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Η “Ανάβαση” του Καζαντζάκη

The development of Nikos Kazantzakis’ philosophical themes by comparison of his early and late literary work

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Abstract

Ο Νίκος Καζαντζάκης είναι ένας από τους πιο διεθνώς αναγνωρισμένους Έλληνες συγγραφείς του 20ού αιώνα, γνωστός για την έντονη φιλοσοφική του έμπνευση. Ωστόσο, λίγα έχουν γραφτεί για το πώς αναπτύχθηκαν τα φιλοσοφικά του θέματα κατά τη διάρκεια των τριών δεκαετιών που έγραφε και δημοσίευε.

Σε αυτή τη διατριβή, ορίζω τέσσερα βασικά φιλοσοφικά θέματα, τα οποία ισχυρίζομαι ότι επανεμφανίζονται σε το λογοτεχνικό του έργο. Ανιχνεύω τα θέματα, χρησιμοποιώντας ως βάση την πρώτη του μεγάλη δημοσίευση, την *Ασκητική* (1927/1928), η οποία είναι ένα θεωρητικό και φιλοσοφικό μανιφέστο. Τα τέσσερα θέματα που εντοπίζω είναι:

- η Άβυσσος: μια Νιτσεική άποψη που ισχυρίζεται ότι ο κόσμος είναι σκληρός και στερείται νοήματος
- η Ανάβαση: μια Μπερξονική αντίληψη ως προς το να αντιστέκεσαι στην άβυσσο και να συνεχίζεις να προσπαθείς να καθορίσεις το πεπρωμένο
- ο Μονισμός: μια Μπερξονική αντίληψη για την ενότητα του κόσμου, η οποία είναι η απόλυτη αλήθεια, αυτό που αποκαλεί Θεό
- η “Ράτσα”: η ιδέα ότι η καταγωγή παίζει ζωτικό ρόλο τόσο στην κληρονομικότητα του αγώνα της ανάβασης όσο και ως ένας τρόπος συλλογικής αντίστασης στην άβυσσο

Στην *Ασκητική* ο Καζαντζάκης πλαισιώνει τα φιλοσοφικά του θέματα σε μια σκοτεινή και βάνουση ατμόσφαιρα, με σωματικές, πολεμικές, φυσιοκρατικές και μεσσιανικές έννοιες. Το βιβλίο στερείται στοχασμού, δεν θέτει ερωτήματα, θέτει κανόνες και εντολές που ο δήμος οφείλει να ακολουθεί.

Ισχυρίζομαι ότι αυτό το σκητικό αντηχεί τις δύσκολες εποχές των αρχών του 20ού αιώνα που έζησε ο Καζαντζάκης, οι οποίες όμως εκτός από αγώνες περιείχαν και νέες ιδέες και αντιλήψεις για την ανθρωπότητα και την κοινωνία, μια εποχή για την οποία η *Ασκητική* προσπαθεί να αποτελέσει απάντηση.

Περίπου τρεις δεκαετίες αργότερα, η *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (1961) είναι η βιογραφική περιγραφή της δικής του *Ανάβασης*, η πρακτική εφαρμογή της φιλοσοφίας του. Τα θέματα της *Ασκητικής* μπορούν να εντοπιστούν ξανά, συμπεριλαμβανομένων ορισμένων υφολογικών

και λεξιλογικών στοιχείων. Ωστόσο, η φιλοσοφία του περιγράφεται με πιο προσωπικό και ταπεινό τρόπο και εστιάζει πολύ περισσότερο στην *Ανάβαση* παρά στην Άβυσσο. Η συλλογική έννοια μετατρέπεται σε έναν πολιτισμικό ουμανισμό που δείχνει ότι ορισμένοι πολιτισμοί στη διάρκεια της ιστορίας έχουν διανύσει μεγαλύτερο δρόμο στην *Ανάβαση* από άλλους. Ωστόσο, θα μπορούσε κανείς να ισχυριστεί ότι η φιλοσοφία του γίνεται καθαρά ατομικιστική, κάτι που αντικατοπτρίζεται και στη δική του ζωή, όπως την περιγράφει στο βιβλίο. Ισχυρίζομαι ότι αυτή η εξέλιξη είναι αποτέλεσμα των άθλιων καταστάσεων του 20ού αιώνα και της απογοήτευσής του από τα κοινωνικά εγχειρήματα της εποχής του, όπως ο κομμουνισμός και το ελληνικό κράτος, αλλά είναι επίσης σύμφωνη με την τάση προς τον μεταμοντερνισμό και την παραμέληση των απόλυτων αληθειών.

Η ανάπτυξη της φιλοσοφίας του Καζαντζάκη είναι επομένως μια εξέλιξη από ένα κοινωνικό ιδανικό που ιδανικά πρόκειται να εκδηλωθεί μέσω της κοινωνίας, σε μια ατομικιστική φιλοσοφία που επικεντρώνεται στην *Ανάβαση* του ατόμου, μια εξέλιξη που εξηγείται από προσωπικά και ιστορικά γεγονότα.

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1 Introduction

Nikos Kazantzakis early on developed an original philosophy, based on a core set of recurring themes which are present throughout his work. Considering the stature of Nikos Kazantzakis within the literary world, it is somewhat surprising that little attention has been paid to the development of his philosophic themes throughout the three decades in which he wrote and published. His books are also rarely placed within their historical context within Greek literature¹. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to pinpoint the development of Kazantzakis' philosophy and to show how this process can be understood in its historical context.

1.1 Theory

Kazantzakis' philosophy evolves around a corpus of ideas which are already present in his early philosophical work *Ασκητική* (1927, 1928). This corpus can be broken down into the concepts of *abyss*, a pessimistic worldview, the *ascent*, self-overcoming and transcending the physical, a *monistic* worldview, that everything in the world shares a common essence, and *heritage* as a container both for collectivistic movements but also a sense of duty towards one's ancestry. These, I argue, form the Archimedean point of Kazantzakis' philosophy, the perfect God's-eye viewpoint from which he is able to study the world and draw inspiration for his work². These themes are originally defined in his philosophical work *Ασκητική* and can be retraced in the later biographical *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (1961), thus arguably presenting themselves as ideal mediators for observing the development of Kazantzakian thought. This development can then be set into context with biographical, social and historical events during that period.

The majority of research on Nikos Kazantzakis tends to limit itself to a few of his works, often those with international prestige, most notably *Βίος και πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά* (1946). *Ασκητική* has also received comparatively much attention and has been analyzed as a basis for Kazantzakian thought³. The available material also provides us with valuable perspectives on the philosophic influences of Kazantzakis, most prominently Friedrich

¹ Bien, 1971, p. 118

² An Archimedean point is a hypothetical vantage point from which one can perfectly observe one's subject or from which one can reason

³ For example Poulakidas 1971 & 1975 or Nowakowski 2025

Nietzsche and Henri Bergson⁴. However, Kazantzakis' last literary work and intellectual biography, *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (1961 posthum), is surprisingly rarely addressed in academic research, even though it contains the author's very own interpretation of his intellectual journey⁵.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this paper is hence to pinpoint the philosophical thematic development between the first definition of his philosophy in *Ασκητική* and his reflections upon his own philosophy, decades later in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, and to connect this development to historical, social and biographical events.

I argue that Kazantzakis' philosophical themes evolve from an early tragic-heroic metaphysics in *Ασκητική*, aimed at the masses, to a reflective and personal humanism in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, emphasizing human agency and reason, and that this shift mirrors biographical, historical and social events of the 1920–1950s⁶.

The questions to be answered are:

- What are the main philosophical themes in Kazantzakis' *Ασκητική* (1928)
- What developments can be found when comparing *Ασκητική* to *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (1961)
- In what ways do these developments coincide with events in the author's biography and the social and historical developments of the time

1.2 Method and Material

A close and contextual reading of the two selected works will sketch out the central philosophically inspired themes. *Ασκητική* lyrically describes Kazantzakis' philosophical thoughts at a relatively young age. I will use the second edition from 1928, as it arguably contains his most refined philosophical standpoints at that time, after Kazantzakis himself went through a de-politicization of his philosophical thought shortly after the first publication⁷. *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* in turn provides selected biographical insights by an aged

⁴ For example Poulakidas 1971 & 1975 or Bien 1965 & 1971

⁵ *Ο Ανήφορος*, a post-war novel with autobiographical elements was published in 2022 and is the latest of Kazantzakis' posthum publications. Originally, Kazantzakis intended to add the entire *Ασκητική* at the end of the book: <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/gr/muthistorima/the-ascent-380>

⁶ Hartman, p. 237

⁷ Nowakowski, p. 332, 337, 352

Kazantzakis who reflects on his intellectual journey. Focus will be placed on passages that explicitly concern his philosophical core themes. The thematic content, but also an analysis of the writing style, will be part of the close reading, including a manual count of central recurring words.

