

Nietzsche's *Leib*: A Glance at *Zarathustra*

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Abstract

The essay is a close reading of Nietzsche's view on the body in his famous Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The essay seeks to show that in his Zarathustra, Nietzsche attempts a philosophy of the body that looks like an inversion of Plato's view on the soul from his Phaedo. At a certain point in the discussion it will become obvious that Nietzsche doesn't simply go for a reversal of Plato's stance: he attempts more, a whole new, "body-centered", philosophy. The paper will try to identify and describe three main clusters of concepts (soul-body, spirit-body, body-earth-life) around which Nietzsche's philosophy of the body in Zarathustra appears to take shape.

Keywords: body, soul, Plato, spirit, Zarathustra

1. Introduction

The very first problem with Nietzsche's text in general is its interpretation. And with this, we are already on "Nietzschean" grounds, so to speak, as this kind of premise is almost like a tribute to an author who valued interpretation higher than the text itself. I have tried to show elsewhere (Maftai 2013) that Nietzsche's texts are notoriously idiosyncratic, highly intertextual and intratextual, profoundly confessional, revelatory and self-revelatory:

"Philosophy, as I have understood it hitherto, is a voluntary retirement into regions of ice and mountain-peaks – the seeking-out of everything strange and questionable in existence, everything upon which, hitherto, morality has set its ban. (...) Every conquest, every step forward in knowledge, is the outcome of courage, of hardness towards one's self, of cleanliness towards one's self (...) *Nititur in vetitum* [we strive after the forbidden]: with this device my philosophy will one day be victorious: for that which has hitherto

been most stringently forbidden is, without exception, truth” (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 168).

His philosophy is always his philosophy, to use a phrase he himself made famous, “my philosophy”, echoing Montaigne’s *c’est moi que je peins*. And, as well as Montaigne, Nietzsche saw philosophy not only as a traditional Stoic art of living, but also as an incessant and personal “hunt for knowledge” (Montaigne), “knowledge” in this case meaning something close to a private “wisdom”¹ and not the attainment of any “objective” philosophical truth. Thus, “knowledge”, in an active sense, concerns here the quest for a truth which is an existential truth and it is privately revealed. “Knowledge” is in this case more soul-searching than seeking for the best argument or the best opinion. The last chapter of Montaigne’s *Essays* (III: 13, *On experience*) reveals his particular discomfort with the opinions of philosophers and lawmakers and their futile struggle in attaining the best opinion and in reaching the argument closest to the truth through an almost Sisyphic effort of “interpretation” and “glossing”, which leads ultimately only to “uncertainties and quarrels” (Montaigne 2003, 1210). His frustration with interpretation is legendary: “Yet do we ever find an end to our need to interpret? Can we see any progress or advance towards serenity?” (Montaigne 2003, 1211).

Montaigne thinks here like an Ancient skeptic: he sees serenity as the professed end of the act of thinking, a serenity which can be achieved only by starting with the skeptic’s “indifference” (*epokhē*), in the sense of the “withholding of assent” in relation to the opinions of others. Thus, by implication, the only real philosophical truth ever to be attained is the personal truth, which one achieves through gaining “wisdom” (above all with respect to your own self): here, Montaigne’s skepticism and stoicism shake hands. *Epokhē* goes hand in hand with the Stoic “care of the self”. The result is a philosophical experiment which can only be envisioned as a private quest for a personal truth. The reality is that there is no real philosophy other than your own, and no real truth but your own truth. Being true to yourself means rejecting all this vicious circle of glossing over the opinions of others and not finding your own truth, but only speculating over the truth of

others: "It is more of a business to interpret the interpretations than to interpret the texts, and there are more books on books than on any other subject: all we do is gloss each other. (...)" (Montaigne 2003, 1212). The only way out of this is achieving your philosophical "freedom", your freedom of thought through your own philosophy, whose subject is none other than yourself: "I must have more freedom in this than others do since I am specifically writing about myself and (as in the case of my other activities) about my writings." (Montaigne 2003, 1213).

However, even if the method of the quest is Stoic or Skeptic, the main thrust of Montaigne's doctrine is modern: serenity is just a professed end, yet the quest may be infinite: "There is no end to our inquiries: our end is in the next world." (Montaigne 2003, 1211). No end in sight, thus limitlessness, uncertainty and lack of definite form: this is the modern in Montaigne. Unlike the ancient Skeptic which strives for limit and serenity, the modern one sees relentless struggle and inquiry as a heroic virtue: only a mind "diminished" or "weak" would be content with a definite answer. Thus, it seems that as long as interpretation is not caught in the vicious circle of regurgitating the opinions of others, and is attached to a personal², tireless, self-overcoming quest, it becomes a virtue, the privilege of a "powerful mind" – a foregoer of Nietzsche's 'free spirit' – whose active principle is not "glossing", but "inventing"³:

"It is only our individual weakness which makes us satisfied with what has been discovered by others and by ourselves in this hunt for knowledge: an abler man will not be satisfied with it. (...) When the mind is satisfied, that is a sign of diminished faculties or weariness. No powerful mind stops within itself: it is always stretching out and exceeding its capacities. It makes sorties which go beyond what it can achieve: it is only half-alive if it is not advancing, pressing forward, getting driven into a corner and coming to blows; its inquiries are shapeless and without limits; its nourishment consists in amazement, the hunt and uncertainty (...)." (Montaigne 2003, 1211)

