Nietzsche’s Attempt to Tempt Nature:
The Will to Power and The Eternal Return of the Same
A General Interpretation of Nietzsche’s Doctrine, with Special Reference
To Chapter 2 of Part III of Thus Spoke Zarathustra

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master’s of the Arts from the department of political science in the University of Toronto.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to understand Nietzsche’s task of translating man back into nature. Nature, for Nietzsche, offers no escape from the things that come into being and pass away, or from becoming. To study nature or to philosophize therefore means to understand becoming. Nietzsche means to translate man back into a nature that is itself becoming. For Nietzsche this means overcoming the spirit of revenge against becoming which means grasping the full implications of his doctrine of the eternal return. This doctrine succeeds at the cost of radically restructuring what nature and philosophy mean. Nietzsche seeks to discover nature for man, but in so doing he reduces reason, traditionally understood to be the hallmark of man’s nature. In attempting to overcome the spirit of revenge, Nietzsche highlights the human concern with the noble, but, partly because he is ultimately too given over to this concern, Nietzsche does not see a way to a recovery of human reason on the basis of an examination of that human concern with the noble.
for here, as everywhere, “nature” shows herself as she is, in all her wasteful and indifferent magnificence, which is outrageous but noble.

-Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 188

Introduction

“God is dead.” So proclaims Zarathustra in the prologue to that book of Nietzsche’s the title of which bears the Persian prophet’s name: Thus Spoke Zarathustra. And thus he may have spoken, but how are we, for whom such statements are no longer so shocking, to know that he is right? Maybe the apparently simple fact that such statements no longer shock is itself a clue. For despite our countries’ leaders’ invocations of God’s name in times of crisis, and even the large numbers of people living within the protective walls of the western liberal democracies who claim to believe in God, it is at the same time clear that significant portions of us who have been allowed, wittingly and unwittingly, to benefit from the fruits of modern civilization and its nigh absolute conquest of nature through technology, think of God--at least as He used to be conceived of--as, at best, an afterthought; the subject, perhaps, of “interesting” cocktail conversation. To the extent to which many of us claim to “believe in something,” we believe as it suits us. We pick and choose those bits of the old religions and gods that appeal to our modern, mainly democratic, sensibilities, opting for an amorphous “spirituality” which, in its openness to everything and anything, radically distorts the meanings of the religions and cultures from which it thinks it takes its bearings. We certainly do not think of God in the way that men of previous generations—both believers and non-believers—did, and perhaps certain people living on the fringe of our own
societies and in the Islamic world still do. One could in fact, and in the spirit of Nietzsche, make a strong case that we no longer think of God in this way because we no longer think much of anything. Those who do “think” about God, and who do not “go voluntarily into the madhouse,” usually think of Him along the afore-mentioned lines and can be thus accounted for by Nietzsche: “given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown”¹ The overwhelming majority of the other showings of piety in at least the western democracies, “death-bed” conversions, statements that there “are no atheists in the fox-hole,” also seem to be accounted for, in large measure, by Nietzsche’s words. To repeat, God is dead. Many, perhaps even most of us do not—at least on the face of it—seem to be terribly concerned.

But Nietzsche, unlike most of us, was more than “concerned” by the death of God. The death of God opens up a deep and gaping abyss. The death of God means that human beings no longer have anything other than their meager selves and mundane existences, nothing to which they are forced to look up or before which they are forced to bow down. The death of God makes possible the last man. But the death of God or the denial of the superhuman also makes possible the superhuman in a radically new sense, the superhuman as man, the superman. This, then, appears to be the impasse from which Nietzsche, at least in his Zarathustra, explicitly starts: last man or superman? But this cannot be simply left at a choice; Nietzsche’s whole task is to pave the way for the victory of the latter, or to show that the superman, also called the philosopher of the future, is evidently necessary. The superman, unlike the god of old, will for the first time give meaning to the earth, and hence to human life, by looking to the earth and to life, not
away from them. For the death of God is not only the death of religion as previously understood. The death of God also means the death of traditional philosophy, and of the false understanding of nature to which this philosophy was devoted.

Nietzsche’s task is to discover nature, a discovery made possible by the death of God. His task is therefore to discover what philosophy, the investigation of nature, truly is. The results, I can provisionally state, are the twin teachings of the will to power and the eternal return. The will to power is a doctrine of becoming, or of change, i.e. a teaching that there is no realm in which things, including man, do not come into being and pass away; no escape possible into a realm that is free from change. The eternal return is the eternalization of becoming, an eternalization of that realm in which things only come into being and pass away, in which all is change. Man, for Nietzsche, has his being--what makes him man--in becoming, or he owes much more to becoming than was ever previously thought. Nature is pure becoming. To study nature, to know what is, or to philosophize, therefore means to understand becoming, which is, to say the least, difficult, becoming not being graspable, and therefore truly thinkable, by man. And yet Nietzsche means to discover, i.e. to “grasp,” if only in its “essentials,” becoming. He means to “translate man into nature.” What this entails is an enormous struggle against the millennia-old direction of man away from nature by both the philosophers who falsely understood themselves to be directed towards the contemplation of nature, and by Christianity. Above all, for Nietzsche this means an overcoming of what he calls the spirit of revenge. This overcoming of the spirit of revenge and hence this translation of man into nature for the first time can, in the end, only be effected by grasping the full

\footnote{Nietzsche, GS 108.}
implications of the eternal return. The enigmatic discussions of the enigmatic visions of the eternal return in chapter 2 of Part III of Thus Spoke Zarathustra point to the heart of what Nietzsche means by translating man into nature.

If this project succeeds, however, it does so at the cost of radically restructuring what man, nature, and philosophy, the study of nature, mean. Nietzsche seeks to discover nature for man, but in so doing he removes, or at any rate reduces, reason, that which was traditionally understood to be the hallmark of man's nature. But in determining what is necessary for such a scheme, or in understanding what it is in nature, despite its having been covered up, that will allow man to be fully translated into nature, Nietzsche highlights an aspect of human nature--the human concern with the noble--not as it is only after being dug up from murky depths, but as it is for those of us who are at all concerned with what it means to be self-aware and who therefore still have eyes to see nature before us and in us. This, I maintain, is itself something by which men may again take their bearings towards recovering the fullness of their natures but without having to dig deep beneath or behind the surface of things. Nietzsche himself may have intended this, and it is to his enormous credit that he suggests as much in his writings. To examine what is meant by nature, and its alleged discovery by Nietzsche, above all by attempting to do the greatest justice to Nietzsche's thought insofar as I have access to it, is my purpose.

The death of God is the starting point for understanding the heart of Nietzsche's dilemma. There is no way to brush over this or make it simple. While Thus Spoke Zarathustra starts explicitly from that premise, only a close, step-by-step interpretation of that book, with necessary references to Nietzsche's other works, would suffice for the task of understanding this problem in its deepest complexity. Such an interpretation is, in
this context, not possible. It is nonetheless necessary, I think, to elaborate what I understand to be the most fundamental problems that Nietzsche faces generally even while focusing on the more specific problems of the eternal return as explicitly articulated by Zarathustra. Since Zarathustra so resists interpretation, I propose to make sense of the passage in Zarathustra chosen for consideration by referring constantly throughout this paper—sometimes at length—to Nietzsche's other works. Still, let us start at the beginning of the passage chosen for consideration, chapter 2 of Part III of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, "On the Vision and the Riddle." 

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2 All translations from Thus Spoke Zarathustra and Nietzsche's other works are my own, unless otherwise indicated. I have used the de Gruyter edition of Nietzsche's collected works: Friedrich Nietzsche, Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden. Herausgegeben von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari: Neueausgabe, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, München 1999.

3 I have been helped enormously in my understanding of Nietzsche by the thought of Leo Strauss, in general or to the extent to which I think I understand it, and in particular by his "Note on The Plan of Beyond Good and Evil" and the transcripts from his 1959 lecture course on Zarathustra.
I. Why the Teaching of the Eternal Return is Presented as a Vision and a Riddle

The “Vision and the Riddle”  — the Presentation of the Doctrine of the Eternal Return as a Religious Teaching?

Why a vision and why a riddle? The language of visions and riddles, or visions of riddles, is not, at least as it is conventionally understood, the language of reason, of philosophy. "Visions and dreams" on the part of founders and prophets are of decisive importance for "establishing the divine code or of the sacred account of the first things."

The language of visions and riddles appears, then, to be the language of religion, of religious men. To view the riddle is in some sense to grasp the riddle in a "leap," as one of Nietzsche’s commentators, Heidegger, suggests, especially when "the riddle involves beings as a whole." In speaking of making a leap, one invariably brings to mind making a leap of faith. Faith is said by the rationalists to be in the most important sense inimical to reason. The truth of faith, or the validation of it, is often said to be revealed in visions, or dreams. Visions and dreams, especially visions and dreams of riddles, appear to defy reason, or to be beyond reason. Why? Because in waking states of consciousness, the visions and dreams, or more precisely, what are believed to be the truths imparted through those visions and dreams, are neither verifiable to the men who experience the visions and dreams themselves, nor demonstrable to others who have had no such experience. Visions and riddles, or visions of riddles, are, then, thoroughly enigmatic.

