The Sound of Nietzsche’s “Long Bright Silence”: The Interpretation of Zarathustra as an End in Itself

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I. THE INHERENT CHALLENGE OF INTERPRETING ZARATHUSTRA

Nietzsche’s notions of the analytical and the poetic are deliberately incoherent—their forced union would not be reflective of life itself, which is riddled with the contrasts that keep creation in motion. This is why in his discussion of Thus Spoke Zarathustra in “Ecce Homo,” Nietzsche calls himself a “poet” and a “philosopher.” In Zarathustra, Nietzsche combines the two by simultaneously presenting and criticizing both notions in the context of every other concept addressed in the text. Whereas most writers would be unable to appeal both to poetry and analytic philosophy, this clash is a key quality of Nietzsche’s prose. His writing in Zarathustra is not devoid of assertions and comparisons, yet neither is it logical in the traditional sense; it is beautifully lyrical, while undermining lyricism. Far beyond questioning modern morals, Nietzsche’s distinctive style questions analytical interpretation, our modern faculty for examining morality. Beyond acting as a tool for tearing down traditions, this unique way of writing is absolutely necessary in order to be compatible with Nietzsche’s philosophy, since the narrative itself acts as a microcosm of the larger project by breaking conventions—even its own—in order to force the reader to engage in the creative process of interpretation.

But in order for the narrative to engage us in this way, we must find a way to overcome our ingrained bias for the rules of rationality. Nietzsche realizes that it would be
impossible to fully critique modern criticism while using a language wholly tied up in the tradition of rationalism, for "what the mob once learned to believe without reasons—who could overthrow that with reasons?"\(^2\) In order to criticize it, Nietzsche distances himself from the current institution; to this end, he replaces our current language, as well as its underlying rational and moral conventions, with a new kind of verbal expression that is meant for new ears. This is a language that constantly undermines itself, never offering the reader the comfort of a conclusion, since the statement’s contradiction always follows elsewhere with equal gravity. This conjunctional tension forms the same kind of "oppositional tension and harmony, [which] must pair to create a work of art."\(^3\)

It is lost in hermeneutics, where one searches for a specific meaning or translation of the piece at hand, sacrificing its discordant elements for the sake of isolating some singular trend that represents only a fraction of the true whole.

To modern listeners, what Nietzsche says can therefore only be heard as a "long bright silence," because he is speaking in such a way "that no one may discern [his] ground and ultimate will."\(^4\) We modern thinkers, who are conditioned to approach philosophical writing by searching for maxims to affirm, deny, dismiss or follow dogmatically, would only misrepresent Nietzsche’s meaning all the more quickly if he tried to state it directly. Thus Spoke Zarathustra is unhearable, incomprehensible nonsense, until one separates oneself far enough from analytic tradition and lifts oneself high enough above modern divisions to see the whole—only then can one make out the melody of Zarathustra’s higher frequencies, the new music for which "a rebirth of the art of hearing was among its preconditions."\(^5\) This type of perspective can only be achieved by moving beyond Socratic reason, which though it seems all-encompassing today, is only a subset of the type of fuller thinking the early Greeks engaged in when "there was no convention to meet them halfway."\(^6\)

Even though Nietzsche may believe that “the time for [him] hasn’t come yet,”\(^7\) our likely failure to understand his message is by no means an excuse for us to avoid the task entirely. We must confront it head-on:

Your enemy you shall seek, your war you shall wage—for your thoughts.
And if your thought be vanquished, then your honesty should still find cause for triumph in that … let your work be a struggle.\(^8\)

