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Thus Spoke Zarathustra

*A Book for Everyone
and Nobody*



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INTRODUCTION

Thus Spoke Zarathustra—A Book for Everyone and Nobody: the subtitle, at first puzzling, is also telling. The work is for ‘nobody’ insofar as it’s an intensely personal piece of philosophizing: ‘There is in this book an incredible amount of personal experience and suffering that is comprehensible only to me—many pages strike me as almost *blood-thirsty*’ (B Aug. 1883). So why did Nietzsche bother to make public his personal experience? And to what extent is the result philosophy, whose practitioners have traditionally aimed at impersonality, generality, or even universality? The answer lies in Nietzsche’s unusual understanding of philosophy and the philosopher, as exemplified in his most unusual book: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche knew that what is personal may after all touch others, though the process remains obscure. ‘Strange!’ he wrote in 1880, ‘I am dominated at every moment by the thought that my history is not only a personal one, that I am doing something for many people when I live like this and work on and write about myself this way’ (W 9: 7 [105]). A few years later he says this about the way philosophers can transform life-experience into thought: ‘We must constantly give birth to our thoughts out of our pain, and nurture them with everything we have in us of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and catastrophe. Life to us—that means constantly transforming everything we are into light and flame, as well everything that happens to us’ (JS Preface, 3). Such light and flame can illumine the way for others through the medium of the written page, as long as the style is sufficiently vibrant.

Then the life that is saved in the book is immortal since it survives its author’s death with a strange autonomy: ‘It seeks out readers for itself, ignites new life, delights, terrifies, engenders new works, becomes the soul of plans and actions’ (HA 208). If the word ‘instructs’ is notably absent from this list of capabilities, this is because Nietzsche follows Goethe’s well-known dictum: ‘I hate everything that merely instructs me, without amplifying or directly enlivening my activity.’ It is his concern with imbuing *Zarathustra*’s pages with the most vital life that enables a presentation of the personal to transform the reader’s experience: ‘Whoever has *lived* in

this book returns to the world with an altered face and vision' (*B* 22 Feb. 1884). Dozens of Nietzsche's letters testify to a passionate desire to reach other people and change their minds.

We can see, then, how *Zarathustra* might be a book for someone other than the author, but this hardly makes it a book 'for everyone'. Martin Heidegger reads the 'for everyone' helpfully as 'for every human being as a human being, for each one whenever and insofar as one becomes for oneself worthy of thinking about in one's essential nature'.¹ But how many of us become that for ourselves? Nietzsche does claim, in a letter written while he was composing the third part of the book (*B* 13 Feb. 1883), that the work is 'accessible to anyone'—but since he is writing to his publisher, and authors seldom proclaim minimal market for their books, a little scepticism might be appropriate. Nonetheless, the publication history of *Zarathustra* suggests that the book has a remarkably broad appeal: just as it was the author's favourite among his works, it has also been the most popular among general readers (if not among Nietzsche scholars).

Heidegger reads the 'for nobody' of the subtitle as meaning 'for nobody among the inquisitive types who . . . merely intoxicate themselves with isolated fragments and particular aphorisms from this book'. This makes sense in view of Zarathustra's calling aphorisms 'mountain peaks' or 'summits', which suggests a vast mass of supporting material (thoughts, ideas, images) to be negotiated before they can be adequately understood. This takes work—or, to put it more encouragingly: *Zarathustra* is a text that richly repays the effort of repeated readings over time.

For a deeper understanding of the book, Nietzsche reminds us, we need to appreciate its context: 'To have the prerequisite for understanding *Zarathustra*, all my earlier writings must be genuinely and profoundly understood; also the *necessity* of the sequence of these writings and the development expressed in them' (*B* 29 Aug. 1886). Even if one restricts the requirement to his published works it is still exacting, in view of the seven books that appeared before *Zarathustra*: *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Untimely Observations*, *Human, All Too Human*, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*,

¹ Martin Heidegger, 'Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?', in David B. Allison (ed.), *The New Nietzsche* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 64.

Dawn of Morning, and *The Joyful Science*.² Nietzsche explicitly refers to these last two as ‘commentaries on *Zarathustra* written in advance of the text’ (B 7 Apr. 1884).

If all this doesn’t enlighten sufficiently, one can turn to Nietzsche’s next book, *Beyond Good and Evil*, which he wrote as an explication of *Zarathustra*, since so few readers appeared to have understood the earlier text. In a letter to the historian Jacob Burckhardt, whose colleague Nietzsche had been at the University of Basel, he wrote: ‘It says the same things as my *Zarathustra*, but differently, very differently’ (B 22 Sept. 1886). Lastly, there is an indispensable discussion of *Zarathustra* in one of Nietzsche’s last works, *Ecce Homo* (1888).

The nineteenth century was a time of fervent Orientalism in Europe, with especial interest in Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster is the Greek name for the Persian prophet Zarathustra, whose dates are unknown but who probably flourished some time between the twelfth and sixth centuries BCE. In the fifty years before Nietzsche’s book appeared, over twenty major studies of the *Zend-Avesta* (the sacred text attributed to Zarathustra) and/or its author were published in German.³ Having been a classical philologist, with friends who were Orientalists, Nietzsche was well aware of this interest in Zarathustra in academic circles and beyond. Later, in *Ecce Homo*, he remarks that no one has ever asked him ‘what the name “Zarathustra” means in [his] mouth’ (EH ‘Why I Am a Destiny’, 3). A notebook entry penned a few weeks after he was first struck by the thought of eternal recurrence, which became the basic idea of *Zarathustra*, reads as follows:

Midday and Eternity
Hints toward a New Life

Zarathustra, born by Lake Urmi, left his home in his thirtieth year, went to the province of Aria and wrote the *Zend-Avesta* during ten years of solitude in the mountains. (W 9: 11 [195])

² *Untimely Observations* was first published in four separate parts: *David Strauss the Confessor and Writer*, *The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth. Assorted Opinions and Maxims* was first published as a supplement to *Human, All Too Human*, and *The Wanderer and His Shadow* was subsequently published together with *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* as Volume 2 of *Human, All Too Human*.

³ Hushang Mehregan, ‘Zarathustra im Awesta und bei Nietzsche: eine vergleichende Gegenüberstellung’, *Nietzsche-Studien*, 8 (1979), 292.

This sentence is a paraphrase of a passage from the cultural historian Friedrich von Hellwald concerning the Persian prophet.⁴ Somewhat modified, it later becomes the opening sentence of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Hellwald also writes that Zarathustra was the first to come up with the idea of a 'moral order to the world'. As Nietzsche later puts it: 'The transposition of morality into metaphysics . . . is *his* doing.' And so the reason for the choice of protagonist is this: 'Zarathustra *created* this disastrous error, morality; consequently he must be the first to *recognize* this' (*EH* *ibid.*).

