



Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is one of the most controversial thinkers in the history of Western philosophy. His powerful and provocative ideas have had a widespread impact upon twentieth century culture. This pervasive influence can be explained in part by the powerful and provocative nature of his writings, but perhaps even more so because of the sense in which his thought seemed to have anticipated the twentieth century. In a time when European culture was still confident of achieving its Enlightenment ideal of the progress of human society, progress towards unlocking the secrets of nature and progress towards founding society upon universal foundation of reason, Nietzsche's writings anticipated a cataclysmic crisis. As the confidence of European culture was shattered in the cataclysms of two world wars and the atomic age which seemed to

place the future of human civilization in question, Nietzsche's vision seems to have been prophetic.

Nietzsche's philosophy is controversial not only for its attack against Christianity—perhaps the most well-known line of his writings is the announcement that “God is dead”—but also for its profound critique of the most fundamental assumptions of Western philosophy. As a result Nietzsche's thought calls into question not only the whole of European morality, but also the very notion of philosophy as it had been understood since Plato.

Due in part to the difficulty of that critique, Nietzsche's writings have been widely interpreted throughout the course of the twentieth century, and in some cases quite grossly misinterpreted, as was clearly the case with the attempt by the Nazis to adopt his philosophy. A German by birth, Nietzsche barely set foot in his native land during the last ten years of his active life, never tiring of criticizing the growing anti-Semitism and nationalism in Germany. In January of 1889 Nietzsche collapsed on the streets of Turin Italy, his brilliant mind shattered perhaps by the ravages of tertiary syphilis. He was brought back to Germany and spent most of the last eleven years of his life in the care of his sister, all the while completely unaware that his books were now being widely read.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy is that the very conception of philosophy changes with his writings. In his conception of a “philosophy of the future,” philosophers will accept that they are artists. For Plato, philosophers, of course, are far more important than artists. Whereas philosophers have the serious task of climbing out of the cave of *appearance* and discovering the *true world*, artists are stuck in the *dreamworld* playing with fictions that are no more than shadows on the wall of the cave of appearance and three steps removed from *truth*. Descartes too, while toying at first with the thought that he cannot tell the difference from dreaming and waking life, really wants to prove that he is awake and that it is possible to escape the dreamworld and discover the truth about reality. Nietzsche counters with the thought that the philosophers of the future will recognize that philosophers have always been artists playing with fiction; instead of trying to wake up from the dream these future philosophers will have awakened to the fact that they are dreaming, and in that awareness, like lucid dreamers, will continue to dream. With Nietzsche's writings the traditional idea of the distinction between philosophy and art, or philosophy and literature, begins to break down, and it is with this breakdown that the controversy surrounding so called “postmodern” philosophy begins.

Lucid Dreaming: Philosophy as Art

In the closing aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil*, we see something of a reversal of the traditional relationship between philosophy and art. Here the author looks back over what he has just written and questions just what the writings of a philosopher are.

Alas, what are you after all, my written and painted thoughts! It was not long ago that you were still so colorful, young, and malicious, full of thorns and secret spices—you made me sneeze and laugh—and now? You have already taken off your novelty, and some of you are ready, I fear, to become truths: they already look so immortal, so pathetically decent, so dull! And has it ever been different? What things do we copy, writing and painting, we mandarins with Chinese brushes, we immortalizers of things that *can* be written—what are the only things we are able to paint? Alas, always only what is on the verge of withering and losing its fragrance! Alas, always only storms that are passing, exhausted, and feelings that are autumnal and yellow! Alas, always only birds that grew weary of flying and flew astray and now can be caught by hand—by *our* hand! We immortalize what cannot live and fly much longer—only weary and mellow things! And it is only your *afternoon*, you, my written and painted thoughts, for which alone I have colors, many colors perhaps, many motley caresses and fifty yellows and browns and greens and reds: but nobody will guess from that how you looked in your morning, you sudden sparks and wonders of my solitude, you my beloved—*wicked* thoughts! (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 296)

In Plato's dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, Socrates discusses the problem of writing in telling his friend Phaedrus an Egyptian myth about the origin of writing. Writing was presented as a gift to the Pharaoh but the gift was rejected as the Pharaoh regarded it as a poisoned present. Writing is dangerous according to the myth as it can lead to misunderstanding. Plato privileges speech over writing as there is less distance between the speaker and the listener and less chance for the meaning of the words to be lost in interpretation. In the *Phaedrus*, writing is also explicitly connected with painting and thus art which Plato, in the *Republic*, regards as three steps removed from the Truth. The opposition of speech over writing thus fits within the Platonic opposition between philosophy and art, reality and appearance that structures Plato's thought and what Nietzsche refers to as the 'history of metaphysics' that is the history of Western philosophy. In this aphorism which closes one of his later, most controversial books, Nietzsche connects again writing and painting and seems to be warning the reader not to take what he has written as "truths" but as "written and painted thoughts." This challenges the history of metaphysics and the opposition between philosophy and art that structures that history.

Nietzsche's attempt at a crossing of philosophy and art might well have been hinted at in his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which he set out to understand the origins of Greek tragedy. It was his controversial view that the high point of Greek culture came not with Socrates and Plato but rather a century earlier with the Greek tragedians. What intrigued Nietzsche about the Greeks of the tragic age is that they did not yet have that optimistic view of Socrates and Plato that if we only had reason we would have virtue and then happiness as well. Instead they had this terribly pessimistic mythology. Nietzsche recounts the story about Silenus, a demi-god, companion of Dionysus, who is captured by King Midas in the forest and later interrogated by the king. The king wanted to know what was best and most excellent thing for human beings. Silenus's response might just be the most pessimistic view of human existence possible:

Stiff and unmoving, the daemon remains silent until, forced by the King to speak, he finally breaks out in shrill laughter and says: 'Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell

you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon. (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 3)

Nietzsche considers this extremely pessimistic mythology and wonders how it is that these Greeks of the tragic age even managed to go on living. The answer he came up with was that it was art, in particular it was the art form of tragedy that somehow enabled the Greeks of this tragic age to overcome the tragic character of existence and find a reason to go on living. But what was it about tragedy that made it a “saving sorceress, expert at healing”? In Nietzsche’s analysis Greek tragedy was born from two completely opposed art impulses—the *Apollinian* and the *Dionysian*.

The Apollinian impulse is the impulse to create beautiful illusions. One might consider the paradigmatic Apollinian art of sculpture in which the human form is presented not at all realistically, but better than reality. The creation of beautiful illusions was necessary in order to overcome their insight into the tragic character of existence—the beautiful illusions were veils to cover over the terrible truth about existence. For Nietzsche, however, this impulse to create beautiful illusions is not just confined to art more narrowly considered. All our attempts to make sense of the world, to create order out of chaos and find meaning in existence, are basically expressions of this Apollinian impulse to create beautiful illusions. The Apollinian is the very principle of identity as Nietzsche understood it. To say something is “this” and not “that,” to draw boundaries and make distinctions, is this very impulse to make order out of chaos. Another important aspect of Nietzsche’s analysis of the Apollinian art impulse is that he considered it analogous to *dreaming*.