4 Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 87.
But don’t the visions and dreams of founders and prophets, or at least what is *believed* to be those visions’ and dreams’ meanings, always unridge the *most important* riddle? For in establishing the particular divine code of a people, they first establish that code *as divine*, or they first determine that a god, the highest thing as such, *is concerned* with giving his code, his laws, to a people. That there *is* such a god, at least, seems to be the clear, and therefore un-enigmatic, core of the vision’s meaning.

But Nietzsche himself tells us to persist in the “*refusal* to be deprived of the stimulus of the enigmatic.”⁶ Following Heidegger, we admit that “we would misunderstand the riddle and our riddling on it abysmally if we were to believe that our task is to hit upon a solution that would dissolve all that is questionable. Riddling on this riddle should rather bring us to experience the fact that *as* a riddle it cannot be brushed aside.”⁷ The vision of the riddle does not appear to unridge the riddle in this *most crucial* sense. There does not, in short, appear to be a god standing behind the riddle—at least not a god in the sense indicated above. But, by that same token, the fact that there appears *not* to be a god standing behind the riddle is itself an indication that the riddle may not be *wholly* impervious to scrutiny. Riddles certainly resist *easy* interpretations. But they require one to think, i.e. to interpret, and thus to articulate, to lay bare, their ridding character, or to expose the problem inherent therein, even if only as a problem that does not admit of a neat or easy solution. While the vision may thus be a vision of *the* riddle at the heart of all things, of all that is, of being simply, ⁸ it is, as such, a recognition of that riddle, and hence of our desire to unridge its ridding character.

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Why the “Vision and the Riddle” is not a Religious Teaching

That the vision of the riddle, Zarathustra’s vision, is not to be grasped as a vision associated with faith in a god beyond the world of things that come into being and pass away is shown by the fact that it replaces that teaching about faith brought to all men by Jesus. Like Jesus, who rose from the dead after two days to speak with his disciples of the afterlife, of the total redemption of man’s soul from the sinning, and hence misery, of this world in that eternal, heavenly world beyond this one, Zarathustra, after first remaining silent for two days, speaks “the riddle of what” he saw, “the vision of the loneliest,” only on the evening of the second day, or on the third day of his journey. Jesus’, or God’s, redemption of the world and man through His death is thus replaced by Zarathustra’s redemption of the world and man through life. Zarathustra’s teaching may, then, be said to replace explicitly the Christian teaching in this most crucial of respects.

The Christian teaching of faith had understood itself to supersede the Jewish one of law, just as the number of days passing between Jesus’ death on Friday to his resurrection on Sunday, had moved the Sabbath, the day of rest commemorating God’s rest from creation, from Saturday to Sunday. Zarathustra, like Christ and unlike the resting Creator God, is, in the chapter on “The Convalescent,” raised from a death-like state to speak the most important speech concerning eternal return on the seventh day, i.e. on the Christian Sabbath. But, like the resting Creator God, who looks over His Creation,

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calling it “very good,” and blessing the seventh day,¹¹ Zarathustra, offers the world a new blessing of sorts, looking over not the creation—as the world is not seen by him to be a creation—but what the “creation” of the human understanding of the eternal return has enabled him to see concerning the character of the world as becoming. Zarathustra thus replaces the god of both Judaism and Christianity and the concepts of time attendant upon each.

Christ’s teaching had been understood to supersede the Jewish law through its insistence on faith. In a most important passage from the Gospel According to Matthew Jesus rebukes his disciple Peter for “being a man of little faith” when Peter appears reluctant to walk across water to him. His faith, it appears from the context, would enable Peter to walk across the water. Such faith seems, then, to make the unthinkable thinkable, and the ungraspable graspable. To enable one to walk upon water is to enable one to stand firmly on the unfirm, to make the fluid, the moving, the soft and porous, into the solid, the static, the hard and impermeable. The miracle that enables the believer to do this, so far from revealing the mysterious character of things, disrupts that mystery with the unmysterious God, unmysterious because he is so obviously an answer to the believers’ needs, so obviously the rock on whom the believers can stand, the being in whom they find repose and rest from their toils. Faith facilitates the miracle, and so faith allows the believer to escape from the fluid character of what is, from becoming, to the solidity of a false being. Faith for man, the faith that Jesus’ disciples try so desperately to find within themselves, is motivated by his desire to counteract his defeat by the passing

¹¹ Genesis 1:31-2:3.
of time. Faith as such is faith in a god beyond time. Such faith in Zarathustra's view stems from the "spirit of revenge" against all time and passing away.

**Interlude: The Spirit of Revenge**

The "spirit of revenge," in the words of Zarathustra, "has so far been the subject of man's best reflection."\(^{12}\) The spirit of revenge "moves stones out of wrath and displeasure."\(^{13}\) It creates for itself a weightedness, a weighing-down, or a sense of permanent rootedness. The spirit of revenge is peculiar to man, that animal unique among all animals in that he is aware, painfully aware, of his own death, and the possibility of oblivion attendant thereon. The "man" Nietzsche claims, "says 'I remember' and envies the animal," the animal who lives "unhistorically."\(^{14}\)

History, Nietzsche reveals in an early work, is the full awareness of the changeability, the impermanence, of all human standards and ideals. This is a deadly and deadening awareness because it destroys or undermines the horizon of forgetting in which men necessarily live and act.\(^{15}\) Men, therefore, even while perhaps being dimly aware of the implications of such a deadening awareness, turned away from it to live within their unconsciously or semi-consciously created horizons, "looking toward some fixed pole or center"\(^{16}\) with which they might find support, permanent support, for themselves. The most permanent support is, of course, the support of a god. The spirit of

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\(^{12}\) Nietzsche, TSZ, "On Redemption".
\(^{13}\) IBID.
\(^{14}\) IBID.
\(^{15}\) Nietzsche, UAHL, 1.
revenge, the spirit that "has so far been the subject of man's best reflection"\(^{17}\) and which is responsible for conjecturing such support, is the spirit of the animal--man--who has wanted to create beyond himself.\(^{18}\) Not simply from fear of death, but also from a sort of cruel courage standing defiant before the world in which all things come to be and pass away, man has created the permanent, or eternally fixed, beyond.\(^{19}\)

**The “Vision and the Riddle”—an exoteric presentation of philosophy?**

Are we to understand, then, that Zarathustra's speech to be given to his addressees in the form of a vision and a riddle only appears to be religious but that its serious core is philosophic, even perhaps philosophic in the old sense—whatever that may mean? Does Zarathustra merely dress his speech on the eternal return in religious language, thereby following the age old tradition of the philosophers who "always had to use as a mask and cocoon the previously established types of the contemplative man—priest, sorcerer, soothsayer, and in any case a religious type—in order to be able to exist at all"\(^{20}\) among the non-philosophic believers? The sort of men to whom this speech is addressed, sailors, supplies the answer to *this* question.

Sailors are men who defy rational calculation, men who take to sea for the sake of the adventure that the sea itself holds in store. Where these sailors can "guess," Zarathustra says, they "hate to deduce." The matters Zarathustra is about to relate are not subject to proof or deduction, for if the truth of these matters could be proven, that truth

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\(^{17}\) Emphasis added.

\(^{18}\) Nietzsche, *TSZ*, Prologue 3.

\(^{19}\) Cf. Nietzsche BGE, 225 with BGE, 13. Cf. also what is implied in these sections with statement about man inventing Hell for himself in *TSZ*, Part III on "The Convalescent."
would be alien to life, because life is changeable and uncertain. Life is “changeable and wild and a woman in every way, and not virtuous.”21 One cannot, then, properly speak of her, for speech itself is insufficient to grasp the changeable qualities of life. There is something apparently cowardly to this “thread” of speech, which fails to recognize it for what it is: at best only a thread. The virtue required, therefore, for grasping the matters that Zarathustra is to relate, is courage. For these sailors—Zarathustra’s “friends”—do not like “to live without danger.” They want, as it were, their courage, their spirit, to be constantly tested. These sailors are not reliant on their art, their knowledge of sailing, to save them from the dangers to which sailing on wild seas is prone.22 Not being reliant on such art, or such knowledge, they exhibit something close to the new “philosophic spirit,” of Zarathustra, which, as we shall see, “does battle with its opposite, the spirit of gravity, the spirit of Socratic or ‘Alexandrian’ man, rational optimists who demand that all beings be thinkable and who follow the cowardly way of deduction of proof.”23 Zarathustra, it appears, does not adopt the “ascetic wraps and cloak” of “the ascetic priest,” not only because he thinks there is “sufficient pride, daring, courage, self-confidence”24 among these sailors for him to speak freely, but also because the understanding of the world and man that necessitated such an approach—both on behalf of the philosophers and the enemies of philosophy—is fundamentally mistaken.

