

Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching

For Individuals and Culture

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B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

2013

Nietzsche's Care for Stone: The Dead, Dance, and Flying¹

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From his childhood through to the end of his career, Nietzsche greatly appreciated the therapeutic powers of the natural world, and he celebrated and advocated them in many passages in his writings.² The energies of animals and birds and beasts of prey and of burden, the forces of wind and storm, the rushing of streams and rivers, the massive heavings of the sea, the quiet majesty of forests, and the still power of mountains—since all of these belong, for Nietzsche, to what he calls the “great economy” of the soul, it is healing and whole-making to be aware of them and interact with them more fully. Since stone and rock hold a special place in this economy, a focus on these phenomena will render this vast topic manageable within the compass of a brief chapter.

A consideration of Nietzsche's views of rock and stone, and the role played by related imagery in his texts, reveals a generally unnoticed feature of his philosophy of nature as well as his philosophical therapeutics. He especially reveres unhewn rock, for what it can teach us about life, and for what its image tells us about what is unteachable in the depths of the soul. In this his ideas are unusual in western traditions of thought: although reverence for unworked stone is typical of most cultures in their beginnings (the Celts and the Polynesians, for example), among mature civilizations the East-Asian stand out in their zealous retention of it. In the West, Nietzsche's precursors in this respect are Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.³

For this task, we need to appreciate the relations between our *ideas* of stone, many of which come from our understanding of rock through natural science, and the archetypal *images* that flow from the same source, prefigured in myth and imaginably elaborated in poetry and literature, and in a way congruent with the ideas. Nietzsche's relations to rock, as the hardest, heaviest part of the earth, are most richly imagined in his “most personal” book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and especially in the protagonist's relations with his arch-enemy, the Spirit of Heaviness. Zarathustra's accomplishes his greatest therapeutic task, the overcoming of this powerful antagonist, through the medium of stone: the philosophers' stone and the stone of death, and the rock on which he sits and dances, and from which he ultimately takes off and flies.

Youth, death, and the stone of fate

In his youth, according to his early notebooks and letters, Nietzsche was something of a nature mystic. The first poem (and the second item) recorded in his juvenilia, dating from when he was 10 years old, begins with the (in German) rhyming couplet: "There on that outcrop of rock/There's my favourite place to sit."⁴ At the age of 14 he wrote:

From childhood on I would seek solitude and would feel best when I could abandon myself to myself undisturbed. This usually happened in the open temple of nature, where I would find the truest friends.⁵

Prominent among such friends is stone: following a list of what he calls "my enemies"—"mosquitoes, cloudy skies, and warm damp air"—the first in a list of "my friends" is: "rocks." Nietzsche records in his notebooks several childhood memories of digging up "calcite [a carbonate mineral] and other rocks" on a ridge near his home in Naumburg. Under the heading "Windlücke" (a spot not far away) he wrote: "Rocks as witnesses of prehistory. . . . What happy days!"⁶ This childhood experience is at the basis of a later aphorism that imagines the human being—himself—seen "In the Mirror of Nature," and asks:

Is a human being not well described when we hear that . . . from childhood on he experiences and reveres unhewn rocks as witnesses of prehistory which are eager to acquire language?⁷

Gravestones, stone bordering the underworld of the dead, weigh heavy in young Nietzsche's recollections of childhood. At the age of 14, he reminisces about his (now distant) home town: "How lively still the graveyard stands before me! How often I wondered, when I saw the ancient mortuary, about the biers and the black mourning crepes, the old grave inscriptions and monuments." And a few years later, he writes: "A little higher than the ponds stand the parsonage and the church, the former surrounded by gardens and groves of trees. And next to them the cemetery, full of sunken gravestones and crosses." At 19, Nietzsche writes yet another autobiographical sketch titled "My Life," in which he likens (his) life to a landscape where the "rock formations and kinds of stone" show the general structure of the life, while the vegetation provides the individuating physiognomy of "the small experiences and inner processes." "The following brief biographical notes," he goes on, "are smooth stones; in reality these stones are beautifully clad in moss and earth." And shortly after that he writes again of "the cemetery, full of sunken gravestones and crosses."⁸

During this period, Nietzsche developed a Hölderlin-influenced, hylozoist philosophy of life, according to which everything is alive and ordered in a hierarchy "beginning with stone . . . progressing to plants, animals, and human beings, and issuing in earth, air, heavenly bodies" and so forth, and which regards the entire world as being animated by *die Urseele*, the Primordial Soul.⁹ At the age of 21, as a graduate student in Leipzig, Nietzsche came across a similar but highly elaborated philosophy

of life and the lifeless when he first read Schopenhauer's masterpiece, *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer posits "will" as a cosmic force that drives all motion and transformation, including the human life that we live.