Like many a philosophical masterpiece, *Zarathustra* engages in a dialogue with earlier texts, though the range in this case goes beyond the philosophical to include the Homeric epics, the fragments of Heraclitus, Plato's dialogues, the Luther Bible, Goethe's *Faust*, Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, Emerson's *Essays*, and Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungen* and *Parsifal*. As a schoolboy, Nietzsche was a voracious reader, and these literary texts were a formative influence on him. Friedrich Hölderlin was, along with Goethe, Germany's greatest poet; but it was his epistolary novel *Hyperion*, whose protagonist is a romantic idealist devoted to the regeneration of his native Hellenic culture, that most fascinated the young Nietzsche. It is not generally appreciated that Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'the Sage of Concord', became so popular in Europe during his lifetime that his essays were regularly translated into German not long after their publication in Boston. At 17 Nietzsche recognized a wise mentor and kindred spirit in Emerson, whose powerfully eloquent prose style and ideas about fate, history, and the soul exerted a lasting influence on him as a thinker and writer.⁵ And since *Zarathustra* is a masterpiece of literature as well as philosophy (the author calls it a poetic composition), the figure of its protagonist is formed through deliberate associations with Homer's Odysseus, Plato's Socrates, some Old Testament prophets, the Jesus of the Gospels, Byron's Manfred, Goethe's *Faust*, Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, and Wagner's Siegfried and Parsifal.

⁴ Friedrich von Hellwald, *Culturgeschichte in ihrer natürlichen Entstehung bis zur Gegenwart* (Augsburg, 1874), 128. See Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Knowledge of Philosophy* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

⁵ For a brief account of the influence of Goethe, Byron, Hölderlin, and Emerson on the young Nietzsche see ch. 1 of my *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

A consideration of this last influence highlights the musical and operatic nature of the text. Roger Hollinrake has argued persuasively that *Zarathustra* is in several respects a response to Wagner, and particularly to the 'system of thought' developed in *The Ring* and to *Parsifal*. He writes: '*Zarathustra* was planned as a whole and from the outset as a reply to Wagner, embodying in its own literary idiom just those qualities Nietzsche believed that Wagner, the artist, theorist, and messianic leader, had betrayed.'⁶ To mention just the main points of the argument: while working on *Zarathustra* Nietzsche writes of his aim to 'become Wagner's heir'; Nietzsche saw Wagner and himself as distinctively 'dithyrambic artists'; the assault on Christianity (especially in the Fourth Part) is just as much 'a protest against the messianic pretensions of the second Bayreuth Festival', and *Zarathustra*'s general deprecation of pity is primarily aimed against Wagner's doctrine of pity in *Parsifal*.

As far as the literary style of *Zarathustra* is concerned, Nietzsche emphasizes two sources in particular: 'The language of Luther and the poetic form of the Bible as the basis for a new German *poetry*: that is *my* invention!' (*W* II: 25 [173]). But he also sees these sources as being superseded: 'With *Zarathustra* I believe I have brought the German language to its culmination. After *Luther* and *Goethe* there was still a third step to be made' (*B* 22 Feb. 1884). Many scholars believe that Nietzsche managed to make that step. Much of the language in *Zarathustra* does resonate grandly with—though it sometimes parodies—Luther's Bible, which sounds slightly less archaic to the contemporary German ear than the King James Version does to ours.

Origins

Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry David Thoreau before him, Nietzsche did his best thinking while walking in the open air, so that *place* was of the utmost importance to him as a philosopher. 'Nobody is free to live wherever he wants, and whoever has great tasks to accomplish has an especially narrow range of choice. The influence

⁶ Roger Hollinrake, *Nietzsche, Wagner, and the Philosophy of Pessimism* (London and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. ix.

of climate on the metabolism goes so far that a blunder in regard to place can alienate us from our task altogether' (*EH* 'Why I Am So Clever', 2). Nietzsche's strong physical constitution had been weakened by his contracting dysentery and diphtheria while serving as a medical orderly in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. As he became older his system became ever more sensitive to the physical environment. During the last decade of his productive life, he travelled continually—packing his trunk and moving somewhere else four times a year, with every change of the seasons—all for the sake of being in the right place for his task of thinking and writing. More than with any other philosopher, Nietzsche's works show the influence of the places in which they were thought out and written down.

Although the first part of *Zarathustra* came to him while he was living in Rapallo, a fishing village on the Ligurian coast just east of Genoa, Nietzsche writes that 'the birthplace' of this book is 'the Engadin' and 'sacred Sils' in south-eastern Switzerland (*B* 3 Sept. 1883, 25 July 1884). This aphorism from *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, written shortly after his first visit to the Engadin in 1879, conveys a vivid sense of his feelings for the place that gave rise to *Zarathustra*:

In many places in nature we discover ourselves again. . . . How fortunate the one who can have this experience right *here*, in this constantly sunlit October air, in this happy and mischievous play of the breezes from morning till night, in this purest daylight and temperate coolness, in the totally graceful and genuine character of the hills, lakes, and forests of this high plateau . . . how fortunate the one who can say: 'There is surely much that is grander and more beautiful in nature, but *this* is intimately familiar to me, related by blood, and even more.' (*WS* 338)

Nietzsche didn't return to the Engadin till two years later, when the power of the place helped produce the thought that was the seed from which the book was to grow:

The basic conception of *Zarathustra*, the *thought of eternal recurrence*, the highest formula of affirmation that can ever be attained, dates back to August of 1881: it was sketched on a piece of paper with the inscription '6000 feet beyond human beings and time'. That day I was walking through the woods by Lake Silvaplana; I stopped at a powerful pyramidal block of stone not far from Surlei. The thought came to me there. (*EH* 'Why I Write Such Good Books: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*', 1)

The basic idea of *Zarathustra*, then, is affirmative in the extreme and struck Nietzsche at a place so special that he characterizes it unambiguously. The block of stone is massive, about 3 metres tall, and stands right on the shore of the lake, slightly overhanging the water. Beyond the opposite shore looms the majestic peak of Mount Julier, which rises another 5,000 feet above the valley floor and whose pyramidal shape frames and echoes the contours of the 'eternal recurrence' rock. Given what we know about Nietzsche's hiking habits in the Sils-Maria area, he would have been walking briskly for at least forty-five minutes before coming upon this place, breathing deeply the sweet but somewhat rarefied air of the high Alpine valley. Under such conditions on an August day, in such a place, resolute pessimists could be subject to affirmative thoughts.