So much, apparently, for elbow room left for balance and intended *objectivity*⁴ in one's argument: a notion that, in certain ways, Nietzsche strongly resented. An aspect that complicates the picture is the self-conscious, relentless presentation of at least some of his ideas and arguments not just as thought experiments⁵, but as linguistic experiences as well. Nietzsche

was keenly aware of and deeply interested in the role language plays in the structuring of thinking. Some interpreters may see this as a big hindrance in the process of evaluating the meaning of his arguments. Nietzsche saw this not as an encumbrance, but as a way of emphasizing and encouraging the creative role of language in the structuring of philosophical thought. His famous phrase, that “we think *only* in the form of language (...) we cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language”⁶ is a powerful testimony of the ambiguous role played by language with respect to philosophical thinking: on one hand, language structures thinking, it creates a “linguistic order of thinking” (Hatab); on the other hand, language “flexes”, so to speak, thinking, it “bends” it, precisely because of its power to communicate meanings in arguments. Additionally, the posthumous fragment quoted above is a perfect example of seemingly Nietzschean conflicting arguments, as the idea of a thinking revealed only linguistically appears to undermine other Nietzschean arguments, such as the idea of a body which is the seat of thinking (see Z, I.4: “On the Despisers of the Body”). However, these contentions may not appear in conflict if the argument runs differently: supposing that language is the only medium for thinking, the second argument (“body is the seat of thinking”) would also be acceptable if language itself would be seen as an embodied process. Thus, in this case, Nietzsche’s arguments are not necessarily conflicting if one accepts them as being under a different perspective. The latest trends in the field of the philosophies of the body⁷ refer to *embodied cognition*, defined as the body’s so-called “thinking” which seems to lie beyond (or beneath) the linguistic level: i.e. all that “meaning-making” encompassing „all the processes by which we enact meaning through perception, feeling, imagination and bodily movement”, in the words of the *embodied cognition* theorist Mark Johnson (Johnson 2018, 2).

2. The Status of *Zarathustra*

Burnham & Jesinghausen (2010), in their comprehensive analysis of *Zarathustra*, underline the intricacy and intractability of the text and state a few reasons for this: the complexity of the writing itself; the apparent unusability of the

text; the offensive, misogynistic rhetoric in some of the fragments; the history of the reception of the text, sometimes grotesquely misread as part of the fascist rhetoric and propaganda (2010: 2). The intractability of the *Zarathustra* is so intense, that “to say anything about *Zarathustra* is to interpret it” (2010, 14).

As *Zarathustra* appears as literary work, the status of the work as a philosophical text may be an issue. Andrew Bowie⁸ argues in his *From Romanticism to Critical Theory* (1996) that “style”⁹ in literature embodies a kind of discourse which is, according to him, *unique, inimitable, aesthetically relevant and immune to paraphrase* (Bowie 1996, 10). In short, Bowie argues that literary discourse is shielding itself from “ideology” precisely because it bears the status of illusion, of fiction. Ultimately, the literary text simply does not let itself be thoroughly criticized. Bowie argues that when dealing with literature, one sees the “text’s resistance to being clearly understood, despite its apparent meaningfulness” (Bowie 1996, 11).

Surely, this raises a challenge to traditional philosophical discourse, which claims to remain meaningful even when all style and all literary expression is abstracted from it. Thus, philosophical discourse is believed to possess a certain “philosophical” autonomy, coming from the meaningfulness of its arguments, whereas the literary text, on the other hand, is believed to enjoy aesthetic autonomy, which makes it, up to a certain point, philosophically unreadable – ultimately, there is no philosophical “standard of truth” to be defended in a literary text. Nevertheless, this distinction between literature and philosophy raises more problems than is meant to solve, since it leaves out the *avant la lettre* existentialist self-search peculiar to philosophers such as Seneca, Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, Emerson, Nietzsche.

This makes Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, the literary-philosophical experiment that, according to its author, began with an epiphany about Eternal Recurrence (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 230), even more challenging. In the *Preface to Ecce Homo*, his last written work, Nietzsche acknowledges *Zarathustra* as his greatest achievement and as the coronation of his work as a “disciple of the philosopher Dionysus” (Nietzsche 2007, 167):

“In my lifework, my *Zarathustra* holds a place apart. With it, I gave my fellow-men the greatest gift that has ever been bestowed upon them. This book, the voice of which speaks out across the ages, is not only the loftiest book on earth, literally the book of mountain air – the whole phenomenon, mankind, lies at an incalculable distance beneath it – but it is also the deepest book, born of the inmost abundance of truth (...)” (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 169)

Against the apparently religious overtones of the book’s style, Nietzsche wants to make sure that he will not be misunderstood: “Here is not a ‘prophet who speaks (...) No fanatic speaks to you here; this is not a ‘sermon’; no faith is demanded in these pages” (169). Yet he is also aware that his work may be misread or even not understood at all: “But I should regard it as a complete contradiction of myself if I expected to find ears and eyes for my truths today: the fact that no one listens to me, that no one knows how to receive from me today is not only comprehensible, it seems to me right that it is so.” (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 204). He also acknowledges that his *Zarathustra* book is the product of an epiphany and the expression of a very powerful and intimate experience. Actually, the whole philosophy in *Zarathustra* is the result of this epiphany. This is why the critique regarding this book will always be difficult, if not impossible: after all, how can one interpret one’s personal, unique experience?

“After all, no one can draw more out of things – books included – than he already knows. A man has no ears for that which he cannot access through experience (*Wofür man vom Erlebnisse her keinen Zugang hat, dafür hat man kein Ohr*). To take an extreme case, suppose a book contains only incidents which lie outside the range of general or even rare experience – suppose it to be the first language to express a whole series of experiences. In this case nothing it contains will really be heard at all and thanks to an acoustic delusion people will believe that where nothing is heard there is nothing to hear. This at least has been my usual experience and proves if you will the originality of my experience (*die Originalität meiner Erfahrung*).” (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 205).

