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The Faithfulness to the Earth of Nikos Kazantzakis' Odysseus

I will be talking about faithfulness to the earth in this essay.[1] The phrase "der Erde treu" comes, of course, from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* The connections that concern me reach to Homer, to Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* and to Heraclitus. Homer and Heraclitus, and Kazantzakis and Nietzsche are two pairs of philosophical, poetic thinkers who stand outside the dominant tradition of western thought, opposed to it. Nietzsche and Kazantzakis will be my primary concern. Because they stand so close to us, they are expectedly difficult to properly understand. The loss of perspective of such proximity is complicated by their *radical* criticism of the intellectual era they reject. As a young professor in Basel, Nietzsche reflects upon this role, self-consciously,

> There are times of great danger in which philosophers appear—times when the wheel rolls even faster—when philosophers and artists assume the place of the dwindling *mythos.* They are far ahead of their time, however, for the attention of contemporaries is only quite slowly drawn to them. A people which becomes aware of its dangers produces the genius.[2]

The task of Kazantzakis ad Nietzsche is the creation of a new *mythos.*

Homer and Heraclitus enter my discussion for a number of reasons. An obvious one is that Kazantzakis's major work, one he often called *the work,* is a sequel to Homer's *Odyssey.* The one philosopher to whom Nietzsche always claimed an affinity was Heraclitus. Such intellectual indebtedness is rooted in the fundamental difference between Homer, Heraclitus and the Platonic-Christian world. In the first chapter of *Mimesis,* Erich Auerbach compares two basic styles which he uses as a starting point for his study of the literary representation of reality in European culture. These styles are the Homeric and the Old Testament (which I am calling, more generally, the Platonic-Christian). Of the Homeric style Auerbach says,

> Delight in physical existence is everything [in Homeric poems], and their highest aim is to make that delight perceptible to us . . . they bewitch us and ingratiate themselves to us until we live with them in the reality of their lives; so long as we are reading or hearing the poems, it does not matter whether we know that all this is only legend, "make-believe," The oft-repeated reproach that Homer is a liar takes nothing from his effectivenss, he does not need to base his story on historical reality, his reality is powerful enough in itself; it ensnares us, weaving its web around us, and that suffices him . . . . The general considerations which occasionally occur . . . reveal a calm acceptance of the basic facts of human existence, but with no compulsion to brood over them, still less any passionate impulse either to rebel against them or to embrace them in an ecstacy of submission.[3]

I would add, with no belief in another reality that eliminates the need for brooding or submitting.

In contrast to the Homeric "calm acceptance" Auerbach points out,

> It is all very different in the Biblical stories. Their aim is not to bewitch the senses, and if nevertheless they produce lively sensory effects, it is only because the moral, religious, and psychological phenomena which are their sole concern are made concrete in the sensible matter of life. But their religious intent involves an absolute claim to historical truth.[4]

The contrast here is between a delight in physical existence which curiously is not necessarily based upon historical reality and a claim to absolute, historical truth that, equally curiously, pays little attention to sensuous existence.

The Old Testament, Platonic style, is, as I have already suggested, dominant in western thought and as such easier for us to understand. It is based upon a dualistic metaphysics that finds its first complete philosophical articulation in Plato. In Plato the distinction is between the ever-changing, illusory world of appearances (or becoming) and the pure, unchanging world of ideas (being). With this dualistic vision we can see how a belief in absolute, historical truth can be combined with an essentially negative attitude towards the sensuous. Human access to truth is only possible to the extent that we can transcend the world of becoming and discover the unchanging truths in the world of ideas. Thus we can say that in time, in history, truths are revealed to the human soul, but the truths themselves are not historical, truths do not change. For Plato the clearest example of this transcendence of the sensuous is found in mathematical knowledge. In Christian terms we can speak of the revelations in the Old Testament and the appearance of God in human form in the New Testament.[5]

Auerbach also suggests that the Platonic view of life "broods over," "rebels against," or "ecstatically submits to" the basic facts of human existence. These reactions are possible because of the belief in another, perfect reality and the associated belief in Divine Providence. In this belief in an ideal world a negative attitude towards the physical world is concealed; there is in the Platonic tradition an unconscious unfaithfulness to the earth. Nietzsche named this unfaithfulness nihilism.