21 Nietzsche, TSZ II, “The Dancing Song”.
23 Lampert, 1986, p. 162.
24 Nietzsche, GM, 3.10.
The Philosophers, The Spirit of Revenge, and The Spirit of Gravity

For “Socratic” or “Alexandrian” man, just as for the men of faith, there was, it seems, also a “god” of sorts, even if a “god of the philosophers.” That “god” was not only the “god” that they were forced to speak of in concealing their true, atheistic, intentions. That “god,” Nietzsche suggests, was the dogmatic assertion of the philosophers themselves about nature; or “the pure spirit and the good as such.” 25 In the most crucial respect, then, even the philosophers were motivated by the spirit of revenge against all time and passing away in their concern with knowing nature and grounding man’s reason in nature, a realm of being beyond becoming, beyond all coming to be and passing away. This concern with grounding what they imagined was the highest in man, his reasoning element, in the fixed, and, if not the eternal then at least the sempiternal (the eternal insofar as it is coeval with man), order of nature Zarathustra calls the “spirit of gravity.” The philosophers, then, have failed to understand what really is, and in so failing, they have failed as philosophers:

Supposing truth is a woman—, what then? Is the suspicion not grounded, that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have not understood themselves in regard to women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have taken care to approach the truth so far, have been unskilled and unseemly ways to take a female for themselves? It is certain that she has not allowed herself to be taken:—and every kind of dogmatism is left standing dismayed and discouraged. 26

Nietzsche aims to succeed for the first time where all other philosophers have failed. He aims— for the first time ever— to take the female for himself. He aims, then, to

25 Nietzsche, BGE, Preface.
discover for the first time what nature really is. Just as Zarathustra was said to have explicitly replaced the teaching of Christianity/Judaism concerning the God beyond time, so too, may Nietzsche, or his Zarathustra, be said to replace the teaching of the philosophers, and their false understanding(s) of nature. He does this, or attempts to do this, on the basis of the modern discovery--understood to be of pivotal importance--of man's non-human origins and, which is connected to this, "History." He understands, then, man's "character" not as rigid or fixed, but as fluid, as becoming rather than being. In this most decisive of respects, man, Nietzsche believes he can prove, is of a piece with the whole realm of becoming.

The Language of the Eternal Return, of the "Vision and the Riddle" as Poetry

It is therefore important to note, in returning to Zarathustra, that Zarathustra addresses this teaching about becoming, the eternality of becoming, or the eternal return, to the sailors. The sea on which these sailor-addressees of Zarathustra sail is, then, an appropriate metaphor for this changeable and uncertain life. The sea, with its "roaring, and bellowing, and thundering," no less than the tranquil calm of its mysterious deep, in both of which the "ungraspable phantom of life" itself is said to be held, is crucial to understanding the enigmatic, but not completely unknowable character of the doctrine of eternal return. The sea both sustains and threatens life; it is both fixed and moving; both calm and enraged; it both exposes distinctions and conceals them. To speak poetically, while perhaps seeming to speak religiously, the sea's lord, Poseidon, was allotted the

domain of the sea by the Fates, and his domain is no less than the domains of his brothers, of Hades and Zeus, to whom the Fates in turn allotted the domains of "the mists and the darkness" and "the wide sky, the cloud and the bright air" respectively. But "earth and high Olympus are common to all three."\textsuperscript{29} The sea, then, is both a symbol for a part of the world and emblematic of its character as a whole.\textsuperscript{30}

But how, then, can one \textit{grasp} the sea in its apparently mysterious vastness? As of life herself, one cannot, it seems, properly \textit{speak} of the sea, for speech itself is insufficient to grasp the changeable qualities of both. Any speech on the character of life generally (or what stands in as metaphor for it here, the sea), and on the eternal return particularly, is itself unequal to the task of expressing what life and the eternal return are. Poetry, if a new kind of poetry, would seem to be called for. The playful, the light, the dancing language of joyful poetry, a language which embraces, because taking its bearings by, becoming, by the eternality of coming into being and passing away, does not partake of the spirit of revenge; faith in or a god or gods, or even reason culminating in an understanding of nature that is, in its essential character, beyond or behind time, of necessity does. The vision and riddle must, then, be communicated by poetry, by the language of poetry, by inspiration, not by the language of philosophy hitherto understood, by deduction.

The word "poetry" itself, which is derived from the Greek \textit{poiein}, to make, contains, then, one element of the intricacy of Nietzsche's thought: of creativity or

\textsuperscript{27} Edgar Allen Poe, "MS. Found in a Bottle."
\textsuperscript{28} Herman Melville, \textit{Moby Dick} Chapter I.
\textsuperscript{29} At least Poseidon thinks so. \textit{Iliad} Book XV 190. Lattimore translation.
creation, or of stamping from within onto the apparently meaningless given or "without."

**Interlude: The Will to Power**

This "without" is the whole realm of becoming. Nietzsche’s phrase for describing this whole or what it is that characterizes it in its flux is the will to power.\(^{31}\) Man is distinguished from the other beings by his mind, his reason. But for Nietzsche, this reason is not some separate entity unto itself, which accesses the eternal or even sempiternal ideas. No, man’s reasoning, his knowledge, must be understood as a function of the whole of what man is, i.e. of his body,\(^ {32}\) and hence of that body’s being rooted, to the extent to which it is coherent to speak of it in this way, in becoming, in change. Now, the height of man’s reasoning he calls philosophy, the “most spiritual form of the will to power."\(^ {33}\) But this philosophy, as we have already noticed, is of a radically different character from any philosophy previously heard of. Knowledge or wisdom for Nietzsche appears not to be what it was for the ancient philosophers: contemplative; but rather creative.\(^ {34}\) But what does that mean?

By the creative knowledge that is the will to power, Nietzsche means above all to oppose the notion that beings, especially human beings, have a fixed purpose, or goal, or that nature somehow prescribes a goal, an end. In the case of man, that end was understood, at least by the ancient philosophers, to be reason. Man, they imagined, is

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\(^{31}\) Nietzsche, BGE 13, 22, 36, 51 ("anti-nature" of saint); WP 1067.

\(^{32}\) Nietzsche, TSZ. “On the Despisers of the Body.”

\(^{33}\) Nietzsche, BGE, 9.
oriented towards the good: what is most clearly good for man, what is most coherently and consistently, or most unconfusedly understood by man to be good is the use of his reason, of his mind, of that which makes him man, and sets him apart from the other beings. Nietzsche, however, most emphatically perhaps through his Zarathustra, opposes to this notion the view that even Zarathustra, for example, is a "becoming and an end and an opposition to ends." Man stamps "ends" onto, creates meaning from, the apparently meaningless given whole. No philosopher until Nietzsche had been sufficiently aware of this fact, despite the fact that, according to him, they had all unconsciously willed the "creation of the world." What the previous philosophers did unconsciously, Nietzsche aims to do consciously. If there is an "end" for him, it is in becoming, and in constant, or never-ending becoming at that. As there cannot be an end, so too can there not be a "way," unless, again, it is the way of becoming: "the way—that does not exist." This is the necessary consequence, it appears, of asserting the primacy of becoming as opposed to being, that is to say, in asserting the fluidity of all "types" and concepts, determined by the beings' own "desire" to "create beyond themselves."

But this is no simply spontaneous assertion or otherwise ungrounded creation, as those "creations" of the past borne out of the spirit of revenge against time and which sought their own grounding in the spirit of gravity were. For this creativity takes its bearings by a truth not simply created by man, the truth that the essence of life, of being

35 IBID. Part II, "On Self-Overcoming."
36 Nietzsche, BGE, 9.
38 Nietzsche, TSZ, Prologue, 3.
itself, is creativity.\textsuperscript{39} The doctrine of the will to power, of the character of the world and man as constant becoming, understands itself therefore as the best interpretation hitherto: “Supposing that this too is only an interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—so, all the better.”\textsuperscript{40} In a way, Nietzsche invites objection, for objection as such, at least in the way that he seems to understand it, confirms the unfinished and unfinishable character of all seeking after knowledge.

The sailors to whom Nietzsche’s Zarathustra addresses his enigmatic speech, are men who had come “from far away and wanted to sail further,” that is, perhaps forever, shunning all desires for returning—at least permanently—to land. They may, therefore, be capable of understanding not only the unfinished character of the teaching, but perhaps its unfinishable character as well. Aphorism 575 from \textit{Dawn}, emphasizes this point clearly:

\begin{quote}
All those brave birds that fly out into the far, the furthest,—it is certain! somewhere they will not be able to go on further and will perch themselves on a mast or a bare cliff—and they will even be thankful for this miserable accommodation! But who would dare to infer from that, that there was not more of an immense free space, that they had flown as far as one could fly! All of our great teachers and predecessors have finally come to a stop, and it is \textit{not the noblest} (edelste) or \textit{most graceful of gestures}, with which weariness comes to a stop: it will be the same with you and me! But what does that matter to you and me! Other birds will fly farther! This \textit{insight and faith} of ours vies with them in flying up and away; it rises above our heads and above our impotence into the heights and from there looks out into the distance, and sees before it the flocks of birds which, far stronger than we, still strive whither we have striven, and where everything is sea, sea, sea!\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

It would seem, then, that endless progress in apprehension is possible. But, as Nietzsche himself seems to wonder, is the notion of an endless progress coherent