The reader will recognize that same *will* not only in those phenomena that are quite similar to his own, in human beings and animals, as their innermost nature; but continued reflection will lead him to recognize the force that drives and vegetates in the plant, indeed the force by which the crystal is formed, the force that turns the magnet to the North Pole . . . and finally even gravitation, which acts so powerfully in all matter, pulling the stone to the earth and the earth to the sun; all these he will recognize as being different only in the phenomenon, but the same according to their inner nature . . . and as that which is immediately known to him as *will*.¹⁰

In the course of a series of lectures Nietzsche delivered in Basel "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions" (1872), he speaks through the persona of "an old philosopher":

If you want to lead a young person onto the right path of education and culture, be careful not to disturb his naively trustful and personally immediate relationship with nature: forest and rock, storm and vulture, the single flower, the butterfly, the meadow and the mountainside must speak to him in their own tongues; at the same time he must recognize himself in them as in countless dispersed reflexes and reflections and in a multicolored whirl of changing appearances.¹¹

Rock, among other natural phenomena, speaks to the open soul in the language of rock, such that the soul can then see itself in all of stone's aspects and facets. The old philosopher goes on to bemoan the fact that few youths are fortunate enough to enjoy such close personal relations with the natural world, since education teaches them early on how to subjugate nature toward one's own ends through "clever calculation and cunning."

Nietzsche's early experiences of stone in the graveyard, stone's connection with death, guide his subsequent reflections on the natural world beyond human life—and beyond all life, to the "lifeless." He had witnessed a move beyond biocentrism in his early readings of Emerson, who often reflects on rock and stone. In his mid-30s, Emerson recorded in his journal a kind of death experience that he had on stepping out of the house into a night illumined by the full moon.

In the instant you leave behind all human relations . . . and live only with the savages—water, air, light, carbon, lime, & granite. . . I become a moist, cold element. 'Nature grows over me.' . . . I have died out of the human world & come to feel a strange, cold, aqueous, terraqueous, aerial, ethereal sympathy and existence.¹²

Several of Nietzsche's unpublished notes similarly celebrate our intimacy with the so-called inanimate world: "To be redeemed from life and become dead nature again can be experienced as a festival—of one who wants to die. To love nature! To revere

again what is dead!" For Nietzsche, what makes us from the start close relatives of this "dead" realm is our physical constitution as living organisms.

How distant and superior is our attitude toward what is dead, the anorganic, and all the while we are three-quarters water, and have anorganic minerals in us that perhaps do more for our well- and ill-being than the whole of living society!¹³

The idea of crossing over to the realm of the inanimate in the form of stone appears in the published works in the brief aphorism "How One Ought to Turn to Stone": "Slowly, slowly, to become hard like a precious stone—and finally to lie there, still and to the joy of eternity."¹⁴ It is a long process: beginning with Nietzsche's experiences of dying away from the human world, burning his life into writing such notes and aphorisms, which are then subject to successive interpretations, until there emerges a gem of a thought that will consistently delight, when seen from different angles and in different lights.

By writing, Nietzsche is doing what all natural phenomena are already doing all the time. There's a magnificent characterization of nature as secular inscription at the beginning of Emerson's essay on Goethe:

All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river its channel in the soil; the animal its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf their modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or the stone. . . . The round is all memoranda and signatures, and every object covered over with hints which speak to the intelligent.¹⁵

And in his essay "Fate" (a favorite of Nietzsche's from his youth), Emerson emphasizes the interplay between fate, or "Nature as tyrannous circumstance," imagined as rock, and the dynamic powers of human life—the task being to integrate our own powers with the "negative power" of circumstance.

The book of Nature is the book of Fate. She turns the gigantic pages—leaf after leaf—never re-turning one. One leaf she lays down, a floor of granite; then a thousand ages, and a bed of slate; a thousand ages, and a measure of coal; a thousand ages and a layer of marl and mud.¹⁶

Then come vegetation and animal life and, finally, human existence—where "when a race has lived its term, it comes no more again." Impermanence still reigns. But the rock remains, the leaf of granite slowly curls up, jutting out into the world of the human as adverse circumstance.

Famine, typhus, frost, war, suicide, and effete races, must be reckoned calculable parts of the system of the world. They are pebbles from the mountains, hints of the terms by which our life is walled up. . . . We cannot trifle with this reality, this cropping-out in our planted gardens of the core of the world.¹⁷

We trifle with that core at our peril, and are doing so now, insofar as our persistence with ever deeper mining, hydraulic fracturing, and carbon sequestration evidence a

stubborn refusal to face reality and accept limits to our powers to satisfy our insatiable desire to consume.

In one sense, we can turn to stone because we are already half way there.

The image of stone in self-fashioning

At the end of the first section of Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, after a glowing description of Apollo as the divine shaper of the dream-world and imagination, there is an account of the effects of *Rausch*, intoxication, as a manifestation of Dionysus as "loosener" or "dissolver."