The nihilism of our intellectual tradition has remained concealed for much of the time since Plato. Only in the 19th Century do we find widespread brooding over the facts of existence. Schopenhauer became the locus of this pessimism in the latter half of that century, but now we pay more attention to the "fear and trembling" of Kierkegaard transformed into the *Angst* of existentialism. What is important to the picture I am presenting here is that the brooding, rebelling and submitting one encounters in Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and the thinking that follows theirs is wholly rooted *within* the dualistic metaphysics of Plato. In Plato we have one limit of the horizon of western thought; with Schopenhauer we have the other. The idealism of Plato and the pessimism of Schopenhauer share as essential elements the same belief in absolute truth and the same opposition to the sensuous world which Auerbach identifies as the core of the Old Testament style.

The insight of Auerbach about these two fundamental views of existence finds fuller expression in the thinking of Nietzsche and Kazantzakis. Nietzsche exerted an early and profound intellectual influence upon Kazantzakis. At the age of twenty-five Kazantzakis wrote a law dissertation, "Friedrich Neitzsche and the Philosophy of Right." Pandeles Prevelakis in his study of Kazantzakis says that the dissertation,

> summarizes those parts of Nietzsche's philosophy which he himself has absorbed—ideas, precepts, utopias, which we shall meet again, *remarkably unchanged*, throughout his later work and particularly in *The Saviors of God* and *The Odyssey*. The great themes which were to occupy his whole life and to direct his creative effort—'optimistic or Dionysiac nihilism,' the theory of the [Übermensch], the bankruptcy of Western Civilization—are from now on, thanks to Nietzsche's philosophy, clear in his mind.[6] (my emphasis)

By the time he was thirty-two Kazantzakis had also translated *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into modern Greek. Several scholars[7] have written about Kazantzakis' "Nietzscheanism;" invariably they argue the literary-biography questions of which Nietzschean text served as a model for a given text of Kazantzakis. I choose to explore their relation in a different manner—to look at themes which appear throughout the writings of both, themes that underlie their thought generally. With this approach I can best point to the collection of ideas of the Platonic tradition to which Nietzsche and Kazantzakis reacted, and to the alternatives they present.

I have said that the task of Kazantzakis and of Nietzsche is the creation of a new *mythos*. Both were uniquely aware of the magnitude of such work; both knew it would not be accomplished in their lifetimes. Though the forms that their efforts took were quite diverse, and often on different levels, they share several essential ideas. The first common theme of theirs we must examine is the rejection of the dualistic metaphysics upon which the Platonic view is built. In Nietzsche the opposition to Plato's metaphysics is explicit; it is the central underlying theme in all he wrote. Kazantzakis, Prevelakis has already told us, became clear about the great themes which occupied his entire life by studying Nietzsche. One of those themes, the rejection of Platonic metaphysics, was so fully assimilated by Kazantzakis that it never appears explicitly in his work. It is present throughout his writing but always in a transfigured form.

To focus upon the opposition to Plato's metaphysics in Nietzsche we can look at three texts that show the history of Nietzsche's attitude. In *The Birth of Tragedy* we find the most elaborate presentation of the beginning of Nietzsche's meditations. He begins, I must say, somewhat confusedly. On the one hand, the general approach to tragedy taken there, using the two artistic deities of the Greeks, seems to be quite consistent with Plato. Further, the connection of Apollo and Dionysus to the psychological states of dreams and intoxication and then to the worlds of representation and will in Schopenhauer emphasize the apparent dualism of Nietzsche's argument. I say *apparent* here because closer examination of *The Birth of Tragedy* shows its dualism to be, using the enigmatic term Nietzsche was so fond of, "mere appearance."

The argument of *The Birth of Tragedy* is that tragedy must be understood as being both Apollinian[8] and Dionysian and not merely as Apollinian as had been thought. More specifically, Nietzsche argues that tragedy is *equally* Dionysian and Apollinian, that the drama on the stage is the Apollinian embodiment of Dionysian insights. As such the tragic vision is a unified view of life and not the dualistic view of Plato or Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's break from Plato is further seen in his discussion of the death of tragedy at the hands of Euripides and Socrates. For Nietzsche the unification of the Apollinian and the Dionysian in tragedy is ultimately a radically ambiguous unity. Euripides, guided by Socrates, reacted to the ambiguity of earlier tragedy negatively. Sophocles and Aeschylus were wrong in portraying the suffering of the good person, according to Euripides, Socrates and Plato. In Euripidean tragedy, then, we find suffering as punishment for wrongdoing—justifiable punishment. Euripides' tragedies were, says Nietzsche, in their quite rational view of life neither Apollinian nor Dionysian.