A year-and-a-half later Nietzsche was living on 'the graceful, quiet Bay of Rapallo':

My health was not the best, the winter cold and unusually rainy. . . . In spite of this, and almost as proof of my proposition that everything decisive originates 'in spite of' something, it was from this winter and these unfavourable circumstances that my *Zarathustra* originated.—In the mornings I would climb the magnificent road to Zoagli uphill in a southerly direction, looking out over pine trees and far out to sea. In the afternoons, as far as my health permitted, I would walk around the whole Bay of Santa Margherita as far as Portofino. . . . It was on these two paths that the whole first part of *Zarathustra* came to me, and above all Zarathustra himself, as a type: or rather, *he came over me there*. (EH *ibid.*)

A contemporary letter confirms the al fresco origins of the book's first part: 'All of it was conceived in the course of strenuous hiking: absolute certainty, as if every sentence were being called out to me' (B 10 Apr. 1888).

Later that year: 'In the summer [of 1883], having returned to the sacred place [Sils-Maria] where the first lightning of the Zarathustra-thought had struck me, I found the second part of *Zarathustra*. Ten days were sufficient; in no case, neither with the first nor with the third and last part, did I need longer' (EH *loc. cit.* 4). The landscape of this sacred place—with its lakes lined by pines and firs, flower-studded alpine meadows, majestic mountain peaks snow-capped all year round, tall waterfalls and rushing torrents, and everywhere

spectacularly shaped, sized, and coloured rocks—permeates the text of *Zarathustra* and especially chapters in the Second Part.

And at the end of the year: ‘The following winter, under the halcyon sky of Nizza [Nice] which at that time shone into my life for the first time, I found the third part of *Zarathustra*—and was finished. Scarcely one year for the entire work.’ Nietzsche needed clear skies if he was to be fully creative, being exquisitely sensitive to changes in atmospheric pressure and humidity. But he also needed to be by the sea: ‘I could only have composed the final verses of my *Zarathustra* on this coast, in the home of *gaya scienza*’ (B 7 Apr. 1884). And it was just along the coast, in Menton as well as Nice, that he composed the Fourth Part of the book, in the winter of 1884–5.

If Nietzsche did indeed write the first three parts of *Zarathustra* in ten days each, then, given the book’s depth of thought and intricacy of imagistic structure, we have a classic case of inspiration—as he himself observes at length:

Retaining only the smallest remnant of superstition one can still hardly reject the idea of being a mere incarnation, a mere mouthpiece, a mere medium. The concept of revelation, in the sense that suddenly and with indescribable certainty and subtlety something becomes *visible* and audible, something that shakes one to the depths and bowls one over, simply describes the fact of the matter. . . . A rapture whose enormous tension discharges itself now and again in floods of tears, in which one’s walking pace involuntarily quickens or slows down. . . . Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree, yet in a tempestuous feeling of freedom, of being unconditioned, of power, of divinity. . . . The involuntariness of the images and parables is the most remarkable thing of all; one no longer has any conception of what an image or a parable is: everything offers itself as the closest, the most appropriate, the simplest expression. (EH loc. cit. 3)

Nietzsche goes on to emphasize the somatic dimension to this Dionysiac effusion. Describing the composition of a chapter in the Third Part during the steep climb from sea-level to high cliffs along the coast from Nice, he writes: ‘Suppleness of the muscles was always greatest for me when the creative forces flowed most fully. The *body* is inspired: let us leave the “soul” out of it. . . . I was often seen dancing; at that time I could hike in the hills for seven or eight hours without a trace of weariness’ (EH loc. cit. 4).

Nietzsche was well aware that this outflow of creativity was possible only on the basis of his long pondering of the ideas: 'The *whole* of *Zarathustra* is an explosion of forces that have been accumulating for decades' (B 6 Feb. 1884). He was also aware of the dangers of such tremendous creative exhilaration: 'With explosions like this it is easy for the originator to blow up along with them.' These periods of exhilaration were clearly what made life worth living for Nietzsche, despite the grimness of their context: 'Aside from these ten-day work-periods, the years during and above all *after Zarathustra* were a time of incomparable distress. One pays dearly for being immortal: one dies for it several times during one's life' (EH loc. cit. 5). But a refusal to take himself too seriously also helped. Shortly after the idea of eternal recurrence struck, he wrote in letters to friends: 'I really should be in Paris at the big exhibition on electricity, partly to learn the latest, and partly as one of the exhibits. . . . In this respect I'm perhaps more sensitive than any other human being, to my great misfortune!' (B 21 Aug., 28 Oct. 1881).

The Overhuman

One reason why scholars of Nietzsche's work tend to devote less time to *Zarathustra* than his other books is its apparently unphilosophical form. Whereas the standard philosophical text advances arguments within the context of a clearly articulated conceptual framework, *Zarathustra* presents an imagined life within a larger play of images, by means of what the author calls a 'return of language to the nature of imagery' (EH loc. cit. 6). Concepts—the root of the word means 'to grasp'—enable the mind to get a grip on at least some aspects of the world by excluding what they don't grasp, through a logic of negation and opposition. Images, when deployed by a thinker as careful as Nietzsche, also operate according to a certain logic; but the ways in which they work are more complex. Whereas a treatise that articulates ideas or theories in terms of concepts asks that the reader assent to (or refute) their validity, a text like *Zarathustra* invites the reader to follow a train of thought through fields of imagery, and to participate in a play of imagination that engages the whole psyche rather than the intellect alone.

There is consequently very little standard philosophical vocabulary

in *Zarathustra*: the term ‘being’ (*Sein*) is used rarely, and even ‘nature’ appears only once. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that *Zarathustra* does contain three major philosophical ideas: the Overhuman (*Übermensch*), will to power, and the eternal recurrence of the same.

In the first section of the chapter ‘Why I Write Such Good Books’ in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche tells us that the word *Übermensch* as used in *Zarathustra* refers to ‘a type that has turned out in the best possible way, by contrast with “modern” human beings, with “good” human beings, with Christians and other nihilists’. The mention of ‘other nihilists’ suggests that the Overhuman is far from the type that dismisses this transitory world of ours as meaningless or worthless. But the term *Übermensch* is hard to translate. ‘Superman’ conjures up unfortunate associations with musclebound blue-suited heroes and overemphasizes the ‘above’ connotation of the ‘over’ (*über*) at the expense of the ‘across’. ‘Overman’ is therefore better—but since *Mensch* is rendered in the present translation as ‘human’ or ‘human being’, ‘Overman’ fails to convey the relations Zarathustra keeps emphasizing between the human and the Overhuman: ‘I want to teach humans the meaning of their Being: that is the Overhuman, the lightning from the dark cloud of the human’ (Prologue, 7). Leaving *Übermensch* untranslated, on the grounds that it is almost an English word, fails in the same way.

