to Nietzsche, "the only means" (*das einzige Mittel*) that a philosopher has to communicate the specificity of their experience and vision of the core of things, but it is "an impoverished means" (*ein kümmerliches Mittel*), "a metaphorical, completely unfaithful transposition" (*eine metaphorische, ganz und gar ungetreue Übertragung*) to this vision and experience.[49] Accordingly, the discontinuity carried out by the concept does not only bring an interruption in the direct experience of the monstrous in nature, but also consists in a less powerful means compared to what it is trying to present and, in addition, a means whose weakness is related to the incapacity to present it properly. Nevertheless, if a philosopher is to be understood on the basis of their personality, the impoverished character of the concept, as an unfaithful metaphor or transposition, has to be an indicator of their grandiosity, namely that of the tragic hero facing the monstrous in nature with their impoverished means and even running the risk of being annihilated. The stammering language of the fragments by the Pre-Platonic philosophers manifests itself similarly to that of the Aeschylean tragic hero.[50]

However, Nietzsche does not simply talk about the transposition from a non-linguistic level to that of language, but rather about a foreign language and a "transposition into a different sphere and language" (*Übertragung in eine verschiedene Sphäre und Sprache*). This difference and foreignness are relative to what philosophical language aims to express, which means two things: first, that the transposition occurs from a linguistic level to another and, secondly, that the passing from a non-linguistic level to a linguistic one is not cancelled – it is, rather, the very process of mediation through language that gets multiplied. The phenomenon of the monstrous as a whole, in which the philosopher's tragic grandiosity is involved, is depicted by Nietzsche with an enormous complexity, one that in fact assumes a monstrous character. The understanding of the role of philosophical language in the complex picture sketched by Nietzsche involves situating the concept in the

[49] Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, KSA 7.473, where Nietzsche refers that the philosopher's activity is carried out by means of metaphors. For the importance of metaphor in the context of Greek tragedy, cf. GT 8, KSA 1.60. In Nachlass 1869/70, 3[20], KSA 7.66, Nietzsche defines the symbol as "the transposition of a thing into a totally different sphere" (*die Übertragung eines Dinges in eine ganz verschiedene Sphaere*). The concept of symbol, defined in this way, plays a decisive role in *The Birth of Tragedy*: cf. GT 2, KSA 1.33-4; GT 6, KSA 1.51; GT 10, KSA 1.73; GT 16, KSA 1.108. On transposition, metaphor and the like in Nietzsche, cf. Otto (1994) 167-90; Orsucci (1994) 193-207; Otto (1998) 119-52.

[50] Cf. Nachlass 1869, 1[107], KSA 7.42; also VP, KGW II 4.321; and PHG 4, KSA 1.821.

internal multiplicity of the monstrous. Now, in so far as regards language, the concept belongs to the results of the enchantment produced by the monstrous in nature, and its creation, the transposition of intuition to an impoverished means of expression, consists in a multiplication and complexifying of the linguistic level involved in the monstrous taken as a whole. This, primarily, because the concept has a double participation in the discontinuity characterising the global phenomenon of the monstrous. On the one hand, it institutes the passing from the non-linguistic/non-conceptual plane to the linguistic/conceptual one, that is, the passing from intuition to the fundamental linguistic schema "All is One." On the other hand, it carries out an intralinguistic splitting or discontinuity, namely via the transition from the "All is One" to, for example, the communicable formula that the unity of being is in water. As Nietzsche says immediately after the excerpt transcribed above: "This is how Thales saw the unity of beings – and as he wanted to communicate, he spoke of water!" (PHG 3, KSA 1.817) But, as was indicated initially, what is valid for Thales is also valid for the other Pre-Platonic philosophers.

What we have to consider next is how the particular doctrines of some of the first philosophers (that is, of those that Nietzsche comes to analyse in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*) emerge as conceptual responses to the monstrous in nature – responses to which Nietzsche gives an artistic and tragic dimension.

6. The Pre-Platonics as artists and heroes

After this consideration of what is common to the Pre-Platonic philosophers, Nietzsche continues by applying the same constellation of conceptual figures (the monstrous, personal, tragic, heroic, frightening, artistic, metaphorical etc.) to the specific teachings of each one of them, up to the moment in which the text gets interrupted without him arriving at accomplishing the project of examining all the Pre-Platonics.[51] Although Nietzsche does not limit himself in this context to using the conceptual figure of the monstrous, the fact that the other figures he employs orbit around that of the monstrous, in the way I have demonstrated so far, means that this figure is at the centre of his understanding of the status or condition of each one of the doctrines of the first philosophers.

[51] Of the eight philosophers announced in PHG 1, KSA 1.807, he only considers Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Anaxagoras, leaving Empedocles, Democritus and Socrates aside. For a more complete treatment, also including Anaximenes, Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, Xenophanes, Zeno and Leucippus, cf. the lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*.

Anaximander is presented as a philosopher who, in his theatrical attitude towards the world, displayed "a truly tragic pride" (*wahrhaft tragischer Stolz*; PHG 4, KSA 1.820), "as if this existence was a tragedy," in which he played the role of "hero" (*Held*; PHG 4, KSA 1.821).[52] Heraclitus is described as the owner of an "amazing strength" (*eine erstaunliche Kraf*; PHG 5, KSA 1.824-5) for managing to transform the "frightening and stunning representation" (*furchtbare und betäubende Vorstellung*; PHG 5, KSA 1.824) of becoming "into its opposite, into the sublime and into a happy amazement" (*in das Entgegengesetzte, in das Erhabne und das beglückte Erstaunen*; PHG 5, KSA 1.825).[53] The principle of war, which accounts for the struggle among the qualities of the world of phenomena and for the provisional domination of some over the others, highlights cosmic justice, a doctrine resulting from the transposition of the conflicts underlying the Greek mentality to the very general level of the foundations of a cosmodicy (PHG 5, KSA 1.825) and revealing Heraclitus' profound allegiance to his era.[54] Becoming and the fading away apparent in the world of phenomena, the constructing and destroying that get manifested in the alternating domination of some physical qualities over the others, are compared by Heraclitus, "the aesthetic human being" (*der ästhetische Mensch*; PHG 7, KSA 1.831), to the "game of the artist and the child" (*Spiel des Künstlers und des Kindes*; PHG 7, KSA 1.830).[55] If the conflicts between the elements in nature already suggest a strong parallel with those represented on the tragic stage, Nietzsche emphasises this parallel by referring to Heraclitus' teachings as a raising of the curtain in a "theatrical show" (*Schauspiel*; PHG 8, KSA 1.835).[56] As regards Parmenides' doctrines, Nietzsche points to the fact that the words "being" (*Sein*) and "non-being"

[52] Cf. Nachlass 1869/70, 3[84], KSA 7.82; 1872/73, 19[18], KSA 7.421; 19[89], KSA 7.449; Gast 11 (quoted by Paolo D'Iorio and Francesco Fronterotta in Nietzsche [1994] 296n2). At the beginning of his lecture dedicated to Anaximander, Nietzsche adds a reference to a passage from Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (8.70) where the latter points to the theatrical posture of the Milesian philosopher (cf. Nietzsche [1994] 115; this addition is absent from the edition of the lectures in KGW II 4).

[53] Cf. n46 above.

[54] In *Homer's Contest* (CV 5, KSA 1.783-92), Nietzsche offers a general view of ancient Greek culture based on the idea of conflict. On the importance of this idea for Nietzsche's work as a whole, cf. Siemens and Pearson (2019); Pearson (2022).

[55] Cf. VP, KGW II 4.278, where Nietzsche characterises the image of the playing child as a sublime simile. For this image in *The Birth of Tragedy*, cf. GT 24, KSA 1.153.

[56] In VP, KGW II 4.278, Nietzsche refers to Heraclitus' cosmology as resulting from his artistic consideration of the world. Cf. Nachlass 1869/70, 3[84], KSA 7.83; 1872/73, 19[18], KSA 7.421; 19[89], KSA 7.449; 19[134], KSA 7.462; 23[35], KSA 7.555.