A world where the good people are happy and the bad suffer would be a most desirable world in which to live; but Euripides, Socrates, Plato *and* Nietzsche knew that such is not the world in which we do live. In looking at a world in which the good often do suffer and the bad often don't Plato was lead, says Nietzsche, to conclude that if *this* world is not rational and good then there must be *another* that in fact is. This "argument" of Plato's is what Nietzsche later came to call the "mistake of 2000 years." In speaking of the need for a "re-birth" of tragic wisdom, the young Nietzsche was rejecting the dualistic metaphysics of Plato but was still unaware of the countless, all-pervasive forms Platonic thinking had taken in western thought. The complete break from Plato was not accomplished by Nietzsche until 1883 with the publication of *Also Sprach Zarathustra.*

Zarathustra opens with one of Nietzsche's most infamous ideas—the death of god. The idea is mentioned in the "Prologue" once, in the briefest of ways: as the text develops there are few further references, all equally brief. Only in *The Gay Science*, published in 1882, the year before *Zarathustra,* is there any development of the idea and even there primarily in one crucial aphorism, "The Madman." The circumstances here suggest that in speaking of the death of god Nietzsche was giving a name to a complex of ideas that had become fully clear to him. At the time Nietzsche seemed more concerned with developing the implications of his thought than in providing a map for others to follow. What became clear to Nietzsche was that the two thousand (or more) year-old belief in absolutes *could*, in fact *should*, be abandoned. The God that died was the world of Platonic ideas. Such ideas had, Nietzsche realized, lost their compelling nature and could now be seen as the nihilistic values they were. He did not present an argument proving that the Platonic absolutes did not exist—such a proof is not to be found in Nietzsche's entire *corpus.* What is often missed in discussing the absence of such a proof in Nietzsche is that there is no parallel proof in Plato demonstrating that the Platonic ideas/forms exist. In any event, Nietzsche in 1883 seemed fully satisfied with the clarity of his own thinking; others would have to discover the path of his thought on their own through studying his earlier books or wait till the final year of his writing.

One of the books written in 1889, *Twilight of the Idols*, contains the third part of the survey we are making of the history of Nietzsche's rejection of Plato's dualistic metaphysics. *Twilight* contains the aphorism "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable"—the most explicit rejection of Platonic metaphysics found in Nietzsche. In this aphorism Nietzsche traces the "History of an Error" from Plato to Christianity, Kant, positivism, and then to Zarathustra as the "end of the longest error." This overview of Nietzsche's writing career shows that an essential element of his thought from beginning to end was his rejection of Plato's dualistic metaphysics—the changes one observes are only of the form which this opposition took.

Let us turn now to see how the rejection of the dualistic metaphysics of Plato is presented in Kazantzakis. As stated earlier this rejection appears throughout Kazantzakis' writings yet it is never explicitly developed. As Kimon Friar, translator of *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, says,

> Like all poets, Kazantzakis is not so much a systematic philosopher as one who, reaching out the tentacles of his mind and spirit, and grasping whatever might bring him nourishment, sucks up all into the third inner eye of vision peculiar to himself alone, and moves the reader with an imaginative view of life so intense as to be, in truth, a new apprehension.[9]

The most important form Kazantzakis' peculiar vision took is precisely his *Odyssey*. We shall look there for his new apprehension of Plato—an apprehension guided by Nietzsche.

Kazantzakis begins his Odyssey boldly, as a sequel, with the word 'And,' "And when in his wide courtyard Odysseus had cut down/the insolent youths. . ." (I, 1-2) Much of the Homeric Odysseus continues in Kazantzakis' vision, far more than the events surrounding Odysseus' return to Ithaca. Odysseus is home only a very short time when he is once again ready to sail off. He remains there only long enough to see Telemachus married, to build a new boat and to find five companions ready for new adventures.

They set sail without any destination consciously in mind but soon Odysseus realizes that he must first go see Menelaus and, of course, Helen. On getting to Sparta, Odysseus further realizes that he hopes to talk Helen into going off with them. He finds Menelaus has become a landlord, a shepherd, "But at his side his wealthy friend weighed all things well, /and in his anxious landlord's eyes could only see / in the whole world but gain and grain, what's yours, what's mine." (IV, 157-9) Disgusted, Odysseus decides to leave and finds Helen also quite willing to leave, saying, " ' . . . life can create with him nor fruit nor flower now.' " (IV, 988)

Menelaus hosts a farewell party for Odysseus—not knowing that Helen is leaving too. It is during this party that we can see one version of Kazantzakis' rejection of Platonic metaphysics. The context is borrowed from Nietzsche's discussion of the death of God. During the party Menelaus decides he must give Odysseus his most valuable prize—a small statue of Zeus that Leda had given him —" '. . . that the dread god might guard [him].' " (IV, 1021) (Kazantzakis might oppose