In the part of *Ecce Homo* dedicated exclusively to *Zarathustra* (‘Why I Write Such Excellent Books. Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book For All and None’), he acknowledges writing this book under the power of “inspiration”. This experience of creating the work is one of “revelation”

(*Offenbarung*) (Nietzsche 2007, 237), described in the terms of a poetic rapture: “One hears – one does not seek; one takes – one does not ask who gives: a thought suddenly flashes up like lightning, it comes with necessity, without faltering – I have never had any choice in the matter.” (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 234). Nietzsche acknowledges *Zarathustra* as his best achievement in writing, as the ultimate “art of speech” (*Kunst zu reden*), where “eloquence has become music” (*die Beredsamkeit Musik geworden*). *Zarathustra* is also the text where he creates the “language of the dithyramb” (*die Sprache des Dithyrambus*) (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 237-9). He himself declares: “I am the inventor of the dithyramb” (*Erfinder des Dithyrambus*) (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 239). *Zarathustra* is the coronation of his “Dionysian philosophy” (*dionysische Philosophie*) (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 215) which began, apparently, with the Birth of Tragedy and with his discovery of the “tragic” philosophy of Dionysus. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche names himself the “first tragic philosopher” (Nietzsche 2007, 215), whose philosophy is a “most joyous, most exuberant, and exultant yea to life, (...) not only the highest, but also the profoundest conception (...) nothing that exists must be suppressed, nothing can be dispensed with” (214). The tragic philosophy is an affirmation of life, yet this one is not unlike any other affirmation: “it is a yea-saying to the point of justifying, to the point of redeeming even all that is past”, as he contends when speaking again of his *Zarathustra* (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 241). When mentioning the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche also seeks to invent a genealogy of his most intimate philosophical ideas, from the “great Greeks in philosophy”, the Pre-Socratics, to himself. Heraclitus and the Stoics are mentioned as the philosophical foregoers of his doctrine of “Eternal Recurrence”. Heraclitus is also mentioned as the forefather of Nietzsche’s “Dionysian philosophy”, with respect to the “yea-saying to the impermanence and annihilation of things (*Bejahung des Vergehens und Vernichtens*), which is the decisive feature of a Dionysian philosophy; the yea-saying to contradiction and war (*das Jasagen zu Gegensatz und Krieg*), the postulation of Becoming (*das Werden*), together with the radical rejection even of the concept Being (*Sein*) (...)” (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 215). In *Ecce*

Homo, Nietzsche sees all his writings in retrospect, and he is almost naturally inclined to see his latest ideas (the thought of *Eternal Recurrence*, the Dionysian *yes-saying*) as anticipated by all his earlier works. For example, the key figure of Dionysus now appears to have been present throughout all his earlier works (Nietzsche 2007, 204-252).

3. “But the poets lie too much”

Burnham & Jesinghausen (2010) contend that, in his *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche indulges in a thorough ‘play[ful]’ rhetoric, which, apart from the presence of the main figures of the text (“Zarathustra, Dionysus, the animals, the different other voices that sometimes take over”), makes abundant use of four “types of textual ‘play’”: allusion, satire, symbol and allegory (see 2010, 8 ff.). So much so, that, in this text, it seems that “everything has meaning; often more than one meaning” (*ibid.*).

And there’s more: it seems that Zarathustra is not just an anti-prophet, but also a “seducer” (*ein Verführer*) (EH, ‘Preface’, §4). In a later fragment from *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche speaks of the “Dionysian” as the “highest deed” of his Zarathustra, but also of a kind of poet, “der die Wahrheit erst schafft”, who “first creates the truth” (Nietzsche 2007, 237), unlike Dante, for example, who was “no more than a believer.” The presence of the allusion to the poet as the “creator” in the same fragment where he writes about his “revelation of truth” in *Zarathustra* is a subtle indication that this “truth” is the result of an artistic “inspiration”, *i.e.* of a creative act. The presence of the “poet” and of his creative impetus is unmistakable. At this point, Nietzsche becomes the advocate of a long-standing tradition which envisions the poet as the inventor of “truth” in *fiction* – a “truth” which cannot be distinguished from “lying”. Lawrence J. Hatab (Hatab 2018) analyzes this tradition at length¹⁰. Suffice is to say that chapters from *Zarathustra*, such as “On the Poets” or “The Song of Melancholy”,¹¹ take on a whole constellation of philosophical issues, such as “truth”, “appearance” and “falsehood”, as Hatab argues. For example, he contends that Nietzsche tries to detach the problematic of “truth” from its double, untruth, or “error”. With respect to appearance, it seems that “mere’ appearance in

a deficient sense” is not acceptable anymore. With respect to “falsehood”, Nietzsche goes back to the roots of the problem, which lie in the Platonic appearance-reality dichotomy. As a classical philologist, he was aware that Plato fought against a tradition that saw poetry as the creation of a *pseudos*, of a “fictive truth” (Hatab). This “fictive truth” undermined Plato’s ontological and epistemological dichotomies, as well as the discipline of the soul. Moreover, Plato was aware of the poetic tradition, starting with Homer and Hesiod, which blended *pseudos* (fiction) with *alētheia* (truth) (Hatab 2018). The Pre-Socratic Greeks were thus particularly aware of the power of the poetic words or of speech to create or to invent things, to create ‘things’ with words and to persuade other minds of the “reality” of those things.