(*Nichtsein*) correspond merely to "symbols for the relations of things among themselves and to us" (*Symbole für die Relationen der Dinge unter einander und zu uns*) which "nowhere touch on the absolute truth" and which, as the specific words that they are, only designate the most general relations among all things (PHG 11, KSA 1.846). As Nietzsche upholds, being and non-being, not only in Parmenides but as such, correspond to anthropomorphisms that, through metaphors, get transferred to things, in a process culminating in forgetting the anthropomorphic character of these terms and the metaphorical nature of their transfer to things (PHG 11, KSA 1.847).[57] Anaxagoras' νοῦς, which Nietzsche translates as *Geist* ("spirit"), is, for the author of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, "an artist" (*ein Künstler*), whose job of putting cosmic becoming in order corresponds, therefore, to an "artistic phenomenon" (*ein künstlerisches Phänomen*; PHG 19, KSA 1.869). It is, according to Nietzsche, a "monstrous artistic work" (*ungeheures Künstlerwerk*), which he compares to Phidias' Parthenon (PHG 19, KSA 1.869).[58] Anaxagoras' teachings thus reflect Greek art, in such a way that he too is a philosopher deeply immersed in his time and culture.[59]

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[57] According to the Nietzschean classification of the forms of anthropomorphism, there are ethical and logical ones, and Parmenides falls under the latter rubric: cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[116], KSA 7.457. But, as the posthumous fragment just cited already indicates, all Pre-Platonic philosophers have an anthropomorphic view of reality: cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[125], KSA 7.459; 19[134], KSA 7.462; 19[237], KSA 7.494; 19[248], KSA 7.497; 23[3], KSA 7.539; 23[7], KSA 7.540; 23[10], KSA 7.542; 23[45], KSA 7.558. This also applies to every human being as such: cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[236], KSA 7.495. On this generalised application, its connection with the question of metaphor and the artistic nature of anthropomorphism, cf. section 8 below.

[58] Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 23[35], KSA 7.555.

[59] As indicated at the outset of this section, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* ends up leaving Empedocles, Democritus and Socrates aside. Nevertheless, in the lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* and the posthumous notes written around 1872/73, Nietzsche offers a picture of them as tragic and artistic thinkers: cf. VP, KGW II 4.321, 327, 328 (Empedocles); VP, KGW II 4.339-40; Nachlass 1872/73, 23[35], KSA 7.555 (Democritus); VP, KGW II 4.353-4, 360 (Socrates). In the cases of Democritus and Socrates, which may seem less evident in this respect, their artistic dimension rests on the fact that they propose hypotheses about the world – and tragic ones for that matter: the Democritean hypothesis of materialism (VP, KGW II 4.334, 340; cf. VP, KGW II 4.327), involving what Nietzsche calls a "pessimism of chance" (*Pessimismus des Zuffals*; Nachlass 1872/73, 23[35], KSA 7.555), as well as the Socratic, moral one concerning the possibility of a victory over the instincts (VP, KGW II 4.360; cf. VP, KGW II 4.355, where Nietzsche maintains that a purely human ethics is something Socrates is searching for), which resulted in his glorification through the grandiosity of his death (VP, KGW II 4.360). As Nietzsche claims, a hypothesis about

For space reasons, this overview of the application of the above-mentioned conceptual figures to the teachings of the Pre-Platonic philosophers had to be brief and take the form of a mere listing (and an incomplete one for that matter). An exact indication of how such figures apply to each one of the Pre-Platonics and, in this particular context, are linked to each other in accordance with a conceptual organisation centred around the monstrous is not the purpose of the present essay and would require a more extensive treatment than is acceptable here. With the listing done now, the intention is merely to call attention to the fact that the figures in question are present throughout Nietzsche's entire text and, in spite of the contrasts outlined therein among the different philosophical doctrines, contributed to it evolving in a continuous line traced by these figures and being organised based on a structure underpinned by them.[60]

Meyer upholds a different thesis, namely that Nietzsche's text presents a fundamental split between Heraclitus' philosophy and that of Parmenides, in such a way that it is possible to see a parallel between this split and the opposition, depicted

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the world is a consequence of the artistic work of phantasy: cf. the marginal note in the manuscript of the lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* quoted in full by D'Iorio and Fronterotta in Nietzsche (1994) 111 (this important passage is truncated in the edition of the lectures in VP, KGW II 4.234); also PHG 3, KSA 1.813-14.

[60] The figures of the monstrous, personal, tragic etc. are found throughout Nietzsche's text, as the language and rhetoric associated with them can testify: cf. PHG 4, KSA 1.819; PHG 10, KSA 1.842; PHG 15, KSA 1.860; PHG 16, KSA 1.862; PHG 17, KSA 1.865; PHG 19, KSA 1.869 (*ungeheuer*: "monstrous"); PHG 4, KSA 1.818; PHG 17, KSA 1.866 (*erhaben*: "sublime"); PHG 5, KSA 1.824; PHG 10, KSA 1.839; PHG 11, KSA 1.845; PHG 18, KSA 1.867; PHG 19, KSA 1.870 (*furchtbar*: "frightening"); PHG 8, KSA 1.834 (*übermenschlich*: "superhuman"); PHG 19, KSA 1.870 (*mächtig*: "powerful"); PHG 4, KSA 1.821 (*riesenhaft*: "gigantic"); PHG 18, KSA 1.836 (*Schauder*: "shudder"); PHG 12, KSA 1.850 (*Schrecken*: "terror"); PHG 19, KSA 1.870 (*würdevoll*: "venerable"). On how *ungeheuer* refers to the meaning of the other terms now listed, cf. section 1 above. But Nietzsche applies these figures to the first philosophers also in contexts other than that of the manuscript of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. In particular, he uses the figure of the monstrous to refer to different aspects related to the first philosophers: their historical development (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[36], KSA 7.428-9; 1875, 6[48], KSA 8.115; Nietzsche's letter to Carl von Gersdorff, April 5, 1873, no. 301, KGB II 3.139: "The path from Thales to Socrates is something monstrous;" cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[136], KSA 7.463; and, on Greek culture in general, BA III, KSA 1.703), character (CV 5, KSA 1.788; cf. CV 1, KSA 1.758: "[the first philosophers] treated themselves with a superhuman appreciation, even with almost religious reverence;" VP, KGW II 4.263; and, in addition, FW 351, KSA 3.588) and doctrines (VP, KGW II 4.241, 265-6, 267, 353-4; Nachlass 1872/73, 23[34], KSA 7.554).

in *The Birth of Tragedy*, between poetry and Socrates. According to Meyer, Heraclitus is the most significant figure in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, because, through his anti-metaphysical philosophy and in contrast with Parmenides' metaphysical thinking, he represents the philosophical and anti-metaphysical worldview in Nietzsche's text, which involves a rejection of metaphysics and of Schopenhauer's pessimism prominent in *The Birth of Tragedy*.[61] However, Nietzsche asserts that the opposition causing a split in the development framework of Greek philosophy before Plato is that taking place between Parmenides' thinking and that of Anaximander:

> Parmenides, probably only in his old age, once had a moment of the purest abstraction, unclouded by any reality and completely bloodless. This moment – more un-Greek than any other in the two centuries of the tragic age – whose product is the doctrine of being became a boundary stone for his own life, separating it into two periods: but simultaneously the same moment divides Pre-Socratic thought into two halves, the first of which is the Anaximandrean, the second of which can be called, precisely, the Parmenidean. The first, older period in Parmenides' own philosophising still bears the face of Anaximander; it produced a completed philosophical-physical system in response to Anaximander's questions. When later that icy shudder of abstraction [*Abstraktions-Schauder*] seized him and he put forward the simplest sentence about being and non-being, his own system was among the many older teachings that he had thrown to destruction. (PHG 9, KSA 1.836)

But in fact this split in Pre-Platonic philosophy does not introduce any break with the unbroken line underlying Nietzsche's text. If, on the one hand, from the point of view of the content of the doctrines propounded by each Pre-Platonic philosopher, we could talk of a transition from Anaximander's physicalist thinking to Parmenides' abstractions, on the other, from the perspective of Nietzsche's understanding of the earliest philosophers' attitude and of the fundamental operations involved in the formation of their teachings, the unity of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* remains solid. Contrary to what Meyer claims, this is a moment in the text on the origins of Greek philosophy where the parallels with *The Birth of Tragedy* are not very strong, given that, in contrast with what occurs with tragedy by way of Socratic thinking, the transformation triggered by Parmenides' philosophy does not entail any kind of decline in terms of the artistic character of early

[61] Meyer (2014b) 208-9. Cf. also Kirkland (2011) 433: "There is […] no metaphysical substrate behind what appears […]."