We will accept Nietzsche’s challenge and make the interpretation of Zarathustra our struggle. However, even if the challenge is accepted, it is difficult to know where to begin. How can one philosophically analyze a work that criticizes philosophical analysis? How may we listen to, and someday sing with, a song whose composer tells us we cannot hear its notes? Despite the potentially far-reaching impact of Zarathustra on all writing and interpretation, we do not know how to write about it or how to interpret it. As “Nietzsche … has cast the strongest doubt on language itself, how are we to comprehend his language, and how do we use ours in commenting on his work?”\(^9\)
This problem is dodged by most critics through sly selectivity. Nietzsche is “dynamite,”\textsuperscript{10} and interpreters tend to treat his writings accordingly, carefully diffusing individual elements rather than tackling the functional, volatile whole of his work. These so-called charitable interpreters, who believe they are doing Nietzsche a favor by “rewriting” him in unambiguous statements that produce a philosophical system … [by] explaining away Nietzsche’s contradictions [in] various ways,”\textsuperscript{11} are attempting to disarm Nietzsche’s reputation as a vicious and unapproachable thinker—one who first destabilizes the foundations of modern society and ethical conduct and then only offers us the option of becoming just as destructive ourselves. But a radical ideology is not what is most unsettling about Nietzsche, since one could simply quarantine such claims and evaluate their merit in isolation without cause for uneasiness. What makes Nietzsche so threatening is not necessarily what he says, but the manner in which he says it—a manner which ultimately questions the legitimacy of any interpretation whatsoever.

In this way, the interpretation of Nietzsche’s \textit{Zarathustra} seems to be asking the reader to unite a pair of opposites that cannot be unified. Nevertheless, if we set forth our interpretation of what Nietzsche might be saying, and then address the implications of our interpretation in light of Nietzsche’s views as a whole, we may begin to “create and carry together into One what is fragment and riddle and dreadful accident,” for we, too, have the ability to be “also a creator and guesser of riddles and redeemer of accidents.”\textsuperscript{12}

II. WHAT SAYS ZARATHUSTRA?

Most simply, \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} is a narrative that follows the wise hermit Zarathustra through his wanderings. It is a tale full of parody, parable, and contradiction. Its divergence from traditional philosophical texts is immediately striking: some say it is “anti-myth,” some believe it both accepts \textit{and} rejects myth,\textsuperscript{13} and still others see it not as a whole but as a mere “labyrinth of isolated, contradictory statements.”\textsuperscript{14} All these interpretations are, to varying degrees, justified by Zarathustra, which indicates how successfully pluralistic the work is—how it can be “A Book for All.” Yet it is also a book for “None,”\textsuperscript{15} which implies that there is an ultimate message to be grasped beyond the mere proliferation of interpretations it supports. To begin looking for this message, we shall examine the Eternal Recurrence, what Nietzsche himself calls “the fundamental conception of this work.”\textsuperscript{16}

The first explicit account of the Eternal Recurrence appears when Zarathustra encounters “the spirit of gravity, [his] devil and archenemy,”\textsuperscript{17} who is used as a foil to illustrate what a shallow interpretation of the Eternal Recurrence might be. The differences in their interpretations center on a key element of the Eternal Recurrence: the present, or ‘Moment.’ In Zarathustra’s explanation of the Eternal Recurrence, he describes a ‘Moment’ figuratively as the gateway at which two eternities meet “face to
face.” These eternities are tied together in such a way that all events are dependent upon all others, so that “this moment” is inextricably linked to “all that is to come.” The important difference between Zarathustra’s view and conventional theories of time is that according to Zarathustra, past and future meet in opposition, instead of the future passing one-way through present into past. The spirit of gravity evokes the latter view by describing “time itself as a circle,” like a rotating wheel. Zarathustra scolds him for holding such a view, arguing that it is “making things too easy on [one]self.” Why is this? For Zarathustra, the structure of time itself must conform to his account of the best way to be in time. The type of existence proposed by a circular time is irreconcilably passive, since the Moment is only a sort of ‘flowing-through’ of an inaccessible future to an inaccessible past. That is, although time is circular—which makes it seem as though one would eventually be able to regain access to one’s past—even when one passes back around the same point on the circle one is still impeded by passivity, since the constant flowing-through provides no opportunity to grab hold of and shape one’s past.

In Zarathustra’s conception, however, the Moment is struggle: as the meeting point of two opposing forces, we are required at every ‘now’ to fight to reconcile our past with our future. As Heidegger explains:

Whoever stands in the Moment is turned in two ways … the ring is not closed in some remote infinity [as the spirit of gravity believed] but possesses its unbroken closure in the Moment, as the center of the striving … the moment … determines how everything recurs.19

Nietzsche lays the foundations of this concept in his earlier works, specifically through his interpretation of Heraclitus’ philosophy in his essay “Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks.” Since Zarathustra never fully clarifies the Eternal Recurrence in even his most explicit discussions, Nietzsche’s work with Heraclitus will provide an invaluable map for indicating how Nietzsche intends to lead us through Zarathustra.