With respect to this, Hatab launches an interpretation about Nietzsche’s truths. The *first* of Nietzsche’s ‘truths’ is a fundamental, “tragic” truth about becoming. The *second* truth would be the truth of the “true world” (TI, Nietzsche 2007, 22-23), a truth postulated by “Platonic” philosophies (Kant included), that seeks a standard of truth above the world of becoming. The *third* truth, Hatab argues, would be the reply to the “error”, *i.e.* the confirmation of the eventual irrelevance of the second truth. Thus, as Nietzsche argues in the *Twilight of the Idols*, rejecting the idea of a “true world” would also abolish the “world of appearance” (Nietzsche 2007, 23). This is the moment of the *incipit Zarathustra*, of the Zarathustrean promise of a world without false “ideals” (EH, ‘Preface’, §2): embracing this truth would restore the “value, meaning and truthfulness” of “reality”, as Nietzsche writes.

“I do not set up any new idols (...) To overthrow idols (idols is the name I give to all ideals) – that is much more like my business. In proportion as an ideal world has been falsely assumed, reality has been robbed of its value, its meaning and its truthfulness. The “true world” and the “apparent world” - in plain English, the fictitious world and reality ... Hitherto the *lie* of the ideal has been the curse of reality” (EH, Nietzsche 2007, 167-8)

Hatab assumes that this third “truth” is “in a positive sense” an “apparent truth” which “balance[s]” the “negative truth of becoming” with the “error of Being” (Hatab 2018). This move, according to him, would also agree with the “perspective

of art” as “art’s overt non-foundational posture gives it a distinctive position among cultural productions, and that is why Nietzsche uses the metaphor of art to characterize all forms of thought.” (*ibid.*)

This is, in “Dionysian” terms, the truth of the creator or the “artistic” truth preached by Zarathustra: a truth which is always aware of its non-foundational, creative roots. Hatab also argues that this creative truth can cope with the first, tragic, truth of becoming, as, for example, these two truths come together in Zarathustra’s “Dionysian philosophy”, which embraces and accepts the tragic, existential, truth about becoming in a non-pessimistic way – through the spreading, efflorescence, of new – ‘lying’ – truths. This also entails the possibility that all this “artistic” construction may be a deception, yet this is acceptable, as long as this deception is life-affirming and “truthful”, *i.e.* candid about its falsehood: “the deceptive character of art, therefore, is far from falsehood in the strict sense; it ‘accords’ with tragic truth.” (*ibid.*)

Obviously, this raises the question about the status of the character Zarathustra himself and of his pronouncements: Nietzsche’s work is ripe with allusions to the ‘lying’ of the poet. At the same moment, the “poet” is characterized several times as a “fool”¹². At this point, we might say, Nietzsche is true to his words: if “whoever must be a creator always annihilates,” (Z, I.15 “On the Thousand Goals and One”), then Nietzsche metaphorically elevates but also undermines the main character of his book “For Everyone and Nobody”: Zarathustra is not only heroic, but anti-heroic as well. He speaks the truth by lying and he is serious in his foolishness. He laughs, yet his is a tragic, yet conquering, laughter. This is the “Dionysian philosophy” of – creatively – coping with sorrow, meaninglessness and death.

Actually, the initial storyline from Zarathustra was fully tragic. As Babich (2013, 64 ff.) suggests, the first sketches included Zarathustra’s “literal” death. Babich also spots in the posthumous fragments an “outline” dedicated to the “death” of Empedocles, which ended with the “death of the great Pan.” (*ibid.*) There is also an episode, Babich adds, in the published version of Zarathustra, which seems to suggest the death of Zarathustra (Z I.19 “On the Bite of the Adder”).

In sum, we may contend that the philosophical poem *Zarathustra* is already an illustration of the creative/destructive “Dionysian” philosophy. Seeking an answer to our initial queries regarding the status of the text, one can observe that *Zarathustra* is an attempt at breaking the barrier between literature and philosophy, as an example of the new philosophy envisioned by Nietzsche.

4. *Zarathustra*, Body and Soul – With Plato as Preface and Epilogue

As early as Plato, philosophers have usually undermined the significance of the body in their normative assessments of philosophical living. This had tremendous impact upon the basic philosophical view of what constitutes the ‘essential’ human element, or man’s fundamental nature. Plato, voiced by Socrates, thought that the fundamental experience that sets philosophy in motion is a meditation upon death: “those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead.” (*Phaedo*, 64 a-b, in: Plato 1914). Also, when describing death as a departure of the ‘soul’ (*psukhḗ*) from its mortal coil, the ‘body’ (*sōma*), Plato concluded that the departed soul “exists alone by itself” (64 c-d). Thus, since the soul is all that remains, and, in sum, the essential in man, the life of the “true philosopher” (*alēthōs philōsophos*) would mean “despis[ing] (*atimázein*)... [the] cares of the body (*tàs perì tò sōma therapéias*)” or the “turn[ing] away from the body (*aphestánai autoū*) and concern[ing] himself with the soul (*pròs dè tèn psukhèn tetráphthai*)” (64 c-e). This would result in not indulging in the “pleasures of the body” (65a), and, basically, not caring about things related to the body “except so far as it is necessary to have them” (64 e). In terms of the power of knowledge, living philosophically would mean the “acquirement of pure knowledge”, in which case, the body would be a “hindrance” in the “search for wisdom”. In its search for the “truth”, the soul is “deceived” (*exapatātai*) by the body (65 b). When in contact with the body, the soul is hindered by “hearing [or] sight (...) pain [or] any pleasure”, thus, it cannot “reach out toward the reality” (65c). In the end, the “soul of the philosopher” is the one who “greatly despises the body” (*hē tou*

philosóphou psukhè málista atimázei tò sōma) and “avoids it and strives to be alone by itself” (65 d). The body is an “evil”, and the soul is “contaminated” by it (66b). And, as far as we can notice from Socrates’ monologue later in the text, philosophical practice is very much disturbed by the body, which becomes an issue of great concern to the one whose life is dedicated to the mind:

(...) And the body fills us with passions and desires and fears, and all sorts of fancies and foolishness, so that, as they say, it really and truly makes it impossible for us to think (emphasis mine) at all. The body and its desires are the only cause of wars and factions and battles (...) And so, because of all these things, we have no leisure for philosophy. But the worst of all is that if we do get a bit of leisure and turn to philosophy, the body is constantly breaking in upon our studies and disturbing us with noise and confusion, so that it prevents our beholding the truth (...). (*Phaedo*, 66 c-e)

Philosophy in itself is seen as a kind of constant struggle to contain the body. The effort and the result of this endeavour is a continuous “purification” (*kátharsis*), Socrates argues, which refers to the “separating, so far as possible, [of] the soul from the body”, where the soul is constantly “freed from the body as from fetters” (67 c). *Phaedo* (71 e *sqq.*) mentions that “our souls exist in the other world” and that the soul is the only one “coming to life again” by transmigration. This is Plato’s answer to the pivotal issue of death. The “souls of the dead” do not perish, they “exist somewhere, whence they come back to life” (72 a). Our essential element is our soul, and it is immortal. Thus, our whole life should be a philosophical preparation for the moment of death, which is just the beginning of a new life for the soul. In seeing and preparing for this, the mind of the philosopher is a mind of a man who has made peace with his death, with his bodily mortality. It would thus seem absurd for someone “who had been all his life fitting himself to live as nearly in a state of death as he could” to be “disturbed when death came to him”. As well as in the case of other ancient philosophies, the purpose of the Socratic struggle with the body is to cope with one’s fear of death by a mental, moral and physical preparation, *i.e.* to see fear of death as utterly irrational – as the fear which is marked, as Plato argues, by an excessive “love” for the body. It is not accidental

that the “lover of wisdom” (*philósophos*) is the opposite of the “lover of the body” (*philosómatos*), as to the former would be entirely “foolish (...) to fear death” (*alogía eíē ei phoboíto tôn thánaton*): “the true philosophers practise dying (*hoi orthōs philosophoūntes apothnēskein meletōsi*), and death is less terrible to them than to any other men” (*Phaedo*, 67 e-68b). The one who is prepared for death “will confidently believe that he will find pure wisdom nowhere else than in the other world” (68b). Only they will rightfully bear the name of philosophers, “those alone who despise the body and pass their lives in philosophy (*toīs málista toū sómatos oligōroūsin te kai en philosophía zōsin*)” (68c). The philosopher’s “soul” is thus the one who has no “fear of the invisible and of the other world” (*toū aidōūs te kai Háidou*), who also knows that is not “imprisoned in a body.” (81d-e)

However, there are other dialogues (*Alcibiades*) where Socrates explores the possibilities of defining human being either as a soul, or as a body, or as the unity between them: “Soc. (...) man must be one of three things. Alc. What things? Soc. Soul, body, or both together as one whole” (130 a). A few lines later (130 c-d) Socrates will return to his favourite version: man is “nothing else than soul”. Thus, only the soul is “himself” [the human being], others (such as body and things relating to it) are just “his own things”, not “himself” (131 c): “he who enjoins a knowledge of oneself bids us become acquainted with the soul” (130 e). Because of this, Socrates acknowledges concerning his partner in dialogue, which is Alcibiades, that he is the “only lover of *him* [Alcibiades]” and not of “what is *his*” (131 e), as he is the one who loves Alcibiades’ soul, and not his body: “and that [the body] is losing its charm, while *you* [the soul] are beginning to bloom” (132 a), Socrates replies. The passages are important, as they review the possible relationships between soul and body. Other sources, such as Xenophon, remind us that the young Socrates did not desert his body, on the contrary. As any other Athenian of his age, he was taught to take and took great care of his body, with physical training: “He [Socrates] did not neglect his body, and he did not praise those who neglected theirs” (Xenophon, in: Hughes 2011, 101). This is consistent with Socrates in other contexts, such as

Plato's *Republic*. The aim of the *Republic* is to imagine the best *politeia*. The functioning of the best *politeia* is dependent on the fact that its citizens must be useful not only to themselves, but also to their city. The purpose of the state's *paideia*, or education, in the ideal republic, is to create citizens which are ultimately useful to their *polis*. Useful to their *polis* are only those, whose "bodies and souls are constitutionally sound" (410 a). Physical training – for the guardians – is thus a necessary part of the *paideia* of these citizens of the ideal state, and the care of the body goes hand in hand with literary education, "poetry and music" – both, physical and literary education, must be kept "simple and flexible" (404 a). The physical training must also be associated with a good, healthy, diet – just as in the case of the literary tastes. Socrates condemns the "excessive" concern with the body, which goes beyond the need to keep the body in good health (407 c). Yet this physical education is not – or, more exactly, should not be – for its own sake: both physical and literary training need to be exercised with the aim of "improving the soul" (410 b); otherwise, "merely literary and musical education makes men softer than is good for them", whereas "unmitigated athletics produce a sort of ferocity" (410 c-d). In sum, both types of education should "aim chiefly at improving the soul" (410 b-c). Socrates' views in the *Republic* with respect to the role of physical training are thus fairly in accordance with the common ancient Greek perceptions concerning the body (Hughes 2011, 101-110).

Nietzsche views on the body have been disputed amongst phenomenological, naturalistic, "embodied", hermeneutical, feminist, psychoanalytical and existentialist interpretations¹³. Our interpretation will only focus on a close reading of the essential passages from Zarathustra that refer to the "body" or to the concepts pertaining to the body and to the relations thereof. The presence of the "body" in Zarathustra is, nevertheless, somewhat special: the "body" is often contextualized by or in special clusters of concepts. There are at least three important "clusters" involving the notion of "body:" First, there is the historical "soul-body" conceptual pair, constant almost throughout the entire text. Then, there is the special relation of the "body" to the "spirit", referred to several times in the text.