Though this is not a philosophical but literary thesis, it is plausible that the mentioned core concepts need to be defined carefully. *Ασκητική* has already been condensed philosophically in previous research which can be used as a basis, literature on Kazantzakis' philosophical heritage will be used to develop upon these themes⁸. The apparent lack of analysis of *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* will require that the previously sketched out themes are manually retraced and then compared. The development sought may as well be one of discourse, i.e. an explicit intellectual or philosophical shift, or a literary shift, one of voice and emphasis. Drawing upon conceptual genealogy, I hold that systems of thought are the product of contingent turns of history and that we ought to look at how events in history cause the transition from one way of thinking to another⁹. The traced development in Kazantzakis can thus not be explained without taking into consideration the world in which the author acts¹⁰. I will thus reflect his philosophy and its development against a biographical, political and social background.

It is at this point vital to emphasize that the research questions draw a demarcation line between my theme of Kazantzakis' intellectual development from *Ασκητική* to *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* on one side, and on the other side the question of how his biography is reflected in his work overall¹¹. Indeed, I will present a short biography of Nikos Kazantzakis and briefly show how it relates to his philosophy, but this is merely done to the extent to which it establishes a deepening of my findings and does not claim to exhaust the biographical dimension of his work. This thesis is hence not a work of biographical nature, we are first and foremost concerned with the development of ideas, which in turn find explanations in lived experience. This differentiation is also reflective of the chosen material, as *Ασκητική* arguably is a philosophical work or manifest while *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* is explicitly not a typical

⁸ For example Poulakidas 1971 & 1975, Nowakowski 2025, Bien 1965 & 1971

⁹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/#ArchGene>

¹⁰ Μάλαμας, 2025, p 16

¹¹ Such a question is addressed by Καρύδας, Μάλαμας Α. - *Φιλοσοφικές και φιλολογικές διαστάσεις της δοκιμιακής γραφής του Νίκου Καζαντζάκη* - Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, Φιλοσοφική Σχολή, Τμήμα Φιλοσοφίας και Παιδαγωγικής 2025 URL: <https://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/367235>

work of biography, but of an intellectual biography or legacy. I thus do not claim to reflect on the life of Kazantzakis', but on his thought at a certain point in time.

2 Prologue

In the following a short biography of Nikos Kazantzakis and a historical and philosophical background of *Ασκητική* are provided, before moving on to the book itself.

As Φλωκατούλας notes, Nikos Kazantzakis' emotional and ideological worldview was profoundly shaped by turbulent social and historical forces of his era, early on marked by revolutions, exile, and the collapse of the Ottoman authority¹². He was born February 18th 1883 in Megalo Kastro near Heraklion, the capital of Ottoman-ruled Crete¹³. His father Michalis Kazantzakis (1856-1932) was a strict, authoritarian figure *dedicated to an uncompromising code of ethics, who expected his son to honour his family traditions and Cretan descent*¹⁴. In *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* Kazantzakis describes how he early on was influenced by the intertwining ideas of duty and heritage, values often violently imposed by his father. In a letter to his son on Naxos, Michalis Kazantzakis writes:

«Εγώ πολεμώ τον Τούρκο, κάνω το χρέος μου· πολέμα κι εσύ, βάστα μη σου σηκώσει το μυαλό ο Φράγκος, σκύλος είναι κι αυτός σαν τον Τούρκο· μην ξεχνάς πως είσαι Κρητικός και πως το μυαλό σου δεν είναι δικό σου, είναι της Κρήτης, ακόνιζέ το όσο μπορείς, να βοηθήσεις κι εσύ μια μέρα με το μυαλό σου την Κρήτη να λευτερωθεί [...]»¹⁵

His mother Maria Christodoulaki (1862-1932) formed the counterpart, described by Kazantzakis as a *saintly woman*¹⁶. As Φλωκατούλας suggests, Kazantzakis early on tried to make sense of and to harmonize these opposites as something sharing a common core¹⁷. Due to repeated attempts of rebellion on Crete, his family was forced to seek refuge in Piraeus in 1889 for six months. During the final Cretan rebellion in 1897, they fled to Naxos and remained there for around two years. In *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, Kazantzakis reflects on how these rebellions early on infused struggle into his worldview, while on Naxos he learned that struggle was not only Cretan, but a universal phenomenon:

¹² Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 7

¹³ <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work/megalonontas-185>

¹⁴ Ibid., Kazantzakis, 1982, p. 32; Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 28

¹⁵ Kazantzakis, 1982, p. 100

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35; Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 7

¹⁷ Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 27-31

Ο κόσμος είναι πιο μεγάλος από την Ελλάδα, ο πόνος του κόσμου είναι πιο μεγάλος από τον πόνο τον ειδικό μας, κι η λαχτάρα της λευτεριάς δεν είναι προνόμιο του Κρητικού μονάχα, είναι αγώνας αιώνιος του ανθρώπου. Δε χάθηκε η Κρήτη από το νου μου, μα αλάκερος ο κόσμος απλώθηκε μέσα μου, έγινε θεόρατη Κρήτη, που λογής λογής Τούρκοι την τυραννούν, μα όλο τινάζεται όρθια και ζητάει λευτεριά. Έτσι, μετατρέποντας σε Κρήτη αλάκερο τον κόσμο, μπόρεσα στα πρώτα χρόνια της εφηβικής μου ζωής να νιώσω τον αγώνα και τον πόνο του ανθρώπου.¹⁸

On Naxos Kazantzakis began his secondary education at the French Mercantile School of the Holy Cross where he learned both French and Italian and began to acquaint himself with European literature and western culture¹⁹. In 1899 the family returned permanently to Heraklion, with Kazantzakis completing secondary school in 1902. He was captivated by art while the scientific theories he learned about shook what he had taken as fundamental certainties²⁰. This violent loss of certainties and the challenge this poses to man would become a fundamental problem of his philosophy. Still in Crete, he and a group of friends founded the *Φιλική Εταιρεία* (the Friendly Society), named after the secret society behind the Greek independence movement, the aim of which was to create a better world²¹. Bettering the world by taking action will remain motivational to Kazantzakis. In *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* he describes the alienation and disappointment he sensed when he learned that years later he was the only former member of the *Φιλική Εταιρεία* who still held on to their former ideals²². Having studied law in Athens, Kazantzakis continued his studies at the Collège de France in Paris in 1907, attending lectures by philosopher Henri Bergson. Here he became closely acquainted with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, his dissertation being entitled *Ο Φρειδερίκος Νίτσε εν τη φιλοσοφία του δικαίου και της πολιτείας* (1909)²³. Following the October Revolution of 1917, Kazantzakis experienced a new era of ideas, inspiring his quest for a new philosophy for mankind²⁴. Committed to social change, he had various stints with the Greek government and worker's union²⁵. He would continue to write *Ασκητική* between 1922-1923 while in post-war Berlin and Vienna, where the economic collapse and the struggle of the people had a profound impact on him²⁶. Back in Greece, this period marked the peak of the Greek nationalist *Μεγάλη Ιδέα*²⁷. Greece's final attempt to regain presumably

¹⁸ Kazantzakis, 1982, p. 98

¹⁹ <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work/megalonontas-185>

²⁰ Ibid., Kazantzakis, 1982, p. 116-117

²¹ <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work/megalonontas-185>

²² Kazantzakis, 1982, p. 142

²³ <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work/studies-and-travels-186>

²⁴ <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/taksiduontas-rousia>

²⁵ Λαγού, 2025, p. 8

²⁶ Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 10

²⁷ Beaton, 2004, p. 67

historically Greek soil by force was followed by the Greek-Turkish war, the Asia Minor catastrophe and the population exchange of religious minorities, which made a deep impression on Kazantzakis²⁸. With Greece arriving in the industrial era, urbanization led to a third of the country's population soon living in large cities²⁹. Accordingly, the social, political and literary interest shifted towards new and more complex social relations³⁰. Meanwhile in Berlin and Vienna, Kazantzakis was systematically involved in working towards social revolution and attempted to find a communist-oriented journal³¹. Between 1925 and 1929 he spent time in Russia, particularly Moscow³². Here an early enthusiasm for Lenin and Communism turned into disillusionment in light of the actual results of the political movements of this epoch³³.

2.1 Philosophic influences

It is in front of this scenery that Kazantzakis published *Ασκητική* in 1927, times which saw new ideas for humanity being developed in the wake of the breakdown of the old-world order³⁴. It is also Kazantzakis' first major publication after his encounter with Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, on whose philosophies the book is based³⁵.