The Dionysian impulse is the opposite of that calmness and desire for order that is the Apollinian. The Dionysian experience is a feeling of the most intense *rapture* or *ecstasy*—a feeling of being carried outside oneself. Apollinian boundaries which frame identities are transcended and dissolved. “If one were to transform Beethoven’s jubilant ‘Hymn to Joy’ into a painting and place no constraints on the imagination as the millions sink into the dust, shivering in awe, then one could begin to approach the Dionysian. Now the slave is a freeman, now all the rigid, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice, or ‘impudent fashion’ have established between human beings, break asunder” (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 1). In the Dionysian experience the Apollinian veils are torn, one becomes aware that the Apollinian identities are just beautiful illusions. The Dionysian art impulse manifests in all art forms which aim at this ecstatic experience, and in all work which aims at tearing through the veils and shattering the beautiful illusions produced by the Apollinian impulse.

The key to the healing power of Greek tragedy, according to Nietzsche, is that somehow both these diametrically opposed art impulses are brought together. Both the Apollinian and the Dionysian on their own can easily be pathological. It is easy to see that the Dionysian on its own would lead to chaos and breakdown of any order. The Apollinian on its own could easily fall into pathological escapism, living in a world of illusion but naively unaware of the illusion, dreaming but not aware of the dream. If the Apollinian and Dionysian are brought together, then perhaps we get the Apollinian ability to create beautiful illusions but with the Dionysian awareness that this is what we are doing. Or, to put this another way, we get the *lucid dream*—the ability to dream, but with the awareness that we are dreaming. Normally, waking life is considered more real, more valuable than the dream, but Nietzsche suggest here in this passage a very different evaluation of the relationship between dreaming and waking life:

The analogy with dream tells us something about this naive artist. If we imagine the dreamer calling out to himself in the midst of the illusory dream world, but without disturbing it, ‘It is a dream, I will dream on’, and if this compels us to conclude that he is deriving intense inward pleasure from looking at the dream, but if on

the other hand the ability to dream with such inner pleasure in looking depends on us having entirely forgotten the day and its terrible importuning, then we may interpret all of these phenomena, under the guidance of Apollo, the diviner of dreams, roughly as follows. There is no doubt that, of the two halves of our lives, the waking and the dreaming half, the former strikes us being the more privileged, important, dignified, and worthy of being lived, indeed the only half that truly is lived; nevertheless, although it may seem paradoxical, I wish to assert that the very opposite evaluation of dream holds true... (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 4)

Though there were many aspects of *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche would later distance himself from, this idea about lucid dreaming is perhaps the key to his mature philosophy. As his thought developed he put forth a more and more radical critique of truth and of the traditional conception of philosophy. In still an early text, from about the same time as *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche puts forth this view that truths are really illusions, worn out metaphors (which he explains with a metaphor):

What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically enhanced, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. ("On Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral Sense," 84)

According to Nietzsche, philosophers have always been artists in some sense but didn't realize it, like one dreaming but unaware that one is dreaming. In Nietzsche's later work he continues this questioning concerning the search for truth:

The will to truth which will still tempt us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect—what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! That is a long story even now—and yet it seems as if it had scarcely begun. Is it any wonder that we should finally become suspicious, lose patience, and turn away impatiently? that we should finally learn from this Sphinx to ask questions, too? *Who* is it really that puts questions to us here? *What* in us really wants "truth"?

Indeed we came to a long halt at the question about the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete stop before a still more basic question. We asked about the *value* of this will. Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?

The problem of the value of truth came before us—or was it we who came before the problem? Who of us is Oedipus here? Who the Sphinx? It is a rendezvous, it seems, of questions and question marks.

And though it scarcely seems credible, it finally almost seems to us as if the problem had never even been put so far—as if we were the first to see it, fix it with our eyes, and *risk* it. For it does involve a risk, and perhaps there is none that is greater. (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 1)

In this next passage Nietzsche makes something of a risqué joke of the desire of traditional philosophers to discover a truth without veils. The goal of philosophy as Plato conceived it was to discover a truth without veils, a completely objective truth, the truth of reality behind the veils of appearance. Here Nietzsche satirizes this ideal of a "naked truth":

. . . And as for our future, one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youths who endanger temples by night, embrace statues, and want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons. No, this bad taste, this will to truth, to "truth at any price," this youthful madness in the love of truth have lost their charm for us: for that we are too experienced, too serious, too merry,

too burned, too profound . . . We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and "know" everything.

"Is it true that God is present everywhere?" a little girl asked her mother; "I think that's indecent" a hint for philosophers! One should have more respect for the *modesty* with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties. Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is to speak Greek *Baubo*?¹

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to *live*. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearances. Those Greeks were superficial *out of profundity*. And is not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there we who have looked *down* from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—*artists*? (*The Gay Science*, Preface)

The philosophers of the future, Nietzsche looks forward to will give up this youthful madness to discover the naked truth—and will thus understand, contrary to Plato and the history of Western philosophy, that they are artists, wrapped in the dreamworld. Later in that same text we see again this revaluation of the relationship between dreaming and waking life and the value of lucid dreaming:

The consciousness of appearance.— How wonderful and new and yet how gruesome and ironic I find my position vis-à-vis the whole of existence in the light of my insight! I have discovered for myself that the human and animal past, indeed the whole primal age and past of all sentient being continues in me to invent, to love, to hate, and to infer. I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish—as a somnambulist must go on dreaming lest he fall. What is "appearance" for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown *x* or remove from it!

Appearance is for me that which lives and is effective and goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that this is appearance and will-o'-wisp and a dance of spirits and nothing more—that among these dreamers, I, too, who "know," am dancing my dance; that the knower is a means for prolonging the earthly dance and thus belongs to the masters of ceremony of existence; and that the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to *preserve* the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all dreamers and thus also *the continuation of the dream*. (*The Gay Science*, 54)

Perspectivism

Nietzsche's epistemological position is often referred to as "perspectivism." In opposition to that desire to reveal the 'naked truth,' Nietzsche recommends a more modest position that it is naive to think that we can ever see the world from a point of view that is not a particular perspective. In this aphorism, again from *Beyond Good and Evil*, this notion of perspectivism is clearly connected with the conception of the philosopher as artist and philosophy as fiction:

¹ *Baubo*: A primitive and obscene female demon; according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, originally a personification of the female genitals.

Forgive me the joke of this gloomy grimace and trope; for I myself have learned long ago to think differently, to estimate differently with regard to deceiving and being deceived, and I keep in reserve at least a couple of jostles for the blind rage with which the philosophers resist being deceived. Why *not*? It is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than mere appearance; it is even the worst proved assumption there is in the world. Let at least this much be admitted: there would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective estimates and appearances; and if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and clumsiness of some philosophers, one wanted to abolish the "apparent world" altogether well suppose *you* could do that, at least nothing would be left of your "truth" either. Indeed, what forces us at all to suppose that there is an essential opposition of "true" and "false"? Is it not sufficient to assume degrees of apparentness and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance different "values," to use the language of painters? Why couldn't the world *that concerns us* be a fiction? (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 34)

In the following famous preface to that text Nietzsche identifies perspectivism as a basic condition of all life and then cracks another joke about traditional philosophers and their desire to possess the truth. The Greek word for 'truth' (*aletheia*) is feminine in gender and Nietzsche perhaps puts his finger on the problem of philosophy by pointing out that truth is a woman. Philosophers, Nietzsche irreverently suggests, have been like love-sick suitors all depressed because they have never understood that this woman-truth can never be possessed.