Thirdly, there is a larger cluster of concepts mentioning “body”, “earth” and “life” that Nietzsche at some point refers to.

All in all, it is obvious from the start that it is not clear what Nietzsche refers to exactly when mentioning “body” in *Zarathustra*: a phenomenological, biological, cultural, rhetorical or a hermeneutical aspect. The available reading is given only by the use of the concept in particular situations. One can often observe the meaning of the term only in relation to other concepts from the “cluster.” In the following, we will analyze the aforementioned “clusters”.

Soul-Body. This is the most important cluster, around which almost the entire Nietzschean-Zarathustrean thinking on the “body” revolve. We have already suggested that “despiser of the body” (Z I.4 *Von den Verächtern des Leibes*) is accurately a Platonic phrase and that it is the exact definition of a philosopher, according to Plato’s *Phaedo*. The opposite of the Platonic “lover of wisdom” (*philosophos*) would thus be the “lover of the body” (*philosómatos*). The Platonic philosophical soul is an entity striving for the “other world”, and not “imprisoned in a body.” (*Phaedo*, 81d-e). The Platonic philosopher is the one “who is really in love with wisdom and has a firm belief that he can find it nowhere else than in the other world (*è en Háidou*)”. Also, if “he is really a philosopher (...) he will confidently believe that he will find pure wisdom nowhere else than in the other world” (68b). A direct reference to the “other world” (*jener Welt*) is also present in Z I.3, in an emphatic anti-Platonic stance: “But the ‘other world’ is well concealed from humans, that dehumaned unhuman world that is a heavenly nothing” (Nietzsche 2008, 28). It appears thus that the best of the Nietzschean “body” rhetoric, which mostly appears in the first part of *Zarathustra* (Z Prologue 3-4; Z I.3; Z I.4; Z I.22) is an anti-Platonic stance, with a Nietzschean twist. As *Phaedo* claims that the soul “is most like the divine and immortal and intellectual and uniform and indissoluble and ever unchanging”, whereas the body is “on the contrary, most like the human (*anthrōpínō*) and mortal (*thnētō*) and multiform (*polueideī*) and unintellectual (*anoétō*) and dissoluble (*dialutō*) and ever changing” (80b), Nietzsche simply refuses the Platonic claim. His philosophy is not supporting an “unhuman” stance,

but rather a “human” (the Platonic *anthrōpínō*), “all-too-human” one. Opposite to Plato, – to whom the soul is “the invisible, divine, immortal and wise” (81a), and thus superior, in terms of value, to the body – Nietzsche’s philosophy overturns the verdict: what Plato labels as “error and folly and fear and fierce loves and all the other human ills (*plánēs kai anoías kai phóbōn kai agríōn erótōn kai tōn állōn kakōn tōn anthrōpeíōn*)” (*Phaedo*, 81a), or simply “body”, Nietzsche sees as the most real and the most important. A philosopher is therefore no more the one who “lives in truth through all after time with the gods” (81a). A philosopher is not the one amongst those “who have duly purified themselves by philosophy” and “live [in the afterlife as souls] henceforth altogether without bodies” (*Phaedo*, 114b-c). Nor are the Nietzschean philosophers a species of those “who are found to have excelled in holy living [and] are freed from these regions within the earth and are released as from prisons” (114b). Socrates acknowledges that the authority of the soul over the body should be a position of force: with the help of a quote from Homer, he claims that the soul must not be seen as a “harmony which would be led by the conditions of the body”, but “rather as something fitted to lead and rule them, and itself a far more divine thing than a harmony” (94e). Indeed, the soul “tyranniz[es]” (94d) those elements which are under his power. Moreover, Plato claims that the soul must present itself philosophically, and not mythologically, and that “our soul before it entered into the body existed just as the very essence which is called the absolute exists” (92 d-e). Thus, the soul becomes the object of a philosophical argument. In fact, Nietzsche strikes back at Plato with the same argument put into practice by Plato himself: misogyny, the hate of argument, of philosophy and misanthropy, the hate towards man, have common origins. The one who hates free thinking will be the one who hates or despises man. The hate towards the human being comes from ignoring man’s real nature. As Plato himself claims, “misology and misanthropy arise from similar causes. For misanthropy arises from trusting someone implicitly without sufficient knowledge (...) [the ignorant] has no knowledge of human nature (*áneu tékhnēs tēs perì tanthrōpeia*)” (89d-e).

What the Nietzschean message acknowledges overall and, in a sense, pushes forward, is the unavoidable dissolution of the (immortal) “soul” in modern culture, an exact opposite of the “impending dissolution of the body” (88 b-c), against the hypothesis that “the soul is altogether immortal and imperishable” (88 b), advocated by Plato. The move in *Zarathustra* is thus a double move: first, to criticize the so-called Platonic-Christian worldview about the body (see Burnham & Jesinghausen 2010, 5); then, to secure a place for the “body” in the new architecture of reality that emerges after the “God is dead” event (Nietzsche 2008, 11). It is obvious that the “death” phenomenon of the “soul” is an effect of the “death of God” phenomenon and that there is a whole history of the “body” in European culture from the early Renaissance to the Modern Age, a history at the end of which the “soul” remains nothing more than a “dogma”, its place being taken by the “psyche” (Porter 2003, 28-61; 347-373). “Death” of the “soul” emerges in *Zarathustra* with a rather sarcastic remark of the protagonist: “On my honour, friend (...) all you are speaking of does not exist: there is no Devil and no Hell. Your soul will be dead even sooner than your body: so fear nothing more!” (Nietzsche 2008, 18). This is another anti-Platonic charge (*Phaedo* 111c – 114c), against the myth of the punishment of corrupt souls in the afterlife: with the “death” of Hell, the fear of an afterlife full of punishments and cruelty for the lost, corrupted souls, also vanishes; nor is the false hope for a future reward of a good deed in the “other world” acceptable anymore. The “despisers of life” or *despisers of the body* appear very early in the text (Z Prologue 3), as they relate to the “sacrilege against the earth”, which is “to revere the entrails of the unfathomable more than a sense of the earth” (2008: 12). The intention of the protagonist, which also marks the intention of Nietzsche as philosopher, I believe, emerges right from the start (2008, 9): “Zarathustra wants to become human again”, signalling, in my opinion, the turn of philosophy towards the anti-Platonic “human affairs”, ta *anthrópina*. Nietzsche’s concept of a philosopher is at this point exactly the opposite of the Platonic *philósophos*: the Nietzschean philosopher is a *philosómatos*, a “lover of the body” in a broad philosophical