‘Overhuman’ also serves to emphasize that the *Übermensch* is attained through an *overcoming* of the human—as intimated by the word’s first occurrence, in Zarathustra’s first words to the people: ‘I teach to you the Overhuman. The human is something that shall be overcome’ (Prologue, 3). Part of what this means is that the Overhuman emerges from our going beyond the human perspective and transcending the anthropocentric worldview. This is made clear by the three repetitions of the exhortation, ‘Behold, I teach to you the Overhuman!’ followed by declarations of the Overhuman’s kinship with the natural elements: it is ‘the sense of the earth’, ‘this sea’, and ‘this lightning’. And in exhorting his audience to prepare the way for the Overhuman, Zarathustra says: ‘I love him who works and invents to build a house for the Overhuman and prepare for it *earth* and *animal* and *plant*’ (Prologue, 4, emphasis added). Prepare those three because the way to overcome the human is to acknowledge and emulate the nonhuman nature—mineral, animal, vegetal—of which we

consist and on which we depend.⁷ A notebook entry reads: ‘N.B. The highest human being is to be conceived in the image of nature’ (*W* 11: 25 [140]).

Given the powerful presence of the natural world throughout the narrative of *Zarathustra*, it is not surprising that the Overhuman should be reached through retaining or regaining the connection with the animal aspects of the human and with the site of natural functions that is the body. It is important to maintain the tension ‘between beast and Overhuman’ in crossing over to the latter (Prologue, 4), and those who despise the body are ‘no bridges to the Overhuman’ (I. 4). It is a psychological rather than a political goal—‘There where the state *ceases*’ is where one finds ‘the rainbow and the bridges of the Overhuman’ (I. 11)—though it can be reached through the medium of friendship (I. 14). It is also for Zarathustra the primary goal of procreation and marriage (I. 18, 20). Rather than claiming to have attained the condition of the Overhuman himself, Zarathustra simply proclaims the possibility, which will take time to be realized: ‘You lonely ones of today, who withdraw to the side, you shall one day be a people: out of you, who have chosen yourselves, shall a chosen people grow:—and out of them the Overhuman’ (I. 22). But Zarathustra’s father (Nietzsche often refers to Zarathustra as ‘my son’) later remarks on his extreme kindness (even toward ‘his opponents, the priests’) and adds: ‘Here the human is overcome at every moment, the concept “Overhuman” had become the highest reality here’ (*EH* loc. cit. 6).

Since it seems that a condition for the possibility of the appearance of the Overhuman is ‘the death of God’, it’s often assumed that this advent heralds the disappearance of the Divine. The book’s First Part does indeed end with the resounding cry, ‘*Dead are all Gods: now we want the Overhuman to live*’—but this is only a provisional teaching of Zarathustra’s that will soon be superseded. At this early stage he would rather his disciples rid themselves of all belief in supernatural beings than move too soon to a more salutary polytheism—from which they might relapse into some other form of ‘monotontheism’. A careful reading of the last three parts of the

⁷ For a discussion of Nietzsche’s unusual interest in the mineral realm especially, see my essay ‘Staying Loyal to the Earth: Nietzsche as an Ecological Thinker’, in John Lippitt (ed.), *Nietzsche’s Futures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 167–88.

book reveals that for Zarathustra the world, seen clearly and rightly understood, is ‘a dance-floor for divine accidents’ and ‘a Gods’ table for divine dice and dice-throwers’ (3. 4). There is a new kind of religion here—what has been aptly called Nietzsche’s ‘Dionysian pantheism’.⁸

Will to Power

Will to power is a difficult idea that has been widely misunderstood, but two common misconceptions are easily dispensed with: the ‘will’ of will to power is not the kind of willpower exerted by the human ‘I’ or ego; nor is the ‘power’ any kind of brute force exercised by human beings. An immediate prototype of the idea of a transpersonal or cosmic will is to be found in Schopenhauer, who argues in *The World as Will and Representation* that the entire world is basically will, as manifested in phenomena such as gravity, magnetism, and the life-force that drives plants, animals, and human beings. The human will is simply a more highly developed form of the basic force of the universe. Though Nietzsche’s idea of will to power is more complex, he follows Schopenhauer in understanding will cosmically and non-anthropocentrically. In *Zarathustra* (2. 12) no lesser authority than Life herself tells the protagonist that all life is ‘will to power’, and in aphorism 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil* (the *locus classicus* for the idea) Nietzsche suggests that not just life but the entire world ‘would be precisely “will to power” and nothing besides’.⁹

For Nietzsche, brute force is the crudest, most vulgar form of power, and one quite restricted in its range. A tyrant can exercise power over others by imprisoning, torturing, and killing them, but this power comes to an end with the tyrant’s death. (If henchmen continue his work, it is then their own power they are exercising, not his.) At the other end of the spectrum is the power of ideas. Socrates and Jesus had no physical power over others—indeed both were undone by others’ physical power over them—but their ideas have been enormously powerful and far-reaching. Indeed some of their power accrued just because their formulators were prepared to die

⁸ See my essay, ‘Nature and the Human “Redivivized”’: Mahāyāna Buddhist Themes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in John Lippitt and James Urpeth (eds.), *Nietzsche and the Divine* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 181–99.

⁹ For a more comprehensive treatment of this idea see ch. 8 of my *Composing the Soul*.

for them: as Life says to Zarathustra, 'Much is valued by the living more highly than life itself; but out of this very valuing there speaks—will to power!' (2. 12)

While their executioners are of no significance today, Socrates and Jesus continue to affect people's lives all over the world, millennia after their deaths. Their ideas are compelling insofar as they interpret the world in a new way, offering a different understanding of existence. To the extent that they give powerful interpretations of human existence they are engaging in philosophy, which Nietzsche characterizes in *Beyond Good and Evil* as 'the most spiritual will to power' (BGE 9). They stand at the opposite, higher end of the spectrum from powerful tyrants. As Emerson puts it (in 'The American Scholar'): 'Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind.'

The first mention of will to power in *Zarathustra* is in the chapter 'On the Thousand and One Goals', where Zarathustra says: 'A tablet of things held to be good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power' (1. 15). A people's will to power is expressed in its interpretations of the world, especially in terms of value judgements of good and evil: 'What the people believes to be good and evil betrays to me an ancient will to power' (2. 12).

After *Zarathustra* Nietzsche extends the idea of will to power beyond life to all existence, in a famous thought experiment that invites the reader to understand the drives (*Triebe*—which for him constitute our psychical life as human beings) as being what the whole world consists in. But rather than making a metaphysical or ontological assertion concerning the ultimate nature of the universe, he writes at the end of aphorism 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil* just this:

Supposing, finally, that we were to succeed in explaining our entire drive-life as the development and ramification of one basic form of will—namely, of will to power . . . supposing one could find in this the solution to the problem of procreation and nourishment—it is *one* problem—one would then have the right to determine all effective force univocally as: *will to power*. The world seen from within, the world determined and defined in its 'intelligible character', would be precisely 'will to power' and nothing besides.