Under the magical spell of the Dionysian it is not only the bonds between humans that are restored: alienated, or hostile, or subjugated nature also celebrates again her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, the human being.

Nietzsche conjures here, and we should hear, Schiller's "Ode to Joy" as sung at the end of Beethoven's *Ninth*: "Be embraced, you millions! Take this kiss for the whole world!" A festival indeed, but important that Dionysus is the god of wine, and to have the "joy bubbling in the goblets, in the grape's golden blood," since he brings suffering as well as intoxication.¹⁸ The rush of intoxication takes us out of ourselves, dissolving the bounds of the individual, both enacting and alleviating the suffering at the same time.

This rending, the authentic Dionysian suffering, is like a transformation into air, water, earth and stone, plant and animal; where the condition of individuation is regarded as the source and primal ground of all suffering, as something inherently reprehensible.¹⁹

But Dionysus is the god not only of the vine but also of the dance. "In singing and dancing the human being expresses itself as a member of a higher communality," insofar as Dionysian intoxication undermines the principle of individuation that keeps us feeling ourselves separate from other human beings and the world of nature.

The human being is no longer an artist but has become a work of art: the artistic power of the whole of nature, to the most blissful satisfaction of the Primal One, manifests itself here through the frissons of intoxication. The most noble clay, the most costly marble—the human being—is here kneaded and hewn, and to the chisel blows of the Dionysian worlds-artist there rings out the cry of the Eleusinian Mysteries: 'Do you prostrate yourselves, millions? Do you sense your creator, world?'²⁰

The intoxicating power of the Dionysian, working through the whole of nature's artistic forces, makes human beings works of art by shaping and integrating them into the totality. But then "the Dionysian worlds-artist" is said to knead and hew and sculpt the human being through the distinctly Apolline art of sculpture, whereby the context of the stone is chiseled away to reveal the individual form.

In an unpublished note from 1880, Nietzsche abandons the idea that a divine artist fashions us, in favor of the notion of our forming the “authentic self” ourselves:

*To make ourselves, to shape a form from all the elements—that is the task! The task of a sculptor! Of a productive human being! It's not through knowledge but through practice and a model that we become ourselves!*²¹

This image is prefigured in Emerson, who writes that “Man is a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe.” As embodied in an evolved figure that retains all its previous forms, the human is also bedrock and core of nature, combined with elemental, solar power.

The lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is [also in the human being]. On one side, elemental order, sandstone and granite, rock-ledges, peat-bog, forest, sea and shore; and, on the other, thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature—here they are, side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, king and conspirator, belt and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man.²²

Nietzsche develops this idea, but with a heightened tension between the sides that would preclude the “peacefully,” in a passage addressed to those who want to “abolish suffering.”

In the human being *creature* and *creator* are united: in the human there is material, fragment, abundance, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but there is also in the human creator, sculptor, hammer-hardness, spectator divinity, and seventh day—do you understand this opposition? And that your pity is for the creature in the human, for that which has to be formed, broken, forged, torn, burned, annealed, and purified—for that which must necessarily *suffer* and *ought to suffer*?²³

Now the Dionysian worlds-artist (shadowed by the Christian Creator), who molds the noble clay and sculpts the marble of the human, works through certain human beings so that they become artists of the human as well. This kind of work is performed by and on the body, through physical practice guided by a *Vorbild* (literally, preimage), a pattern or model. Yet, what subsequent generations appreciate in such work is often the substance of the corpus rather than its form.

The philosopher believes that the value of his philosophy lies in the totality, in the building: posterity finds the value in the stone with which he built and with which others have since built often and better.²⁴

The kind of artistic creation Nietzsche is talking about here takes place on an interpersonal level and a far grander scale. In the course of a diatribe against the shortsighted superficiality of the modern age in Europe, Nietzsche deplores the tendency for people to become mere actors (where all nature ceases and becomes art) and bemoans the lack of architects who would build a real society out of individuals. He calls for a regaining of the broad perspective that would see the present in the

context of the vast sweep of history and the individual against the background of the development of the race.

Who would still dare to undertake works that would take millennia to be completed? The basic faith is dying out . . . that the human being has value and meaning only insofar as it is a stone in a vast edifice: for which it would have to be first and foremost solid, a stone and above all not an actor!²⁵

And how does one attain such a condition? “Slowly, slowly, to become hard like a precious stone—and finally to lie there, still and to the joy of eternity.”

This transformation is to take place in a world of perpetual becoming—all there really is in Nietzsche's Heraclitean world. In an allegory of “time and becoming,” Zarathustra praises and justifies “all impermanence.” The suffering that derives from a life of impermanence is redeemed by his creating will, through which “life becomes lighter.” Having worked on himself, sculpted his life into shape, his formative will then turns outward.

To the human being it drives me again and again, my fervent creating-will; thus is the hammer driven to the stone.