Greek thinking.[62] In addition, the parallels between the two Nietzschean texts are weak in the point under discussion also because, in Nietzsche's interpretation of both Heraclitus' and Parmenides' attitudes and in terms of the operations that he asserts are involved in the formation of their teachings, there is no contrast between an anti-metaphysical philosophy and a metaphysical one. Moreover, the operations underlying the formation of Heraclitus' teachings have a metaphysical character, to the extent that they transcend the limits of sensible experience.[63] Indeed metaphysics, conceived in this way, characterises the whole of Nietzsche's text on Greek philosophy, which does not reflect, as Meyer signals, a worldview that is anti-metaphysical and hostile to Schopenhauer's thinking.[64]

7. The fictional nature of personality in *Homer and Classical Philology*

There is, therefore, an unbroken line that without interruption runs through Nietzsche's text on the Pre-Platonic philosophers, in spite of the contrasts existing among their various teachings. Regardless of the difference between Thales' thesis that water is the principle of all things and Anaximander's that everything originates from the indeterminate, and between the latter doctrine and those of the other Pre-Platonics, there are, according to Nietzsche, common elements that are always underlying their attitude towards reality and their discoveries. Such ele-

[62] In the passage quoted, Nietzsche states that, when creating his doctrine of being, Parmenides was overcome by the tragic emotion of shudder. It is true that Nietzsche maintains that the Parmenidean abstractions are un-Greek, but this obviously does not mean that they do not have an artistic nature. In this respect, not even Socrates represents an exception, for, as we have seen, his ethical thinking too has an artistic dimension.

[63] Cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.813; PHG 5, KSA 1.824, 826; PHG 6, KSA 1.827; also section 5 above.

[64] Cf. PHG 1, KSA 1.808, where Schopenhauer is called a "giant" (*Riese*); PHG 5, KSA 1.823-4, 826; Nachlass 1872/73, 19[4], KSA 7.418; 19[85], KSA 7.448 (here Nietzsche shows his intention to dedicate an essay, or its "Preface," on the earliest philosophers to Schopenhauer); also Colli (1988) 918. For parallels between the Nietzschean depiction of the first philosophers and his understanding of the figure of Schopenhauer, cf. n29 above; and, in addition, Tejera (1987) 38-40, 46; D'Iorio (1994) 394-9, 404, who points out what he calls "Schopenhauerian masks" in Nietzsche's portrayal of the early Greek thinkers. On the pessimism of the Pre-Platonic thinkers, cf. n28 above. Although Nietzsche, in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and other writings on the Pre-Platonics, intends to go beyond Schopenhauer, his reflections are carried out within the framework of a Schopenhauerian problematic, as demonstrated, for example, by the Nietzschean consideration of whether such philosophers are pessimists or have overcome pessimism.

ments rest on the interrelations among the categories of monstrousness, personality, tragic heroicity and suchlike, whose determination has been highlighted up to here.

For a Greek philosophy historian, either a contemporary of Nietzsche or now, the Nietzschean view of the earliest philosophers would seem strange. The bizarreness of his perspective would be due to the fact that it presents these philosophers' teachings not based, primarily, on their content, but rather on the existential attitude and the intellectual operations that make them possible. This means, on the one hand, that he, as we saw earlier (sections 2 and 4), does not give priority either to the specificity of the first philosophers' theses, or to their sequence in time, or even to the similarities or differences among them – giving it, rather, to the personal characteristics common to all such philosophers. And, on the other hand, it means that, instead of elaborating on the declared content of their theses, he tries to pinpoint the metaphysical operations, common to all the Pre-Platonics, which precede such theses. Indeed, Nietzsche presents a philosophical theory about the Pre-Platonics' very way of philosophising: a meta-philosophy of early Greek philosophy, as it were. But what a philosophy historian, in particular one of Greek philosophy, might find strange is also the tenor of the categories he uses in his description of the origins of philosophy: the monstrous, personal, tragic, heroic and the like.

Understanding more deeply the nature of these categories as such is an essential part of answering the main question of the present essay: what is tragic about the philosophers in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*? As we shall see, the attempt to understand their nature will reveal that the Nietzschean text on the first philosophers is closely linked to two other texts of his: *Homer and Classical Philology* and *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*.

At certain moments, Nietzsche seems to have doubts about the objective validity of his depiction of the Pre-Platonics' character and the basis of their doctrines. In a posthumous fragment from Summer 1878 he reflects on the possibility of the convergence, carried out by him, between the earliest philosophers and Greek art, in particular tragedy, being merely a projection of his own habits and needs:

> When I listened to the overall sound of the older Greek philosophers, I thought I heard tones that I was used to hearing in Greek art, and especially in tragedy. To what extent this was due to the Greeks, or to what extent it was simply due to my ears, the ears of a human being with a great need of art – that I cannot say with certainty even now. (Nachlass 1878, 30[52], KSA 8.530)

Here Nietzsche reconsiders his views on the Pre-Platonic philosophers at a distance of a few years. But a more sinister reflection, namely about his extreme solitude as a philosopher and the expressing of his thinking not being anything but a conversation with himself, arises in a fragment written between Summer 1872 and the beginning of 1873, and therefore at the time of his notes leading to *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*:

> I call myself the last philosopher, for I am the last human being.[65] No one speaks to me but myself, and my voice comes to me like that of someone dying. With you, beloved voice, with you, the last breath of memory of all human happiness, let me spend just one more hour; through you I will deceive myself from loneliness and lie myself into multiplicity and love, for my heart is reluctant to believe that love is dead; it cannot bear the shudder of the loneliest loneliness and forces me to speak as if I were two.[66] (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[131], KSA 7.460-1)

However, Nietzsche had already started to reflect critically on concepts used in modern times, especially by classical philology. In his inaugural lecture on *Homer and Classical Philology*, and also in his notes preparing the definitive draft of the lecture, he makes a critical appraisal, in the framework of his research on Homer, of the concept of personality, which is at the centre of his interpretation of the earliest philosophers and which, as we have seen, the manuscript on the origins of philosophy depicts as being centred on the idea of the monstrous. Therefore, although there is no genetic link between the inaugural lecture and the manuscript on Pre-Platonic philosophy, there is nevertheless a strong thematic connection between both writings, which justifies the analytical developments that now follow.

In a context where philology lacks a conceptualisation giving it unity and is characterised, "in the style of Proteus" (*proteusartig*), by an extrinsic confluence of "very different scientific impulses" (Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.272), his lecture tries to highlight the task, that he and the other philologists should take on, of overcoming "the lack of a conceptual unity" (HKPH, KGW II 1.249) in the discipline under whose title their activity is comprised. He proposes that, within the field of philology, the "contraposition" (*Gegenüberstellung*) and "contradiction"

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[65] Regarding the Nietzschean idea of "the last philosopher," a designation that he even considered using as the title of his essay on the first philosophers (Nietzsche's letter to Erwin Rohde, November 20 and 21, 1872, no. 276, KGB II 3.95), cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[36], KSA 1.428; 19[318], KSA 1.516; 19[320], KSA 1.517.