Supposing truth is a woman—what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman's heart? What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won—and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. *If* it is left standing at all! For there are scoffers who claim that it has fallen, that all dogmatism lies on the ground—even more, that all dogmatism is dying. . . .

Let us not be ungrateful to it, although it must certainly be conceded that the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors so far was a dogmatist's error—namely, Plato's invention of the pure spirit and the good as such. But now that it is overcome, now that Europe is breathing freely again after this nightmare and at least can enjoy a healthier—sleep, we, *whose task is wakefulness itself*, are the heirs of all that strength which has been fostered by the fight against this error. To be sure, it meant standing truth on her head and denying *perspective*, the basic condition of all life, when one spoke of spirit and the good as Plato did. Indeed, as a physician one might ask: "How could the most beautiful growth of antiquity, Plato, contract such a disease? Did the wicked Socrates corrupt him after all? Could Socrates have been the corrupter of youth after all? And did he deserve his hemlock?" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface)

Nietzsche jests here that perhaps Socrates deserved his hemlock for corrupting Plato with this idea of a truth without veils, a truth that denies the basic perspective condition of all life. Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates is actually quite complex. If one focuses on the story in the *Apology* about the oracle at Delphi—that the key to wisdom is knowing that one does not possess wisdom—then Nietzsche is perhaps very close to Socrates here. Nevertheless, in his attempt to overturn Platonism and the history of metaphysics, Nietzsche will often target Socrates. Here is Nietzsche's response to Socrates' famous last words:

The dying Socrates.—I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said—and did not say. This mocking and enamored monster and pied piper of Athens, who made the most overweening youths tremble and sob, was not only the wisest chatterer of all time: he was equally great in silence. I wish he had remained taciturn also at the last moment of his life; in that case he might belong to a still higher order of spirits. Whether it was death or the poison or piety or malice—something loosened his tongue at that moment and he said: "O

Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster." This ridiculous and terrible "last word" means for those who have ears: "O Crito, *life is a disease*." Is it possible that a man like him, who had lived cheerfully and like a soldier in the sight of everyone, should have been a pessimist? He had merely kept a cheerful mien while concealing all his life long his ultimate judgment, his inmost feeling. Socrates, Socrates *suffered life!* And then he still revenged himself—with this veiled, gruesome, pious, and blasphemous saying. Did a Socrates need such revenge? Did his overrich virtue lack an ounce of magnanimity?—Alas, my friends, we must overcome even the Greeks! (*The Gay Science*, 340)

In this passage we see a critique of the idea of knowledge as merely passive contemplation. This idea is naive or delusory, according to Nietzsche, in not seeing the artistic element in all knowing:

The delusion of the contemplatives. . . he calls his own nature *contemplative* and overlooks that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating this life. . . . We who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually *fashion* something that is not there yet: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations. This poem that we have invented is continually studied by so-called practical human beings . . . who learn their roles and translate everything into flesh and actuality, into the everyday. Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present—and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it. Only we have created the world *that concerns humanity!*—But precisely this knowledge we lack, and when we occasionally catch it for a fleeting moment we always forget it again immediately; we fail to recognize our best power and underestimate ourselves, the contemplatives, just a little. We are *neither as proud nor as happy* as we might be. (*The Gay Science*, 301)

This passage further suggests how perspectivism means that knowledge is not passive contemplation but active interpretation:

How far the perspective character of existence extends or indeed whether existence has any other character than this; whether existence without interpretation, without "sense," does not become "nonsense"; whether, on the other hand, all existence is not essentially actively engaged in *interpretation* that cannot be decided even by the most industrious and most scrupulously conscientious analysis and self-examination of the intellect; for in the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these. We cannot look around our own corner: it is a hopeless curiosity that wants to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there *might* be . . . But I should think that today we are at least far from the ridiculous immodesty that would be involved in decreeing from our corner that perspectives are permitted only from this corner. Rather has the world become "infinite" for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*. (*The Gay Science*, 374)

Nietzsche's view that all knowledge is the result of an active interpretation is, of course, already suggested in Kant's 'Copernican revolution' which rejects the idea of the mind as a passive mirror of nature. Kant had already rejected the idea that we can ever through reason discover the truth of reality as it is in-itself (the naked truth) behind the veils of the phenomenal world (the world as it appears to us). Nevertheless, Kant hoped to save the Enlightenment agenda of grounding philosophy in a universal truth by assuming that the mind is basically the same in all of us human beings. Nietzsche radicalizes Kant's insight and in this passage suggests that language itself perhaps plays some role in programming the way the mind sees 'reality':

The strange family resemblances of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing is explained easily enough. Where there is affinity of languages, it cannot fail, owing to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean, owing to the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions—that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; just as the way seems barred against certain other possibilities of world-interpretations. It is highly probable that philosophers within the domain of the Ural-Altai languages (where the concept of the subject is least developed) look otherwise “into the world,” and will be found on paths of thought different from those of Indo-Germanic peoples....(*Beyond Good and Evil*, 20)

Due to the fact that we only see reality from a limited perspective and understand it through a particular language Nietzsche rejects the notion that we can ever arrive at a completely objective, ‘factual’ view of reality. In his late unpublished notes we see this explanation of his perspectivism:

Against positivism, which halts at the phenomena—“There are only *facts*”—I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact “in itself”: perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing. . . .

In so far as the word “knowledge” has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings.—“Perspectivism.” (*The Will to Power*, 481)

That the value of the world lies in our interpretation (that other interpretations than merely human ones are perhaps somewhere possible); That previous interpretations have been perspective valuations by virtue of which we can survive in life, i.e., in the will to power, for the growth of power; that every elevation of man brings with it the overcoming of narrower interpretations; that every strengthening and increase of power opens up new perspectives and means believing in new horizons this idea permeates my writings. The world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations; it is “in flux,” as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth: for there is no “truth.” (*The Will to Power*, 616)

Does Nietzsche’s perspectivism mean that one can no longer speak of truth? Here are a couple of passages which suggest something about the “philosophers of the future” and their love of truth:

A new species of philosophers is coming up: I venture to baptize them with a name that is not free of danger. As I unriddle them, insofar as they allow themselves to be unriddled for it belongs to their nature to *want* to remain riddles at some point these philosophers of the future may have a right it might also be a wrong to be called (*at*)tempters (*Versucher*). This name itself is in the end a mere attempt (*Versuch*) and, if you will, a temptation (*Versuchung*). (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 42)

Are these coming philosophers new friends of “truth”? That is probable enough, for all philosophers so far have loved their truths. But they will certainly not be dogmatists. It must offend their pride, also their taste, if their truth is supposed to be a truth for everyman—which has so far been the secret wish and hidden meaning of all dogmatic aspirations. “My judgment is *my* judgment”: no one else is easily entitled to it—that is what such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say of himself. . . . (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 43)

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* the central character, Zarathustra, expresses his teaching in the same spirit:

By many ways, in many ways, I reached my truth: it was not on one ladder that I climbed to the height where my eye roams over my distance. And it was only reluctantly that I ever inquired about the way: that always offended my taste. I preferred to question and try out the ways themselves.