Plato's metaphysics, but he shows no lack of appreciation of the irony that Plato so enjoyed.) On being given the statue Odysseus calls on Zeus, "pure patron of great friendship," to punish him if he ever lets Menelaus, "slip into Lethe's well." (IV, 1030-31) Zeus responds, but to Odysseus alone,

> 'Ah, cunning sly, perifidious fox, have you no shame?
> If I should rise to tell all I know of you,
> mocker of gods, the stones of earth would rise to stone you!'
> The treacherous man scowled angrily and shouted back:
> 'Sit on your eggs, you deathless scarecrow; don't get smart!
> If I shoud rise and to the quacking mob disclose
> all that I know of *you*, O fool, you're a lost wretch!
> 'Swallow your tongue, dear friend, hold our secret fast;
> don't let the fools get wind of us, keep all your wits!'
>
> (IV, 1034-43)

Zeus asks Odysseus to hold *their* secret fast—that the gods are nothing but human creations. This secret is the basis of the "solution" offered by the Platonic—Christian tradition to those who would otherwise "brood over" human existence.

During the night after the farewell party Odysseus has another encounter with Zeus, and again we find that the gods no longer have their former status.

> but the uncompassionate fisher hooked a mammoth shark:
> deep in the dead of night, before the crack of dawn,
> the fearful patron of pure friendship, Zeus, came down
> and stood with flashing flame before the archer's bed.
> He foamed with fury at the lips, his thunderbolts
> twisted and turned like scorpions in his monstrous hands,
> but the archer yelled: 'Unhappy creature of our hearts,
> I pity your sad doom and harmless thunderbolts.
> Should I but bend or move a little, or open my eyes,
> poor orphaned child born of our fear, you'd fade in air!'
>
> (IV, 1254-63)

One could well argue here that in translating Nietzsche's claim, "It was suffering and incapacity that created all afterworlds."[10] Kazantzakis also became more able to see clearly his own ideas about gods and "afterworlds."

We need not survey all the passages where Kazantzakis speaks of ideals or gods being the product of the human imagination alone—but we must examine two more. After sailing on to Crete Odysseus and friends soon become involved in the overthrowing of the decadent King Idomeneus at Knossos. Once this is completed they sail on, leaving Helen behind to have children by a "blond gardener," a barbarian from the North. They sail on to Egypt and then down the Nile to its source. In the middle of Africa they encounter a tribe of natives whose village is being devastated by a plague. Odysseus and friends are in dire need of food so they carve a headless god out of a block of wood. Orpheus, their flute-playing companion is sent to the village with the idol, told to fall into a trance and then when recovered tell the villagers that this god will overcome their problems if they will give him food in exchange. When the blind of the village begin seeing again, and the lame walking, Orpheus begins to worship the god he had helped create. Odysseus comments,

> 'All of us, bone and soul, all push on toward our ruin.
> To meet your doom by woman's kisses, wine, or sword
> is not a heavy shame and suits the worthy man,
> but to hack out a log and shape a rotten belly
> and then, O nitwit, to forget without much cause
> and worship your hand's plaything as a god indeed— . . .
> Alas, you stumbled, piper, and the sentry saw you!'
>
> (XIII, 895-900, 912)

Orpheus, it seems, was quite capable of embracing at least some facts of life in what Auerbach calls an "ecstasy of submission."

The most fascinating form in which Kazantzakis opposes the idealism of Plato's dualistic metaphysics comes when Odysseus and his few remaining companions reach the source of the Nile. Odysseus decides that now he must build "God's city," his ideal city. Curiously, his ideal city resembles Plato's on several, essential levels. First we learn that as in Plato's ideal city, Odysseus' city will have three classes of people—workers, warriors and rulers.

> 'Ah, how the great thoughts of a full man spread their roots
> upon the ground and then take shape with sticks and stones.'
> The lone man murmured as he watched his craftsmen toil.
> He judged each soul in action, marked deep in his brain
> each strength, each bodily movement, and each grace of mind;
> he'd picked already what great workers were most firm
> with their sharp tools of trade for earth, or sea, or air,
> yet placed above them the sharp-spoken and cruel lancers
> who held the keys of manliness, the seal of honor,
> but highest, the mind battlers, the full fruit of strife.
>
> (XV, 535-44)

Next we learn that justice in the individual and in the state are considered analogues—that justice is primarily hindered by the intemperate desires of individual citizens in society.

> The town formed like a body in the archer's mind;
> all rushed to the same goal obediently and worked
> toward their full-rigged, invisible monarch in their hearts.
> At night, when all cooked by the fire's submissive flames,
> the master-craftsman counseled his hard workers well:
> 'God wants no separate hearths or double-bolted doors;
> who in his croft corrals his children, wife and beasts
> walls up all virtues, makes them idle, chokes his god,
> till the whole world's confined within his private gate.
>
> (XV, 545-54)

The purpose here is not to document all the ways in which Odysseus models his city upon the ideal of Plato; noting the general nature of such parallels suffices.