Nietzsche and The Tragic Worldview

It was hence during these uneasy and dynamic times that Kazantzakis developed his own model for mankind, with Friedrich Nietzsche at the center of this undertaking³⁶. Kazantzakis even translated Nietzsche's works *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* and *Thus spoke Zarathustra* into Greek³⁷. One of the major themes of these works is *the tragic worldview*³⁸. It entails that the world is cruel, in flux, has no meaning and no sympathy for humanity. Nietzsche argues that this is how pre-Socratic Greeks understood the world and it is from this pessimistic outlook that they developed a fruitful coping mechanism, an *amor fati*

²⁸ Meletsi, 2016, p. 229; Nowakowski, 2025, p. 335

²⁹ Antoniadis, 2022, p. 838-139

³⁰ Beaton, 2004, p. 99, 104, 107

³¹ <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work/stin-mesopolemiki-europi-188>

³² <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/taksiduontas-rousia>

³³ Nowakowski, 2025, p. 335

³⁴ Sörlin, 2004, p. 613

³⁵ Kazantzakis, 1982, p. 470; Nowakowski, 2025, p. 334

³⁶ Nowakowski, 2025, p. 246, 249; Levitt, 1977, p. 361

³⁷ Murray, 2022, p. 312

³⁸ Bien, 1965, p. 151

(love of fate), which in spite of this outlook was utterly life-affirming and assertive³⁹. About Oedipus in Sophocles' play Nietzsche writes:

*The most suffering figure of the Greek stage, the unfortunate one, was understood by Sophocles as the noble man who is destined to error and misery despite his wisdom, but who in the end, through his immense suffering, exerts a magical, beneficial power around himself, which is effective even after his death.*⁴⁰

Nietzsche places struggle at the center of existence. To him, it is the heroic solitary individual which overcomes all harshness and all his own weaknesses, which is the goal for humankind⁴¹. This interpretation of the world and the stance humans ought to take towards it, is central to Kazantzakis' thought.

Bergson as the positive force

If Nietzsche is the negative force and a mirror in which Kazantzakis could see his own epoch reflected, Henri Bergson is the positive and affirming counterpart⁴². Besides studying under Bergson, he also translated the essay *Laughter - An Essay on the meaning of the Comic*⁴³. During the 1920–1930s, Kazantzakis developed his own metaphysics based on Bergson's *élan vital* (vital impulse) which views the universe as a unified creative force, always changing and thus being full of potential⁴⁴. To Bergson, evolution is always in progress, pushing us forward in a creative, not repetitive universe⁴⁵. It is this universe that enables *creative evolution*, life as an ongoing possibility to be formed, which in turn asks man to take action⁴⁶. Kazantzakis would transform Bergson's *élan vital* into an existential imperative: the human duty to ascend, to spiritualize matter, and to participate in the universe's creative movement.

2.2 Summary: Prologue

Kazantzakis was in his early years emotionally and intellectually influenced by the historical and social upheavals of the times, often connected to personal experiences. He was also greatly influenced by the epoch's intellectual world. I have focused on two thinkers whose works I believe are at the center of his thought and incorporate several other notions which he

³⁹ Ibid., Bien, 1971, p. 254; Merrill, 1975, p. 103

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, 1930, p. 91

⁴¹ Καρύδας, 2025, p. 214; Bien, 1971, p. 264; Merrill, 1975, p. 100

⁴² Poulakidas, 1971, p. 267, 273, 275

⁴³ <https://www.kazantzakispublications.org/en/translations2.html>

⁴⁴ Bergson, 1998, p. xii, 126; Bien, 1965, p. 119; Poulakidas, 1971, p. 267

⁴⁵ Bergson, 1998, p. 85, 89, 248

⁴⁶ Poulakidas, 1971, p. 267; Καρύδας, 2025, p. 245

worked into his philosophy, such as Buddhism, Christianity and Communism. Nietzsche's tragic worldview, what Kazantzakis calls *η Άβυσσος*, the abyss, melts with Bergson's *élan vital*, a unified universe and creative evolution in which man is able to shape it, an idea that Kazantzakis will develop into *η Ανάβαση*, ascending.

Having learned about the background of *Ασκητική*, we are now ready to embark upon the book itself.

3 *Ασκητική*

Kazantzakis drafted *Ασκητική* between 1922–1923 while in Vienna and Berlin with its initial publication in 1927⁴⁷. It functions as his philosophical framework or even manifest through both its content but also its style and form⁴⁸. It is noteworthy that Kazantzakis already began revising the book in 1928 while in Moscow, adding the chapter *Η Σιγή* (the Silence) and changing the tone within the book. Kazantzakis himself expressed a large emotional and philosophical charge associated with this reevaluation of his own work⁴⁹. The added chapter has a violent, prophetic tone and reinterprets *Ασκητική* toward a mystical-existential vision which now marks the entire book⁵⁰:

Μια γλώσσα πύρινη είναι η ψυχή κι αγγίζει και μάχεται να πυρπολήσει τον κατασκότεινο όγκο του κόσμου. Μια μέρα όλο το Σύμπαντο θα γίνει πυρκαγιά⁵¹.

An expanded second edition followed in 1945 which arguably consists of corrections rather than radical changes in thought⁵². My focus will thus be on the second edition from 1928.

Prior to the first edition in 1927, Kazantzakis had already published several political-philosophical essays which anticipated *Ασκητική* in both the philosophy and writing style⁵³. It is vital to also point out the development of his political notions in these two versions of the book. As Beaton notes, Kazantzakis early on saw the universe's creative force at work within the proletariat which he thought would change the world⁵⁴. The first edition of *Ασκητική* even includes an introductory note about the struggle of communist circles of

⁴⁷ Nowakowski, 2025, p. 332

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 333

⁴⁹ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 178; Poulakidas, 1975, p. 216; Nowakowski, 2025, p. 342

⁵⁰ Nowakowski, 2025, p. 342

⁵¹ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 179

⁵² Nowakowski, 2025, p. 332, 352

⁵³ Ibid., p. 336

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 338; Beaton, 2004, p. 110, 120

Russians, Poles, and Germans⁵⁵. However, the second edition lacks all of these previous political undertones and references, pointing to an important change of thought, with Kazantzakis distancing himself from political elements and instead focusing on the existentialist struggle and the changing of the very essence of mankind⁵⁶.

3.1 The philosophical themes of *Ασκητική*

I will now pinpoint the foundational philosophical themes in *Ασκητική* which I argue can be summarized with the interconnected themes of *the abyss* and *the ascent, monism* and *heritage*. Besides the thematic content, the following will also present the framing of the same, how style and vocabulary are arguably strategically used to further a specific interpretation.

The Abyss

Ασκητική fundamentally adapts Nietzsche's tragic worldview, most explicitly in the chapters *η πορεία* (the March) and *το όραμα* (the Vision), where the fundamental human condition is described as one of hopelessness, darkness and bodily agony from which there is no hope or promise of redemption⁵⁷.

Σε άξαφνες φοβερές στιγμές αστράφτει μέσα μου: «Όλα τούτα είναι παιχνίδι σκληρό και μάταιο, δίχως αρχή, δίχως τέλος, δίχως νόημα».⁵⁸

Δεν είμαι καλός, δεν είμαι αγνός, δεν είμαι ήσυχος! Αβάσταχτη είναι η ευτυχία κι η δυστυχία μου, είμαι γιομάτος άναρθρες φωνές και σκοτάδι κυλιούμαι όλο δάκρυα κι αίματα μέσα στη ζεστή τούτη φάτνη της σάρκας μου.⁵⁹

The tone and vocabulary is unsettling, positioning man in a monumental, negative, agonizing bodily endowment:

Ναι, ναι, δεν είμαι τίποτα. Ένας αγνός φωσφορισμός απάνω στην ογρή πεδιάδα, ένα άθλιο σκουλήκι που σούρνεται κι αγαπάει, φωνάζει και μιλάει για φτερούγες, μια ώρα, δυο ώρες, κι ύστερα το στόμα του φράζει με χώματα. Άλλη απόκριση οι σκοτεινές δυνάμες δε δίνουν.⁶⁰

Αβάσταχτη είναι η ευτυχία κι η δυστυχία μου, είμαι γιομάτος άναρθρες φωνές και σκοτάδι κυλιούμαι όλο δάκρυα κι αίματα μέσα στη ζεστή τούτη φάτνη της σάρκας μου.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Nowakowski, 2025, p. 352

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 337

⁵⁷ Poulakidas, 1975, p. 209

⁵⁸ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 92

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 109

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 139

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 109

Ένας λάκκος αίμα είναι η κεφαλή σου, και μαζώνονται κοπάδια κοπάδια οι γίσκιοι των πεθαμένων και σε πίνουν να ζωντανέψουν⁶².

The abyss itself is throughout described as a downward movement of the universe, decay, nothingness, dissolution and primordial chaos:

Ερχόμαστε από μια σκοτεινή άβυσσο' καταλήγουμε σε μια σκοτεινή άβυσσο' το μεταξύ φωτεινό διάστημα το λέμε Ζωή.⁶³

Κύματα σκοτεινά, πηχτά, όλο αίματα οι αιώνες ανεβοκατεβαίνουν. Η κάθε στιγμή είναι μια άβυσσο που ανοίγει.⁶⁴

The abyss is thus Nietzsche's tragic worldview refined and agonizingly, even violently, placed directly in the body. The Nietzschean pessimistic outlook on human existence and his nihilistic epoch must have been recognizable to Kazantzakis, from his early experiences of conflict and struggle on Crete but is also overall from the brutal but also ideologically lively times at the beginning of the 20th century to which he tried to find his own answer.

Ascending

Ascending is Kazantzakis' course of action which enables man to move beyond the abyss.