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. Prologue, 3. This expression of “desire” is an obvious anthropomorphism. Cf. also \textit{Will to Power}, 1067.
\textsuperscript{40} Nietzsche, BGE, 22. “Supposing” is too weak. The German is “gesetzt,” which means “established,” “firmly planted;” it is related to the word for law.
ultimately? Is there not implied in the very notion of progress, progress towards something desirable in itself? Nietzsche, far from being unaware of this difficulty, concludes the section above, not simply by claiming that all is “sea, sea, sea,” but by asking a series of questions, perhaps the most important questions:

And where are we to go then? Do we want to go over the sea? Where does this mighty longing draw us, this longing that is worth more to us than any pleasure (Lust)? Why just in this direction, there where all the suns of humanity have gone under? Will it perhaps be said of us one day that we too, steering towards the west, hoped to reach an India,—but that it was our fate, to be wrecked against infinity? Or, my brothers? Or?—

In thinking that it might be “our fate to be wrecked against infinity (Unendlichkeit)” we are forced to wonder what Nietzsche means by infinity. Either his teaching is like the previous teachings of the philosophers, and is simply another unconscious or semi-conscious imprinting of one’s own will to power onto the meaningless given, or—and I think this is the meaning of this pregnant “or” here—it is the true teaching, and in that sense the final teaching. The following questions necessarily arise: does Nietzsche mean hereby to suggest that all may not be “sea,” which, as we have seen, is an appropriate metaphor for becoming, and therefore that there may be “land,” if a new, strange land, an “America of the soul,” and therefore an end? Does he mean, then, that all things are not simply becoming but, in some way, “being,” or even “fixed” in a way that is coeval with man’s being as man? Must philosophy, the “most spiritual will to power” be simply the will to the “creation of the world’ to the causa prima?”\footnote{42} Or can it gain some knowledge that is not merely creative, if not of the causa prima, then at least of its essential character? Can knowledge, in short, be

\footnote{41 Emphasis added.}
contemplative? The difficulty involved in these questions was thought by Nietzsche to have been resolved by the doctrine of the eternal return. Let us therefore turn back to the text, which treats that mysterious doctrine.

42 Nietzsche, BGE, 9.
II. Confronting the Spirit of Gravity

The Setting

The riddle that Zarathustra saw, the “vision of the loneliest,” begins with a depiction of Zarathustra himself, walking “gloomily through the deadly pallor of dusk—gloomy and hard with lips pressed together.” Not “only one sun had set” for him, Zarathustra continues, but, presumably, many. Now dusk is that time of day during which the sun has already begun to set; it is the darker stage of twilight. The sun sets on the horizon, casting its glow across the horizon for what seems like a moment frozen in time, before it dips behind the horizon hiding its light from the world and man. Men, Nietzsche had previously claimed, live within horizons—false horizons—established by false suns. But now the suns have set on those horizons, perhaps enabling Nietzsche’s, or Zarathustra’s new sun to rise. The dusk for Zarathustra, while appearing “gloomy,” is unlike that of Hegel, whose Owl of Minerva flew at dusk, indicating thereby that the historical moment of highest wisdom coincides with that historical moment’s end. No, the dusk in which Zarathustra wanders, in signifying the setting of another sun, may signify the possible rise of a new one, and therefore a new beginning for wisdom.

But before a new sun can rise, Zarathustra too must rise. The physical world around him, however, itself prevents him from doing so: the mountain path which he is attempting to ascend, cheered neither by herb nor shrub, the “mocking” pebbles that prevent his foot from having a firm hold, the “spirit” that draws his foot “downwards,
abysswards.” The whole world seems to be in concert with this spirit, the spirit of gravity, or in fact seems itself to be an incarnation of the spirit of gravity. The difficulty of overcoming such a world, of ascending in spite of it, implies the enormous difficulty in affirming the world as it is, set apart from those creations of the world in the creators’ images that have dominated hitherto. Implied, then, is the difficulty of overcoming that tradition of rationalism which is a will to the “creation of the world’ to the causa prima,” but which is at the same time insufficiently aware that it is a will to such a creation, a creation of the world in its own image.44 In its most recent form this “rational spirit of Socratism or Platonism” is “Schopenhauarean” pessimism or nihilism.45 The world from which Zarathustra is attempting to ascend, itself echoes the words of the soothsayer who pronounces the extreme view of that pessimism or nihilism: that “all is the same, all is empty, all has been;” “the hills” themselves echo it.46

The Dwarf-Mole

Nonetheless, upward Zarathustra climbs, in spite of the spirit of gravity, suddenly personified in the form of a dwarfish, mole-like creature, a diminutive, grotesque creature from beneath the earth, a burrowing, mining beast. This creature sits on Zarathustra as he

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43 I have used Kaufmann’s translation here.
44 Nietzsche, BGE, 9.
45 Lampert, 1986 p. 162. Cf. Rosen, p. 1995 180. Rosen is, I think, also correct to speak of the deformed character of the dwarf, (Cf. Nietzsche, TI “The Problem of Socrates” 3) thus reminding of the difference between what will be Zarathustra’s redemption of deformities or accidents in willing the eternal return of them, and Christ’s redemption through the miraculous healing of faith and the afterlife. That these two forms of non-Zarathustrean redemption are, for all intensive purposes, i.e. from Nietzsche’s or Zarathustra’s perspective, the same (motivated by spirit of revenge) I think I have demonstrated. See pages 2-5, and pages 6-7 above.
46 Nietzsche, TSZ, Part II, “The Soothsayer.”
tries—with great difficulty—to climb, “dripping lead through” Zarathustra’s ear, and “leaden-thoughts into” his brain. Like the pebbles beneath Zarathustra’s feet, the dwarfish mole “mocks” Zarathustra, calling him a “philosopher’s stone,” a “sling-shot stone,” a “star-crusher.” The dwarfish beast, in describing him as a philosopher’s stone—that supreme object of medieval alchemy, supposed by some to have been able to change common metals into gold—reminds of the modern rationalist, or scientific premise directed against such spurious, medieval notions: that things are limited or governed by low necessities, and therefore that Zarathustra’s project to discover that the earth has a heart of gold is destined to be frustrated as well. Zarathustra too, the dwarf insinuates, is indebted to the scientific view sprung by Copernicus of the earth, and hence of man, in relation to the rest of the universe. In that view the earth is no longer a center of the universe, but one planet among many; the universe is infinite or almost infinite, and the heavens therefore do not look to man like a protective vault. According to this view, man loses his original or pre-scientific orientation towards the heavens.

But as the law of gravity—that great discovery of Newton’s to whom much of the rest of modern science and the technology attendant upon that science is indebted—would have it, Zarathustra must fall back to the earth, ever to be frustrated in the limitations imposed by nature, or at least of the modern rationalist understandings of nature. There is, according to that understanding, nothing “up there” anyway. But in its

47 Although the German reads “Stein der Weisheit;” not, as one would expect, “Stein des Weisen.”
48 Nietzsche, TSZ, Part II, “On Great Events”.
49 For Nietzsche’s response to this great difficulty, to which I cannot do justice in this paper, see “Before Sunrise” and “On the Great Longing” where Zarathustra calls his soul “an azure bell.” Lampert makes much of this, and is absolutely correct, I think, to understand it as an attempt to discover the dignity of nature. Nonetheless I cannot agree with his “ecological” presentation of Nietzsche’s thought in
radicalized, most recent form, even what little guidance was offered by the low-to-the-ground conception of nature, and, specifically, human nature, of modern science or philosophy has been abandoned: there is only this world, which is now seen, by the most advanced stage of modern thought which the dwarf-mole represents, to be itself meaningless, to have no support from without: "all is the same, all is empty, all has been;" there is only the abyss towards which the dwarf-mole seeks to drag down Zarathustra.

The Spirit of Gravity as Nihilism, the Final Stage of Platonic Philosophy

But if there is only the abyss, is it any longer coherent to speak of the dwarf-mole as an embodiment of the spirit of gravity, of that which seeks to take its bearings by a fixed center? For if the dwarf-mole is the incarnation of the spirit of gravity as such, it would seem, of necessity, to have something of great importance in common with the tradition of philosophy, or with that rational optimism begun by Socrates and made widespread by Plato which sought to "regard as 'true' what is permanent and universally evident."50 Can it be that what it regards as permanent or universally evident is the meaninglessness of being as such, thus determining, in the spirit of the history of that rationalism which wishes to make all being thinkable, something of fundamental importance about being as a whole?51 If so, if thus motivated by the spirit of revenge, it would seem, then, that there is a latent hope, or moralism, even if only negatively

Zarathustra. It fails, in my opinion, to do justice to the cruelty, both in its subtle and less subtle forms, of Nietzsche's thought and what is meant by that cruelty, precisely for the discovery, or recovery, of nature.

expressed as hopelessness, in the dwarf-mole's or Schopenhauerean pessimist's apparent insight into the meaninglessness of things. As Nietzsche elsewhere indicates:

It follows from this that even that anti-nature of morality, which takes God to be the antithesis and condemnation of life is just one of life's value judgments—of which life? Of which kind of life?—But I already gave the answer: of the weakened, tired and condemned life. Morality, as it has been understood up to now—as it was finally formulated once again by Schopenhauer, as "negation of the will to life"—is the décadence-instinct itself, which makes itself into an imperative. "Perish!" it says—it is the condemnation decreed by the condemned.52