This hypothesis offers an image of the human being, body and soul,

as a configuration of drives situated within the larger world as an encompassing field of interpretive forces.

The following year, in an addition to *The Joyful Science*, Nietzsche suggests that ‘all existence is essentially interpreting existence’—an idea that brings him close to Chinese Daoist and Japanese Buddhist ways of thinking.¹⁰ If all existence is interpreting, then all phenomena are expressing through their existence: ‘*This* is what it means to be’—or rather ‘become’. A rock asserts itself as a paradigm of elemental solidity. Where vegetation prevails is the claim: *these* processes, we plants, are what sun and earth, water and air, really are becoming. Trees interpret the elements most magnificently over time. Animals supervene, intimating: *this* is what vegetation can become, as they incorporate and assimilate denizens of the plant realm. And humans, presenting themselves as the ultimate embodiment of mineral, vegetal, and animal, represent the grandest interpretation of all—and among humans philosophers represent ‘the most spiritual will to power’.

Eternal Recurrence

It was seven years after his epiphany on the shore of Lake Silvaplana that Nietzsche called eternal recurrence ‘the basic conception of *Zarathustra*’ and ‘the highest formula of affirmation that can ever be attained’. The first mention of the idea is in a notebook entry with the heading ‘The Recurrence of the Same’ and dated ‘Beginning of August 1881’. The final paragraph reads:

The new *gravity: the eternal recurrence of the same*. The infinite importance of our knowing, erring, of our habits, ways of living for all that is to come. What do we do with the *rest* of our life—we who have spent the largest part of it in the deepest ignorance? We teach the teaching—that is the most powerful means by which to *incorporate* it into ourselves. Our kind of blissfulness, as teacher of the greatest teaching. (*W* 9: 11 [141])

To the extent that each of our actions at every moment changes the world, in this moment and with effects that ramify throughout all

¹⁰ *JS* 374. See the essays on China and Japan in Graham Parkes (ed.), *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

subsequent moments, the question ‘What do we do with the *rest* of our life?’ takes on considerable weight. A profound change has taken place in Nietzsche’s life, and he realizes that if others can be induced to ask themselves this question, the change may well be of infinite importance for all that is to come.

A letter written shortly afterwards to his friend Heinrich Köselitz begins:

Now then, my dear, good friend! The August sun is above us, the year moves along, it becomes more still and peaceful on the mountains and in the forests. On my horizon thoughts have arisen the like of which I have never seen before—but I will let nothing be known of them and shall maintain myself in an unshakable silence. Now I shall have to live for at least a *few* years longer! (B 14 Aug. 1881)

But Nietzsche didn’t maintain his unshakable silence for long: a year later he published *The Joyful Science*, at the end of which he introduced the thought of eternal recurrence (though not by name). Here is the classic formulation of the idea:

The Greatest Weight.—What if, one day or night, a daemon were to slide up after you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life, as you now live and have lived it, you will have to live again and innumerable times over; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every pleasure and every thought and sigh and all the unspeakably small and large things in your life must come back to you, and all in the same order and sequence—and likewise this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and likewise this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence will be turned over again and again—and you with it, you tiny speck of dust!’—Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the daemon who talked this way? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment in which you would answer him: ‘You are a God and never have I heard anything more divine!’ If this thought were to gain power over you, it would transform you as you are, and perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?’ would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight! Or how well disposed to yourself and to life would you have to be, to *long for nothing more* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?— (JS 341)

Rather than proclaiming a metaphysical truth or proposing a theory of the universe, this aphorism invites us to engage in a thought experiment—‘What if . . .?’—that could transform us as we are. The

daemon's question concerns 'This life, as you now live and have lived it'. What we are asked to contemplate the eternal recurrence of is only our life *up to this moment*—it might change drastically in the next moment, depending on how we respond to the question. The main point is the choice and the choice is real: this is no fatalism, since the future is opened up by the thought.

The daemon offers two alternatives: we might curse him for burdening our existence every moment with such a weighty question, or else bless him for revealing such a divine prospect. Most people would no doubt prefer to continue living 'in the deepest ignorance' and not to have to shoulder the burden of choosing: the daemon warns that the weight could be lethally crushing. But it could also be transformative, especially if we have experienced a tremendous moment in which we were so well disposed to ourselves and to life that we could say: 'Yes, I want this once more and innumerable times more.' But this requires our also reliving eternally our life up to that moment, with 'nothing new in it . . . and all in the same order and sequence'. In *Zarathustra* we see the protagonist entertain a similar prospect, but in the company not of a daemon but a dwarf—the Spirit of Heaviness, Zarathustra's Devil and arch-enemy (3. 2).

Several notebook entries from the period after the initial epiphany shed helpful light on this difficult idea. A passage that is the prototype for 'The Greatest Weight' begins: 'The world of forces undergoes no diminution: for otherwise in an eternity of time it would have become weak and collapsed' (*W* 9: 11 [148]). Nietzsche speculates here (and elsewhere in the unpublished notes) that in a closed system containing a constant, finite sum of forces, every possible configuration of those forces will recur, given an infinite extent of time. Much scholarly ink has been spilled about this intriguing speculation, but since its plausibility doesn't underwrite the presentation of eternal recurrence in *Zarathustra* there is no need to rehearse the relevant studies here. An idea that does figure in this passage and the later text, however, is that of 'the whole interconnection of all things'. Toward the final climax of the book, Zarathustra sings: 'Did you ever say Yes to a single joy? Oh, my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well. All things are chained together, entwined, in love—' (4. 19. 10). This is why affirming eternal recurrence is tantamount to *amor fati*, love of fate, since it involves saying Yes to

everything that has contributed to any single moment of one's life that one wants to affirm.

The thought of eternal recurrence is not to be taken as something to think about intellectually (Can it be true? Does everything really recur?), but rather as a possibility that can inform and clarify our existential choices: 'Rather than looking towards distant unknown bliss and *blessings* and *reprieves*, simply live in such a way that we would want to live again and want to live *that way* for eternity!—Our task steps up to us at every moment' (*W* 9: 11 [161]). The beauty of this idea is that while the prospect of eternal recurrence prompts one to substitute for mindless activity, and acts performed solely out of a sense that they are socially required, things one genuinely wants to do, it prescribes no specific content. The choice is up to the individual in his or her loneliest loneliness.

There is nevertheless a strong sense in *Zarathustra* of the worth of creative activity, as prefigured in another contemporary note:

We want to experience a work of art again and again! One is to form one's life in such a way that one has the same wish with respect to its individual parts! This is the main idea! Only at the end will the *teaching* of the repetition of all that has been presented, after the tendency has been implanted to *create* something that can *flourish* a hundred times more powerfully in the sunshine of this teaching! (*W* 9: 11 [165])

Zarathustra frequently refers to himself as a 'creator' and one who seeks fellow creators. In the wake of the death of the one Creator God, the task of creation devolves on human beings, who will not, however, create *ex nihilo* but rather in interaction with the forces of nature and history. When all transcendent sources of value turn out to be empty, creation of new values becomes an urgent task and one that requires destruction of the old values. The necessity for concomitant creation and destruction is at the core of what Nietzsche calls 'the Dionysian', a crucial feature of eternal recurrence, where what must be willed is the recurrence of everything that has led up to the present moment.