[66] Cf. SE 3, KSA 1.354-5, where Nietzsche upholds that Schopenhauer was one of those demigods who could endure and overcome the greatest loneliness and lack of love from his contemporaries.

(*Widerspruch*) between science and art (HKPH, KGW II 1.252) get surpassed, so that a philological practice gets constituted which, by abandoning a rigidity and specialisation that destroy the formative capacity of the classical ideal through its "fearsome and beautiful Gorgon's head" (*furchtbar-schönes Gorgonenhaupt*; HKPH, KGW II 1.251), make it possible to bridge the "abyss between the ideal antiquity [...] and the real one" (HKPH, KGW II 1.253), between the knowledge deriving from scientific research on the ancients (HKPH, KGW II 1.251-2) and the aesthetic process of appraisal of the present based on the artistic model of antiquity (HKPH, KGW II 1.249-50), whose purpose is the perfecting of the way of living (HKPH, KGW II 1.251). In spite of it being possible to consider it an unreachable and even illogical objective, he maintains that "The whole scientific and artistic movement of this peculiar centaur" that is classical philology, which walks "with a monstrous drive but a Cyclopean slowness," will lead to the realisation of the essence of this discipline (HKPH, KGW II 1.253).[67]

Nietzsche's lecture, by tackling the Homeric question or "the question about Homer's personality" (*die Frage nach der Persönlichkeit Homers*; HKPH, KGW II 1.254), aims precisely to show that the movement towards such a realisation is already underway in the field of classical philology (HKPH, KGW II 1.253-4). In fact, *Homer and Classical Philology* intends to demonstrate that rational and scientific research on the Homeric question ends up leading to an understanding of Homer's personality rooted in an "aesthetic judgement" (*aesthetisches Urteil*; HKPH, KGW II 1.263). As he writes in the notes for the drafting of the lecture on Homer: "everywhere a historical name needs help from a mythical double" (Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.274). With this, he is calling attention to the fact that Homer, before Pisistratus, corresponded to a "miraculous concept" (*Wunderbegriff*; Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.275), which refers to a "miraculous man" (*Wundermann*; HKPH, KGW II 1.264; cf. Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.281), that is, a "mythical person" (*mythische Person*) or a "fabulous figure" (*fabelhafte Figur*; Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.281). If, until Pisistratus, Homer was the name of a portent, to whom "a monstrous miraculous work" (*ein ungeheures Wunderwerk*; Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.277) was attributed, with Pisistratus and up to the Alexandrian age, Homer's mythical personality got analysed "in an ever more rational way" (Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.275), to the point that what Nietzsche calls the humanisation of Homer took place (Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.278-9, 281), that is,

[67] Regarding Nietzsche's view of aesthetic classicism, cf. Emden (2004) 372-90; Siemens (2004) 391-410. On Nietzsche and the historical-critical method, cf. Benne (2005); Zhavoronkov (2021). For the paradoxical nature of classical philology according to Nietzsche, cf. Thouard (2000) 155-62; Porter (2014) 27-50; Lima (2024) 91-116.

the process by which he ceases to be a fabulous figure and becomes a human being. Through this process of rationalisation and humanisation, which continues to occur in Nietzsche's time, Homer ceases to be a "name for heroic material in epic form" (Vorarbeiten zu HKPH, BAW 5.277), "a material singularity" (HKPH, KGW II 1.266), to become a "psychological possibility" (HKPH, KGW II 1.256) or an aesthetic singularity (HKPH, KGW II 1.266), in other terms, an author characterised by the regularity and consonance of his way of expression (HKPH, KGW II 1.256) and by his functioning as an unreachable and ideal poetic model (HKPH, KGW II 1.264) of "aesthetic completeness" (HKPH, KGW II 1.263). Such a process also entails a narrowing of the range that can be covered by the name Homer, given that the latter, "the father of heroic epic poetry" (HKPH, KGW II 1.264) in general, gets transformed into the author of the two great models of literary beauty that are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (HKPH, KGW II 1.263).[68]

As it materialises in *Homer and Classical Philology*, the Nietzschean attempt to unify classical philology shows that the application of a scientific method to the Homeric question results in an understanding of Homer as an aesthetic personality. As I indicated, the process equivalent to the aestheticisation of Homer's personality began, according to Nietzsche, with a transformation of the ancient conception of Homer as a mythical personality. At the starting point and finishing point of the process, there are, therefore, two distinct conceptions of Homer's personality. More than being distinct, the two conceptions pertain, for Nietzsche, to two different questions: "We believe in the one great poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey – but not in Homer as this poet*" (HKPH, KGW II 1.266).[69] But, in both cases, it is possible to ask the decisive question raised by Nietzsche: "*Has a person been made into a concept or a concept has been made into a person?* This is the authentic 'Homeric question,' that central problem of personality" (HKPH, KGW II 1.257). He puts this question as regards the mythical conception of Homer's personality up to Pisistratus' time, but the question is also important in the case of the aesthetic conception, since, as he says, the problem raised in it is the core problem of Homer's personality as such. However one wants to conceive this personality, in a mythical or aesthetic way, it is a question, in any case, of creating a person from a concept –

[68] Concerning Nietzsche's approach to the Homeric question, cf. Porter (2000) 62-9; Porter (2004) 18-24; Zhavoronkov (2014) 139-55; Zhavoronkov (2021) 23-33.

[69] Cf. P I 13, 44b: "Here is the place where, for the first time, a sharp distinction must be made between two questions of personality: namely, the personality of the poet of the Homeric epics and that of Homer" (quoted by Carl Koch and Karl Schlechta in BAW 5.478).

in a word, of a personified concept.[70] Both a mythical conception of Homer's personality and an aesthetic one are problematic from an empirical point of view, in the sense that they derive from intellectual operations and not from an empirically verifiable historical reality. To a great extent, it is in the identification of the fictional and imaginary character of the two conceptions of Homer's personality that resides the philosophical problem of the latter (HKPH, KGW II 1.267).[71]

8. Concepts as artistic products in *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*

With *Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche points out the fictional, imaginary and fantastic character of the idea of personality, which plays such a decisive role in his approach to the Pre-Platonic philosophers. If the idea of personality is of this nature, his approach to the Pre-Platonics can also be considered fictional, imaginary and fantastic, that is, baseless and lacking foundations in reality itself. In other words, the idea of personality as developed in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* also gets undermined as a tool for a historically rigorous understanding of Pre-Platonic philosophy. In the same way, the other categories which together with it form the conceptual network on which the text on early Greek philosophy is built – especially the monstrous, but also the tragic, heroic and suchlike – can, by contagion, be seen as baseless, mere projections of Nietzsche's mind or resulting from his solitary dialogue with himself (cf. the two posthumous fragments quoted in the main text of the previous section).