The basis of the Eternal Recurrence appears in “The Tragic Age” when Nietzsche extracts the implications of Heraclitus’ theory20 of flux: “[Heraclitus] believes … in a periodically repeated end of the world, and in an ever renewed rise of another world.”21 Since everything that makes up reality is subject to fluctuation and variation, “the whole nature of reality lies simply in … acts and … there exists no other sort of being.”22 Thus, any hermeneutical meaning structures that might be imposed upon these bare acts are absent, imbuing the Moment in which acts occur with supreme authority. This is why the Eternal Recurrence affords one the ability to re-evaluate one’s past continuously. The Moment’s authority precludes the past becoming something more solid, concrete, and out of reach; there is nothing more lasting, or more powerful, than our actions at every moment. “Zarathustra once defines, quite strictly, his task—it is [Nietzsche’s], too—and there is no mistaking his meaning; he says Yes to the point of justifying, of redeeming even all of the past”23 when he acknowledges our ability in the Moment “to
recreate all ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it’—that alone should [Zarathustra] call ‘redemption.’” This sort of redemption would be impossible were all Being not subordinate to the flux. It is flux alone that allows the past to confront the future at the Moment.

Those who cling to the tenets of reason would argue that “planks and railings are over the river [of flux]. Whatever is over the river is firm; all the values of things, the bridges, the concepts, all ‘good’ and ‘evil’—all that is firm.” They would claim that there does exist some static Being in our rational beliefs resistant to the flux, to Becoming. For Nietzsche, these are only artificial constructs—rickety bridges—and are counterintuitive by their nature, since in the “erection of every ideal on earth … reality has had to be misunderstood and slandered.” Reality is slandered because ideal rational thinking has failed to capture the nature of existence. “Intuitive thinking,” on the other hand, succeeds in “embrac[ing] two things: one, the present many-colored and changing world that crowds in upon us in all our experiences and two, the conditions which alone make any experience of this world possible: time and space.” Because time and space are sensed intuitively before any reasoning is even possible, they should be considered more fundamental and more natural than rationality; hence rationality must be a less inclusive, distorted way of assessing existence. In order for nature’s flux to maintain its constant motion, “everything forever has its opposite along with it,” a characteristic of nature that defies Aristotle’s law of contradiction, the founding tenet of modern rational analysis. Not only are rational philosophers guilty of possessing an inaccurate and incomplete view of nature, but they also engage in “unhistorical” thinking by denying the flux, since one need only look back to see that their concepts fail to endure the “thawing wind” of Becoming. Thus, the Moment as we experience it spatially and temporally, and the way in which nature conducts itself, both suggest that rationality’s assertion of its concepts’ enduring authority over the Moment is simply untrue.

Yet even once we recognize the foundations that lead Nietzsche to make the Eternal Recurrence central to Zarathustra, it is ambiguous in what form one should take this concept. It is fairly obvious that it cannot be merely a “cosmological hypothesis” whose “credibility” could depend upon “a proof.” Instead, Nehamas suggests describing it as the concept that

... in every moment is implicit everything that has occurred in the past and everything that will occur in the future ... if anything had occurred differently, everything would have occurred differently ... if anything happened again, everything would happen again.

Such a phrasing of the Eternal Recurrence would probably ring very true for Zarathustra, as it “does not presuppose the truth of the claim that the world, or one’s life, eternally repeats itself—or even that this is a credible notion.” Zarathustra wouldn’t fight to assert a truth, since he knows that humanity came to believe in the institution of reason through some means other than reason itself. As reason cannot be a precondition for ac-
cepting itself,32 so too can reason never be overthrown by reason alone. Furthermore, Zarathustra is a creator, so if he is making a new truth, it does not follow that he should feel compelled to confirm his new truth with some exterior or pre-existing truth, since his work is an end in itself resistant to requests for justification or assertions of falsehood.33

The Eternal Recurrence amounts to an aesthetic imperative for the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of our past, and “since … complete or total interpretation is an impossible purpose to aim at, the model accounts for … Nietzsche’s overarching metaphor of the world in general as a text to be interpreted.”34 In the Eternal Recurrence, individual agency and our access to Zarathustra’s teaching itself both depend upon our ability to interpret the events in his writing as well as the events of our own past unceasingly, in the search for an all-encompassing interpretation: an ideal goal that is impossible to achieve. The Eternal Recurrence therefore keeps us forever Becoming in a never-ending, asymptotic approach—forever in the Moment and constantly reassessing our experience, so that we never latch onto conceptual bridges and ignore the characteristic fluctuations and contradictions inherent in the world around us.