Ah, you humans, in the stone there sleeps an image, the image of my images!
Ah, that it must sleep in the hardest, ugliest stone!

Now my hammer rages fiercely against the prison. Fragments fly from the stone: what is that to me?

I want to perfect it: for a shadow came to me—of all things the stillest and lightest once came to me!

The beauty of the Overhuman came to me as a shadow. (Z 2.2)

Zarathustra, the awakened one, having seen in the raw material of the human the *Vorbild* of the Overhuman, will awaken the image to life by demolishing the prison from the outside, liberating the figure crushed into the dense conformity of stone. There will be fragmentation, pulverizing, suffering in shards and fragments. But this is what thinking in action, philosophizing with a hammer, sometimes entails.

Rock and fate in *Zarathustra*

When Nietzsche writes about *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*, he says that the work's “basic conception” is “the thought of eternal return, the highest formula of affirmation that can ever be attained.”

[This thought] dates from August of 1881. . . . I was walking along the lake of Silvaplana through the woods; I stopped beside a powerfully towering pyramidal block of stone not far from Surlei. The thought came to me there.²⁶

The thought that enables the greatest affirmation of life struck the thinker as he stood by a pyramid of rock that most people would see as inanimate and lifeless. But let us remember what Nietzsche wrote not long after about the living by contrast with

the lifeless: "Let us be wary of saying that life is opposed to death. The living is only a species of the dead, and a very rare species at that."²⁷ The living is not opposed to the dead because they are equally manifestations of will to power. After Nietzsche first presents the idea of will to power in *Zarathustra*, where we learn that "all life is . . . will to power," he then suggests in *Beyond Good and Evil* that the whole world is "will to power and nothing besides."²⁸ It is thus no surprise that rock should play a major role in the process recounted in *Zarathustra* whereby will to power learns to will eternal return.

In "The Grave-Song," Zarathustra voyages across the sea to "the Isle of the Graves," bringing "an evergreen wreath of life . . . to the graves of [his] youth" (Z 2.11). He laments that the "visions and apparitions" of his youth—"godlike moments" he calls them—died away so quickly, and now lie here buried. He laments that they were "murdered" by his enemies (Nietzsche's sister in collusion with the Wagners, according to allusions to personal betrayals he had recently experienced) who had cut short moments he thought were eternal in their capacity to return. He was ready to affirm the Emersonian maxim, "Godlike shall all beings be to me," when they assailed him in a distinctly ungod-like manner. When he was ready "to dance as [he] had never danced before, away beyond all heavens," they cut him short again, by cutting him off from "the visions and consolations of [his] youth." How is he to redeem these moments, resurrect these memories? The significance of the answer is emphasized by its being sung rather than spoken.

Yes, something invulnerable, unburi-able is within me, something that explodes rock: that is *my will*. Silently it strides and unchanging through the years. . . .

To this day you continue to break through all graves! . . .

Yes, you are still for me the demolisher of every grave: hail to thee, my will! And only where there are graves are there resurrections. —²⁹

Thus sang Zarathustra. —

However, as we learn from his speech "On Redemption," Zarathustra's liberating will is still itself a prisoner and impotent with respect to the past: "That time does not run backwards, this arouses the will's fury; 'That which was'—that is the stone which it cannot roll away" (Z 2.20). This fury turns into "the spirit of revenge" against all impermanence, which condemns everything in its flux to pass away into an unalterable, petrified past. This spirit affirms that the stone *can* be rolled away, in a resurrection that rises above impermanence and death to a realm of immortality.³⁰

But toward the end of this speech, Zarathustra realizes that the *creative* will can say to "that which was," to the past: "But thus I willed it . . . thus do I will it!" Once the will realizes itself as will to power, as a play of constantly self-renewing interpretive forces, it can achieve "something higher than any reconciliation [with the passing of time]" which Zarathustra calls *zurückwollen*. This means that one learns to *will backward*, and thereby to roll away with a different motion the stone that blocks redemption of the past and explode the rock that impedes resurrection of those god-like moments of one's life that appeared to be dead and gone. Then one will also *want the past back* and come to love fate and all the unalterable events that make up one's becoming in the present moment. This is ultimately to will the eternal recurrence of the moment.

Stone plays a central role in Zarathustra's first full presentation of the thought of eternal recurrence, in his account of the "Vision and Riddle." In the previous speech, he prepares himself:

Before my highest mountain I stand and before my longest wandering: therefore I must first descend deeper than I have ever done before: . . .

Where do the highest mountains come from? I once asked. Then I learned that they come from out of the sea.

The evidence is inscribed in their stone and in the walls of their summits. It is from the deepest that the highest must come to its height. —(Z 3.1)

The strata of softer stone bespeak the sea's floor and bear the inscriptions of ancient marine life in the form of fossils, while the layers of granite evidence an igneous extrusion from nearer the earth's core. But then long ago the granite floor curled up like a light leaf from the depths into the highest height, the rock itself taking slow and gradual flight. Correspondingly, Zarathustra must turn to stone, sinking to the deepest layers of the soul before ascending to its peaks.