A trying and questioning was my every move; and verily, one must always learn to answer such questioning. That, however, is my taste—not good, not bad, by *my* taste of which I am no longer ashamed and which I have no wish to hide.

“This is *my* way; where is yours?”—thus I answered those who asked me “the way.” For *the* way—that does not exist. (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, On the Spirit of Gravity 2)

Considering his critique of the traditional notion of philosophy how are we to read Nietzsche’s philosophy? It seems essential before considering any of his important and controversial ideas that we first grasp what is radically different about his philosophy. Obviously, one misunderstands Nietzsche if one reads any particular passage and think that he puts it forth as a truth in the traditional sense. His writing is thus very different from that of Descartes, whom we assume is trying to persuade us of something, like the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, through a line of argument. Nietzsche’s thought often has the form of a thought experiment in which we, the reader, cannot really be sure if he even wants us to agree with him. In a note from a letter at the end of his career as a writer he writes to a friend:

It is not at all necessary or even desirable to side with me; on the contrary, a dose of curiosity . . . and an ironic resistance would be an incomparably more intelligent position to adopt. (Letter of 1888)

The Death of God

Perhaps the most well-known passage from Nietzsche is this one in which a ‘madman’ announces the ‘death of God’. Given what is radically different about the character of Nietzsche’s philosophy, that his written and painted thoughts are meant to be taken as art and not truth, what might be the point of this story?

The madman. —Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" —As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? —Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we need to light lanterns in the morning? So we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. The tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves." (*The Gay Science*, 125)

Certainly we do get the sense from this passage of some impending crisis. In a passage from his unpublished notebooks (the beginning of a book that was never finished) we read this:

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism*. This history can be related even now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect. (*The Will to Power*, Preface, 2)

On the one hand, the 'death of God' seems to bring on a crisis and an impending catastrophe for European (Western) culture. It was this anticipation of a crisis coming for humankind that resonated so powerfully for so many artists and writers trying to make sense of existence after the cataclysm of the first world war. The 'death of God' is perhaps a metaphor for a crisis which has marked much of the twentieth century and seems likely to only deepen in the century to come.

From the perspective of Nietzsche's perspectivism all of our knowledge and our values are, in Nietzsche's famous phrase, only "*human, all-too-human*." We can never know reality from a neutral vantage point or God's-eye point of view. This means that our "truths" and our "values" tell us as much about ourselves as they tell us about "reality"—they tell us something about what kind of particular human beings we are that "see" things from this particular *perspective*. One consequence of this is that Nietzsche regards himself as the first philosopher-psychologist. He examines the history of ideas not in order to determine which beliefs are "true" and "false," and which values are "good" and "evil"; instead he seeks to psychoanalyze Western culture by deciphering the hidden motivation or "drives" behind every valuation of "good" and "evil," "true" and "false." The result of Nietzsche's diagnosis is that he finds many of the main beliefs of Western thought to exhibit symptoms of *nihilism*—which, for Nietzsche, is a disease, a sickness, a weariness with life itself as summed up in Socrates' last words. At first glance Nietzsche's philosophy might seem to be a philosophy of despair or a philosophy of nihilism; however, Nietzsche's philosophy can be seen as an attempt to confront the problem of nihilism, to find a path of thinking beyond nihilism, to think through a philosophy that would be anti-nihilist, and affirmative of life. A hint of this might be found in this passage in which Nietzsche seems to find a reason for cheerfulness in the wake of the 'death of God':

The meaning of our cheerfulness.—The greatest recent event—that "God is dead," that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. For the few at least, whose eyes—the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt; to them our old world must appear daily more like evening, more mistrustful, stranger, "older." But in the main one may say: The event itself is far too great, too distant, too remote from the multitude's capacity for comprehension even for the tidings of it to be thought of as having *arrived* as yet. Much less may one suppose that many people know as yet *what* this

event really means—and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality. This long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm that is now impending—who could guess enough of it today to be compelled to play the teacher and advance proclaimer of this monstrous logic of terror, the prophet of a gloom and an eclipse of the sun whose like has probably never yet occurred on earth?

Even we born guessers of riddles who are, as it were, waiting on the mountains, posted between today and tomorrow, stretched in the contradiction between today and tomorrow, we firstlings and premature births of the coming century, to whom the shadows that must soon envelop Europe really *should* have appeared by now—why is it that even we look forward to the approaching gloom without any real sense of involvement and above all without any worry and fear for *ourselves*? Are we perhaps still too much under the impression of the *initial consequences* of this event—and these initial consequences, the consequences for *ourselves*, are quite the opposite of what one might perhaps expect: They are not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn.

Indeed, we philosophers and "free spirits" feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea."— (*The Gay Science*, 343)

Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is Nietzsche's philosophical-literary masterpiece. Nietzsche develops in this text his most important ideas but he does so by embedding them in a fictional story. So in this text we find the most powerful expression of his idea of presenting philosophy as fiction. Nietzsche names the central character after the founder of the ancient Persian religion known as Zoroastrianism. Nietzsche traces the error of Western culture all the way back to the Persian prophet—he was the first to portray the entire cosmos as a conflict between good and evil gods, and the first to conceive of a judgment day at the end of the world when the good will be rewarded with eternal life. Nietzsche brings Zarathustra back to atone for his mistakes by teaching a new teaching. Much of the imagery of Nietzsche's text is taken from Zoroastrianism, especially significant is the imagery of the judgment day: at the end of the world all souls must pass over a narrow bridge across the deepest abyss—those who followed the evil god plunge into the abyss while those who followed the good god cross over and gain eternal life. Nietzsche uses this imagery of a dangerous crossing over an abyss throughout the text but it will have an entirely different point.

As the drama of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* unfolds three important, much discussed, and often greatly misunderstood Nietzschean ideas are presented. The first teaching Zarathustra comes to teach is the notion of the *overman* or *superman* (*übermensch*). Often mistaken for some kind of superhero (apparently it was the inspiration for the comic-book hero) the *übermensch* for Nietzsche is about the further evolution of humankind. Nietzsche sees humanity as facing an unprecedented crisis in our time which will require a transformation or evolution of humankind. The evolution Nietzsche has in mind is philosophical rather than physical. It will require a questioning of the entire Western philosophical tradition and a completely different attitude toward life.

The second idea presented in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the *will to power*. This notoriously difficult idea is still often misconceived as simply a desire for power. The *will to power* for Nietzsche is not, however, something that one could choose to have or not, but is rather a characteristic of everything that lives. The

question is not whether one should have the *will to power* or not, but rather what kind or quality of *will to power* will manifest. The evolution of humankind will involve a transformation of *will to power*.

The third idea brought forth through Zarathustra is the idea of *eternal recurrence*. The idea is so bizarre that some commentators on Nietzsche don't even consider it, and yet the central drama of what Nietzsche regarded as his most important book turns on Zarathustra's struggle to call up from the depths this abysmal thought. The idea is actually introduced in the penultimate section of book four of *The Gay Science*—the last section is the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (book five of *The Gay Science* was written after *Zarathustra*). The idea of the *eternal recurrence* is thus clearly the central idea behind *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Here is the famous passage where the idea is first introduced:

The greatest weight.—What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (*The Gay Science*, 341)

* * *

Selections from
Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Zarathustra's Prologue

1

When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains. Here he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude, and for ten years did not tire of it. But at last a change came over his heart, and one morning he rose with the dawn, stepped before the sun, and spoke to it thus:

"You great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?"