Also, here we encounter a vocabulary of struggle, war, elements and the body:

Από τις δυο στράτες, διαλέγω τον ανήφορο. Γιατί; Χωρίς νοητά επιχειρήματα, χωρίς καμιά βεβαιότητα' κατέχω πόσο ανήμπορος στην κρίσιμη τούτη στιγμή είναι ο νους κι όλες οι μικρές βεβαιότητες του ανθρώπου.⁶⁵

Αγνάντευε το σκοτεινό πέλαγο χωρίς να τρεκλίζεις, κοίταζε κατάματα την άβυσσο, κάθε στιγμή, χωρίς φαντασία, αναίδεια και φόβο. Χωρίς φαντασία, αναίδεια και φόβο. Μα δε φτάνει' κάμε ένα βήμα ακόμα' πολέμησε να δώσεις νόημα στ' ασυνάρτητα παλέματα του ανθρώπου.⁶⁶

Ascending is an active choice in face of darkness and dangers, with an uncertain goal and outcome. It also carries with it a Nietzschean notion in its aim to overcome fear, instinct, comfort and one's past⁶⁷. Once the ascent has been embarked upon, the undertaking stays fragile, always threatened by human weakness to turn into a descent back towards the abyss:

Πώς να πολιορκήσω με λόγια το φοβερό τούτο δράμα; Σκύβω στο χάος κι αφουκράζομαι. Ένας ανεβαίνει αγκομαχώντας μυστικό, επικίνδυνο ανήφορο. Μοχτάει, αγωνίζεται με πείσμα

⁶² Ibid., p. 115

⁶³ Ibid., p. 87

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 124

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 108

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 124

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 109

ν' ανηφορίσει. Μα βρίσκει εμπόδιο αντίδρομή του ορμή: Ένας κατεβαίνει βιαστικά μυστικό, καλόβολο πολύ κατήφορο.⁶⁸

Together, the abyss and the ascent form an eternal dichotomy and movement of forces between which all things are caught up, which on one hand makes existence uncertain, but it also means that there is always change and possibility. In the following, the negative interpretation of the abyss is contrasted with an interpretation of action, again a Bergsonian idea, which Kazantzakis inherits:

Ευτύς ως γεννηθούμε, αρχίζει κι η επιστροφή' ταυτόχρονα το ξεκίνημα κι ο γυρισμός' κάθε στιγμή πεθαίνουμε. Γι αυτό πολλοί διαλάλησαν: Σκοπός της ζωής είναι ο θάνατος. Μα κι ευτύς ως γεννηθούμε, αρχίζει κι η προσπάθεια να δημιουργήσουμε, να συνθέσουμε, να κάμουμε την ύλη ζωή' κάθε στιγμή γεννιούμαστε. Γι' αυτό πολλοί διαλάλησαν: Σκοπός της εφήμερης ζωής είναι η αθανασία.⁶⁹

This focus on action is throughout emphasized by the use of deontic modality (the tone states how the world ought to be and what one must do) in Kazantzakis' lexicological choices, the content and the subjunctive mood, which set a commanding tone, urging one to resist the abyss and to ascend⁷⁰. An explicit example is the following citation, where the unsettling question *Πού πάμε;* derived from the chaos of existence, is immediately cut off: *Σώπα!*, followed by the imperative that such questions are never asked by warriors, those who ascend:

»Πού πάμε; Θα νικήσουμε ποτέ; Προς τι όλη τούτη η μάχη; Σώπα! Οι πολεμιστές ποτέ δε ρωτούνε!»⁷¹.

The commanding tone is enhanced by the lack of personal reflection, discussion or persuasion throughout the book, rather, it lays out its worldview and the rules one ought to follow. Underlining the commanding, even prophetic tone, is furthermore the choice of perspectives. Throughout, Kazantzakis switches between:

- the first person as the narrator

Μα μια άλλη μέσα μου φωνή [...]⁷²

Ναι, ναι, δεν είμαι τίποτα.[...]⁷³

- the second person as the receiver of insights and commands

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 135

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 87

⁷⁰ <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/deontic-modals/v-1>

⁷¹ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 112

⁷² Ibid., p. 96

⁷³ Ibid., p. 139

Χρέος σου [...] ⁷⁴

Αγνάντευε το σκοτεινό πέλαγο [...] ⁷⁵

Η ράτσα σου [...] ⁷⁶

Το σώμα σου [...] ⁷⁷

This encapsulates the first person and the second person as both staring at the abyss, but adding to the imperative notion of the book, the command is stated towards the second person. As there is no second character, we must assume that the one commanding is either Kazantzakis, or more likely, a superordinated instance, *Telos*, the receiver being us, mankind.

Ascending is thus an active choice that one makes and has to keep on making, despite one's fears, weaknesses, and the tragic outlook of the world. At the same time, it is this unpredictable world in flux which also offers mankind the possibility to form it. As a work of action, rather than reflection and contemplation, the reader is urged, even commanded, to embark upon the ascent with an omnipresent emergency.

Monism

To the task of ascending and the notion of overcoming, Kazantzakis adds the Bergsonian monism. Monism is the philosophical belief that everything in existence stems from a single ultimate source and that thus all things have a common fundamental core⁷⁸. There exist several types of monism within philosophy, its roots can be traced back to the presocratic philosophy. Heraclitus (around 500 BCE) for instance held, that fire is the basic material of the world and that the cosmos is governed by *logos*, a single order that directs all things⁷⁹.

Kazantzakis' monism then is an inheritance from Bergson's universe in flux and the transcendence of the physical by spiritualization and transubstantiation⁸⁰. To Kazantzakis the purest form of transcendence is turning matter into spirit or making the spirit visible, his monism which he calls God, his *Telos*⁸¹.

Ένα μονάχα λαχταρίζω: Να συλλάβω τι κρύβεται πίσω από τα φαινόμενα, τι είναι το μυστήριο που με γεννάει και με σκοτώνει, κι αν πίσω από την ορατή ακατάπαυτη ροή του κόσμου κρύβεται μια αόρατη ασάλευτη παρουσία⁸².

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 106

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 106

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 114

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 118

⁷⁸ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/monism/>; Hartman, p. 119

⁷⁹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/presocratics/#XenColHerEph/>

⁸⁰ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 106; Poulakidas, 1975, p. 211, 214

⁸¹ Poulakidas, 1975, p. 211, 214

⁸² Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 111

Έτσι μονάχα νικούμε τη λεπτομέρεια, τη θανάσιμη αμαρτία, νικούμε τη στενότητα του μυαλού μας, μετουσιώνουμε τη σκλαβιά του χωματένιου υλικού, που μας δόθηκε να δουλέψουμε, σ' ελευτερία⁸³.

This monism, which can be grasped behind the scenery of ontological illusion, turns everything into one single entity which diminishes differentiations. Even death is merely another part of an eternal process. In the following, this is underlined by the prophetic and commanding tone which is omnipresent in the book:

Μα μια άλλη μέσα μου φωνή, ας την πούμε έχτη δύναμη, ας την πούμε καρδιά, αντιστέκεται και φωνάζει: «Όχι! Όχι! Ποτέ μην αναγνωρίσεις τα σύνορα του ανθρώπου! Να σπας τα σύνορα! Ν' αρνιέσαι ό,τι θωρούν τα μάτια σου! Να πεθαίνεις και να λες: Θάνατος δεν υπάρχει!»⁸⁴

As we have seen before, Kazantzakis also dramatizes his monism via its manifestation in flesh and blood:

Κάποιος μέσα μου αγωνίζεται ν' ανασηκώσει ένα βάρος, ν' αναμερίσει τη σάρκα και το νου, νικώντας τη συνήθεια, την τεμπελιά και την ανάγκη⁸⁵.

As previously observed, throughout the book, choices of words such as *αμαρτία*, *σκλαβιά*, *χωματένιου υλικού* add a bodily and elemental tone. Other recurring words as *φωτιά*, *φλόγα* and *σκοτάδι* add drama but also naturalistic and elemental imagery. In the following, several of these elements mix while reflecting the monistic unity of the universe:

Κι αργά η φλόγα καταλαγιάζει, η μήτρα της ύλης δροσερεύει, ζωντανεύει η πέτρα, και θρύβεται' κι ανεβαίνει τρέμοντας στον αγέρα ένα μικρό, πράσινο φύλλο. Πιάνεται από το χόμα, στερεώνεται, σηκώνει το κεφάλι του και τα χέρια, αρπάζει τον αγέρα, το νερό, το φως, αρμέγει το Σύμπαντο.⁸⁶

Adding to the bodily and elemental tone, Kazantzakis chooses to also lend his monism, and in fact his book, a theological rather than a philosophical connotation. *Ασκητική* starts with the idea that man within himself hears a cry, the cry of God:

Μα ξάφνου μια σπαραχτική κραυγή μέσα μου: «Βοήθεια!» Ποιος φώναξε;⁸⁷

Η Κραυγή κηρύχνει μέσα μου επιστράτευση. Φωνάζει: «Εγώ, η Κραυγή, είμαι ο Κύριος ο Θεός σου! Δεν είμαι καταφύγι. Δεν είμαι σπίτι κι ελπίδα. Δεν είμαι Πατέρας, δεν είμαι Γιος,

⁸³ Ibid., p. 146

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 96

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 109

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 130

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 106

δεν είμαι Πνέμα. Είμαι ο Στρατηγός σου!⁸⁸

The cry is the cry of God, which awakens an urge within man to fulfill his duty towards God by mobilizing his resources⁸⁹. This cry is the first glimpse one perceives of the monism of reality⁹⁰. Kazantzakis here again emphasizes practical action, *η πράξη*, a key concept for Bergson⁹¹. This staging of his philosophy in theological terms lends the book a prophetic and messianic touch, reflected also in the use of religious words such as *Θεός* (God, 40 times), *Γιος* (son, 20 times).