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[70] Between Autumn 1867 and Spring 1868, in a short note, Nietzsche formulates the following general question: "Which names can be demonstrated as personified concepts in literary history?" (BAW 4.30)

[71] On the connection between personality and illusion, cf. Nachlass 1873, 29[4], KSA 1.622. The concept of personality has enormous hermeneutic importance for Nietzsche: cf. *Encyclopaedie der klassischen Philologie*, KGW II 3.375; *Einführung in das Studium der platonischen Dialogen*, KGW II 4.7; also Porter (2000) 82-126, notably 119: "[…] Nietzsche is plying a philology based in part on personalities, as in his reconstructions of Democritus and Homer […]." In addition to its tragic, fictional and hermeneutic character, this concept is the basis of the Nietzschean diagnosis of the role of individuals in their historical situation: cf. SE 6, KSA 1.403; BA II, KSA 1.681; BA IV, KSA 1.729; Nachlass 1874, 35[14], KSA 7.819 (*freie Persönlichkeit*: "free personality"); HL 4, KSA 1.274; Nachlass 1873, 29[88], KSA 7.670; 29[90], KSA 7.672 (*schwache Persönlichkeit*: "weak personality"). For Burckhardt's influence on the Nietzschean notion of personality, cf. Laks (2020) 369-82.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that, when he highlights the fictional character of the idea of personality in his lecture, Nietzsche is not denouncing the fictionality of something that he alone has created, but rather that of the intersubjective constructions that emerge in certain cultural contexts and dominate them. In the lecture, the domain of culture in question is classical philology, which at that time was one of the mainstays of the cultural education of individuals.[72] And the specific topic chosen by him, the so-called Homeric question, was not just any old one, but one regarding the most representative figure of ancient culture, in a comparison with which modern culture moved towards its self-definition.[73] A fiction prevailing in the field of classical philology and the Homeric question, as is the case of the idea of personality, consists, therefore, in one that is central to modern culture and to the image that this has of itself. If, in denouncing the fictionality of the idea of personality, Nietzsche can be making a sort of self-criticism, he is doing it as a member of a culture who, as such, makes use of the concepts prevailing in it.[74]

But Nietzsche goes further in his critical reflection on the nature of concepts. Continuing to follow the Nietzschean path in this direction is key to understanding the nature of concepts such as the monstrous, personal, tragic, heroic and the like, whose interrelations have been an important subject of consideration in the present essay and are central in determining the tragic character of the Pre-Platonic philosophers according to Nietzsche.

If *Homer and Classical Philology* made clear the fictional nature of the concept of personality, *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* will point out that fictionality characterises all concepts as such.[75] In the latter text, Nietzsche upholds not only the fictional character of all concepts but also that the creation of conceptual fictions results from an impulse inherent to human beings. Rather than a sign of the weakness of humans in reaching the truth, the fictionality of concepts constitutes a demonstration of their strength in going beyond truth and making possible life in abundance. What makes the text on truth and lies decisive in the present essay is its close relation, both thematically and genetically, to *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. For we know that Nietzsche thought about writing an introduction, focusing on the question of truth and lies, to a never completed study

[72] Cf. Latacz (2014) 5-7.

[73] Cf. Porter (2002) 66, 81. For a more complete and recent account of the history of the Homer reception, cf. Porter (2021).

[74] Cf. Porter (2004) 8, 23-4.

[75] Nietzsche will keep this view on the nature of concepts up to the end of his philosophical career: cf. Nachlass 1888, 14[148], KSA 13.332: "Parmenides said 'one does not think what is not' – we are at the other end and say 'what can be thought must certainly be a fiction.' Thinking has no grip on the real, but only on — — —."

on the connection between philosophy and art, which would materialise in the manuscript on the first philosophers.[76]

In *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* – in a passage that replicates the language of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* to the letter – Nietzsche indicates that "[The sculptor of language] only signals the relations of things to human beings and, to express them, resorts to the most audacious metaphors as means of help" (WL 1, KSA 1.879; cf. PHG 11, KSA 1.846). According to Nietzsche, in the use of the words making up a language, it is not "truth" (*Wahrheit*) nor the "adequate expression" (*adäquater Ausdruck*) of things – that is, it is not the "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*) nor its grasping by way of the concept in the latter's traditional sense (WL 1, KSA 1.879) – that is at stake. Strictly speaking, instead of concepts, words are metaphors, that is, they do not render things themselves, but rather express the result of a dual process that goes, at the first stage, from the transfer of a stimulation of the nerves to an image and then, at a second stage, as far as the transformation of this image into a sound. Throughout this process, in each one of the steps presented, a metaphor gets performed: "A nerve stimulus first transferred into an image! first metaphor. The image recreated in a sound! Second metaphor" (WL 1, KSA 1.879).[77] Just as in Nietzsche's description of the intellectual operations underlying the conception and expression of the teachings of the earliest philosophers (cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.817), here too a metaphorical process that consists in a "complete leaping over the sphere [in question each time] to the middle of a totally different and new one" (WL 1, KSA 1.879; cf. WL 1, KSA 1.884) is in operation.[78] In spite of the physiological character of the idea of stimulation of the nerves, the phenomenon that Nietzsche is describing resembles the metaphysical operation –

[76] Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[189-91], KSA 7.478; Riedel (1990) 3; D'Iorio (1994) 407; Otto (1998) 125. According to the latter scholar (125-6), both the text on the first philosophers and that on truth and lies are located at the intersection between, on the one hand, history of philosophy and, on the other, theory of knowledge and language. Otto also claims (126) that what the text on the early Greek philosophers depicts from the perspective of the history of culture is presented by the text on truth and lies from an anthropological point of view; this means that the two texts are complementary and cannot be read separately. Regarding *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* and Nietzsche's theory of language in general, cf. (in addition to the works already cited in n49 above) Böning (1988); Crawford (1988); Meijers and Stingelin (1988) 350-68; Meijers (1988) 369-90; Branco and Constâncio (2011); Branco and Constâncio (2012); Scheinberger (2016).

[77] Cf. *Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik*, KGW II 4.426, where Nietzsche describes the constituting process of human language in identical terms.

[78] For this conception of "leap" (*Sprung*, *Schwung*), cf. also PHG 9, KSA 1.837; PHG 15, KSA 1.856; VP, KGW II 4.241; Nachlass 1872/73, 19[215], KSA 7.486.

that is, the creation of the language level as something going beyond the empirical one of the physiology of the human body – which is involved in the generalisation common to all Pre-Platonic philosophers: "All is One" (cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.813).

The similarities between the text on the early Greek philosophers and *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense* are many, to the extent that they could be considered twin texts, but the unpublished opusculum on truth and lies is a lot more developed from the point of view of the psychological mechanism underlying human language and in terms of the appraisal of the latter's nature as metaphorical. What in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* is presented as a fundamental operation on which the teachings of each Pre-Platonic philosopher are based gets described in the text on truth and lies as something inherent to human beings as such, in a way that the portrait of the Pre-Platonics and of their personal attitude in the former text only represents an exemplary illustration of what is depicted in the latter one as a constitutive activity of human beings.[79] The opusculum on truth and lies analyses in detail the transformation of metaphor into concept, a process by which it unmasks the concept and reveals its status as a metaphor. As Nietzsche indicates, the concept corresponds to the "residue of a metaphor" (*Residuum einer Metapher*; WL 1, KSA 1.882) and truth, which the concept is assumed to render, corresponds to forgetting the metaphor, that is, the illusion resulting from the strength of the image that the metaphor produces.[80] Truth consists in a dual illusion: an illusion about the illusion that cancels out the awareness of the illusion by the one who created it (WL 1, KSA 1.880-1; cf. PHG 12, KSA 1.847). The double negation of the illusion, which thus cancels itself out, represents a forgetting on the part of the human being of themselves as an "artistically creative subject" (*künstlerisch*

[79] Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[80], KSA 7.446: "[…] all human beings are artistic, philosophical, scientific." On the intrinsically rhetorical character of human language as such, cf. *Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik*, KGW II 4.425-6.