III. WHY NOT ‘BEING’?

Having examined the central positive doctrine of Zarathustra, we will now examine its central negative implications. In order for us to take Zarathustra’s teachings to heart, to feel unsettled enough in our current dependence on reason that we are ready to listen to the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, Zarathustra must challenge rational conventions to show us the crisis of modern man. Thus “every sentence in [Zarathustra] was, with a consistency [Nietzsche] admired, some truth stood on its head: one really had to do no more than ‘revalue all values’ in order to hit the nail on the head.”35 This crisis is the death of Being, and its far-reaching implications show why it is understandable that the modern man would feel angry with Nietzsche for uncovering what lies under the rug of reason. Without Being, mankind is immersed in the pluralism of the flux; even if the cage of rationality has limited mankind’s understanding of nature, many find it safer to live within its boundaries than to plunge naked into the stream. What Nietzsche welcomes as an arena for creation brings with it the loss of objective truth as we know it—a frightening prospect.

Before we continue in our examination of Zarathustra’s teachings, we ought to better explain why he so staunchly prefers Becoming to Being. In Zarathustra, this is for the most part illustrated by the satiric buffoonery of those who adhere to religious and scientific over-arching principles, as can be found in Nietzsche’s depiction of the over-simplified chants and bizarre rites of the animals that worship Zarathustra in Part IV.36 But Nietzsche parodies even Zarathustra himself, turning him into a braying ass—since no element of Zarathustra, even its hero, can be above the destructive counterpart of the cre-
The conflict between Being and Becoming is dramatized early on by Nietzsche in his essay “The Birth of Tragedy,” in which he explicates the conflict between Socratic reason and the more primitive Greek tragedy. On the one hand, there is the concept of the Apollonian dream, the means by which “all the pleasure and wisdom and beauty of ‘appearance’ speak to us.” Working both with and against the Apollonian is the Dionysian intoxication—the “gospel of world-harmony,” a oneness with nature. In the Dionysian state, “man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.” United, these two elements compose tragedy: the artistically guided appeal to passionate and empathetic feelings. After the appearance of Socrates, this form of tragedy is almost completely lost. In the realm of Socratic theory, the poet becomes “forever calm and unmoved, [in] a wide-eyed contemplation, which sees images before itself” as the result of a subject-object divide. This is the victory of “highly realistic imitations” ordered by “aesthetic Socratism,” which forces everything beautiful to be “intelligible,” since “knowledge is virtue.”

The problem with Socrates’ mode of thought is not simply that it is analytical—Nietzsche acknowledges that analysis must exist alongside “instinctive wisdom” to prevent the excesses of the “mystic” thinker. The real problem with Socrates’ “logical drive” is that it is “utterly forbidden to turn against itself.” Though Nietzsche points out some undesirable effects of such a system, beyond all specific criticisms of Socrates and logic in general is the problem that such thinking establishes maxims that cannot be questioned or challenged by competing ones, such as the aforementioned law of contradiction, even in the face of experience to the contrary. All the Socratic thinker can do is merely dissect whatever is within the bounds of those maxims—there is no creation, no re-evaluation, and no flux. In order to legitimize this type of system, one must (as Plato did by following Socrates’ teachings) appeal to some outside, other-worldly Ideal, a “pseudo-reality.”