The passage evokes Goethe's gem of an essay "On Granite" (which Nietzsche surely knew), where the poet-scientist writes of "the ancient discovery that granite is both the highest and the deepest . . . the solid ground of our earth," and of "the serene tranquility afforded by that solitary, mute nearness of great, soft-voiced nature." In contrast to the fertile valleys, the granite peaks "have never generated anything nor devoured anything living: they exist prior to and superior to all life."³¹

In the context of discussing Nietzsche's idea of fate, the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani makes the following comments on this essay of Goethe's:

Sitting atop a mountain on an outcrop of granite, overlooking a vast vista stretching out from beneath him, Goethe immersed himself in the thought that the vista had undergone numerous changes in the long history of the earth; that the granite on which he was sitting extended down deep into the earth's strata to form the backbone of the earth's crust throughout all its changes and movements. The image illustrates the idea of the self as a fate deep down within our foundations: fate as self—"this is I."³²

Nishitani connects Goethe's granite essay with a powerful passage on granite in *Beyond Good and Evil*. There Nietzsche takes on the strange and wonderful task of "translating the human being back into nature," in the hope of revealing "the terrifying [and] eternal ground-text of homo natura."³³ The next aphorism describes this natural ground of the human.

Learning transforms us, it does what all nourishment does that does not merely "preserve"—as the physiologist knows. But in our ground, "deep down inside," there is something unteachable, *some granite of spiritual fate*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions. In every cardinal problem there speaks an unchangeable "this is I": about man and woman for example a thinker cannot relearn but only finish learning—only fully discover what on that topic "stands firm" in him. . . . Later one sees [any solutions] as mere

steps toward self-knowledge, signposts to the problem that we *are*—or, better, to the colossal stupidity that we are, to our spiritual fate, to what is *unteachable* “deep down inside.”

The immediate background to this idea of an immutable foundation to the human psyche is provided by Schopenhauer, who argued that the empirical character is unalterable on the grounds that it is the unfolding of an act of the will, which stands outside time altogether.³⁴ Nietzsche alludes to this idea in his untimely meditation on Schopenhauer when he writes:

Your true educators and formative teachers [*Bildner*] reveal to you what the true primal sense and basic material of your being is, something absolutely ineducable and unformable [*unbildbar*], but in any case hard to reach, bonded, lamed: your educators can be nothing other than your liberators. . . . Education is liberation, a clearing away of all weeds, talus, vermin that would touch the tender sprouts of vegetation, outpouring of light and warmth, affectionate downrushing of nighttime rain.³⁵

Granite is a fitting image for the very bottom of the soul, for that in us that we cannot change, a fate of which we are innocently unconscious and which we become aware of only slowly and with difficulty, if at all. As the core of our being, which reaches back down through the deepest strata of history, it is the most deeply embodied stratum of our, our innermost incorporation. It is therefore the layer that is the hardest to sculpt, just as granite is far harder to shape than sedimentary rock.

Stone in eternal return

The account of Zarathustra's initial vision of eternal return opens in the ominous atmosphere of “a corpse-coloured twilight.”

A path that climbed defiantly through boulders, malicious, desolate, not graced by weed or shrub: a mountain-path crunched beneath my foot's defiance.

Mutely striding over the mocking clatter of pebbles, trampling the stone that made it slide: thus my foot forced its way upward. (Z 3.2, 1)

Zarathustra is working his way up through a field of boulders, with pebbles and stones underfoot. On top of it, he defies the force of gravity by trampling the stone to make his ascent, even though the sliding sometimes sets him back.

Upward:—in defiance of the spirit that drew it downward, drew it abyssward, the Spirit of Heaviness, my Devil and arch-enemy.

Upward:—although he sat on me, half dwarf, half mole; lame; laming; dripping lead into my ear, lead-drop thoughts into my brain.³⁶

In climbing, Zarathustra's foot is defying gravity, the Spirit of Heaviness, imagined as a subhuman dwarf who drips “lead-drop thoughts into his brain.” If the weight of this

base metal, poisonous in high doses, is not to bring him down and take him under, Zarathustra will have to learn (as Nietzsche said to his friend Overbeck he himself would have to learn) the trick of the alchemist: of turning the base metal of experience into gold by willing its eternal return. But the dwarf mocks this ambitious project, saying to him:

“O Zarathustra, you Philosophers’ Stone, you slingshot-stone, you star-pulverizer! You threw yourself so high—but every upthrown stone—must fall.

“Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning: O Zarathustra, far indeed you threw the stone—but onto *you* will it come falling back!”