"For ten years you have climbed to my cave: you would have tired of your light and of the journey had it not been for me and my eagle and my serpent.

"But we waited for you every morning, took your overflow from you, and blessed you for it.

"Behold, I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to receive it.

"I would give away and distribute, until the wise among men find joy once again in their folly, and the poor in their riches." "For that I must descend to the depths, as you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and still bring light to the underworld, you overrich star.

"Like you, I must *go under*—go down, as is said by man, to whom I want to descend.

"So bless me then" you quiet eye that can look even upon an all-too-great happiness without envy!

"Bless the cup that wants to overflow, that the water may flow from it golden and carry everywhere the reflection of your delight.

"Behold, this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become man again."

Thus Zarathustra began to go under.

2

Zarathustra descended alone from the mountains, encountering no one. But when he came into the forest, all at once there stood before him an old man who had left his holy cottage to look for roots in the woods. And thus spoke the old man to Zarathustra:

"No stranger to me is this wanderer: many years ago he passed this way. Zarathustra he was called, but he has changed. At that time you carried your ashes to the mountains; would you now carry your fire into the valleys? Do you not fear to be punished as an arsonist?"

"Yes, I recognize Zarathustra. His eyes are pure, and around his mouth there hides no disgust. Does he not walk like a dancer?"

"Zarathustra has changed, Zarathustra has become a child, Zarathustra is an awakened one; what do you now want among the sleepers? You lived in your solitude as in the sea, and the sea carried you. Alas, would you now climb ashore? Alas, would you again drag your own body?"

Zarathustra answered: "I love man."

"Why," asked the saint, "did I go into the forest and the desert? Was it not because I loved man all-too-much? Now I love God; man I love not. Man is for me too imperfect a thing. Love of man would kill me."

Zarathustra answered: "Did I speak of love? I bring men a gift."

"Give them nothing!" said the saint. "Rather, take part of their load and help them to 'bear it—that will be best for them, if only it does you good! And if you want to give them something, give no more than alms, and let them beg for that!"

"No," answered Zarathustra. "I give no alms. For that I am not poor enough."

The saint laughed at Zarathustra and spoke thus: "Then see to it that they accept your treasures. They are suspicious of hermits and do not believe that we come with gifts. Our steps sound too lonely through the streets. And what if at night, in their beds, they hear a man walk by long before the sun has risen—they probably ask themselves, Where is the thief going?"

"Do not go to man. Stay in the forest! Go rather even to the animals! Why do you not want to be as I am—a bear among bears, a bird among birds?"

"And what is the saint doing in the forest?" asked Zarathustra.

The saint answered: "I make songs and sing them; and when I make songs, I laugh, cry, and hum: thus I praise God. With singing, crying, laughing, and humming, I praise the god who is my god. But what do you bring us as a gift?"

When Zarathustra had heard these words he bade the saint farewell and said: "What could I have to give you? But let me go quickly lest I take something from you!" And thus they separated, the old one and the man, laughing as two boys laugh.

But when Zarathustra was alone he spoke thus to his heart: "Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that *God is dead!*"

When Zarathustra came into the next town, which lies on the edge of the forest, he found many people gathered together in the market place; for it had been promised that there would be a tightrope walker. And Zarathustra spoke thus to the people:

"I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"

"All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm; Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.

"Whoever is the wisest among you is also a mere conflict and cross between plant and ghost. But do I bid you become ghosts or plants?"

"Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman, is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go.

"Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and these sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth.

"Once the soul looked contemptuously upon the body, and then this contempt was the highest: she wanted the body meager, ghastly, and starved. Thus she hoped to escape it and the earth. Oh, this soul herself was still meager, ghastly, and starved: and cruelty was the lust of this soul. But you, too, my brothers, tell me: what does your body proclaim of your soul? Is not your soul poverty and filth and wretched contentment?"

"Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this sea; in him your great contempt can go under.

"What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your reason and your virtue.

"The hour when you say, 'What matters my happiness? It is poverty and filth and wretched contentment. But my happiness ought to justify existence itself.'

"The hour when you say, 'What matters my reason? Does it crave knowledge as the lion his food? It is poverty and filth and wretched contentment.'

"The hour when you say, 'What matters my virtue? As yet it has not made me rage. How weary I am of my good and my evil! All that is poverty and filth and wretched contentment.'

"The hour when you say, 'What matters my justice? I do not see that I am flames and fuel. But the just are flames and fuel.'

"The hour when you say, 'What matters my pity? Is not pity the cross on which he is nailed who loves man? But my pity is no crucifixion.'

"Have you yet spoken thus? Have you yet cried thus? Oh, that I might have heard you cry thus!"

"Not your sin but your thrift cries to heaven; your meanness even in your sin cries to heaven.

"Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue? Where is the frenzy with which you should be inoculated?"

"Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this lightning, he is this frenzy."

When Zarathustra had spoken thus, one of the people cried: "Now we have heard enough about the tightrope walker; now let us see him too!" And all the people laughed at Zarathustra. But the tightrope walker, believing that the word concerned him, began his performance.

4

Zarathustra, however, beheld the people and was amazed. Then he spoke thus:

"Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

"What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a going under.

"I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.

"I love the great despisers because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore.

"I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman's.

"I love him who lives to know, and who wants to know so that the overman may live some day. And thus he wants to go under.

"I love him who works and invents to build a house for the overman and to prepare earth, animal, and plant for him: for thus he wants to go under.

"I love him who loves his virtue, for virtue is the will to go under and an arrow of longing.

"I love him who does not hold back one drop of spirit for himself, but wants to be entirely the spirit of his virtue: thus he strides over the bridge as spirit.

"I love him who makes his virtue his addiction and his catastrophe: for his virtue's sake he wants to live on and to live no longer.

"I love him who does not want to have too many virtues. One virtue is more virtue than two, because it is more of a noose on which his catastrophe may hang.

"I love him whose soul squanders itself, who wants no thanks and returns none: for he always gives away and does not want to preserve himself.

"I love him who is abashed when the dice fall to make his fortune, and asks, 'Am I then a crooked gambler?' For he wants to perish.

"I love him who casts golden words before his deeds and always does even more than he promises: far he wants to go under.

"I love him who justifies future and redeems past generations: for he wants to perish of the present.

"I love him who chastens his god because he loves his god: for he must perish of the wrath of his god.

"I love him whose soul is deep, even in being wounded, and who can perish of a small experience: thus he goes gladly over the bridge.

"I love him whose soul is overfull so that he forgets himself, and all things are in him: thus all things spell his going under

"I love him who has a free spirit and a free heart: thus his head is only the entrails of his heart, but his heart drives him to go under.

"I love all those who are as heavy drops, falling one by one out of the dark cloud that hangs over men: they herald the advent of lightning, and, as heralds, they perish.

"Behold, I am a herald of the lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud; but this lightning is called *overman*.

When Zarathustra had spoken these words he beheld the people again and was silent. "There they stand," he said to his heart; "there they laugh. They do not understand me; I am not the mouth for these ears. Must one smash their ears before they learn to listen with their eyes? Must one clatter like kettledrums and preachers of repentance? Or do they believe only the stammerer?"