[80] Cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[215], KSA 7.486, where Nietzsche upholds that concepts – and, for that matter, human reason – derive from "false conclusions" (*falsche Schlüsse*) and "logical fallacies" (*logische Fehlschlüsse*). Here Thales' thesis that "all is water" is presented as an example of a concept resulting from a fallacy (something applicable to the fundamental doctrines of all the Pre-Platonics). However, this understanding of concepts is given from the point of view of truth as logical correctness. It turns out that, more than fallacies, concepts are "more correctly" (*richtiger*) described as "metonymies" (*Metonymia*; cf. Nachlass 1872/73, 19[204], KSA 7.481), as something whose constitution involves a process of a rhetorical or poetic – therefore, artistic (cf. *Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik*, KGW II 4.425) – nature. Furthermore, concepts are not unrelated to the tragic and the heroic, as they are portrayed as being the consequence of a "daring leap" (*kühner Schwung*).

schaffendes Subjekt; WL 1, KSA 1.883; cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.817). For Nietzsche, the metaphorical activity intrinsic to human beings, corresponding to "an interpretive transposition, a stammering translation into a language that is totally strange" (WL 1, KSA 1.884; cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.817) with respect to the starting sphere, displays "an aesthetic behaviour" (*ein ästhetisches Verhalten*; WL 1, KSA 1.884; cf. PHG 7, KSA 1.831).[81] In accordance with such a behaviour, human beings create anthropomorphic determinations based on which they are able to understand the world in which they live and tailor it to their own needs (WL 1, KSA 1.880, 883; cf. PHG 11, KSA 1.847).[82]

Now, as regards the vital motivations at the centre of human beings' metaphorical activity, the text on truth and lies, if compared with the text on the Pre-Platonics, also makes a generalisation, in the sense that the existential drive that is the basis of the latter's doctrinal outputs is presented as something that is part of the constitution of the human as such. In fact, Nietzsche relates that the formation of metaphors corresponds to "a human being's fundamental impulse, which one cannot, at any moment, remove from the balance sheet, because, with this, one would remove the human being themselves from the balance sheet" (WL 2, KSA 1.887). Or, as he also maintains, "The human being themselves [...] has an undefeatable propensity to let themselves be deceived" (WL 2, KSA 1.888). This impulse towards creating metaphors, together with the illusions or deceptions in which they consist, corresponds to the vital principle leading to the intrinsically human activity of art and myth production (WL 2, KSA 1.887). According to Nietzsche, this activity is uninterrupted, but finds its most fertile form of manifestation when it places itself at the service of the transformation of the world, which the forgetting of the metaphor, with the resulting emergence of the concept and of truth, had regularised and rigidified (WL 2, KSA 1.887). It is thanks to the power of dissolving the regularity and rigidity of the world, involved in the revival of the metaphor, that he associates the result of the artistic and mythical activity of metaphor formation with

[81] In PHG 7, KSA 1.831, Nietzsche refers to Heraclitus as an aesthetic human being, which, as will become clearer in what follows, is another term for what Nietzsche in the text on truth and lies calls "the intuitive human being" (*der intuitive Mensch*; WL 2, KSA 1.889; cf. PHG 5, KSA 1.823 and VP, KGW II 4.263, where the intuitive human being is precisely Heraclitus; also GT 1, KSA 1.25 on the key importance of intuition for the so-called "science of aesthetics").

[82] In *Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche makes a little broader use of the concepts of aesthetics and the aesthetic. There they point in addition to an assessment of the literary quality of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but the artistic creation component, understood as something independent from empirical reality, is present in the Nietzschean application of the aforementioned concepts to the question of Homer's personality.

the "world of dreams" (*Welt des Traumes*), in opposition to "the real world of the human being in a state of wakefulness" (*die vorhandene Welt des wachen Menschen*; WL 2, KSA 1.887).[83]

In *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, both on one hand truth and the concept and on the other the metaphor and illusion are works of the intellect, which can be found now at the service of survival and rationality (WL 1, KSA 1.876, 878) and now at the service of intuition and art (WL 2, KSA 1.888-9). Nietzsche maintains that "[the human being]," who uses his intellect as a tool, "is indifferent as regards pure and inconsequential knowledge, and has even a propensity towards hostility as regards truths that are perhaps harmful and destructive" (WL 1, KSA 1.878). But, as he also points out, "The intellect [...] is free and released from its remaining slavery as long as it can deceive without *harming* and then celebrates its Saturnalia; never is it more exuberant, rich, proud, cunning and bold" (WL 2, KSA 1.888).[84] According to his thesis, there are historical periods, like antiquity and

[83] In WL 2, KSA 1.887-8, Nietzsche resorts to Greek culture to provide an example of a world dominated by myths and, therefore, closer to dreams than to a waking state. Such references to the dream world allow us to place human and a fortiori philosophical concepts on the side of the Apollonian (cf. GT 1, KSA 1.26-8 for the connection between dreams and the god Apollo). Cf. n46 above, where a link was established between the petrification operated by philosophical concepts in their response to the Dionysian experience of the monstrous in nature and the artistic and existential function of the Apollonian. However, what stands out at this point in the text on truth and lies is the other side of the function of the Apollonian. If above I emphasised the petrifying function of conceptualisation and the Apollonian, what is important to stress now is their power to dissolve the rigidity of established concepts that have become truths and have forgotten their own metaphorical character, thus stifling community life. In other terms, it is a matter of stressing the capacity of the Apollonian to renew the power of concepts to contribute to affirming life and embellishing appearances, thus conferring them the fascinating aspect of dreams. On both sides of the Apollonian, cf. GT 1, KSA 1.26-8; GT 2, KSA 1.32; GT 4, KSA 1.38-9, 40-2; GT 12, KSA 1.83-4; GT 24, KSA 1.151. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche emphasised the petrifying function of the concept, above all because it was necessary to stress the ability of the concept to halt the disintegrating effect of the monstrous in nature upon the philosopher and their community. But once the concept has become rigidified, becoming aware of the metaphorical and artistic character of conceptualisation makes it possible to reactivate its creative, symbolic function. Although such a reactivation is not prima facie evident in the manuscript on early Greek philosophy, the renewing potential inherent to conceptualisation, which the opusculum on truth and lies calls attention to, is present in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, not least every time Nietzsche depicts one of the early Greek philosophers criticising their predecessor(s).

[84] Cf. VP, KGW II 4.215; also DW 1, KSA 1.558; GG, KSA 1.586.

especially the Greek one, when an intuitive and irrational human being, who mocks abstraction, comes out victorious over one who is rational and not artistic, one who fears intuition (WL 2, KSA 1.889). In such historical periods or in the exceptional circumstances in which the intellect frees itself of its survival function, it contributes to the establishing of an excessive and abundant life or, in other terms, to the celebration of its Saturnalia, the Roman festivities resembling Greek Dionysian ones. A free intellect, the tool of an intuitive human being, responds artistically, through the formation of a metaphorical language, to the impressions triggered by powerful intuitions which almost render humans speechless (WL 2, KSA 1.888-9; cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.813, 817).[85] The free unleashing of metaphor formation gets accompanied by a destroying of concepts, strictly understood as ancillary to the basic necessities of human life, and leads to a "domination of art over life" (*Herrschaft der Kunst über das Leben*), in accordance with which an intuitive human being does not take note of the urgencies of life and "only takes life dissimulated in appearance and beauty as real" (WL 2, KSA 1.889).[86] Everything that makes

[85] Due to the close connection between the text on truth and lies and that on the first philosophers, what is now being said sheds new light on a decisive aspect of the experience of the monstrous in nature as presented in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. What in the latter text was described as an experience that places the philosopher on a plane prior to language (cf. PHG 3, KSA 1.813 on mystical intuition; also section 5 above for the problem of the transition from a plane prior to language to that of language) is now pointed out as something that suspends the communicative function of language, making it momentarily useless to account for what is being experienced and signaling beforehand that the experience in question cannot be directly communicated. This makes clear the symbolic and creative dimension of human language, especially as it is used by the philosopher and the artist in their response to the experience of the monstrous in nature.