sense. The body becomes a pivotal element in this move of turning to the – authentically – human. Actually, “body” becomes the metonymy, if not the symbol, of human being itself. That is why the concept sometimes emerges literally, as “body” in opposition to “soul”, or figuratively, as symbol or mark in a new, anti-Platonic, philosophy. In a certain way, the body takes over the role that had previously been attributed to the soul: “Once the soul looked despisingly upon the body, and at that time this despising was the highest thing (...) Thus she thought to slip away from the body and the earth. Oh this soul was herself still lean, ghastly, and starved” (2008: 12). The counter reaction is that the “body” is now the one which “proclaim[s] about your soul” (2008, 12). The difference that Nietzsche now works on is the one between “body” and “corpse”, a difference which he achieves by symbolically transferring the Platonic moral rejection of the “body” (*Leib*) upon the “corpse” (*Leichnam*):

“(...) No human did he catch, but rather a mere corpse (...) companions I need and living ones – not dead companions and corpses that I carry with me wherever I will. But living companions I need, who follow me because they want to follow themselves (...) Companions the creator seeks and not corpses, nor herds or believers either. Fellow creators the creator seeks, those who inscribe new values on new tablets” (2008, 18-21).

Obviously, the “corpse” is not a dead body; it is a moral dead body, a refusal of “life”, which marks a moral fossilization, a moral lifelessness. This lifelessness is specific to the Platonic-Christian worldview: “They want very much to be dead, and we should applaud their wish! Let us guard against waking these corpses and damaging these living coffins”; “As corpses they meant to live, in black they decked out their corpse (...)” (Z I.9 “On the Preachers of Death”, in 2008, 40-41; Z II.4 “On the Priests”, in 2008, 79). Actually, this mentioning of the “corpse” in opposition to what Nietzsche calls a “creating body” (*schaffende Leib*) (2008, 31) body is a reaction to the same Phaedo (80c), where Socrates refers to the lifeless body as “corpse (*nekròn*), which is naturally subject to dissolution and decomposition”, in the context of putting an emphasis of the frailty and mortality of the body – at the same time reminding Cebes that even a corpse leaves something “indestructible”

behind, such as bones, let alone the soul. To Plato, thus, the body itself is close to a living corpse, an entity which possesses no authority, no leadership – Plato mentions the “soul” as “leading” (*hēgemoneúousá*) (*Phaedo*, 94c) –, no reason and no consciousness without the soul, and that must be constantly kept in check as it is the source of “desires and passions and fears” (*epithumíais kai orgaís kai phóbois*) (94d).

But, in the new paradigm of the “body” emerging in *Zarathustra*, everything changes: the “body” becomes the leader of the “soul”. The “body” is the ultimate authority in spiritual as well as bodily matters, so to speak. The body emerges as the active, not the passive element, of the relationship. The body is the one which, let’s say, calls the shots. Suddenly, Nietzsche’s philosophical worldview is turning the tables on these matters: the “body” is now the real source even of the old Platonic “care for the soul” and despising of the body: “From their bodies and this earth they imagined themselves transported, these ingrates. Yet to what did they owe the spasms and rapture of their transports? To their bodies and to their earth.” (2008, 29) The same idea emerges a few passages later: “Verily, not in worlds behind and redemptive drops of blood: but the body is what they [the Christian believers] too believe in most, and their own (emphasis mine) body is their thing-in-itself” (2008, 29). It is obvious that the new “bodily” perspective is associated with a “healthy body”, which, in turn, is associated with the “sense of the earth”: “Listen rather, my brothers, to the voice of the healthy body (...) more honestly and purely does the healthy body talk, being complete and four-square: and it talks of the sense of the earth” (2008, 29). Notice also the earlier reference to the “earthen head”, instead of a “head [buried] in the sand of heavenly things”, an “earthen head that creates a sense for the earth!” (2008, 28). On the opposite side, the “sick and moribund” are the ones who “despised body and earth and invented the heavenly realm and the redemptive drops of blood”, although “even these sweet and dismal poisons they took from body and earth!” (2008, 29). Towards these “sick and moribund”, Zarathustra is “gentle”, as he wishes them that “they [may] become convalescents and overcomers and create for themselves a higher body!” (2008, 29).

Z I.4 “On the Despisers of the Body” is where the so-called “doctrine” of the body unfolds. In contrast to the “child”, who still believes in body and soul – “Body am I and soul” (2008, 30) – the “awakened” discovers that he is “body (...) through and through, and nothing besides (...) soul is merely a word for something about the body” (2008, 30). In this perspective, “reason” is a faculty that belongs to the body altogether. Moreover, the body is itself a “great reason, a manifold with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman” (2008, 30). Hence, the traditional faculty of “reason”, which now becomes the “small reason”, is in its own turn “a tool of the body”, which carries the name “spirit” – in fact, a “small tool and toy” of the “great reason”, which is the body itself (2008, 30). The body is even greater than the “I”, which one imagined to be the seat of reason: “the greater thing (...) is your body and its great reason: it does not say I, but does I” (2008, 30).