However, as can be seen in Socrates’ “dream phenomenon,” in which he was compelled to “make music,” one might be compelled to ask “whether the relationship between Socratic thought and art is necessarily only an antipodal one and whether the birth of an ‘artistic Socrates’ is actually a contradiction in terms.” Through Socrates’ desire to compose music and write poetry in prison, as well as in Plato’s inclusion of myth in the dialogues, we begin to see their “apprehension … about the limits of the logical nature.” These ancient thinkers, however, were operating in the infancy of logic, and therefore still had the sense to rethink what declared itself beyond rethinking. After the Enlightenment solidified the foundations of knowledge in logic and reason, such a daring move became much more difficult.
Nietzsche revisits this issue in the *Genealogy of Morals* when he discusses the ramifications of the “ascetic ideal” propagated by religion, science, and political civilization. He calls this ideal an “artifice for the preservation of life” which ultimately results in a bastardization, an anesthetization of life by the “taming of man.” The desire for such an existence comes from man’s intrinsic “desire to be different, to be in a different place.” In his unhappiness he seeks not a just new solution, but a new world. This makes man a servant: listless, pious and inert. Yet just as Nietzsche has faith in the power of Becoming over Being, he too believes that man will overcome this sickness and, from the sores of self-disgust, heal himself by shrugging off the harnesses of Being. He will once again dare, act, achieve, and experiment.\textsuperscript{44} Since “all great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming,” it is the “will to truth”\textsuperscript{45}—our own interpretation of it, as opposed to some “criterion of the correct perception”\textsuperscript{46}—that will lead to the downfall of orthodox morality and systematized logic.

It is science’s piety, lack of creativity, and restrictive nature that Nietzsche sees as the Socratic pestilence of stability in a once-vibrant Heraclitean world of Becoming. Becoming is preferable to Being because it is what allows man to find his individual interpretation of the world, since he is able to use his creative ability instead of merely maneuvering craftily under the rule of unquestioned laws. Laws and reason inevitably undermine themselves throughout history, as can be observed with the vast changes in systems of thought and belief between different civilizations and generations.\textsuperscript{47} Why wait under a dying system, instead of becoming an agent of change?

Therefore, the Eternal Recurrence is the tool Zarathustra provides us with to escape the confines of Being so that we may embrace Becoming in the Moment. Only then will we see again the full spectrum of experience of which black-and-white rationality has robbed mankind.

IV. HOW SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA?

The main difficulty one has with *Zarathustra*, even if one believes one has developed a decent notion of its ultimate doctrines, is what to do with it as a text. Nietzsche appears to show us what we should avoid, when Zarathustra’s animals sing to him an abridged version of the Eternal Recurrence. Zarathustra chides them for being barrel organs and for turning the darker implications of the doctrine into a silly song.\textsuperscript{48} However, before we are even allowed to agree with Zarathustra and dismiss such a playful characterization of his teachings, his quest turns into an extravagant parody. It seems as though the whole of Zarathustra’s previous instruction collapses into a silly romp, and Zarathustra is by no means reluctant to participate.

Such parody takes over Section IV of the book, when Zarathustra comes across a host of caricatured wanderers as he searches for the Overman. For this reason, many critics downplay the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, as it renders any critical assessment of the
first three parts useless and irrelevant. Some interpreters dismiss this downturn at the end of the book as an accident, as a mistake, or as a symptom of Nietzsche’s growing mental health problems. But from Nietzsche’s letters, it is obvious that this section was intentionally written the way it is. From Nietzsche’s letters, it is obvious that this section was intentionally written the way it is.49 We ought to read the fourth section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the book’s unique dénouement: a destructive process that compels the reader to turn back, revisit the start of the book, and begin all over again, if only just to see what went wrong and where, but also to avoid blindly worshipping the words of Zarathustra as the other characters in the book do.

What here may seem to be a fragmented, incoherent style, with intentionally disjointed and self-effacing themes, may just as well be attributed to play. After all, Nietzsche valued play and mischievousness. Despite the utter significance he attributes to his writings, he is not above laughing at himself, at all those who vehemently and viciously oppose him and at everything held to be dogma.50 Despite the dark and dire scenes in *Zarathustra*, the hero can never rest in despair, for it is in the very nature of Zarathustra’s acceptance of the Eternal Recurrence that he smiles at what would paralyze others in fear or helplessness. It is the triumph of Zarathustra that he does not despair in the knowledge that all of humanity’s Edens have been razed, for his tears would only add salt to the already poisoned earth. Instead, he sees the dust as the perfect medium in which to draw his own figures with the sharp stick of his will. Nietzsche destroys only to allow us to create, and he clears away his own constructions to give us all the more room to build. The fourth section isn’t a failure on the part of Nietzsche or of Zarathustra; rather, it shows a successful acceptance of the Eternal Recurrence. Nietzsche is only doing himself what later interpreters would have done to his work anyway—embracing the knowledge that his teaching would not stand unchallenged forever.51