Monism in Kazantzakis stands for the unity of all things, which is his *Telos*. Ultimately, it is towards realizing this unity of the world and becoming one with everything that his ascent is aimed at. Especially his monism, but also the book itself, is marked by a religious and messianic tone which at the same time is commanding.

Heritage and the individual

A recurring term which Kazantzakis uses is *ράτσα* (race or breed, 19 mentions), in fact, there is an entire section dedicated to it (*Β` Σκαλοπατι: Ρατσα*)⁹².

Η ράτσα σου είναι το μεγάλο σώμα, το περασμένο, το τωρινό και το μελλούμενο. Εσύ είσαι μια λιγότερη έκφραση, αυτή είναι το πρόσωπο. Εσύ είσαι ο ίσκιος, αυτή το κρέας⁹³.

Grounded in the body, Kazantzakis here thematizes the individual as belonging to or descending from a certain race. He also uses *γονιό* and *πρόγονοι* (parents, ancestors) in similar sense, even in combination with *ράτσα*:

Μέσα μου, η αγωνία που ανηφορίζει συντάζεται, για πρώτη φορά, σε ακέραιη ανθρώπινη φωνή, στρέφεται κατά πρόσωπο και με φωνάζει καθαρά, με τ' όνομα μου, με τ' όνομα του γονιού μου και της ράτσας μου!⁹⁴

The term *ράτσα* I propose is both a popular term of the epoch and a stylistic choice to add to the archaic and elementary tone of soil and blood. As the term *ράτσα* today carries with it many problematic connotations which it did not have 100 years ago, I choose to use the term *heritage*. Other possible translations would be *lineage* or *ancestry*: they all state that the

⁸⁸ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 111

⁸⁹ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 106; Poulakidas, 1975, p. 211

⁹⁰ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/monism/>

⁹¹ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 145; Poulakidas, 1975, p. 213

⁹² Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 114

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 114

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107

individual is the descendant of a lineage of struggle, of ascending, and it is this inheritance which one becomes responsible for. As Nowakowski notes, the struggle described is not political or social, but struggle in and of itself⁹⁵.

Το σώμα σου το αόρατο είναι οι πεθαμένοι πρόγονοι κι οι απόγονοι οι αγέννητοι. Το σώμα σου τ' ορατό είναι οι άντρες, οι γυναίκες και τα παιδιά που ζουν της εδικής σου ράτσας⁹⁶.

The theme of heritage also unveils a tension in Kazantzakis' thought. Towards *Telos*, the individual must transcend four levels: the ego, the race, mankind and finally the earth⁹⁷.

Social relationships are thus a means to unify individuals in a shared effort to ascend further, a mediator of *Telos*, exemplified for instance by the proletariat⁹⁸. The collective is often described in a war-like atmosphere, taking on the ascent collectively:

Η ζωή είναι στρατιωτική θητεία στην υπηρεσία του Θεού. Κινήσαμε σταυροφόροι να λευτερώσουμε, θέλοντας και μη, όχι τον Άγιο Τάφο, παρά το Θεό το θαμμένο μέσα στην ύλη και μέσα στην ψυχή μας.⁹⁹

The tension arises because on one hand, the individual must move towards ever broader levels of collectivism, necessarily implying subordination¹⁰⁰. At the same time, individual agency never dissolves and indeed, though arguably his philosophy is aimed at the masses, it is the acting individual which Kazantzakis is addressing, not the collective. This tension can be viewed from a historic background, where all around Kazantzakis new ideas moved the masses. In the same manner, a new philosophy, a Kazantzakian one, perhaps could help to move them away from the abyss. Making sense out of this tension will be a task for philosophers, for our aim it is sufficient to mark it out and to observe how it plays out in Kazantzakis' later work.

3.2 Summary: *Ασκητική*

Kazantzakis views the human endowment as fundamentally Nietzschean tragic, a worldview which arguably was already shaped at an early age. To Nietzsche, Kazantzakis adds the bodily manifestation of struggle. From this abyss, the Bergsonian call to action is vital as Kazantzakis views it as every individual's duty to continue on the ancestor's ascent towards transcendence of the ontological. Again, these themes can be traced to his early life and his

⁹⁵ Nowakowski, 2025, p. 341

⁹⁶ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 118

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 109-133; Poulakidas, 1975, p. 211

⁹⁸ Poulakidas, 1975, p. 215

⁹⁹ Καζαντζάκης, 2023, p. 155

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 109-133

father's notions of duty and activity. Kazantzakis' existentialist duty, framed in religious notions, is laid upon the acting individual which however ought to transcend itself through ever broader collectives towards the universalistic *Telos*. The entire world is a unity and an eternal process, a monism which humans have a duty to embrace¹⁰¹. As Φλωκατούλας noted, Kazantzakis early on tried to harmonize the different characters of his parents, arguably already there looking for a monistic essence¹⁰².

This philosophy of *Ασκητική* is created in the wake of Kazantzakis' search for a solution to the human condition and a troublesome epoch, including inspiration from monumental works by Nietzsche but also Bergson. Historically, it falls in the time of social and political unrest with new ideas for mankind establishing themselves¹⁰³. The second edition however is also marked by the lack of political elements, taking the form of a personal manifesto¹⁰⁴. It is within this world in turmoil I argue that *Ασκητική* establishes itself as a heroic metaphysical and prophetic manifesto, underlined by stylistic elements such as the commanding voice towards the second person. The vocabulary which Kazantzakis chooses also underlines the monumental, religious, agonizing and commanding atmosphere. Having performed manual counts of the following lexicological choices, I found forms of *αίμα* (blood) 40 times throughout the text, *σώμα* (body) about 30 times, forms of both *πολεμά* and *αγώνας* (fight/war, struggle) each appear some 60 times. These carry archaic and bodily connotations which I argue ground Kazantzakis' philosophy in the most fundamental of all human spheres, that of existence in itself.

4 Intermission: Kazantzakis and Greece after 1928

Between the second edition of *Ασκητική* and *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, lie several critical decades of personal and historical events embedded in the midst of the 20th century, which we must consider if we want to grasp the origin of any change in his thought throughout his later years¹⁰⁵.

As noted, Greece experienced fundamental changes during the time between the two world wars. The death of the *Μεγάλη Ιδέα* changed the political attitude and self-perception while the refugee crisis and population exchange put pressure on society and posed a challenge to

¹⁰¹ Poulakidas, 1975, p. 215; Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p.10

¹⁰² Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 27-31

¹⁰³ Bien, 1972, p. 246, 249; Levitt, 1977, p. 361; Sörlin, 2004, p. 613

¹⁰⁴ Nowakowski, 2025, p. 341

¹⁰⁵ Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 7

nation building¹⁰⁶. A fundamental split between the political left and right manifested itself which would put its mark on the country for decades to come¹⁰⁷. Political unrest marked the 20s and 30s culminating in the coup d'état by future dictator Ιωάννης Μεταξάς¹⁰⁸. It was during this time that Kazantzakis rewrote *Ασκητική*, an epoch marked by constant travels. He also wrote political and travel articles for newspapers in Paris and Athens and became increasingly interested in socialist experiments, though he never joined a party¹⁰⁹. He returned to Greece in 1938, experiencing at close hand what Antoniadis calls *the dark decade*, beginning with the outbreak of the second world war and continuing with the Greek civil, a conflict that would continue to divide Greek society for decades¹¹⁰. The civil war killed around 80.000 Greeks; 700.000 Greeks lost their homes¹¹¹. In 1946, when Kazantzakis emigrated from Greece for good, he wrote *Ο Ανήφορος* (the Ascent, 2022, posthum) a post-war novel with autobiographical elements¹¹². Though it was published posthum, it is in line with the Greek literature of the epoch, which, though operating in a highly political environment, did not reflect these circumstances, but was rather marked by the search for a new contextualisation of the world¹¹³. In the wake of the 1940s, large investments were made into the Greek economy which led to further urbanization but also increasing social tensions¹¹⁴. The time leading up to the military junta that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974 was again marked by political chaos¹¹⁵. In 1945 Kazantzakis married Eleni Samiou and moving forward again had stints at the Greek government. He also travelled to England, France and the Middle East while gaining international prestige. In his last years Kazantzakis settled in France where he wrote several masterpieces including *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*. On the flipside of things, back in Greece he was insulted as both a communist and an atheist with political threads being pulled to boycott his nomination for the Nobel prize in literature¹¹⁶. The orthodox Church of Greece tried to excommunicate him on the accusation of blasphemy due to his novels *Ο Καπετάν Μιχάλης* (1953) and *Ο τελευταίος πειρασμός* (1955), which was

¹⁰⁶ Beaton, 2004, p. 68, 128

¹⁰⁷ Antoniadis, 2022, p. 142; Beaton, 2004, p. 129

¹⁰⁸ Antoniadis, 2022, p. 142; Beaton, 2004, p. 129

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.kazantzakispublications.org/en/kazantzakis4.html>; Beaton, 2004, p. 120

¹¹⁰ Antoniadis, 2022, p. 162, 169, 184, 205; Beaton, 2004, p. 197

¹¹¹ Beaton, 2004, p. 197

¹¹² <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/gr/muthistorima/the-ascent-380>

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 130, 182

¹¹⁴ Antoniadis, 2022, p. 211

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 213

¹¹⁶

<https://www.parathyro.politis.com.cy/news/701518/nikos-kazantzakis-enas-oikoumenikos-syggrafeas-kai-stoxastis-ypo-diogmo>

placed on the list of forbidden books of the Roman Catholic Church¹¹⁷. Nikos Kazantzakis died in 1957 and thus never witnessed the new dictatorship in Greece, but surely the tensions that gave rise to it.