This latest form of rationalist morality, of the spirit of gravity appearing or claiming not to be motivated by the concern with support or fixedness as such, but whose version of the Kantian categorical imperative is "perish!", is rooted in a teaching of death. It is, according to Nietzsche, the "most world-denying of all possible ways of thinking."53 It means that the "aim is lacking;" that the "'why?' finds no answer?"54 Nietzsche, however, claims to have "looked into, down into"55 this most world-denying way of thinking, to have "lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end," and now to be "leaving it behind, outside of himself."56 Nietzsche claims, in direct opposition to nihilism, then, to pose "the question of the why? the what for? for the first time..."57

52 Nietzsche, TI, "Morality as Anti-Nature" 5.
53 Nietzsche, BGE, 56.
54 Nietzsche, WP, 2.
55 Nietzsche, BGE, 56.
56 Nietzsche, WP, Preface, 3.
57 Nietzsche, EH, second sub-section of section on Dawn.
III. Courage and Cruelty

Courage

How does Nietzsche claim to be able to pose the question of the why, or the what for? By *vanquishing* nihilism, by *courageously* slaying the three things that constitute it: dizziness at the edge of abysses, pity,—that “praxis” of both Christianity and “nihilism”\(^{58}\)—and death itself. Courage--a philosophic courage we will see--will be the virtue required to overcome nihilism. That is to say, Nietzsche, or his Zarathustra, can succeed in this regard only by *thinking* “this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet inevitably recurring *without any finale of nothingness.*” This “thought,” consistently thought through, is none other than “the eternal recurrence.”\(^{59}\) The eternal return, then, the doctrine Nietzsche’s Zarathustra presents, can only be articulated by seeing the spirit of gravity in the dwarfish, mole-like form of Schopenhauerean pessimism which is itself the result of Plato’s attempt “to prove to himself that reason and instinct of themselves tend toward one goal, the good, ‘God’”\(^{60}\) and raising it. Zarathustra’s courage “so far” at least, has “slain (his) every discouragement.”

There is “something in” Zarathustra that he calls his courage. It finally bids him to “stand still and speak: ‘Dwarf! It is you or I!’” It is either the way of the dwarf or the

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\(^{58}\) Nietzsche, A, 7.  
\(^{59}\) Nietzsche, WP, 55 Emphasis added.
way of Zarathustra; either the way of pessimism pure and simple, or of that which has seen into the heart of pessimism and claims to be able to move beyond it.

Now the teaching of pessimism, of the spirit of gravity in its final form, is that there is no unchanging ground, and hence no support for human beings, especially for what was previously considered by human beings to be their highest possible achievements. One might not unreasonably expect, then, that what claims to be able to supersede that teaching and even to vanquish it, precisely by seeing through it, will discover a new ground. Might that new ground be a new sort of ground entirely, one which the entire tradition of philosophy and so too its most recent spokesperson, the dwarf, overlooked in looking for a permanent ground, or in wishing to make all beings thinkable? Or is the ground of the new discovery courage itself? Is courage alone a sufficient ground for overcoming or slaying pessimism or nihilism? Can nihilism be slain? What would this mean, or what would rise up to take its place? Is courage the decisive factor in overcoming nihilism anyway?

**Interlude: Courageous Nihilism?**

Could there not, for example, be a courageous nihilism, one which intransigently refuses to sacrifice its claimed realization that man has no support—either intellectual or moral—in the universe, and which therefore refuses or denies all comforts, all momentary escapes that cause him to flee from his grim realization into imagining or hoping that

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60 Nietzsche, BGE, 191.
there is somehow cosmic support or meaning for him? This, however dour it may appear to us, is at least a possibility.

And yet, is this possibility not patently absurd? Why courageously affirm “the nothing” if there is nothing to affirm, nothing which will grant the worth of that affirmation? Does not such a view imply the goodness of the nothing, insofar as the nothing is true, and hence, the goodness of truth? Why, as Nietzsche would ask, not untruth? Why maintain courage in the face of the nothing, which is so obviously painful insofar as it appears to be admittedly self-sacrificial, and not resign oneself to the nothing, experiencing what is left of life as animal pleasure? What justification, other than a flimsy preference, is there for choosing hardheaded and resolute commitment to the truth that there is nothing instead of avoiding the implications of that truth in various forms of distracting entertainment? Why not, in short, experience life as animals, for whom there appears neither to be an awareness of “the nothing” nor, conversely, an awareness that there is a higher meaning and hence a “something”: eating when hungry, drinking when thirsty, relieving oneself when it is necessary to do so, frolicking aimlessly, rubbing against each other on occasion; and all with neither hope nor hopelessness?

Nietzschean/Zarathustrian Courage

But wait: we have just described the last man, the man whose very existence seems to be increasingly enabled by the insights into the lack of all cosmic meaning and support. If these insights are themselves the results of a fundamental problem inherent in
the tradition of philosophy at least since Plato, i.e. in a failure to understand the task of philosophy, the investigation into what is, being or nature, then its final human result—the dismayed nihilistic preachers of death and the last men, these latter dead even to the concerns of the nihilists—is itself unnatural. The task for Nietzsche, then, is to “translate man back into nature.”

This, or what this translation must mean, I think, is the answer to the at first apparently questionable proposition of overcoming the spirit of gravity, of Schopenhaurean pessimism, and hence of the whole tradition of philosophy, through courage.

Man, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra claims, is the “most courageous animal: hence he overcame every animal.” Courage—both as it appears in itself in man, and as an anthropomorphic term for something like the “discharge of strength” is the crucial ingredient in determining man’s movement upward, from non-man to man, and perhaps also from man to superman. Man, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra also later claims to his animals in “The Convalescent,” is the “cruelest animal.” Zarathustra’s statements regarding man would seem to be of a piece with each other, and must therefore be understood in light of each other. Man is, then, both courageous and cruel. What is it about man that makes him, of all the animals, at once the most courageous and the cruelest? To what extent are courage and cruelty related, or even the same? To what extent are they different? That Zarathustra speaks of these two characteristics in speaking of man as an animal, even while setting him apart from the animals is, I think,

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62 Emphasis added.
63 Ibid. 13.
important. I mentioned earlier how important for Nietzsche the modern discovery of man’s non-human origins was.\textsuperscript{66} We may, then, be able to begin to grasp perhaps the deepest implications of Nietzsche’s thought by understanding what Nietzsche might have meant in having his Zarathustra speak of man as the most courageous animal, and—by extension—of what he means in having Zarathustra later assert that man is the cruelest animal. We may, therefore, be able to begin to grasp the meaning of what Zarathustra had meant when he had asked the “wisest” to “test whether in all seriousness” he had “crawled into the very heart of life and into the very roots of its heart.”\textsuperscript{67}

\textbf{Courage, Cruelty and the Will to Power}

Philosophy, that “most spiritual will to power”, is the \textit{will} to the “‘creation of the world’ to the \textit{causa prima}.” If this creation is not understood by philosophy \textit{to be} a creation, it is, at best, a \textit{creation} of the world in the image of that philosophy.\textsuperscript{68} Such philosophy, Nietzsche claims, is a “philosophy that has begun to believe in itself.”\textsuperscript{69} Belief is close to opinion. If a thing is held to be by opinion, it may only seem, or appear, to be. It is not necessarily true. There is, Nietzsche indicates, in seeming, in appearances, or in the will to appearances, a feeling of security.\textsuperscript{70} This security is shattered, or this “will to appearance, to simplification, to the mask, to the cloak, in short

\textsuperscript{65} Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{66} This point is generally overlooked by many commentaries on Nietzsche perhaps because those commentators take this discovery, and therewith also its implications, for granted. I am indebted for my understanding that the so-called discovery of man’s non-human origins plays a decisive role for understanding Nietzsche’s thought to the transcripts from Leo Strauss’s 1959 lecture course on \textit{Zarathustra}.
\textsuperscript{67} Nietzsche, TSZ, Part II, “On Self-Overcoming.”
\textsuperscript{68} Nietzsche, BGE, 9.
to the surface—for every surface is a cloak—is countered by that sublime seeker after knowledge, who insists on profundity, multiplicity, and thoroughness, with a will which is a kind of cruelty of the intellectual conscience and taste."71 Every courageous thinker, Nietzsche continues, will be able to recognize this, but only assuming that he "has hardened and sharpened his eye for himself long enough and that he is used to severe discipline72 and also to severe words." This cruel and courageous self-discipline, Nietzsche suggests, maintains a "profound aversion to reposing once and for all in any one total view of the world."73 Nietzsche seems to indicate thereby that a philosophy that has "begun to believe in itself," at least in the sense in which a philosophy that does not self-consciously create the world in its own image and rests content with that image, is not deserving of the name. He warns, then, against confusing the opinion of a thing with knowledge of it. It would seem, then, that he allows for something like knowledge of opinion, that is to say, knowledge of the fact that an opinion is only an opinion. The surface, the seeming or superficial—what is by opinion—can only be countered by a relentless probing in the direction of what is beneath that surface, the true or profound. But man needs surfaces, veils that cover over the true meanings of things. Only an unyielding and courageous defiance towards surfaces and veils, because they hide from man the truth about things, and therefore a cruelty towards what it is in him that needs surfaces and veils can allow man to see things for what they are.