Just as the alchemists strove to transform base metals into gold, the depth-psychologist in Nietzsche has to transform the base dross of experience into something invaluablely radiant. The Spirit of Heaviness derides this aspiration by pointing out that the end of all his striving is death: being mortal, his exertions condemn him to his own stoning. The dwarf mocks his titanic pride in his will’s ability to explode the rock that blocks redemption of his past, by calling him a star-pulverizer. What is the point of being the slingshot-stone that slays giants if, no matter how often one picks oneself up and projects oneself into the future again, the Spirit of Heaviness always “draws one downward” back to earth, “abyssward” into the underworld of death?

But during the silence that follows, Zarathustra manages to summon the courage to challenge the Spirit of Heaviness to a fight to the death:

For courage is the best of dead-strikers (*Todtschläger*), courage that attacks: it even strikes death dead, for it says: “Was that life? Well then! One more time!”

Through this idea, which the Spirit of Heaviness is incapable of thinking, the affirmation of the fleeting moment in the prospect of its eternal return, Zarathustra overcomes his arch-enemy. By intimating the thought of eternal return in front of the gateway of the “Moment,” he reduces the dwarf to silence and disappearance.

After returning home to the solitude of his cave Zarathustra says, in a speech “On the Spirit of Heaviness,” that enmity toward that spirit “makes me of the bird’s kind” (Z 3.11, 1). Making the medium appropriate to the topic, he will “sing a song” about his avian enmity, and about how he will overcome the Spirit of Heaviness by learning to fly.

Whoever one day teaches human beings to fly will have shifted all boundary stones; all boundary stones will themselves fly into the air before him, and the earth itself he will baptize anew as “the Light One.”

... [As for] the human who cannot yet fly:

Heavy are both earth and life for him; and thus the Spirit of Heaviness *wills* it! But whoever wants to become light and like a bird, he must love himself:—thus *I* teach. (Z 3.11, 2)

This passage intimates the possibility of a self-reorientation with respect to the fundamental forces of the world, in which what gives things their weight is no longer a single force—gravity, or God, or the human intellect—setting all things

uniformly in one direction, but rather a dynamic matrix of ever-changing energies. Under such conditions values are easily invertible and perspectives reversible, and the demarcations (boundary stones) between categories are no longer fixed and immutable. These boundaries do not, however, disappear, giving rise to anarchy and indeterminacy; but they fly into the air and become light enough to be easily moved and removed by one who understands the greater patterning of the interconnection of all things.

To combat the Spirit of Heaviness, which makes human life such a burden, one must learn to love oneself—and to do that one must know oneself.

And verily, this is no commandment for today and tomorrow, to *learn* to love oneself. Rather, of all arts this is the most subtle, cunning, ultimate, and most patient.

For all that is one's own is well hidden from its owner; and of all treasure hoards it is one's own that is excavated last—thus the Spirit of Heaviness brings it about.

Knowing oneself is hard—Zarathustra repeatedly calls the task *schwer*, which also means “heavy”—because the Spirit of Heaviness, working through and as the cultural traditions of (in our case) Platonism and Christianity, endows us with “heavy words and values” such as “good” and “evil,” before which those who have the strength will kneel reverentially, “like the camel,” in order to assume the weighty burden of tradition.

While such cultural values are necessary for our becoming what we are, they are not only heavy enough to crush creativity in all but the strongest, but also *alien* in relation to the deepest strata of the soul, which are necessities—compacted into the body over many millennia—by comparison with the contingencies of one's contemporary culture. This is why the phase of the camel lands us in the desert, a zone infertile as rock, where no creative growth takes place (Z 3.11, 2).

The ancient incorporation of cultural and historical forces has been deformed by too many wrongheaded flights of the spirit, undertaken during the ages when humans had forgotten how to be true to the earth, as Zarathustra explains in his speech “On the Bestowing Virtue.”

In a hundred ways up to now has spirit as well as virtue flown away and made mistakes. Ah, in our bodies all this delusion and mistaking still dwell: body and will it has become there.

In a hundred ways up to now has spirit as well as virtue experimented and gone astray. Yes, the human has been an experiment. Ah, much ignorance and error has become body in us!

Not only the reason of millennia—but also their madness breaks out in us. Dangerous it is to be an heir. (Z 1.22, 2)

The task of knowing oneself is made harder by all this ignorance and error and madness at the core of our somatic endowment. Being so deeply incorporated, they cannot be shaken loose by mere intellection but need physical movement to turn them to our advantage.

But the task of loving oneself is made harder still by the difficulty of engaging what is not alien or foreign but most deeply one's own.

And verily! Much that is one's *own* is a heavy burden too! And much that is within the human being is like an oyster: namely, disgusting and slippery and hard to grasp —

— such that a noble shell with noble decoration must intercede. But this art too must one learn: to *have* a shell and handsome sheen and clever blindness! (Z 3.11, 2)

So hard is it to love what is disgusting in ourselves that we shy away from acknowledging it by masking it from others and ourselves, cultivating a selective blindness to what we are “deep down.”