Spirit-Body. Already shown above, spirit-body is the second cluster of notions important with respect to the Zarathustra conception of the body. Burnham and Jesinghausen (2010, 28-30) agree that there are two main meanings of “spirit” in Zarathustra. One, already suggested, is the “spirit” seen as “small reason” or as “soul”, according to the Platonic-Christian difference between soul and body. The other meaning of the term envisions a more active sense, of “spirit as a mode of the living body”, which “cuts right across the distinction between body and mind” (2010, 29). “Spirit” is in this case the name for what Nietzsche sees as the “spiritualization” of drives (2010, 29). Throughout the text, as the two commentators mention, “spirit” is often associated with “heart”. According to Burnham and Jesinghausen, “heart” means “the dominant will to power insofar as that manifests as the immediate expressivity of the body as pathos or affect: one’s inner emotional life and desires.” (2010, 29). Out of this new context, there emerges a new idea of the “Self”. Nietzsche seeks to conjugate his new vision of body with this new notion of “Self”, by declaring that the body, the successor of “soul” and “I”, is the Self: “behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown wise man – his name is Self. In your body he dwells, he is your body” (Nietzsche 2008, 30). To the “Self”, “senses and spirit” are mere “tools and

toys". The Self is the "I's ruler" (2008, 30). In this line of argument the "creating body" becomes the "creating Self" (2008, 31).

Body-Earth-Life. The connection body-earth-life is, at this point in our discussion, implicit. As already shown, the "despisers of life" as *despisers of the body* appear early in the text (Z Prologue 3), as these despisers practice a "sacrilege against the earth", which is "to revere the entrails of the unfathomable more than a sense of the earth" (Nietzsche 2008, 12). The bodies of the "despisers" are, thus, despising themselves. More clearly stated, they are despising their own "Selves", as Nietzsche states that the "Selves" of the despisers "want to die and turn away from life": "Your Self wants to go under, and therefore you became despisers of the body!" (2008, 31). These "Selves" have become "angry with life and the earth" (2008, 31).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, Nietzsche's view of the body in *Zarathustra* is a splendid example of Nietzschean transvaluation attempt with respect to the body-soul dichotomy. In *Zarathustra*, his literary-philosophical masterpiece, he begins with an anti-Platonic stance that seems to show a reversal of Plato's position on the soul-body relation from the *Phaedo*. At a certain point in the discussion it becomes clear that Nietzsche does not just go for a reversal of Plato's arguments: he attempts more, a whole new perspective, whereupon the body takes the command of "soul", "spirit" and "reason", and becomes our entire "reality", our only paradigm – albeit with infinite possibilities of interpretation. This paradigm shift, which involves a shift towards the "body", the "life" and the "earth", is a necessary step in the shaping of a human, anti-Platonic, "philosomatic", way of understanding reality.

NOTES

¹ On the distinction between "philosophy" and "wisdom", see Seneca, Epistles, LXXXIX.

² "In the philosopher, on the contrary, there is absolutely nothing impersonal (...)" (BGE, Nietzsche 2014, 521).

³ “[O]ur minds do not find the field any less vast when examining the meanings of others than when formulating our own – as though there were less animus and virulence in glossing than inventing!” (Montaigne 2003, 1208).

⁴ Actually, Nietzsche sought to redefine objectivity through the lens of perspectivism. See Hatab (2018) and his interpretation of Nietzsche’s new notion of objectivity as “pluralized ‘objectivity’, wherein the more perspectives one can adopt, the more adequate one’s view of the world will be”.

⁵ As Anderson (2017) suggests, Walter Kaufmann’s 1950 *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* addresses Nietzsche’s manner of philosophizing as an “experimentalist” one, at least with respect to his aphoristic fragments. Yet Anderson shows that “not every Nietzschean aphorism is an experiment, and not every short section (...) an aphorism”. Anderson contends that some fragments are “summative conclusions” or “compressed formulations” of ideas that are to be found in relation to other similar ideas from the larger texts themselves. With respect to “thought experiments”, Anderson gives the example of “The Eternal Recurrence of the Same”, which has been interpreted by some commentators not as a doctrine, but as a “practical thought experiment” that Nietzsche proposes with a view to “test whether one’s life has been good”.

⁶ KSA 12:5 [22]. The translation appears in Hatab (2018).

⁷ See, for an introduction to the topic, Marzano (2012).

⁸ Bowie (1996). The issue has been previously discussed in Maftei (2013, 90-91).

⁹ See Nietzsche’s remarks on “style” in EH, ‘Why I Write Such Excellent Books’, § 4.

¹⁰ See also Zittel (2000), for a thorough investigation of the role of “art” in Zarathustra, and for an interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophical poem as “poetic nihilism”. On poetic lying, see Zittel (2000, esp. 39-58).

¹¹ See Z IV.14: “The Song of Melancholy”; Z, II.17: “On the Poets”.

¹² Z IV.14 “The Song of Melancholy”. See also Babich (2013) and her interpretation of the *Übermensch* in the light of Lucian’s Kataplous and his parody of the *Hyperanthropos*, the Tyrant, as the *Übermensch* “unmasked” (Babich 2013, 67).

¹³ See, among others: Vallega-Neu (2005, 21-37); Dries (ed.) (2018); Brown (2006); Gerhardt (2006); Emden (2005); Acampora (2018); Heit (2018); Torjussen (2009). For an introduction to the issue in Romanian: Bondor (2012). General historical accounts on philosophies of the body: Porter (2003).

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