69 IBID.
70 Nietzsche, BGE, 230.
71 IBID. 230. I have used Kaufmann's translation from "wirkt jener sublime Hang des Erkennenden entgegen" on. Emphasis added.
72 "Zucht" can also mean "breeding." "Züchten" means "to breed."
73 Nietzsche, WP, 470. Translated by Walter Kaufmann.
Now Nietzsche refers in aphorism 188 of *Beyond Good and Evil* to severe discipline and even to severe obedience as "the moral imperative of nature." This discipline and obedience, necessarily inculcated in man by others, must in the most important sense, be more *deeply inculcated in man by himself*. This discipline, even this *cruelty*, a "cruelty turned against oneself,"\(^{74}\) is a form of "self-overcoming"\(^{75}\) or of the will to power turning against itself. This cruelty, or this ruthless honesty with oneself, is not to be confused with what he calls, and other philosophers would also call, the "love of truth."\(^{76}\) This "love of truth," as opposed to this cruel or ruthless probity, belongs to "the gold dust of *unconscious* human vanity."\(^{77}\) What claims to be love of truth is therefore *unconsciously* motivated by the will to power. What claims to be a love of truth is not a love of truth that is, but a *will* to a "truth" that might not be. It is not a love of truth because what it thinks is true--nature--in the sense that it thinks of nature, i.e. as simply amenable to and supportive of a reasoning that could claim to be final, and hence true, *is not*. It is the unconscious printing onto nature of that which is not nature. The Truth--Nietzsche's "truth,"--on the other hand, is decidedly different: the will to power of life "walks on the heels of (the) will to truth."\(^{78}\) His truth is, then, a conscious printing onto nature and, as a conscious assertion of will to power in accordance with the relentless turning of the will to power against oneself. That truth is, or would seem to be, in agreement with the will to power that is nature. The will to power turned against itself sees, then, that knowing, or knowledge, in the final sense desired by philosophers from

\(^{74}\) Nietzsche, BGE 229.
\(^{75}\) Nietzsche, TSZ II "On Self-Overcoming."
\(^{76}\) Nietzsche, BGE 230
\(^{77}\) IBID. Emphasis added.
\(^{78}\) Nietzsche, TSZ II, "On Self-Overcoming."
Socrates on, i.e. as grounded in a realm of being beyond becoming, or as beyond the will to power, is impossible.\textsuperscript{79}

The long tradition of philosophy, which attempted to know all being, or the being beyond becoming, did not take this impossibility into account. The final and, it seems, necessary result of that tradition is a pessimism, which says of all life, of all being, that "all is empty, all is the same, all has been" that is, a teaching that is the very opposite of life affirming. Nietzsche's Zarathustra slays, puts to death, this teaching of death, and, in so doing, slays death itself: "'Was that life? Well then! Once more!'" This act, Nietzsche claims elsewhere, is

"the ideal of the most highly courageous, alive, and world-affirming human being, who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with what was and is, but who wants to have what was and is repeated into all eternity, crying insatiably da capo, not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle..."\textsuperscript{80}

This, then, is an indication of what Nietzsche means in seeking to "translate man back into Nature." This, he claims, is his "task."\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79} Socrates, too, would seem to have thought that knowledge in the apparently complete sense that Nietzsche seems to want to indicate in referring to the "love of truth" was also impossible, or that knowledge is necessarily incomplete knowledge, i.e. that the knowledge that is available is knowledge of opinion, or knowledge of ignorance. But the difference between them is nonetheless crucial regarding precisely this point of seeming agreement. To Nietzsche's ruthless honesty or intellectual probity, Socrates could still oppose a "love of truth," and do so coherently. I will attempt to take this up explicitly, even if only cursorily, in my conclusion.

\textsuperscript{80} Nietzsche, BGE, 56. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{81} Nietzsche, BGE, 230.
IV. Nietzsche’s Task, and its Relation to the Moment of Willing the Eternal Return

The Task

In Ecce Homo, in the second sub-section of the chapter on Dawn, Nietzsche describes his task as follows:

“My task, to prepare a moment of the highest self-examination (Selbstbesinnung) for humanity, a great noon, where it looks back and looks forward, where it steps out from the rule of chance and priests and poses the question of the why? the what for? for the first time as a whole.”

The great noon is the peak, the absolute moment, during which mankind can become clear about its why and what for. Its why and what for is understood by Nietzsche to be the will to power. This noon will be, then, a moment, a moment in which the task--Nietzsche’s task--will have been prepared; it will be the moment in which the doctrine of will to power has become conscious of itself, or when the “complementary man in whom the rest of existence justifies itself”82 “consciously creates values on the basis of the understanding of the will to power as the fundamental phenomenon.”83 If, as Nietzsche suggests, that understanding consists above all in coming to terms with and learning to

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82 Nietzsche, BGE, 207.
“get along with what was and is,” i.e. an overcoming of the spirit of revenge, then such a “complementary man” will “want to have what was and is repeated into all eternity.”

**The Moment at the Gateway**

We notice, in returning to *Zarathustra*, that the moment in which Nietzsche’s task as described in *Ecce Homo* is made clear appears to be similar— at least as a moment—to the moment that *Zarathustra* “shows” the dwarf, a “moment” described as a gateway with a “lane” leading backward, and a lane leading forward. Both of these lanes *appear* to be linear because they each lead in both directions eternally. But they are not linear, for what “to us looks like two straight avenues taking off in opposite directions is in truth that segment of an enormous circle which is visible to us here and now, while the circle itself perpetually revolves back upon itself.”

What at first appears to us as a linear time, and therewith perhaps a conception of time as a progress towards a perfect moment in which either oblivion from or permanent rest from all time and passing away may take place, is soon determined to be circular. Hence, we see, there can be no such oblivion or rest. There is, then, both a moment and not a moment, for all “gateways” along the backward and forward leading paths of eternity are moments in themselves, all equal to each other. But there is a moment of insight, a moment in which the character of these eternally recurring moments, occurs, despite the fact that “no one has yet followed either to its end.” There is, then, an apparent break or stop along the eternally leading

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84 Nietzsche, BGE, 56.
backwards and forwards paths, a break or a stop during which one can become clear about the character of those paths, even if only to then affirm those eternally recurring backwards and forwards moving paths.

That moment will not, however, be a moment apart from the other moments; the gateway will not last forever. The moment of willing the eternal recurrence--even the future moment of the "great noon"--eternally recurs; this itself means that the moment is not eternal. Eternal recurrence is the opposite of the "eternal" that is beyond time, or the eternal redemption through linear time. Eternal recurrence is, one might say, the antidote to "the eternal" as such. It is itself this moment now, and all other moments too. Man can gain a "moment" of awareness, but even that moment of awareness is momentary. To use the language of Nietzsche in the afore mentioned passage from Ecce Homo, we might say that man has ascended or will ascend to this peak; but that he cannot hide from the fact that this peak, as a peak, has a descending as well as an ascending path. He must look down, now that he has climbed up; or he must look out and forward through the gateway and out and backwards as well. Both the ascent and the descent, both directions, must be faced and must be faced squarely. This implies that time, or time as human beings have conceived of it because they have participated in it, is itself momentary; that "time" is coeval with man.

The dwarf-mole seems to agree readily to at least a version of these propositions: "All truth is crooked, all time is a circle." But Zarathustra intensifies the view of the dwarf, for "it is not similar things that come and go in an endless enervating cycle that thwarts all ambition" for "exactly the same things return, precisely as they were and
are. The dwarf takes cognizance of the eternally recurring cycle of things as meaningless, but his will becomes frozen. He, the nihilist, is only able to repeat to himself the words of the soothsayer. But Zarathustra wills the eternal return of all things, including the eternal return of the dwarf-mole and his view that all life is meaningless. Zarathustra sees the nihilist—who would never wish for the return to the meaninglessness of life, of being as nothingness—and raises him. “We,” says Zarathustra, meaning not only Zarathustreans, but all of us Platonists, Christians, and all those who seek refuge in being beyond becoming and everything in between; Schopenhaurean pessimists, latter-day nihilists, and the last men that are somehow the human results of all these; all of these must be willed to return. Here, perhaps upon realizing this in its fullest implications, Zarathustra begins to speak more softly, afraid of his thoughts and “the thoughts behind (his) thoughts.” These thoughts, among them “the thought that is hardest to bear,” grow “terrifying.”

The End of Man

Almost as difficult to bear as the thought that is simply hardest to bear, and a great obstacle to philosophy, however, is the prospect that there was a great time before which man as man lived, and there will in all likelihood be a time during which he will no longer live as well. This fact, if indeed it is a fact, poses a great difficulty to philosophy precisely because it ensures the almost complete impenetrability of

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86 Lampert, 1986, p. 165.
87 Heidegger, Vol. II, p. 44.
philosophy into the question of nature, at least in a way that is satisfying for him who demands clarity about the whole, therefore the “why” and “what for” not only of man. This fact ensures, therefore, that there cannot even be eternal problems, because, for man at least, there is nothing eternal. There is only this—in the grand scheme of things—very brief moment during which he exists and thinks, and then nothing.