5 Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο

Having distilled the philosophical themes in *Ασκητική* and mapped out the contextual points leading up to *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, we will now look at the evolution of these themes.

In *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, Kazantzakis reflects on his life through his central philosophical motifs, an autobiographical novelistic composition that condenses his fundamental philosophical quests and connects them to selected biographical episodes to form a personal journey¹¹⁸. Kazantzakis himself notes that it is to be read as his own personal ascent rather than a biography¹¹⁹. The title *αναφορά* (report) already hints at a confessional or narrative¹²⁰. The book chronologically follows Kazantzaki's intellectual process from childhood to his later years of writing and stops at the point where he is able to give a final definition to his philosophy. It is intellectually biographical in that it focuses on selected personal episodes, which he holds as essential to the development of his thought, making use of a variety of stylistic forms such as myths, dreams, symbolism, fairy tales, wordplay, elements of diaries and letters, personal notes, memories, associations and intuitions.

A few words on narratives and the interpretation of biographies seem in place here. As Jonathan Culler notes, literary theory highly questions a permanent essential self and views it rather as constructed, unstable and shaped by discourse¹²¹. Meaning is produced through systems and reality is always mediated by mechanisms of knowledge¹²². An autobiography hence is not a simple recording of experiences, it is mediated intentionally and striving for order, causality and coherence¹²³. What we get in an autobiography is hence not an objective collection of events but a selection of content intentionally aimed at comprising a story. This premise is important for the interpretation of *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* as we are not only dealing

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<https://www.parathyro.politis.com.cy/news/701518/nikos-kazantzakis-enas-oikoumenikos-syggrafeas-kai-stoxastis-ypo-diogmo>; <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/gr/muthistorima/o-teleutaios-peirasmos-144>

¹¹⁸ Καρύδας, 2025, p. 14, 133-134

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 53

¹²⁰ Λαγού, 2025, p. 54, 57

¹²¹ Culler, 2000, p. 110

¹²² Ibid., p. 61

¹²³ Ibid., p. 84

with a biography, but with an intellectual biography where the author himself explicitly states that the content has been framed as to provide an example of his lived philosophy:

Δε σου μίλησα για τις λεπτομέρειες της καθημερινής ζωής, φλούδες και τις πέταξες μέσα στα σκουπίδια της άβυσσος, τις πέταξα κι εγώ»¹²⁴

[...] Η αναφορά στον Γκρέκο δεν είναι αυτοβιογραφία. Η ζωή μου η προσωπική για μένα μονάχα έχει κάποια πολύ σχετική αξία, για κανέναν άλλον. Η μόνη αξία που της αναγνωρίζω είναι ετούτη: ο αγώνας της ν' ανέβει από σκαλοπάτι σε σκαλοπάτι και να φτάσει [...] στην κορφή που αυθαίρετα ονομάτισα Κρητική Ματιά.¹²⁵

On one hand, this means that none of the content can be seen as random: we must believe that what Kazantzakis provides us with is always intentional as to create a literary example of lived philosophy. On the other hand, it means that though the book is ideally fitted as to analyze Kazantzakis' philosophy in his later years, the author's aim must caution us and remind us to be suspicious towards the validity of its biographical elements, which as Λαγού notes are incomplete and whose truthfulness must be discussed in context of further material and findings¹²⁶.

5.1 A shift of mood towards ascending

Throughout *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* the philosophical themes which we have gotten to know in *Ασκητική* are recognizable and suggest that Kazantzakis adheres to the same philosophical ideas throughout his work. What can be perceived as a development, I will argue, is not the thematic content, but a shift in tone and emphasis which imply a different stance towards how Kazantzakis imagines the manifestation of his philosophy.

Throughout *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* we recognize Nietzsche's tragic worldview which we already have met in *Ασκητική*. However, in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* it appears in much more personal, exemplary, rich and descriptive ways. Kazantzakis first encounters the abyss while he was still in school, recognizing that neither the world nor humans are at the center of the universe and that there exists no such thing as a great scheme or narrative in life¹²⁷:

Το πρώτο μυστικό, το φοβερό, ήταν τούτο: η Γη δεν είναι, όπως θαρρούσαμε, το κέντρο του Σύμπαντος· ο Ήλιος κι ο έναστρος ουρανός δεν περιστρέφονται υποταχτικά κύκλο από τη

¹²⁴ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 488

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 53

¹²⁶ Λαγού, 2025, p. 54

¹²⁷ <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work/megalonontas-185>

Γη μας· δεν είναι ο πλανήτης μας παρά ένα μικρό κι ασήμαντο αστράκι, παραπεταμένο στο Γαλαξία, και κινείται δουλικά κύκλο από τον Ήλιο. [...] ο άνθρωπος δεν είναι κανακάρικο, προνομιούχο πλάσμα του Θεού, δε φύσηξε ο Θεός απάνω του την πνοή του, δεν του 'δωκε ψυχή αθάνατη.¹²⁸

Kazantzakis also stays true to his monism, the unity of all things beyond the ontological experience of man:

Ο μεγάλος καλλιτέχνης βλέπει κάτω από την καθημερινή ρεούμενη πραγματικότητα αιώνια ασάλευτα σύμβολα. Πίσω από τις σπασμωδικές, ασυνάρτητες συχνά ενέργειες των ζωντανών ανθρώπων διακρίνει καθαρά τα μεγάλα ρέματα που συνεπαίρνουν τις ψυχές. Μετατοπίζει σε αέρα αθάνατο τα εφήμερα γεγονότα. Τη ρεαλιστική αναπαράσταση, ο μεγάλος τεχνίτης τη θεωρεί παραμόρφωση και γελοιογραφία του αιώνιου.¹²⁹

The manifestations again differ in their tone and visuality from *Ασκητική*, with the former warrior here turning into an artist.

The second element of his dichotomy, the abyss, is also described throughout the book, but it is notably not as emphasized as in *Ασκητική* where not only the content but also the tone is darker, louder, more urgent. *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* in contrast reads itself increasingly as an antidote to Nietzsche's pessimism. Even though it accepts the abyss, there is an optimistic outlook, a concrete focus on what is possible through the practical application of Kazantzakis' philosophy. This is partially done in large proclamations and revelations, but more importantly, as I hold that nothing in the text is random, the philosophy also manifests itself through small reflections along the way:

[...] μου αρέσει, κι ας χαθώ, να παλεύω με το Θεό. Αυτός πήρε λάσπη κι έπλασε τον κόσμο, εγώ λέξεις· αυτός έκαμε τους ανθρώπους όπως τους βλέπουμε να σούρνουνται στο χώμα· εγώ θα πλάσω με φαντασία και αγέρα, με το υλικό που πλάθονται τα όνειρα, άλλους ανθρώπους, με πιο πολλή ψυχή, ν' αντέχουν στον καιρό, να πεθαίνουν οι άνθρωποι του Θεού και να ζουν οι δικοί μου.¹³⁰

Ξέρω καλά πως ο θάνατος δε νικιέται· μα η αξία του ανθρώπου δεν είναι η Νίκη, παρά ο αγώνας για τη Νίκη. Και ξέρω ακόμα ετούτο, το δυσκολότερο: δεν είναι ούτε ο αγώνας για τη Νίκη· η αξία του ανθρώπου είναι μια μονάχα, ετούτη: να ζει και να πεθαίνει παλικαρίσια και να μην καταδέχεται αμοιβή. Κι ακόμα ετούτο, το τρίτο, ακόμα πιο δύσκολο: η βεβαιότητα, πως δεν υπάρχει αμοιβή, να μη σου κόβει τα ήπατα παρά να σε γεμίζει χαρά, υπερηφάνια κι αντρεία.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 116-117

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 172

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 146

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 477

Another recognizable element is the call for action¹³². Kazantzakis himself describes how he sets out on several practical adventures as a way to get out of the theory and to ascend practically¹³³. Again, this is no longer proclaimed as a general command, we find it exemplified and manifested. In the following, the ascent of two of Kazantzakis' heroes, Zorba and Christ, are described:

Θυμήθηκα ένα λόγο του Ζορμπά: «Εγώ ενεργώ πάντα ως αν ήμουν αθάνατος». Τη μέθοδο αυτή του Θεού ας ακολουθούμε κι εμείς οι θνητοί, όχι από μεγαλομανία κι αναίδεια, παρά από την ακαταμάχητη λαχτάρα της ψυχής προς τ'απάνω· η προσπάθεια να μιμούμαστε το Θεό είναι ο μόνος τρόπος να ξεπεράσουμε, ας είναι και μια τρίχα, ας είναι και για μια στιγμή [...]¹³⁴

Ό,τι απάνω απ' όλα με γοήτευε και μου 'δινε κουράγιο ήταν πως ο άνθρωπος που βρίσκονταν μέσα στο Χριστό ξεκίνησε, με τι παλικαριά κι αγώνα, με πόση παράφορη ελπίδα, να φτάσει στο Θεό, να σμίξει μαζί του, να γίνουν αζεδιάλυτα ένα. Άλλος δρόμος να φτάσεις στο Θεό δεν υπάρχει· ετούτος μονάχα: να μάχεσαι, ακολουθώντας τα αιματομένα χνάρια του Χριστού, να μετουσιώνεις τον άνθρωπο μέσα σου, να γίνει πνέμα, να σμίξει με το Θεό.¹³⁵

Though the book is mostly written in the first person, the second person is used in several places to refer to actual characters besides the narrator Kazantzakis, as in the epilogue, where he addresses his ancestor, and in the chapter *Παρίσι Νίτσε ο Μεγαλομάρτυρας* where he addresses Nietzsche¹³⁶:

Ένωθες πως ήσουν δέντρο που λύγιζε από το βάρος του καρπού και λαχτάριζες τα χέρια να 'ρθουν να σε τρυγήσουν· στέκουσουν στην άκρα του δρόμου, αγνάντευες κάτω τις πολιτείες των ανθρώπων, μα κανένας δεν έρχονταν. Δε βρίσκεται ένας να με αγαπάει; φώναζες στην ερημιά σου· δε βρίσκεται ένας να με βρίσει, να με περγελάσει; Πού 'ναι η Εκκλησία να με αναθεματίσει; Πού 'ναι η Εξουσία να μου πάρει το κεφάλι; Φωνάζω, φωνάζω, δε με ακούτε;¹³⁷

The choice of grammatical person must be viewed as related to the narrator's diegetic state¹³⁸. Hence Kazantzakis uses the second person no longer to provide orders, but to present his own interpretation of the thought and life of characters important to him and his biography, without claiming objective truth, but framing them as part of the ascent.

¹³² Ibid., p. 169

¹³³ Ibid., p. 446, 472

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 494

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 286

¹³⁶ Λαγού, 2025, p. 59, 60

¹³⁷ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 322

¹³⁸ Λαγού, 2025, p. 61, 65

Another way of framing is recognizable in the lexicological choices. Words connotating *moving forward* or *upward* are present all over the book, framing the experience of the book as one of ascending, both explicitly and in seemingly unimportant sentences, here exemplified in *σκαρφάλωνε* (climb) and *ανεβαίνουν* (go up):

[...] Και τι συγκίνηση να βλέπεις να σκαρφαλώνει τον ατέλειωτο ανήφορο, πρωτοπόρος, και ν' ανοίγει δρόμο [...] ¹³⁹

[...] άλλοι ανεβαίνουν πιο πάνω ένα σκαλοπάτι και λεν [...] ¹⁴⁰

Though one rediscovers several choices of *Ασκητική*, words as *φωτιά* (light) and *φλόγα* (flame) receive a more personal, concrete and coherent role which can be translated to the will to ascend:

Ναι, ξέρω πούθε έρχομαι·
αχόρταγος σαν τη φλόγα
καίω και καίγουμε.
Ό,τι αγγίζω γίνεται φως
κι ό,τι αφήνω γίνεται κάρβουνο.
Σίγουρα είμαι φλόγα. ¹⁴¹

[...] το φως στην Ελλάδα είναι όλο πνέμα. Μέσα στο φως αυτό κατόρθωσε ο άνθρωπος να δει καθαρά, να βάλει τάξη στο χάος και να το κάμει κόσμος. Και κόσμος θα πει αρμονία. ¹⁴²

5.2 From Collectivism towards Humanism

As established in *Ασκητική*, Kazantzakis is faced with a tension in how the individual relates to the collective and the unity of the world. *Ασκητική* addresses the individual directly, with the aim of a collective movement. In *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, several passages are dedicated to specific cultures, showing how the ascent is culturally embedded, implying a philosophical shift from metaphysical collectivism towards a humanism that emphasizes human agency and reason

Έρωτας ελευτερίας, να μην καταδέχεσαι, μήτε για τον παράδεισο ακόμα, να σκλαβώνεις την ψυχή σου· παιχνίδι παλικαρίσιο απάνω από την αγάπη και τον πόνο, απάνω από το θάνατο· να συντρίβεις τα παλιά καλούπια, και τα πιο ιερά, όταν πια δε σε χωρούν - να οι τρεις μεγάλες φωνές της Κρήτης. ¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 106

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 492

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 315

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 164

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 436

Υποβάλλει το αττικό τοπίο πώς πρέπει να 'ναι το πρότυπο του ανθρώπου· καλοδουλεμένο, λιγόλογο, λυτρωμένο από τα περιττά πλούτη, δυνατό, που όμως να μπορεί να συγκρατάει τη δύναμή του και να βάζει όρια στη φαντασία [...] Πώς έγινε το θάμα ετούτο, πού βρίσκει η χάρη τόση σοβαρότητα, πού βρίσκει η σοβαρότητα τόση χάρη, πώς μπόρεσε η δύναμη να μην καταχραστεί τη δύναμή της; Τούτο θα 'ναι το ελληνικό θάμα.¹⁴⁴

Και τι συγκίνηση να βλέπεις να σκαρφαλώνει τον ατέλειωτο ανήφορο, πρωτοπόρος, και ν' ανοίγει δρόμο, πότε με τη χλαμύδα και το κοντάρι, πότε με τη φουστανέλα και το καριοφίλι, και πότε με τη βράκα την κρητικιά, ο Έλληνας!¹⁴⁵

The ascent is here no longer a universal metaphysical imperative but something that certain epistemically analyzable cultures embody more than others. Also, the forms of ascending and the difficulties one faces vary in time and space¹⁴⁶. From Nietzsche, both Presocratic Greece and Wagner's Germany are viewed as such cultures¹⁴⁷. The Russian people of the 1920s and 1930s are also held as such¹⁴⁸. But also, Greek culture is said to have a fundamental understanding of the world stance which leads to the ascent, two cultures which he is able to identify himself with¹⁴⁹. Finally, at the end of *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, Kazantzakis establishes what he calls *Κρητική ματιά*, defined as an ideal culture of ascent¹⁵⁰.

However, also in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, the tension which we detected in *Ασκητική* remains. Kazantzakis frequently hails the cultures of ascent, placing himself within the line of the Cretan heritage of ascending¹⁵¹. On the other hand, his own personal ascent throughout his biography is suspiciously lacking an active collective notion. Throughout the book Kazantzakis establishes himself as a withdrawn, shy person who enjoys solitude, perhaps the company of some few similar spirits:

Τις Κυριακές μου άρεσε να πηγαίνω εκδρομές μόνος· η συντροφιά με φίλους, οι κουβέντες τους, οι χωρατάδες, τα γέλια τους, εξευτέλιζαν, μου φαίνονταν την άγια σιωπή.¹⁵²

κινήσαμε με πολλούς συναγωνιστές, με ιδέες πολλές, συνοδεία μεγάλη· μα όσο ανηφορίζαμε κι η κορφή μετατοπίζονταν κι αλάργαινε, συναγωνιστές κι ιδέες κι ελπίδες μας αποχαιρετούσαν, λαχάνιαζαν, δεν ήθελαν, δεν μπορούσαν ν' ανέβουν πιο απάνω· κι

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 136-137

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 106

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 270

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 313, 321, 335

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 388, 390, 467

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 106

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 476

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 448

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 134

απομέναμε μονάχοι με τα μάτια καρφωμένα στην Κινούμενη Μονάδα, στη μετατοπιζόμενη κορφή.¹⁵³

Even when the call to action manifests itself in Kazantzakis and truth and lies melt into a monistic understanding, this results in his literary work as a lone task for the individual:

Έγραφα και καμάρωνα, ήμουν θεός κι έκανα ό,τι ήθελα, μετουσίωνα την πραγματικότητα, την έπλαθα όπως θα 'θελα και θα 'πρεπε να 'ναι, έσμιγα αξεδιάλυτα αλήθειες και ψευτιές, δεν υπήρχαν πια αλήθειες και ψευτιές, όλα ζύμη μαλακιά και την έπλαθα, την ξέπλαθα, όπως μου κανοναρχούσε το κέφι μου, λεύτερα, χωρίς να πάρω κανενός την άδεια.¹⁵⁴

When he thus speaks about ascending cultures, it seems to be more of a reflection, an interpretation or phantasy of somebody imagining himself being part of it. Furthermore, though he speaks passionately about cultures, he is just as emphatic about his individual heroes:

Ο Χριστός, ο Βούδας, ο Μωυσής, βρήκαν άβυσσο· μα έριξαν γεφύρι και πέρασαν. Και πίσω τους περνούν, αιώνες τώρα, τ' ανθρώπινα κοπάδια.¹⁵⁵

On Lenin he writes:

[...] Χριστός και τούτος, κόκκινος. Η ουσία είναι η ίδια, η αιώνια ουσία του ανθρώπου, καμωμένη από ελπίδα και φόβο· τα ονόματα μονάχα αλλάζουν.¹⁵⁶

To Kazantzakis, the duty of ascending remains vivid, prominent lexicological choices being *ευθύνη* and *χρέος* (duty, obligation). They however lack the commanding tone of *Ασκητική*, focusing more on individual realization and choice (I manually counted forms *ευθύνη* 30 times, *χρέος* 79 times):

Χαρά στο νέο που θαρρεί πως έχει χρέος να ξαναδημιουργήσει τον κόσμο· να τον κάμει πιο σύμφωνο με την αρετή και τη δικαιοσύνη· πιο σύμφωνο με την καρδιά του· αλίμονο σε όποιον αρχίζει τη ζωή του χωρίς παραφροσύνη.¹⁵⁷

The existential burden of ascending remains something radically individual, though *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* tries to frame the ascent in cultural terms. Beyond this tension, we can however observe a move from metaphysical collectivism and universalism to culturally inflected humanism through the anthropological manifestation of his theory. Φλωκατούλας argues that

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 490

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 145

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 272

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 394

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 206

this shift is reflective of the ideological polarization of the 20th century to which Kazantzakis tried to respond in a manner beyond ideology¹⁵⁸.

6 Summary: towards a personal philosophy

I have analyzed the philosophical elements and their framing in *Ασκητική* and looked at how they reappear in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*. From the second edition of his philosophical work *Ασκητική* to his intellectual biography *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, Kazantzakis' underlying philosophical themes remain continuous. According to Kazantzakis' description in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, he experienced Nietzsche's tragic world already at an early age, by the uneasy times that he lived through and the negation of the certainties that he held about life and the world¹⁵⁹. The abyss is a world of steady flux and man cannot hope for a helping hand or an end to his struggle. From Bergson and Nietzsche, Kazantzakis inherits the idea of accepting this eternal struggle, but instead of being turned into a passive victim, one is motivated to take action, again something Kazantzakis' describes as early life experiences, manifested in his father or the *Φιλική Εταιρεία*¹⁶⁰. As the world is in flux, this also opens up for change, a chance for man to embrace. Finally, to Kazantzakis and Bergson, the world is more than the sum of its elements, it is one unity, *Telos*, which he calls God, towards which mankind ought to transcend¹⁶¹. According to Φλωκατούλας, this search for a monistic view was already present in Kazantzakis from his attempts to harmonize his parents' opposing characteristics¹⁶².

The difference then between the two works of his is not one of content, but of tone, how the philosophy manifests itself in literature and what this tells us about how Kazantzakis envisioned his philosophy. I argue that fundamentally, the difference between *Ασκητική* and *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* is that of a theoretical work during a revolutionary epoch, and one based on lived experience, marked by the failure of grand social and political endeavours and a continuous human crisis¹⁶³. The support for this thesis derives from the summary of the following observations:

¹⁵⁸ Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 6

¹⁵⁹ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 98, 116-117

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100, 113

¹⁶¹ Καρύδας, 2025, p. 14-15, 133-134

¹⁶² Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 27-31

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 14-15

- While *Ασκητική* provides a gloomy and urgent atmosphere, which through various stylistic methods violently orders the individual to take action, *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* provides an intimate account, which is intense none the less, but is presented as a humble and reflective personal quest.
- *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, both in tone, vocabulary and content is more focused on the ascent than on the abyss.
- Both works entail a tension between the individual and the collective, which remains unresolved. However, Kazantzakis moves from a collectivistic notion to one of humanism where the ascent manifests itself culturally through human agency and reason, enabling Kazantzakis to identify with ascending cultures in Greece or Crete, something which in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* is related to his proud and dutiful Cretan father¹⁶⁴.
- Finally, Kazantzakis himself and his heroes are characterized as lone individuals and the move from *Ασκητική* to *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* is precisely one from a collectivistic manifest for the masses to a personal philosophy.

Throughout this thesis I have established Kazantzakis as a person with a genuine social commitment, both intellectually but also in practice, which strengthens the point that his work is influenced by the social conditions surrounding him and that it aims at influencing his surroundings. *Ασκητική* was written in a time of social revolutions and the modern dynamics of constructing a better society and human¹⁶⁵. The book may have had the ambition to play a role in these developments, its original publication containing several political elements, the reworked book however focusing on the universal struggle in itself. *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* then should be viewed within the context of Kazantzakis' disappointments with many of the political and social endeavours, whose negative outcomes he experienced personally, including his disillusion with the communist revolution, the Greek state and the hostility aimed towards him politically and by the churches¹⁶⁶. Between both books lay deep human abysses, including the aftermath of the Asia Minor catastrophe, totalitarian regimes on either political spectrum, culminating in the worst war in human history, which in Greece continued even after Nazi-Germany had left the country. The following epoch,

¹⁶⁴ Φλωκατούλας, 2018, p. 28

¹⁶⁵ Runeby, p. 43, 78, 277, 281; Sörlin, 2004, p. 613

¹⁶⁶ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 436; Nowakowski, p. 335; Μάλαμας, 2025, p. 548, <https://www.parathyro.politis.com.cy/news/701518/nikos-kazantzakis-enas-oikoumenikos-syggrafeas-kai-stoxas-tis-ypo-diogmo>; <https://www.kazantzaki.gr/gr/muthistorima/o-teleutaios-peirasmos-144> <https://www.parathyro.politis.com.cy/news/701518/nikos-kazantzakis-enas-oikoumenikos-syggrafeas-kai-stoxas-tis-ypo-diogmo>

postmodernism, reacts with the critique, and the disappearance, of the large ideological systems on either side of the iron curtain, with the individual now being placed at the centre of the world, turning away from systematic solutions and universalism¹⁶⁷. With its humble and individual-based narrative, *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* reflects exactly the development from *modernism*, personified by *Ασκητική*, to *postmodernism*. According to Beaton, this development of Kazantzakis also echoes the overall trend of Greek literature during that time, which focused on contextualizing the world and to understand the world and its relation to the past¹⁶⁸. It is in this context that a more moderate and humble tone can be understood, retreating towards the individual, trying to handle one's own existence, in contrast to proclaiming revolutionary ideas aimed at mass movements.

Kazantzakis' intellectual development thus emerges not as a break but as a deepening along the trends of the epoch: the early revolutionary metaphysical framework of *Ασκητική* is put to test and thereby refined through the lived experience and cultural introspection of *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* deriving at a personal and humble philosophy through lived experience influenced and driven by the historic and social events of that time.

7 Epilogue: Zarathustra

In conclusion, I would like to propose a final interpretation of Kazantzakis' intellectual journey which relies on his Nietzschean themes. I do not think that it is a coincidence that his personal path in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* mirrors the story of Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, one of the books which he had previously translated. On one hand, Levitt notes that Nietzsche's literary figures inspired both the life and the work of Kazantzakis. Beaton furthermore adds that Kazantzakis viewed the role of the poet as one of a prophet¹⁶⁹. In Nietzsche's book then, the protagonist, the prophet *Zarathustra*, is not the personified idol of Nietzsche's philosophy (the *Übermensch*), he is merely prophesying his arrival, while undertaking his own journey of struggle, of ascending¹⁷⁰. And just as *Zarathustra*, Kazantzakis' story in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* is one of continuously ascending, without ever arriving at his own ideal. Over and over, he has to reevaluate his ideas and begin ascending anew:

¹⁶⁷ Runeby, 2002, p. 43, 78, 277, 281; Sörlin, 2004, p. 613; May, 2001, p. 28

¹⁶⁸ Beaton, 2004, p. 130; 182

¹⁶⁹ Levitt, 1977, p. 364; Beaton, 2004, p. 110

¹⁷⁰ Levitt, 1977, p. 365

Ντρέπουμε ν' αναθυμούμαι την εωσφορική τούτη αλαζονεία· μα ήμουν νέος τότε, και νέος θα πει να επιχειρείς να γκρεμίσεις τον κόσμο και να 'χεις το θράσος να θες να οικοδομήσεις καινούριο, καλύτερο.¹⁷¹

As Poulakidas exemplifies, the transcendence of the physical was an idea which Kazantzakis battled with his entire life¹⁷². In the light of all this, my final interpretation of *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* is, that Kazantzakis turns himself into *Zarathustra*, setting himself up as the prophet of his own philosophy, whose *Telos* he knows he will not reach, but towards which, in accordance with his philosophy, he is nevertheless committed to keep on ascending. Thus, the development from *Ασκητική* to *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* also turns into a shift in self-positioning: from metaphysical legislator to autobiographical prophet.

¹⁷¹ Καζαντζάκης, 1982, p. 146

¹⁷² Poulakidas, 1975, p. 214

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