Yet for all his efforts, Nietzsche’s reluctant conviction that “only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world justified to eternity”52 separates him from traditional philosophy. However, this tradition also excludes the proto-philosophers such as Heraclitus, whom Nietzsche most closely resembles in writing style. Like Heraclitus, Nietzsche writes “very tersely, to be sure, and for that reason [is] obscure for readers who skim and race,” yet he is never intentionally obscure. Given the aesthetic contemplation needed to keep one’s past Becoming, he simply has no choice other than to write in a way that accommodates the “struggle of the many [which] can yet carry rules and laws inherent in itself … [the] necessity and random play, oppositional tension and harmony, [that] must pair to create a work of art.” He must promote interpreting one’s life from within it, as opposed to at a distance, like “how the artist stands contemplatively above and at the same time actively within his work.”53

*Zarathustra* succeeds in combining the poetic and analytical in the sense that neither is ever abandoned for too long; Zarathustra sings beautifully, yet he despairs of being “only fool, only poet.”54 He systematically undermines modern thought, yet does so without the hope of establishing some new rigid system himself. Furthermore, it is not possible to separate the analytic from the poetic sections of the text cleanly, as is much
easier with Plato. A sort of system is still created, but it is an artistic one, which functions similarly to the way music can evoke our emotions while still following an underlying mathematical structure. Similarly, we judge characters’ worth not based upon their correspondence with a pre-existing concept of morality, but by whether they follow a pattern of “perfectly integrated” or right-seeming actions. Socratic reasoning cannot be altogether avoided by Nietzsche in order to accomplish a return to tragic Greek thinking, since he, too, would be as guilty as the rationalists if he ignored this competing position for the sake of creating false unity. Instead, it is a tool Nietzsche uses to address and dismantle the dogma that have been cemented in modern thought. However, a clash of different modes of reason alone is not enough—this is why reason carries with it the poetic in Nietzsche’s work (working together as the Apollonian and Dionysian do in tragedy). The constructive process of poetry is what allows for Eternal Recurrence in the world, what feeds the cycle, what saves mankind from despair and utter ideological dismemberment, by appealing to a time before Socratic reason and by presenting an alternative to its logic. Poetry provides “the metaphysical consolation—with which … all true tragedy leaves us—that life at the bottom of things, in spite of the passing of phenomena, remains indestructibly powerful and pleasurable … eternally the same in spite of the passing of generations and of history of peoples.”

Here we may revisit our goal at the outset: if nothing goes unquestioned in Zarathustra, including language and interpretation, how can we interpret it? The narrator of Zarathustra gives us the answer: “Now it may have been so or otherwise; and if the ass really did not dance that night, yet greater and stranger wonders occurred than the dancing of an ass would have been. In short, as the proverb of Zarathustra says: “What does it matter?” As long as one is interpreting, creating, or not letting-alone, the specifics of the interpretation itself are of very little significance. An individual must interpret the past in the Moment, rather than forcing interpretation to mesh with an ultimate moral code. Individual moral awareness, even if deviant, is far more valuable than incidental adherence to society’s paradigm. Examining texts—or more importantly, the world—according to logical tenets and conventional steps is likewise a false and hampering restriction on one’s ability to thoughtfully conceive of an interpretation. No interpretation is truer than another, none is better or worse—it is the individual himself who benefits from the process of creation.