Nietzsche explains how Zarathustra can shoulder the heavy burden of fate and yet be 'the lightest':

Zarathustra is a dancer—[which is] how he who has the hardest, most terrible insight into reality, who has thought the 'most abysmal thought', nevertheless finds in that no objection to existence, nor even to its eternal

recurrence—but rather one more reason for *being himself* the eternal Yes to all things . . . that is the concept of Dionysus. (*EH* *ibid.* 6)

The Story of Zarathustra

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is, as its title suggests, a book of speeches rather than a treatise or collection of writings. Like Plato's Socrates, Zarathustra is not a writer but a speaker, one of Nietzsche's voices heard in an abundance of direct speech. The speeches are embedded in a dramatic narrative, as in a *Bildungsroman*, where the protagonist is progressively educated and shaped by the circumstances he encounters. But while most books in this genre begin with the hero's childhood or youth, the drama of *Zarathustra* starts when he is already forty years old. The primary dramatic element in the narrative concerns his changing relationships with the various audiences for his speeches and also with figures like his Wisdom and Life.

Zarathustra has lived with his eagle and serpent in a cave high in the mountains for ten years, during which time he has gathered much wisdom, which he now wants to share with the world by going down to 'become human again'. He descends the mountain and addresses a crowd assembled in the market-place on the topic of the Overhuman—but is greeted with rude incomprehension. He realizes he must instead find companions to whom he can impart his teachings, and who can become 'creator, harvesters, and celebrants' with him. He succeeds in attracting some disciples, but they eventually begin to disappoint him by failing to understand the depth and subtlety of his teachings and by becoming mere followers. Near the end of the book's Second Part he delivers a crucial speech 'On Redemption' to an audience of cripples and beggars, in which he shows how will to power can be transformed so as to will eternal recurrence. But he himself can't yet will this way, and so he leaves his disciples and returns to his solitude.

At the beginning of the Third Part, Zarathustra travels by ship from the Isles of the Blest across the sea, enjoying revelatory visions while on board. On reaching the mainland he journeys through several towns, a large city, and a town he had visited before called The Motley Cow, making the occasional speech to a general audience on the way, before finally returning to his cave in the mountains. There he enjoys his solitude again and delivers several speeches to an

imagined audience in preparation for going back down to his disciples for a third time. He eventually manages to confront the thought of eternal recurrence, after which he talks about both confrontation and thought with his eagle and serpent. After an ecstatic conversation with his own soul, he sings a song to the feminine figure Life and then a final, Dionysian song to celebrate his marriage to her as Eternity.

When Nietzsche finished the Third Part of *Zarathustra* in January 1884, he announced the completion of the book as a whole in numerous letters to family and friends, referring in a letter to his publisher to 'this third act of my drama (or rather the finale of my symphony)' (*B* 18 Jan. 1884). But ten months later he writes to his sister: 'If all goes well, I shall need a publisher and printer for the fourth part of *Zarathustra* in January' (*B* 15 Nov. 1884). He even goes on to talk about 'the now unavoidable fifth and sixth parts (it cannot be helped, I must help my son Zarathustra to his beautiful *death*, or else he will give me no peace)'. But writing to an old friend three months later, he announces the existence of 'a fourth (and last) part of *Zarathustra*, a kind of sublime finale, which is not at all meant for the public' (*B* 12 Feb. 1885). In April of 1885 forty-five copies of the Fourth Part were published privately at Nietzsche's own expense and sent only to his closest friends. And so when the first edition of the complete *Zarathustra* appeared the following year, it was in three parts, with no mention of a fourth. Subsequent letters to his friends express a vehement desire never to have the Fourth Part made public. Nevertheless, those responsible for publishing new editions of Nietzsche's works after his mental collapse in 1889 saw fit to include it in the new edition of *Zarathustra* three years later.¹¹

While working on the Fourth Part, Nietzsche considered calling it 'Zarathustra's Temptation', and later describes its theme as 'the overcoming of pity' (*EH* 'Why I Am So Wise', 4). Faced with a group of 'superior humans' representing the best types that the modern age can produce, Zarathustra still finds them wanting. His task is then to avoid allowing pity for them to distract him from his true 'work': preparing the ground for the Overhuman. In the morning of

¹¹ For a detailed account of the status of the Fourth Part, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), Appendix. This superb study by Lampert is invaluable for an understanding of *Zarathustra* (and much else in Nietzsche).

the day on which the action takes place, these superior humans arrive severally in Zarathustra's domain: two kings, a scientist, an old sorcerer (and greatest living poet), the last pope, the ugliest man, a voluntary beggar, and Zarathustra's own shadow. In the central chapter, 'At Midday', the protagonist regains his solitude for a while, and in an exquisitely mystical moment he experiences the perfection of the world just as it is.

In the evening they all eat a 'Last Supper' together in Zarathustra's cave, and the superior humans celebrate an 'Ass Festival', after which even the ugliest man is able to love life and the earth enough to want them all over again. This prompts a last, profoundly Dionysian song from Zarathustra in which all opposites are brought into coincidence. But the next morning the superior humans are startled by the lion's roar into raising again their 'cry of need'—which is a sign to Zarathustra that they are not yet able to will eternal recurrence after all. And so he prepares to leave them in order to go down again and resume his work.

The Musicality of Zarathustra

Writing at the end of his career about the genesis of *Zarathustra*, and of the day in August 1881 when its basic idea first struck him, Nietzsche says: 'If I count back a few months from that day, I find as an omen a sudden and profoundly decisive change in my taste, above all in music. One can perhaps count the whole of *Zarathustra* as music—certainly a rebirth in the art of *hearing* was a precondition for it' (*EH* 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', 1). To understand how *Zarathustra* can be taken as music, it helps to have some biographical background.¹²

Nietzsche grew up in a distinctly musical milieu: his father played the piano, childhood friends were musical, and piano lessons from an early age developed his own talent on that instrument. When an illness once deprived him of piano playing, he wrote to his mother from boarding school: 'Everything seems dead to me when I can't hear any music' (*B* 27 Apr. 1863). During his teens and twenties he

¹² An excellent study in this context is Georges Liébert, *Nietzsche and Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

wrote prolifically for piano and voice, producing close to a hundred compositions.¹³

As a young teacher of classics at the University of Basel, Nietzsche followed the example of the ancient Greeks in reading aloud whatever he was writing. According to one of his students: 'He would declaim [what he had written] in order to experience its cadence, its accent, its tonality and metrical movement, also in order to test out the clarity and precision of the idea expressed.'¹⁴ Then, a few years before composing *Zarathustra*, he wrote: 'I read thinkers by assimilating their music to my passions and I sing their melodies after them: I know that behind all those cold words there moves a soul of desire, and I hear it singing, for my own soul sings when it's moved' (*W* 9: 7 [18]). During his time in Basel he was often invited to stay with Wagner and his family in their house on Lake Lucerne, where a common after-dinner activity was to read aloud works of literature and manuscripts that he and Wagner were writing at the time.