On completion of this ideal city, on the day of inaugural celebrations Kazantzakis presents his final transition. In the midst of great celebration the city is destroyed by an earthquake, an earthquake that swallows not only Odysseus' city but also his closest companion. It seems to me that here we have the fundamental event, for Odysseus, surely, but more importantly for Kazantzakis. In *Zorba the Greek* Kazantzakis is told by Zorba that he has everything except one thing—madness; one needs a little madness, says Zorba, or else one never dares to cut the rope and be free. That rope is, perhaps fundamentally, the belief in, the need for the hope that sustains the incredible power of the human quest as conceived by Plato. Odysseus knew the difficulty of cutting that rope—and the necessity.

> for the lone man turned slowly . . .
> as his mind marched beyond all sorrow, joy, or love
> —desolate, alone, without a god—and followed there
> deep secret cries that passed beyond even hope or freedom.
> . . .
> Untamed Odysseus then raised his head high and hung
> above the chasm and sank into the terror of thought.
>
> (XVI, 403-413)

Odysseus realized, finally, that his desire to build "God's city" was the product of his rebellion against this world with all its decadence—particularly, perhaps, that of his old friend Agamemnon. This ideal city was embraced by Odysseus as a solution to the "facts of existence" he had seen; it was a Platonic ideal, a final goal to be reached, the completion of the quest. He made, however, one further step, he "cut the rope" as Zorba would say. He realized that all such Platonic quests are unfaithful to the earth. Odysseus saw that like Orpheus, the piper, he had almost "stumbled." "By God, I made you with such craft, such cunning wiles/that for a time, like Orpheus, I was almost fooled!" (XVI, 1089-90)

One is reminded here, of course, of a passasge from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Part One.

> Thus I too once cast my delusion beyond man, like all the afterworldly. Beyond man indeed?
> Alas, my brothers, this god whom I created was man-made and madness, like all gods! Man he was, and only a poor specimen of man and ego: out of my own ashes and fire this ghost came to me, and, verily, it did not come to me from beyond. What happened, my brothers? I carried my own ashes to the mountains; I invented a brighter flame for myself. And behold, then this ghost *fled* from me.[11]

Like Zarathustra, Odysseus carried his own ashes to the mountain and invented a brighter flame for himself.

Our task from this point is to explore the "brighter flames" invented by Zarathustra and Odysseus. Such a step takes us to the second set of ideas, essential ideas shared by Nietzsche and Kazantzakis. We have seen thus far that like Nietzsche, Kazantzakis rejects the dualistic metaphysics of Plato. We must, however, be most cautious in how we interpret this rejection. One way to approach the criticisms of Nietzsche and Kazantzakis is to see that like Plato they are concerned with the human quest—all three, we might say, begin their thinking by turning to Homer. Plato, as we know from the *Republic*, had some fundamental problems with the Homeric view of things—many of these are stated explicitly. Though its source in Homer is not explicit, the presentation of the philosopher's quest in the "Allegory of the Cave" must indeed be considered in its similarities to and differences from Homer—at least, we must here consider such similarities and differences as seen by Kazantzakis and Nietzsche.

We are getting closer to seeing precisely the problems Nietzsche and Kazantzakis have with Plato when we emphasize that for Plato the philosophical quest can be completed, absolute knowledge can be attained. Kazantzakis' Odysseus came quite close to this belief—but the destruction of his city prevented his "being fooled." But just how was Odysseus almost fooled? He almost forgot that his "god" was something he himself had crafted. He had crafted his god out of his own "brooding over the facts of existence," out of his rejection of those facts and the subsequent embracing of his ideal vision in an "ecstasy of submission." For Nietzsche the same is true of the ideal world of Plato, of all idealists.

> It was suffering and incapacity that created all afterworlds—this and that brief madness of bliss which is experienced only by those who suffer most deeply.

> Weariness that wants to reach the ultimate with one leap, with one fatal leap, a poor ignorant weariness that does not want to want anymore: this created all gods and afterworlds.
>
> Believe me my brothers: it was the body that despaired of the body and touched the ultimate walls with the fingers of a deluded spirit. Believe me, my brothers: it was the body that despaired of the earth and heard the belly of being speak to it. It wanted to crash through these ultimate walls with its head, and not only with its head—over there to "that world." But "that world" is well concealed from humans—that dehumanized inhuman world which is a heavenly nothing; and the belly of being does not speak to humans at all, except as a human.[12]

It is the *body*, says Zarathustra, that out of despair with itself creates gods and afterworlds. The *body* despairs of the earth, is unfaithful to the earth, rebels against the earth.