Nietzsche could not simply resign himself to this state of affairs, or turn away from asking questions about it. In facing man’s coming to be from non-man, from “worm” to “ape” to “man” and even to the “superman” who will stand at the peak, man or superman faces the question not only of this man’s individual death, but of man’s inevitable demise and even extinction.

Nietzsche faced this question, unlike most of us, in the most steely-eyed way conceivable. In this most important of respects, Nietzsche was unlike the “shallow optimist,” Friedrich Engels, the friend and collaborator of Karl Marx, who, while recognizing that there is nothing “imperishable except the uninterrupted process of becoming and perishing” and even that there is “not only an ascending, but also a descending, process” for human beings, completely evaded this difficulty by concluding that we are not to worry, and hence not really to think about the implications for man and nature, because “we are certainly still rather remote from the point where decline begins to set in”.

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88 This despite the fact that, according to Zarathustra, man will recur—although the theoretical justification for this admittedly unlikely possibility lies elsewhere in Nietzsche’s works, alluded to in Zarathustra only in the chapter “On the Three Evils.”

89 Nietzsche, TSZ Prologue 3.


91 Friedrich Engels, “Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie,” This was quoted from by Leo Strauss in his lecture “Progress or Return?” and I have used what appears to
Unlike Engels, Nietzsche thought these implications through as far as he could.
The doctrine of the eternal return is Nietzsche's answer to this insight into the problem of facing what is implied, then, in both the ascent and descent, or of what is implied in consistently understanding being as becoming. Only if eternity is eternal becoming, or eternal recurrence, is this moment of insight—a moment that will itself eternally recur—the solution to the problem faced by but never adequately dealt with by the philosophers of the past, of their failed attempts to ground the human being in, to translate the human being into, nature. Only if the philosopher is not motivated by the spirit of revenge, only if he is not guilty of fabricating or stamping a "god" or "nature" or "being" onto becoming, only if he celebrates not just the transitory aspect of becoming that he in his life experiences, but all of it, eternally, is he truly free from the spirit of revenge and therefore natural as man. That this is a difficult, and even at first sight undesirable, proposition goes without saying; hence the necessity of willing it, of the great cruelty of the will of the spirit turning against itself in ruthless honesty and rigorous self examination, so as to be able finally to rejoice in it, and even, so to speak, to become "will-less."92

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92 Nietzsche, TSZ II, "On The Sublime Ones."
V. The Thought Most Difficult to Bear

The thought that will be the most difficult to bear, however, concerns the last man, and hence consists in reconciling the will to the future, the will to the superman who vanquishes the last man, with the eternal recurrence and therefore the eternal recurrence of last men, or rather of what had led to them. I can only treat of this problem cursorily here, since the bulk of that theme is taken up in “The Convalescent” for which another fifty or so pages of interpretation would be needed.

The Dog and the Moon

With the slaying of the dwarf, or at least his disappearance, the scene changes. Zarathustra suddenly hears the howl of a dog, a dog he claims to have heard before as a child. His “thoughts race back” to his childhood. Are we to understand as a “child” the young Zarathustra who had brought the Persians their god of light and darkness, the prophet who had first cursed the world with good and evil? What does Zarathustra mean by referring to this moment of both remembering and at the same time now hearing the dog’s miserable howl, now seeing the fullness of the moon? The dog is unlike Zarathustra’s own animals, the eagle and the snake, the anti-Christian symbols of pride.
and cunning. But the dog is the shepherd's animal, the animal used for herding sheep. Is the dog, or something like the dog, necessary for the future herding of sheep by the new shepherd, the superman? Do the dog and his shepherd, in short, indicate the new political character of the superman's project, a project that Zarathustra seems not to be able to engage in with his animals, the symbols of his solitude? If the dog's bark forces Zarathustra's thoughts to race back to his childhood and his "childhood" is the symbol for his past as Zarathustra, prophet and lawgiver, and bringer of tables of good and evil to the Persians, are we to understand that even the new political act, the new legislation, will, being a political act, necessarily partake of that spirit of revenge and gravity that seems, in this scene, to be recalled? Is facing this prospect part of what is implied in truly overcoming the spirit of revenge?

Let us go further: The dog trembles at the moon, the fullness of the moon, the celestial body which sheds the only available light. The moonlight casts shadows over things and hides or distorts their appearances. By the light of the moon one can see, but not clearly; one "sees," therefore, because one imagines things which are not there: ghosts, spirits. The moment of this vision is the deepest midnight, or that moment of the day, of night, most removed in time from the noon when the sun stands in the center of the sky casting its light into and onto everything. The light of the moon is a "merely borrowed light," the light associated by Nietzsche with ancient philosophy, with contemplation, and not with creation. The dog, the shepherd's dog, is terrified by this moon. This terror must, then, be indicative of the terror of Zarathustra's most terrible

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94 Ibid.
thought. Somehow grappling with the implications, the deepest implications, of the eternal return, must occur at night, even though the moment in which the “complementary man in whom the rest of existence justifies itself” steps forward, consciously creating new values on the basis of the conscious discovery of nature—the will to power—is noon. But “the world is deep,” and “deeper than day had been aware.” This would seem to mean that willing the eternal return, especially if it is to be grounded in something other than the willing of it, is to recognize the necessity of the return of precisely that mode of thinking, against which willing the eternal return was necessarily willed in the first place. Is there perhaps something dark, mysterious, something which resists the clarity of daylight, and therefore which resists full articulation about willing the eternal return simply?

What does Zarathustra mean by remembering that as a “child” he felt pity, and at the same time, that he is now moved to feel pity for the whole scene again? Pity, which he had slain in the dwarf, that “praxis” common to Christianity and nihilism, rushes back at this moment. These things, Christianity, nihilism, pity; in short all things motivated by the spirit of revenge, we have already indicated, “return” in a manner of speaking. Is this scene, then, an indication of what Zarathustra must have to grapple with as his most terrible thought, namely, the thought that even or precisely willing the eternal return and thus overcoming the spirit of revenge means not taking revenge against the darkest forces of the spirit of revenge—conveyed in some manner by these memories of memories—or not stamping onto the apparently meaningless given a world apart from the meaningless given, but serenely resigning oneself to that meaningless given, celebrating it in its
meaninglessness? But if the shepherd and his dog are, as I have suggested, indications of at least future potential political or legislative activity, and all such activity necessarily partakes of the human need to "stamp" human creations onto the otherwise meaningless whole, i.e. necessarily partakes of the spirit of revenge and gravity, will the new legislator himself partake of those spirits? Or are the grounds for his new legislation the absolute overcoming of the spirit of revenge, and hence the ability to recognize without disdain the unexamined human need to partake in the spirit of revenge? Might he sometimes even cultivate it for the sake of overcoming it? "Must there not be that over which one dances and dances away? For the sake of the light and lightest must there not be moles and grave-dwarfs?" Do we not hereby return to something like Plato's notion of the noble lie? Does willing the eternal return in all of its implications, mean coming face to face with the deepest recesses of that which is being willed against, and hence, for the true overcoming of it, that which is being willed eternally?

This, or something like it, seems to be the general theme of this section. This becomes clearer in the second episode, where we see Zarathustra observing the shepherd.

**The Shepherd and the Snake**

Suddenly, "in the bleakest moonlight," Zarathustra sees a man, a "young shepherd...writhing, gagging, in spasms, his face distorted, and a heavy black snake hanging out of his mouth." He had "never seen so much nausea and pale dread on one

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95 Nietzsche, TSZ, Part III, "The Other Dancing Song."
face" as he had seen on this shepherd's. The shepherd's dog jumped and bristled and whined ever more ferociously, unable to do anything about the terrible, black snake crawling into his master's mouth, unable or resistant to affirm, unlike Zarathustra's animals later, and even if only as an animal, the now apparently destructive doctrine of the eternal return in the form of this black, heavy snake. The eternal return here appears to be destructive rather than creative.97 Why is it shown in the form of a snake? And why is that snake black?