In one of his earliest sketches for *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche envisages the First Part's being written 'in the style of the first movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*' (*W* 9: 11 [197]). And on finishing that part, he writes to his composer friend Köselitz: 'With this book I have stepped into a new *Ring*'—the allusion to Wagner's masterpiece suggesting the added dimension of opera (*B* 1 Feb. 1883). Two months later, when he asks Köselitz, 'Under which rubric does this *Zarathustra* really belong?' he reverts to the symphonic in answering his own question: 'I almost believe that it comes under "symphonies". What is certain is that with it I have crossed over into another world' (*B* 2 Apr. 1883). No lesser a symphonist than Gustav Mahler corroborates: 'His *Zarathustra* was born completely from the spirit of music, and is even "symphonically" constructed.'¹⁵ And after finishing the Third Part Nietzsche frequently refers to it as 'the finale of my symphony', and points out that its connection with the beginning of the First Part gives the work the structure of a circle—though not, he hopes, a vicious one (*B* 30 Mar. 1884). He thereby affirms the recurrence of the ring after all.

¹³ See Curt Paul Janz (ed.), *Der musikalische Nachlass/Friedrich Nietzsche* (Basel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1976).

¹⁴ See Curt Paul Janz, *Nietzsche Biographie*, 3 vols. (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), i. 475.

¹⁵ As quoted by Bernard Scharlitt, 'Gespräch mit Mahler', *Musikblätter des Anbruchs*, 2 (1920), 310.

In the book he wrote after *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes in the context of listening with ‘the *third ear*’ about ‘the *art* in every good sentence’:

A misunderstanding of its tempo, for example—and the sentence itself is misunderstood! Let there be no doubt about the rhythmically decisive syllables . . . let us lend a subtle and patient ear to every *staccato*, every *rubato*, let us divine the meaning in the sequence of vowels and diphthongs and how delicately and richly they can take on colour and change colour as they follow each other. (*BGE* 246)

This is good advice for reading *Zarathustra* in particular: Nietzsche later draws special attention to ‘the tempo of Zarathustra’s speeches’ and their ‘delicate slowness’—‘from an infinite fullness of light and depth of happiness drop falls after drop, word after word’—as well as the necessity of ‘*hearing* properly the tone that issues from his mouth, this halcyon tone’ (*EH* Preface, 4).

In the original German text most of the paragraphs in Zarathustra’s speeches are around two-and-a-half lines long, with some two lines and others three or four. (The obvious prototypes are the Zarathustrian *Gâthas*, which are in five- or six-line stanzas,¹⁶ and the Book of Psalms, where the verses are shorter.) The length seems to correspond with a kind of ‘mental breath’ on Zarathustra’s—and also the reader’s—part: after a full inhalation at the beginning, the thought seems to come naturally to an end after a steady exhalation over a period of two-and-a-half lines.¹⁷ Nietzsche’s punctuation further enhances the text’s musicality: the exclamation-mark in *Zarathustra* (of which there is a profusion) may helpfully be read as analogous to a *forte* in a musical score, and the dash (a favourite mark of Laurence Sterne’s, whom Nietzsche greatly admired) often plays the part of the *fermata* in music—especially as a means of extending a pause for reflection on the part of the reader.¹⁸

¹⁶ For an English translation that strictly observes the metre, see Lawrence H. Mills, *Zarathustrian Gâthas in metre and rhythm* (Chicago: Open Court, 1903).

¹⁷ ‘A periodic sentence in the ancient sense is above all a physiological whole, insofar as it is encompassed by one whole breath’ (*BGE* 247).

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin offers an illuminating analogy with Jugendstil architecture and design: ‘Zarathustra has appropriated from Jugendstil primarily its tectonic elements rather than its organic motifs. The pauses especially, which are characteristic of his rhythms, are an exact counterpart to the basic tectonic phenomenon of this style, which is the predominance of the hollow form over the filled.’ *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 557.

Repetition is a key element in most kinds of music, and repetition is rife throughout *Zarathustra*—not only repetition of words and phrases, but of entire sentences and even paragraphs. The motto that precedes the Second Part is a repetition of one-and-a-half sentences from the last section of the previous part, just two pages earlier. Nietzsche comments in a letter to Köselitz: ‘From this motto there emerge—it is almost unseemly to say this to a musician—different harmonies and modulations from those in the first part. The main thing was to *swing oneself up to the second level*—in order from there to reach the *third*’ (B 13 July 1883). There are also striking repetitions of vowel and consonant sounds (something very common in Wagner’s librettos, and especially in *Siegfried*). In a letter to Erwin Rohde, Nietzsche writes: ‘My style is a *dance*; a play of symmetries of all kinds and an overleaping and mocking of these symmetries. This goes as far as the choice of vowels’ (B 22 Feb. 1884). Nietzsche also uses repetition of consonants to great effect: the first page-and-a-half of the Second Part builds to a climax where Zarathustra speaks of his speech as ‘the roaring of a stream out of towering cliffs’, of his love as ‘overflowing in torrents’, and his soul as ‘rushing down into the valleys’ (2. 1). The imagery is vivified by a flood of initial ‘s’ and ‘sh’ sounds—though such a stream of sibilants is sadly impossible to reproduce in English.

Nietzsche had to ignore Rousseau when he wrote in a letter to the conductor Hermann Levi, ‘Perhaps there has never been a philosopher who was so fundamentally a musician as I am’ (B 20 Oct. 1887)—though *Zarathustra* must still qualify as the most musical work of philosophy in the western tradition. Hardly surprising from an author who wrote of ‘life as music’ and ‘the music of life’ (JS 372), and who said near the end of his career: ‘Life without music is nothing but an error, exhausting toil, exile’ (B 15 Jan. 1888).