Odysseus also knows about the body despairing of the body, of the earth. He saw it happen in Orpheus who, in being sent to obtain food by giving the natives a "god" Orpheus had helped carve, ended up being the chief priest in the worship of this new god. Much more important, however, is the fact that Odysseus saw this same "body despairing of the body" in himself. His desire to create "god's city" cannot be separated from his own rebellion against what he had seen on the earth. Odysseus could not accept Agamemnon's having become a landlord whose central concern was to invent happiness by taking care of his body. But such happiness involves, more than anything else, the avoidance of suffering. Agamemnon had become the "last man" of Zarathustra. In despairing of the decadence he saw throughout his travels Odysseus found himself wanting to reach that other world.

Odysseus, however, like Zarathustra, did not stumble; he realized the truth of Zarathustra's claim, "the belly of being (Bauch des Seins) does not speak to humans at all, except as a human." Being speaks to us as a human, humanly—it speaks through the body, to the body. The new flame that Odysseus invents for himself is rooted in his overcoming his despair of the body, not by escaping from the body to the ideal Platonic world, but rather by a return to a faithfulness to the body and to the earth. The path Odysseus followed out of the "terror of thought" into which he had sunk was the return to being faithful, first, to his own body.

> he suddenly felt a tender love for his maligned,
> most faithful body, raised his hands and blessed it wholly
> beginning with its black and much-experienced eyes:
> O eyes, sheer magic crystals, the mind's fiery tears,
> O sun-washed flowers of the soil's most high desire,
> . . .
> My dear unslaked, unsated eyes, may you be blessed!
> And you, shells of a secret beach, cast on the sands

> of our resounding world by mystic swirling storms,
> O ears, O serpent spirals . . . may you be blessed!
> And you, O flowering wound, carnation-curled and crisp,
> O crimson lips that kissed . . . all the world full on the mouth.
> . . .
> And you, my rabbit, sniffing at the ghostly air
> . . .
> Neither the ears nor eyes, nor even the full lips,
> can pierce the heart of mystery with such nakedness.
> . . .
> Blind mother, with your fingertips' unnumbered eyes
> . . .
> What do I want with the mind's hollow satisfactions,
> why should I seek gods in the clouds . . .
> Mother, you know I love you, for I'm not pure soul
> but filled with sucking pores like you, with flesh like you.
> My dear unslaked, unsated touch, may you be blessed!
>
> (XVI, 486-562)

Auerbach claims that in Homeric poems delight in physical existence is everything, that the aim of the poems is to make such delight perceptible. We can see here, then, another way in which Kazantzakis' Odysseus is indeed the descendant of Homer's.

I have so far dealt with only one part, albeit the essential one, of faithfulness to the earth. At this point it is not clear how Odysseus' blessing his body is any different from Menelaus' having become a landlord. We must look further to see in what way Odysseus has indeed invented a brighter new flame for himself. We find another crucial aspect of Odysseus' vision in one of his reflections that actually occurs before the destruction of his city. From what has been seen so far it is clear that Odysseus' city was to be quite like the ideal city of Plato. Odysseus was not however, satisfied with such a plan; he was looking for a single "law" that might truly be the foundation for his city. One day he saw a cloud of termites mating in the air. As soon as the males had performed their duties they fell to the earth dead and were quickly devoured by birds, snakes, gold-beetles and scorpions (XV, 577-96). In watching, Odysseus suddenly realized the "law" he was seeking. "Whatever blind Worm-Mother Earth does with no brains/we should accept as just, with our whole mind, wide-eyed;/if you would rule the world, model yourself on God.' " (XV, 600-02).

If we were to properly understand Odysseus' insight here we must realize that its roots are to be found in Heraclitus. Following Heraclitus, Odysseus combines two ideas—existence is conceived by both, fundamentally, as flux, as becoming, and in the constant changing of this world there is justice. Heraclitus uses fire as the most significant symbol to represent change. "This universe, which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or man, but it has always been, is, and will be—an ever-living fire, kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures."[13] In our context the most important aspect of change is the "fire going out." In the Platonic-Christian view the passing away of things is interpreted, generally, in moral terms. This moral interpretation of passing away is, further, "negative"—that which passes away *deserves* to pass away. Such an interpretation is derived of course from the belief in a separate world where change does not occur. The truly good, says Plato, does not change; if it did change, it could only be from perfection to imperfection. Change itself, then, is an indication of imperfection, even if the change involves improvement. Once again, to reach the state of changelessness one has to reach that "other world."