"They have something of which they are proud. What do they call that which makes them proud? Education they call it; it distinguishes them from goatherds. That is why they do not like to hear the word 'contempt' applied to them. Let me then address their pride. Let me speak to them of what is most contemptible: but that is the *last man*."

And thus spoke Zarathustra to the people: "The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. His soil is still rich enough. But one day this soil will be poor and domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow in it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whir!"

"I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves."

"Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*."

"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" thus asks the last man, and he blinks.

"The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest."

"We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth."

"Becoming sick and harboring suspicion are sinful to them: one proceeds carefully. A fool, whoever still stumbles over stones or human beings! A little poison now and then: that makes for agreeable dreams. And much poison in the end, for an agreeable death."

"One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one is careful lest the entertainment be too harrowing. One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion."

"No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse."

"Formerly, all the world was mad," say the most refined, and they blink.

"One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened: so there is no end of derision. One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled—else it might spoil the digestion."

"One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health."

"We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink."

And here ended Zarathustra's first speech, which is also called "the Prologue"; for at this point he was interrupted by the clamor and delight of the crowd. "Give us this last man, O Zarathustra," they shouted. "Turn us into these last men! Then we shall make you a gift of the overman!" And all the people jubilated and clucked with their tongues.

But Zarathustra became sad and said to his heart: "They do not understand me: I am not the mouth for these ears. I seem to have lived too long in the mountains; I listened too much to brooks and trees: now I talk to them as to goatherds. My soul is unmoved and bright as the mountains in the morning. But they think I

am cold and I jeer and make dreadful jests. And now they look at me and laugh: and as they laugh they even hate me. There is ice in their laughter."

6

Then something happened that made every mouth dumb and every eye rigid. For meanwhile the tightrope walker had begun his performance: he had stepped out of a small door and was walking over the rope, stretched between two towers and suspended over the market place and the people. When he had reached the exact middle of his course the small door opened once more and a fellow in motley clothes, looking like a jester, jumped out and followed the first one with quick steps.

"Forward, lamefoot!" he shouted in an awe-inspiring voice. "Forward, lazybones, smuggler, pale-face, or I shall tickle you with my heel! What are you doing here between towers? The tower is where you belong. You ought to be locked up; you block the way for one better than yourself." And with every word he came closer and closer; but when he was but one step behind, the dreadful thing happened which made every mouth dumb and every eye rigid: he uttered a devilish cry and jumped over the man who stood in his way. This man, however, seeing his rival win, lost his head and the rope, tossed away his pole, and plunged into the depth even faster, a whirlpool of arms and legs. The market place became as the sea when a tempest pierces it: the people rushed apart and over one another, especially at the place where the body must hit the ground.

Zarathustra, however, did not move; and it was right next to him that the body fell, badly maimed and disfigured, but not yet dead. After a while the shattered man recovered consciousness and saw Zarathustra kneeling beside him. "What are you doing here?" he asked at last. "I have long known that the devil would trip me. Now he will drag me to hell. Would you prevent him?"

"By my honor, friend," answered Zarathustra, "all that of which you speak does not exist: there is no devil and no hell. Your soul will be dead even before your body: fear nothing further."

The man looked up suspiciously. "If you speak the truth," he said, "I lose nothing when I lose my life. I am not much more than a beast that has been taught to dance by blows and a few meager morsels."

"By no means," said Zarathustra. "You have made danger your vocation; there is nothing contemptible in that. Now you perish of your vocation: for that I will bury you with my own hands."

When Zarathustra had said this, the dying man answered no more; but he moved his hand as if he sought Zarathustra's hand in thanks. . . .

On the Three Metamorphoses

Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

There is much that is difficult for the spirit, the strong reverent spirit that would bear much: but the difficult and the most difficult are what its strength demands.

What is difficult? asks the spirit that would bear much, and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded. What is most difficult, O heroes, asks the spirit that would bear much, that I may take it upon myself and exult in my strength? Is it not humbling oneself to wound one's haughtiness? Letting one's folly shine to mock one's wisdom?

Or is it this: parting from our cause when it triumphs? Climbing high mountains to tempt the tempter?

Or is it this: feeding on the acorns and grass of knowledge and, for the sake of the truth, suffering hunger in one's soul?

Or is it this: being sick and sending home the comforters and making friends with the deaf, who never hear what you want?

Or is it this: stepping into filthy waters when they are the waters of truth, and not repulsing cold frogs and hot toads?

Or is it this: loving those who despise us and offering a hand to the ghost that would frighten us?

All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert.

In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon.

Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? "Thou shalt" is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will." "Thou shalt" lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales; and on every scale shines a golden "thou shalt."

Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: "All value of all things shines on me. All value has long been created, and I am all created value. Verily, there shall be no more 'I will.'" Thus speaks the dragon.

My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough?

To create new values—that even the lion cannot do; but the creation of freedom for oneself for new creation—that is within the power of the lion. The creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred "No" even to duty—for that, my brothers, the lion is needed. To assume the right to new values—that is the most terrifying assumption for a reverent spirit that would bear much. Verily, to him it is preying, and a matter for a beast of prey. He once loved "thou shalt" as most sacred: now he, must find illusion and caprice even in the most sacred, that freedom from his love may become his prey: the lion is needed for such prey.

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.

Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I have told you: how the spirit became a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

Thus spoke Zarathustra. . . .

On the Thousand and One Goals

Zarathustra saw many lands and many peoples: thus he discovered the good and evil of many peoples. And Zarathustra found no greater power on earth than good and evil.

No people could live without first esteeming; but if they want to preserve themselves, then they must not esteem as the neighbor esteems. Much that was good to one people was scorn and infamy to another: thus I found it. Much I found called evil here, and decked out with purple honors there. Never did one neighbor understand the other: ever was his soul amazed at the neighbor's delusion and wickedness.

A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power.

Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy.

Whatever makes them rule and triumph and shine, to the awe and envy of their neighbors, that is to them the high, the first, the measure, the meaning of all things.

Verily, my brother, once you have recognized the need and land and sky and neighbor of a people, you may also guess the law of their overcomings, and why they climb to their hope on this ladder.

"You shall always be the first and excel all others: your jealous soul shall love no one, unless it be the friend"—that made the soul of the Greek quiver: thus he walked the path of his greatness.

"To speak the truth and to handle bow and arrow well"—that seemed both dear and difficult to the people who gave me my name—the name which is both dear and difficult to me.

"To honor father and mother and to follow their will to the root of one's soul"—this was the tablet of overcoming that another people hung up over themselves and became powerful and eternal thereby.

"To practice loyalty and, for the sake of loyalty, to risk honor and blood even for evil and dangerous things"—with this teaching another people conquered themselves; and through this self-conquest they became pregnant and heavy with great hopes.

Verily, men gave themselves all their good and evil. Verily, they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. Only man placed values in things to preserve himself—he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning. Therefore he calls himself "man," which means: the esteemer.

To esteem is to create: hear this, you creators! Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the most estimable treasure. Through esteeming alone is there value: and without esteeming, the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear this, you creators!