The human is hard [*schwer*] to discover and its own self hardest of all; often the spirit lies about the soul. Thus the Spirit of Heaviness brings it about.

But he has discovered himself who can say: This is *my* good and evil; with that he has struck dumb the mole and dwarf who says: “Good for all, evil for all.”

The Spirit of Heaviness can be overcome only gradually, in stages. First one must sink like a stone, “descend deeper than [one has] ever done before” in order to confront one's basic “colossal stupidity”; then, on that basis, one can learn to move over and rise above it.

And above all I learned how to stand and walk and run and jump and climb and dance.

But this is my teaching: whoever wants to learn to fly must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance:—one cannot fly into flying!

Near the beginning of his next speech, “On Old and New Tablets” (the old modeled on Mosaic stone), Zarathustra tells of how his “great wing-beating yearning . . . often tore [him] up and out and in the midst of laughing” so that he “flew quivering, an arrow, through sun-drunken rapture”:

— out into far futures that no dream as yet had seen, into hotter souths than artists had ever dreamed of: to where Gods in their dances are ashamed of all clothes . . .

Where I also found my old Devil and arch-enemy again, the Spirit of Heaviness and all that he created: —

For must there not exist that *over* which one dances and dances away? Must there not exist, for the sake of the light and the lightest, moles and heavy dwarves? — (Z 3.12, 2)

The Spirit of Heaviness was right to say that Zarathustra, like the rest of us, is ever “sentenced to his own stoning,” since even when he flies into those farther futures and hotter souths he still encounters his arch-enemy, who is always there.

While it is only on the basis of those deepest layers of the soul that one can properly dance—over the realm of the dead—the dance that may lead to flight, this dance is,

like play, devoid of any purpose beyond itself. After all, as Zarathustra says: "We should consider any day lost, on which we have not danced once!" (Z 3.12, 23).

And indeed the Third Part of *Zarathustra*, which Nietzsche originally intended as the last of the book, ends with "The Seven Seals (or The Yea- and Amen-Song)" and two sections on the dance and flying. The first celebrates the virtue of the dancer, Zarathustra's "Alpha and Omega," whereby "that all that is heavy becomes light, all body becomes dancer, all spirit becomes bird" (Z 3.16, 6).

If ever I spread tranquil heavens over me and soared with my own wings into my own heavens:

If I swam playfully in deep light-distances, and if to my freedom some bird-wisdom came: —

— but thus bird-wisdom speaks: "See, there is no above, no below! Throw yourself around, and out, and back, you who are light! Sing! speak no more!" (Z 3.16, 7)

This is the human spirit liberated by the thought of eternal return, freed finally from the weight of all that is created by the Spirit of Heaviness: "compulsion, statute, need and consequence and purpose and will and good and evil." But this is no transcendent flight of the spirit into a realm beyond heaven and earth, but rather the flight of the bird, which always eventually comes down to earth in order to rest and nest.

The "Fourth and Last Part" of *Zarathustra* begins "as he sat on a rock in front of his cave and quietly looked out—out over the sea, and away over winding abysses" (Z 4.1). Then, with his eagle and serpent, Zarathustra climbs a high mountain in order to make the offering of honey, to bait his fishing line to catch the most wondrous human beings he can. For this he must take a firm stand:

— with both feet I stand securely on this ground,

— on an eternal ground, on hard primeval rock, on this highest hardest primeval mountain-range, to which all winds come as to a weather-divide, asking Where? and Whence? and Whither?

If this affirmation sounds strange, coming as it does from the great anti-foundationalist Zarathustra, we should recall that the rock of the peak is continuous with the "granite of fate" that supports the mountain and sustains the soul, and that Zarathustra can speak like this only because he has already learned to dance and to fly.

At the end of Part Four, Zarathustra returns to his cave. "And once more Zarathustra sank into himself and sat down on the large rock again and meditated." It is thanks to this meditation, seated on his rock, that he is able to speak his final speech and leave his cave, "glowing and strong, like a morning sun coming out of dark mountains" (Z 4.20).

* * *

In terms of contemporary therapies, Nietzsche is not advocating anything as literal as the putative healing powers of gemstones and crystals, nor is he counseling regular conversations with our rock collections, insofar as the language that unhewn rocks

may speak is no human language. They speak rather “in their own tongues,” in the primordial language of nature—which we nonetheless may, with practice, learn to understand at least in part. What he is advocating is that we attend to the images of stone that occur in our dreams and fantasies, and get in touch with “our inner rock.” Just as Emerson’s experience of living with “carbon, lime & granite” undergirds his talk about “how much firmness the sea-beaten rock has taught the fisherman,” so Nietzsche’s acknowledgment of the “anorganic minerals” in the human body is at the basis of his idea that we have within us, psychologically, the firmness of stone: indeed not only “some granite of spiritual fate” but also “something that explodes rock.”³⁷ Stone is also emblematic of the “dead nature” that we need to participate in if we are to live a full and fulfilled existence.