[86] The free intellect expresses itself through the activity of the philosopher (cf. n84 above; n71 for passages on the idea of a free personality; Nachlass 1872/73, 23[22], KSA 7.547; 1874, 34[43], KSA 7.807 on the idea of the free spirit before *Human, All Too Human*; 1872/73, 21[16], KSA 7.527; 23[3], KSA 7.539 regarding the superior function of the intellect). What Nietzsche is claiming is that every human being as such forms and uses concepts, and that every human has the potential to become a philosopher, but only in so far as they have become philosophers are they able to form and use concepts consciously and with the deliberate purpose of making life liveable through the transfiguration of appearance (for the process of transfiguring appearance in tragedy and art in general, cf. GT 16, KSA 1.108; GT 24, KSA 1.151; GG, KSA 1.599; Nachlass 1870/71, 5[112], KSA 7.123; 7[18], KSA 7.140; 7[121], KSA 7.169). Such a transfiguration involves the destruction of crystallised concepts relating to the practicality of human life, but it leads to the artistic creation of renewed concepts that promote the intensification of life through their beauty and sublimity. This corresponds to a form of disciplined introduction into culture of the disintegrating power

up life, including that which was invented to respond to the most basic and everyday necessities, gets clothed in a lovely appearance, which transfigures everything into the expression of "a sublime abundance" (*ein erhabenes Glück*; WL 2, KSA 1.889; cf. PHG 5, KSA 1.825). Like the early Greek philosophers (PHG 1, KSA 1.805) and ancient Greek culture in general, in which Nietzsche seeks an outstanding example of this abundant and prosperous life, every human, in their ability to become an intuitive being, can live as an "excessively joyful hero" (*überfroher Held*; WL 2, KSA 1.889), who – through art, myth and metaphor – responds to the experience of the monstrous in nature and confronts the monstrous threat of the secularisation and rationalisation of culture (cf. PHG 1, KSA 1.808).

As I have indicated, Nietzsche's reflections in *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* deal with the fictional, artistic and heroic nature of all human concepts, in other words, how they amount to creations that, among other things, have the fundamental function of making life prosperous and abundant. Therefore, as human categories, those created by the Pre-Platonic philosophers to respond to the monstrous in nature (and thus confront the monstrous dangers of secularisation) also have a fictional, artistic and heroic character and their central purpose is to contribute to making community life beautiful and sublime, prosperous and abundant. And in the same way, as we shall see in the following, concluding section, the categories that inform the Nietzschean interpretation of the Pre-Platonics – the monstrous and the like (the personal, the tragic etc.) – are of such a nature and fulfil such a purpose too.

9. Conclusion: Nietzsche as a tragic philosopher

Let us now recall this essay's argument so far, before making one last fundamental point, namely about the way Nietzsche's conception of the early Greek philosophers reflects his activity and self-representation as a philosophical tragic hero facing the monstrous.

According to what we have seen, the tragic nature of the philosophers in Nietzsche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* has to do, on the one hand, with their belonging to the historical period in which they lived, in the sense that their

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of the monstrous in nature, therefore a way of confronting the secularisation and rationalisation of culture – in other terms, the dangerous manifestations of the monstrous in history (concerning the unusefulness of "wisdom" [σοφία, *Weisheit*] as opposed to "cleverness" [*Klugheit*], cf. VP, KGW II 4.218; cleverness is referred to in WL 2, KSA 1.889 as one of the characteristics of "the rational human being" [*der vernünftige Mensch*]).

activity reflects this period and, at the same time, sought to contribute to its preservation. And, on the other hand, it has to do with the tragic form in which this reflecting and contributing come true, more precisely, with the way in which such philosophers embody a culture characterised by a symbolic relation to the monstrous in nature and an artistic expression of pessimism (to use a terminology that is more prominently present in *The Birth of Tragedy*) and are opposed to the frightening and monstrous tendencies present in their culture towards secularisation and rationalisation.

For Nietzsche, the core of the Pre-Platonic philosophers' tragic nature is in their personality – in their behaviour vis-à-vis the world. Their personality consists in an attitude defined by grandiosity and heroicity not only in tackling the monstrous danger of the secularisation of culture but also in the linguistic, metaphorical and artistic response to the monstrous in nature. At the centre of his analysis he places features common to all the Pre-Platonics, giving them preference to the detriment of the doctrinal aspects distinguishing these philosophers from each other, namely features having to do with the connection between intuition and language. As was pointed out, the phenomenon of the monstrous plays a pivotal role in this complex connection at its various stages, which go from the intuition of the monstrous in nature, via the monstrous generalisation of such an intuition in the abstract formula "All is One," up to the specific formulation of each one of the Pre-Platonics' doctrines.

Nietzsche undertook a discordant history of Greek philosophy, in which the perspective of a progressive development of philosophical doctrines is replaced by the principle of polyphony and the singularity of each one of the early Greek philosophers' doctrines. All these doctrines are understood, en bloc, on the basis of personal attitudes and fundamental intellectual operations, common to all such philosophers, defined by their monstrousness, tragicity and heroicity, and possessing a metaphorical, symbolic and artistic nature. He was fully aware of the attack that his approach represented against the perspective then current regarding the history of Greek philosophy, as well as of the extravagance of his analysis principles when compared with the methodology usually applied by historians of ancient thought.

In *Homer and Classical Philology*, he criticises the fictional nature of two conceptions of Homer's personality, both the mythical conception preceding Pisistratus and the aesthetic one still dominant in modern times. If, in terms of their empirical verifiability, both display significant weaknesses, to the extent that they have to be considered fictional, from the point of view of their effectiveness as intersubjective categories, each of them is decisive in its respective historical period,

in such a way that the aesthetic conception, due to the key role of classical philology in modern education, is a corner stone in the construction of modernity's self-image. But as became clear from *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, the becoming aware of the fictionality of Homer's personality and, by extrapolation, of the idea of personality as such – and, in the final analysis, of all human categories in general – is not useful only for Nietzsche to demonstrate the inadequacy of these categories as regards a grasping of reality and an obtaining of truth. In fact, in a way that shows multiple and decisive parallels with *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, he privileges the role that the fictionality of human categories plays in making possible the abundance and prosperity of life. For him, this fictionality gets displayed in the metaphorical nature of language, as well as in the linguistic transpositions that occur when human beings try to express their intuitions. The metaphorical nature of language is an ongoing activity of the human intellect, which, when at the service of mere survival and the ensuring of the basic necessities of life, submits to the forgetting of such a metaphoricity and its respective associate, illusion, and thus generates the rigidified concept and its associate, truth. The freeing of the intellect from this submission makes possible the domination of art over life, the unimpeded activity of the metaphoricity of language in the creation of conceptual illusions that render life prosperous and grandiose, in such a way that human beings can exist, in the image of the Pre-Platonic philosophers and Greek tragic culture, as joyful heroes.

However, the consequences of Nietzsche's analysis of the fictionality of human categories do not end here. In their fictional character, human categories are not only those used by the early Greek philosophers, Attic tragedians, Homer scholars since antiquity and human beings as such. As a classical philologist, philosopher and human being, Nietzsche himself also makes use of them. And he is using them, specifically, in everything considered in this essay: in his analysis of the first philosophers, Attic tragedy, the Homeric question and the metaphorical nature of human categories as such. There is, therefore, an unbroken line, as regards their cognitive status and vital potentialities, between the categories interpreted by Nietzsche and those which he uses to interpret them. His interpretation of human categories is thus determined by its performativity, given that it puts the very categories interpreted into practice, as well as by its immersiveness, for the interpretive activity itself is aimed at by the interpretation and belongs to the domain of the object interpreted.