We recall that one of Zarathustra's own animals is a serpent, a snake-like creature. Where Zarathustra's serpent appears to be a purposeful inversion of what is so negatively determined about the serpent or snake on the basis of the story of the Garden of Eden, the heavy, black snake as Zarathustra sees it here, dangling from the mouth of the shepherd, in the black of deepest midnight, seems to represent a reversion to something like the snake of that story. The serpent, we are told there, is "more subtle than any beast of the field."98 It is cunning: craftily moving on, stinging and then engulfing its prey. Its eyes are cold and unblinking, both inviting and repelling. Its eyes, looking out at man, invite him to speak, to give the first speech expressly uttered by him other than to name the other animals. In Genesis, the serpent is the first thing other than God whose speech is written. Its first speech is an invitation to challenge God, causing the human being to whom it speaks to rebel by invoking or eliciting what may only have been the latent potential to rebel lurking within. The serpent is thus responsible for awakening man to his rebellious potential, a potential which has everything to do with

98 Genesis 3:1.
“becoming like God, knowing good and evil.” The black serpent thus stands at the beginning of man’s black beginnings as the being who takes revenge against becoming and refuge in the fortress of a god beyond becoming. To overcome the long and black history of revenge initiated by the first bite of an apple given to man by the serpent, to return, moving away from the darkness, to the light of noon, man must bite the head, the apparently rebellious because apparently rational element, from the serpent. Only after having bitten back the head from the beast responsible for turning man away from his nature, only after having spat out the corrupting “knowledge of good and evil” which leads to the “mole and dwarf who say ‘Good for all, evil for all,’” can man return, by willing the eternal return in all of its implications, take back the apple forbidden man by God and shown to man by the serpent, smell it “and find its fragrance lovely.”

The shepherd, Zarathustra demands, must bite the head from this snake. This act of biting, Zarathustra tells his audience of sailors, was a “vision and a foreseeing.” He invited the sailors who hate to deduce to guess the meaning of the riddle, to guess “what” Zarathustra then saw in “a parable,” and who “this shepherd” was, into “whose throat the snake crawled.” The audience of sailors, just as the readers, are to guess, of course, that it is none other than Zarathustra himself. Is it?

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100 My “Biblical” interpretation of the snake should indicate sufficiently why I think Heidegger is more or less correct to speak of eating the snake as digesting and therefore being able to overcome nihilism, if nihilism is the end-result of thinking in terms of good and evil. But this can also mean coming to terms with the full implications of the eternal return à la Lampert, since overcoming nihilism is tantamount to willing the eternal return.
Zarathustra and the Shepherd

Posing a great difficulty to the possibility that they are one and the same despite the fact that Zarathustra speaks in “The Convalescent” of “how that monster crawled into my throat and suffocated me,” is the difference of the shepherd’s immediate reaction from Zarathustra’s. Zarathustra becomes the convalescent, i.e. he suffers terribly as a result of having digested this snake head and must recover, whereas the shepherd “spewed away the head of the snake—and he jumped up. No longer shepherd, no longer human—one changed, radiant, laughing!” If he is no longer shepherd, is he no longer a premonition of the necessarily political task of willing the eternal return and therefore of teaching men to “remain faithful to the earth?”

Having digested the snake, having become “no longer shepherd,” has he become a-political? But before it seemed necessary or at least desirable, especially for the complete affirmation of the eternal return, to become political, to legislate anew. At any rate, one is forced to wonder how Zarathustra himself will respond to this question, as his reaction to the laughter of the shepherd is curious: “O my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human laughter; and now a thirst gnaws at me, a longing that never grows still. My longing for this laughter gnaws at me; oh, how do I bear to go on living! And how could I bear to die now!” Zarathustra, we are tempted to say, is envious of the shepherd’s laughter; that he hopes, but is unsure whether he ever will be able, to attain to such laughter. Even if this vision is only a premonition or a “foreseeing” of Zarathustra’s biting the head from the black snake, we are forced to reiterate that Zarathustra does not laugh during his long stage of
convalescence, but is forced again and again to confront the difficulty in thought of reconciling the desire to overcome the small man, that product of the history of philosophy and religion animated by the spirit of revenge, with not himself succumbing to the spirit of revenge. In short, tragedy, not comedy (unless it is a tragic-comedy--there being no better response than to laugh) seems to distinguish Zarathustra as a convalescent. Zarathustra reminds us in his convalescence that man "is the cruelest animal." Is the truth that man, Zarathustra, is finally able to see, through his relentless probity and even cruelty toward himself, itself the result of a discipline or the "moral imperative of nature," an incommensurable truth, a tragic irreconcilability of ends? Or is the laughing response to that a grounded and coherent response that Zarathustra—as yet—and perhaps therefore also Nietzsche himself is unable to attain?

"—To repeat: how many gods are still possible!—Zarathustra himself, to be sure, is merely an old atheist: he believes neither in old nor in new gods. Zarathustra says he would; but Zarathustra will not—Do not misunderstand him.

The type of God after the type of creative spirits, of 'great men.'" \(^{103}\)

\(^{102}\) Nietzsche, TSZ, Prologue 3.
Conclusion

The ambiguity expressed above can be put in a form of this question, asked by Thomas Pangle, in his brilliant essay on Zarathustra: "The decisive question is, will there be, can there be, the eternal return of men and values who will someday prove the possibility of the yet unrealized nobility; or will there only be the eternal recurrence of Zarathustra and his hopes?" By the "yet unrealized nobility" I understand a necessarily political, or new legislative activity based upon willing and therefore having come fully to terms with the deepest implications of the eternal return. Is this possible or not? Nietzsche seems to leave it at this, a question. This, it seems to me, is the question at which we arrive after having attempted to understand what Nietzsche means by wanting to translate man back into nature.

It seems, then, that Nietzsche's attempt to turn, or return, to nature may succeed, but in an odd way. For in speaking of translating man to a nature that is itself a will to power or a becoming on the basis of the most spiritual form of the will to power turning against itself, Nietzsche appears not to have been led back to being, i.e. to that which was thought to be the truth about nature, or to that which was most emphatically thought "to be" in both being and becoming. There is, or appears to be, only becoming, even if an eternal becoming. Philosophy, that most spiritual form of the will to power, is somehow becoming as well, and when turned against itself in the manner Nietzsche speaks of, recognizes this fact clearly, decisively, for the first time ever. But to recognize this fact is

103 Nietzsche, WP 1038. Trans. Walter Kaufmann.
not to rest and therefore to lapse into the hopes or illusions about being from which this ruthless honesty seeks to escape because it seeks clarity. No, philosophy in Nietzsche’s sense is clarity about the fundamental “character” of the whole, its perpetually returning movement or flux.

Nietzsche’s philosophy seems, then, to hold out far greater expectations from philosophy than at least the ancient philosophers did. For, whereas the ancients were at least skeptical regarding the possibility of complete knowledge of the whole, they attempted to gain knowledge of or about its most important, because most pertinent, part, the human part. They did this not by looking behind or digging, or “cutting into” the human experiences, in the way that Nietzsche seems to have done, but by understanding those experiences as they were articulated by those who claimed to have had them. They were not therefore compelled to jettison the experiences of men and what was claimed about those experiences, in the hopes of discovering the true experience. Nietzsche, in going behind the appearances, the surfaces, of things, seems unfortunately compelled to jettison more than those appearances and the human experiences that go with them. This, I think, is conveyed by Zarathustra’s mysterious dialogue with the mysterious embodiment in speech of Life at the end of Part III of Thus Spoke Zarathustra:

Then life looked thoughtfully behind herself and around herself and said quietly: “O Zarathustra, you are not faithful enough to me. You haven’t loved me (Du liebst mich lange nicht) as much as you say you do; I know that you are thinking that you want to leave me soon. There is an old heavy, heavy growl-bell that growls right up to your cave:-- when you hear this bell strike the hour at midnight, then you think between one and twelve—you think then, O Zarathustra, I know it, that you soon want to leave me!”

“Yes,” I answered hesitantly, “but you also know…” and I said something into her ear, right between her tangled, yellow, foolish hair-locks.

“You know that, O Zarathustra? That nobody knows.”
And we saw each other and looked on the green meadow over which the cool evening was just running, and we wept with each other. —But then life was dearer to me, than my wisdom ever was.

We see that a return to nature is not necessarily a return to reason, or to that peak of reason which is, or could be, wisdom. We turn, or return, to an animal nature, or to a nature, an incomplete but deep understanding of which, even in human terms, seems to be impossible. Nature, life, resists interpretation. And yet nature so resists interpretation, it is claimed, because nature or life is becoming. This incongruence seems to be the core of Nietzsche's thought. It is to his great credit that he appears to have recognized that and left it at that, hoping perhaps that the conundrum he faced—perhaps inadequately—would be faced by someone else, and perhaps adequately. It seems that on the basis of this incongruence, one could go either of two ways: the way of him who radicalizes an understanding of being as only becoming and the eternality of becoming as only the time that men—different men—experience in a necessarily finite or limited manner, making all of being become essentially mysterious, and at the same time making men oblivious of eternity; or the way of him who sees the great difficulty—perhaps the impossibility—of concluding definitively that being is becoming, or that becoming is being, and who therefore understands that the only access to that question is through an investigation, not of what is first simply, but of what is first for human beings, taking his bearings by what appears to be a fact that for all human beings as such there is necessarily a concern with eternity, and hence necessarily at least a sempiternal standard of human nature.
Bibliography

Abbreviations for Nietzsche’s Works

A  The Antichrist
BGE Beyond Good and Evil
D  Dawn
EH Ecce Homo
GM The Genealogy of Morals
GS The Gay Science
TI Twilight of the Idols
TSZ Thus Spoke Zarathustra
UAHL The Use and Abuse of History for Life
WP The Will to Power

I. Works Cited

Nietzsche’s Works


II. Nietzsche’s Works Cited in Translation


III. Other Works