Heraclitus and Odysseus (and Nietzsche) have a different view of change. They all contemplate and participate in a world that is wholly a world of becoming. They see justice in this world not because some things are better than others in any ultimate sense but rather because *everything* changes. "It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife."[14] Instead of seeing punishment in change one should rather see, though admittedly with greater difficulty, harmony. "People do not understand how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself. There is harmony in the bending back, as in the case of the bow and the lyre."[15] This "bending back" is what Odysseus saw in the actions of blind Worm-Mother Earth.

In light of this attitude towards change, towards life itself we can now see that Odysseus in his faithfulness to the earth is indeed far removed from Menelaus the landlord. Menelaus, as Nietzsche's last men, does not see harmony or justice in the "bending back." In fact their invention of happiness is fundamentally avoiding all strife. They too believe that the best life is the one of the least amount of change, of strife. They see their life as even a victory over the idealistic Platonists who do accept one kind of struggle—the struggle to get to the "other world." In contrast to these last men who are the most unfaithful to the earth Odysseus realizes, perhaps only completely after his city has been destroyed, that life is strife, "bending back." The greatest virtue on earth is not to become free/ but to seek freedom in a ruthless, sleepless strife.' " (XV, 1171-2). The Homeric Odysseus was striving to get home to Ithaca, Kazantzakis's left again for further journeys. After the destruction of his city he says to himself, " 'My soul, your voyages have been your native land!' ' (XVI, 959).

In order to complete our discussion we need, finally, to look at the positive content of the brighter flame of Odysseus. So far we have only examined what his vision is not. After the destruction of his city Odysseus continues his travels southward. Now he is no longer accompanied, no longer the "shepherd and dog of a herd." His travels end at the South Pole where Odysseus dies.

In many ways these final adventures are simply the completion of the life of one who has "a chart of winds spread through [his] heart." (XIX, 1428). A closer look, however, dicloses that Odysseus comes to understand his quest more fully than when he left Ithaca the second time. An essential clue to the deeper understanding of Odysseus is provided in a passage from Heraclitus already examined. Heraclitus finds harmony in the bending back of the lyre; that is, he finds harmony through music, through an aesthetic perspective. This privilege of considering existence aesthetically is, of course, one of the strongest reasons that Nietzsche was so greatly influenced by Heraclitus. From the observations made along the path we have followed so far, it ought not to be surprising to find that Kazantzakis' Odysseus also comes to look at the world "aesthetically."

It is, of course, true that Odysseus pays attention to art from the very beginning. One of his five companions is Orpheus, the piper. What we are concerned with, here, is the development of Odysseus' attitude towards art. While Odysseus and friends are travelling south along the Nile they stop at Thebes. Odysseus becomes involved in a people's rebellion, a Marxist rebellion against the Pharaoh. The young Pharaoh speaks of art to his jesters,

> "Fools, art is a heavy task, more heavy than gold crowns;
> . . .
> I'd give, believe me, a whole land for one good song,
> for I know well that only words, that words alone,
> like the high mountains, have no fear of age or death."
> . . .
> Meanwhile the archer by the doorway did not move,
> but his mind raced, and the whole world spun within his head;
> perhaps this breathless, fragile seed of kings was right,
> perhaps upon this brainless earth, this mad goldfinch,
> a song may stand more firm in time than brain or bronze.
>
> (XX, 688-701)

At this point Odysseus is only made to pause and think of art. Clearly he accepts art as having value, but not enough. In fact, what Odysseus values in art at this point seems to be immortality. Stated otherwise, here Odysseus seems to still be looking at the "good" Platonically, the good is that which does not change.

Much later, when Odysseus is travelling alone, he abandons his belief in ideal worlds, and turns again to art, but now, to his own making of art. " 'No master god exists, no virtue, no just law,/no punishment in Hades and no reward in Heaven!' " proclaims Odysseus, the "herald of a sacred, proud new earth." (XVI 1241-50) Having become free from the ideal world of Plato Odysseus begins to dance. "Through his free heart there blew a chaste immaculate wind;/he stepped on the high peaks of both despair and strength/and on his mind's rim broke in dance like a wild eagle." (XVI, 1270-2) Zarathustra came to precisely this conclusion after he has given up despising the body and seeking "afterworlds."