V. Conclusion

When Nietzsche applies poetic techniques to philosophical issues, he succeeds in creating a new method for examining the world. In the agency implied by the Eternal Recurrence, he implores us to leave nothing uninterpreted, to let nothing stop Becoming long enough to form a Being. Nietzsche’s style of writing is symptomatic of his teaching: the narrative itself makes light of the heavy, contradicts conventional pursuits, and ul-
timately turns on its own head. Nietzsche has no other option, for to write more tradi-
tionally would be to undermine the essence of his ethos. Therefore it is unreasonable to
say Zarathustra isn’t philosophy because of the way in which it is written; instead, it is
written that way because it is a new philosophy. It is not the kind of philosophy with
which one is invited to agree or disagree. By contemplating the text at all, one is already
adhering to Nietzsche’s central doctrine of interpretation, and thus already agreeing
with him in the way most significant to his purpose. In Zarathustra, Nietzsche has given
us neither a polemic nor a command; instead, he has learned “that to give presents well
is an art and the ultimate and most cunning master-art of graciousness.”58 By luring us
with a text that provides an unending resource for interpretation, the form of Nietzsche’s
philosophy alone causes us to engage in the activity he deems most valuable. His writing
has managed to bypass our habit of analytical reasoning, to intuitively trigger us to ques-
tion it even before our rationality leads us to realize that this is what Nietzsche has
wanted us to do all along.59 And once we come full-circle and realize his trick, we have
no choice but to “laugh and be elevated at the same time.”60 Even in the face of failure
we should not fear, since, after all, the wise Zarathustra is often only tight-lipped to
keep from deafening the reader with his laughter. Our struggle should be a beautiful and
joyous undertaking; only when we feel we’ve found some satisfactory answer should we
truly be worried. Nietzsche would remind us that “it is a game. Don’t take it so pathet-
ically and—above all—don’t make morality of it!”61

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NOTES

2: Nietzsche, Friedrich. Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None. Trans. Walter
3: Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks (1873).” The Ni-
p. 111.
8: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 47.
9: Kuenzli, Rudolph E. “Nietzsche’s Zerography: Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” Boundary 2,
Vol. 9, No. 3, Why Nietzsche Now? A Boundary 2 Symposium. (Spring - Autumn,
11: Kuenzli, p. 100.
12: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 139.
14: Kuenzli, p. 103.
15: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. iii.
17: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 156.
18: Ibid., p. 158.
20: It should not be assumed, however, that Zarathustra is merely Heraclitus’ voice speaking through Nietzsche—in fact, the opposite is the case. Nietzsche certainly uses the fragments and the intellectual heritage of the Greek thinker as an inspiration for both his writing style and his mode of thought in Zarathustra. However, Nietzsche is adapting Heraclitus’ writing as a creation from much more than an analytical dissection of. He exercises a hermeneutic freedom far beyond what appears objectively in the text—an early model for what his readers must attempt to do with Zarathustra.
24: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 139.
25: Ibid., p. 201.
29: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 201.
31: Ibid., p. 338.
33: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 290. At this point, one might argue that Zarathustra owes the rationalists this same consideration—that this position could just as easily be assumed in order to support their belief in reason. This issue illustrates a key aspect of Zarathustra’s project: his support of the creator but not the adopter. Though
Zarathustra wants to shake mankind from its intellectual stagnancy, he doesn't want to put forth what could become a universally accepted, widely verified truth (Nietzsche, “Zarathustra” 23). He is not looking for people who accept everything he says, but instead for people who try to rebel against it, as he, too, had rebelled against what came before him, and in that process became a creator. The Eternal Recurrence is a doctrine of physical and mental action, and by goading us into challenging conventional thought, or even Nietzsche's thought, it achieves its goal. Whether we ultimately decide to accept the doctrine or not is irrelevant.

34: Nehamas, p. 352.
36: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 315.
38: Ibid., p. 45.
40: Ibid., p. 66.
42: Nietzsche, “Birth,” p. 67. This is the foundation of not only logic, but of religion, since the latter also moves its ultimate authority outside of the world to an unquestionable realm: “those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Despisers of life are they,” who keep one from “remain[ing] faithful to the earth” (Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 13).
44: Nietzsche, “Genealogy,” pp. 120-121.
51: Nietzsche would likely argue that adding such an ending to any religious text would have saved civilization a lot of time, and would have made Nietzsche’s message much easier to receive.
54: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 298.
57: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, p. 318.
58: Ibid., p. 270.
59: To those who would argue that the essay has established this point by appealing to analytical reasoning, and that the problems raised by Nietzsche are thereby resolved or at least rendered moot, it should be noted that Zarathustra himself doesn’t banish reason from his kingdom. Reason has its place, too, but it is not the only option for analysis, nor the enduring authority. Rather, it is a machine for tearing down bridges (including its own) to clear the way for new ideas. This essay is not meant to be the interpretation of Nietzsche’s project, nor is it meant to provide the reader with a comfortable conclusion. Instead, it offers an invitation to engage; as with Zarathustra, the fact that analytical reasoning was appealed to in the essay’s progression does not indicate an inherent methodological flaw so long as the invitation is accepted.