Change of values—that is a change of creators. Whoever must be a creator always annihilates. First, peoples were creators; and only in later times, individuals. Verily, the individual himself is still the most recent creation.

Once peoples hung a tablet of the good over themselves. Love which would rule and love which would obey have together created such tablets.

The delight in the herd is more ancient than the delight in the ego; and as long as the good conscience is identified with the herd, only the bad conscience says: I.

Verily, the clever ego, the loveless ego that desires its own profit in the profit of the many—that is not the origin of the herd, but its going under.

Good and evil have always been created by lovers and creators. The fire of love glows in the names of all the virtues, and the fire of wrath.

Zarathustra saw many lands and many peoples. No greater power did Zarathustra find on earth than the works of the lovers: "good" and "evil" are their names.

Verily, a monster is the power of this praising and censuring. Tell me, who will conquer it, O brothers? Tell me, who will throw a yoke over the thousand necks of this beast?

A thousand goals have there been so far, for there have been a thousand peoples. Only the yoke for the thousand necks is still lacking: the one goal is lacking. Humanity still has no goal.

But tell me, my brothers, if humanity still lacks a goal—is humanity itself not still lacking too?

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

On the Vision and the Riddle

When it got abroad among the sailors that Zarathustra was on board—for another man from the blessed isles had embarked with him—there was much curiosity and anticipation. But Zarathustra remained silent

for two days and was cold and deaf from sadness and answered neither glances nor questions. But on the evening of the second day he opened his ears again, although he still remained silent, for there was much that was strange and dangerous to be heard on this ship, which came from far away and wanted to sail even farther. But Zarathustra was a friend of all who travel far and do not like to live without danger. And behold, eventually his own tongue was loosened as he listened, and the ice of his heart broke. Then he began to speak thus:

To you, the bold searchers, researchers, and whoever embarks with cunning sails on terrible seas—to you, drunk with riddles, glad of the twilight, whose soul flutes lure astray to every whirlpool, because you do not want to grope along a thread with cowardly hand; and where you can *guess*, you hate to *deduce*—to you alone I tell the riddle that I *saw*, the vision of the loneliest.

Not long ago I walked gloomily through the deadly pallor of dusk—gloomy and hard, with lips pressed together. Not only one sun had set for me. A path that ascended defiantly through stones, malicious, lonely, not cheered by herb or shrub—a mountain path crunched under the defiance of my foot. Striding silently over the mocking clatter of pebbles, crushing the rock that made it slip, my foot forced its way upward. Upward—defying the spirit that drew it downward toward the abyss, the spirit of gravity, my devil and archenemy. Upward—although he sat on me; half dwarf, half mole, lame, making lame, dripping lead into my ear, leaden thoughts into my brain.

"O Zarathustra," he whispered mockingly, syllable by syllable; "you philosopher's stone! You threw yourself up high, but every stone that is thrown must fall. O Zarathustra, you philosopher's stone, you slingstone, you star-crusher! You threw yourself up so high; but every stone that is thrown must fall. Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning—O Zarathustra, far indeed have you thrown the stone, but it will fall back on yourself."

Then the dwarf fell silent, and that lasted a long time. His silence, however, oppressed me; and such twosomeness is surely more lonesome than being alone. I climbed, I climbed, I dreamed, I thought; but everything oppressed me. I was like one sick whom his wicked torture makes weary, and who as he falls asleep is awakened by a still more wicked dream. But there is something in me that I call courage; that has so far slain my every discouragement. This courage finally bade me stand still and speak: "Dwarf! It is you or I!"

For courage is the best slayer, courage which attacks; for in every attack there is playing and brass. Man, however, is the most courageous animal: hence he overcame every animal. With playing and brass he has so far overcome every pain; but human pain is the deepest pain. Courage also slays dizziness at the edge of abysses: and where does man not stand at the edge of abysses? Is not seeing always—seeing abysses?

Courage is the best slayer: courage slays even pity. But pity is the deepest abyss: as deeply as man sees into life, he also sees into suffering.

Courage, however, is the best slayer—courage which attacks: which slays even death itself, for it says, "Was *that* life? Well then! Once more!"

In such words, however, there is much playing and brass. He that has ears to hear, let him hear!

2

"Stop, dwarf!" I said. "It is I or you! But I am the stronger of us two: you do not know my abysmal thought. *That* you could not bear!"

Then something happened that made me lighter, for the dwarf jumped from my shoulder, being curious; and he crouched on a stone before me. But there was a gateway just where we had stopped.

"Behold this gateway, dwarf!" I continued. "It has two faces. Two paths meet here; no one has yet followed either to its end. This long lane stretches back for an eternity. And the long lane out there, that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths; they offend each other face to face; and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: 'Moment.' But whoever would follow one of them, on and on, farther and farther—do you believe, dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?"

"All that is straight lies," the dwarf murmured contemptuously. "All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle,"

"You spirit of gravity," I said angrily, "do not make things too easy for yourself! Or I shall let you crouch where you are crouching, lamefoot; and it was I that carried you to this height.

"Behold," I continued, "this moment! from this gateway, Moment, a long, eternal lane leads *backward*: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever *can* walk have walked on this lane before? Must not whatever *can* happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before? And if everything has been there before—what do you think, dwarf, of this moment? Must not this gateway too have been there before? And are not all things knotted together so firmly that this moment draws after it all that is to come? Therefore—itself too? For whatever *can* walk—in this long lane out *there* too, it *must* walk once more.

"And this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must not all of us have been there before? And return and walk in that other lane, *out* there, before us, in this long dreadful lane—must we not eternally return?"

Thus I *spoke*, more and more softly; for I was afraid of my own thoughts and the thoughts behind my thoughts. Then suddenly I heard a dog howl nearby. Had I ever heard a dog howl like this? My thoughts raced back. Yes, when I was a child, in the most distant childhood: then I heard a dog howl like this. And I saw him too, bristling, his head up, trembling, in the stillest midnight when even dogs believe in ghosts—and I took pity: for just then the full moon, silent as death, passed over the house; just then it stood still, a round glow—still on the flat roof, as if on another's property—that was why the dog was terrified, for dogs believe in thieves and ghosts. And when I heard such howling again I took pity again. Where was the dwarf gone now? And the gateway? And the spider? And all the whispering? Was I dreaming, then? Was I waking up?

Among wild cliffs I stood suddenly alone, bleak, in the bleakest moonlight. *But there lay a man.* And there—the dog, jumping, bristling, whining—now he saw me coming; then he howled again, he *cried*. Had I ever heard a dog cry like this for help? And verily, what I saw—I had never seen the like. A young shepherd I saw, writhing, gagging, in spasms, his face distorted, and a heavy black snake hung out of his mouth. Had I ever seen so much nausea and pale dread on one face? He seemed to have been asleep when the snake crawled into his throat, and there bit itself fast. My hand tore at the snake and tore in vain; it did not tear the snake out of his throat. Then it cried out of me: "Bite! Bite its head off! Bite!" Thus it cried out of me—my dread, my hatred, my nausea, my pity, all that is good and wicked in me cried out of me with a single cry.

You bold ones who surround me! You searchers, researchers, and whoever among you has embarked with cunning sails on unexplored seas. You who are glad of riddles! Guess me this riddle that I saw then, interpret me the vision of the loneliest. For it was a vision and a foreseeing. *What* did I see then in a parable? And *who* is it who must yet come one day? *Who* is the shepherd into whose throat the snake crawled thus? *Who* is the man into whose throat all that is heaviest and blackest will crawl thus?