Unlike Zarathustra, most of us will not manage to learn to fly, but at least we can dance. A man who knew a thing or two about dancing as well as flying once sang about the power of philosophy in these striking images:

The power of philosophy—yeah
floats through my head,
Light like a feather,
heavy as lead.³⁸

Among the so-called “heavy metals,” some (iron and zinc, for example) are necessary to life, whereas others (like lead and mercury) are of no benefit to the living—and in sufficient quantities are even deadly. Recall Zarathustra’s characterization of the Spirit of Heaviness as “half dwarf, half mole; lame; laming; dripping lead into my ear, lead-drop thoughts into my brain” (Z 3.2, 1). It is fitting, then, that the dance should draw from that vitality in the body which is “light like a feather” to counteract that death-related element which is closest to the densest stone, “heavy as lead.”

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this chapter appeared under the title “Nietzsche on Rock and Stone: The Dead World, Dance and Flight,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21/1 (2013): 20–40. Permission to reuse some of this essay here is gratefully acknowledged. Translations of passages from Nietzsche’s works are my own, from the Colli & Montinari critical editions, since the extant English versions fail to capture some of the nuances necessary for the argument—with the exception of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2005).
- 2 See my essay “Staying Loyal to the Earth: Nietzsche as an Ecological Thinker,” in John Lippitt, (ed.), *Nietzsche’s Futures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 167–88.
- 3 For an overview of the role of unhewn rock in the development of the classical Chinese garden, see my essay “Thinking Rocks, Living Stones: Reflections on Chinese Lithophilia,” *Diogenes* 52/4 (2005): 75–87; and for the Japanese tradition, “The Role of Rock in the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden: A Philosophical Essay,” in François Berthier (ed.), *Reading Zen in the Rocks: The Japanese Dry Landscape Garden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 85–155. The parallels with Nietzsche’s understanding of stone are remarkable, though it is not possible to draw

- them here. For a comparison of Nietzsche's ideas with Emerson's, see my "Floods of Life around Granite of Fate: Nietzsche and Emerson as Thinkers of Nature," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 43 (1997): 207–40.
- 4 Nietzsche, *KGW* I,1: p. 6.
 - 5 Nietzsche, "From My Life," *KGW* I,1: p. 288.
 - 6 Nietzsche, *KSA* 8: 41[21], 1879; 11[11], 28[6], 1878.
 - 7 Nietzsche, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, aphorism 49.
 - 8 Nietzsche, "From My Life," *KGW* I,1: p. 283; "The Course of My Life," *KGW* I,2: p. 259; "My Life," *KGW* 1,3: pp. 89–91.
 - 9 Nietzsche, "The Course of My Life," *KGW* I,2: p. 256.
 - 10 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, § 21; see also §§ 22 and 23.
 - 11 Nietzsche, *KSA* 1:715–16.
 - 12 Emerson, *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 5:496–67.
 - 13 Nietzsche, *KSA* 9: 11[125], 1881; 9: 11[207], 1881.
 - 14 Nietzsche, *Dawn of Morning*, aph. 541.
 - 15 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Goethe," *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays & Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), p. 746.
 - 16 Emerson, "Fate," in *Essays & Lectures*, p. 949.
 - 17 Emerson, "Fate," pp. 951–52.
 - 18 Schiller, "Ode to Joy," lines 9–10, 73–4.
 - 19 Nietzsche, *KSA* 7: 176.
 - 20 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 1.
 - 21 Nietzsche, *KSA* 9: 7 [213], 1880.
 - 22 Emerson, "Fate," p. 953.
 - 23 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aph. 225.
 - 24 Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, aph. 201.
 - 25 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aph. 356.
 - 26 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, § 1.
 - 27 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aph. 109.
 - 28 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 2.12; *Beyond Good and Evil*, aph. 36.
 - 29 Compare *Matthew* 27:51–3: "And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection."
 - 30 See *Luke* 24:2, where after the Resurrection the women "found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher."
 - 31 Goethe, "On Granite," in *Goethe: Collected Works*, vol. 12, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 131–34.
 - 32 Nishitani, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 91–2.
 - 33 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aph. 230.
 - 34 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, especially vol. 1, § 55.
 - 35 Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," § 1. The word translated by "talus," *Schuttwerk*, carries a connotation of boulders, scree, or rock-fragments.
 - 36 There is a parallel between Zarathustra's encounter with the dwarf and Siegfried's encounter with the dwarf Mime in Wagner's *Ring*.
 - 37 Emerson, *Nature*, ch. 5, "Discipline."
 - 38 Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Misty Morning," *Kaya* (1978), 1:00–1:24.