Afterlife

After his death in 1900 Nietzsche’s reputation grew and spread throughout Europe and beyond, to make him one of the most powerful influences on twentieth-century culture. Of *Zarathustra* especially it was true that ‘it sought out readers for itself, ignited new life, delighted, terrified, engendered new works, became the soul of plans and actions’ (HA 208). The idea of the *Übermensch* and Zarathustra’s

call for the destruction of old values and creation of new ones had special appeal for revolutionary movements in almost all the arts in the early twentieth century. To the extent that people sensed the death of God, there was a readiness for a teaching that affirmed human life on sacred earth. In philosophy *Zarathustra* was an influence on such figures as Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Karl Löwith, Walter Benjamin, Pierre Klossowski, and Gilles Deleuze; and in psychology, on Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung. In the fields of literature, painting, and architecture the book was received with great enthusiasm by many artists who were to set the cultural tone of the new century.¹⁹

The particular attention Nietzsche has received from the music world no doubt has to do with his association with Wagner, together with the fact that he himself wrote music as well as some excellent poetry. His writings have inspired the composition of more music than the work of any other philosopher: by 1975 over 170 composers had created some 370 musical settings of ninety texts by Nietzsche.²⁰ Among these, there are eighty-seven pieces that are settings of excerpts from *Zarathustra* or are explicitly inspired by the text as a whole. The best-known are Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1896), the fourth movement of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 3 (1902), and the massive choral work by Frederick Delius, *A Mass of Life* (1907), which contains eleven substantial excerpts from the text. Other composers impressed by *Zarathustra* were Arnold Schoenberg, Anton von Webern, Paul Hindemith, Carl Orff, Hugo Wolf, and Alexander Scriabin.

Nietzsche's ideas also received attention from the National Socialists in Germany, thanks to some malicious editorial work after his death on the part of his anti-Semitic sister Elisabeth, who ultimately ingratiated herself with Hitler. To make Nietzsche's philosophy appear compatible with Nazism requires selective extraction of ideas from their contexts, since he was vehemently opposed not only to

¹⁹ e.g. Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, Hugo von Hoffmansthal, August Strindberg, Paul Valéry, André Malraux, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, George Bernard Shaw, H. L. Mencken, and Eugene O'Neill in literature; Edvard Munch, Otto Dix, Emil Nolde, and other German Expressionists in painting; and Henry van de Velde, Peter Behrens, and Le Corbusier in architecture.

²⁰ David S. Thatcher, 'Musical Settings of Nietzsche-Texts: an Annotated Bibliography', *Nietzsche-Studien*, 4 (1975), 284-323; 5 (1976), 355-83.

nationalism and socialism (German nationalism in particular) but also to anti-Semitism. As far as *Zarathustra* is concerned, one has to ignore half of what the protagonist says about contempt and violence and cruelty in order to render these themes sinister or disturbing. For Zarathustra, despising belongs together with loving: to avoid emitting resentment all around us we have to learn to love ourselves—and for that we need first to know ourselves, which inevitably leads to despising ourselves (thanks to the dark side of human nature in which we all participate). Similarly, the violence and cruelty Zarathustra speaks about are first of all to be directed toward oneself: he has to learn how to hammer himself into shape, a difficult and painful task, before he can earn the right to be hard on others. All of this is anathema to the Nazis, whose basic practice is to project their own shadow-side onto easily identifiable groups of ‘others’.²¹

Overall, the most remarkable feature of *Zarathustra*’s reception is its more or less global reach. It was not long after Nietzsche’s mental collapse in 1889 that his ideas reached Japan. An essay appeared there in 1898 under the title ‘The Reception of Nietzsche’s Thought in Relation to Buddhism’.²² The author makes the insightful suggestion that ‘even though Nietzsche himself did not exactly greet Buddhism with enthusiasm, one can say that in the ideal of the *Übermensch* he comes close to the idea of the Buddha’. Two famous novelists of the period, Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai, were especially impressed by *Zarathustra*. In his marginalia to an English translation, Sōseki remarked a number of parallels with the Buddhist and Confucian traditions: ‘This is oriental. Strange to find such an idea in the writings of a European.’ And in his novel *Seinen* (Youth), Ōgai aptly compares contemporary modernizers in Japan with the ‘last humans’ excoriated in *Zarathustra*’s Prologue. In 1913 the philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō published a magisterial study of Nietzsche that influenced several generations of Japanese thinkers, and notably

²¹ On despising and loving, see Prologue, 3 and 5; 1. 17; 3. 5, 14; and for hardness and cruelty 2. 2, and *BGE* 61–2, 225.

²² For a more detailed treatment of this topic see my essays ‘The Early Reception of Nietzsche’s Philosophy in Japan’, in Parkes (ed.), *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, 177–99, and ‘Nietzsche and East Asian Thought: Influences, Impacts, and Resonances’, in Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 356–83. In his introduction to the first English translation of *Zarathustra* (1896), Alexander Tille compared the text to the Buddhist *Tripitaka* (the Pali Canon scriptures concerning the teachings of the Buddha).

members of the well-known 'Kyoto School' of philosophy. *Zarathustra* was the first complete work of Nietzsche's to be translated into Japanese, in 1911, and since then no fewer than five further translations have been published.

The first (partial) translation into Chinese appeared in 1919, by Lu Xun, who went on to be one of China's best-known writers. Many of the intellectuals involved in the revolutionary New Culture and May Fourth movements, which got under way in 1915, were deeply influenced by Nietzsche's 'culture criticism' and iconoclasm. Lu Xun maintained his interest in Nietzsche and sponsored the first full translation of *Zarathustra*, which was published in 1936. Since then no fewer than nine further complete translations have appeared in China—a figure that is all the more amazing since none were published in the twenty years following the Communist takeover in 1949. Given the size of print-runs in China, it is probable that more copies of *Zarathustra* have been sold in Chinese than in any other language.²³

The enthusiastic reception of Nietzsche in Asia derives in part from his having had some acquaintance with Indian philosophy (through books on Hindu and Buddhist thought), Chinese philosophy (one Confucian and one Daoist text), and Japanese culture (through one of his best friends).²⁴ But whatever the extent of influence *ex oriente*, the Asian reception of his work suggests that his attempts to 'think *more orientally* about philosophy' and to look at the world with a 'trans-European' and even an 'Asiatic and trans-Asiatic eye' met with some success.²⁵ At any rate, the resonances between themes in *Zarathustra* and in Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist philosophies are undeniable, and are surely the major ground for the book's enthusiastic reception in Asia. While Nietzsche's claim that with *Zarathustra* he has 'given humanity the greatest gift that has been given to it so far' (*EH* Preface, 4) may be somewhat overstated, the book is surely one of the most cosmopolitan philosophical texts ever written.

²³ See Cheung, Chiu-yee, *Nietzsche in China (1904–1992): An Annotated Bibliography* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1992), and Shao, Lixin, *Nietzsche in China* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

²⁴ See Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Knowledge of Philosophy* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2005), cha. 6. For Nietzsche's Japanophile friend, see my 'Nietzsche and East-Asian Thought'.

²⁵ *W* 11: 26 [317]; *B* 3 Jan. 1888; *BGE* 56.