The two posthumous fragments quoted in the main text of section 7 above show that Nietzsche was aware that his own interpretive activity – as a classical philologist, philosopher, culture critic and member of a culture – is determined by that very thing he identifies as underlying the activity of the first philosophers, Greek

tragic culture, classical philology and modern culture in general. Just like these philosophers, the members of Greek tragic culture, classical philologists, the members of modern culture and human beings in general, he also resorts to illusion to seek to obtain a whiff of prosperity and abundance (Nachlass 1872/73, 19[131], KSA 7.460-1). And he acknowledges that his interpretation of the earliest philosophers based on Greek tragic art could originate from a projection of his – he who is, in his own words, a "human being with a great need of art" (*ein sehr kunstbedürftiger Mensch*; Nachlass 1878, 30[52], KSA 8.530), that is, someone living in a period when the authentic tragic art has disappeared and left a vacuum that the example of Attic tragedy and of the tragic nature of the early Greek philosophers' personalities may help to fill.[87]

It is the attempt to bridge this gap, regarding the absence of an authentic modern tragic art and, in general, of an authentic tragic culture in modern times, that leads Nietzsche to draw up and carry out many of his projects, among which there is the drafting of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. And, as one of the posthumous fragments just cited suggests, the attempt to bridge this gap is carried out by him based on a resort to illusion as a way of obtaining abundance and prosperity, the very thing he identifies as defining the activity of the early Greek philosophers, the Greek tragic poets and human beings as such. As he proposes in his text on the Pre-Platonics, "The task is to bring to light what we must always *love* and *revere* and what no later knowledge can rob us of: the great human being" (PHG Einleitung, KSA 1.802). This means that, in his activity as a Greek philosophy historian, he tries to retrieve the figure of the monstrous, grandiose human being, exemplified by the personality of the earliest philosophers, as something to be incorporated in modern culture. More than this, he claims to be the person embodying this figure and asserting, like the first philosophers did in Greek tragic culture, his monstrousness and personality in modern culture, as the agent of the modern world's becoming aware of itself and its need of a cultural transformation. Similarly to what occurs with the philosophers in the, by him entitled, "Tragic Age of the Greeks," he displays his monstrous, grandiose, tragic and heroic character in the struggle against the monstrousness of secularisation and rationalisation – which *The Birth of Tragedy*, a book that more fully considers the condition of modern culture than the text on the origins of philosophy, paradigmatically diagnoses based on Euripides and especially Socrates (GT 13, KSA 1.90).

[87] In GT 16, KSA 1.103, Nietzsche refers to the struggles between the optimism of knowledge and "the tragic need of art" (*die tragische Kunstbedürftigkeit*). On this idea of a need of art, cf. also GT 15, KSA 1.102; CV 3, KSA 1.765; Nachlass 1871, 10[1], KSA 7.337.

There are, nevertheless, a few aspects where Nietzsche, without ceasing to take inspiration from the Pre-Platonic philosophers, distinguishes himself from them. To start with, he does not live in a tragic period or culture, of which he is a reflection and which he makes an effort to preserve. In his case, the project of restoring a tragic culture in the modern world is that of restoring an inexistent or asphyxiated culture – that of the transformation of his culture or a renaissance of occult and sleeping forces in the latter's underground levels (GT 16, KSA 1.103; GT 23, KSA 1.146-7). By adopting the example of the Pre-Platonics, he creates, in his capacity as an artist and metaphor producer, the language and the categories from which the very example to be adopted is built, that is, all the complex of ideas that gravitate around the monstrous, personal, grandiose, tragic and heroic, as well as around the artistic, symbolic and metaphorical nature of the Pre-Platonics' philosophical activity.[88]

If, according to Nietzsche's interpretation, what is tragic in the earliest philosophers has to do with their immersion in Greek tragic culture, what is tragic in him, as an interpreter of early Greek philosophy, is the attempt to restore a tragic culture in modernity based on the creation of an example which he performatively adopts at the very moment when he is carrying out such a creation. The monstrous element in Nietzsche – his personal, grandiose, tragic and heroic dimension – resides in the way the metaphorical and artistic nature of the categories created by him attempts to deal with not exactly a monstrous danger, as in the first philosophers'

[88] In the *Second Untimely Meditation*, *On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*, Nietzsche maintains that the authentic appropriation of the past is carried out by someone of the "most monstrous nature" (*ungeheuerste Natur*; HL 1, KSA 1.251). According to him in this text, "History belongs, first and foremost, to the doer and the powerful, to the one who wages a great struggle, who needs examples, teachers, comforters and cannot find them among their contemporaries nor in the present" (HL 2, KSA 1.258). "[H]istory," he says, "is only endured by strong personalities [...]," by those who are "strong enough [...] to be the measure of the past" (HL 5, KSA 1.283). He suggests, using the example of Plutarch's work, that the true historian must seek "the heroic" (*das Heroische*; WL 6, KSA 1.295) and, furthermore, that historiography must transform itself into a "work of art" (*Kunstwerk*; WL 7, KSA 1.296). But, more than just seeking it, historiography must bring about the "production of the grandiose" (*Erzeugung des Grossen*; HL 9, KSA 1.317). Although this is a text on how to behave in relation to the past in general, Nietzsche does not fail to refer to archaic Greece as his model par excellence, as that grandiose world in which the historian has the "mighty task" (*gewaltige Aufgabe*; WL 8, KSA 1.307) of finding their examples in their struggle against a present that finds itself dominated by a "conceptual monstrosity" (*Begriffs-Ungeheuer*; WL 10, KSA 1.331) that must be eliminated. This is, at least in part, how he sought to practice his historiography and to build his own image as a historian and classical philologist (cf. below, n90).

case, but rather the factual monstrousness of a modern world lacking what could grant it abundance and prosperity.[89] It is a question, with all its circularity and *mise en abîme* effect, of the very tragic and artistic capacity to form and adopt the tragic and artistic ideal of a Greek culture, where the Pre-Platonics are prominent figures, with the ability to promote "the domination of art over life" and to live like "an excessively joyful hero" who sees expressed in all things "a sublime abundance" (WL 2, KSA 1.889).

But, after all, the tragic character of the first philosophers is not separate from Nietzsche's. In fact, the latter decisively determines the former, in the sense that the former corresponds to a result of his activity as a tragic philosopher, that is, one deriving from his need to produce an ancient tragic, artistic ideal.[90] In sum, what is tragic in the earliest philosophers also has to do fundamentally with them being an ancient tragic, artistic model through whose creation Nietzsche secures that he will have something from which to draw inspiration in order to carry out his task of transforming modern culture.

During his career as a philologist, Nietzsche hesitates about the value to attribute to the fictionality of the categories from which a modern intellectual may seek to understand antiquity. In posthumous fragments quoted in this essay, he highlights the problem that the use of fictional categories represents from the point of

[89] Of course, this does not mean that there are no parallels between the tragic and the modern age or no traces of a tragic attitude in modernity. Cf. n26 above for citations regarding the characterisation of modernity as an epoch assailed by monstrous dangers and the Nietzschean image of the Persian wars for referring to his own culture. Although *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, as well as the lectures and other writings revolving around the same topic, build an inspiring model based on the attitude of the Pre-Platonic philosophers, it is important not to forget that Nietzsche also creates two other paradigmatic figures, which we could call his modern heroes, namely those of Schopenhauer and Wagner. The latter, who take on traits identical to those of the Pre-Platonics (cf. nn28 and 64 above), are the main figures through which he constructs the ideal of the existence of traces of tragic personalities in modern times.

[90] As Nietzsche himself states in Nachlass 1872/73, 19[35], KSA 7.428, "One must *will the illusion* – therein lies the tragic." Cf. GT 1, KSA 1.27: "'This is a dream! I want to dream it further.'" And, in addition, cf. nn46 and 83 above. Much later, in his *Ecce Homo*, he describes himself as "the first tragic philosopher," moving away, except with regard to Heraclitus, from his earlier diagnosis of the first philosophers as tragic figures (EH, GT 3, KSA 6.312). On the reconstructive, inventive and projective nature of his historiography, cf. VP, KGW II 4.214; Nachlass 1875, 6[10], KSA 8.100-1; 7[2], KSA 8.122; 1880, 7[18], KSA 9.320; and, notably, 1875, 30[60], KSA 8.532: "My way of reporting something historical is actually to tell my own experiences […]." Regarding the Pre-Platonics as precursors of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, cf. Oehler (1904) 44.

view of effectively capturing the reality of the ancient world. However, in the specific context of the writing of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, the Nietzschean assessment of this fictionality is unequivocally positive, especially if we take into account the close relationship considered here between the text on early Greek philosophy and *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*. Such a fictionality – which importantly concerns the category of the monstrous and those gravitating around it (the personal, tragic, heroic etc.) – is precisely what allows him to assume the condition of a tragic philosopher who creates his own ancient tragic ideal, through whose inspiration he believes he can assert himself as the philosophical mentor of the Wagnerian cultural reform based in Bayreuth.

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