The shepherd, however, bit as my cry counseled him; he bit with a good bite. Far away he spewed the head of the snake—and he jumped up. No longer shepherd, no longer human—one changed, radiant, *laughing!* Never yet on earth has a human being laughed as he laughed! O my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no

human laughter; and now a thirst gnaws at me, a longing that never grows still. My longing for this laughter gnaws at me; oh, how do I bear to go on living! And how could I bear to die now!

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

* * *

Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity

Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is seldom understood. Given his attack on the traditional notion of truth it can hardly be that he thinks he has discovered the truth that 'God is dead.' Rather, his critique is that the doctrines of Christianity are put forth as "the truth" of the meaning of the life of Christ despite the fact that these doctrines cannot be anything other than an interpretation of the meaning of that life. Nietzsche's critique of Christianity echoes the theme of Dostoevsky's story "The Grand Inquisitor" from *The Brothers Karamazov* in that the traditional Christian doctrine that teaches eternal reward in exchange for correct belief might, after all, be the very opposite of the teaching of Christ. In *The Antichrist* (perhaps better translated as *The Anti-Christian*) Nietzsche offers a different interpretation.

In the whole psychology of the "evangel" the concept of guilt and punishment is lacking; also the concept of reward. "Sin"—any distance separating God and man—is abolished: *precisely this is the glad tidings.*" Blessedness is not promised, it is not tied to conditions: it is the only reality—the rest is a sign with which to speak of it.

The consequence of such a state projects itself into a new practice, the genuine evangelical practice. It is not a "faith" that distinguishes the Christian: the Christian *acts*, he is distinguished by acting *differently*: by not resisting, either in words or in his heart, those who treat him ill; by making no distinction between foreigner and native. . .

The life of the Redeemer was nothing other than *this* practice—nor was his death anything else. He no longer required any formulas, any rites for his intercourse with God—not even prayer. He broke with the whole Jewish doctrine of repentance and reconciliation; he knows that it is only in the *practice* of life that one feels "divine," "blessed," "evangelical," at all times a "child of God." Not "repentance," not "prayer for forgiveness," are the ways to God: *only the evangelical practice* leads to God, indeed, it is "God"! . . .

The deep instinct for how one must live, in order to feel oneself "in heaven," to feel "eternal," while in all other behavior one decidedly does *not* feel oneself "in heaven"—this alone is the psychological reality of "redemption." A new way of life, *not* a new faith. (*The Antichrist*, 33)

If I understand anything about this great symbolist, it is that he accepted only *inner* realities as realities, as "truths"—that he understood the rest, everything natural, temporal, spatial, historical, only as signs, as occasions for parables. The concept of "the son of man" is not a concrete person who belongs in history, something individual and unique, but an "eternal" factuality, a psychological symbol redeemed from the concept of time. The same applies once again, and in the highest sense, to the *God* of this typical symbolist, to the "kingdom of God," to the "kingdom of heaven," to the "filiation of God." Nothing is more unchristian than the *ecclesiastical crudities* of a god as person, of a "kingdom of God" which is to come, of a "kingdom of heaven" beyond, of a "son of God" as the second person in the Trinity. . . .

The "kingdom of heaven" is a state of the heart—not something that is to come "above the earth" or "after death." The whole concept of natural death is lacking in the evangel: death is no bridge, no transition; it is lacking because it belongs to a wholly different, merely apparent world, useful only insofar as it furnishes signs.

The “hour of death” is no Christian concept—an “hour,” time, physical life and its crises do not even exist for the teacher of the “glad tidings.” The “kingdom of God” is nothing that one expects; it has no yesterday and no day after tomorrow, it will not come in “a thousand years”—it is an experience of the heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere. (*The Antichrist*, 34)

This “bringer of glad tidings” died as he had lived, as he had taught—*not* to “redeem men” but to show how one must live. This practice is his legacy to mankind: his behavior before the judges, before the catchpoles, before the accusers and all kinds of slander and scorn—his behavior on the *cross*. He does not resist, he does not defend his right, he takes no step which might ward off the worst; on the contrary, he *provokes* it. And he begs, he suffers, he loves *with* those, in those, who do him evil. *Not* to resist, *not* to be angry, *not* to hold responsible—but to resist not even the evil one—to *love* him. (*The Antichrist*, 35)

Only we, we spirits who have *become free*, have the presuppositions for understanding something that nineteen centuries have misunderstood: that integrity which, having become instinct and passion, wages war against the “holy lie” even more than against any other lie. Previous readers were immeasurably far removed from our loving and cautious neutrality, from that discipline of the spirit which alone makes possible the unriddling of such foreign, such tender things: with impudent selfishness they always wanted only their own advantage; out of the opposite of the evangel the church was constructed.

If one were to look for signs that an ironical divinity has its fingers in the great play of the world, one would find no small support in the *tremendous question mark* called Christianity. Mankind lies on its knees before the opposite of that which was the origin, the meaning, the *right* of the evangel; in the concept of the “church” it has pronounced holy precisely what the “bringer of glad tidings” felt to be *beneath* and *behind* himself—one would look in vain for a greater example of *world-historical irony*. (*The Antichrist*, 36)

I go back, I tell the *genuine* history of Christianity. The very word “Christianity” is a misunderstanding: in truth, there was only *one* Christian, and he died on the cross. The “evangel” *died* on the cross. What has been called “evangel” from that moment was actually the opposite of that which *he* had lived: “*ill* tidings,” a *dysangel*. It is false to the point of nonsense to find the mark of the Christian in a “faith,” for instance, in the faith in redemption through Christ: only Christian *practice*, a life such as he *lived* who died on the cross, is Christian.

Such a life is still possible today, for certain people even necessary: genuine, original Christianity will be possible at all times. Not a faith, but a doing; above all, a *not* doing of many things, another state of *being*. (*The Antichrist*, 39)

* * *

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Press, 1966.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. “On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense.” In *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Antichrist*. In *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited and translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Press, 1974.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Press, 1968.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Nietzsche's conception of philosophy differ from the traditional view?
2. Explain Nietzsche's "perspectivism."
3. Given that Nietzsche was not claiming to state "the truth" about God, what might he have meant by the 'death of God'? Why does he find a reason for cheerfulness in the wake of the death of God?
4. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* what is the point of the encounter between Zarathustra and the saint in the forest in section 2 of the *Prologue*?
5. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* what is this notion of *overman* which Zarathustra comes to teach? What is the difference between the *overman* and the *last man*?
6. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* what are the three metamorphoses of the spirit Zarathustra describes in his first speech? How are these three metamorphoses of the spirit related to the teaching concerning the *overman*?
7. What is meant by the *will to power* introduced in the chapter "On the Thousand and One Goals" of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*? What ancient pre-Socratic doctrine does this teaching put forth in this section resemble?
8. What is this strange idea of the *eternal recurrence* that is introduced in "On the Vision and the Riddle" of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*? What is the point of this "abysmal thought"?
9. What did Nietzsche mean in *The Antichrist* in saying that "the very word 'Christianity' is a misunderstanding"?