> I would believe only in a god who could dance. And when I saw my devil I found him serious, thorough, profound, and solemn: it was the spirit of gravity—through him all things fall.
>
> Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come let us kill the spirit of gravity!
>
> I have learned to walk: ever since, I let myself run. I have learned to fly: ever since I do not want to be pushed before moving along.
>
> Now I am light (leicht), now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god dances through me.[16]

As Odysseus continues to travel, alone, he encounters numerous bards singing in small villages. He listens to them, realizing that only they seem to share his vision. In one village he hears a bard singing of a cock-pheasant that sang with human speech to a Prince Elias, "All flow on toward the sea and drown in that dark stream,/great towns and all their souls submerge, all women rot,/all gold crowns rot, and even gods rot like the trees;/don't cling to them, O Prince, they fade like whirling smoke,/the only deathless flame is man's own gallant song!" (XIX, 1224-28) There is an essential difference between this bard's comments upon the song and those of the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh was willing to give up a whole land for one good song because, like mountains, *words* have no fear of age or death. The Pharaoh wants immortality through a song that will be remembered by later generations. The bard tells us not to cling to any expectation of permanence—everything rots, even gods. For this bard only the song is deathless, but deathless as the flame is deathless. This bard, then, looks at the deathless as does Heraclitus, "It is in changing that things find repose."[17] To put this insight in other terms, what Odyssesus and the bard know is that it is not *a* song that is deathless, but *singing* that is deathless.

The realization that singing is the most important deathless thing in this world is the core of the collection of ideas that connect Nietzsche and Kazantzakis with Homer and Heraclitus. It is, further, the basis upon which Nietzsche and Kazantzakis oppose the Platonic-Christian tradition. To see more clearly why, more narrowly, Kazantzakis was so drawn to Nietzsche we must add one final thought. While both Nietzsche and Kazantzakis see "singing" as the highest human activity and celebrate all forms of singing, they also are most interested in one kind of singing. We hear about this singing from another of the bards Odysseus listened to one day. After the bard had finished singing and the crowd had gone Odysseus speaks to him as a "brother." The bard, however, is wholly satisfied with his own life of solitude and singing. " 'What do I care about your life, ascetic archer?/ What do I care what's false or true, what's yours, what's mine?/It may well be, you fool, I've sung my own pain only!/. . . Take your own road ascetic, I've no need of you.' " (XIX, 1421-31) Odysseus felt as close to this bard as to anyone he had met since leaving Ithaca again. It is neither simply that the bard was free, nor that the bard prefers solitude, nor that the bard sang that Odysseus felt him to be a friend; rather, it was because the bard sang his own sufferings. The ability to sing one's own sufferings was, of course, what made Greek tragedy the highest form of art for Nietzsche. Singing one's own sufferings is not only the highest form of art; it is the highest affirmation of life. Singing one's sufferings is the alternative Nietzsche and Kazantzakis see to the Platonic brooding over and rebelling against the basic facts of existence.

Odysseus, in getting ready to die, proclaims, " 'The womb of life is fire, and fire the last tomb,/and there between two lofty flames we dance and weep;' "/(XXIII, 935-6) Kazantzakis concludes the Prologue to his poem, "Ahoy, cast wretched sorrow out, prick up your ears—/I sing the sufferings and the torments of renowned Odysseus!"

NOTES

1. I would like to express my appreciation to the Wright State University College of Liberal Arts for the release from teaching duties which provided time for the work appearing in this paper. I would also like to thank the Research Council of Wright State University for financial support.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume I: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. D.F. Krell, (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 3.
3. Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. W. R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 13-14.
4. Auerbach, p. 14.
5. In saying that the appearance of Christ in human form is "easy to understand," I am ignoring the argument by Kierkegaard that the divine entering history is the greatest of paradoxes. One could gain access to the radical alternative to the Platonic tradition I am identifying in Heraclitus, Homer, Nietzsche and Kazantzakis by following Kierkegaard.
6. Pandelis Prevelakis, *Nikos Kazantzakis And His Odyssey*, trans. P. Sherrard (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), pp. 15-16.
7. Peter Bien, Andreas Poulakidas, Morton Leavitt and Brian McDonough, among others.
8. I choose to use "Apollinian" rather than "Apollonian" as doe Kaufmann, Morgan, Brinton; Nietzsche used *Apollinisch*.

9. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, trans. K. Friar, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), pp. XVII—XVIII. (Subsequent references to Kazantzakis' poem will be included parenthetically in the text; Roman numerals are references to specific Books of the poem, Arabic, *line* references.)
10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. W. Kaufmann, (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 143.
11. Nietzsche, p. 143.
12. Nietzsche, pp. 143-44.
13. Philip Wheelwright, *Heraclitus* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 37.
14. *Heraclitus*, p. 29.
15. *Heraclitus*, p. 102.
16. Nietzsche, p. 153.
17. *Heraclitus*, p. 29.